Chapter 1

Introductory orientation

1.1 INTRODUCTION

Early childhood educators and researchers (Desouza & Zeck 2003:215, Jackman 2001:8-10, Pianta 1996:32-33) have concerned themselves with the problems of how to raise the school performance of disadvantaged learners, how to improve their attendance and how to end the destructive cycle of low achievement. They also realised the importance of cultural and socioeconomic contexts in the development and learning of young learners. Poor achievers, the group most in need of consistent instruction, are the group most likely to be frequently absent from school causing them to fall further and further behind. This cycle leads to the verifiable prediction that most of these students will drop out of school.

According to Jackman (2001: 7), poor preschoolers experience problems of adjustment in school even though their language and communication development is fairly good. Hargis (1997: 23) maintains that the rigid standards that are characteristic of the curriculum produce complex problems in the schools. Learners are disadvantaged by this system and teachers have great difficulties in dealing with the situation. Researchers (Center 1998: 143-144; Pianta 1996:32-34) devote much of their effort to help learners who do not achieve, who drop out, or whose problems confront the school system and ultimately the community.

In addressing the problem of poor school achievement, most researchers (Hatton 1996: 39-40; Lee, Loeb & Loebeck 1998: 479; Roberts, Mazzucchelli, Taylor & Reid 2003: 280) agree that the intellectual deficiencies of disadvantaged learners must be removed before any measure of academic success is possible. Learners who are given learning tasks that are outside their skill level cannot devote attention to the tasks and consequently develop compounding problems. When these problems occur frequently, they tend to worsen the learners' situation for as long as the learners are in school. Attempts to find solutions have

resulted in different programmes, such as intervention, supportive, compensatory or bridging programmes.

In South Africa the Department of Education uses the concept "intervention" when referring to preschool programmes (Department of National Education 2001d: 5). The Department of Social Development that also deals with the education of young learners states that early learners have the right to care and "intervention programmes" provided within the Department (Department of Social Development 2002: 16). In this study the preferred concept is "intervention" since this is the concept adopted by the Department of Education (Department of National Education 2001d: 5).

Intervention programmes gained momentum as a result of the rapidly growing interest in the needs of learners whose school progress and life chances are affected by social handicaps such as poverty and broken homes (Schweinhart & Weikart 1997:117; Taylor 2002:6-8). Typically these disadvantaged learners are said to exhibit some of the following problems: language inadequacies, not only in vocabulary but also in the organisation of syntax and sentence structure. They struggle linguistically because of perceptual deficits both visual and auditory, largely as the result of a lack of appropriate experiences.

Disadvantaged learners have an inability to sustain attention, particularly where they are faced with structured cognitive demands. They also have a poor self-image that results in early withdrawal from school. They lack motivation towards learning and are associated with scholastic underachievement and behaviour problems, especially truancy and delinquency (De Witt & Booysen 1995:132-133; Pianta 1996:32-34; Jackman 2001:394).

While the disadvantaged learner can be described from an academic perspective, some authors emphasise the health aspects. Researchers such as Villalón and Suzuki (2002:50-51), Washington and Oyemade (1995:11) maintain that certain factors, such as malnutrition, impair learning efficiency. Pre-maturity, low birth weight, hereditary and genetic conditions, adverse prenatal factors and events during birth and delivery also contribute to the learner's shortcomings. According to Lee et al (1998: 479) and Hargis (1997:7), all learners should receive a formal development check at about two and a half years. Learners with such problems need to be identified as soon as possible so that they can receive the necessary assistance.

It is now generally acknowledged that the years from birth to age five lay the foundation for the linguistic and cognitive skills that are basic to successful school experiences (Center 1998: 143-144). In the belief that early intervention is likely to benefit the disadvantaged learner, a large number of preschool programmes have been developed. In the United States the Project Head Start programmes began as eight-week experiments in 1965 but have increasingly expanded to full-year services.

According to Washington and Oyemade (1995:11-12) these programmes were designed to prepare disadvantaged learners to cope with later school life and prevent developmental deficits which would hamper their educational progress. They have been popular programmes that stressed social and educational action, but emphasised, above all, the importance of language development and the socialisation of the learner.

In South Africa, most of the intervention programmes were introduced as a result of the De Lange Report on education (Hartshorn 1992:46-48). This report recommended that the state should provide at least one year preschool education for all learners, but especially for disadvantaged learners, to prepare them for school and to reduce the high failure rate in the coloured and African communities during the early years of school. Most of them were cognitive programmes that could be categorised as either "school readiness," "developmental" or "language development" (Department of National Education 2000: 2-3).

What emerges from most intervention programmes is that the early years before schooling are the most critical for the acquisition of learning skills. However, Hargis (1997: 8) maintains that the cycle of failure begins early for disadvantaged learners thus intervention is necessary even in the public school. Secondly, the preschool programmes are child-centred as opposed to those of Grade 1, which are typically content-centred, thus demanding academic skills.

In the same way, Villalón and Suzuki (2002: 50-51) mainly on their interpretation of Piagetian theory, argue that there is little justification for concentrating efforts on the preschool age and that the years from six to twelve are the crucial ones with respect to later academic achievement. While they (Villalón & Suzuki 2002: 50-51) agree that there are optimal ages

for learning certain skills, it is definitely not true that most academic skills such as reading and writing are learned during the early years before school.

The development of early learning programmes, such as the "Follow Through" programme, is a recognition of the fact that it is necessary to ensure that the effectiveness of intervention programmes does not diminish later when formal learning in the public school commences. It is thus important to continue with intervention programmes even when the learners were previously exposed to such programmes before (Center 1998: 144).

Public schools have the capacity to develop high quality early childhood programmes. They already have the resources needed to operate sound programmes for young learners. They already have the knowledge base needed for young learners, the physical facilities, the administrative systems and the professional staffing procedures, all of which are needed to develop an early childhood curriculum and to operate programmes for five and six-year olds. The public schools also have the advantage of credibility in the community and well established connections with parents, local government and other community agencies (Lee et al 1998: 48).

Intervention programmes in the Foundation Phase are also developed on the basis that the environment, contrary to belief in predetermined and fixed development, plays a predominant role in the child's development (De Witt & Booysen 1995: 123; Morris 2000: 75; Pianta 1996: 49-50). The goal has been to make up for those environmental deficits in society and school that retard and limit educational progress. They have been mainly directed at the five and six year olds who have not started with formal schooling.

A central factor in the functioning of the school is that teachers must be fully committed to providing an environment in which learners actively learn by using their own knowledge. The learner's knowledge stems from personal interaction with the surrounding world, from direct experience with real objects, from talking about real experiences and ideas, and from the application of logical thinking to these events. The teacher's role is to support these experiences and help the learner think about them logically (Ross & Smith 1997: 175-176; Jackman 2001: 99-104).

The advantage that the school may have in programme delivery does not preclude the community from providing effective programmes capable of promoting the learning of five and six year olds. According to Vinovskis (1999: 188) such programmes originated as a social service rather than an educational function. In this regard the programmes have included measures to alleviate poverty, provide medical facilities, house families, and establish projects to involve parents and the community (Washington & Oyemade 1995: 12)

It is thus generally accepted (Ross & Smith 1997: 171) that the use of intervention programmes, community-based or school-based, cannot be justified if the effort does not interact later with regular schooling to improve learning appreciably. Among the factors that determine their success are firstly, the design of the programme, that is, its goals, content and duration. Secondly, teachers' qualifications and specific training needed to implement the programme are important.

When intervention programmes are designed for disadvantaged learners with the purpose of increasing school attainment, it is imperative that their design and implementation strategies are researched to ensure that the programme's effectiveness is not compromised. Of significance too, is the investigation of the arrangements that succeed programme completion, as this is an integral part of the implementation process.

This study will thus investigate the design and implementation of existing intervention programmes in the Foundation Phase of disadvantaged schools in the Gauteng Province. The contention is that their design and implementation is significant in the alleviation of academic problems experienced by disadvantaged learners in the research area in a similar manner as indicated in the literature.

1.2   AWARENESS OF THE PROBLEM

The problem regarding the introduction of intervention programmes in the Foundation Phase was first noted when erstwhile Lebowa Education Department, now Limpopo Provincial Education Department, launched an inquiry into the low academic achievement of the primary school learners under its jurisdiction in Lebowa (Limpopo). The high rate of failure and subsequent dropout in Sub A (now Grade 1) and in the successive classes within the then Lower Primary School (now Foundation Phase) was cause for concern for the Lebowa

Education Department. The Lebowa Education Department at the time did not support preschool education.

A pilot study was carried out in some village schools to investigate how the Lebowa Department of Education was dealing with Sub A (now Grade 1) failures and what measures were in place to help learners from poor rural environment to perform well academically. This inquiry revealed that the programmes, "Learning Through Play" and "Stepping Stones", produced by MC Grové from 1989 to 1994 both aimed at promoting school readiness, were used as 12 week intervention programmes to address the problem of repeated failure in the Sub A class of disadvantaged village schools.

The introduction of these programmes was a response to the report of the De Lange Commission mentioned earlier. Although they were designed as one-year programmes, the then Department of Education and Training (DET) instructed schools to administer them for three months at the beginning of the year (Hartshorn 1992: 48).

The findings of the pilot study further established that teachers were expected to instruct learners in these programmes and at the same time teach the whole syllabus. In addition, teachers were required to use the literacy programme, "Breakthrough to Literacy", a Molteno programme that was originally used in the primary schools of erstwhile Bophuthatswana. This was a comprehensive, graded programme that was introduced in Sub A and continued to Standard 2 (now Grade 4). The programme was written in the home languages used in the schools at the time.

Many teachers were not trained in the instruction of these intervention programmes and thus implemented them incorrectly. Some teachers abandoned the programmes before the stipulated period and concentrated on the syllabus while others exceeded that period because they did not know how to conclude the teaching.

Some teachers found the programmes valuable while others in the same school said the programmes brought about no changes in learners' scholastic attainment.

None of the teachers made attempts to provide for pupils of different ability, they were mostly concerned with putting the learners through the programme as instructed, individual differences not withstanding.

It was noted that there were a greater number of programmes available in the urban schools as compared to the rural schools and, virtually all the schools used the mentioned programmes provided by the DET. A number of Non Governmental Organizations (NGOs) produced some of these programmes and offered teacher training in their use. In Lebowa very little NGO participation was evident.

When this situation in the rural Lebowa was compared to that of the urban area in Johannesburg where the pilot study was carried out, the same problems of implementation were noted. However, some teachers in Alexandra Township said the programmes produced improved results at the end of the term. The teachers later arranged what they termed "ability groups" after completion of the programme.

In general, it seems that very little research, if any, regarding the implementation of intervention programmes in disadvantaged urban and rural schools has been undertaken. It is often said that the key to success with disadvantaged learners, whatever kinds of intervention programmes are devised, is to have staff who are highly skilled, understanding and patient (Ross & Smith 1997: 175). It is therefore important that further research is conducted to establish how teachers presently implement intervention programmes.

With regard to the appropriateness of the intervention programmes in South Africa, it also appears that little research was carried out and no measure of follow up was put in place to establish if the programme influenced learners' school achievement or not. When the Outcomes Based Education (OBE) (Department of National Education 1995) was introduced as the new system of education, there was no clarity about what would happen to the intervention programmes mentioned earlier. There was, however, strong emphasis on the introduction of a Reception Year as a measure to intervene.

The Department of National Eduction (2002b) has since clarified the situation and reiterated that the Reception Year (now referred to as Grade R) would be introduced as a school-based

intervention programme. No specific intervention programmes for Grade 1 learners without preschool experience were mentioned.

It became prudent to break the study into two phases and to investigate, firstly, whether provincial education departments had introduced other intervention programmes other than the Grade R class and how these were implemented. In this phase a total of 288 Grade R learners between the ages of five and six years from four provinces, namely, Gauteng, North Western Province, Limpopo and Mpumalanga were tested to determine their need for intervention before school.

1.3   DISSERTATION OF THE PROBLEM

Discussions on poor education achievement and how to prevent or ameliorate the problem have led to the introduction of a number of intervention programmes. In Early Childhood Development (ECD) intervention programmes focus largely on the promotion of developmental competence, such as language, social, cognitive, motor or self-help skills. However, there are strong arguments in favour of prevention and early intervention. As a result some of these programmes are, of necessity family-based because of the age and developmental level of preschool learners (Roberts, Mazzucchelli, Taylor & Reid 2003: 280-281)

Comprehensive early intervention programmes aimed at skills building are based on social learning theories. However, these interventions are more effective if implemented with younger learners, are provided more intensively, and have stronger effects for learners with higher levels of ability (Roberts et al 2003: 280-281). There is a need for more research on the effects of implementation strategies adopted in the case for young learners. There is also a need for studies that investigate how particular intervention strategies relate to learners and their families.

Intervention programmes for early learners receive widespread attention because they are regarded as the most effective way of preventing learning difficulties, especially for disadvantaged learners. They are usually part of nationwide education reforms, especially in countries undergoing political change (Desouza & Zeck 2003: 216).

The major significance of early intervention programmes is their potential for prevention and cost effectiveness, especially when compared to the limits of remediation and treatment. Recently, studies have demonstrated the positive short-term and long-term effects of participating in early childhood intervention programmes for a variety of school and social competencies. These include academic achievement, the need for remedial education and social services (Reynolds, Temple & Ou 2003: 634; Balfanz Ginsburg & Greenes 2003: 2).

Researchers (Morris 2000: 75, Reynolds et al 2003: 634-635, Roberts et al 2003: 279) state that most of the evidence for the link between preschool participation and long-term effects on good school progress comes from model intervention demonstration programmes rather than established, large-scale programmes run by human service agencies and schools. There is a need for evidence from large-scale established school programmes.

A good approach to assisting disadvantaged learners says Morris (2000: 79), is to develop the teachers' ability to adequately understand the intervention programmes and to develop learners accordingly. For some learners the gap between what they know, understand and can do, and what they are expected to know and are required to do when they start school, are too great. The gap between the learner's behaviour and adult expectations should be bridged as soon as possible. This will help the learner to settle down and begin to make progress. If this does not happen there is a danger that matters will deteriorate further as the learner becomes fixed in a pattern of poor behaviour and inadequate performance. Teachers will also become increasingly frustrated by the learners and by the failure of their own efforts.

1.4   STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The preceding discussion has indicated that the attainment of any programme goals depends to a large extent on its design and its successful implementation by trained staff. This brings the following question to the fore:

To what extent can the design and implementation strategies of intervention programmes for disadvantaged school beginners in the research area influence their level of school readiness?

The underlying assumption is that learners who have been exposed to intervention programmes are more ready for school than those who have not been put through such a programme.

1.5   THE AIM OF THE STUDY

This study is primarily intended to investigate the design and implementation of intervention programmes in the Foundation Phase. Since the Grade R class was introduced as a school-based intervention programme (Department of National Education 2001d: 18-19) it will be the focus of investigation in this study.

As a secondary aim the study plans to provide information on the following:

- ECD policy for Grade R implementation
- Teacher training to programme use
- The classroom situation in the research schools.

1.6   SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

Intervention programmes and their implementation become important when viewed in terms of THEIR implications for successful learning. It is an accepted fact that poor learners underachieve at school (Pianta 1996: 32-33) and that one way of helping them to acquire basic skills for learning is through the use of intervention programmes. A lack of or unsuitable presentation of such programmes leads to the attainment of low scores on tests of intellectual ability, which can result in unnecessary placement in special needs education, retention in grade, low scholastic achievement and eventually dropping out of school (Pianta 1996: 33).

In many countries schooling is regarded as central and vital for upward mobility and should therefore be seen to play such a role. Poor people have always seen education as the key to their advancement, be it economic social or political. At the same time the school is a middle class institution that sets norms and standards applicable to the middle class that disadvantaged learners cannot match. In this way the gap between the poor and the middle class is created. Poor background leads to poor education, which leads to poor school achievement, which leads to poor chances in a job market, to low income, to poor housing, to

starting a family under poor conditions, and so the cycle continues (Vinovskis 1999: 200). For South Africa the outcome of this investigation will indicate the developmental weaknesses of Grade R learners with the intension of addressing them and thus breaking the poverty cycle.

In the sixties the same belief was held in America and Head Start, a programme aimed at providing poor learners with basic skills for later learning was initiated. Although Head Start was intended to help poor learners preparing for entrance into elementary school, it ultimately provided a broad array of educational, health, nutrition, social and psychological services. The belief held was that a childhood spent in poverty does not reinforce values and motivation deemed vital to economic achievement and independence in the future (Vinovskis 1999: 189; Washington & Oyemade 1995: 24).

The South African Government supports the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, and also considers early childhood education to be important for future scholastic achievement and economic development (Department of National Education 2000: 43). The Convention states that all children have the right to education, health and good family support (Department of Social Development 2002: 3). The integrated approach recommended for ECD by the Departments of Education, Health and Social Development is aimed at promoting the holistic development of the young learner. The proposal to introduce Grade R for all five and six year olds in the formal schooling is intended to lay the foundation for future learning for those learners who never had access to preschool education (Department of National Education 2001d: 18-19). It is important therefore to investigate the design and implementation of the Grade R class to ensure that the aim of the Department of Education is realised.

Teacher expertise in improving the learner's achievement is an important aspect of the implementation process. The role of the teacher is to encourage experimentation and to guide and extend learners' thinking by using informal questioning or dialogue as a teaching strategy. While the design of intervention programmes tends to emphasise the learning of specific skills, there is a clear emphasis on teacher-learner interactions with regard to the implementation process. The teacher's approach to any given programme determines its success to a great extent. It thus becomes important to know more about teachers' roles in the implementation of intervention programmes (Villalón & Suzuki 2002: 50-52).

Primary schooling has been formally accepted as a human right for almost fifty years, but the provision thereof based on economic criteria is more recent. There is also evidence that primary schooling improves productivity in later years not only in the formal sector, but also in the urban informal settlements, and rural areas. In addition, reductions in fertility, improvements to family health and nutrition and reduction in infant and child mortalities are each statistically associated with primary school attendance, particularly for women (Villalón & Suzuki 2002: 50-52).

The South African government embraces the view discussed above and incorporated the idea in its new education policy. The education reforms are aimed at solving some of the problems in the primary school that contributed to failure at all levels. It is, however, disturbing to learn from the report (Asmal 2000:3) written to the former Minister of Education, Dr K Asmal that the implementation of policy has been confounded by, among other things, inadequate orientation and poor training and development of teachers.

It is now understood that at least some of the blame for learners' failure in school can be attributed to the lack for appropriate learning environments in school, where classroom experiences are meaningless to learners from lower socioeconomic environments (Villalón & Suzuki 2002: 50-52). Research work is thus needed to elucidate the nature of the interaction between teachers and learners and between the school and the learners' environment.

The policy (Department of National Education 1995) decision to incorporate Grade R as part of the programme in the Foundation Phase raises questions about possibilities of success given the school environment in the disadvantaged communities. At the same time, the quality of many community-based organisations are a cause for concern should they be deemed the sole providers of this intervention programme. The recommendation of the ECD Policy that Grade R should be provided by both the community and the school could allay these fears. The quality of the programmes and the ability of staff responsible for implementing such programmes do, however, raise concerns.

If educational reforms directed at access to school and success in learning is to become a reality, intervention programmes must be considered and it therefore becomes more pressing than before to undertake research in this area.

1.7   EXPLANATION OF TERMS

In order to give the reader a clear conceptualisation of the problem and an understanding of the approach followed in this investigation, there is a need to define the terms that are used in this study.

1.7.1   Intervention programmes

Intervention programmes describe educational and social measures aimed at solving or alleviating the problems faced by disadvantaged learners (Taylor 2002: 57-58).

According to Roberts et al (2003: 280) intervention programmes are considered a conscious and purposeful set of actions intended to change or influence the anticipated course of development.

For the purpose of this study intervention programmes refer to those educational inputs aimed at improving the educability of learners who otherwise might not learn the basic skills, particularly reading, writing and arithmetic. The concept is inclusive of school readiness, and includes language and cognitive programmes used in the primary schools. This term "intervention" is preferred to other concepts such as compensatory, remedial, supportive or bridging programmes because of the connotations associated with such words. This term is also used by the Department of Education.

1.7.2   Disadvantaged learners

According to Center (1998: 145), the concept "disadvantage" is used to refer to those who are relatively impoverished economically, particularly in relation to the labour market but also socially regarding educational achievement.

Center (1998: 145) sees educational disadvantage is seen as the learner's inability to adapt to and take part in activities and experiences that the school demands of him or her.

Educationally disadvantaged learners are therefore those learners who do not enjoy the opportunities for development that would enable them to compete on a fair basis with others in order to attain the level of achievement regarded as the norm.

1.7.3   "At risk" learners

Learners who are at risk are those who, by default, are affected most by risk factors. Those risk factors are: low achievement, retention in grade, behaviour problems, poor attendance, low socioeconomic status and attendance at school with large numbers of poor students (Morris 2000: 4).

According to McAfee and Leong (2002: 16) "at risk" learners are those less fortunate learners with developmental difficulties, ranging from the relatively minor to the serious and fundamental. They live in unsatisfactory circumstances and are more likely to fail in the education system than others.

In this study "at risk" learners are those who face risk factors mentioned above, who are from poor environments and who may eventually drop out of school after repeated failure.

1.7.4   Basic skills

Broadly speaking basic skills include such attributes as the ability to take care of one's personal needs, handle the tools of everyday living, communicate with other people and control primitive impulses (McAfee & Leong 2002: 16-17).

Center (1998: 143-147) describes the concept from an educational perspective. He contends that the term is usually employed to describe the ability to read, to write, spell and manipulate numbers, which most young people begin to acquire between the ages of 5 and 6 years.

The perspective in this investigation is similar to the latter explanation. In addition, basic skills include the ability to concentrate on an activity, listen to and understand instructions or ask meaningful questions.

1.7.5   School readiness

School readiness refers to the state of the child's total development that enables him or her to embark on formal learning. It includes the child's ability to function in formal settings (Center 1998: 140).

Washington and Oyemade (1995: 93) explain that school readiness is understood to refer to the child's physical, psychical emotional and social development. It implies that the learner is ready to learn formally.

1.7.6   Early childhood

The early childhood period, in keeping with the stipulations in the White Paper on Education and Training (Department of National Education 1995), is regarded as the period between birth and 9 years. However, for the purpose of this study the focus will be from age 5 when learners enter the Reception class, until age nine when they are in Grade 3.

1.7.7   The Grade R class

The Grade R class refers to the class of five and six year olds in the Foundation Phase. It is regarded as synonymous with Grade 0, which was present in white South African schools, the American Kindergarten and the British Infant class (Department of National Education 1995).

1.7.8   Intellectual development

Intellect can be explained as the process of knowing. The development of the intellect is an orderly, predictive process by which we come to know and understand the world (Morris 2000: 81).

Intellectual development is regarded as the result of certain processes, such as perception, concept formation and language development that promote knowing. Their development is the result of the interplay between neurological structures and environmental influences.

1.7.9 Language competence

Language can be defined as human speech, the written symbols for speech or any means of communicating. Language development follows a predictable sequence and is related to chronological age. Competence in language is achieved when the learner masters underlying rules of grammar and uncovers the system that guides language usage (Jackman 2001:60).

A learner who has acquired language competence is able to recognise the meanings of words, has the ability to describe events, can make requests and understand instructions given to him or her.

1.8 RESEARCH DESIGN

The case study was chosen as research design for this study. It is regarded as the most suitable plan or approach for investigating and answering the research question. It is also regarded as a suitable paradigm to be used with the research methods used in this study.

1.8.1 The methods of research

The investigation in this study will be conducted through the use of both the qualitative and quantitative methods of research. Qualitative research will be the predominant method because it is an approach that advocates the significance of conducting research in the natural setting and in specific contexts (Nash 2002: 10). The quantitative approach will be used to gather and interpret the outcome of the screening test that will be used to determine the developmental skills of Grade R learners.

1.8.2 Research techniques

Research techniques such as observation, the interview, the focus group and the preschool test will be used to gather data that may lead to the answer of the stated problem. Observations will be used to study the classroom situation as well as teacher-learner interactions. Observations will also furnish information about the school environment and

other activities relevant to the aim of the research. According to Neuman (2000: 170) the observation method deals with overt behaviour of people in appropriate situations and under conditions of normal living or at other times with some special set of factors operating.

The interview as a research tool can either be formal, less structured or completely informal (De Vos, Strydom, Fouché & Delport 2003: 294). It will be used to clarify certain issues that may arise during observation in the classroom setting while intervention programmes are used. The focus group will be used to evaluate the influence of Grade R instruction on learners' skills for learning. The preschool test will be used to gain an idea about the literacy levels of learners in the research.

1.9 DELIMITATION OF THE STUDY

Intervention programmes can be researched from a number of perspectives. This study will focus on the design and implementation of Grade R classes in the research schools. It will be conducted in one of the Districts of the Gauteng Education Department, namely Alexandra Township, which is a typical disadvantaged area.

As this is a case study, all the school-based Grade R programmes in the area will be researched. Alexandra is a small Township with a small number of primary schools and not all schools have introduced Grade R.

1.10 OUTLAY OF THE STUDY

The following is a sequence of chapters to be written in this study.

Chapter 1: Introductory orientation

The chapter is an introductory orientation aimed at acquainting the reader with the whole study. The main purpose is to define and state the problem, outline the aim of the study and show which methods of research will be used in carrying out the investigation. Within this framework, it provides a discourse on the problem and indicates the significance of the research.

Chapter 2: Literature review of early intervention programmes

This chapter deals with a literature review of intervention programmes. It provides a background of the origins of intervention programmes worldwide and refers to examples in different countries. It also discusses the theoretical basis of intervention programmes and highlights problems associated with being disadvantaged. The aim is to gather information that will provide a conceptual framework and background to this study.

Chapter 3: Discourse on policies and the design and implementation of intervention programmes for disadvantaged school beginners

This chapter involves a discourse on the factors that influence the design and implementation of intervention programmes. It emphasises discussion on factors that influence successful implementation strategies as well as good policies that underlie successful intervention programmes. The aim is to acquire a clearer understanding of programme design and implementation so as to investigate Grade R classes properly. The chapter also includes discourse on ECD policies and how these are interpreted in the classrooms.

Chapter 4: The history and current situation of early intervention programmes for disadvantaged learners in South Africa.

This chapter researches the background and history of intervention programmes in the country and focuses on the Gauteng Province, where information is available. It traces the conception of various programmes both inside and outside the schools. It also discusses government initiatives in developing early learning programmes and refers to the audits and White Papers aimed at promoting early learning.

Chapter 5: The research design

This chapter refers to the strategy followed in gathering data necessary to answer the research question. The design that spells out the total activities to be undertaken in the investigation of the problem is explained. A discussion of the research methods to be employed in this study is ultimately followed by an indication of which research techniques will be used in the actual data collection.

Chapter 6: The analysis and discussion of research findings

In this chapter data from the field will be analysed and discussed. The gathered information will be compared with what pertains in literature.

Chapter 7: Conclusions, recommendations and limitations of the study

In this chapter the researcher will draw conclusions about the study and make recommendations on the design and implementation of Grade R. Finally the limitations of the study will be stated.

1.11   CONCLUSION

The purpose of this chapter is to familiarise the reader with the stated research problem and to provide a broad idea of how the research will be conducted. The delimitation of the study helps to identify the focus and the scope, while an overview of the chapters to come serves to show how the study is approached. From the available literature on the dissertation of the problem and the significance of the study, it is evident that there is a need to carry out this research.

Chapter 2

Literature review on intervention programmes

2.1   INTRODUCTION

The foregoing chapter served to orientate the reader to the problem that and to state the aim of this study. The basis of the problem and the rationale for research were discussed. The chronology of chapters to come was intended to give an overview of the research as a whole. It is now necessary to provide a literature review on early childhood intervention programmes that will serve as theoretical basis for the study.

Central to the discussions will be the study of early intervention programmes and their implementation strategies preceded by a historical perspective of such programmes. Contentious matters such as what approaches are best for developing disadvantaged learners and the role of intervention programmes will be scrutinised. Finally, a review of intervention programmes in different countries will reveal how different circumstances influenced the implementation strategies of early intervention programmes.

2.2   THE ORIGIN AND HISTORY OF INTERVENTION PROGRAMMES

The needs of learners whose academic achievement could be affected by social handicaps such as poverty, a background that lacks stimulation or a broken or incomplete home, have interested many researchers (Chance 1997: 506; Lee 1998: 479; Vinovskis 1998: 49; Yoshikawa 2002: 5).   These researchers observed that in school districts a large concentration of learners from disadvantaged backgrounds academic achievement levels are lower, the dropout rates are higher, representation in special education programmes is higher, school attendance is poorer, there are more discipline problems, and educators leave the profession in greater numbers.

The same point of view is held by Jackman (2001: 8-9), Vinovskis (1999: 160), and Yoshikawa, Rosman and Husueh (2002: 5) who maintain that the low achieving learner from the disadvantaged environment needs further investigation. They claim that such learners may share the chronological age of other learners with whom they begin school but they do not share the same readiness and learning facility to benefit from a rigid curriculum. By the time many learners from low-income families start attending school, the best that educators can hope to prepare them for is unskilled jobs that do not exist.

According to Shonkoff and Meisels (2000: 54-56) intervention programmes came into being with the assumption that learners would catch up given the extra help. For many years private charities and local communities tried to provide at least a minimal education for poor learners in an effort to alleviate the problem. In the sixties for instance, America waged a battle against poverty by developing various programmes for disadvantaged learners through the support of the federal government. While many welcomed the financial support of the federal government, others objected to what they regarded as interference of the government into an area traditionally reserved for parents and local communities.

Some researchers such as Anderson and Pellicer (1996: 27), Taylor (2002: 6) and Woods (1996: 16-17) considered the origin of intervention programmes in America as an inappropriate response to the demands of the civil rights movement for racially integrated schools. According to this view, intervention programmes were the outcome of the insistent demand of the black people for better education. In the sixties, intervention programmes in segregated schools emerged as a good alternative to school integration.

In many countries intervention was mainly directed at minority groups who were mostly immigrants lacking material means and who were culturally different from other inhabitants in the country and the underprivileged groups from depressed urban areas. The term "intervention" was used to describe educational and social measures aimed at solving or alleviating the problems faced by learners from poor environments (Center 1998: 144; Kreisman 2003: 240; Newage Research 2002: 2).

2.2.1 Early historical models

While most of the current models of early childhood education are related to particular theories of learning, this was not true of earlier models. As Barnett and Boocock (1998: 1-3) put it, the programmes that evolved in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries were designed before the study of human development was undertaken. Knowledge of learners' characteristics was intuitive and programmes were based more on philosophic conceptions of knowledge rather than on scientific knowledge of the learner's behaviour emanating from the impact of experience on the learner's development. Today early learning centres are based on specific philosophies which are reflected in their functioning (Click 2000: 99-100).

The following are some of the models referred to as the foundations of intervention in early education:

2.2.1.1 The Infant School

An institution that had much more widespread influence, "the infant school", was established in 1816 by Robert Owen of Scotland. It was the first level of the Institute for the Formation of Character and focused on learners between the ages of three and six years (Shonkoff & Meisels 2000: 488).

Owen had a philosophy of education that influenced the methods and goals of the infant school but they were not based on any developmental theory. While learners were taught the basic skills of reading, writing and arithmetic, they were also about the physical world, handicrafts, singing and dancing. There was a belief that school should be a happy place and that learners should not be coerced into learning. Owen's ideas spread throughout Europe and the United States of America. However, the popularity ceased to exist when public schools in America shifted their interest to young learners (Barnett & Boocock 1998: 62; Shonkoff & Meisels 2000: 488-489).

2.2.1.2 Froebel's Kindergarten

The kindergarten created in Germany in 1837 by Friedrich Froebel was conceived before there was any scientific study of learner development. His ideas were based on his belief in the unity of the individual, God and nature. He designed materials called "gifts" and activities called "occupations" that were used in the learning process. The Programme also included nature study, language and arithmetic (Vinovskis (1999: 163). Froebel's kindergartens became popular in Germany and soon spread to Europe and America. Although kindergartens were sponsored by various agencies and institutions during this period, they all followed the curriculum model designed by Froebel (Barnett & Boocock 1998: 62).

2.2.2 Twentieth Century Curriculum Models

As knowledge on how learners learn and develop increased, the learner study movement came into being. Influences from progressive education and psychoanalytic theory had an impact on the emerging curriculum. One of the programmes that were developed at this time and that had a significant impact on early education was that conceived by Maria Montessori. Although Montessori's conceptions of development were influenced more by anthropology than by developmental psychology, the model of early education that she created had a strong developmental component and fits within this framework (Barnett & Boocock 1998: 62; Hernandez 1997: 15).

2.2.2.1 Montessori Schools

Maria Montessori was a physician who first worked with mentally handicapped learners. She later applied what she had learned working with these learners to the education of normal learners in her school in Rome. Her approach was rooted in the work of earlier philosophers such as Rousseau, Pestalozzi and Froebel (Shonkoff & Meisels 2000: 5).

Like Froebel, Montessori believed that learners' development unfolded naturally. She saw knowledge as being based in learners' perceptions of the world rather than from manipulating objects that represent abstract symbols. Numerous materials designed to train specific senses were developed and could be used without educators' supervision. In addition to

reading, writing, arithmetic, nature study and geography, Montessori emphasised 'exercises in practical life'. These activities were meant to help learners to function independently and included washing, getting dressed and cleaning tables (Click 2000: 44).

The Montessori curriculum model allowed the environment to modify learners' development. As learners moved through various stages of development the educator would prepare the environment so that the learner could seek those experiences that would nurture this development and would allow them to use it as long as they wished. The programme began with appealing material that enabled learners to gather and order sensory information as the basis of their developing knowledge and no system of reward and punishments were used (Click 2000: 45).

This curriculum has remained intact in contemporary Montessori education, although additional educational activities have been included in many Montessori programmes in the last two decades.

2.2.2.2 Nursery Schools

Another early childhood programme that was developed in the early twentieth century was the nursery school. This was created by Margaret McMillan and her sister, Rachel in a London slum in 1911. Since she was involved with poor learners from the slums, she became instrumental in the introduction of legislation to raise the minimum age for such learners to go to work and fought to get schools to provide lunches, baths and medical examination for learners (Anderson & Pellicer 1996: 21; Shonkoff & Meisels 2000: 5-6).

The purpose of McMillan's nursery school programme was to provide a nurturing environment for poor learners. In addition to meeting their physical needs for adequate nutrition, exercise, cleanliness and medical examinations, the nursery school provided an educational programme. Materials similar to those used by Montessori were used to promote sensory learning. To McMillan, everyday experiences were more appropriate for sensory learning hence her belief in the value of 'the garden' where learners were encouraged to explore and play in the water. The open air nursery school became internationally known and in 1922 the first nursery schools were opened in the United States (Taylor 2002: 8).

