

**MANAGING TEACHING AND LEARNING IN MULTI-GRADED  
CLASSROOMS IN THABO MOFUTSANYANA EDUCATION  
DISTRICT, FREE STATE**

by

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## DECLARATION

Student no: 3420 698 1

I declare that “**Managing teaching and learning in multi-graded classrooms in Thabo Mofutsanyana Education District, Free State**” is my own work and that all the sources that I have quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.

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SIGNATURE

(Mr Msimanga M.R.)

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DATE

# DEDICATION

**This study is dedicated to:**

My wife, **Nonhlanhla**, for her continuous support and her sacrifices during my studies.

My late father, **Petrus Sebolai Msimanga**, and my mother, **Elinah Mametsing Msimanga**, for their commitment to my upbringing and education.

My brother, **Motsamai**, and my sisters, **Mavis**, **Mosela**, **Palesa** and **Tshepiso**, for their support and encouragement.

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## **LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS**

CA	: Creative Arts
CAPS	: Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement
CREATE	: Consortium for Research on Education Access
DBE	: Department of Basic Education
EMIS	: Education Management Information System
EMS	: Economic and Management Sciences
FET	: Further Education and Training
FP	: Foundation Phase
HEI	: Higher Education Institutions
HSRC	: Human Science Research Council
ICT	: Information and Communication Technology
IP	: Intermediate Phase
LO	: Life Orientation
NST	: Natural Science and Technology
NS	: Natural Science
PED	: Provincial Education Department
SP	: Senior Phase
SS	: Social Sciences
UNESCO	: United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation
UNISA	: University of South Africa

## **ABSTRACT**

Managing teaching and learning in multi-graded classrooms in Thabo Mofutsanyana Education District, Free State is a study undertaken to determine how teachers manage teaching and learning in multi-grade classrooms. A qualitative research design has been used. Literature review explored the origins of multi-grade teaching, its advantages and disadvantages, teaching and learning in multi-grade classrooms, the use of resources, difficulties faced by teachers teaching in multi-grade classrooms and overcoming these difficulties.

Data revealed that teachers struggle to manage teaching and learning in multi-grade classrooms because they use curriculum policy documents which are meant for mono-grade classrooms. Teachers are overloaded with work. Peer tutoring, self-directed learning and cooperative learning help teachers to manage teaching and learning. Based on the findings, recommendations were made to the teachers, PED and DBE. The findings and recommendations will help the teachers in managing teaching and learning in multi-grade classrooms.

Key terms:

Classroom management, classroom organisation, cooperative learning, farm schools, learning styles, mono-grade classroom, multi-age, multi-grade classrooms, multi-grade teaching, multi-year curriculum spans, peer tutoring, quasi mono-grade, resources, self-directed learning.

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# CHAPTER 1

## ORIENTATION OF THE RESEARCH

### 1.1 INTRODUCTION

This study is undertaken to analyse how teachers in farm schools manage teaching and learning in multi-grade classrooms. Joubert (2010:58) states that multi-grade teaching is used in approximately 7,000 South African schools and most of these schools are in rural areas. The Free State Department of Education (2009:48-52) indicates that there are 587 farm schools in the Free State Province. According to Jordaan (2006:26) multi-grade teaching is associated with small schools, such as farm schools, in remote and sparsely populated areas. The number of farm schools shows that farm schools still have a place in the education system. It is amazing that teaching still take place in so-called one- or two-classroom schools, better known as multi-graded classrooms. One could imagine the challenges principals or teachers have to face when teaching multi-graded learners in such classrooms and the innovation and creativity that has to emerge in the teaching-learning environment to make such interventions sustainable. Taking into consideration the number of multi-graded classrooms still found in rural South Africa, the topic was thought to be highly relevant for investigation. This study will focus on multi-grade teaching and learning in farm schools.