Owen's infant school, Froebel's kindergarten, Montessori's Casa dei Bambini, and McMillan's nursery school each had a major impact on the field of early childhood education. All of these programmes, except Froebel's kindergarten, were initiated to improve the lives of young learners living in poverty. Each programme valued early childhood as central to intellectual and moral development and each curriculum expressed a unique view of how experiences and interactions with materials and people would influence that development. With the exception of the infant school, these programmes still exist today although with slight modifications. The Head Start Programme for instance, could be regarded as a modification of McMillan's nursery schools (Click 2000: 45).

2.3   THE IMPORTANCE OF THE EARLY YEARS

Advocates of intervention programmes adamant about beginning the process as early as possible but there is no conclusive evidence that if skills are not acquired early they cannot be acquired later on, perhaps more efficiently. There is agreement that learners who are behind their peers for too long may develop a negative self-esteem (Barnett & Hustedt 2003: 2).

While accumulated evidence from research has pointed to the early years, especially the first three years, as the optimal period for developing the learner on a cognitive, social and emotional level, some researchers (Center 1998: 145) have cast doubt on the existence of critical periods. They consider this notion that there are certain limited periods of time during which a particular class of stimuli will have particularly profound effects, and that the same stimulation before or after this interval will have little, if any effect on the developing learner to be false. It negates the fact that intervention can be effective in offsetting the effects of an adverse environment, the age of the learner not withstanding.

On the one hand, many learners are disadvantaged educationally in that without special help they will not acquire such skills. They are the ones for whom intervention programmes are essential and early education has come to be the appropriate age to begin (Zadja 1996: 117). At the same time there is an expectation that less than ideal forms of childcare and parental interactions can be compensated for by positive experiences in the classroom (Scanlon & Velluntino 1997: 191-192).

On the other hand Hargis (1997: 27) expresses the probability that there are optimal ages of learning certain skills, but explains that the same might not apply to academic skills. Many preschool practitioners believe that spending much of a learner's early years systematically teaching him things that he or she would probably learn later at home, or at school or in the community may deprive the learner of time for other experiences, especially those more directly promoting social and emotional development.

In the belief that early intervention is likely to be particularly beneficial to the disadvantaged learner, the preschool age became the focal point of a large number of projects. The Head Start programmes were designed to prepare disadvantaged learners to cope with later schooling and to prevent developmental deficits which would hamper their educational progress (Hargis 1997: 26; Jackman 2001: 26).

The programme was innovative, comprehensive and wide-ranging, stressing social and educational action, but emphasised, above all, the importance of the learner's language and emotional development. It was also noted that the programme could produce short term gains in the disadvantaged learners' academic performance and have reduced later grade retention and special education placements (Barnett & Boocock 1998: 76).

From the discussions above, it seems that problems of disadvantaged learners differ from country to country, and the measures designed to help these learners vary greatly in their objectives and purposes. Arriving at consensus on those issues pertaining to intervention programmes will therefore not be easy, including the correct period of implementing such programmes.

2.4   INTERVENTION PROGRAMMES AND RELATED CONCEPTS

The discussion on the importance of introducing intervention programmes at an early age highlights the need to understand and know the role of these programmes. It is therefore important to know the various concepts associated with intervention programmes as their meanings can influence the role of such programmes.

For many educators and practitioners there is no precise definition of intervention programmes. For the benefit of those dealing with young learners the need for clarity on

intervention programmes is an urgent one, including the increasing value that society places on educational achievement (Anderson & Pellicer 1996: 27).

Different terms are used to describe early childhood programmes, namely, compensatory, special, remedial, supportive, intervention or programmes without a qualifying word. In this regard Lee, Loeb and Loebeck (1998: 481-482) observed that the notion of intervention programmes has no single definition, nor is it a single programme or a set of practices. There is no simple explanation or description of intervention programmes, it is an amalgamation of many different programmes, practices and services (Barnett & Hustedt 2003: 2-4).

Some researchers (Center 1998: 143-145; Ross & Smith 1997: 175-176) refer to the ambiguity, double meanings and emotionality associated with the term "compensatory education" and prefer to use 'intervention' to which they assign a relatively precise meaning.

Other researchers (Center 1998: 143-145; Ross & Smith 1997: 175-176) perceive the term 'compensation' to have a closer connotation to the concept of 'special' than to 'remedial'. They assume that some condition beyond the learner's control will limit his/her scholastic achievement unless something is done to obviate such negative effects. The unfortunate condition that requires special education is usually physical. The learner is physically disabled , brain damaged, or impaired in some other way that makes his/her attendance in a regular classroom unprofitable and sometimes obtrusive to others.

Intervention programmes are seen as a means of making amends or making up for a loss. However, there was a reaction to this definition with regard to programmes such as Sesame Street that benefited both disadvantaged and advantaged learners. It could well be that learners need intervention programmes including a large proportion that is not recognised when conventionally talking about intervention programmes (Lee et al 1998: 481-483).

When considering general strategies for promoting educational possibilities of young learners from disadvantaged backgrounds, it is difficult to find a broader concept than intervention. After all, intervention is what all education is about. When illiterate, egocentric five year olds become literate and able to communicate and take the perspective of others, this can be accounted to the efficacy of the school's intervention (Center 1998: 145)

Preschool education might thus be considered as intervention although questions arise about the basis for some of the assumptions on which particular interventions are based, including the intervenor's right to intervene. It should be made clear, however, that the responsibility of addressing the education backlog of disadvantaged learners should not be placed on preschool education alone. This is but one link in the educational chain. Other programmes can be used to achieve the same aims as early intervention programmes (Welch 1995: 146).

The goals of the various programmes do not serve as good criteria for the differentiation because of the confusion created when Montessori was not accepted as intervention in some quarters, and the fact that Sesame Street was meant to be intervention for disadvantaged learners, yet benefited middle class learners equally (Center 1998: 146).

According to Shonkoff and Meisels (2000: 141) many learners are at a disadvantage in pursuit of a meaningful and independent life due to a number of potential obstacles. Some of these learners come from impoverished homes, while others are from ethnic and cultural minorities. He continues to say that it is critically important to clarify that these learners are not deficient or disabled.

These learners are variously categorised as disadvantaged, deprived, low achievers or "at risk". Such concepts have been the source of many debates and as Pianta (1996: 116) cautions, the labeling of any condition has difficulties and often encourages stereotyped thinking.

Taylor (2002: 485) explains that the term 'at-risk' includes learners who are potential failures and families who experience poverty, unemployment, the presence of HIV, medical problems, substance abuse, teenage parents, domestic violence and other problems that limit probability of success.

Many researchers (Smith 1998: 9; Wong & Reynolds 1996: 2; Welch 1996: 28-29) use the term "at risk" to describe learners who are experiencing academic failure in educational settings. They further indicate that such learners may be those who cannot speak English and could be at risk of referral to special education or are at risk of dropping out of school. They believe learners who, for whatever reason, fail to master basic skills in school, and are less empowered to become independent and contributing members of the community.

In recent years the definition of 'at risk' learners includes abused learners. In America early learning centres require parents to sign a 'child abuse prevention pamphlet' in order to control parental abuse. (Click 2000: 79).

Wong and Reynolds (1996: 4-5) indicate that it is important to keep in mind the wide range of individual differences which exist in any group. It is also important to remember that some learners from the poorest homes do well in school and present no problems, while other learners from middle class families suffer deprivation of, for example, parental warmth and affection.

Concepts such as disadvantage, impoverished, cultural deprivation or at risk call for some form of action but the application of programmes to address such conditions need not be confined to particular geographical areas or social classes. It is important to identify as early as possible which individual learners need help, diagnose their specific difficulties and deficits and select from a variety of materials and techniques those most appropriate for them (Smith 1998: 8).

Pianta (1996: 116) provides a useful breakdown of the concepts implicit in disadvantage. These include poverty, cultural diversity, social differences, communication and language.

According to Lamorey (2002: 67) culture is a broad abstraction that includes the forms of knowledge, belief systems, languages, religion and values of a society. Each culture has its own explanations for why some children are born with disabilities and how these children are to be treated.

To Gollnick and Chinn (1996: 132) Culture is defined as a set of variables that include attitudes, values, norms, beliefs, and customs that are transmitted to group members, creating a sense of identity as well as a pattern of behaviour. Culture influences an individual values and thinking. Cultural conflict occurs when variables of one micro culture clash with those of another and the values and beliefs of a divergent culture may radically differ from those of the school.

Finally, it is evident that many connotations of intervention programmes and disadvantage have accumulated, but as can be recognised, different definitions may have different implications for educational policy and social action. There is need for an acceptable definition of intervention programmes and disadvantaged status based on a much more refined assessment of environmental circumstances and further examination of the individual patterns of learning ability to which instructional strategies should be matched.

For purposes of this study the Reception Year is regarded as an intervention measure for disadvantaged learners (Department of National Education 1995) and its implementation will be investigated. However, there is a need for future research on the curriculum to establish what qualifies it as an intervention programme.

2.5 THE INFLUENCE OF CHILD DEVELOPMENT THEORIES ON EARLY INTERVENTION PROGRAMMES

The *Growing learner study movement* of the early twentieth century and the writings of John Dewey on education brought about a period of programme evaluation and questions on programme relevance. The movement called on early childhood researchers to focus on real life experiences and move away from abstract thinking. Leaders of the reform movement emphasised the need for early learning to focus on the learner's real life experiences and criticised the formal aspects of the Froebelian kindergarten education (Kagan and Neuman 1998: 365, Taylor 2002: 47).

According to Kagan and Neuman (1998: 365) and Taylor (2002: 47) the focus of education shifted from abstract to concrete, to personally meaningful experiences which enabled learners to understand of the world. They emphasised the importance of subject matter learning and that the curriculum should grow out of the subject matter of the school. School subjects were regarded as aspects of the total social experience, as reflections of human achievement.

New ideologies, social, political and economic factors brought about some profound changes in early childhood education in the 1960s. One conclusion of the reforms of this period was that intelligence is the product of environmental factors. It was argued that a greater proportion of development occurs during the early years of life and that an organism is most

sensitive to environmental influences during periods of rapid growth Schweinhart & Weikart (1997: 119-121).

The reforms in early childhood education lead to a number of approaches that could be classified into four general categories, namely developmental programmes, behavioural programmes, constructivist programmes and open education programmes.

2.5.1   Developmentally appropriate programmes

A number of early childhood programmes initiated by researchers are built on the premise that early intervention programmes for learners from low-income families must be developmentally appropriate and not emphasise academics. (Balfanz 2003: 4; Beaty 2000: 77; Taylor 2002: 101).

According to Bredekamp and Copple (1997: 5) and Hyun (1998: 7), developmentally appropriate practice is founded on Piaget's theory, is purposeful and enables all learners to construct a knowledgeable, confident and positive self-identity. Learners develop multiple perspectives in understanding themselves and others, and diverse social phenomena, all of which are fundamental to their cognitive development. The goals of early childhood education can only be fulfilled when the environment, materials and teaching practices employed with young learners are appropriate to their levels of understanding and their unique modes of learning.

Taylor (2002: 102) asserts that developmentally appropriate practice promotes an awareness of learners' predictable stages of growth in all developmental areas: physical, emotional, social and cognitive. As a major mode for meeting the individual learner's needs, learner-initiated, learner-directed, educator-supported play is an essential component of developmentally appropriate practice.

To Hyun (1998: 7), appropriate practice is purposeful action and experience that enables all learners to construct a knowledgeable, confident, positive self identity and to develop multiple perspectives in understanding self, other, and diverse social phenomena, all of which are fundamental cognitive tools for their living. An appropriate practice responds positively to the

individual's unique and different phases of growth, change, and learning styles. By so doing it enables all learners to discover their own fullest potential.

Beaty (2000: 77-78) describes developmentally appropriate practice as the outcome of a process of educator decision making based on educators' three areas of knowledge namely age appropriateness, individual appropriateness and learners' social and cultural contexts. Developmentally appropriate practice is based on what is presently known and understood about learners' growth and learning.

The underlying principle in most of the above definitions is that developmentally appropriate practice is usually explained in the context of the school. As Hyun (1998: 9) explains, educators are regarded as the first promoters of learners' well being. In this context, each educator's appropriate practice reflects social values based on his or her own socio-cultural background.

The educator translates those values into experiences for the individual learners. Once the educator practices in a classroom with learners who come from different socio-cultural backgrounds than the educator's, the educator should go beyond his or her own socio-cultural background to incorporate the diverse socio-cultural backgrounds (Taylor 2002: 102-103).

One aspect of the theory that is highly relevant to education is the zone of proximal development. This is the range between the current level of functioning of a learner without assistance and what the learner can accomplish with support provided by a sensitive adult, another learner or recorded routine. The idea is not to match the learner's current functional level but to provide support for the learner to work harder (Taylor 2002: 103).

The use of developmentally appropriateness as the sole criterion for judging educational programmes for young learners has been criticised. The developmental dimension of the programmes is only one of three dimensions that need to be looked at. The other two include the cultural and knowledge dimensions. The cultural dimension takes into consideration society's values and is ultimately a reflection of what we want learners to be and become. The knowledge dimension relates to what we believe learners need to know to get along in

their present lives, as well as to function successfully in the future (Gestwiki 1996: 10; Hyun 1998: 16).

2.5.2   Resistance to developmentally appropriate programmes

A number of researchers (Barnett & Boocock 1998: 78-79; O'Brien 1996: 3; O'Brien 1997: 100; Warger 1998: 73) contend that early learning programmes, in particular the kindergarten programme for economically disadvantaged learners must include effective academic instruction as well as learner development experiences. Delaying academic instruction for disadvantaged learners because they are not "ready" only widens the gap. Narrowing this performance gap requires early, intensive intervention.

Barnett and Boocock (1998: 78) maintains that five year olds enter school full of enthusiasm to learn. By the age of sixteen, however, they often seem to be negative, if not resentful toward education.   He further says this metamorphosis is particularly marked in disadvantaged learners.   The greatest challenge facing early childhood educators is to preserve learners' positive attitudes towards school.

O'Brien (1997: 100); and Warger (1998: 73) explain that in developmentally appropriate typical preschool programmes including kindergartens, learners are usually given the latitude in choosing what to do and experience virtually complete acceptance of their actions. A picture of scribbles is acknowledged for the pretty colours, a jangle of toy cymbals for making music, working with others to cut out pictures and paste them together is cooperative problem solving. The goals are primarily participation, cooperation and expression. Learners explore, participate, express themselves and develop trust, seeing school a safe place from home. The learner is a success and an important transition from home to school has begun.

Warger (1998: 58), however, points out that in contrast to the above, first grade is typically content centred.   Reading, language and mathematics require instructional time, which dictates the schedule. Learners' choices are curtailed. More important, participation and expression are no longer sufficient to gain approval. A much narrower range of responses is acceptable. Reading the sentence "I saw a cat" as "once upon a time" will not be acceptable nor is reading the number "six" as "nine" acceptable. He explains that in the first grade, success and confidence slowly erode for many disadvantaged learners.

Kindergarten becomes a critical and sometimes difficult transition period to first grade. Kindergarten prepares the learner's school career, and influences many other aspects of the learner's life. The transition may be less crucial for learners from affluent families than from learners from low socioeconomic backgrounds. Without a well-supported transition from a learner centred environment learners from low socioeconomic backgrounds may not be successful in the first grade (Lanzi, Phillips, Ramey & Ramey 1998:311-312).

Although kindergarten learners need to perform familiar activities, they must also experience success with content-centred activities. Although the kindergarten day is short, both types of activities can be scheduled. The difficult task is planning and implementing the content-centred activities so that the disadvantaged learners will develop academic competence and a positive self esteem (Warger 1998: 75).

In a study by Kreisman (2003: 239) and O'Brien (1997: 101), it was revealed that although Head Start educators professed a preference for a very individualistic, learner-centred model for early learners, this was not realistic. The learners' day was actually split almost exactly between informal, learner initiated, developmentally appropriate activities and more formal, educator directed group activities with a strong academic emphasis. In short, the programme practices were not consistent with developmentally appropriate practice.

O'Brien's (1997: 100) study further revealed that a number of Head Start educators indicated a preference for developmentally appropriate practice. However, some of them pointed out that the programme should focus more on helping learners to learn skills, knowledge, and behaviour that would best suit the very structured, academic public schools they would soon be entering.

There have been criticisms of using developmental appropriateness as the sole criterion for judging educational programmes for young learners. The developmental dimension of the programme is only one of three dimensions that need to be looked at. The other two include the cultural and knowledge dimensions. The cultural dimension takes into consideration society's values and is ultimately a reflection of what we want learners to be and become. The knowledge dimension relates to what we believe learners need to know to get along in their present lives, as well as to function successfully in the future (Warger 1998: 75-76).

It is ultimately important to point out that although programmes may be regarded as developmentally appropriate, they are in practice an amalgamation of developmental and behavioural approaches in varying degrees and not completely learner-centred. According to Barnette (2000: 362), determining the effects of different approaches to the education of young learners is a complex task. Different approaches have different goals; thus different outcomes should be expected, and comparing the curricular on the same outcome measures may be biased.

In this regard the question about developmentally appropriate practice that should continually be asked is "whose knowledge and ways of knowing are represented? Whose interests are served by such a curriculum based on such practice? Whose experiences are represented? Is what is considered appropriate in one culture possibly inappropriate in another? Is it possible that our developmentally appropriate classrooms are not really appropriate for some learners?" (Kreisman 2003: 240; O'Brien 1997: 102).

2.5.3   The open education approach

Shonkoff and Meisels (2000: 135-136) maintains that identifying the common characteristics of the open education approach is a difficult task partly because it has been a grass roots movement characterised by individuality, and partly because of lack of theories that provide the basis for the arguments. In open education programmes, the total development of the learner is the most important goal and learners' interests provide the basis for learning in school. Different instructional methods are used, but the emphasis is on active learning and discovering rather than on educator telling.

The open approach is regarded as the outcome of the 'progressive movement' of the 1960s. It is based on the progressive education movement and began when new views of learner development challenged the belief in fixed intelligence and suggested that learners can learn more than was expected of them. Psychologists and educators began to test educational programmes for young learners in relation to their short and long term effects on learning and development (Shonkoff & Meisels 2000: 36).

Barnett and Boocock (1998: 79) says the open classroom approach flows from a belief that learners must direct their own learning and will learn when they are ready, as long as the educators provide stimulating materials and support for the learners' choices. Often, the main goal of this approach is socialisation and learning is viewed as an interactive process between the learner and his or her environment. In this model educators initiate activities designed to promote learners' reasoning and problem solving abilities, and they interact with learners during activities to add value to new ideas or enhance learning. The open classroom and interactive curricular are both considered non-didactic because educators rarely instruct learners directly on discreet skills.

This approach stresses that learners should be helped to understand more fully what is important to them, rather than focusing on the achievement of specific academic objectives to prepare learners for something that will come later. The classroom is organised into centres and active learning is encouraged. Identifying the common characteristics of the open education approach is a difficult task, partly because it has been characterised by individuality, partly because of a lack of theories to justify it and partly because it is continually changing (Shonkoff & Meisels 2000: 135-136).

According to Jackman (2001: 96) all of the models that were part of the Head Start and Follow Through Planned Variations approaches had some elements of open education. Such models had broad educational goals and considered communication skills and personal development to be as important as cognitive processes and academic preparation.

2.5.4   The behavioural approach

According to Warger (1998: 105) the behavioural approach, which is also referred to as the academic or direct instruction approach, the educator defines the content of the day's academic sessions. Learners are provided with sequenced series of activities that gradually build competence in reading, language concepts and the understanding of basic number concepts. Instruction is deliberate and systematic practice using newly taught concepts is used. These concepts and skills are further reinforced during unstructured portions of the programme.

Although educators, not learners, determine the objectives of each day's systematic lesson, in good academic early childhood programmes learners are actively involved. The majority of instruction is conducted in small groups, with a small amount of follow up worksheet activities. Learners constantly respond to educators' questions and to each other's comments. They receive clear and immediate feedback on their responses and are provided with additional practice if necessary. Good academically focused programmes also include time for play, socialisation and art (Hyun 1998: 8; Warger 1998: 105).

A typical direct-instruction kindergarten intervention programme begins with an assessment of learners' skills and knowledge to ensure that instruction begins at the appropriate level. Careful assessment takes into account each learner's needs and developmental maturity, and helps the educator place learners in flexible ability groups of six to twelve learners. These ability groups allow the learners to progress more closely to their optimal rates. Group composition changes as the learners' learning rate change (Warger 1998: 75-78).

The group activities are composed of short segments that focus on specific skills or combinations of previously taught skills. Educators explain, demonstrate, and ask questions for fifteen or twenty minutes in each subject area. These short segments closely approximate the attention span of kindergartens, capturing their interest through fast-moving and varied tasks (Warger 1998: 75-78).

Direct instruction can take as little as one hour a day. The educator and a paraprofessional teach two groups concurrently while a third group works independently at learning or activity stations. Learners at the activity stations might choose from a variety of learner-centred activities such as building with blocks, looking at books, playing in the kitchen or at the sand and water tables, and working on the computer. A fine motor and manipulative table might be equipped with puzzles, crayons, and clay. The remainder of the daily schedule includes typical whole group activities such as music, art, gross motor activities, and snack time (Shonkoff & Meisels 2000: 187).

2.5.5 Resistance to the behavioural approach

According to Warger (1998: 55), the paradigm that dominates contemporary education is behavioural despite many denials. This practice is implicitly or explicitly based on the

theories of Thorndike and Skinner. The core principles of the behavioural paradigm assume that only those aspects that can be measured are of value psychologically and by extension, educationally. Stimuli and responses, test questions, and answers are all measurable and, therefore all that are valuable from a behavioural point of view.

Warger (1998: 55) is of the opinion that the behavioural view is implicit in educational settings where testing determines learning success and is the final evaluator in decisions about individual retention and advancement. In its extreme form behaviourism conceptualizes the learner as a more or less empty bottle that gets filled up with many facts and skills at each grade level. Learners are taught according to a set of learning principles that have been demonstrated experimentally. The possibility of these principles can be measured by standardised tests and classroom management can also be accomplished using a set of well-defined behavioural principles.

Another unacceptable characteristic of the behavioural approach is that learners are taught according to a set of learning principles that have been demonstrated experimentally. Such principles may or may not pay respect to the learner's home or broad environmental background, something that is emphasised in social theories such as the constructivist theory of Vygotsy (Shonkoff & Meisels 2000: 187-189).

2.5.6   The constructivist approach

The constructivist approach to learner development has an interactive sociocultural perspective. He believes that learners build knowledge through the interaction of biological maturation and environmental influences. However, constructivists do not believe that features of the environment are universal across different cultures and contexts. In practice, experiences are processed or interpreted through varying cultures or contexts and may have different effects on learners' learning and development, depending on the learner's culture and the context he or she experiences (Shonkoff & Meisels 2000: 250).

Some researchers (Warger 1998: 53) believe that the goals of early childhood education can only be fulfilled when the environment, materials and teaching practices used with young learners, suit their levels of understanding and their unique modes of learning.

This category of programmes for the education of young learners comprises programmes such as the High Scope model and programmes developed by Copple. These approaches use the work of Piaget as a basis for development. At the same time, the fact that such programmes differ in significant ways suggests that Piaget never intended his theory to be directly translated into curriculum for young learners. These differences result from the way in which Piaget's work has been interpreted by the curriculum developer, the specific elements of the theory that are central to the curriculum, and the elements other than the developmental theory that are included in the curriculum conception (Shonkoff & Meisels 2000: 94-95).

The high quality early education programmes based on Piagetian ideas are fundamentally premised on the belief that learners are active learners who develop their knowledge from activities they plan and carry out themselves (Barnett & Boocock 1998: 85-86). The good educators try to identify the learner's zone of proximal development and to individualise their efforts with each learner. They then structure activities just above the learner's current ability. To help the learner make that leap, the educator needs individual knowledge of the learner's current functioning and must understand the step that lies immediately ahead for the learner.

Having looked at the merits and demerits of the different approaches, Shonkoff and Meisels (2000: 95-96) questioned whether it could be assumed that all young learners should attend the same kinds of programmes given widely disparate backgrounds. The conclusion was that there may be no need to separate the developmental from the academic approaches, instead, the approaches could be fused into a hybrid while considering individual situations. The suggestion is to stand middle ground where childhood can be preserved and at the same time learners are given access to academic skills.

Furthermore, to empower economically disadvantaged learners, there is a need to bring early education to where the learners are, consider both cultural and community contexts, and move towards a model of practice that is more in line with dominant early childhood education practices. That way both learners' existing cultures and those with which they need to be familiar can be addressed (Shonkoff & Meisels 2000: 95-96; O'Brien 1997: 101).

Regarding issues of power in early learning programmes, it is recommended that the opinion of early childhood educators and their experiences be considered. It must be acknowledged

that it is impossible to create a model for good educators without taking issues of culture and community context into account. To quote Shonkoff & Meisels (2000:105), "We have to really listen to the voices of non-white, non-middle class educators and stop trying to tell people that we know what is best for them. We have to not just say, but truly believe that people are experts on their own lives."

2.6 THE ROLE OF INTERVENTION PROGRAMMES

A number of researchers (Balfanz 2003: 4; Chance:1997: 506; Hargis 1997: 6-7; Rath 2002: 81) agree on the fact that intervention programmes are some of the most important efforts to equalise educational opportunity. The concept stems from the recognition that learners from disadvantaged backgrounds frequently do not have the same educational benefits as their peers.   Intervention programmes are intended to ease those problems by providing disadvantaged learners with additional services to help them complete their education on more equal terms.

After more than three decades, however, popular intervention programmes like Title 1 and Head Start are now being criticised for failing to have done enough to close the large gap in school achievement between disadvantaged learners and their more fortunate counterparts. Educators, policy makers, and parents increasingly need to know whether intervention programmes really work (Vinovskis 1999: 188).

One way of responding to the above question, would be to refer to evaluation reports on intervention programmes to establish whether it was successful or not. In addition, reference will be made to what is regarded as factors that influence programme success. A review of intervention programmes in various countries will ultimately provide an idea of how the programmes were conceived and how they are implemented.

2.6.1 The evaluation of intervention programmes

The concept of intervention programmes has come under heavy criticism mainly on the grounds that it has not been successful in achieving its goals and should therefore be considered a lost course (Wong & Meyer 1998: 117-118). Several surveys of intervention programmes conducted in the early sixties for disadvantaged learners concluded that while

they were satisfied that the programmes could be helpful to individual learners, there was no evidence that any of the programmes reviewed had significantly raised the achievement of participating learners. Intervention programmes like the Head Start had had little impact on the cognitive development of the learners involved.

Schweinhart and Weikart (1997: 119) and Shonkoff and Meisels (2000: 365-366) also examined the evaluation reports and came to the conclusion that the evidence regarding the effectiveness of intervention programmes was ambiguous. They maintain that it is difficult to refute the criticism that the programmes have not had widespread substantial success irrespective of whether one believed that all intervention efforts have failed or whether the evaluation process was flawed.

At the same time Sweinhart and Weikart (1997: 118) reported that a review of a Direct Instruction curriculum model, indicated significantly higher IQ increases on the Stanford Binet Intelligence Test than did the Nursery School group. The conclusion from the study through age ten was that well implemented preschool curriculum models had strong effects on learners' intellectual and academic performances.

In support of the effectiveness of intervention programmes, McDill (1998: 325) refutes research outcomes that claim, for instance, that Title 1 was not meeting its fundamental mandate of eliminating the large achievement gaps between the high poverty learners and their less disadvantaged peers. In contrast, results of evaluation studies carried out in the last decade provide convincing evidence of at least limited effectiveness of Title 1.

The second accusation against intervention programmes is that programmes have tried to change what cannot be changed to any great extent as genetic factors are more important than environmental factors in producing differences in measured intelligence. The premises on which intervention programmes efforts have been based should be re-examined (Bailey 2000: 72; Bornman & D'Agostino 1996: 139-140).

Recently the old controversy over the relative importance of nature in the development of intellectual functioning has been revived in the discussions on the value of intervention programmes. Some researchers (Horowitz 1996: 182; Stevenson & Lee 1996) hold the view that greater weight ought to be given to genetic differences. Others (Hohmann & Weikart

1997: 35-37) maintain that those who hold such a view underestimated evidence of strong environmental influences on measured intelligence.

Hohmann and Weikart (1997: 36) point out that the basic structures of the brain need rich post-natal stimulation in order to develop adequately. While they accept that intelligence has a genetic basis and that all learners do not have the same educational potential, they stress that intelligence is a developmental concept, and that the level of stimulation has considerable effect on its development.

According to Macguire (1999: 48) it is true that some intervention programmes have been based on the over optimistic premise that environmental modification and stimulation can achieve wonders with nearly all learners. At the same time it is necessary to give support to Beck's (1999: 118) suggestion that educators should cease to use intelligence tests as a means of assessing cognitive gains resulting from specific intervention programmes. Such tests have particular limitations when used with disadvantaged populations. Instead they must employ mainly direct tests of the skills which a programme is intended to improve or inculcate.

In the third instance, researchers (Wang 1996: 4-5; Welch 1995: 51) also warn that it is wrong to label learners as disadvantaged. These researchers observed that concepts such as disadvantaged and deprived are loosely used and maintain that such labelling often encourages stereotyped thinking.

The use of labels has to some extent interfered with the success of the programme since it included some learners who would normally not have been part of the intervention programme and excluded others who would have benefited from such programmes (Pianta 1996: 116). It is important to design programmes based on the diagnosis of individual learners' problems, but as Zadja (1996: 117) points out, planners have developed programmes for entire populations when individual diagnosis and study might indicate that only certain aspects of the programmes are appropriate for a particular learner.

Finally, it should be noted that there are those researchers (Cohen & Bronson 1997: 407; Epstein, Schweinhart & McAdoo 1996: 32) who suggest that in spite of the justifiable criticism levelled against labeling learners, the designation of whole sections of populations as

disadvantaged has served to focus attention on the problems to be tackled. They, however, hasten to advise that labeling learners as disadvantaged or at risk has a danger of stigma being attached to the identification or deficit of any kind.

The period during which intervention programmes are implemented has an impact on the success of the programmes (Anderson & Pellicer, 1996: 28; Lee et al 1998: 478) and has, as a result, compromised the goal of many programmes. While it is true that the early years are of great significance for the learner's later development, it is important to indicate that the years from six to twelve are crucial with respect to later academic achievement.

Lee et al (1998: 479) agree about the significance of the early years, but proceed to explain that many projects in intervention programmes have chosen to work with young learners because these projects received only sufficient funds to enable them to concentrate on a limited range.

Evaluation outcomes have indicated that generally, participant learners performed better than non-participants, especially immediately after the programme (Macguire 1999: 51). The increases have been greatest when programmes were of longest duration. In addition to reporting gains on intellectual functioning, some researchers (Beck 1999: 123; Cohen & Bronson 1997: 426) also have reported immediate positive effects on learners' attitudes, motivation and social behaviour.

Follow-up evaluations have indicated that the immediate advantages to participant learners generally diminish by the end of the first or second year in public school. By the end of the third grade poor learners who have had preschool experiences perform approximately on par with their peers who have not, and both groups perform below national norms (Barnett & Boocock 1998: 45).

2.7   EXAMPLES OF INTERVENTION PROGRAMMES IN INDUSTRIALISED COUNTRIES

Nations have, for various reasons, always valued education which has been regarded as an enabling mechanism for individuals and society to increase economic productivity (Vinovskis 1999: 187). Calls for improved schooling continue to focus on the need for educated citizens

and productive workers. To achieve this objective, the preschool years are targeted more than ever before (Anderson & Pellicer 1996: 28; Woods 1996: 17).

2.7.1   Intervention programmes in the United States of America (USA)

Intervention programmes in the USA have been comprehensive in aim and scope. During the early 1960s the effects of early intervention on human development were studied with the outcome that preschool intervention programmes might be the important step for disrupting the cycle of poverty experienced by large numbers of Americans. This notion received federal support and led to the establishment of the Head Start Project in 1965 and others that followed (Cohen 1997: 420; Woods 1996: 17).

The discussion on intervention programmes in this section will focus on those programmes that are of relevance to the South African situation and those that may be the original version of a South African model. A programme like Head Start, for instance, embodies elements of provision that may be similar to the proposed inter-sectoral provision of the Departments of Education, Social Development and Health in South Africa.

2.7.1.1 Project Head Start

Head Start, initially a hastily implemented summer programme in 1965, was converted to a year round programme after the realization that it was not sufficient to overcome the problems faced by young disadvantaged learners. Although it was intended to help at risk learners prepare for entrance into Foundation Phase, its proponents were determined to keep it separate from the traditional educational programmes that were seen as too narrow in scope and ineffective in practice (Click 2000: 47; Schweinhart 1997: 117; Vinovskis 1999: 205).

Rather than being a strictly education programme, Head Start was expected to provide a broad array of educational, health, nutrition, social and psychological services. Yet, in proposing the programme to policy makers and the public, advocates frequently focussed on the widely held hope that Head Start would dramatically improve the IQ of young at risk learners and raised high expectations for the programme's success (Click 2000: 48; Vinovskis 1998: 111; Vinovskis 1999: 205).

Some of its broad objectives were to promote learners' mental processes and skills, with particular attention to conceptual and mental skills, and to foster the emotional, social and physical development of the learner. The programme also aimed to inculcate a responsible attitude towards society and to encourage learners and their families to solve problems (Ross & Smith 1997: 172; Taylor 2002: 8-10).

Head Start suffered a serious setback after the evaluation of the programme in 1969 found that gains in the participating learners' IQs were small and faded quickly. Some of the non cognitive benefits of the programme were praised but these were not emphasised. It did not adequately prepare many of its learners for transition from the programme to the regular school. As a result the Follow Through Programme was created (Click 2000: 48).

2.7.1.2 The Follow Through Programme

The Follow Through was started as a pilot venture in 1969 to extend Head Start services from preschool into the primary school. The agreement was that it should focus primarily on learners in kindergarten and primary school who were previously enrolled in Head Start or similar programmes. It was designed to provide services to both learners and parents from low economic backgrounds (Ross & Smith 1997: 175).

Follow Through was to be a comprehensive programme providing for the educational, emotional, physical, medical and nutritional needs of Foundation Phase learners and was to be administered under the authority of the Department of Health, Education and Welfare. The agreement was that it should be an experimental programme designed chiefly to produce information that would be useful if the programme was extended nationwide (Ross & Smith 1997: 175).

Based on this broad task, Follow Through undertook a strategy of planned variation to assess the effectiveness of a variety of different approaches for working with disadvantaged learners and their families in a number of different cultural and environmental settings. Lee et al (1998: 479), Ross and Smith (1997: 175-179) refer to the following five approaches that were adopted.

The first group placed heavy emphasis on teaching academic skills and concepts within the classroom through programmed instruction techniques. Highly structured educational environments were developed to accelerate rates of learning.