Thalheimer (2010) and Brown (2010a:75) argue that multi-grade teaching demands more from the teacher than a single-grade teaching. Juvane (2005:9) contends that for learners to learn effectively in multi-grade classrooms, schools must have well organised, well resourced and well trained teachers. Brown (2010a:75) asserts that it is important to for the teachers to understand the process for creation and implementation of the multi-grade classrooms and its methodologies. Research conducted by Little (2004b:10-12) and Miller (1991b:5) indicate that multi-grade teaching has challenges and benefits. While Beukes (2006:133) contends that multi-grade classrooms have special advantages, despite the constraints.

Gower (2010:30) states that the baseline study into multi-grade education at rural schools in the nine provinces revealed that:

- Most learners come from a poor background. In some instances learners have to do a household task before going to school.
- Learners start school after the age of eight and have a tendency to drop out.
- Numbers drop in winter especially for learners who do not have transport.
- Teachers follow teacher-centred strategies and learners' involvement is poor.
- Education officials are largely indifferent to rural people because of a strong urban bias on the part of the politicians and policymakers.
- Officials in most district offices are poorly trained in the principles of multi-grade education.
- Principals teach full time and are also responsible for the administration of the school and curriculum development.

The revelations by Gower (2010) and arguments of different authors in the preceding paragraphs show the need for a study on managing multi-grade classrooms. This study is also motivated by the experiences of a researcher based on the daily observations of multi-grade teaching. Firstly, the curriculum used in multi-grade classrooms is meant for mono-grade classrooms and educators were trained for mono-grade classrooms. Secondly, educators mix approaches of multi-grade teaching in their classrooms. This study will try to help teachers to improve their skills regarding teaching and learning in multi-grade classrooms. The study will help the teachers to manage teaching and learning in multi-grade classrooms to ensure that effective teaching and learning takes place. The study will make recommendations on how to deal with the problems identified above. The next section will discuss the background to the study.

## **1.2 BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY**

Based on the arguments presented by other researchers on multi-grade teaching the following issues show the need for this study:

- Demands of multi-grade teaching on a teacher.

- Process of teaching in multi-grade classrooms.
- Methodologies for multi-grade classrooms.
- Advantages of multi-grade classrooms.
- Teachers' preparedness.
- Effective learning and teaching.

According to Berry (2006:1), multi-grade teaching occurs when a single class contains two or more student grade levels. Multi-grade teaching is the teaching by one teacher of children working in several grades or age groups (Hargreaves, 2000:1). The two authors above agree that multi-grade teaching takes place where one teacher in one classroom teaches learners in different ages and levels of learning. The study will address how teachers manage to teach learners of different ages and levels of learning in one classroom.

Dolik (2002) states that combined grades classrooms have been in existence since the rural classroom school house, and that combined grades are not an issue while split grades have been used by educators for twenty years with creative and successful results. This indicates that multi-grade classrooms have been in existence for a longer period of time and need creativity to produce good results.

Jordaan (2006:27) identifies the advantages of multi-grade teaching as flexible schedules, opportunity for resourceful and independent learning, less formal classroom situation and friendly relationships. Flexible schedules are implemented to meet the needs of individual learners or the group's needs. Flexible schedules can allow for learner-centred teaching approaches which will allow learners to learn at their own pace. Group work strategies can also be used where learners can learn from other learners. Learner-centred and group work strategies if implemented properly will lead to effective teaching and learning. Learners in combined classrooms have an opportunity to be resourceful and learn independently because the teacher does not focus on one age group or grade level. They have the opportunity to learn the work of the previous and next grades. The opportunity is created for learners to work with lesser assistance from their teacher. Classrooms are less formal and that allows learners to interact



easily with their teacher and classmates. Friendly relationships develop because of small class sizes and the teacher knows each learner personally. Understanding and respect develops naturally between the learners and the teacher because of this personal interaction. The study will help teachers to recognize the advantages of multi-grade teaching, and how they can be implemented to properly manage teaching and learning.