The second group, the discovery approach, aimed to develop learning processes that would create autonomous, self-confident learners. Their focus was not on teaching but rather on promoting exploration and self-discovery. The system resembled the open-classroom model that facilitated interconnected discoveries about the physical environment and the social environment.

The third group referred to as the cognitive discovery approach, was almost like structured learning but was less systematic and aimed at developing the growth of basic cognitive processes (Ross & Smith 1997: 175-176).

The fourth group was the self-sponsored approach where the educators played the role of originator and provider of the project. They had the latitude of adapting the project to suit the individual and environmental needs of different learners.

The fifth group was almost similar to the self-sponsored approach but emphasised commitment to high levels of parent participation in programme planning and health issues of young learners.

According to the latest approaches, the programmes now include learners with AIDS and those with Special Needs (Lee et al 1998: 479; Shonkoff & Meisels 2000: 518-520; and Taylor 2002: 286-288).

2.7.1.3 Title 1 Programmes

Title 1 programmes were part of the strategy to fight poverty in the United States as they had faith in the efficacy of education in eradicating poverty. Disadvantaged learners were targeted and significant amounts of funds were set aside to eliminate much of the large academic achievement gap observed between poor learners and their more fortunate counterparts (Vinovskis 1999: 188).

Despite the tremendous diversity in Title 1 programmes, the emphasis in most has been on the basic skills of reading and mathematics. Delivery services included pullout, add-on, in-class, and replacement programmes with the nature and content of services determined by the individual school district or even individual schools. For example the improvement of reading and language skills was sought through new curricula, teaching methods, instructional material and instructional systems. New technologies included language laboratories, talking typewriters, and more recently, a variety of computer-based instructional programmes (Vinovskis 1999: 189; Wong & Meyer 1998: 117-118).

A review of these programmes revealed that Title 1 programmes emphasised maternal and child health services and authorised financial assistance to develop health services for poor mothers and children. Title II emphasised services for crippled learners and the prevention of crippling diseases and the amelioration of secondary handicaps. Title III consisted of welfare services and focused on the funding of programmes, especially in rural areas, for the care and protection of homeless, dependent and neglected learners (Shonkoff & Meisels 2000: 7-8; Reynolds, Temple, & Robertson 2002: 268-269).

Title 1 was more of a funding mechanism than a specific programme or policy for helping learners who were at risk. No demonstrated relationship between the costs of the instruction learners received and changes in academic achievement were found. More disturbing, policy makers did not really know which intervention programmes or practices were most effective in helping disadvantaged learners. Many local schools simply accepted the funds without fundamentally altering the educational opportunities they offered poor learners or used some of the funds to educate non-Title 1 learners (Shonkoff & Meisels 2000: 7-8; Vinovskis 1999: 190).

According to Wong and Meyer (1998:118), Title 1 recipients did better than non-Title 1 learners but unfortunately at risk learners in high poverty schools were not helped to close the academic achievement gap. Title 1 may have helped, but was too weak an intervention to bring the participating learners up to par with their classmates.

Not all of the results of the evaluation of early childhood programmes are as discouraging as Head Start and Follow Through. Some have produced promising results as the widely cited

SWELL and the Perry Preschool Programme in Ypsilanti, Michigan (Center 1998: 146; Vinovskis 1999: 208).

2.7.1.4 Literacy Programmes

In addition to the programmes discussed above, the USA uses language and literacy programmes such as the Integrated Reading-Writing Programme, DISTAR and Schoolwide Early Language and Literacy (SWELL). Such programmes are premised on the strong belief that providing disadvantaged learners with appropriate early intervention in print concepts, story language discourse, and phonological processing skills in the early years will reduce subsequent difficulties with reading, spelling and writing (Center & Freeman1997: 23; Traweek 1997: 160).

Of these programmes, SWELL is the most popular and is based upon an interactive intervention model of reading acquisition. It assumes that an essential prerequisite for reading develop during the preschool years as learners interact with a literary environment. However, it also acknowledges that those learners who have not been exposed to concepts about print, and to lively verbal exchanges with their parents and peers, do not understand the nature of text nor that letters represent speech and they are meant to communicate a meaning (Center and Freeman1997: 23).

The proactive role of the school, in respect of literacy, has been reinforced by a recent longitudinal study which found that schools which had well developed reading programme in Kindergarten produced long term benefits for all learners, but particularly so for those classified as at risk (Center and Freeman1998: 24).

Evidence on the critical role of early school instructional programmes also indicated that the reading success of learners who enter school lacking in the rudimentary reading skills appears to be more sensitive to instructional variation. This is not so with the success of learners who enter with better developed skills (Scalon & Velluntino 1996: 62). Furthermore they identified instructional programmes that placed greater emphasis on phoneme awareness, alphabetic mapping and word identification skills as those most likely to prevent reading impairment in at risk learners.

Preliminary evaluations of SWELL programmes at the end of a twelve month implementation period have indicated significantly higher scores in SWELL schools on tests of early literacy measuring the reading of connected text (Center & Freeman 1997: 21).

The Perry Preschool project was conducted among disadvantaged, low IQ learners from Ipsilanti, Michigan. The subjects were recruited by locating families with three year old learners and interviewing the parents to determine their occupation, education, and household density (Vinovskis 1998: 115). It took place during the academic year as a regular school programme. The curricular approach was based on the theories of development of Piaget. The theoretical approach emphasised the relationship between content and levels of development, for example motor and verbal (Vinovskis 1998: 115).

Developmentally appropriate activities and learners' roles were emphasised. Learners entered the programme at age three and attended for two years while educators visited their homes for ninety minutes per week. The early childhood programme was very successful, that is, it significantly increased high school graduation rates (Vinovskis 1999: 207). .

The High Scope is a cognitively inclined curriculum model designed in the late sixties to assess which of the curriculum models worked best for learners living in poverty. The bases of this curriculum are that learners must be actively involved in learning and that they construct knowledge from interaction with the world around them. The role of the educator is to supply learners with experiences through the use of thought provoking questions (Reynolds, Temple, Robertson & Mann 2002: 285; Reynolds et al 2003: 268; Schweinhart & Weikart 1997: 117).

The High Scope curriculum model represents the open framework approach based on Piaget's constructivist theory of learner development. Educators facilitate intellectual, social and physical key experiences in learners' development. These key experiences represent the domains of the learners' initiative, social relations, creative representation, music and movement; language and literacy and the logical and mathematical operations of classification, seriation and number and their application to space and time (Hohman 1997: 20; Schweinhart & Weikart 1999: 120).

The High Scope curriculum model is said to improve adult success and social responsibility better than the Direct Instruction preschool because learners are encouraged to take initiative and to select and plan their activities (Hohman 1997: 20). In addition, linking planning ability to social responsibility, correctional programmes that place an emphasis on participants' critical thinking and reasoning about their behaviour have been found to effectively prevent crime (Hohman 1997: 20-21; Schweinhart & Weikart 1997: 120).

2.7.2   Intervention programmes in Britain

Although the causes of educational disadvantage may differ from country to country, most of the approaches to intervention programmes are not strikingly different from the American pattern. In Britain the gap between the educational opportunities and achievements of working class and middle class learners, which seem to widen as the learners get older, has been a concern (Mittler 1999: 3).

A nationwide scheme was proposed to help schools in the neighbourhoods where learners were most severely affected by a combination of social and education handicaps. Like their American counterparts, the British government recommended that schools in grossly deprived areas referred to as "educational priority areas", should be given special help so that they could supply compensating environments. Local authorities were asked to adopt a policy of "positive discrimination" in favour of such schools (Gill 1998: 15).

In Britain there was a belief that emergency short-term programmes would result in noticeable changes. Arrangements to promote intervention programmes included designating a number of schools as "in need of care" and gave such schools preferential treatment. This included increasing provision of free preschool education, extending the school day, for extra informal work, and preparing new readers and other material relevant to the experiences of learners from culturally deprived families (Gill 1998: 15).

Educational opportunity and success are greatly affected in Britain, not only by the factors in the home and school, but also by regional inequalities. Osborn, Broadfoot, Panel and Pollard (1997: 377) emphasise the need to take into account the learner's total environment in assessing his or her opportunities for education.

2.7.2.1 The Swansea Project

The Swansea Project was intended for the at-risk five to six year old learners. The learners were evaluated three years after having completed the programme and their performance measured against the predictor variables set for school performance (Osborn et al 1997: 377-379).

The Swansea Project suggests that intervention programmes must be focussed eventually on the home and the school. There is a need to look at the preparation for school given to learners by families in deprived areas and to survey the special problems of schools for early learners in disadvantaged areas (Mittler 1999: 7).

According to Rodd (2002: 344) in the past five years there has been concern about the focus on assessment and the achievement targets prescribed in the National Curriculum. The strategies used in the National Curriculum which include the Literacy Hour, the Numeracy Strategy and the Key Stage 3 to improve learner performance put pressure on the learners and they feared failure, became disengaged and alienated from learning.

Teachers are leaving the profession because of pressure to cover a curriculum dominated by literacy, numeracy, science and communication technology. The curriculum is said to devalue the arts and humanities and is driven by assessment. This explains the present recruitment and retention crisis in the teaching profession in England (Rodd 2002: 344).

The situation of early learning programmes in South African can to a great extent be likened to the English situation. The role of the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) is similar to that of the National Research Foundation (NRF) in South Africa which also emphasises science and technology more than the arts and humanities. Secondly, teachers are leaving the profession although it may be for different reasons. There is therefore a strong need for an investigation into the low teacher morale and the demands of the new education dispensation.

2.7.3   Intervention programmes in industrialized Asia

2.7.3.1 Early childhood programmes in Japan

Japan experienced a wave of industrialisation in the sixties and along with it education reforms. The development of early learning centres in this country was not the result of indigenous movements but owe their existence to the ideas of European philosophers and educators such as Froebel and Dewey. The Japanese advanced and adapted western ideas for use in their own country rather than in initiating new approaches (Ben-Ari 1997: 197).

The education of young learners spread rapidly in Japan because of the same factors that led to their popularity in the west. They were effective in providing care for learners of working mothers, offering early social experience, preparing learners for early Foundation Phase and compensating for life in urban environments (Wai-Yum 2003: 43).

Practitioners in early childhood stress the importance of social and emotional development and believe that socio emotional development is not only of fundamental importance itself but is also a necessary precursor of intellectual development. They do not emphasise the direct teaching of academic skills until the learner's emotional development has reached at least the age of six, when he or she begins Foundation Phase (Wai-Yum 2003: 46).

2.7.3.2 The organisation of Japanese programmes

The organisation of Japanese programmes in early childhood education differs markedly from what is found in the west where nursery schools and kindergartens typically are separate institutions. In Japan the two are combined into single units serving three to six year olds and most are privately owned (Ben-Ari 1997: 198). To provide better clarity, he refers to the different institutions by Japanese names.

The Yochien (nurseries) cater for learners under three years of age and may also include five year olds. They are usually privately owned or are sponsored by Buddhist temples or Christian missions (Barnett & Boocock 1998: 76).

In Japan, most of the learning centres are in the form of Katsura Hoikuen (day care centres) and cater for learners between the ages of four and six years although most of the learners are between the ages of three and five years. Educators are highly literate and parents of learners are predominantly white-collar company employees, educators and self-employed people. Hoikuen were established after the Second World War for learners of the poor in an effort to counter the rapid urbanisation of Japan (Ben-Ari 1997: 197).

2.7.3.3 The curriculum

The curriculum of Japanese kindergartens is divided into six domains: health, society, nature, language, drawing, music and rhythm. Notable is the omission of academic subjects. No time is allocated for teaching mathematics or reading, and no Japanese characters are taught. In fact, Kelly (1996: 334) asserts that any teaching of academic subjects is counter to the policies of the Ministry of Education.

Whatever is introduced about mathematical concepts of quantity, time and space is aimed at increasing learners' interest in and general knowledge about mathematics, rather than at teaching formal mathematical operations. Most important is the fact that Japanese parents send their learners to kindergarten to learn about group activities. Those who seek more training for their learners may also enroll them in a private school where they may learn the rudiments of mathematics reading or English (Kelly 1996: 335).

According to Ben-Ari (1997:197) what gives character to these institutions are the documents that guide the nature of programmes and their organisation. Organisational documentation, not including learners' books, is more extensive in Japan than in any other industrialised country.

2.7.3.4 The implementation strategies

The implementation strategies of early childhood education in Japan are likened to the organisation in industry. Implementation is predicted on the same kinds of premises as management techniques of industry and large scale organisations. For instance "standard products" are developed on the basis of design and specifications set forth by the social world. In the same way preschools transform the crude raw material of childhood into a

socially useful product. They do so by the system of bureaucratic processing by which learners are classified into subcategories. Standards of physical, technical and intellectual achievement are set for each subcategory and spatial frameworks for the achievement of these standards are created (Ben-Ari 1997: 235; Kelly 1996: 345-347).

The second principle is that educational transformation is undertaken in a highly systematic, directional and intentional way. The production of social beings in institutions of early childhood education is done in a more ordered and methodical manner than in "ordinary" families or oral societies. Japanese preschools are out to deliberately and precisely make youngsters into good Japanese learners (Ben-Ari 1997: 236-237).

The systematic checks carried out at certain developmental stages in the learners' lives can be seen as kinds of quality control mechanisms by which the 'product' and the means of its production are evaluated. This ensures that the ECD model is not predicted on some abstract cultural givens, but on the concrete organisational arrangements (Ben-Ari 1997: 237-238).

The foregoing discussion on intervention programmes in industrialised countries indicates that the programmes owe their existence to economic development initiatives aimed at uplifting poor sections of communities. The trend has been to focus on child and family development through relevant quality programmes.

2.8 EXAMPLES OF INTERVENTION PROGRAMMES IN DEVELOPING COUNTRIES

In developing countries the need for early learning programmes is determined by circumstances at a given time and by what societies want their learners to be like. Concrete real life situations and not philosophical definitions define human life and what the future of children and of society should be. In situations where there is a high rate of mortality, survival is of primary concern and little thought is given to the learner's intellectual development. When the infant mortality rates change, attention can be shifted to the intellectual and psychological development of the learner (Evans 1998: 427, Gill 1998: 16).

According to Evans (1998: 427) in Sub-Saharan Africa, severe adverse conditions have placed learners at risk. Persistent and worsening poverty, rapid economic change and

population growth, increasing urbanisation, a changing family structure, growing numbers of orphaned refugees and displaced women and learners from internal civil strife, are conditions that have impacted negatively on the growth of early childhood education. Fortunately the decline in infant mortality rates has increased the wave of interest in early childhood education. Emphasis on survival strategies has now shifted to economic needs that force societies to plan for their children. Conditions such these make viable social policy for learners younger than five years of age an urgent necessity.

2.8.1   Intervention programmes in Sub-Saharan Africa

2.8.1.1 Intervention programmes in Kenya

In the past in Kenya, learners' development occurred naturally, within a framework of caring in a traditional community of predominantly rural families. Emphasis was on learner care and not on educational development. Although the programme of this system presented limits to learners' development and mobility within the group, it provided learners with security of acceptance because of the clearly defined roles and relationships (Riak 1997: 205)

Kenya's young parents today, especially the rural mothers and single parents, are obliged to combine child-rearing with economic activities without the traditional support system. The overall result is that parents who cannot afford to pay child minders and whose children cannot accompany them to the work place often leave their children in the care of other children who should themselves be in school, or they leave them to fend for themselves. These are the children both in rural and urban areas, who may be malnourished, may become victims of fire, abuse and other environmental hazards. They may later become adult social misfits through no fault of their own (Myers 1996: 66-67).

Recent decades, however, have seen major changes in social structures and a great change in outlook with regard to child development and greater demands being made on the new generations. The weakened role of the extended family resulting from technological changes and urbanisation has led to new concepts and values about childrearing practices (Evans 1998: 428, Riak 1997: 206).

According to Colletta and Reinhold (1997:3-4), government participation in preschool education was through the Ministry of Housing and Social Services. This Ministry together with other Ministries such as Health, Local Government and Education made a great impact in one form or another in their effort to lay the foundation of preschool education in Kenya.

The general objectives of preschool education in Kenya include among others, developing the learners' mental capabilities and physical growth, developing learners' self reliance and thinking skills, enriching the learners' experience so as to enable them to cope better with primary school life. The programme also aimed at teaching learners to appreciate their cultural background and customs (Riak 1997: 206; UNICEF 2000: 6).

The National Centre for Early Childhood Education (NACECE) based at the Curriculum Development Centre, Kenya Institute of Education, was established as the professional body to implement government policy on early childhood education. The centre developed a network of subcentres known as District Centres for Early Childhood Education (DICECEs), whose officers served as facilitators and trainers for early childhood programmes (Riak 1997: 208).

According to Evans (1998: 427-429) the Ministry of Basic Education was responsible for curriculum development and the development of support materials. However, since most of the nursery schools are built and managed by parents' committees and although people's attitudes are positive, care was taken to minimise the cost of production of these support materials so as to accommodate those poor nursery schools in the rural areas. The establishment of an Early Learning Resource Centre was seen as a solution to such problems.

The curriculum of Kenyan programmes resembles that of other countries to a great extent. Different terminologies are used for various institutions concerned with the care and education of learners before they enter formal schooling. The terminologies used in urban areas include: kindergarten, nurseries, and pre-primary. In rural areas these institutions are commonly known as day care centres or nurseries. To avoid the confusion arising from these different concepts, the proposition was made that a uniform concept of 'preschool centres' be adopted.

It could be noted that with the change of government this situation might be different and may need to be updated.

2.8.1.2 Intervention programmes in other Sub-Saharan African countries

Although information on ECD programmes from different African states is scarce, Colletta and Reinhold (1997: 1-2) explain that such programmes have been introduced in Sub-Saharan Africa for the same reasons as in other countries.

Torkington (2001: 2-4) indicates that different African states realise that their economic and social development are dependent upon their future generations. The realisation that the development of early learning programmes is feasible if approached in an integrated manner has promoted the existence of such ECD programmes. The following serve as good examples.

The Angolan Mobile Trauma Team combines the traditional culture and healing rites with modern methods on child development, trauma and healing. The Child-to-Child Health and Education programmes in Botswana also serve as a school readiness programme. The Nigerian Development Communication Project reaches learners between the ages of three to six years via national television. In Zimbabwe the Kushanda integrated community project in commercial farming settlements serves as focal point for early learning programmes. In countries such as Ghana and Mali ECD programmes are combined with maternal health, skills training and women's joint credit associations (Colletta & Reinhold 1997: 2-5; UNICEF 2000: 6).

With regard to ECD policies, the working group of the Association for the Development of Education in Africa (ADEA) reported that ECD policies in the region are broad and include children between the ages of three to six years. The main task of the working group is to circulate policy documents among different governments as a way of raising awareness and encouraging government commitment in ECD (Torkington 2001: 2-4).

2.8.2   Intervention programmes in developing Asia

2.8.2.1 The Indian early childhood programmes

Early childhood programmes in most populous poor countries such as India are non formal. The overall goals of the programme are to provide a comprehensive range of services to children and mothers, to create a mechanism at village level through which services can be delivered, and to give priority to India's low income groups including the underprivileged tribes and castes. The specific objectives include laying the foundation for psychosocial, physical, and social development of the child, to enhance the capability of mothers to look after the needs of the child and to achieve effective coordination among agencies and departments involved in child development (Brayboy & Deyhle 2000: 164; Myers 1996: 95).

The integrated package of the Indian Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) services works through a network of Anganwadi (literally, courtyard) Centres, each run by an Anganwadi Worker (AW) and helper usually selected from the local village. The AW undergoes a three month's training in one of the training centres run by the voluntary and governmental agencies. The responsibilities of the AW include non formal preschool education, supplementary feeding, health nutrition education, parenting education through home visiting community support and participation and primary maternal and child health care referrals. Support is provided to the AW by a supervisor (one per twenty AWs) and a Child Development Programme Officer (one per five supervisors) who is directly responsible for the implementation and management of each ICDS project (Myers 1996: 95; Sadao 2002: 73).

The ICDS programme utilises existing services of diverse governmental departments and of voluntary agencies. Overall administration lies with the Department of Women and Child Development within the Ministry of Human Resource Development. Although the programme often operates at a minimum level of quality, it has never the less had important effects on early learning. The ICDS, the largest programme of its kind, illustrates the power of political commitment to achieve significant rates of coverage in integrated programmes of attention to children up to age six, with important effects on health and education at a reasonable cost per child (Myers 1996: 96; Brayboy & Deyhle 2000: 164-169).

2.8.2.2 The Indonesian early childhood programmes

The Indonesian early childhood programmes are built around a system of home visits which are part of nutrition programme. These services and their organisational structures have nutrition as a base for the introduction of early childhood development programmes designed to enhance the mental and social development of children under five years of age (Brayboy & Deyhle 2000: 166).

The Health Ministry for the Role of Women established an organisation consisting of women whose role is to promote information on childcare. This effort helped to provide a more appropriate developmental environment for young children. In addition, mothers participate in group discussions, share and make and borrow toys from a toy-lending shop and agree upon particular activities that they work out at home (Myers 1996: 104; Sadao 2002: 73-84).

Myers (1996: 105) also explained that research plays a significant role in the development of programmes for early learners. A research project on child-rearing practices pointed to a number of practices detrimental to health and or development and identified some traditional practices that were positive and needed to be reinforced.

It is important to note that in Indonesia the health-based childhood programmes recognise local practices and rely on skills of successful local caregivers. The two elements are brought together by evidence derived from research.

2.8.2.3 The Nepal early childhood programmes

The Nepal ECD programmes are unique in their support for children and mothers. In rural Nepal where more than forty two percent of the population is estimated to live below the poverty line and where the infant mortality rate is very high, women play a major economic role in the sustenance of the family farm that produces the family's average annual income. They are also engaged in a range of informal income generating activities. The government initiated programme of production credit for rural women. The goal of the credit scheme is to support activities that would simultaneously generate income and improve conditions in the community, including levels of health, nutrition and literacy (Brayboy 2000: 163-167; Myers 1996: 100).

To obtain and guarantee repayment of credit, the credit programme asked that the women organise themselves into small groups of five or six. These groups of women also became the unit for organising day care. Within the group women agree to share responsibility for taking care of their children between the ages of one and three in their homes, and on a rotating basis, each woman taking the children in her home for one day of each week. All women in the group receive an intensive four-day training course at the village level. Each group is provided with a basic kit of materials. Since the majority of women are illiterate, pictures of different activities are used in the curriculum and innovative Napalese NGOs provide training in childcare (Myers 1996:101).

Brayboy (2000: 165-167) attributes the success of the programme to decentralised planning involving the community, a comprehensive curriculum and on training that respects traditional practices while incorporating new information. It is important to note that the operating costs to the government are very low and success has occurred despite Nepal's difficult terrain and occasional conflicts between traditional child rearing habits and new approaches.

2.8.3   Intervention programmes in Latin America

2.8.3.1 Early childhood programmes in Brazil

In Brazil the integrated attention to the educational, health, and nutritional needs of young children proved to be a cost effective investment. An innovative programme involving urban families living in marginal economic conditions paid for itself by reducing repetition significantly in the first five years of primary school (Hoot & Parmar 1996: 760).

The PROAPE child programme funded by the World Bank began in 1977 as a pilot project in the state of Pernambuco and in 1981, was extended to another ten states of Northern and North Eastern Brazil, using several adaptations of the pilot project. The programme involves bringing children of ages four to six together in centres during week mornings in groups of about a hundred for a snack and for supervised psycho motor activities. A health component is also included involving check-ups, vaccinations, dental treatment and visual examinations (Evans 2002: 16-20).

In an evaluation of the PROAPE programme it was revealed that the dropout rate of the children who attended the programme was much lower that those who did not attend. The grade retention rate was also significantly low implying that the cost per first grade graduate for PROAPE was cost effective (Evans 2002: 15; Hoot & Parmar 1996: 161).

2.8.3.2 Early childhood programmes in Peru

According to Evans (2002: 25) a nutrition education project for mothers was begun in several villages in Peru where the infant mortality rate was high and malnutrition widespread. The project, initiated by volunteers from a university, evolved into a community programme that included daily cooking of mid morning snacks for children. From this cooking programme, a non formal preschool emerged that was intended to help the children who were brought along to develop mentally and socially and to prepare them for schools.

An evaluation of the PRONOEI showed that PRONEI children were socially and intellectually more prepared for primary school than a comparison group of similar children who had not participated in the PRONEI. However, this difference did not seem to be retained as children moved through the primary school presumably because of the low quality of the primary schools. The Peruvian government holds the view that effectiveness at low cost can be achieved but there is need to consider the preschool and primary school together in order to maximise the effectiveness of both (Evans 2002: 27; Myers 1996: 97-98).

2.8.3.3 Early childhood programmes in Colombia

The Colombian early childhood programme, "Homes of Well-being" is a large scale community based response to the problems of malnourishment and delayed development that experienced by millions of the country's children under the age of seven. In this programme, children from ages one to seven are cared for in groups of about fifteen children in homes located within their own neighbourhoods (Gilliam & Zigler 2000: 442).

While meeting directly the care and development needs of the children, the programme also seeks to improve a community's economic base. It assists by providing paid employment to neighbourhood care givers, by freeing other women to seek or upgrade their employment, and by directing funds to local business for economic activities related to the home day care,

such as improving homes or supplying food (Evans 2002: 27; Gilliam & Zigler 2000: 450; Peralta 2003: 64)

2.8.3.4 Early childhood programmes in Chile

According to Peralta (2003: 72), education has been a priority of the national agenda in Chile for a long time. At the early days of the republic, a cultured elite returned from exile in Europe, bringing new social ideals, especially related to education. Later on a law on compulsory primary education was enacted, continuing the trend towards greater access to education. The expansion of primary education coverage reflected the importance of schooling and the role of the state in providing opportunities for learning and development to the whole population.

Early intervention programmes have been considered "a good start" at education for the disadvantaged learners. The realisation that there are positive effects of early learning programmes in children's language, their cognition and social skills, encouraged the government to invest in preschool programmes (Villalón & Suzuzki 2002: 51). The programmes emphasise literacy, numeracy and social skills and are based on the developmental appropriate practice.

2.8.3.5 Early childhood programmes in Ecuador

Desouza and Zeck (2003: 215-216) explain that the political instability and weakened economy have challenged Ecuadorians to revamp their education system. Problems facing the poor in rural areas include sanitation, clean drinking water, transportation and proper housing. Many women have sole responsibility of supporting and taking care of their children because the men have either abandoned them or have gone to the cities to look for work.

Many young children receive no preschool education because they bear responsibility of caring for their younger siblings. The World Bank supports family development and early learning. In these centres teachers stress a Montessori designed type of environment with living centres, outside recreation, and bodily expression to promote intellectual and social development. The development of fine motor skills is regarded as significant for learning and is stressed in the curriculum. Foundations for numeracy are laid by introducing numbers and

shapes (Desouza & Zeck 2003: 218; Narayam, Patel, Schafft, Rademacher & Koch-Schulte 2000: 2).

Subjects are taught in an integrated manner to make learning enjoyable although teachers give direct instruction. Learner-to-learner interactions are restricted because of large class sizes and recitation and repetition are used to teach the alphabet. All learners were expected to move at the same rate (Desouza & Zeck 2003:222; Narayan et al 2000: 2).

2.9   CONCLUSION

It is evident from the foregoing literature review that intervention programmes in early childhood development is a phenomenon of historic significance. While these programmes were met with mixed reactions in the past, there is proof that with time their acceptance has escalated. They are now regarded as part of the education scene despite the debates around their definition and the role they are intended to play in the development of the child.

The fact that such programmes exist in both the first and third world is indicative of their influence in the development of the young learner and in his or her future success at school. The success of the programmes is ultimately determined by the manner in which they were conceived and the implementation strategies used in the realisation of their goals.

Chapter 3

Discourse on policies, the design and implementation of intervention programmes for disadvantaged school beginners

3.1 INTRODUCTION

Chapter 2 served to explain the origins and nature of intervention programmes for early learners and to provide a conceptual framework from where the argument of this study would be built. The discussion on programme appropriateness and the weaknesses of certain models brought about the realisation that some implementation approaches and programme designs may or may not be suitable for specific groups of learners. This information will thus guide the investigation on the implementation and design of intervention programmes in this study. The information in chapter 2 was, however, broad and did not deal with an in-depth analysis of programmes or the policies that guide such programmes.

This chapter will thus have a critical look at discourse on programme design, the implementation of ECD policies, the role of ECD teachers and the importance of research in ECD. The meaning of the concept 'discourse' will introduce the discussion in this chapter. This information will serve as reference for a discussion on the design, implementation and ECD policies in South Africa that will be undertaken in chapter 4.

3.2 DEFINING THE CONCEPT "DISCOURSE"

For the purpose of this study, "discourse" must be understood within the following context that promotes a broader debate.

The dictionary refers to discourse as the act, power or faculty of thinking consecutively and logically. The concept is synonymous with "dialogue" and "dissertation". According to Shonkoff and Meisels (2000: 136) discourse reflects a set of shared or common understandings about the critical dimensions of something and the ways in which it is organized. Ritchie (2003: 42) on the other hand, indicates that at any given time, the discourse on a topic is bound in important ways by culture, history and the influence of certain individuals and groups. It can be viewed as what we say and do not say as well as what we think or do not think about something, maybe because we are unable to or we dare not.

3.3   DISCOURSE ON THE DESIGN OF EARLY CHILDHOOD PROGRAMMES

The history of intervention programmes that was discussed in detail in chapter 2, section 2.2.1 indicated that early childhood programmes have been around for more than a century. However, instead of a refinement of the programmes, there are conflicting ideas about what constitutes an effective intervention programme as could be seen in the discussion of developmentally appropriate programmes, the open and behavioural approaches to intervention programmes in chapter 2, section 2.6.1 (Balfanz 2003: 4; Hargis 1997: 6-7; Vinovskis 1999: 200).

Research has established how valuable the programmes are and recommended best designs and implementation strategies, but this has not resolved the problems associated with on to early learning. It is recommended that in order to produce effective programme designs, underlying problems should be investigated and solved (Balfanz 2003: 4; Rath 2002: 81, Shonkoff & Meisels 2000: 368-369). Some of these problems are discussed below:

3.3.1   Problems associated with intervention programmes

Firstly, a major criticism against intervention programmes is that they lack definition and fall short of stating what constitutes an effective programme. The argument is that a good intervention programme should have clear aims and broad outcomes more than simply provide a minimal average gain in achievement. This fact was elaborated on in chapter 1, section 1.3 (Roberts et al 2003: 280-281; Taylor 2002: 109-111).

Secondly, the guidelines for inclusion in the programme are not clear. In America, for instance, the state specifies which schools are eligible for the programmes by ranking them on the basis of the poverty levels in the school attendance area, or by using data from the free price lunch or Aid to Families with Dependent Children. The flaw is that the guidelines do not specify *how* schools should serve those learners. It is not clear whether the learners should be "pulled out" of the programme or how long they should be in the programme in order to achieve the goals of the programme (Vinovskis 1999: 55; Morris 2000: 75).

Thirdly, different implementation strategies and focus of programmes give rise to conflicting interpretation of the same programme. Some programmes emphasise care within a broad social context while others focus on narrow education aspects. In addition their implementation differs little from that of remedial programmes even though the latter serve substantially different purposes (Shonkoff & Meisels 2000: 365-366).

Intervention programmes are designed to provide support for educational disadvantages that are a result of poverty. Remedial programmes, on the other hand, are designed to teach basic skills to learners who do not achieve well, regardless of the cause of their low achievement (Balfanz 2003: 4; Rath 2002: 81; Vinovskis 1999: 200).

In the fourth instance, governments and policy makers displayed a lack of commitment with regard to effective programmes for poor learners. There has not been enough focus on the design or rigorous testing to find out which programmes are most effective with at-risk populations in different settings (Reynolds et al 2003: 633-634).

A fifth observation is that decisions about programmes tend to be made in the Central Office rather than at school level. (In South Africa this can be equated with the national Department of Education.) Furthermore an analysis of the programmes shows that the Central Offices often make their decisions on the basis of expediency and economy rather than suitability and effectiveness (Bennett 1998: 62-65; Hernandez 1997:18).

A final concern is that intervention programmes tend to rely on the use of paraprofessionals or teacher aides because aides are less expensive than certified teachers. The use of paraprofessionals also limits the possibility that the programme's strengths and weaknesses

will be revealed. Many paraprofessionals have limited educational backgrounds and no formal training in teaching basic skills to low achieving learners (Bennett 1998: 62-65).

As a result of all the outlined flaws, intervention programmes tend to be most effective for learners who are not extremely in need of assistance to succeed in formal learning. The programmes are relatively ineffective for the majority of poor learners and many of them either enter formal learning unprepared or are retained in the programme for another year (Vinovskis 1999: 202).

In recent years a new problem is the inaccessibility of intervention programmes to the most vulnerable and most at-risk learners. Bennett (1998: 62-65) points out that inaccessibility could be the result of a lack of awareness of available services on the part of parents. There may also be individual reasons such as learners' ill health, parents' substance abuse and family violence. It is difficult for learners living in such circumstances to gain access to intervention programmes as their families are less empowered or not motivated to take action.

According to Shonkoff and Meisels (2000: 135) the reason could also be that the services are provided by an independent commercial sector, which many cannot afford. Teachers trained at top universities could be providing the service and working at kindergartens that may not be affordable to the poor. It could also be that societies have stereotypes and biases against girls, specific ethnic, socio-economic, religious or language groups and exclude the physically and mentally handicapped.

What emerges from the discussion above can be linked to the problems noted during the pilot study of this research. "The Stepping Stones" and "Learning Through Play" school readiness programmes referred to in the pilot study, could be attributed to the first five problems outlined above. Chapter 1, section 1.2 contains a discussion of these problems. This study is planned to investigate those factors that either impede or facilitate the implementation of Grade R in the research area.

3.3.2   Factors that influence programme success

It is encouraging to note that intervention programmes can be improved substantially and that in some countries efforts are under way to improve their effectiveness (Vinovskis 1999: 200). Improvement can be effected in a variety of ways:

Since the rationale for most intervention programmes is to provide learners with the knowledge and skills needed in the regular school programme, it is important to indicate what the programme aims to achieve. Success will be realised by means of setting specific and meaningful standards (Gould 1999: 190; Shweinhart & Weikart 1997: 121).

Secondly, it is important to know the school situation. For a programme to succeed, it is necessary to build strong leadership teams composed of both administrators and teachers. These teams can oversee the programme and the progress of its learners because they understand it best. This was the rationale behind the Follow Through Programme discussed in chapter 2, section 2.7.1.2 that was introduced after the evaluation of Head Start (Gould 1999: 191-193; Shweinhart 1997: 121-123).

In addition to the recommendations above, it is important to indicate which theory underpins the design of the programme because theories provide the basis on which concepts such as intervention and school readiness are built (Jackman 2001: 24-29; Mittler 1999: 5-7; Shonkoff & Meisels 2000: 364-367; Department of National Education 2002a). Theories on early intervention programmes are discussed in chapter 2, section 2.5.

Programme success also depends on teacher qualifications and expertise since it is the teachers who drive the programmes and who would know how best to adapt the programmes for specific learners. It is imperative therefore for programme developers to indicate the age of learners and the racial, social and economic diversity of the community from where these learners are drawn (Vinovskis1999: 116).

3.4 DISCOURSE ON ECD POLICIES

The realisation that even popular intervention programmes like Head Start and Follow Through are now being criticised for not successfully addressing the education problems of disadvantaged learners, despite being founded on government policies, calls for a closer look at such policies. Government policies aimed at meeting learners' needs have been mostly directed towards reducing the number of learners disadvantaged by poverty, but there is no certainty that the policy initiatives were rewarded (Wong & Meyer 1998: 118).

Barnett and Boocock (1998: 192) maintain that the reason for the continued criticism of intervention programmes could be that, in addition to poverty, there is another trend affecting early childhood education in America, namely the increasing racial and ethnic diversity of American children. They also maintain that policies are not likely to reduce disadvantage substantially if there is no research on the educational needs of diverse poor learners and the effects of childhood policies. All of these trends underscore the importance of creating policies and programmes that respond to the educational needs of an increasingly diverse population of children.

In an effort to address the emergent situation, a proposition was made for alternative approaches to public policies to ensure that the increasingly diverse developmental needs of young children are met. These policies were intended to reduce the number of learners disadvantaged by poverty. They were also directed at family circumstances or toward providing services specifically designed to meet the particular needs of learners in disadvantaged circumstances (Bornman & D;Agostino 1996:309; Winton 2000: 87).

3.4.1 Policy options

In the discussion on the need and role of early intervention programmes in the introductory paragraph of chapter 1 and in chapter 2, section 2.6, there is a wide consensus on the fact that poverty is a contributing factor to poor school performance. As a result, many governments were prompted to develop ECD policies that would alleviate the plight of the learners who live in poverty. The support varied from broad-based investment that includes whole families to specific approaches that focus on the transition to the first year of school (Balfanz 2003: 4; Hargis1997: 6-7; Rath 2002: 81).

In general, three policy options can be recognised. They include policies that reduce poverty, government subsidies and policies that promote departmental interdependence for cost effectiveness.

3.4.2   Policies to reduce poverty

Although there is not enough evidence to show the usefulness of this option, it is continually used. The approaches used in this option included paying funds directly to the impoverished families or providing funds to single mothers. Another strategy involved educating poor families about child rearing practices and about the value of a good family life (Chance1997: 506).

In Sub-Saharan Africa poverty alleviation became an option because of the persistent poverty, rapid population growth and the disappearing family support role. Early childhood support in these countries is broad based and includes health, nutrition and educational development. (Colletta & Reinhold 1997: 3; Duncan & Brooks-Gunn 1997:26)

3.4.2.1 Economic support through government taxes and transfers

Evans et al (2002: 28) maintains that the progress was made in the year 2000 to meet the needs of young children around the world. She asserts that the value of early childhood programmes has increased significantly and based this assertion on the Framework for Action adopted at the World Conference for All (WCEFA) held in Jomtien, Thailand, in 1990. This conference, among other things, stated that a good foundation for educational quality and efficiency should be set in the early childhood years. Government increasingly understand the value of early childhood programmes. This is based on the understanding of the economic benefits for different countries. As a result these programmes are a priority for investment within governments and major donor agencies.

It has also become evident that countries have created policies that recognise children's rights and define the role of government in providing support to young children and their families. The Accra Declaration from Ghana is sited as an example of a good economic intervention policy that placed high priority on children from disadvantaged environments. It

called upon all relevant governments, agencies, non-governmental organisations, individuals and other partners in early childhood development to collectively broaden Ghana's scope and vision for young children (Duncan & Brooks-Gunn 1997:28; Evans et al 2002: 30).

According to Vinovskis (1999: 189) intervention programmes and support systems, such as Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC), Food Stamps, Child Nutrition, Food Programme for Women, Infants and Children, Foster Care and Head Start effectively transfer income from the government treasury to disadvantaged children by providing either cash payments or non-cash benefits or services. Collectively, these benefits substantially reduce childhood poverty.

Although it is accepted that economic support through government taxes and transfers can reduce poverty, statistics and different accounting approaches negate this outcome. Such differences are ascribed to the fact that some poor families were not reached thus leaving the poverty rate unchanged. Secondly, it could be that the support did not take into consideration taxes that were payable by these poor families and other commitments facing such families (Delgado 1999: 81-82).

What finally emerged is that many poor children who live in families that receive government assistance continued to live in poverty because the assistance was not generous enough, even when combined with the meagre salaries earned by such families. Government support was not sufficient to lift them out of poverty. Similarly public policies are not likely to reduce most, if any of the sources of demographic diversity of children. There is therefore an increasing need for public policy to influence the wellbeing and developmental outcomes of children living in poverty (Delgado 1999: 81-82).

3.5   DISCOURSE ON THE IMPLEMENTATION OF ECD POLICIES

In many instances early childhood intervention programmes are designed during periods of transition, and are by force of circumstances, determined to find solutions to problems that plagued education systems. In industrialised countries, some of the problems might seem remote. However, those problems that appeared to be peripheral to such societies ultimately influence them in one manner or another (Winton 2000: 88).

3.5.1   The development of successful strategies

There are concrete ways of linking policy to practice. Implementation might be achieved through the involvement of for example a lobby or policy institute, the creation of pilot projects, and through information campaigns. Research results can also be directly endorsed by governments and made public in layman's language thus encouraging dialogue with ECD workers (Evans 2002: 15; Winton 2000: 87).

It is important to open channels of communication and develop exchange programmes. This ensures that ECD researchers and teachers understand each other and broad policies such as the children's rights are made known to ECD workers. To disseminate policy, it is necessary for experts and institutions that are able to carry out studies on targeted learners to identify projects in priority areas and set them up (Tougas 2000: 20-21).

Bennett (1998: 62-68) developed strategies that provided a more systematic approach to the implementation of ECD policies. His strategies attended to the plight of the socially excluded groups such as the chronically unemployed, immigrant and ethnic minority families. The strategies were based on principles regarding core values of equity, respect for diversity and dialogue.

The most important fact to note is that the success of any policy depends on the government's vision and how it motivates, guides and sustains people in their effort to bring about change. Agenda setting, networking and the establishments of social movements are some of the mechanisms that can contribute to the success of policy implementation (Winton 2000: 87).

The application of policy will remain illusive if there is no earmarking and identification of adequate resources. The devolution of resources to local authorities may be a key policy-centred strategy in assuring that resources reach through to the learners and families for whom they are intended. This will be effective only if mechanisms for accountability, monitoring and evaluation are set up (Bennett 1998: 63-68; Tougas 2000: 20-21).

Client-centred, programme-centred and organization-centred approaches are some of government recommended strategies. The purpose of the client centred-strategy was to

empower parents as the first custodians of their children to feel confident about their parenting role. The programme centred strategy responded to what was happening at grass roots level by building a network that also includes, for example, representatives of the police, social work, health services, unemployment schemes, the business community, schools, researchers and even recreational services (Bennett 1998: 63-68).

The recommended government strategies were usually for large-scale coverage and speedy implementation. However, experience has proven that they may only be successful if project staff consists of members of networks that are extensive and intensive. Government strategies also include low cost ECD which involves focusing on limited and disadvantaged populations only and establishing programmes in which trained paraprofessionals or families are the principal caregivers and teachers (Tougas 2000: 20).

It is also important to identify under-utilised resources that can be incorporated into programmes, for example people of all ages; facilities that are used part time and recycled materials. It would also be useful to incorporate ECD programmes into existing health, nutrition or adult education programmes. Media and popular channels of communication could be used for advocacy (Evans 2002: 4).

Fragmentation of ECD services can lead to unequal access and duplication of efforts. A good strategy for an organization-centred policy would be to set up an umbrella body that could monitor the situation of excluded groups and signal problems (Evans 2002: 4-5; Winton 2000: 88).

3.5.2   Promoting quality in policy making

Torkington (2001: 2-4) states that if ECD policies and interventions are to be successfully developed, action is needed at several levels particularly by governments. She argues that the presence of early childhood programmes on national agendas will be determined by the importance given to ECD policy makers, planners and child workers at local, national and international levels.

African countries that are trying to improve the quality of ECD, such as Ghana and Namibia formed teams that comprised researchers, a representative of UNICEF in the country office

and one member from government. Teamwork and networking are regarded as major components of successful policy (Torkington 2001: 2-4).

According to Colletta and Reinhold (1997: 4) using community members as teachers and trainers and developing curricular from local traditions improves the quality of ECD programmes. To improve the quality of ECD teachers and practitioners it is advisable to locate training institutions close to ECD centres and to provide real experiences for trainees.

The important issues to consider at local level include the demographics that will help determine demand and supply, available resources that can be used for provision, priorities of local government or municipalities. On the basis of these facts measures can be taken for instance to expand existing provisions, improve the quality or coordinate existing services (Bennett 1998: 46).

Quality provision at national level should be directed by major international events such as the Children's Rights. Governments must realize that children are an integral part of society and must be included within the legal framework. A good example is the system in Mauritius where child welfare is addressed through the Ministry of Women's Rights, Child Development and Family Welfare. Governments must also take charge of funding, training of staff and promote research in ECD (Colletta & Reinhold 1997: 4; Hayden 2000: 54-55).

It is evident therefore that today policy makers must consider how their policies will influence education planning, teaching, community participation, learning and the functioning of development agencies. There is need for a shift from formal structures to a broad social structure that will accommodate all structures dealing with children. Promising policies can ultimately fail, either because national policy initiatives were not adequately transferred to the local level, or developments at the local level were not reinforced by national policy-making (http://www.unicef.org/education/policy).

The Consultative Group on Early Childhood Care and Development (1999: 1-5), is a consortium of international organisations that supports children from birth to eight years. They suggested that the best way to formulate policies would be for all organisations dealing with children to use the Declaration on Education for All (EFA) and the agreements of the

Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) as the rallying point for policy formulation (http://www.unicef.org/education/policy; Shalala 2001: 9).

3.5.3   The role of government in the implementation of programmes

When programmes fail to achieve the desired effect, governments to bears often have to bear the brunt. There has been a debate on the scale of implementation and therefore on the devolution of decision making powers to local departments. The scale of implementation is determined by two views, namely, universal and contextual views (Grant 2000: 206).

Those who ascribe to the former view believe in universal principles that are applicable to a very wide range of practices and situations. The demand in need determines the dissemination effort. The proponents of the second approach, which is termed contextual, emphasise local practice, local initiative, spontaneity, mutual learning and problem solving. They argue that early childhood programmes generally start at local neighbourhood level, mostly by volunteers coming to join forces to establish, for example, a preschool. Later on professionals and the local government get involved (Van Oudenhoven & Wazir 1999: 10-14).

The concern with the former approach is that usually universality does not accommodate local needs. A major drawback of the second approach is that at grassroots level both human and physical resources are difficult to organise. It is therefore crucial for government to consider both views in order to avoid marginalising the very groups that need the support (Van Oudenhoven & Wazir 1999: 10-14).

3.6   DISCOURSE ON THE SCHOOLS AND ECD PRACTITIONERS AND TEACHERS

3.6.1   The role of the school

Research has shown that successful transition from home to school might depend, in part, on the extent to which the home and school environments are mutually supportive. Although theories of achievement and motivation claim that the change in self worth is a reflection of learners' cognitive development, these theories do not take into account the learners' actual experience of school. Further research that takes learner's views into consideration is needed (Evans 2002: 6)

Shaeffer, Dykstra, Irvin, Pigozzi and Torres (2001: 7) indicate that in most developing countries formal education was accepted as one of the principal means available of fostering human development and thereby to reduce poverty, exclusion, ignorance, oppression and war. At the same time there is awareness that schools are generally not keeping up with the challenges today, let alone preparing themselves for the challenges of the new century.

3.6.2   The role of ECD practitioners and teachers

Some researchers (Macguire 1999: 49; Winton 2000: 90-94) claim that many schools have succeeded in bridging the gap because they had a vision, provide a challenge to all pupils whatever their perceived capabilities, and pursued particular policies and practices. They ascribe the success to knowledgeable principals who put more emphasis on the programmes and ensured that such programmes were embedded in the curriculum. They also identified four areas where good teachers excel: content, knowledge, teaching for student learning and teacher professionalism

However, other researchers (Barber 2001: 11-12; Evans 2002: 4, Shaeffer et al 2001) are convinced that the solution to poor learners' school problems does not lie in the massive restructuring of schools. The way teachers see their learners who enter the schools each day and how teachers see their roles in their learners' lives is more important than the way the school looks. Schools must be aware of the effect of new technology and the huge social changes that result from it.

In countries such as England the challenge of reforming public schools lies in the question whether the country will maintain the high standards it set for itself. In such countries modern technology promotes individual attention by using computers built for specific activities (Barber 2001:12).

In a publication of UNICEF edited by Chetley (2001:5) which looked at African learners, several strategies that could assist in the uplifting of ECD practitioners and teachers in the elementary school were considered but limited funds remained a constraint. The key message that emerged from their deliberations was that there are many possible approaches, but the basis must be to build on what exists rather than imposing foreign solutions.

3.7 DISCOURSE ON THE IMPORTANCE OF RESEARCH IN INTERVENTION PROGRAMMES

Today, with new productive technologies and increased global competition, there is a growing need for workers who are more highly trained and educated if the standard of a country is to be set and compared to other countries. As the global economic competition increasingly becomes a concern, there is a need to mobilise attention for children again, this time for those under the age of six years. New research to inform the public policy debate about the kinds, the costs, and the quality of early childhood programmes available to the youngest members of societies is needed (Shalala: 2001: 9 www.fpg.unc.edu/NCEDL/Humanecology).

3.7.1 The role of research

Research can guide policy if researchers could use measurable variables such as achievement test scores. One reason why for instance, the success of Head Start was questioned in some quarters is that it relied heavily on IQ tests. Firstly, the concept of IQ was illusive because of the nature-nurture debate. Secondly, when the initial gains in IQ were found to fade away in the first few years of school, Head Start fell from grace (Zigler & Zyfco 2000: 62).

The lesson learned from such a stance is that there is no instant treatment that can instantly transform children from poverty-stricken environments. Researchers can advise policy makers that the best results come about as a result of continued research and experimentation (Zigler & Zyfco 2000: 67).

To this effect Zigler and Styfco (2001: 13) reported their findings on the Early Head Start research conducted on children between the ages of two and four years. These children attained high scores and were found to be at less risk than those who started at age five. In addition, positive results were noted with the parents of these children. They exhibited more positive parenting behaviour, reported less physical punishment of their children and provided more help for their children to learn at home.

The debate on the superiority of basic research over applied research has been another factor with a debilitating effect on policy formulation. In practice, says Shalala (2001: 18), the split is very artificial. Successful social policies were formulated without the benefit of basic research and were embraced by policy makers. What is needed is research that can link basic research and social policy.

With regard to the importance of multidisciplinary research, Evans (2002: 20) indicates that a wealth of research is available on the impact of the early years on later growth and development. In total such research provides a rich source of information from where policy makers could tap valuable advice. Further research that will help to design experimental programmes which will ultimately inform policy in this regard is needed.

While Evans (2002: 21) advocates experimental programmes Grant (2000: 210) negates their value and validity. His contention is derived from the observed shortcomings of experimental research, especially the fact that the final outcome of the experiment is influenced by intervening variables such as the quality of the teacher and the implementation strategies that were followed.

Secondly, experimentation by nature involves only a select few, either because of a lack of funds or the difficulty of controlling large numbers of subjects. In both instances a large number of the target population is left out of the loop but is counted when evaluation of the programme is evaluated (Ziegler 1998: 34-36).

3.7.2   Ways of promoting effective research

What transpires from the discussion above is that there is very little or no synergy between research on intervention programmes and policy formulation or implementation. A major concern is that intervention programmes reach a small fraction of the children who need them (Ziegler 1998: 34-36).

Zervigon-Hakes (1999: 271) recommends that researchers who wish to influence policy makers must conduct research that can answer practical implementation questions such as what agency should oversee the services and involve career staff and policy makers in ongoing research. They must work with an interdisciplinary group of researchers to design

and think through the implications of research findings before formulating policy recommendations. It is important to put a "face" on research findings and use anecdotes from case studies or communicate research findings in a simple way in media such as newspapers, television and the radio.

With regard to the role of policy makers, it is important to fund interdisciplinary research that will take economic factors into account and then require researchers to communicate the findings to them. To promote successful programmes, it is imperative to evaluate new programmes after they have had time to become established. Depending on what information is needed, evaluation should be either within the short term or should be in the form of longitudinal research (Evans 2002: 21; Zervigon-Hakes 1999: 271; Ziegler 1998: 34-36).

3.7.3   Factors that hamper good research

It has been recognised that there might be good research that fails to address problems encountered with the implementation of intervention programmes, partly because researchers merely observe cases but do not come with concrete solutions and arguments for problem solution. University staff generally carry out research and not the communities of ECD workers (Evans 2002: 14).

Another commonly noted shortcoming is that researchers may be interested in specific areas that may not be burning problems for ECD workers. In general, researchers do not make their findings known to the relevant role players and thus their findings serve no purpose (Bennett 1998: 65; Evans 2002: 15; Winton 2000: 87).

3.8   NEW CHALLENGES IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF INTERVENTION PROGRAMMES

Researchers (Evans 2002: 5; Lamorey 2002: 70, Shalala 2001: 9) agree that the success of all ECD programmes is a challenge for policy makers who need to establish it as a structural approach to integrating children and families at risk. However, to succeed in this venture, some limitations need to be noted.

3.8.1   Limited research in developing countries

This study has brought the realisation that most of what is documented in the discourse on intervention programmes pertains to the developed countries, especially the United States of America. Literature from developing countries that could be of major significance to educationists and policy makers in South Africa are scarce. Where instances are mentioned, the detail is very scant as can be seen in the following examples.

The Indian practice of massaging newly born babies to foster effective physical development very early in a child's life is mentioned as an example. The oral tradition of West Africa and other African states that promote listening skills to lay the foundation for language development early in life are sited as another example. African children brought up in the traditional way on their mothers' backs develop physical abilities faster in their first year than European children of the same age brought up in cots. In the same way children who, from an early age, are given duties such as fetching and measuring water from the well become independent quicker with greater problem-solving capacities than children of the same age who, are constantly catered for by their parents (Evans 2002: 16, Grant 2000: 204-208).

If countries of the South are only presented with one Western model and told to change their ways, extremely valid age-old practices could be wiped out. Rather than trying to identify a single model, it would appear important to promote a variety of models, knowing that different models are needed not just for distinct countries but also for communities who have their own cultures and values. Children brought up in a variety of different ways can all end up being receptive to learning (Evans 2002: 16-17; Grant 2000: 204).

At the same time it is accepted that a blending of the traditional and the modern may be necessary but that it is important to do it in the interest of the child. There are universal values and specific stages that appear vital in the development of early childhood programmes although culture and customs can direct topics, methods and skills to be learned. The important questions that need to be asked are "to what degree do Euro-Western child development theories fit local perspectives? To what degree are ECD practices at programme, parent and policy levels actively exclusionary?" (Grant 2000: 204).

3.8.2   Poor adaptation to new developments

While many ECD programmes claim to be innovative, they do not keep pace with the realities that children from disadvantaged environments have to face. Child abuse, domestic violence, addiction and neglect are common problems among people from low socioeconomic backgrounds and do not form an integral part of programme design and implementation. These facts add to those discussed earlier under the role of the school in section 4.6.1 (Barber 2001: 13; Pigozzi 2000: 1-5).

3.8.3   Globalisation

African countries stand to lose out in the emerging global trends because of poor and inadequate early childhood programmes. He advised that African states should reform their education programmes to enable citizens to understand the changing world and to cope with complex diversities of the modern age (UNICEF 2000: 3).

3.8.4   Gender equity

An important variable that is lacking in most intervention programmes for early childhood is gender equity. There is a dearth of information on how to translate political commitment on girls (as a disadvantaged group) into effective policies, reforms and programmes. By understanding more about gender differences during the early childhood years and the obstacles to equity, policy makers would understand where these differences begin and how they were shaped (Evans 2002: 20; Pigozzi 2000: 1-5).

Classroom observations of studies undertaken in suppressive countries such as Morocco, Mali, Bolivia and India reported that boys were rewarded more often for correct answers and when they gave incorrect answers were helped more often to get the right answer. Also, a review of the curriculum and media indicated that boys were portrayed to be problem solvers, analytical thinkers and were regarded as more inquisitive. Girls on the other hand were stereotyped as intuitive thinkers, were wary of technology and were often frightened in challenging situations (Pigozzi 2000:1-5).

In an article on gender issues in South Africa written by Chala (2005:1-3) it is reported that in 2003 there were more girls enrolled in schools despite the fact that in grades 1 to 4 boys comprised approximately 52 percent of the total. However, in rural areas, girls are disadvantaged because of cultural practices.

Aduda (2000: 6) and (Pigozzi 2000: 1-5) insist that a global dialogue on equitable access to education for young girls should be arranged to address the problem of working young girls and the myths surrounding their exclusion from education. These situations need to be addressed if programmes are to make an impact in society.

3.9   CONCLUSION

The discourse on the design of intervention programmes and policies that govern their implementation is of importance to this study because educational transformation in South Africa is at the stage where proposed policies are being implemented. The information provides a template into which policy developments in South Africa can be fitted and compared.

The challenges countries FACE in implementing ECD policies are testimony to the fact that policy implementation can be elusive. This study aims to establish how South Africa, in particular, the research area, fares with the implementation of the Grade R policy.

Chapter 4

History and current situation of early intervention programmes for disadvantaged learners in South Africa

4.1 INTRODUCTION

The information that was gathered on discussions and debates about early intervention programmes and the policies that shape such programmes confirm the fact that countries and policy makers still grapple with implementing such programmes. For many countries, success or failure could be attributed to different factors that were noticeable or illusive to administrators in ECD. With this background in mind, an investigation of the South African situation will be undertaken to establish how circumstances, especially the changes in the political situation and therefore the social and economic environment, have shaped early childhood programmes and continue to influence their implementation.

This chapter will therefore provide a contextual framework of intervention programmes within South Africa and where possible, attention will be focussed on the Gauteng Province. Such a discussion will be preceded by a chronology of events after the 1976 Soweto education riots that shaped and influenced the nature of education in South Africa in general, and in particular, intervention programmes for disadvantaged early learners. The investigation will focus on ECD policies in the Department of Education and also on policies from other government departments servicing children within the ECD age group.

4.2 BACKGROUND TO THE PROVISION OF EARLY CHILDHOOD PROGRAMMES IN SOUTH AFRICA

A discussion on the provision of early childhood programmes is base on the fact that in South Africa, as in other countries in the world, education issues are related to and are shaped by developments and debates outside the education arena. The standpoint is held that the current and ongoing South African educational transition process needs to be viewed and understood in the context of the broader political, social and economic transformation processes in the country.

The nature and development of early intervention programmes for disadvantaged early learners in South Africa can be explained in terms of Bekker's (1998: 23) model that describes common factors as well as unique features of the process of educational transition within various countries. According to this model, educational transition takes place in three stages. These include the pre-phase which is characterised by ideological collapse, the first phase where uncertainty prevails when change is eminent, the second phase which signals the beginning of transition and the third stage which is the implementation of the new system.

4.2.1 The pre-phase: the beginning of ideological collapse and anti-authoritarianism

During the pre-phase the transitional process in education is greatly influenced by the prevailing political situation that is being challenged. The legitimacy of the existing system is challenged and ultimately collapses (Bekker 1998: 25). In this regard, two forces influenced the nature of events in South Africa, namely, a weakening of existing ideology and economic stagnation. The outcome of this situation was the democratisation and reconstruction of the education system in order to provide quality learning opportunities to all learners on an equitable basis. After the school crisis that started in 1976 in which segregated education was contested, the state initiated a reform process that was still within the old political framework (Molemane 2000: 15).

A report from the De Lange Commission recommended that the state should abolish the dual education system as a principle. With regard to early learning the state should provide at least one year preschool education for all learners, but especially for disadvantaged learners

in order to prepare them for formal school. Preschool experience would also reduce the high failure rate in the Coloured and African communities during the early years of school (Lomofsky & Lazarus 2001: 307).

Most of the intervention programmes were therefore introduced as a result of the De Lange Report that addressed the uprisings in the schools. The Stepping Stones and Learning through Play programmes referred to in Chapter 1, section 1.2, which were actually bridging programmes, were a response to this call although they did not meet the stipulated requirements (Hartshorn 1992: 46-48; Lomofsky & Lazarus 2001: 307).

According to Milic (2003: 352-353) countries in transition are faced with challenges and barriers which ultimately shape the system of education in those countries. In the case of South Africa the crisis in black education complicated the issue and education became involved with broader political grievances. Community action resulting from the crisis came from various socio-political and labour organisations as well as educationists in progressive education.

The National Education Crisis Committee (NECC) which was an education component of the United Democratic Front (UDF) was a strong negotiating force with government, and also developed principles and educational objectives for a postapartheid education system under the banner of "People's Education" (Lomofsky & Lazarus 2001: 307-309; NEPI 1992: 15).

A huge discrepancy between black and white sectors existed not only in the quality and extent of state financing, but also as regards access to any kind of early childhood care and education programmes (NEPI 1992: 15). Bridgemohan (1997: 19) explains that as a result of inadequate state involvement, the community became actively involved in the provision of early learning programmes. In Gauteng, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) like Grassroots, Little Beginnings, Entokozweni Early Learning and Community Services, and the Alexandra Childminding Project shouldered much of the burden of providing early learning services.

4.2.2   The first phase: uncertainty in the interim period

The momentum of educational reforms picked up during the period after the release of Mandela from prison in February 1990., To effect the transition the National Party (NP) government introduced new education policies and lifted the ban on organisations such as the National Education Coordinating Committee (NECC) (Giliomee 1996: 85-99).

The initiative of the NECC and the combined forces of the ANC and the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) finally led to discussions over new education policies, proposed in the ANC Education Department's Policy Unit (Lomofsky & Lazarus 2001: 307-308; Roux 2000: 175; Giliomee 1996: 85-100).

Although the White Paper on Education (Department of National Education 1995) is regarded as the first policy document that outlined ECD policy in South Africa, the point made in this study is that it was preceded by the policy initiatives of the NECC that were undertaken in 1992. Most of the proposals in the White Paper on Education (Department of National Education 1995) reflect these initiatives as will be seen in the following discussion.

4.2.2.1   The National Education Policy Investigation

The brief of the National Education Policy Investigation (NEPI) investigation on Early Childhood Development was to present and analyse broad options for future early childhood care and education from the perspective of the democratic movement. Some of the findings of this investigation revealed that ECD provision was decided along racial lines. Table 1 indicates numbers and percentages of learners between birth and six years of age according to race groups attending early learning programmes subsidised by the Department of Education and Training (DET) and the Welfare Departments in 1992 (NEPI 1992: vi).

Table 4.1: The number and percentages of learners aged between birth and six years receiving early intervention in 1992

Race group	Learners subsidised by DET	Other sources	Total subsidised	% 0-6 yrs subsidised
African	108 062	226 688	334 750	6
Coloured	25 519	28 481	54 000	11
Indian	15 239	1 761	17 000	13
White	49 409	110 519	160 000	33
Total	198 229	367 521	565 750	9

NEPI 1992

4.2.2.2   Recommended policies

The concerns of the NEPI investigation were lack of resources and access to early intervention for the majority of poor children. Secondly, a lack of coordination between education, welfare and health provision in this sector was seen to be problematic. The multilingual character of the South African population posed questions as to whether the multicultural approach to policy formulation would be best for the country (Lomofsky & Lazarus 2001: 309; Roux 2000: 178).

The following policy options were recommended.

An education policy perspective: The rationale for this option was that scholastic underachievement in the schools for coloured and African learners were due to factors such as lack of exposure to learning materials, severely overcrowded classes, high repetition rates and enrolment of pupils below school entry age. The aim of this option was to prepare learners for school and to reform or transform the Foundation Phase (NEPI 1992:60-61).

Within the Foundation Phase four strategies were recommended, two of which were for school preparation and two for upgrading within the school for those learners who needed further assistance in their learning. The former would be provided through the Bridging

Period Programme (BPP) and the latter through the Primary Education Upgrading Programme (PEUP). The four strategies involve the following:

Developmental social welfare: The point of departure in this option was that early childhood learning was the responsibility of the family. The aim of this option was to support and strengthen the family in its child-rearing function, to enable it to fully meet the needs of its young learners and to ensure that their full potential is developed (NEPI 1992: 61).

Daycare: The basic rationale for targeting the learners of working mothers was that such families were most in need of early childhood services and learners could be neglected if adequate care was not available. Secondly, maternal employment contributed to the economic well being of the family and made it more self-sufficient. Thirdly women were freed to contribute to economic activity, and if adequate child-care was available, mothers were likely to be more productive (NEPI 1992: 69).

Primary health care: Learners from the poorest families were particularly vulnerable to adverse health conditions and poor nutrition before birth and during the early years of life. The aim of this option was to promote the healthy development of young learners through preventative mother and child health services, providing for health monitoring and education, immunisation and basic medicines, adequate nutrition and a safe hygienic environment (NEPI 1992: 64).

Child and community development: This perspective aimed at promoting the optimal development of young learners and improving their quality of life. This would be done in a comprehensive and holistic way through the empowerment of communities, especially women, to provide better health care and learning opportunities before formal schooling started. Rural and marginal urban areas would be targeted to ensure that all learners had sound basic education.

4.2.3 Phase two: The role of national and provincial elections in determining a framework for education

The next phase in the educational transition process according to the model applied by Bekker (1998:24) is determined by the outcome of national and provincial elections. With regard to South Africa, the beginning of a new democracy in 1994 evidenced such a phase.

The process of major transition began with the constitution of the educational legislation and White Papers at national level. For South Africa this also marked the beginning of the new government's involvement in early childhood development.

4.2.3.1 The White Paper on Education and Training

The White Paper on Education and Training (1995) hereafter referred to as The White Paper, described the process of transformation in education and training that would bring into being a system serving all South Africans. In this policy document the concept Early Childhood Development (ECD) is described as "an umbrella term which applies to the processes by which learners from birth to nine years grow and thrive, physically, emotionally, mentally, morally and socially" (Department of National Education 1995: 27-33).

The White Paper proposed that ECD should be provided in a holistic approach and promote the child's cognitive, social and physical well being (Department of National Education 1995: 27-33). These broad recommendations closely resemble the proposals made in the NEPI investigations discussed in section 3.2.2.2.

4.2.3.2 The Interim Policy for Early Childhood Development

Following the establishment of the ECD Directorate at the Department of Education in line with proposals in the White Paper, an interim policy for ECD was developed.

The vision for ECD as quoted in the Interim Policy for Early Childhood Development (Department of National Education 1996:8), hereafter referred to as ECD Policy, "is that it will serve as the bedrock for child and family life, as well as for future learning. It will be concerned with the holistic development of the young child and ensure an environment

characterised by safety, protection, anti-bias and cultural fairness, so that attitudinal and psychological healing, reconciliation and the start of nation building can take place at a young age".

This policy is inclusive of all learners, including those with special needs and aims to develop them in their own right as lifelong learners. This policy aimed to develop an ECD infrastructure that could free parents especially mothers, to take up employment and further their education so as to break out of the cycle of poverty, illiteracy and economic dependence. In addition, communities would benefit from an integrated service directed at satisfying the needs of learners and women in an integrated manner (Department of National Education 1996: 9).

The principles that guided the policy were based on three international events, namely the Convention on the Rights of Learners of 1989, the World Conference on Education for all held in 1990 and the World Summit for Learners held in 1990. The policy was aimed at correcting the imbalances of the past (set out in table 4.1) by providing access and equal opportunities for learners from all backgrounds. The policy targeted learners in the birth to six years age range. It also aimed at providing affordable programmes and increasing public awareness regarding the significance of the early childhood years (Department of National Education 1996: 9-12).

The policy document emphasised the need for collaborative partnerships with the government departments of Health, Education and Welfare. Further recommendations were that the educational component of ECD should be planned in a continuous developmental sequence from birth to the end of the Foundation Phase.

The ECD Policy covered seven key areas (Department of National Education 1996).

(1)   *Provision* that would cover all learners from birth to the age of nine years. One way the Department of Education considered would be effective was to suggest the establishment of a Reception Year (later referred to as Grade R) at the Foundation Phase. This would be the highlight of the ECD policy and would be supported in a variety of forms (Department of National Education 1996: 17).

(2)   A policy for ECD *curriculum*: The quality of a good early childhood programme and its success are determined by the nature of the staff, the curriculum and the approach to childhood development. Since this was an interim policy, the curricula that had been developed by NGO's would be recognised for approximately three years while the practitioners were looking at shaping it in terms of the recommended content (Department of National Education 1996: 19).

(3)   A policy on *accreditation*: The interim guidelines proposed to include those service providers who at the time fell outside the Norms and Standards of the Committee on Teacher Education Programme (COTEP) (now replaced by SACE). Initially, these interim guidelines would be applied specifically to accredit providers outside the formal schooling system. An appropriate body recognised by the Department of Education would function in the interim as the accrediting body (Department of National Education 1996: 20).

(4)   *A policy on the employment of ECD* practitioners proposed that both the formally and privately trained practitioners should be recognised in the interim. A strategy that would cater for practitioners within the framework of the Education Labour Relations Act 146 of 1993 and the Labour Relations Bill of 1996 as well as the Educators' Employment Act 138 of 1994 would be adopted (Department of National Education 1996: 20).

(5)   *The funding of ECD services* remained the responsibility of parents and the departments that always played a role in service provision. However, employers, especially those who employed women, would have to augment public funding. Funding would also involve a partnership of the national, provincial and local governments, the private sector, organised labour, community organisations and donor agencies.

(6)   The process of *policy development, refinement and consultation* would be an ongoing process between the Department of Education and stakeholders in ECD. This was stated in the White Paper (Department of National Education 1995: 33) and the suggestion was made that a statutory consultative body representative of all sectors of ECD must be established. In the interim, acting through the Heads of Education

Departments Committee (HEDCOM), the Department of Education established an Ad Hoc Coordinating Committee for ECD (CCECD) as a vehicle for stakeholder consultation and advice on the development of an ECD Policy.

The foregoing discussion on the different aspects of the interim ECD policy confirms the viewpoint that the recommendations of the NEPI ECD investigation set the stage for policy development. The proposals in the Interim Policy are seen as a refinement of the NEPI initiatives.

4.2.4   The third phase: The implementation of policies

Educational transition in South Africa entered the implementation stage at provincial and school levels where there is continual interaction between educational policy and practice. The following initiatives, born of the need to establish the feasibility of the proposed policies, were put in place and executed nationwide by the Department of National Education.

4.2.4.1   The Early Childhood Development Pilot Project

The Early Childhood Development Pilot Project (ECDPP) was conceived in 1996 by the Directorate of ECD in the National Department of Education to, among others, build capacity, particularly at provincial department level and to assure the quality of community-based sites. A R50 million budget from the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP) was set aside for its implementation that would last for a period of three years. It was aimed at initiating the establishment of the start-up phase of the Grade R (Department of National Education 1995: 33; Department of National Education 1996: 9-25; Khulisa Management Services 1998: 2).

4.2.4.2   The baseline research report on the ECD Pilot Project

An investigation into the achievement of the ECD Pilot Project (ECDPP) was undertaken to examine issues of equity, accreditation of practitioners, quality of sites and programmes, cost effectiveness, as well as norms and standards. The aim of the baseline investigation was to advise the Minister of Education on policy related to the compulsory provision of Grade R, the delivery models and the appropriateness of subsidies. At the end of the three year period,

the research team would recommend to the Minister whether Grade R should be provided at community-based sites, at primary schools or at a mixture of the two (Khulisa Management Services 1998: E1).

The baseline research could only respond to questions on equal access and cost effectiveness of community-based services and of Grade R classes offered at state schools. Since the norms and standards for the provision of ECD services were not finalised, the research team could not address the appropriateness of norms and standards in this report. Similarly they could not comment on the appropriateness and adequacy of the state subsidy or examine the accreditation system (Khulisa Management Services 1998: 4).

Equal access was examined by using questions of gender, disability and per learner cost. Only three percent of community-based sites had equipment accommodating disabled learners, compared to four percent of Grade 1 and seven percent of Grade R sites. It appeared to be cheaper for families to send their children to primary schools rather than to community-based sites when the lower fees at primary schools and the benefits of the Primary School Nutrition Programme were considered.

The quality of ECD services were examined through measurements on the use of creative classroom activities, reports to parents, day plans, practitioner records of learners' work, the presence of books and the education level of the practitioner (Khulisa Management Services 1998: 4-5).

4.2.4.3 Recommendations of the Pilot Project investigation

The specific recommendations made were that the Grade R class should be made compulsory for admission into Grade 1, and its provision should be gradually phased in. Secondly, a combination of Grade R classes should be offered at primary schools and community-based sites. Since the Pilot Project revealed that most of the community-based sites and some of the school-based sites were of very low quality it was recommended that the quality of the Grade R classes should be improved (Asmal 2001: 3-4; Khulisa Management Services 1998: 4-5).

The report stated that in order to ensure successful implementation of the Grade R class, provincial ECD budgets should be ring-fenced and ECD should become one of the key programmes of the national and the provincial departments of education. Should it be decided that the Department of Education would become the employer, it would become necessary for the Department to comply with the Basic Conditions of Employment Act.

If the provincial departments of education became the employers of these ECD practitioners, then practitioners should be required to register with the South African Council of Educators (SACE) and to be represented at the Education Labour Relations Council.

Sites should be registered to ensure that the accommodation is safe and the learners benefit from an educationally enriching environment. In addition there should be adequate support to practitioners so that they can demonstrate an understanding of the expected outcomes or expected levels of learner performance. More learning materials should be provided since they are highly correlated with improved early literacy (Khulisa Management Services 1998:5-6).

During this period the Department of Education looked at other avenues where preparations for policy implementation could be made. Decisions were then taken to enlist the services of radio and television.

4.2.4.4 The South African Sesame Street

The Department of Education and the United States Aid (USAID) signed a Grant Agreement in 1997. The purpose of this agreement was to provide support for the production of a 65 part Sesame Street series on television and radio. The programme was designed to introduce selected components of the Reception Year (now Grade R) component of Curriculum 2005 to South African learners, their families, caregivers and ECD educators (Ward-Brent 1997: 2).

The Sesame Street series is a flagship of the Children's Television Workshop (CTW) designed first and foremost to entertain learners, and is grounded in the belief that learning can be fun. The programme comprising short "street scenes", animations, live actions featuring puppets, provides children with an array of educational experiences that enhance

and expand the children's knowledge and skills (Cole 2002: 355-358; Department of National Education 1998: 1-2; Ward-Brent 1997: 2).

It was also intended to introduce components of the Reception Year curriculum to the millions of disadvantaged learners who did not have access to the first year of schooling. In particular, the educational goals of Sesame Street were to prepare preschoolers for the cognitive, social and emotional demands of formal schooling (Department of National Education 1998: 1-3).

Although the series faced obvious limitations in its ability to promote all eleven of South Africa's official languages on a equal basis, it nevertheless promoted the use of some home languages. It could create an interest in learning the languages of others, thus contributing to learners' awareness of and enthusiasm for the country's multilingual identity (Cole 2002: 358-361; Ward-Brent 1997: 2).

4.2.4.5 Vuleka Radio Productions

Vuleka radio productions were introduced simultaneously with Sesame Street and with same intentions. Valuleka was based in Durban at the University of Natal's Innovation Centre, with a Johannesburg office (Gauteng) led by a co-executive producer of Sesame Street. It was selected by the Learners' Television Workshop (CTW) to be the South African co-producer for the first ever radio version of the internationally acclaimed Sesame Street learners' series (Ward-Brent 1997: 2).

4.2.4.6 The nationwide audit of ECD provisioning in South Africa

Following the investigation on the success of the ECDPP that was supported over a period of three years, the Department of Education together with the European Union Technical Support Project conducted an audit of ECD provisioning throughout South Africa. Whereas the aim of the ECDPP was to advise the Department of Education about increasing access to early learning the audit aimed at providing ongoing policy and planning initiatives in the broad ECD sector (Department of National Education 2001a: 1).

In order to serve the majority of the country's learners, the Government accepted the recommendations of the ECDPP and committed themselves to providing a Grade R class as part of the ten years of compulsory schooling. A strategy was devised to phase in the implementation of the Grade R class over a period of ten years ending in 2010 (Department of National Education 2001a: 8-21).

The audit focused on four indices that provided summaries of key aspects of provisioning. The first referred to the infrastructure index that provided details of materials and resources. The second was the support index that referred to the degree of financial and educational support to the site by government. The third was the programme index that reflected a combination of educational activities and programmes being implemented at the site, and the last referred to the educator index that combined information about the qualification and teaching experience of the educators at the different sites (Department of National Education 2001a: 8-21).

It is important to note that the National Audit investigated a total of 23,482 sites countrywide where it was established that approximately 1,3 million preschool learners were taught by an estimated 55 000 practitioner and educator force. However, the audit indicated with concern that a significant number of learners in the 5 to 7 year age cohort were located in home-based sites that were regarded as 'below average' in quality with high fee levels. It is also important to note that about two thirds of the audited sites are registered with the Department of Education or Department of Social Development (Asmal 2001: 2; Atmore 2004: 1; Department of National Education 2001a: 80-81).

The Audit also reported that about 450,000 of an estimated 960,000 learners, aged between five and six years were receiving some form of ECD education. The majority of the pre-Grade R children were enrolled at home-based centres (Asmal 2001: 2; Atmore 2004: 2).

Since the aim of this study is to investigate the implementation strategies of intervention programmes used in the Foundation Phase of research schools in Gauteng, attention will be drawn to the findings of the Audit that pertain to this area. Where necessary, reference will be made to the broader results to provide deeper meanings.

4.3   ECD PROVISIONING IN GAUTENG

4.3.1   Site types in Gauteng

With regard to Gauteng, a total of 5 308 sites were recorded which indicated that it ranked second in the country in terms of the number of sites. Eighty three percent of these sites are located in the urban formal settlements, 16 percent in informal urban areas and 1 percent in rural areas. Many sites, that is, 75 percent, are located within one kilometer from the nearest primary school and are well resourced in terms of electricity, piped water and flushing toilets. Gauteng is also one province that adopted an inter-sectoral approach to ECD provision through the Impilo Project and this has provided a bigger base of resources (Department of National Education 2001a: 163-165).

Table 4:2: Site types in Gauteng

Site type	Frequency	%
School based	442	8
Community based	1 649	32
Home based	3 097	60
Total	**5 168**	**100**

Source: The Nationwide Audit (2001)

Table 4.3: Registration of sites in Gauteng

Registered with	Frequency	%
Department of Education	1 010	44
Department of Welfare	686	30
Local Authority	284	13
Other	295	13
Total	**2 275**	**100**

Source: The Nationwide Audit (2001)

4.3.2 Learner profiles in Gauteng

The following tables provide information on learner profiles and numbers. Both the learners' gender and population groups conform to national trends. The average number of learners per educator of 16:1 was the lowest in the country then.

Table .4.4: Learners' age and gender in Gauteng

Age (years)	Male	%	Female	%	Total	%
0 – 3	24 400	23	23 807	22	28 207	22
4 – 5	35 545	33	36 191	34	71 736	34
6 – 7	45 549	43	45 782	43	91 331	43
8 - 9	1 267	1	1 154	1	2 421	1
Totals	**106 761**		**106 634**		**213 695**	**100**

Source: The Nationwide Audit (2001)

The concern over the "language of instruction" policy continues to be central to the implementation of ECD programmes including Grade R. As a result the Table reflecting the pattern of "language of instruction" is included.

Table 4.5: Learners' home languages and language of instruction in Gauteng

Language	Home languages	%	Language of instruction	%
IsiZulu	52 424	23	2 303	43
Sesotho	38 149	16	1 747	33
English	35 982	15	4 388	83
Afrikaans	32 817	14	906	17
Sepedi	21 359	9	680	13
Setswana	17 993	8	581	11
IsiXhosa	14 311	6	422	8
Xitsonga	6 580	3	163	3
Others	13 009	6	171	3
Total	**232 624**			

Source: The Nationwide Audit (2001)

4.3.3   Educator profiles in Gauteng

Educators are a key component in the implementation strategy. With regard to Gauteng, the provincial figures conform largely to the national averages. The only exception concerns qualification, where there are more educators with no training (32%) compared to the national figure of 23 percent.

Table 4.6: Educator qualifications by population group in Gauteng

Pop group %	No training %	NGO training %	Under qualified %	Qualified %	Total %
African	75	90	52	13	67
Coloured	1	3	4	1	2
Indian	1	1	4	2	2
White	23	6	40	84	29

Source: The Nationwide Audit (2001)

4.4   SUMMARY OF ECD PROVISION IN GAUTENG

Finally, based on the above statistics, it could be said that ECD provision in Gauteng compares favourably with the national profile. Some ECD facilities such as infrastructure and support structures may be rated as good although the infrastructure in the Western Cape is regarded as the best in the country. The educator profile in Gauteng indicates that more educators were rated "below average" and were mostly African. With regard to the quality of the sites, the indication that 18 percent are below average, 73 percent are average and 9 percent above average suggests that there is room for improvement.

Although the mandate of the Audit was to obtain data to advise on policy development regarding the quality of programmes, among other things, it did not provide information on this index but reported on the quality of sites. It also reported on educator and practitioner qualifications but no reference was made to the quality of these qualifications since no accreditation system was in place to evaluate them at the time. It focused mainly on two quantifiable indices, namely, infrastructure and support system.

The information on the nature of sites and educator qualifications at both the formal and informal settings provided valuable information for policy development, and provided secondary information for this study. In addition it became clear that at the time of the investigation no intervention programmes existed in the schools. In fact, the recommendation of the Audit was that Grade R should be introduced as part of the Foundation Phase in order to prepare learners for Grade 1. For this study therefore, the information from the Audit confirmed the fact that Grade R is recommended as an intervention programme.

It is therefore planned that this study must fill in the gap that was left in the Audit by concentrating on the implementation strategies of Grade R as an intervention programme for the five to six years age cohort in disadvantaged public schools.

The emphasis that is presently put on Grade R classes in disadvantaged schools advocates for more research with regard to the programme's appropriateness, effectiveness and the quality of educators in charge of learners at this level. A further suggestion is that such qualitative research could be followed by a longitudinal assessment for establishing the

effects of various modes and models of ECD provisioning on subsequent school performance.

4.5   The Education White Paper 5 (May 2001)

The Education White Paper 5 (Department of National Education 2001d) follows up on the Education White Paper on Education and Training (Department of National Education 1995) and builds on the Interim Policy for Early Childhood (Department of National Education 1996). It endorses the same view held in the Interim ECD Policy document discussed under 4.2.3.2 and emphasises increased access to early learning programmes.

4.5.1   The rationale for ECD programmes

Five key areas guided the policy proposals in this (Department of National Education 2001d). These include provision, inequality in existing programmes, inequality of access to ECD services, variable quality of services and fragmentation in policy framework for ECD that results in uncoordinated service delivery (Department of National Education 2001d: 3-6). The rationale for addressing these key areas is that the early years are critical for the acquisition of the concepts, skills and attitudes that lay the foundation for lifelong learning. These include the acquisition of language, perception-motor skills required for learning to read and write, basic numeracy concepts and skills, problem-solving skills and a love of learning (Department of National Education 2001d: 6).

In addition, the Government believes that with quality ECD provision in South Africa, educational efficiency would improve, as learners would acquire the basic concepts, skills and attitudes required for successful learning and development prior to or shortly after entering the system, thus reducing their chances of failure. The system would also be freed of under-age and under-prepared learners, who have proven to be the most at risk in terms of school failure and dropout (Department of National Education 2001d: 6).

With regard to this study, the purpose for reviewing the White Paper 5 (Department of National Education 2001d) was reviewed to establish how the Government synthesised the various reports emanating from the different ECD investigations conducted in the country, including the ECD Pilot Project, and how these investigations informed policy perspectives.

The aim was to establish how the proposed programmes were designed, how ECD was conceptualised and what approach would be adopted in provisioning this sector, especially at the Reception Year level.

Since the aim of this study is to establish the design of existing intervention programmes and their implementation, it is envisaged that the Education White Paper 5 (2001) will make reference to such programmes if they exist or make new propositions in that regard.

4.5.2   Policy focus and proposal

While it is acknowledged and recognised that investment in early childhood development before the age of three years is important, the policy priority of this White Paper 5 (Department of National Education 2001d) is the implementation of the Reception Year, that is Grade R for five to six year olds. The goal is to progressively realise the Government's commitment to provide all learners with ten years of compulsory school education, including one year of early childhood development called the Reception Year (Department of National Education 2001d: 6-8; Department of National Education 2001f: ii).

The policy target of the Government is that by the year 2010 all learners entering Grade 1 should have participated in an accredited Reception Year programme. The goal of the government, based on the results of the Nationwide Audit is that 90% of all five year old learners will be accommodated in school-based Grade R classes (Department of National Education 2001d:29-30).

The policy goals for learners in the age range six to nine years will be supplemented by policies and programmes focussing on improving the quality and effectiveness of teaching and learning and the functioning of the schools as they serve these learners in Grades 1, 2, 3, and 4. They also focus on improving the learners' language, mathematical and life skills, knowledge, values and attitudes (Department of National Education 2001f).

4.6   WHITE PAPER 6 (JULY 2001)

In the discussion of the White Paper 5 (Department of National Educatin 2001d) in section 4.5.2 a brief reference was made to the fact that learners with special needs and those infected with HIV would benefit from a policy that would ensure that they had access to learning facilities. This policy document is born of the need to include all learners into the education system and to remove barriers that have excluded some learners, especially those from disadvantaged backgrounds from receiving training (Department of National Education 2001e, Department of Social Development 2005b; Ryan & Destefano 2000: 256).

The White Paper 6 is reviewed because inclusive education is seen as an intervention initiative that can remove barriers that cause learning disabilities in the classroom in the same manner as early learning intervention programmes.

According to the Nationwide Audit (Department of National Education 2001a: 167) there are comparatively few learners with disabilities being catered for at ECD sites and almost a third of those who are attending early learning programmes are over seven years of age. This may indicate that this older cohort of learners remain in ECD as a consequence of being refused entry to formal schooling, or that parental wishes dictate that they remain in the sheltered and nurturing environment of the ECD site as long as possible. The absence of younger learners with disabilities is also a cause for concern and poses considerable challenges to ECD interventions.

4.7   INTERSECTORIAL COLLABORATION

The guidelines for Early Childhood Services (Department of Social Development 2002) paid attention to children under the age of five years now referred to as the Pre-Grade R group. In this regard the White Paper prioritises the development of a strategic plan for inter-sectoral collaboration, focusing efforts on improving the quality of early learning programmes. At the same time the Government refers to the development of curricula, and practitioner carrier pathing and development. In the period leading up to 2010, the Department of Education will prioritise the subsidisation of early learning programmes for the Pre-Grade R group from poor

rural and poor urban families, HIV/AIDS positive learners and learners with special learning needs (Department of National Education 1995: 9).

4.8 THE ECD POLICY OF THE DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

Policy propositions within the Department of Social Development are based on the ratification of the Convention on Rights of the Child on 16th June 1995 and that of the African Children's Charter on 7th January 2000. The Draft Guidelines for ECD Services (Department of Social Development 2005a) comprises the following aspects.

4.8.1 ECD provision

The policy focused on children from birth to the age of nine years with emphasis on the 0 to 3 year old age group. Based on the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the minimum standards set were that each child has the right to care and age appropriate educational intervention that respects their cultural, religious and linguistic heritage. It is stated that children with special needs have the right to therapeutic treatment and their families to specific programmes aimed at training them to use such facilities (Department of Social Development 2005a: 24-26; Ryan & Destefano 2000: 256).

4.8.2 Minimum requirements

Aspects of the policy included minimum standards for ECD services, which includes home-based, community-based and centre-based facilities. Sites, be it at a community centre or in a garage, must be provided with age-appropriate equipment and resources to enable the children to develop optimally. Requirements for after school programmes are also described (Department of Social Development 2005a: 59-62).

4.8.3 Training of ECD practitioners

The policy stated that it is essential to provide quality training services for developing the necessary expertise in ECD. It is important to note that the required minimum qualification for practitioners is Level 1 on the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) and NQF level 4 for the head or principal. This qualification ensures basic knowledge about child development

from birth to six years and provides management and leadership skills respectively (Department of Social Development 2005a: 87-79).

4.8.4   Management and control of ECD centres

The need to put in place administrative structures to efficiently manage facilities and to control of ECD centres was highlighted. In this regard, the recommended ratio for practitioner and child is 1:30. Recommended ratios for the pre-Grade R children range from 1:6 at birth to 18 months up to 1:20 for the three to four age cohort. Other administrative requirements included child enrolment, child registers, daily menus and transporting of children. The draft proposed the introduction of a Developmental Quality Assurance (DQA) policy (Department of Social Development 2005a: 88-90).

4.9   POLICY FRAMEWORK ON ORPHANS AND OTHER CHILDREN MADE VULNERABLE BY HIV AND AIDS IN SOUTH AFRICA

The Department of Social Development was tasked with investigating the impact of HIV and AIDS on children so that Government could adopt an integrated approach to assist such children. Some of the aims of this policy is "to create and promote a supportive environment in which orphans and other children made vulnerable by HIV and AIDS are adequately protected holistically to grow and develop to their full potential within their communities" (Department of Social Development 2005b:7-9).

4.10   TSHWARAGANO KA BANA: AN INTEGRATED PLAN FOR ECD

While the ECD Pilot Project was being investigated, a parallel investigation, in the form of workshops was held in government departments most involved in ECD, namely the Departments of Education, Welfare and Health. The National Programme of Action for Learners (NPA) desk in the Deputy President's office was later included in the planning. The aim of the workshop was to develop a cohesive understanding of existing ECD policies and programmes so as to obviate the problems of fragmentation discussed in chapter 3, sections 3.3.1, 3.4.2.2 and 3.5.1 (Department of National Education 2001c: 5-7).

4.10.1   The development of Tshwaragano Ka Bana

The Draft document, Tshwaragano Ka Bana is the outcome of the interdepartmental workshops that were held to attend to the problems of fragmentation and duplication in the provision of early childhood programmes. It outlines a strategy for an integrated service delivery of ECD programmes. Government adopted a strategy to implement and monitor policies of different government departments by clustering departments that perform related functions together. ECD falls within the Social Cluster which consists of, among others, the Departments of Education, Social Development and Health. The National Programme of Action (NPA) desk at the Presidency plays the role of overseer for this intersectoral body.

In the Tshwaragano Ka Bana document ECD is defined as "…a comprehensive approach to policies and programmes for children from birth to 9 years of age, with the active participation of their parents and caregivers". The concept "integration" is defined as "the approach in ECD where services and programmes are provided in a comprehensive and interwoven manner, with the aim of ensuring the holistic development of children".   "Intersectoral collaboration" is seen as an instance where "different sectors work(ing) together in order to achieve a certain developmental goal. Achieving equity and reaching vulnerable groups are critical aspects of planning for intersectoral collaboration" (Department of Social Development 2005c:12-13).

The Tshwaragano Ka Bana document explains how intersectoral collaboration will increase service delivery, how it will cut costs by sharing resources and avoiding duplication, and how service delivery will be improved. The collaboration is among government departments, NGOs and CBOs. The target population includes children who are orphaned, disabled, poor, who are from dysfunctional families and from families headed by other children (Department of National Education 2001b: 7, Department of Social Development 2005c: 15-17).

The primary aspects of the programme focus on health issues such as immunisations, family issues such as referral services for social security and grants and educational matters such as early learning stimulation and the implementation of psychosocial programmes. The

secondary components that will facilitate the implementation process include human resources, infrastructure, research, monitoring and evaluation (Department of Social Development 2005c: 17-21).

For purposes of this study, attention will be drawn to the recommended design or content of the programme for the five to six year old children and the proposed implementation strategy since it is the subject of this study.

4.10.2   Structural arrangements for implementation

The implementation strategy is planned to begin at cabinet level and end at community level. At cabinet level the role players will be the Ministers of Education, Social Development, Health and the Minister in the President's Office. Their function will be to lay out the broad strategic plan and to arrange for budget needs of this Social Cluster (Department of Social Development 2005c: 22-25). The national departments will constitute the second level where the ECD Intersectoral body will be the focal point. Their role will be, among others, to assist with the coordination and synergy in the implementation of services, develop and review existing policies with regard to children, provide both human and financial resources, and guide and direct the process of integration (Department of Social Development 2005c: 22-28).

At provincial level the Departments of Education, Social Development, Health and the Office of the Presidency will be the core leaders of the sector. Their role will be similar to that at national level including policy formulation at this level. Each Department will budget and deliver services that fall within its core functions. In addition they will establish relationships with other provincial structures that serve young children (Department of Social Development 2005c: 27-29).

The role of the said government departments at municipal level will be to develop local plans to facilitate coordination and to collaborate in the implementation of the programmes. They will also establish links with other relevant government departments, including the Mayor's

Office. The following table is a presentation of how the implementation structure is understood in this study.

Table 4.7: The structure of Tshwaragano Ka Bana

ECD structure	Level	Department	Function
Social Cluster	Cabinet	Ministers of Social Development, Education, Health, the Presidency	Leadership in strategic planning, Budget planning
Intersectoral ECD body	National	Ministers of Social Development, Education, Health, the Presidency	Policy development and review, Facilitate coordination and collaboration Provide human and financial resources Guide the process of integration
Intersectoral ECD body	Provincial	Social Development, Education, Health, the Presidency	Policy development and review, Facilitate coordination and collaboration Provide human and financial resources Guide the process of integration Establish new partnerships
Intersectoral ECD body	Municipality	Social Development, Education, Health, Mayor's Office	Develop local integrated plan Develop synergy with local municipality Distribute resources Review bylaws where necessary Establish partnerships widely

It is stated that 50 percent of young children receive early intervention at household levels, that is, in their homes or in home-based facilities. Thirty percent of the services are community-based and 20 percent are catered for in formal services such as ECD centres, preschools and prisons (Department of Social Development 2005c: 30).

With regard to services, a number of different activities are listed in three categories, namely, Household, Community and Formal Resources. The mechanisms of how these activities will be carried out for the different categories and by whom also differs. For instance, some of the activities of the household category include birth registration and breast-feeding. The mechanism for monitoring the implementation of these is home visitations using an assessment instrument. A cadre of ECD workers would monitor these activities.

The period of implementation is from 2005 to 2010 and will be divided into two phases. The First Phase (2005/6-2006/7) will be dedicated to the collection of baseline data that will inform programme delivery. During the Second Phase (2006/7-2009/10) emphasis will be on the implementation process that is aiming to reach 1 million children, ultimately targeting 2,5 million poor and vulnerable children.

While it is acknowledged that there has been inclusive guidelines to direct the process, there is a realisation that major planning has been at national and provincial levels. It remains to be seen how these well-thought out plans will be interpreted at provincial and district levels, and for the purpose of this study, how policy for implementation is translated at classroom level.

It is also important to note that the White Paper 5 (Department of National Education 2001d: 39-41) listed the limitations for Grade R implementation. The question that arises is whether provincial departments have structures in place to deal with such challenges and whether the solutions to the challenges will be in line with recommendations at national levels. It is also important to establish in what way these limitation will impact on the implementation strategies.

Among the listed areas of concern, this study will look at the development of provincial leadership with regard to management and implementation capacity, the development of an adequate poverty targeted grants-in-aid system, and the ongoing development of the curriculum for Grade R. Since the move to an inter-departmental and integrated approach to ECD provisioning is so advanced, it will be important to establish if the provincial department has set targets and performance indicators for inter-governmental and inter-sectorial coordination of ECD.

The interest in this study is to establish how the recommendations of this policy are effected in Grade R classes of the research area.

4.11   CONCLUSION

This chapter set out to discuss the history of early childhood programmes in South Africa and to explain the rationale behind their development. The literature review in chapter 2 about, for instance, Head Start in America (section 2.7.1.1); the Swansea Project of Britain (section 2.8.1); and the Integrated Child Development Service of India (section 2.10.1), to name a few, would serve as background to this investigation.

It has however, been revealed that access to intervention programmes in South Africa was to a great extent politically motivated, contrary to the programmes alluded to above, whose origins were economic. As a result, a brief historical background of the 1976 school riots that influenced the nature of educational change in the country was reviewed, using Bekker's model as frame of reference as it fitted South African events.

Significant proposals and audits commissioned by the Government and individual organisations with interest in ECD as well as policy documents were also investigated with the intention of identifying proposed intervention programmes for disadvantaged learners, especially in the Gauteng Province. The intention was to see how preliminary initiatives had influenced the final ECD policy or how they were incorporated in the final policy proposals aimed at providing for ECD.

It became evident that the policy proposals in the White Paper 5 (2001d) were informed by the commissions that were undertaken as preparation for policy formulation. However, in terms of this White Paper, there has not been complete alignment with previous recommendations especially with regard to implementation sites and the mode of delivery. The policy emphasised the introduction of Grade R as a measure of intervention but did not emphasise the Pre-Grade R learners. A subsequent policy document, White Paper 2002 (Department of Social Development 2002) paid specific attention to this age cohort and to the quality of programmes.

The proliferation of ECD policies following the recommendations of the audits also confirms the commitment of Government with regard to ECD provision in South Africa. One of the most important initiatives is the development of an Intersectoral collaboration for service delivery. Although no programme design was suggested and the delivery mode is not clear, the effort marks a very important feature of South African intervention programmes.

A notable feature with regard to all policy documents reviewed in this study is the emphasis placed on access to early programmes and scant information on the detail of the implementation strategy. While the outlined history of early programmes for disadvantaged learners explains the reason behind this trend, this should not preclude the importance of investigating the design and implementation strategies of the proposed early intervention programmes, which is the aim of this study.

Chapter 5

The research design

5.1 INTRODUCTION

The foregoing discourse on the various intervention programmes for disadvantaged learners has highlighted the importance of using appropriately designed intervention programmes and of adopting effective implementation strategies. The fact that many such programmes have shortcomings and fail to produce the desired outcomes, calls for further research.

This chapter provides a brief discussion of the research design that was adopted to investigate the implementation of intervention programmes in the research area. The selected research design will be explained. This will be followed by an outline of the methodological approach, together with a description of the techniques that were used to collect data in the field. An account of steps taken to ensure the validity and reliability of the research findings, as well as the ethical measures adopted are explained.

The research question in this study is as follows:

To what extent can the design and implementation strategy of intervention programmes for school beginners in the research schools influence their level of school readiness?

Hence, the aim of the study is to investigate the design and implementation strategy of intervention programmes used in the research schools. The study investigated how the school-based Grade R (as an intervention programme) is implemented in the research schools in Alexandra, a township in Gauteng. A secondary aim of the investigation is to yield information on teacher training for implementing Grade R, ECD policy for the implementation of Grade R and the classroom situation within the research schools.

5.2   THE RESEARCH DESIGN

Different researchers (De Vos, Strydom, Fouché & Delport 2003: 270-272; Sowell 2001: 24-25) interpret the concept research design differently. For the purpose of this study, Mouton's (2003; 24-29) viewpoint is upheld and the concept will be understood to mean "a plan or blueprint of how the researcher intends conducting research".

This investigation is planned to take place in two phases. Phase 1 constitutes a quantitative investigation into the developmental abilities of Grade R learners that are aspects of school readiness. Phase 2 uses a qualitative approach to establish how Grade R is implemented. By using two or three strategies to obtain data, the consistency or reliability of the research outcome can be checked (Hatch 2002: 92-93).

The standpoint in this research is that it is not only feasible to use both paradigms, it is also more constructive to do so than to rely on one approach alone. Mouton (2001: 169-170) says the phenomena that are investigated in the social sciences such as Education are so enmeshed that a single approach most certainly cannot succeed in encompassing complex human behaviour.

5.3   INVESTIGATION IN PHASE 1

The investigation will be conducted in the school-based Grade R classes of carefully selected schools from the different provinces. The research is intended to determine the need for intervention before school entry and will yield quantitative data in respect of language and intellectual, physical, social and emotional development. The School Readiness Evaluation Test for Trained Testers (SETT) were used to measure these skills. Such information is valuable for this study in terms of baseline information on learners' developmental abilities. The idea is also to establish whether there are any intervention programmes in Grade 1 to replace those that existed prior to the new education system.

5.3.1   The research sample

Purposive sampling will be used to select groups of schools that will provide information central to and relevant to the purpose of this study (Sowell 2001: 45). To obtain a broad picture, the schools were selected from four provinces, namely Mpumalanga, Limpopo, North West and Gauteng. The sample was selected on the following basis:

5.3.1.1 Relevance to the research question

All the selected schools have a Grade R programme introduced by their respective provincial departments of Education. The schools enrol learners between the ages of five to six years who are finally admitted into the Grade 1 classes of those schools. The learners are taught by both qualified and unqualified teachers. The implementation of the programme is guided by the Revised National Curriculum Statement Grades R-9 (Department of Education 2002c). The schools thus possess the experience needed for this study.

5.3.1.2 Representation

The sample in Phase 1 is broad and cuts across different provinces. *Typical case sampling* was applied in that all the selected schools fitted the norm, namely that they were provincial schools that offered Grade R recommended by the education department. Two "typical schools" were selected per province. The idea was to gain insight into the challenges experienced by Grade R teachers when implementing the programme.

The sample included a total of 388 Grade R learners from Gauteng, North West Province, Mpumalanga and Limpopo. This sample consisted of urban learners from Gauteng, learners from peri-urban areas of the North West Province, rural learners from Mpumalanga and very rural learners from Limpopo. "Very rural" implies that the villages are very far from town, are small and are spread over large distances.

5.3.1.3 Variables in the research

Since the approach in this phase is quantitative, it is important to ensure that the research variables are the same in all the schools so as not to jeopardise the reliability and validity of the study (Sowell 2001: 45-46). In this regard the variables to be researched are the same since all the schools offer the same Grade R programme prescribed by the Department of Education. The researcher is interested in how the implementation of Grade R can influence the level of learners' school readiness. Secondly, the variables in the Grade R programme, that is, language, intellectual, physical, social and emotional development are the same variables used in the preschool screening test, namely SETT.

5.3.1.4 The learners

The criteria used to select the learners included age, gender and special needs. Learners between the ages of five and six years were selected (some schools registered four year olds). An attempt was made to have an equal number of girls and boys in the sample but it was not always possible. Similarly, an attempt was made to include special needs learners where present. A total of 40 learners per school were selected. Where the number of learners exceeded 40, every other learner was selected after they were arranged according to gender. However, most rural schools had one class of less than or just over 40 learners and almost all of them were selected.

With regard to the testing in the research area, all the learners present on that day were tested. The researcher, however, excluded very sick learners who barely managed to participate in classroom activities.

The decision to use the range of learners indicated above which Sowell (2001: 46) refers to as *maximum variation sampling*, was aimed at ensuring that the sample included all possible kinds of learners.

5.3.2   Data collection procedures in Phase 1

Prior to fieldwork arrangements for the research, the relevant provincial departments and the different head teachers of the research schools were visited. The nature and purpose of the SETT as the research instrument that used for the investigation was explained to the Grade R teachers.

5.3.3   The research technique in quantitative research

The SETT was used to gather data on the developmental level of Grade R learners in terms of their Language and General Development (LGD), Physical and Motor Development (PMD) and Emotional and Social Development (ESD).

According to Johnson and Christensen (2004: 149-150) a preschool screening test is a valuable measuring instrument for educational research and determines the learners' level of readiness for school. In the SETT attention will be drawn to the outcome of individual scales. These scales will be used to determine which areas of development need more attention. With regard to the test conducted in the schools-based Grade R classes the focus remained the same.

McBurney (2002: 185) indicates that although it is not always possible to measure certain traits like intelligence, there are indicators that approximate such constructs that can be used. The SETT uses such indicators to determine intellectual and emotional development as aspects of school readiness.   Behaviours that are associated with intelligence include reasoning logically, displaying common sense and reading with high comprehension (Johnson & Christensen 2004: 149-150).

In this study the advantage of using the SETT is that it is an existing test with high validity and reliability (Mouton 2003: 100). Secondly, this is a test designed specifically for South African learners and as Rossouw (2003: 118) pointed out, local tests do not have the disadvantages of foreign tests. Details of the test are discussed to give the reader an idea of the test and more importantly, to indicate how relevant it is for use in this research. This information will be useful when the test results are discussed in chapter 6.

5.3.4 Background to the SETT

The Education Department of the previous dispensation requested the Human Science Research Council (HSRC) to compile an instrument for determining school readiness among school beginners. The literature survey on school readiness and developmental theories contained evidence that difficulties with school progress may originate mainly as a result of developmental problems that can be classified into three categories, namely, language and intellectual development, physical and motor development and emotional and social development. This theory formed the basis for the test.

5.3.5 The aim of the SETT

The SETT was constructed for the purpose of identifying school beginners or potential school beginners who will not be able to progress satisfactorily during their first school year unless they receive assistance. By means of the SETT evaluation it should be possible to determine beginners' developmental problems at school entrance, so that the supportive process can be expedited and negative school experiences reduced to a minimum.

5.3.6 The design of the SETT

The SETT is designed as an individual test to determine the developmental level of potential school beginners at school entrance or shortly before. Three scales were developed to address problems in the three development areas, namely Language and General Development (LGD), Physical and Motor Development (PMD), and Emotional and Social Development (ESD).

The items in each of these scales were based on principles of developmental psychology and on teaching methods. To enable a teacher to screen a class of 20 learners individually an attempt was made to limit the testing time to half an hour per learner (Joubert 1997:15-16).

The items were also designed in such a way that they were suitable for use by teachers in a structured situation without being influenced by bias; that they made use of everyday materials that appeal to beginners and render the test situation less unfamiliar to them than a

paper and pencil test; and that they were directed towards the developmental level of learners between the ages of five and seven years (Joubert 1997: 17).

5.3.7   Rationale of the SETT scales

An evaluation of the three scales indicated that the LGD was most significant in terms of school readiness followed by the PMD scale and finally the ESD scale. In all the scales, various items were constructed to elicit specific responses. The LGD scale is intended to determine the following:

- knowledge which the learner acquires spontaneously
- the learner's ability to remember
- the learner's ability to recognise similarities in spite of apparent differences
- the learner's ability to repeat and carry out verbal instructions
- the learner's ability to understand (to accommodate) and imitate a task
- the learner's ability to restructure (to assimilate) and then perform a task

It is assumed that the beginner should achieve specific minimum scores on the basic as well as the potential levels to be considered school ready.

The PMD scale is developed to establish the following:

- the dexterity with which the learner uses the large muscles such as those in the arms and legs (gross motor ability)
- the dexterity with which the learner uses the fine hand and forearm muscles (fine motor ability)
- the arousal and perceptual ability of the learner based on his or her reactions to auditory and or visual stimuli (perception)
- the integration of movement and perceptual ability (coordination)

It is assumed that a beginner should achieve specific minimum scores on both motor as well as the integration scales to be considered ready for school.

The ESD scale is constructed to determine the following:

- the confidence the learner displays in his or her ability or success in the tasks that he or she performs

- the interest shown by the learner to handle tasks that are more difficult in nature than what the learner is used to
- the ability of the learner to control his or her emotions and impulses successfully and to channel them in an acceptable manner
- the inner driving force that motivates the learner to achieve his or her aims that is, the learner's motivation

It is assumed that a beginner should achieve specific minimum scores on both the scale for emotionality as well as for sociability to be considered school ready.

5.3.8   The standardisation of the SETT

In the compilation of the SETT a large sample of learners in all the provinces were tested in order to determine cut-off scores according to which school beginners can be regarded as school ready.   The target group comprised learners from the urban areas and included whites, Indians, and coloureds. The African learners were excluded for political reasons at the time.   Rural learners were also excluded owing to practical financial considerations. Research proved that since more than 80 percent of the whites, Indians and coloureds lived in urban areas, the absence of rural subjects would not be detrimental. With regard to the African learners, in this study the period of testing will be adapted as recommended to make up for the difference.

5.3.9   Measures to ensure reliability and validity of the results in Phase 1

An attempt was made to obtain an indication of the reliability of the SETT scales by comparing the ratings of teachers for "readiness" and "not-ready" with regard to LGD, PMD and ESD with those of parents. The percentages of correspondence proved to be high which suggests that the test can be regarded as reliable (Joubert 1997: 29). Secondly, since the SETT is a standardised preschool test, it has a stronger index of reliability as compared to teacher-made tests and can be used with confidence (Johnson & Christensen 2004: 150).

With regard to the validity of the test, report marks for language, for maths and the total year marks were used as criteria for establishing validity. On the basis of the investigation, it was assumed that only 20 percent of all the school beginners in the investigation would make the

desired progress at school. The arithmetic test and the language test proved to be the best predictors of school readiness and thus confirmed the validity of the SETT results (Joubert 1997: 30-32).

5.4   INVESTIGATION IN PHASE 2

A qualitative approach was followed in the second phase. This would yield descriptive and narrative data that would provide in-depth information lacking in the first quantitative phase.

This phase is more focused in that it is a case study and will mainly reveal how Grade R is implemented in the research schools. It also indicates the level of development of the learners in those schools. It is envisaged that the qualitative data emanating from this investigation, together with the quantitative data from the first phase, will assist in answering the research question and in realising the aim of the study.

5.4.1   The qualitative approach

Researchers (Lee 2000: 24; McNiff 2002: 32; Nash 2002: 10; Rossman & Rallis 2003: 3-10) are in agreement that the qualitative method is a research approach that acknowledges the existence of practitioners as real life participants in the research. A major part of fieldwork in this study will involve interviews and interaction with Grade R teachers as participants that are knowledgeable about the Grade R programme.

In qualitative research three attributes are emphasised, the natural setting in which the research is conducted, the emphasis placed on the subject of investigation and the value placed on participants' perspectives. These characteristics, according to Jones (2002: 469) as well as Magolda and Weems (2002: 490) provide the social and human aspects of research that make the qualitative approach unique and separate it from the quantitative approach. This investigation took place in the natural setting of the school and tried to establish what preparations were made to implement Grade R.

The approach in this research is to investigate or collect data within the context of the immediate setting and also in the larger context within which the immediate setting is framed (Bryman 2000: 10-15; Partington 2001: 33; Ford & Fasoli 2001: 12). For instance, interviews

with individual teachers are based on what the researcher observed in the classroom as the teacher was interacting with learners. This is information that will be shaped by the immediate circumstances such as the classroom situation, the teacher's expertise and the whole environment.

Information on a broader scale were collected from focus groups comprising Grade 1 teachers. Anticipated information include the teachers' views on the school readiness level of learners from Grade R. The researcher will illicit information on the school readiness of learners from other institutions as well as establish whether there is a link between the Grade R and Grade 1 programmes.

5.4.2   The case study

According to Wellington (2000: 90-91), a case study is a detailed examination of one setting or one single subject or one single depository of documents or one particular event. In educational research this unit could be a school or a setting within the school, or a person, for example the school principal. In this study the units of study are the school-based Grade R classes introduced in the Foundation Phase of schools in Alexandra Township, which is a district in the Gauteng Provincial Department.

Since this is not a very big township and only four of the primary schools offer Grade R, the case study design is appropriate. All four of the school-based Grade R classes were investigated in the context of the individual schools and the broader environment.

The researcher assumed the role of observer when investigating the different schools and held informal discussions with individual teachers. Such discussions will include one-to-one interviews with Grade R teachers to clarify classroom observations and focus groups comprising Grade 1 teachers. These interviews aim to access more information on the implementation of the programme.

In addition to data gathered through observation, interviews and focus groups, case records such as time tables or Learning Programme planning, were collected as evidence to improve the trustworthiness of this study. It is envisaged that the research results from this study will serve as catalyst for future research and to inform educators more about Grade R as an

intervention programme. The teachers will also be equipped with additional skills for programme implementation and modification.

This case study will resemble what Denzin and Lincoln (2000: 120) and De Vos et al (2003: 275-276) regard as **intrinsic** since it is conducted for purposes of gaining a better understanding of the implementation strategy of Grade R. It could also be regarded as instrumental because it provides insight into a particular issue; in this case, the implementation of Grade R. The investigation will advance an understanding of the issue of school readiness (Wellington 2000: 92-93).

In this investigation the case study is considered positively because it allows emphasis on the research unit, namely the Grade R class and places the investigation within context, in this case within the school (Denzin & Lincon 2000: 667). This approach recognises De Vos et al (2003: 275) and Mouton's (2003: 150) point of view which explains that the case study is situated within its larger context but the focus remains on either the case or an issue that is illustrated by the case.

The study is guided by the literature review on intervention programmes because, as Babbie (2001: 120) points out, those researchers undertaking case studies seek to enter the field with a knowledge of the relevant literature before conducting field research.

Protagonists of case studies (Babbie 2001: 120; de Vos et al 2003: 139-140; Hatch 2002: 30-31) refer to other characteristics that further highlight the advantages of such studies. For instance a case study can be illuminating and insightful. If well written, it can hold the attention and systematically reveal facts that provide a strong sense of reality. Case studies can also lead to subsequent quantitative research by pointing to issues that can or should be investigated more broadly (Krueger & Casey 2000: 24-25).

For the purpose of this study it is hoped that teachers in the research area will have access to the research results and consider the feasibility of the stated recommendations made in this study. Secondly, the study should be of value to the Provincial Department of Education for future planning of Grade R because the case study, derived from research, can be of great value in terms of teaching and learning. The focus on programme implementation will

ultimately impact on teaching and learning in Grade R and later in Grade 1 (Wellington 2000: 97).

Finally, case study research can safely be regarded as valuable, enjoyable and interesting to read and more important than being able to generalise from it, it affords the opportunity to relate to a case and learn from it.

5.4.3   Data collection procedures in Phase 2

Before the process of data gathering commenced, the researcher communicated first with the Head of the District Office responsible for the schools that provide Grade R in Alexandra Township. A set of letters were then written to individual school principals explaining the intent of the researcher and what role the researcher would play in the investigation. School principals were also given the choice to decide which of the set dates would suit them best for the visit. This is in keeping with data collecting procedures (Johnson 2001: 8; Johnson & Turner 2002: 25; Michael & Gerstl-Pepin 2002: 140-143).

During fieldwork the purpose of the research as well as the data collecting procedures were explained to Grade R teachers who were the main participants in this study. The researcher explained the need to use a tape recorder and give the teachers the option to accept or refuse its use in the investigation. At all times the researcher adopted a positive stance in order to establish good rapport.

5.4.4   Ethical considerations

Researchers such as Denzin and Lincoln (2003: 50-51), McBurney (2002: 129-134) and Neuman (2000:90-98) agree that ethical issues are integral to the research process and therefore need to be looked into before the research is finalised. In this study the following ethical issues will be observed.

(1)   *Informed consent.*   During fieldwork the researcher acknowledged the existence of teachers as real life participants in the research. Before data was collected, teachers were told about the research and what was anticipated from the investigation. They were not coerced into participating; their participation was voluntary. They had to give their permission, and their roles in the research as well as the researcher's role were explained.

After the fieldwork was completed attempts were made to interview the Head of the Provincial Department about the overarching implementation strategy for Grade R. Policy issues relating to the implementation of Grade R and the role of the department in this implementation were clarified. Participation will also be voluntary.

(2)   *Respect for the insider's perspective.* The researcher allowed the teachers' opinions to dominate the discussions because as Ford and Fasoli (2001: 12) correctly state, the insider's perspective is very important. She ensured that her worldview, her outsider position and academic advantage did not impede successful data gathering. Care was taken to ensure that the cultural context and linguistic problems did not lead to misinterpretations of the information and slow the fieldwork.

(3)   *The right to participate in own language.*   According to Heath (2000: 47), the participants should have the advantage and right to participate in their first language. Such an approach benefits research, especially in school settings, by making it possible to capture all the dimensions of the study, promoting awareness of the hidden meanings of language and ensuring cost effectiveness.   Fieldwork was conducted with this view in mind. Teachers will be allowed to express themselves in their first language and only used English when they were able to.

(4)   *Anonymity and confidentiality.* To promote anonymity the participants' identities were not disclosed. Different codes were employed for their names and the schools to which they belong.   Where certain characteristics, like language, threatened to disclose identities, the researcher disguised them or did not name them.

Anonymity protects the identity of specific individuals from being known while confidentiality means that information is not disclosed.   Information in this research

was recorded in such a way that it could not be linked to specific individuals. The researcher is however, aware of the fact that her right to protect her subjects is especially vulnerable when it conflicts with political or policy goals.

(5)   *Ethics of power.* When participants were interviewed, the researcher assumed a non-threatening position and allowed the participants to display their knowledge of Grade R without feeling threatened. The interactions will be characterised by mutual respect and trust.

(6)   *Scientific ethics.* Finally, Neuman (2000: 91) and Mouton (2003: 239) refer to unethical behaviour called scientific misconduct, which includes research fraud and plagiarism. Scientific misconduct occurs when a researcher falsifies or distorts the data or the methods of data collection. Scientific misconduct also includes significant departures from the generally accepted practices of the scientific community for doing or reporting research.

Research institutes and universities have policies and procedures to detect misconduct, report it to the scientific community and penalise the researcher who engages in it. The researcher is continually under the supervision of his or her promoter and abides by the rules and regulations of the University.

5.4.5   Research techniques in qualitative research

Sowell (2001: 68) states that a valuable range of data gathering techniques or research tools in qualitative research includes watching, asking, listening and reviewing. In this phase observations, interviews and focus group discussions were used as research tools.

5.4.5.1 Observation

In this research observation was used as a technique to produce descriptive data that will promote the understanding of the implementation strategies employed by teachers in the Grade R classes.   The researcher will carefully scrutinised the physical setting of the classroom, observed teachers and their actions, observed learner interactions with the teachers, interacted with teachers where necessary and record such detail because

something of significance might be revealed. Such observation was conducted within the context in which teaching takes place, that is, in the classroom.

This investigation aims at establishing how Grade R is implemented in schools. Information emanating from the observed physical setting of the classroom may reveal, for instance, if there is demarcation according to the different Learning Areas. Teacher activities, together with learner interactions, are part of the implementation strategy. Such observed behaviour will also indicate how ECD policy is interpreted in the classroom. Available materials and what is communicated to the learners will incidentally provide details on the content or design of the Grade R programme.

Sowell (2001: 69) recommends that the research questions in any study or investigation should guide the choices of researcher roles and strategies. If research questions call for exploration of a phenomenon, the phenomenon in this case being Grade R, researchers must gather several types of data that require interactions with participants within the setting. Since the school visits will be repeated only twice or thrice, the best role to adopt is that of 'observer-as-participant'. In this position the major part of the observation will be listening and watching and occasionally comments will be made.

Details of the observation

The following classroom situation was observed:

- the nature of the classroom, its resources and how these were displayed

- the content or design of the Grade R programme

- teacher-learner interactions

- the number of girls and boys in the classroom and their ages

- the number of special needs learners

- the environment in the school together with the tone of the school

The first three points are factors related to the implementation of Grade R. The structure and size of the classroom will either enable or hinder the teacher to execute the activities of the programme. The next two points relate to policy on ECD and Grade R. Policy states that the

number of learners per classroom must not exceed 25 if teaching is to be successful. Policy also states that special efforts must be made to provide school access to the girl and special needs learners. The last point is a reflection of the nature of management in the school, a factor that can either compromise or support the successful implementation of Grade R.

5.4.5.2 The interview

After the observation period individual teachers were interviewed in an effort to understand some of the observed behaviour. To avoid misunderstandings and missing out on important information, an audiotape was used to capture information during this interview. Where possible, documents that bear significance to the implementation of the Grade R programme will be collected from the different classes.

According to researchers like De Vos et al (2003: 292) and Rossouw (2003: 143) interviewing is the predominant mode of data collection in qualitative research and is defined as a conversation between the researcher and a participant with the specific objective of gathering information about the topic that is being researched. In this research the interview will be used as one of the research tools to gather information from individual teachers and from the small groups. The interview questions were guided by the research question and aim of this study (Rossouw 2003: 143).

A semi-structured interview was used in this research. Open-ended questions were asked and the clues provided by the participant were pursued to collect the desired information. Expanded questions based on the overarching questions were used, for example:

Question:	How were you trained to implement Grade R?
Extended questions:	Who provided the training?
	How long did the training last?
	What resource materials were given, if any?

During the interview the researcher made notes about her personal experience and indicated positive aspects and any inadequacies. Thereafter, the interview that had been conducted and recorded on tape was transcribed. When the fieldwork was completed the researcher

returned to the participants with the results and checked if the transcription indeed reflected what the participants said.

With regard to the interview itself, Rossouw (2003: 146) points out that the way in which the interviewer formulates the questions helps him or her and the participants to remain focused. The fewer questions the researcher asks, the more focussed the interview will be. In this investigation the following overarching questions were asked:

1. How were you trained to implement Grade R?
2. What works well with the programme?
3. What challenges do you face with regard to its implementation?
4. What does ECD policy stipulate with regard to the language of instruction, the number of learners per teacher and what the learners are expected to know at the end of the Grade R programme?
5. What are your recommendations with regard to the implementation of the Grade R programme?

The interview was conducted in the teachers' home languages and in English. The first question concerned the teachers' preparedness to implement Grade R. The responses would indicate the role played by the Provincial Department of Education with regard to programme implementation. The remaining three points indicated the challenges faced by the schools in implementing Grade R. The questions also indicated how policy is translated into action at classroom level.

5.4.5.3 The focus group

The focus group was used as another research tool to gather information. It involved Grade 1 teachers since they are the next level of teachers who deal with learners from Grade R. The focus group was also semi-structured in the same way as the individual interviews. The purpose of the focus group discussion was to gather information that would establish the extent to which Grade R influenced the school performance of learners in the research schools.

During discussions the researcher acted as a moderator for the group, posing questions, keeping the discussion flowing and encouraging participants to communicate fully. Focus groups were preferred in this research because they are much more natural and resemble everyday conversation and therefore promote open discussion that yields substantial information. The dynamic quality of group interaction, as participants discuss, debate and sometimes disagree about key issues, is regarded as a striking feature that will further evoke more responses.

According to De Vos et al (2003: 297), Johnson and Christensen (2004: 183-185); Ritchie (2003: 138-144) and Rossouw (2003: 148), teachers provide valuable information about learner preparedness for formal learning. The outcome of this focus group will yield information about the level of development of the learners from Grade R and will be compared with the findings of the SETT conducted in the first phase of the research.

The focus group will be asked the following:

1. What is the difference (if any) in classroom performance between learners from Grade R and those without Grade R experience?
2. What is the difference (if any) in terms of school performance between those Grade R learners who were school-based and those who were centre-based?
3. What is the link between the Grade R programme and Grade 1?
4. What do you recommend about those learners in Grade 1 without Grade R experience?

5.4.6　　The development of categories and the coding system

The research techniques used to gather data, namely observations, individual interviews and focus groups are regarded as major categories for organising data as recommended by Creswell (2002: 15-24) and Mason (2002): 20-25). The notes written under these three categories during fieldwork are read and reread, and then grouped and regrouped on the basis of the likeness of the information under each category. The emerging patterns under each of the three categories were recorded as sub-categories. The information that could not be included into any of the sub-categories was put aside as "additional" information.

A coding system was devised to group similar information under one heading and also to honour ethical demands. The four research schools was coded as Schools A, B, C and D. The participant Grade R teachers in those schools will be coded as GR1A (Grade R teacher number 1 [/2/3] from school A), GR1B, GR1C, and GR1D. The Grade 1 teachers who participated in the focus groups were coded as G1XA (Grade 1 teacher number X [/Y/Z] from school A), G1XB, G1XC and G1XD.

5.5 RELIABILITY, VALIDITY AND TRUSTWORTHINESS OF RESULTS

In this study the concept reliability is seen as a judgement of the extent to which a test, a method or a tool gives consistent results across a range of settings, and if used by a range of researchers. Validity on the other hand, refers to the degree to which a method, a test or a research tool actually measures what it is supposed to measure (Wellington 2000: 31-33).

Qualitative researchers such as Neuman (2000: 170-171) prefer to use terms that are regarded to be resonant with the goals and values of qualitative research such as "confirmability" of findings, or "trustworthiness" or "dependability" of research evidence. The concept "trustworthiness" is preferred in this study.

Qualitative researchers are subjectively involved with data collection and data analysis and it is necessary to take measures that will ensure that the data is impartial and trustworthy. In order to avoid that trustworthiness is put at risk the researcher employed the following measures:

5.5.1 Extensive literature review

The first way to ensure credibility is for the researcher to have prolonged interaction with the study material and where possible with the respondents. Prolonged involvement promotes knowledge of the theoretical background to the research and knowledge of the culture and values of participants, thus eliminating misconceptions (Rossouw 2003: 180, Flick et al 2004: 186-187; Ritchie & Lewis 2003: 273)

The extensive literature search that was conducted in chapter 2 on the design and implementation of intervention programmes provides a sound theoretical basis for this

research. Also, credibility is promoted by the fact that this research is based on theories about learning and child development.

5.5.2   Triangulation of methods

The researcher will use the quantitative and qualitative methods sequentially. In Phase 1 the SETT, will be used while in the second phase observations, interviews and focus groups will be used (Neuman 2000: 125; Waghid 2000: 15; Walford 2001:7; Zhang 2001: 5-9). The researcher contends that a study using both approaches is more comprehensive.

5.5.3   Discourse with experts

Another way of ensuring that data is trustworthy, according to Rossouw (2003: 180), is to engage in discourse with an impartial expert about the methods of collecting data, analysing and interpreting data and the method of choosing the sample. The researcher consulted an expert in methodology to critique her research design and methodology.

5.5.4   Member checking

The fourth method of ensuring credibility is referred to as member checking. The researcher held critical discussion with the respondents to confirm the trustworthiness of her interpretations. In this respect the respondents are regarded as expects in their experiences and only they can deliver judgement on the truthfulness of the researcher's interpretation of their experiences.

5.6   CONCLUSION

The aim of this chapter was to describe an appropriate research design that would provide answers to the research question. A literature review on the different research designs and methodologies were conducted in this chapter. This served to guide the selection of the most suitable design and methodology. For the second phase, a case study was considered the most suitable design since it enables the researcher to investigate the research problem in depth. The researcher contends that a case study is the most appropriate design to study human behaviour or phenomena such as the school situation in their natural setting.

This chapter also studied the use of both the qualitative and quantitative methods of research and the advantages of using triangulation to promote the reliability, validity and trustworthiness of the research results. As a result this investigation followed a two-phased approach by using the SETT in Phase 1 and using observation, interviews and focus groups in Phase 2.

The research techniques were discussed in detail and an indication was given as to how they would be used in this study. Similarly, ethical issues related to data collection, especially with participant interactions were noted and will be observed in the field. The research results will be tabled in chapter 6.

Chapter 6

The analysis and discussion of research findings

6.1   INTRODUCTION

Chapter 6 is a report of the research findings of the fieldwork conducted in the Grade R classes of the research schools. The fieldwork was undertaken to realise the aim of the study, namely to investigate the design and implementation of Grade R as an intervention programme. The SETT was conducted in order to answer the research question. The outcome will help to establish the extent to which the implementation of Grade R as an intervention programme could influence the level of school readiness of the learners in this investigation.

The positive influence of intervention programmes in improving poor learners' skills for learning was discussed in detail in chapter 2, section 2.3. The literature also explained that the success of any intervention programme depends on the strategies adopted to implement the programme and on the policies that guide such implementation strategies (chapter 3, sections 3.4 and 3.5). The outcome of the fieldwork conducted in Phase 2 of the study will be argued on the basis of this information.

Since the case study was the methodology used for this investigation, the tabling of research findings will be preceded by a brief narrative of the research area and of the schools in the research area as these bear significance to the outcome of the study. The findings will be presented in two separate phases in the same manner as the investigation was conducted. An analysis and explanation of the reported data will provide meaning to the tabled data.

6.2   BACKGROUND OF THE RESEARCH AREA

The research area, Alexandra Township, is a highly densely populated residential area situated approximately fifteen kilometres north of Johannesburg. It was one of the few areas where blacks could own land in South Africa before the introduction of the "Homeland" system. It was declared a "Hostel Region" where "migrant labourers" from the Homelands stayed. This was the beginning of the decay of the township.

A large number of residents were forcefully removed to the South Western Townships (SOWETO) and to Tembisa. Massive six storey hostels colloquially referred to as "Universities", were erected and they ultimately accommodated migrant labourers from KwaZulu-Natal and the Transkei. These ethnic groups increased the already existing ethnic diversity and poverty of the place.

During the political unrest between 1976 and 1990 this hostel area, known as "Beirut", became the source of political violence. The schools in the area were plundered during this period of unrest, leaving this section of the township without schools. Prior to this period, some schools were demolished to make way for the hostels. The political situation encouraged people from rural areas and surrounding countries like Zimbabwe and Maputu to settle in the township, this time in shacks, on the pavements, in the streets and on the pavements of some school premises. Although there are pockets of people living above the poverty line, this area has been declared a poor area and activities are afoot to "renew" it through the "Alexandra Renewal Strategy".

This was a beautiful place where Africans, coloureds, Indians and Chinese lived together. It was a hub of social activities and has produced internationally acclaimed musicians and writers. Politically it was very active and was the home of great politicians. This is a historic place, a place where Nelson Mandela's statue is being erected to recognise the fact that it served as his asylum before his arrest. It is a place that has become the final home for the ashes of the great politician, Dominee Beyers Naudé.

6.3   BACKGROUND TO THE SITUATION IN THE SCHOOLS

The present situation in the research schools is shaped by the historical and political events and is directed by what takes place in the community. The following discussion will focus on the history of the four research schools although reference will be made to other schools, where relevant.

All four research schools have missionary links and are named after the individual churches that supported them.   This situation changed when the previous government banned missionary schools to entrench the Bantu Education school system in 1953.   The schools were renamed; the Lutheren School came to be known as Dr Knack (Higher Primary), and Iphutheng (Lower Primary), the Swiss Mission School as Bovet (Combined), Mabiletsa as Ithute (Higher Primary) and Ikage (Lower Primary), Saint Michaels Anglican as Pholosho (Higher Primary) and M C Weiler (Lower Primary).

The research schools include Bovet, Ikage, Iphutheng and M C Weiler. It is important to state that, while the history of education in this country explains that all missionary work was provided by foreign missionaries, this was not the case in Alexandra. Ikage (and Ithute) was founded by the local church of Mabiletsa. This church continued to lay the foundation for the first secondary school in the township (Madise & Lebeloane 2003).   Researchers in the discipline of History of Education could research this fact further.

All of these schools were accommodated inside the church premises. They had a large number of learners and classroom accommodation was a problem.   There were no playgrounds and schools had to use the township stadiums for sports competitions.   To address this problem, Grade 1 and 2 classes were accommodated inside the church halls, which are divided with benches into four or more "classrooms". In instances where learners were too many for the church halls, additional accommodation was requested at other churches.

Teachers faced many challenges bought about by the congestion, including the problem of learners who sneaked out of their 'classroom' to join the other "classroom" where more interesting lessons like nursery rhymes were being taught. They also had to deal with the

challenge of multiple ethnicities. Most learners did not know whether their home language was Sesotho, isiZulu, Setswana, Sepedi, Xitsonga or Tshivenda. For instance, all learners would raise their hands when asked if their home language was Sesotho. The same learners would raise hands again when asked if they, for instance spoke isiZulu at home.

To circumvent this problem teachers would ask who for instance referred to their mothers as "umama" (isiZulu for mother) or "mme" (Sesotho for mother) or "mane" (Xitsonga for mother) and in that way they could establish the learners' home languages. However, language remained an issue in the early school grades, especially where learners claimed that they referred to their mothers as "mme" and sometimes as "umama".

Today many schools in the Alexandra Township, including all but one research school, are engulfed by informal settlements. Classroom space and the lack of playgrounds remain a challenge for teachers. All of the research schools have now been relocated to new places either as the result of decay or damage due to political unrest. They are situated in multiple storey buildings clustered in one area and all cater for different ethnic groups. Some learners are brought to school by hired vehicles because they live far away from this cluster of schools.

The use of multiple languages continue to be a problem in the context of teaching and learning and the situation is now aggravated by learners from neighbouring countries. Those from Maputo speak a language close to Xitsonga and those from Zimbabwe speak Shona, a language related to isiZulu. Some of the teachers in Grade R who are products of the church schools now adopt a different strategy from their predecessors to address this problem, they use English.

6.4   RESEARCH FINDINGS IN PHASE 1

6.4.1   An analysis of the SETT findings

At the beginning of the year a total of 288 Grade R learners from different provinces, namely Mpumalanga, Limpopo, North West and Gauteng were tested in Phase 1 through the use of the preschool screening test (SETT). A further 100 learners were tested in Alexandra Township (Gauteng) at the research schools during Phase 2 of the investigation.

It is important to state that the test was not used to determine if the learners were ready or not ready for school because as researchers Beck (1999: 118) and Macguire (1999: 48) advised, in chapter 2, section 2.6.1 educators should not use tests to assess disadvantaged learners because such tests are problematic when used with disadvantaged populations. Educators must instead measure individual skills that need to be improved.

The SETT findings will reflect the outcome of the different scales, namely Language and General Development (LGD), Physical and Social Development (PSD) and Emotional and Social Development (ESD) that measure the learners' different learning skills. The nature of the SETT was described in chapter 5, sections 5.3.5 to 5.3.8

Table 6.1: Total number of learners tested per province.

PROVINCE	**LEARNERS**
Mpumalanga	75
Limpopo	82
Gauteng (Alexandra Township)	72
Gauteng (Alexandra Township)	100
North West	59
TOTAL:	**388**

In Tables 6.2 to 6.5, the number of learners that passed or failed the different aspects of the school readiness test are indicated.

Table 6.2: Test findings – Mpumalanga Province

LGD		PMD		ESD	
Pass	Fail	Pass	Fail	Pass	Fail
35 (47%)	40 (53%)	51 (68%)	24 (32%)	51 (68%)	24 (32%)
Total: 75 (100%)		Total: 75 (100%)		Total: 75 (100%)	

Table 6.2 reflects the SETT outcomes of school-based Grade R learners in Mpumalanga. Of the 75 learners who wrote the test, only 35 passed the LGD scale which means that more than half of the testees do not have the necessary language and intellectual development to succeed in formal schooling. Their performance in the PMD and ESD scales was fairly good indicating that the majority were physically and emotionally ready.

Table 6.3: Test findings – Limpopo Province

LGD		PMD		ESD	
Pass	Fail	Pass	Fail	Pass	Fail
22 (27%)	60 (73%)	50 (61%)	32 (39%)	62 (76%)	20 (24%)
Total: 82 (100%)		Total: 82 (100%)		Total: 82 (100%)	

The learners in Limpopo performed even poorer than those in Mpumalanga. Only 22 of the 82 Grade R learners passed the LGD scale (27%). Their 61% and 76% pass rate in the PMD and ESD scales respectively suggests that the majority do not have problems in the development of these skills.   They will however, need assistance with language and intellectual skills.

Table 6.4: Test findings – Gauteng Province (AlexandraTownship)

LGD		PMD		ESD	
Pass	Fail	Pass	Fail	Pass	Fail
19 (26%)	53 (74%)	42 (58%)	30 (42%)	56 (78%)	16 (22%)
Total: 72 (100%)		Total: 72 (100%)		Total: 72 (100%)	

Learners in Gauteng performed badly in the LGD scale like in the previous two provinces. Only 19 out of 72 Grade R learners succeeded in the LGD scale. The pass rates of 58% in the PMD scale and 78% in the ESD scale implies that their physical and emotional skills are developed and they will not have problems in performing activities of this nature.

Table 6.5: Test findings - North West Province

LGD		PMD		ESD	
Pass	Fail	Pass	Fail	Pass	Fail
24 (41%)	35 (59%)	37 (63%)	22 (37%)	49 (83%)	10 (17%)
Total: 59 (100%)		Total: 59 (100%)		Total: 59 (100%)	

The outcome reflected in this table indicates that out of 59 Grade R learners who wrote the test, 35 failed the LGD scale suggesting that the learners are as poor as those in other provinces. The majority of learners performed well in the PMD (63% pass) scale and the ESD scale (83% pass). Like all the learners in the research group, they are also developed physically and emotionally to benefit from formal schooling.

Table 6.6: A summary of the four provinces

LGD		PMD		ESD	
Pass	Fail	Pass	Fail	Pass	Fail
100 (35%)	118 (65%)	170 (59%)	118 (41%)	218 (76%)	70 (24%)
Total: 288 (100%)		Total: 288 (100%)		Total: 288 (100%)	

Table 6.6 shows the overall performance of all the 288 Grade R learners tested in the four provinces. It is evident that the lack of language and intellectual skills that indicate literacy is a problem the majority of learners in all the provinces experience.

6.4.2   An explanation of Tables 6.2 to 6.6.

The extremely poor performance in the LGD scale throughout the provinces confirms what was recorded in the literature study (section 1.6, section 2.3) with regard to the poor learning skills of disadvantaged learners. Those who lag behind for a long time ultimately develop a negative self-esteem and eventually drop out of school.

Although the number of learners who passed the PMD and ESD scales is higher than the number of those who failed the scales, this failure rate is higher than the accepted norm (24%) for the test. It can thus be concluded that the physical and emotional skills of the learners require improvement as well. A further analysis points to the fact that the scores of those learners from rural areas were higher than those of urban learners as could be seen in tables 6.2 to 6.5. The difference could be a reflection of different child-rearing practices. Further research is needed to explain why rural learners are better developed physically than their urban counterparts. In general, both rural and urban learners performed badly in the fine motor development items as expected for learners of this age.

The performance recorded in tables 6.3 to 6.6 suggests that the majority of learners are socially and emotionally mature by age five or six. The low failure rate of, for example 17%

table 6.5 that is significantly lower than the predicted 24% is contrary to the expected low performance discussed in chapter 2, sections 2.5.1 to 2.5.6. The emotional development could be the result of upbringing as suggested or the influence of other variables not controlled in the study. Further research in this regard might explain this phenomenon.

6.4.3   An analysis of the SETT findings in the research schools

The following are results of the SETT conducted in the Grade R classes of the research schools in Alexandria at the end of the year. A total of 100 learners were tested during Phase 2 of the investigation and results are determined in the same manner as explained under section 6.4.1. The results appear in tables 6.7 to 6.10.

Table 6.7: Test findings in SCHOOL A

LGD		PMD		ESD	
Pass	Fail	Pass	Fail	Pass	Fail
3 (13%)	20 (87%)	16 (70%)	7 (30%)	17 (74%)	6 (26%)
Total: 23 (100%)		Total: 23 (100%)		Total: 23 (100%)	

Table 6.7 shows the outcome of the SETT conducted in School A. A total of 23 learners were tested and their performances proved to be poor in the LGD scale (87% failed) and that indicates that they lack the necessary language and intellectual skills. The majority of learners performed well in the remaining two scales of the test.

Table 6.8: Test findings in SCHOOL B

LGD		PMD		ESD	
Pass	Fail	Pass	Fail	Pass	Fail
10 (36%)	18 (64%)	24 (86%)	4 (14%)	25 (89%)	3 (11%)
Total: 28 (100%)		Total: 28 (100%)		Total: 28 (100%)	

Learners in School B performed well in the PMD (86% pass) and ESD (89% pass), and that means they are physically, and emotionally developed and will not have problems at school. However, their poor performance in the LGD scale (87% failed) indicates that they have poor language and intellectual skills.

Table 6.9: Test findings of SCHOOL C

LGD		PMD		ESD	
Pass	Fail	Pass	Fail	Pass	Fail
6 (21%)	22 (79%)	20 (71%)	8 (29%)	21 (75%)	7 (25%)
Total: 28 (100%)		Total: 28 (100%)		Total: 28 (100%)	

Of the 28 learners who wrote the test, 22 (79%) failed the LGD scale. The performance of learners in the PMD and ESD scales is fairly good, indicating that many of them are developed physically and emotionally.

Table 6.10: Test findings in SCHOOL D

LGD		PMD		ESD	
Pass	Fail	Pass	Fail	Pass	Fail
7 (33%)	14 (67%)	18 (86%)	3 (14%)	16 (76%)	5 (24%)
Total: 21 (100%)		Total: 21 (100%)		Total: 21 (100%)	

School D, like SCHOOL B, performed well in the two scales, namely, PMD (14% fail) and ESD (24% fail) but poorly in the LGD scale (67% fail). This indicates that the majority of learners are developed physically and emotionally but lack language and intellectual skills.

Table 6.11: Summary of the test performance in the research schools

LGD		PMD		ESD	
Pass	Fail	Pass	Fail	Pass	Fail
26 (26%)	74 74%)	78 (78%)	22 (22%)	79 (79%)	21 (21%)
Total: 100 (100%)		Total: 100 (100%)		Total: 100 (100%)	

A summary of the end of year test performance in the research schools shows that the Grade R learners have fairly good physical skills and are emotionally developed. The failure rate of 22% and 21% for physical and emotional development respectively falls within the accepted or predicted failure rate of 24% stated in the SETT. However, the poor performance in the LGD scale (74% failed) shows that many are lacking in language and intellectual skills. In other words, of the 100 Grade R learners in the research schools, only 26 acquired literacy skills. Their performance in the language and numeric items of the test was extremely poor.

(An example of the test performance of a learner from one research school is included as Appendix 1). The evaluation sheet of the SETT is also included.

6.4.4   An explanation of tables 6.7 to 6.10

The poor performance in the Language and General Development (LGD) scale was the worst of the three SETT scales and can be ascribed to several factors. Of the four research schools, school A's performance was the worst in all the scales. Overcrowding in this Grade R class was the worst. The learners were too many for one class but not enough for two classes. Secondly, the Grade R practitioner comes from a rural area and knows only one African language.

With regard to the performance in the LGD scale it could be noted that language and general development are two aspects of development not usually emphasised at home-based or centre-based child services. Emphasis at these organisations is normally on health and care and the centres are operated by practitioners and social workers and not by teachers.

Many of the learners come from poor families with parents who are usually not educated to know the importance of early stimulation. In these families intermarriages between different ethnic groups are common and children are exposed to two languages at the same time. Although they ultimately master both the languages they face challenges during the early years. The situation is compounded by the influence of other African (and foreign) languages spoken in the neighbourhood.

Another reason for the poor performance in the language items could be the result of cultural and environmental factors. The African culture still frowns upon learners who talk freely to adults although this practice is fading in urban areas. Non-response is seen as respectable behaviour and is rewarded, especially in rural areas. There is not enough documented evidence to support this interpretation as was pointed out in section 3.7.2.

In the research schools (generally in urban areas) the reason for poor performance could be the multilingual environment coupled with the use of the colloquial language of the Township which is so different from the repertoire of the SETT. A significant number of learners come

from shacks where very little opportunity exists for concept formation and therefore limited possibility for intellectual development.

Age is a very important factor in the development of language and the intellect. Young learners around the age of five years will naturally experience more problems in this scale than their older counterparts because they are naturally less developed (a number of four years old learners were noted in the research classes).

Another important factor is that most learners may not have had nursery school experience. Nursery school attendance was not investigated because most of the nursery schools are not accredited given the poor infrastructure of many such centres in the Township. The large majority of learners who did not perform well in the LGD scale may have difficulty in language and numeracy exercises in Grade 1 unless they are given additional assistance.

It could be noted that the majority of the learners did not have problems with gross motor development. Their physical development could be the result of informal play at home or at care centres. Poor fine motor development and weak eye-hand coordination problems were prevalent among the research subjects. These problems could emanate from child rearing habits or environmental factors. Most parents do not allow their children to touch or manipulate objects in the home for fear that they may damage the hard earned items. Also, in the learners' homes opportunities of involving them in learning activities such as colouring books are minimal.

It can be said that learners with poor gross motor development may experience problems with physical movements in the classroom. Those with fine motor problems will struggle to hold a pencil or do other functions that involve the use of fine motor skills. Eye-hand coordination problems often lead to an inability to copy from the chalkboard or perform other such activities.

Although the predicted failure rate recorded in the (ESD) scale equaled the predicted SETT score of 24 percent, the standpoint in this study is that this is not a true reflection of the learners' emotional development. In the scoring process of this scale learners are credited for waiting for the directive from the researcher before they can respond. Observation indicated that the research subjects scored high, not because they were intentionally waiting

for the directive, but because they were scared to act until persuaded to do so. Secondly, the points they gained by nodding or shaking their heads may not be a true reflection of emotional development but more a sign of poor communication skills and hesitation.

It can be said that during the research process learners needed emotional support because many had to be put at ease during the testing since they were trembling with anxiety. Some of them requested to go to the bathroom during the testing and had to be called back. Others could not refrain from asking for the reward (sweets) on their tables that was part of the test. These behaviours are good examples of emotional immaturity and learners need to be developed in this regard.

6.5   RESEARCH FINDINGS OF THE QUALITATIVE INVESTIGATION IN PHASE 2

6.5.1   The findings of classroom observations

6.5.1.1 The classroom environment

The size of the classrooms: A striking feature of all, except one research school, is that the classrooms are very small and were previously used as storage for books and discarded materials. The classrooms are congested with learners' tables and chairs and there is no place to display the learning materials. It is also difficult to arrange the classroom into the three Learning Areas as dictated in the Revised National Curriculum Statement schools-Grade R-9 (Department of National Education 2002c). In one school the classroom was so small that learners had to walk on the tables to move around in the classroom. Some schools have purchased wendy houses to accommodate more learners, but are limited by the space in the schoolyard.

Facilities for learners: The tables and chairs were not enough for all the learners and similarly, the space on the mat could not accommodate all the learners. Learning materials such as story books or scissors and colour pens are in short supply and learners fight over them. The researcher observed that most of the Grade R teachers were not resourceful and made no attempt to improvise. Their responses in this regard are recorded under the interview discussion in Appendix 4.

6.5.1.2 The learners

There are different ethnic groups grouped in one or in different classrooms of the same school. This situation stems from the history of this area (section 6.3). The number of learners per classroom ranged from 35 to 48. In all the schools girls were in the majority by a minimal margin and this matches the findings of the Nationwide Audit in table 4.4. There were no Special Needs learners. There was no evidence to show that special efforts were made to increase the large number of girls noted in the different schools. However, with regard to the absence of special needs learners at the research schools, it could be said that it is common practice in disadvantaged communities to keep such learners longer at home to give them time to develop more. There were, however, a number of very sick learners in all the schools who needed special attention during teaching. In one school pictures of deceased learners were displayed on the wall.

6.5.1.3 Classroom interactions

Teachers dominate classroom interactions and the learners only respond when they are required to do so. "News time" provided a good opportunity for learners to participate in informal discussions with their teacher in a relaxed atmosphere. Teacher activities are dictated and directed by the time table prepared for the year and based on the RNCS. Effective teacher-learner interactions were difficult to attain because of the large number of learners and the limited space. Teachers reported that it was difficult to assess learners in such conditions. The learners were involved in group work most of the time.

Learner-to-learner interactions were marred by noise and fights for picture books and other limited resources. The researcher was impressed by the teachers' way of controlling noise or of drawing learners' attention. They used musical instruments such as whistles and tambourines instead of raising their voices and therefore adding to the noise.

6.5.1.4 ECD policy

The following policy-related issues were observed:

The language of instruction: Policy states that the learner's home language must be used as the language of teaching (Department of National Education 2002c) but teachers in all the Grade R classes used a mixture of English and African languages to communicate with their multilingual learners. Where necessary, specific instructions were repeated again in the different languages represented in the classroom.

Number of learners per teacher: The number of learners per teacher ranged from 35 to 48 even though ECD policy states that it must be 25 per teacher.

Age of admission: Policy states that learners must be five years or should turn five during the first quarter of the year. However, learners younger than this age were identified.

Expected learning outcomes: Learners are not expected to read and write and counting should go up to 10. During the second fieldwork in October it was observed that some learners could write their names and could count up to 20. They also tried to write some numbers.

6.5.1.5 The school environment

All the schools are multiple-storey buildings because of the shortage of space in the township and all, but one, have no playgrounds. The number of Grade R classes per school ranged from two to four. In one school the learners' toilets are already adapted to accommodate Special Needs learners. For the very poor learners, each school has arranged for some form of feeding scheme although this effort is not sustained because of poor organisation. Congestion is a problem in the school and where there is no brick wall to enclose the school premises, filth from the informal settlement accumulate along the school fence and into the school yard. There is also a disturbance of loud music coming from these informal houses.

A positive factor that facilitated implementation in all the research schools is the strong teamwork among teachers and their eagerness to learn the principles of Outcomes Based Education (OBE). From this observation it can be said that the performance of School A was the worst because the Grade R teacher in that school was on her own and had no colleagues to share her ideas with. School B proved to be the best because the good team work among

teachers was enhanced by the presence of a College trained Grade R teacher who contributed a lot of informed suggestions.

In the three schools the joint efforts of planning themes and learning activities for Grade R and Grade 1 provided the necessary link to Grade 1, although in a limited way. The Grade 1 teachers provided valuable advice.

6.5.1.6 The design of the Grade R programme

The design of the school-based Grade R class follows a constructivist approach. A positive aspect of this underlying philosophy is that it combines the developmental and academic approaches. It can be regarded as a literacy programme similar to the High Scope (section 2.7.1.6) and SWELL Programmes (section 2.7.1.4) of the USA and the Swansea Project of Britain (section 2.8.1).

The design of Grade R was seen from the content of the Revised National Curriculum Statement (RNCS) that was used by Grade R teachers in the research classes and the learning materials for learners. The content is organised into three clusters or programmes referred to as Learning Area Programmes. The first area is Literacy, the second is Numeracy and the third is Life Skills. Each Learning Area has a set of outcomes that must be realised before learners can be regarded as competent with regard to the content of that Learning Area Programme. Guidelines for the evaluation and assessment of learner performance are provided in the RNCS for each of the three Learning Areas (Department of National Education 2002c).

Policy stipulates that the three Learning Areas must complement one another in order to develop the learner holistically.

(An example of a condensed Grade R programme is included as Appendix 2.)

6.5.2   The outcome of interviews

The questions that were listed in chapter 5 formed the major categories for data analysis.

Question 1 : How were you trained to implement Grade R?

Training for all the school-based Grade R teachers and for teachers from accredited ECD centres was accomplished through workshops planned by the Provincial Department of Education. The workshops were not scheduled according to any timetable that teachers were aware of. Teachers were called in whenever there was a need to explain something new.

The training that started in 2003 focused on the implementation of RNCS and did not include core subjects in teacher training, such as Child Development or Classroom Management. They were shown how to develop outcomes of the various Learning Areas and how to ensure that the outcomes were achieved. All the teachers, except one, did not know that the training was outsourced to a private company. They were told that at the end of the training they would be issued with certificates as recognition of their training.

(The researcher was not successful in making contact with the company to clarify the training process. Attempts at meeting with the District Office in charge of the training were also not fruitful.)

Question 2: What works well with the programme?

Learning activities such as cutting pictures and colouring them were regarded as valuable learning experiences. Teachers pointed out that it was rewarding to see learners mastering activities they struggled with previously.

The organisation of learning content into *Learning Areas* was said to make teaching easier and meaningful. The life skills programme was particularly useful for addressing environmental issues that impacted negatively on learning.

The programme guidelines were considered to be useful in helping the implementation, especially since teachers attended the workshops. Unlike in the past, they now knew what to do with regard to teaching the content of the different Learning Areas.

Teachers reported that at the end of the year learners who had followed the programme showed signs of school readiness. They went on to describe how the programme had improved the learners' physical, social and emotional development. Asked about the learners' language development, the teachers explained that the conversation of learners with peers was more spontaneous. However, it could not be said that the content of their home language had improved. In general, Grade R was regarded as very useful. One teacher went on to say "Grade R is a bomb you don't touch it" (colloquial expression for 'excellent').

Question 3: What challenges do you face with regard to the implementation of Grade R?

All the Grade R teachers, with the exception of those from one school, complained that the *lack of classroom space* restricted their efforts to implement the programme. They indicated that it was difficult to create the Learning Areas and carry out certain classroom activities as demanded by the RNCS. Learners could also not engage in any physical activities inside or outside the classroom because their noise disturbed the whole school.

The issue of large numbers of learners per teacher was seen as a problem that hindered the implementation of the Grade R programme as recommended in the RNCS and prevented individual attention or even grouping learners according to their performance.

Insufficient learning support material was sited as another general problem. Learners often fought over, for instance colouring pens or storybooks. It was therefore difficult to do activities that needed the use of those facilities that are in short supply.

Multiple ethnicity in one classroom was a problem but the teachers were convinced that it could be solved by using English and the home languages as languages of instruction. They emphasised that teaching English at this level boosted the learners' positive self-image because learners felt confident when they played with friends who attended "White schools". One teacher explained that parents often requested her to teach their children English. Another said her learners asked her to teach them English so that they could "celebrate (our) their birthdays at Wimpy or McDonalds".

It was difficult for teachers to *develop lesson plans* from stated outcomes of a particular Learning Area because such training was not covered at the workshops. They explained that sometimes the trainers visited schools to see what efforts teachers had made to teach a certain skill. The school that succeeded in teaching learners to consistently demonstrate that the outcome was achieved was used as a model for teaching that specific skill.

Poor parental involvement was regarded by some as a challenge to the successful implementation of the Grade R programme while others blamed the whole Township environment. They all agreed that the activities in Grade R required parents to assist them in educating the learners but pointed out that illiteracy and indifference on the part of the parents proved to be an obstacle to realising that goal. They unanimously agreed that learners raised by grandparents were better controlled than those raised by young mothers. In addition, the broader Township environment did not encourage projects like exploring the local environment. There is little to see in an informal settlement and crime is rife.

Question 4: Policy-related matters: What does ECD policy stipulate with regard to the language of teaching, the number of learners per teacher and what the learners were expected to know at the end of the Grade R programme?

With regard to the *language of teaching*, all teachers knew that ECD policy (Department of National Education 2002d:20) demanded that learners should be taught in their home language. They however indicated that their dual use of English and the home languages spoken by learners in their classrooms was a more practical approach to teaching. According to them it was imperative to use English to draw the attention of all the learners simultaneously. The use of one of the home languages captured the attention of a section of the class at a time while the other learners did not pay attention to the teacher. Learners are registered as they come and a second classroom could be considered only if the first one was full. Teachers referred the researcher to the last part of the language policy which states that care must be taken if a transition from the learners' home language to an additional language for learning and teaching is necessary. They believed their use of English was covered in this part of the policy.

The question about *the number of learners per teacher* evoked mixed feelings among teachers. They were aware of policy stipulations in this regard and also expressed their

misgivings about exceeding the recommended number but at the same time explained that the fees (R80.00 per month) were the source of their income. They were therefore willing to exceed the limit. One teacher said: "Tell the Department of Education that some of us are fully qualified teachers and we do not want to be treated like domestic workers, we need a better salary."

With regard to what is expected of Grade R learners at the end of the year, teachers were aware that learners were not expected to read or write. They noted that learners started by tracing their names from flashcards, later copied them onto a clean page and then after regular practice spelt their names without looking at the example. They also copied numbers and learned to write them. Teachers did not discourage this endeavour but did not know how to encourage further development without coercing the learners into writing.

Question 5 What are your recommendations with regard to the implementation of the Grade R programme?

None of the teachers responded when asked to make recommendations about the implementation of Grade R or about the Learning Areas.

(Appendix 4 is an example of verbatim interview responses.)

6.5.3   The outcome of the focus group discussions

The focus groups consisting of Grade 1 teachers responded in the following manner to the questions.

Question 1: What is the difference, if any, in classroom performance between learners from Grade R and those without Grade R experience?

All the Grade 1 teachers explained that learners who completed Grade R were ready to attend school. The learners demonstrated emotional maturity by not crying in the classroom and they were not frustrated when they gave wrong answers. They were also socially developed because they could function in a group and had learned how to share. Their ability to count and "read" intuitively was a sign of intellectual development. With this

foundation laid, the Grade 1 teacher did not experience a lot of problems in teaching them how to write on lines and how to spell words. In addition, the learners' listening skills were developed to some extent, which enabled them to follow instructions and to engage in verbal interactions with their peers.

Teachers reported that learners without Grade R experience had no learning skills. None of the developmental milestones were reached and the teachers had to start with basic information such as the learners' "body image". They were not communicative and most of them cried when spoken to, some wetted themselves.

There was unanimity about the fact that untrained learners from the rural areas posed a different set of problems. In addition to exhibiting the above problems, they lacked general knowledge or life skills necessary for survival in an urban environment. Most of them did not know concepts such as "chemist" and "hospital", or "supermarket" that were used in a lesson on life skills. They were very inhibited when they had to communicate with adults and shied away from their peers.

Question 2: What is the difference, if any, in terms of school performance between those Grade R learners who were school-based and those who were centre-based?

Teachers explained that learners from accredited centres, that is, centres with proper buildings and facilities were developed to a fair extent but lacked intellectual skills. Training in the centres emphasised health and care as opposed to training in the school-based Grade R classes that focused on learning skills.

The teachers in the centres were mostly social workers by profession and concentrated more on broad family issues than on education matters. These teachers were included in the training workshops for the implementation of Grade R although they did not have knowledge of the core subjects necessary to teach Grade R. They thus experienced more difficulty in understanding the RNCS.

Question 3: What Is the link between the Grade R programme and the Grade 1 programme?

The teachers pointed out that in Grade R a learner's learning profile was recorded in a file which was passed on to Grade 1 when the learner started schooling. This file contained information on the learner's performance in all three Learning Areas and thus indicated what was done in Grade R. Secondly, a thematic approach to learning was followed in all the research schools and both Grade R and Grade 1 teachers came together to plan lessons.

(Appendix 3 contains an example of a learner's learning progress.)

Question 4: What do you recommend about those learners in Grade 1 without Grade R experience?

Some teachers said learners without Grade R experience must be refused entry into school, while others suggested a flexible training programme of one year to bring the learners on par with others. Those learners who would catch up fast could be released from the programme after three or six months and the slow ones would complete the full year. They also emphasised the need to involve parents in such a programme.

(Appendix 5 is an example of a verbatim focus group discussion.)

6.6   CONCLUSION

The aim of this chapter was to report on the research findings and make an analysis of the research results. The information for this purpose was based on the investigations conducted in chapter 5. The results of the preschool screening test recorded in Phase 1 and 2 provided baseline information that helped to answer the research question and establish to what extent Grade R could influence the learners' learning skills. The recorded results in Phase 2 indicated what was done to implement Grade R at school level.

In chapter 7 conclusions will be drawn about the research findings and will lead to recommendations on the implementation of Grade R as an intervention programme.

Chapter 7

Conclusions, recommendations and limitations of the study

7.1   BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

The study on the design and implementation of early intervention programmes for disadvantaged school beginners follows from an investigation that was conducted in the then Lebowa (now Limpopo) Department of Education and the Department of Education and Training (DET) now Department of Education.

The investigation revealed that, in the past, intervention programmes that were introduced in the Grade 1 class of disadvantaged schools were not properly implemented (chapter 1, section1.2). There were no clear directives on the use of intervention programmes such as Stepping Stones and Learning through Play. Teachers were expected to use the intervention programmes and at the same time complete the syllabus. This caused confusion and schools did not know who to appeal to about their problems.

After the education reforms in the country after 1994, there was a need to investigate the state of intervention programmes in disadvantaged schools. It became necessary therefore to establish firstly, if the new Department of Education had introduced such programmes, secondly, how they were implemented and what their influence was on learners' level of school readiness. The sequence of chapters that indicate how the study was laid out can be seen in chapter 1, section 1.10.

In this study, the research question is as follows: To what extent can the design and implementation strategy of intervention programmes for disadvantaged school beginners in the research area influence their level of school readiness?

The aim of the study is to investigate the design and implementation strategies of intervention programmes for school beginners in the research schools.

The conclusion with regard to the research question is derived from the SETT results, (tables 6.2-6.5) conducted in the four provinces at the beginning of the year, the SETT results (tables 6.7-6.10) of the research schools conducted at the end of the year and the focus group discussion conducted at the end of the year with Grade 1 teachers. The decision is also backed up by the literature review as explained in chapter 1 and in section 2.2 and 2.6. This investigation did not use the SETT as a pre- and post-test for reasons discussed under section 2.6.1. The results were used to augment the outcome of the focus group investigation.

Conclusions will also be drawn about other research findings in Phase 1 and Phase 2. In Phase 1 a brief reference to the existence of intervention programmes in the Grade 1 class of the Foundation Phase schools in the four provinces will be made. This will be followed by the conclusion based on the results of the SETT, performed in the Grade R classes at these schools.

The conclusion drawn from the findings in Phase 2 will focus on the design of the Grade R programme and the implementation strategy in the Grade R class. A personal observation that was made throughout the study will be made known and on this basis recommendations will be made. The limitations of the study will be listed and a summary of the investigation will serve to conclude this study.

7.2   CONCLUSION ON PHASE 1 FINDINGS

The absence of intervention programmes such as the Stepping Stones and Learning through Play in the Grade 1 class in all four provinces is regrettable because Grade 1 beginners who have had no preschool training may experience problems in the classroom. However, the introduction of the Grade R class as an intervention measure could overcome the problem in the long term when it is compulsory for all learners to complete the programme or similar programmes before school entry. The poor SETT results confirm the fact that poor learners lack learning skills and it is important to develop the required learning skills. The introduction of the Grade R class is therefore very necessary.

7.2.1 The research question

The conclusion is that the learning skills of the Grade R learners in the research schools did improve to some extent. Their level of physical and emotional development visibly improved while their literacy skills remained very poor.

On the contrary, the Grade 1 teachers (focus group) who are responsible for learners from Grade R pointed out that learners from Grade R were well prepared for school as compared to those from home. They based their claim on the learners' ability to respond well to the classroom situation. They referred to the fact that learners from Grade R had well developed fine motor skills and could handle a pencil well, some could even write their names. The teachers also explained that the learners were emotionally mature because they could work in groups and did not cry on the first day of their schooling.

There appears to be a contradiction with regard to the influence of Grade R on learners' abilities because of certain existing assumptions held by teachers in the research area. Many of them assume learners to be ready for school if they can write their names, if they can hold a pencil, if they do not cry on the first day of school and if they respond to teachers' question. Little attention is paid to learners' ability to copy figures or objects correctly from books or their ability to draw forms, a circle, for example. Teachers do not focus on learners' average length of utterances (language skills) and they do not regard "telegraphic" answers or repeated head-shakes and nods as indicative of a linguistic shortcoming.

Teachers are happy when learners can count up to ten and do not check if learners have acquired the number concept. The SETT, as screening test, on the other hand measures for example, the learner's ability to replicate verbal messages, to respond correctly to teachers' instruction and to derive meaning from counting (a long row of 10 sweets can be built into two rows of five sweet each). It is a concern that learners are poor in this regard since such basic skills are the main determinants of literacy.

The physical and emotional gains mentioned by the Grade 1 teachers could be an indication of the influence of the Grade R programme but could also be the result of maturation or other extraneous variables that were not controlled in the study. This explains why the SETT was

not used as a pre and post test. Instead, observations and focus group (Grade 1 teachers) responses were preferred for establishing the improvement in development by comparing the performance of learners from Grade R and those from home.

The conflicting result on the influence of Grade R could also be explained in terms of teacher training or expertise. It is notable that the responses from the Grade 1 teachers (focus group) were based solely on observable behaviour that is referred to above. Nothing was said about intellectual abilities such as concept formation or learners' thinking strategies. There is no reference to emotional traits such as frustration or perseverance. From discussions with the teachers, there was no evidence that they could use activities that could illicit responses indicating intellectual and emotional information from learners.

It is concluded that the absence of comments on the learners' abilities referred to above could be that the teachers did not consider the acquisition of the skills as significant evidence of school maturity or they were not aware of the development that took place covertly.

Finally, the teachers' standpoint is understandable since it was based on the comparison between Grade R learners and those learners who received no intervention. The latter were said to be severely limited linguistically, physically, socially and emotionally. Teachers said a few of them improved at the end of the first quarter but the majority struggled on for the whole year.

It is because of the thinking above and the observation made during the second fieldwork at the end of the year that the stated conclusion was made about the research question. A comparison of learners' behaviour noted at the beginning of the year and at the end of the year lead to the conclusion that the Grade R experience provided learners with learning skills that they did not have before.

The learners were better controlled despite their large numbers (they could listen to some extent), many of them could handle a pen correctly and were keen to look at the books and to get a chance to draw and colour on loose pages. The learners had learned to ask for permission to leave the classroom (in English), and they 'reminded' the teacher about their favourite activities (mostly 'news time' and 'reading' books). At the beginning of the year the classrooms were chaotic and teachers struggled to get any work done. The learners were

more interested in playing among themselves and fought at short intervals. Many of them were destructive and spoilt the efforts of the few who were trying to colour pictures.

However, despite what the Grade 1 teachers said about the Grade R learners and what was observed during the second visit, in terms of the SETT outcome the Grade R experience did not improve the learners' literacy skills and this is a serious shortcoming that will limit success in Grade 1.

7.3 CONCLUSION ON THE FINDINGS IN PHASE 2

The evidence from the classroom observations and interviews with Grade R teachers with regard to the design and implementation of the Grade R class leads to the following conclusion.

7.3.1 Conclusions on the design of Grade R

The design in this study is defined in terms of the goals, content and duration of the programme. The constructivist philosophy underlying the Grade R programme is sound. This is also true about the duration of the programme, learners will benefit more from a year of intervention than from few months' exposure. A design based on a different philosophy would either neglect the academic aspect that is so relevant for developing learners' skills for formal learning, or it would assume that learners are capable of directing their own learning, which is not the case with disadvantaged learners.

The arrangement of the learning content in the Learning Areas could be improved for better results. There is a need to revisit the decision underlying this arrangement and to provide ways of making the programmes more practical and therefore more effective for skills development. This is particularly so with the Life Skills Learning Area which is very broad and covers very diverse issues.

It is important to look at South Africa and emphasise local needs in the Grade R design rather than adhere to what is recommended internationally. For instance the Japanese model of early intervention programmes (Chapter 2.9) adapted the western ideas for use in their own country. While they promote child development, their programmes adhering to Japanese

national directives. This study concludes that the design of the learning programme could be arranged differently and the content modified to facilitate better skills development in line with the rest of the schooling system.

7.3.2   Conclusion on the implementation strategy of Grade R

The implementation strategy in this investigation is explained in broad terms to include guiding ECD policies, delivery structures, teacher preparedness and arrangements made at school level.   Conclusion on the implementation strategy is based on the outcome of interviews with Grade R teachers, the observed situation in the research schools and the informal discussions with school principals of the research schools.

Observation on the implementation strategy confirms that the Department of Education is committed to the development of early learning programmes aimed at preparing learners for formal schooling.   It can be said that the broad policy issues planned for implementation by the Department were initiated as recommended. For example, guidelines for the funding of Grade R teachers and materials development were passed on to the provincial departments of education to enable implementation.

The introduction of the school-based Grade R class is another example. Access to the Grade R class has been a priority for the Department of Education and this is evidenced by the presence of Grade R classes, even in the remote rural schools. Given the history of early childhood education in South Africa (sections 4.2.1 and 4.2.2) this is understandable and appreciable. However, it does not imply that if literature (chapter 1, section 1.1) points to the advantages that the school may have in programme implementation, the same advantages exist for the situation in the disadvantaged schools in South Africa and therefore in the research area.

It is difficult to make any informed standpoint about implementation at provincial and district levels because attempts at arranging a meeting with the Gauteng education officials were not successful.   It was also difficult to obtain comprehensive documentation either from their offices or from the Internet.   The difficulties experienced in trying to locate officials responsible for ECD or information about implementation could be an indication that the departments still face challenges in structuring the various sectors.

The research schools are not ready for implementing the Grade R class. Poor fiscal and learning conditions, the quality of Grade R teachers, as well as the non-compromising attitudes of other teachers in the school limit possibilities of successful implementation. For example, their insufficient knowledge about the Grade R implementation plan from the provincial department limits the principals from constructing a vision for their school and thus from preparing for the implementation thereof. The paraprofessionals employed in the Grade R classes do not possess those traits referred to in section 3.6.2 that are a prerequisite for successful programme implementation. The adverse effects of the learning environment (6.5.1.1 and 6.5.1.2) cannot be over emphasised.

The fact that several workshops were organised to train Grade R teachers suggests that efforts were made to facilitate the implementation process. However, the schedule of the workshops was erratic and the credentials of the company that provided them could not be established. Also, the nature of "in-service" training that teachers received at the workshops does not provide them with the basic skills for teaching (example, child development and classroom management) that would enable them to improvise in problem situations referred to before. The conclusion is that the workshop training is not effective for paraprofessionals.

The manner in which ECD policy is translated at classroom level is a major concern in this study because it is policy that should give character and guidance to the implementation of the Grade R class.

With regard to the structures for delivery, the absence of a comprehensive curriculum framework has compromised the implementation of the Grade R class. There is no way of establishing the weak link in the chain of implementation. The meaning of curriculum framework in this investigation is quoted from the Interim Policy for Early Childhood Development (Department of National Education 1996:Appendix 2:5). It "provides both a philosophical base and an organisational structure for curriculum development initiatives at all levels, whether on national, provincial, community or school level. Such multi-level involvement could be effected by the provision of national programme directives on the one hand, while the shared ownership of education and training initiatives would be promoted on the other".

In this investigation no functional continuity from national level to district and finally classroom levels could be established. Although the investigation on the state of ECD in South Africa, specifically in Gauteng, discussed at length in chapter 4 from sections 4.2.3 up to 4.5, shows that the policies that guide the implementation strategy at national level are well spelled out, there is a lack of clarity at provincial level and virtually no clarification about the roles and structures at District level. The picture that emerges from the investigation on the implementation of ECD and the Grade R class carried out in chapter 4 is represented in the following table

Table 7.1: The implementation structure for the Grade R class in Gauteng

Level	Directorate/ Dept	ECD structure	Head	Function
National	ECD	CCECD (ad hoc)	Director for ECD	1. To formulate ECD policy 2. To commission audits 3 To commission research 4. To coordinate ECD sector
Provincial (Gauteng)	Education	No information	ECD Director	No documentation
District	Education	No information	Not clear	No documentation
School	Grade R class	SGB Principal Grade R staff	Principal	1. Hire & fund teachers (SGB) 2. Programme control (principal) 3. Implementation (teachers)

To some extent the Department of Education used an international approach (discussed in section 3.5.1) and devolved power to the different provinces to develop own delivery structures in an effort to accommodate the diversity among provinces and to promote ingenuity. It could be noted that in the past, Gauteng used their Impilo Project to broaden access to early learning (sections 4.2.4.6 and 4.3.1). This practice has since been discontinued. While this approach is commendable, the disadvantage is that some provinces took advantage of their unfavourable situation and slowed down the implementation process. Other provinces may want to be unique and do things unconventionally, an approach that may not always be correct.

With regard to the school-based Grade R programme all provinces follow the same programme but each province develops different structures for implementation. The result is a lack of uniformity in delivery structures, in teacher training, funding mechanisms and materials development. For instance, although the Interim Policy for ECD recommended that funding for ECD should be ring-fenced at Provincial level, there is no certainty that there is a standard procedure with standard structures for effecting this policy. It is also not clear how the funding responsibility is passed down from the provincial department to District level.

This is also true about other policy issues, such as language of teaching. The Gauteng province adopted what they considered as best practice in their ECD centres as was seen in chapter 4, table 4.4 (home languages and language of instruction in Gauteng). The majority of ECD centres use English as language of teaching. In the school-based Grade R classes the same situation prevails. At the research schools the language of instruction is dictated by the situation in the classroom. In urban areas and also in the research schools, Grade R classes use a mixture of English and the different home languages spoken by learners in one classroom.

Given this situation, the teachers' decision to depart from the policy of using the home language as medium of teaching is understandable. However, the English proficiency of the Grade R teachers in the research schools is insufficient.

The departure from the policy on teacher-learner ratio is a negative result of the impact of the funding policy. The minimum salaries paid to the Grade R teachers encouraged classroom overcrowding because larger numbers ensured better salaries for the teachers. Contrary to the rationale for the introduction of the Grade R class discussed in section 4.5.1, four year old children will ultimately flood the class and this will impact on the admission policy for the Grade 1 class. The situation is unacceptable because the large numbers prevent effective teaching.

With regard to other important policies, such as those that are intended to alleviate poverty, it is appreciable that the Department of Education followed the same approach as that discussed in the literature (sections 3.4.2 and 3.4.2.1). However, the effort is marred by the poor arrangements at District level. For instance, feeding schemes are present in some of the research schools and not in others.

Another policy is that formulated for children affected by AIDS as discussed in section 4.9. AIDS orphans continue to pay fees in some research schools and not in others. There is no uniformity in how the policy is implemented and the teachers could not explain why. It is important to investigate how the Grade R government subsidies are used in the different schools.

Evidence shows that those classroom and school problems that originated in the past, jeopardise the implementation of the Grade R programme and will persist unless the situation and the demographics in the Township change. Similarly, the existence of the schools as a cluster, also resulting from the political history of the place, may have implications on access to Grade R because the poorest of the poor may not afford money for transporting their children. Prospects of resolving these problems at school level are minimal given the financial constraints of the Department of Education.

A major concern about the school-based Grade R class in the research area (and elsewhere) is that it may not enjoy the full benefits at the Foundation Phase level in the school and may be overlooked by the early childhood sector that is operational outside the school. For example, Grade R teachers are employed by SGB's and not by the provincial education department and they earn low salaries. Not all Grade R activities are included in the school budget.

A study of the latest ECD document, Tshwaragano Ka Bana: an integrated plan for Early Childhood Development in South Africa (Department of Social Development 2005c) laid out the full implementation strategy for an intersectoral approach to early learning for the pre-Grade R group (chapter 4, section 4.10). It is assumed that those community-based ECD centres that offer the Grade R class will also benefit from this coordinated approach. However, this is not certain for the school-based Grade R class.

The final conclusion in this study refers to the concern raised in the White Paper 5 (Department of National Education 2001d) (section 4.10.2 9-41) about whether the provincial departments of education (and therefore the district offices) will have structures in place to deal with observed limitations in schools when they implement the Grade R class. The shortcomings highlighted above suggest that the delivery structures are not complete and

therefore the problems at school level could not be addressed. The reported flaws promoted non-compliance to ECD policies and ultimately limited the influence of the Grade R class with regard to school readiness.

7.4   RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations derive from the fact that there is a need to develop the learners' skills to the desired level and on the conclusion that there are gaps in the implementation strategy for Grade R. The recommendations will be stated first, in terms of the design of the programme and secondly with regard to the implementation strategy.

Figure 7.1(a): Existing structure of the Grade R programme
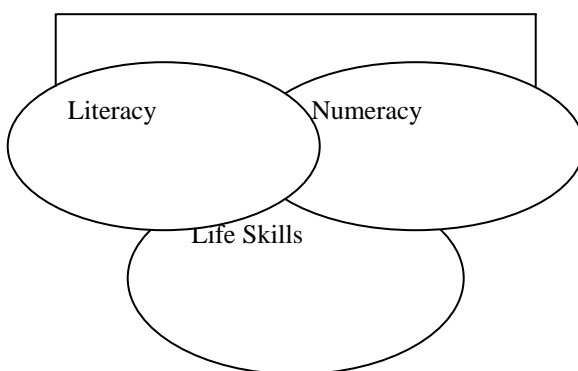
Figure 7.1(b): Existing content of the three Learning Areas

Literacy	Numeracy	Life Skills
Listening	Numbers & operations	Health promotion
Speaking	Patterns & functions	Social development
'Reading' & viewing	Space & shape	Personal development
Thinking & reasoning		Physical development
Language structure & use		Movement

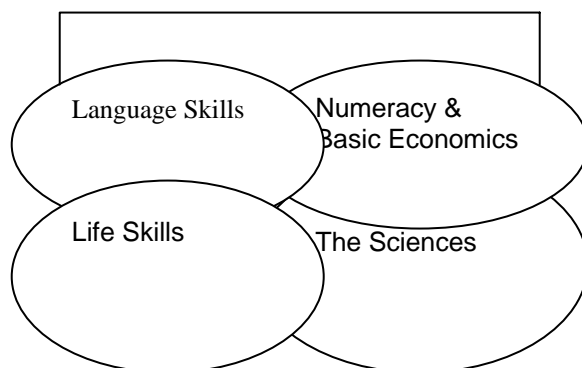**Figure 7.2 (a) Recommended structure of the Grade R programme**

Figure 7.2(b) Recommended content of the four Learning Areas

Learning Area	Content	Skill Development
1.LANGUAGE SKILLS	- Listening & Speaking - Viewing Reading and & Writing - Language structure & use - Thinking & reasoning	Language Development
2.NUMERACY AND BASIC ECONOMICS	- Numbers & Numerical Operations - Relationships, Measurement - Patterns, Functions & Algebra - Space and Shapes (Geometry) - Value systems - Language in math and economics - Thinking & reasoning	Intellectual Development
3. LIFE SKILLS	- The socialisation of the learner - Personal development - Social Relationships - Environmental Awareness - The Arts & Culture - Language in social development - Thinking & reasoning	- Social Development - Physical Development - Emotional Development
4. THE SCIENCES	- Inventions - Technology - Natural Resources - Language in Science - Thinking & reasoning	General Knowledge

7.4.1   The recommended design of the Grade R programme

The design of the programme could be improved by reviewing the grouping of the Learning Area Programmes and considering their content. Figures 7.2(a) and 7.2(b) are a schematic

presentation of the recommended four Learning Areas and the recommended contents of the four Learning Areas respectively.

7.4.2 Explanation of the recommended Grade R design

7.4.2.1 Naming of the Learning Areas

It is important to avoid the confusion that is associated with the concept '"programme". The review of early learning programmes in South Africa that was discussed in chapter 4 revealed that the concept is overused. Every product, initiative, plan or activity is called a "programme". For example, Sesame Street, support for AIDS learners, ways of implementing Grade R and activities in the Grade R class are all referred to as "programmes".

These "programmes" should be called a TV programme, an AIDS initiative, the implementation strategy and learning activities. What is referred to as a Learning Area Programme should simply be referred to as a Learning Area. The content in the Grade R class should then be referred to as the Grade R Programme and must include all the Learning Areas, the implementation strategy and the delivery structures.

The Learning Area Literacy, must be referred as "Language Development" because it deals with language issues. The term "literacy" should be understood in broader terms and should include language skills and the development of numeracy skills that foster intellectual development. A learner is not regarded as literate if she or he cannot count and does not know anything about numbers. Language and intellectual development go together and constitute one area of school readiness.

7.4.2.2 The recommended number of Learning Areas

The Life Skills Learning Area contains a large area of information and is undifferentiated. An analysis of the content and observed classroom activities shows that it includes information on social and physical development, Health, Science and General knowledge. It is necessary to decongest this area and develop the Sciences as a separate Learning Area that could cover all the scientific information. The classification into four groups will be better aligned with the content in the Intermediate and Senior Phases.

7.4.2.3 The recommended content of the Learning Areas

Language usage should be as simple as possible. It is preferable to use "content" instead of "competencies" when discussing the Learning Areas. Teacher expertise in the Grade R class (Foundation Phase) must be considered.

In the Language Learning Area the items, listening and speaking as well as viewing, reading and writing (in that order) belong together. Speaking develops from listening and the writing process is preceded by viewing and reading. Language structure is understood to refer to concept formation, length of sentence and communication skills. The thinking and reasoning processes promote insight into listening, viewing and reading activities.

In the Numeracy Learning Area the content is regrouped and basic skills for Economics are included. Numbers (counting) and Operations (addition, subtraction, multiplication and division) form the foundation. Relationships and measurement (size, length, weight and form) go together because one can establish differences in size, length or weight and so on. Data handling is omitted because all the stated activities can be summed up as data handling.

It is important to include Basic Economic skills in the Numeracy Learning Area because the two are intertwined. In practice counting is never done out of context. One counts commodities (for a reason) or money for economic purposes. Relationships usually compare values for cost effectiveness or for Best Practice. Saving water at school can be regarded as good practice and it is basic economics. Buying a slice of bread and not sweets is an economic practice (and Health) that can be taught at Grade R level.

The Life Skills Learning Area is divided into two areas because of the huge amount of information it contains. The recommended content includes "the socialisation of the learner" which was not emphasised before. Secondly, no reference was previously made to "emotional development" although this is an important aspect of school readiness. The socialising of learners develops their emotional skills because they learn to know who they are and strive to improve their shortcomings, resulting in fewer frustrations.

"Social Relationships" replace Social Development because it is better defined. The Social Relationships will refer to the relationships at home, in the school and the community situations. Child abuse, a major problem in disadvantaged areas can be covered in this topic. Highlighting Environmental awareness (home, school and community) will ensure that learners' sense of care for the environment is heightened. Physical Development and Movement should be regarded as aspects of Personal Development (physical & mental health). Incorporating the Arts and Culture in this Learning Area will ensure the development of artistic skills and cultural awareness at an early stage. The skills could also be developed under the Language Learning Area when learners are taught how to colour pictures.

It is important to note that the content in this Learning Area promotes the learner's physical, social and emotional development which forms part of school readiness that will be lost if the content is left as broad as it presently is.

It is strongly recommended that Science should stand as a separate Learning Area because of its significance in the curriculum and the need to align the Foundation Phase with the other phases. The content could be presented in different sections, such as Inventions (transport, electricity, and communications), Technology (the operation of scientific inventions), and Natural Resources (plants, water, and minerals). At Grade R level the information should be regarded as General Knowledge and should be presented in a casual and interesting manner. For instance information could be preceded by "Did you know that…" It is further recommended that from Grade 1 upwards in the Foundation Phase the emphasis should be shifted from Life Skills to the Sciences, because the desired life skills were emphasised in Grade R. These skills will be enhanced in the course of the learners' development.

Finally, the recommendation to include 'Language' in all the Learning Areas is compulsory if the skills in the Learning Areas are to be effectively taught. Learners experience problems in Maths and Science because they lack the insight into the concepts dealt with in those subjects. Similarly, thinking and reasoning are seen as cross cutters because learners need to know different thinking strategies for the different Learning Areas.

Since policy dictates that all learners who attended the school-based Grade R class should proceed to Grade 1 irrespective of whether they have been favourably assessed, it is recommended that the Department of Education should introduce other intervention

programmes similar to those used in the past (example Stepping Stones) in Grade 1. This was also suggested by those Grade 1 teachers who were interviewed in this study.

7.4.3   Recommendations on the implementation of the Grade R programme

The recommendations for implementation will refer to broad structural development from National level down to the classroom situation because this is how the Grade R programme implementation is conceptualised in this study.

The Department of Education needs to support and monitor the implementation process at provincial and district levels more closely because their approach of devolving decision making powers to the provinces and their districts has slowed down the implementation process tremendously. It is important to adopt a delivery mode for Grade R that will be in line with ECD policy stated in the Interim Policy (Department of National Education 1996: 16-17), and emphasised in the White Paper 5 (Department of National Education 2001d: 3). In this way policy issues can be looked at simultaneously by the different role players and interpreted in the same manner.

The Department of Education must intervene and ensure that the principles that underlie the implementation process are the same in all the provinces and that different structures perform the same tasks in all the provinces. In this way they will be able to establish which provincial departments are lagging behind. For instance the Director of ECD at provincial level must have a counterpart at district level who will be strictly responsible for ECD otherwise the needs of this sector will not be prioritised in the district office. The ECD department at the President's Office should also monitor processes at district level.

The implementation process at classroom level can be facilitated in different ways. The shortage of learning materials could be addressed by resorting to traditional games like example, 'diketo' to develop counting skills and also to improve the learners' eye-hand coordination. Threading beads brought from home could for example develop learners' fine motor skills. Another way would be to purchase one complete set of learning materials for each Learning Area and to use it jointly. Each classroom would then host one well resourced and properly displayed Learning Programme and learners would be required to switch

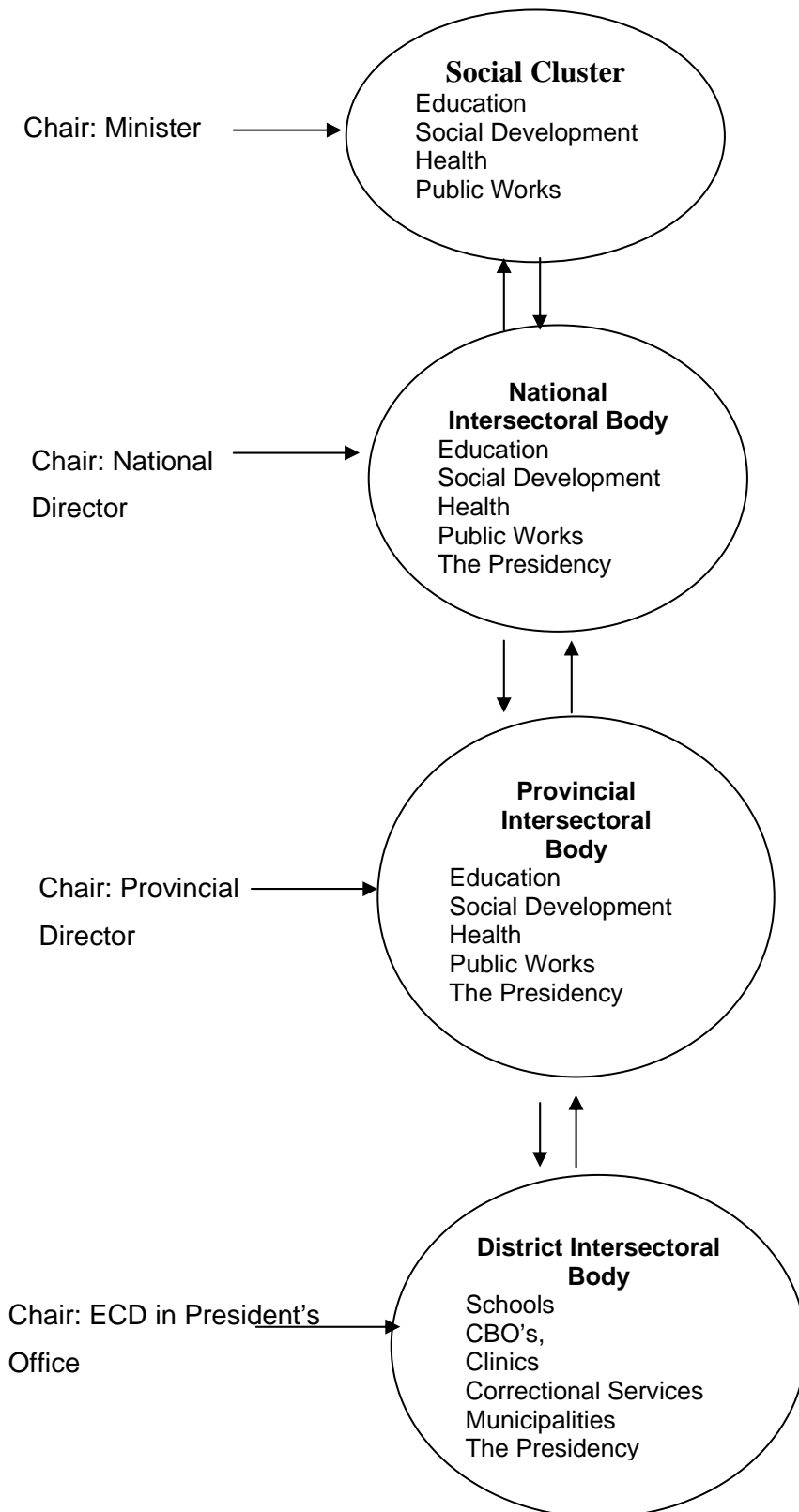classes for activities in that Learning Programme. This arrangement would also free more classroom space.

The SGBs at different schools could relieve the congestion in the Grade R classrooms by raising funds to provide make-shift classrooms, for instance, prefabricated structures. More schools in the research area should be encouraged to start Grade R classes or be assisted to do so in order to further relieve congestion. The rooftops of the schools in the research area could be enclosed with a steel fence and developed as playgrounds. Funds for this purpose could be obtained from those of the "Alexandra Renewal Strategy" introduced by the government to improve the Township.

A different approach with regard to teacher training is needed. While the effort of organising workshops to train teachers in the research schools is appreciated, it is not sufficient to provide the required teacher expertise. The provincial education department needs to contract a distance learning tertiary institution like UNISA (easy for part-time learning) to provide a comprehensive training programme that will equip teachers to deal with multiculturalism and teaching in disadvantaged environments. The acquisition of the certificate or diploma must be encouraged with incentives and the gap in the salaries between Grade R and other teachers in the Foundation Phase should be narrowed.

For short-term relief one Grade R teacher per school could be trained. She or he would then provide professional advice to the paraprofessionals employed in the Grade R classes. The presence of such a teacher at research School B proved to be valuable, the Grade R teachers learned from her.

The proposed intersectoral delivery structure (Tshwaragano Ka Bana) for the pre-Grade R group could be adapted to include both school-based and centre-based Grade R classes at Provincial and District levels. The recommended structure can be represented as follows:

**Figure 7.3: A schematic representation of the recommended implementation structure
of school- and centre-based ECD programmes**

Chair: Minister ⟶

Social Cluster
Education
Social Development
Health
Public Works

Chair: National

Director ⟶

**National
Intersectoral Body**
Education
Social Development
Health
Public Works
The Presidency

Chair: Provincial

Director ⟶

**Provincial
Intersectoral
Body**
Education
Social Development
Health
Public Works
The Presidency

Chair: ECD in President's ⟶

Office

**District Intersectoral
Body**
Schools
CBO's,
Clinics
Correctional Services
Municipalities
The Presidency

The above structures will perform different functions but in a coordinated way as indicated in the following tables:

Table 7.2: The recommended functional structure of the Provincial Intersectoral Body (PIB)

ECD Body	Departments	Head	Functions (Planning & development)

PIB	Education	Director: ECD	**Provision:** School-based Grade R classes
			Training: School-based Grade R teachers
			    Community-based Grade R (education)
			Curriculum: Development of academic content
			Funding: Learning in school Grade R
			    Learning materials in school Grade R
			    Learning materials in com Grade R

	Social Development	Director ECD	**Provision:** Com-based Grade R classes
			Training: Com-based Grade R teachers
			    School-based Grade R (care)
			Curriculum: Development of care & health content
			Funding: Learning in com Grade R
			    Learning materials in com Grade R
			    Learning materials in school Grade R

	Health	Director Community Health	**Provision:** Community & school health care services, health officers/nurses
			    School health officers
			Curriculum: Health and hygiene content
			Funding: Health in com & school Grade R
			    Learning materials in com Grade R
			    Learning materials in school Grade R

	Public Services	Director	**Provision:** Community & school infrastructure **Training:** Community councilors, security officers **Curriculum:** infrastructure & safety content **Funding:** infrastructure & services
	The ECD in the President's Office	Director	**Monitoring and coordination of :** Provision Training Curriculum Funding

Table 7.3: The recommended functional structure of the District Intersectoral Body (DIB)

ECD Body	Departments	Head	Functions (Implementation)

DIB	Schools	Principals & SGB's	**Teaching** School-based Grade R classes
			Training: School-based Grade R teachers
			    Community-based Grade R (education)
			Curriculum: RNCS
			Funding: Grade R teachers (SGB's)
			    Upkeep of learning materials

	Social Development	Qualified Social Worker or Practitioner	**Care:** Com-based Grade R classes
			Training: Com-based Grade R teachers
			    School-based Grade R teachers(care)
			Curriculum: Teach care & health content
			Funding: Care assistants
			    Upkeep facilities in centres

	Health	Director Community Health	**Offer:** Community & school health care
			    services
			Training: Community health officers/
			    nurses
			    School health officers
			Curriculum: Health and hygiene content
			Funding: Health services in com & school

	Public Services	Mayor	**Build:** Community & school infrastructure **Training:** Com councilors, security officers **Curriculum:** infrastructure & safety content **Funding:** infrastructure & services
	The Presidency	ECD Deputy	**Monitoring and coordination of :** Implementation of Services Implementation of Training Implementation of Curriculum Spending of Funds

7.4.3.1 Explanation of the Provincial Intersectoral Structure

The Provincial Intersectoral Body (PIB) for ECD will be chaired by the Provincial Directors. The chairmanship will rotate according to the hosting government department. Initially meetings will be scheduled quarterly in order to ensure that planning starts in time and problems are solved in time. Membership will comprise the Provincial Directors of the relevant departments and their deputies, together with the Provincial Director and deputy from the President's Office.

The role of the PIB is to plan for implementation and it is guided by ECD policy formulated by the National Intersectoral Body (NIB) for ECD. The Provincial Directors should be part of the membership at NIB level so as to understand policy initiatives and be able to translate it into practice at provincial level. The PIB will plan provision, teacher training, the implementation of the curriculum and allocate budget accordingly. In this way Grade R funding (and ECD sector) will be ring-fenced at provincial level.

This arrangement will promote cohesion in the fragmented ECD sector and will avoid duplication and contradictions. For instance, materials development will be guided by the same principles in all the departments dealing with young learners. Similarly, infrastructure, education or health and care matters will be handled in a coordinated manner throughout the departments. There will be synergy between government, non-governmental organisations and public services. The coordination will be monitored by the Director of Children's matters at the President's Office.

7.4.3.2 Explanation of the District Intersectoral Structure

The District Intersectoral Body (DIB) for ECD will be chaired by one deputy from the Provincial offices of one of the government departments. The chairmanship will rotate according to the hosting government department. Since districts are many and rotating meetings may proof to be difficult, the chairmanship could be elected from one of the role players annually. Meetings should be scheduled according to need, depending on the problems experienced during implementation or on the need to give advice about something.

Membership will comprise the Provincial Deputy Directors of the relevant departments, school principals and SGBs, social workers, head practitioners, head community health officials, mayors, head security service officials, representatives of Grade R and Grade 1 teachers, practitioners and the ECD deputy from the President's Office. The nature of the membership will ensure continuity from the provincial level.

The role of the DIB is to implement and deliver services as planned by the PIB. For instance, school principals will oversee the teaching of grade R in the schools and social workers will oversee the presence of facilities as recommended by the PIB. The Head of health will oversee the process of inoculations and HIV awareness. The mayor will ensure the building

of schools, recreational facilities for children, the safety of children and their transportation system. The coordination of all these activities will be the responsibility of the ECD deputy from the President's Office.

This arrangement will promote quick, efficient service delivery and ensure that funds are used properly. The shortcomings that were observed in programme implementation in the research schools could be overcome in this manner.

7.4.4   Recommendations for further research

With regard to the outcome of the investigation in Phase 1, the most important is to standardise the SETT for Black children who were excluded because of political reasons. This is a reliable instrument that has provided significant information about the learners' development for formal schooling. The Human Science Research Council (HSRC) who is the originators of this instrument need to be asked to co-opt researchers in ECD to undertake the task.

Further research is needed in the three scales that comprise the SETT, namely, the LGD, PMD and ESD. It is important to investigate fully the reasons behind the poor performance especially with regard to the LGD scale since it is an important indicator of the level of literacy. Such investigation could include the influence of the learner's home environment, the role played by home-based and centre-based organisations and the influence of teacher qualifications.

The investigation in Phase 2 has also highlighted the need for further research, especially concerning policies that guide the implementation of ECD services. Research into which aspects of the Grade R programme give teachers problems would provide valuable information. The recommendations from such an investigation would not only facilitate implementation, they would also improve the Grade R content.

With regard to learners with special needs, it is necessary to investigate what educational stimulation these learners receive before they enter school and how these learners will perform and be assessed when they enter formal schooling. Additional research would be to investigate how Grade R classes have become ready to accept learners with special needs in

terms of teacher expertise and classroom environment. Research in this area will facilitate policy on inclusion in the Foundation Phase.

The Department of Education should undertake experimentation at school level and encourage Grade R teachers to be part of research teams in new challenging matters such as the behaviour of young learners orphaned by HIV/AIDS or abused learners in the classrooms. Research into indigenous child rearing practices is important and might inform current practices and improve childcare and development.

7.5   LIMITATIONS OF THIS STUDY

A major drawback with regard to the investigation in Phase 1 is the fact that the SETT is not standardised for Black African children. Attempts were made at overcoming this barrier. Although the learners were given extra help with the test items, were encouraged to respond and were afforded more time to complete the tasks, there is no complete certainty that the disadvantage of lack of standardisation was overcome.

For the SETT results to be used for screening purposes, they need to be combined with the outcome from the Aptitude test for School Beginners (ASB) and the nursery school attendance survey and this was not possible as indicated earlier. To make up for this shortcoming, in this study the results were used in conjunction with the outcome of the interview and focus group investigations. Limitations could also emanate from other extraneous variables that the researcher was not aware of.

The interview with Grade R and Grade 1 teachers was conducted in the African languages because of the level of teachers' English proficiency. The meaning of some English concepts may have been slightly altered. A major advantage, however, is that the author speaks the same home languages and there were no problems of translations.

The inability to interview the district and provincial representatives and the staff of the company that was contracted to do the training, could have a limiting effect on the stated recommendations. The lack of a total picture of the implementation strategy could also have influenced the questions prepared for the interviews and the focus groups.

While the researcher is aware that this investigation is a case study and therefore no generalisations can be drawn from it, the study has provided valuable information about the research schools that could be used by the provincial education department. Secondly this investigation could act as a catalyst for more research in Alexandra Township or in other Townships that resemble the research area closely.

7.6   SUMMARY

The question in this study was to establish the extent to which the Grade R class could influence the school readiness level of learners in the research area. It was concluded that the programme helped to develop learners to some extent but not effectively enough to ensure eminent school success. The stated recommendations in this regard could improve the learners' performance in ECD screening tests, such as the SETT. There is a strong need for the Department of Education to commission an investigation into the design of the Grade R programme to ensure that learners' skills are developed and to facilitate implementation.

The Provincial and District Intersectoral structure recommended in this study is not far fetched and it is in fact modelled along the lines of Tshwaragano Ka Bana (Department of Social Development 2005c). The recommendations are feasible and achievable in the short to medium term, that is, 2010. This recommendation derives from the fact that a lot of groundwork in the form of ECD policies and audits has been done. Some structures were developed although they were fluid and changed from time to time. Such structures could be modified and once their functions are aligned, they would be strengthened.

It is important to recognise that the provincial department of education in Gauteng made special efforts to prepare teachers in the research area for the implementation of the RNCS. It is commendable to note that policy documents were used in the training of teachers to ensure that the implementation process was in line with stipulated policies. The Department of Education should be congratulated for undertaking preliminary steps (policies) such as stating what the programme is intended to achieve (school readiness), who it should cater for (the disadvantaged learner), and how it will be funded (grants in aid).

With regard to the broad strategy for the implementation of early learning, it is evident that the Department of Education is following on the National Plan of Action (NPA) referred to in section 4.10. The latest approach to implementation in the country is through intersectoral coordination within the various Clusters developed at cabinet level. Education, Social Development and Health belong to the Social Cluster and there is intersectoral collaboration among these departments in policy implementation.

The best way for the Department of Education to start the intersectoral implementation strategy is to undertake a run of the strategy as a pilot project in the same manner as the ECD Pilot Study was undertaken but this could be on a smaller scale. A case study might be appropriate because it constitutes an ecosystem that would indicate which elements in the system are weak and need to be strengthened. The Social Development Department can be tasked with spearheading the project since the care of young children is predominantly within their control. Secondly, their revised childcare system, discussed in section 4.8 is well structured and well coordinated.

The standpoint in this study is that undertaking more audits is not necessary, contrary to what is recommended in the Tshwaragano Ka Bana document (Department of Social Development 2005c:Section 8:33). Enough baseline information was gathered in the past audits and the funds could be saved to start the new Intersectoral ECD initiative.

This study holds the view that the process of ECD policy implementation has just begun, based on the proposals of Tshwaragano Ka Bana. Up to date the struggle has been to put implementation structures in place and it is not clear if this battle has been won. The emphasis that was placed on access to services is now being replaced by actual delivery. Research at this stage is very important because it is through proper investigations that government will be appropriately advised about the delivery of early childhood programmes.

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Appendixes

APPENDIX 1

A LEARNER'S TEST PERFORMANCE AND EVALUATION SHEET

A CONDENSED GRADE R PROGRAMME

**THE DESIGN OF THE GRADE R PROGRAME**

1.   Background

Grade R is recognised as the lowest level in the Foundation Phase and the content is included in the Revised National Curriculum Statement (RNCS) of 2002. The programme follows the integrated approach as recommended in the RNCS and learners' advancement is determined by the minimum requirements specified in the RNCS. The programme is designed to develop learners' skills for formal learning.

2.   Programme structure

2.1   The Learning Programmes

The programme comprises three Learning Programmes, namely, Literacy, Numeracy and Life Skills. A Learning Programme is defined as a "phase-long plan that provides a framework for planning, organising and managing classroom practice in each phase. It specifies the scope of teaching, learning and assessment for the phase" (Department of National Education 2002b). Structurally it can be presented as follows:
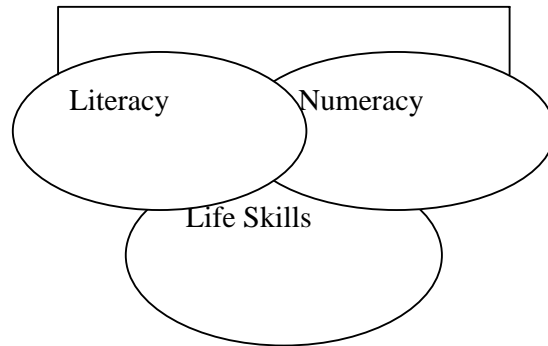
2.2 Learning Outcomes

"A learning outcome is a description of what (knowledge, skills and values) learners should know, demonstrate and be able to do at the end of the General Education and Traning (GET) band" (Department of National Education 2002b). The following are examples of learning outcomes per Learning Programme

Literacy	Numeracy	Life Skills
Listening	Numbers & operations	Health promotion
Speaking	Patterns & functions	Social development
'Reading' & viewing	Space & shape	Personal development
Thinking & reasoning		Physical development
Language structure & use		Movement

2.3 Assessment Standards

"Assessment standards describe the level at which learners should demostrate their achievement of the outcome/s and the ways of demonstrating their achievement. They are grade specific and show how conceptual progression will occur in a Learning Programme" (Department of National Education 2002b).

3.   Structural Functions

3.1   The role of programmes

Learning Progrtammes are structured in such a way that they indicate the learning contenet for the entire phase. They indicate the the core knowldge to be acquired (example: "ability to communicate with others") and how learners are assessed to determine if the learning outcomes are realised.

While the learning outcomes remain the same for the whole phase, the assessment standrds have different levels that are well sequenced to promote progression (example: ability to communicate at concrete level). Time frames for the different Learning Programmes gove guidance on how to plan teaching activities. For example the Literacy Programme should be allocated 40% of the teaching time, Numeracy 35% and Life Skills 25%.

3.2   Work schedule

The yearly programme that shows how teaching, learning and assessment will be sequenced is called the work schedule. It is a means of showing how learning outcomes will be realised.   It indicates the minimum assessment standards that need to be covered in order for the learner to move forward. Assessment technoques such as observation, written work or interviews can be used with learners.

3.3   A lesson plan

A lesson plan is developed from a work schedule.It is a detailed description of teaching and assessment activities that will be undertaken at a given time and can range from a single activity to a term's teaching. It provides the day to day details of teaching and assessment and also enables, for example, events of major importance such as the Olympic games to be incorporated in the curriculum in a structured and yet flexible manner.

3.4   Summary

The Grade R class is introduced to provide learners with the necessary skills for formal learning, especially those from disadvantaged backgrounds who have had no exposure to early learning programmes. The design is based on the principles of integrated learning that are central to the Outcmes Based Education (OBE) system. The structural arrangement of the learning content is intended to facilitate teaching and to ensure that learners' skills in different areas are developed.

AN EXAMPLE OF A LEARNER'S PROFILE

AN EXAMPLES OF VERBATIM INTERVIEW RESPONSES

SCHOOL B

SCHOOL DETAILS

Number of Grade R classes:	4
Total number of learners:	104 (girls=62) (boys=42)
Number of special needs learners:	0
Average age of learners:	5 years
Highest grade in school	Grade 5

1 INTERVIEW WITH GRADE R TEACHERS

Question:	Who trains you about the Grade R programme?
Answer:	Personnel from the Dept of Education
Extended question:	Which office in particular?
Answer:	We are not sure.
Question:	How do they train you?
Answer:	Through workshops
Extended question:	How are the workshops schedulled?
Answer:	They just happen. Some schools started in 2003. Teachers from Centre-based Grade R classes are also taught provided the centre is registered with the provincial deptartment.

Extended question:	How long are these workshops going to continue?
Answer:	We do not know.
Question:	What are you provided with to help with your teaching?
Answer:	We receive resource materials but they are not enough.
Extended question:	How do you improvise?
Answer:	We can't, the departmant must provide more resources.

Question:	What is taught at the workshops?
Answer:	Anything about Grade R. It could be in numeracy, literacy or life skills.
Question:	What do you understand about Grade R?
Answer:	Grade R is intended to promote school readiness in terms of physical, cognitive, social and emotional development. We start with learners who are backward developmentally but by the end of the year they are ready to start school. Some can even write their names and also try to read.
Question:	What works best with the programme?
Answer:	The whole programme. It is just good.
Question:	I realise that you teach in English and use a bit of the two African languages.Are you required to do so?
Answer:	No
Extended question:	Why are you using English then?
Answer:	When you need to speak to all the learners at the same time it is best to use English for all to respond at the same time. When we use one of the African languages, only part of the class listens and the others make noise. It is also good for learners to know English.
Extended question:	Since the two of you belong to the different ethnic groups catered for in this school, why don't you share the learners accordingly?
Answer:	We enroll learners as they come and only start a new class when we have reached the desired number. We cannot shift learners around even when the second classroom is full because the first group is ahead of the second one in terms of learning.
Extended question:	Do you have set times for admissions into Grade R?
Answer:	We allow learners to trickle in for some time so we can have a full class. They pay R80. 00 per month and they are our source of income.
Extended question:	Do you expect learners to learn to write?

Answer:	No. They do it on their own and they want to do it.
Question:	Is there a way that links Grade R with Grade 1?
Answer:	Yes. Learners have files in which their classroom performances and other details are recorded. These files are taken to Grade 1 and in this way the Grade 1 teacher gets to know the learner's profile.
Question:	Who helps you when you are not certain about how to teach in the classroom?
Answer:	We help each other.
Extended question:	How do you know that the other teacher is right?
Answer:	We just try.
Question:	What works best with the programme?
Answer:	Developing the learners for school readiness.
Extended question:	How long does it take to develop them?
Answer:	After three months one sees great improvement. However, we need a year to really get them right.
Question:	What problems do you experience when you teach?
Answer:	Nothing, Grade R is just fine. I'ts a bomb. We need more resources and more space for the learners to do outside activities.
Question:	What recommendations can you make regarding the Grade R class?
Answer:	Nothing. Tell the department to recognise us as teachers because we have the same training as all the other teachers. They must not treat us like domestic workers.

AN EXAMPLE OF VERBATIM FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION

2   FOCUS GROUP WITH GRADE 1 TEACHERS

This focus group consisted of 2 Grade R teachers and 4 Grade 1 teachers. (The Grade 1 teachers requested the researcher to include one particular Grade R teacher because of her expertise.)

QUESTIONS TO THE GRADE 1 TEACHERS

Question: Is there a difference in terms of school readiness between learners from school-based Grade R and those with no Grade R experience?

Answer: Very much. Grade R learners are school ready. They can handle pen correctly, their listening skills are developed, they know how to share and how to work in groups. Learners from home can't do all that and even wet themselves in class. Grade R learners can write their names and numbers. I only teach them how to write within the lines.

Question: Do you expect Grade R learners to know how to write?

Answer: No. Most of the learners however, develop the skill.

Question: What about other skills?

Answer: They are just right. My learners are already able to read their home language and English. (It is September.) We treat learners from home separately and this delays progress.

Extended question: What would you recommend to help these learners?

Answer:	An intervention programme in Grade 1. For some clever ones it could be three months but a year is best. In fact, the dept must make Grade R compulsory for all school beginners.
Question:	How different are learners from registered centre-based Grade R with regard to school readiness?
Answer:	The quality of the learner depends on teacher qualification. Some of these teachers never had any training and therefore benefit very little from the training provided at the workshop.
Extended question:	How does Grade R compare with other intervention programmes that you might know?
Answer:	Grade R differs for instance, from Montessori in that with the latter individual learners determine what they want to do for the day whereas with Grade R the teacher follows the time table. This is the best way to teach learners (Grade R teacher).
Question:	What would you add or remove from the programme to make it better?
Answer:	This is a good programme as is. Learners are constantly exposed to content on literacy, for instance when they go to the shops because they can "read" advertisements and see letters of the alphabet. Life Skills as a learning area could be made more focused.
Question:	What recommendations can you make regarding the programme.?
Answer:	Nothing. Tell the department to recognise us as teachers because we have the same training as all the other teachers. They must not treat us like domestic workers.

SUPPORTING MATERIALS FROM GRADE R CLASSES