Despite of the positive perspective (Jordaan, 2006) presents in his argument however, the issue of management of multi-grade is considered to be a challenge in the following instances. A multi-grade classroom is difficult to manage because there is more than one grade level present in the classroom (Jordaan, 2006:36). This study will endeavour to come up with strategies teachers can use to manage teaching and learning in multi-grade classrooms. Mushwana (2000) identified family poverty, living in conditions of uncertainty, teaching loads and dropout rate as problems facing multi-grade teaching. Research by Beukes (2006) reports that the Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory in the United States noted that: teachers teaching in multi-grade environments are either untrained or trained in monograde pedagogy. They have few teaching and learning resources. Multi-grade classrooms are poor in relation to better resourced single grade classrooms found in large, urban and staffed by trained teachers. Miller (1991a:5) concludes that instruction, classroom organisation and management are complex and demanding for the teacher.

Miller (1991a:10-11) identifies six independent or interdependent dimensions for effective use of multi-grade teaching, namely classroom organisation, classroom management and discipline, instructional organisation and curriculum, instructional delivery and grouping, self-directed learning and peer tutoring. Brown (2010a:58) identifies teacher attitudes, increased awareness, curriculum adaptation, transformation of philosophy of learning, learning materials, social organisation of students, assessment systems and the importance of teacher knowledge and skills as fundamental aspects in multigrade teaching. The study by Beukes (2006:150) identified classroom management, instructional strategies, curriculum, instructional materials and community involvement as key areas in multi-grade teaching training programme. Juvane (2005:9) concludes that the key challenges to be addressed in multi-grade classrooms are policy challenge, changing attitudes, curriculum challenge and resource challenge. In addition to the

identified challenges, Mulryan-Kyne (2007:508) adds effective time management and parent and community relationships. The authors are in agreement that a number of aspects need to be addressed before multi-grade teaching can take place effectively.

Miller (1991a) discusses the dimensions as follows: Classroom organisation deals with instructional resources and the physical environment to facilitate teaching and learning. Learners' discipline in multi-grade classroom is very important for effective learning to take place. Learners must learn from other learners in the classroom, for example, in a multi-grade classroom those in senior grades should help those in junior grades. Learners must be able to work on their own without the teacher's supervision. Classroom schedules and routines that enhance students' responsibility for their own learning will be part of classroom management and discipline.

According to Little (2004b:13-14), multi-grade curriculum spans, differentiated curricula, quasi mono-grade and learner and material-centered are approaches to curriculum in multi-grade classes. Little (2004b) explains the approaches to multi-grade teaching as follows: Multi-year curriculum spans are when all learners work through common topics and activities and units of curriculum are spread across two to three grades. In differentiated curricular learners are engaged in the same topic but each age group engage in learning tasks appropriate to their level of learning. The teacher can use quasi mono-grade in a multi-grade classroom by teaching grade groups in turns as if they were mono-grades. The teacher teaches one grade while other grades are busy with other work. The teacher can use multi-year curriculum spans by allowing learners to work through common topics and activities, and units of curriculum are spread across two to three grades. Learners can cover the same topic but are assessed with regard to their appropriate grade level. Teachers should know these approaches and know when to use a particular approach in the classroom to achieve the set objectives.

Effective teaching and learning will be discussed and ways in which that can contribute in helping educators to manage learning and teaching in multi-grade classrooms. The Department of Education, [sa] defines effective teaching as the thought of helping student learn and every student's encounter should be thought of as a student's opportunity for learning. According to

the Office of Curriculum Development and Management, [sa] effective teaching involves more than simple transmission of information, but also includes motivating students and creating a positive environment. Teachers must create a positive environment in their classroom for learners to learn effectively. They must also motivate learners for effective teaching to take place, and must assist learners to learn from all encounters in the classroom.

According to Cohen (1993:792), teaching is effective to the extent that it enables the learner to learn what has to be learnt, as well as how to learn it, and classroom teaching should emphasise and facilitate the development and mastering of the processes that would yield the desired learning outcomes. Effective teaching identifies and builds on prior knowledge, makes real life connections, develops deep understanding, monitors and reflects on learning (Department of Education, [sa]). Learners should be able to learn what they have to learn and use appropriate methods to learn effectively. Teachers must base their teaching on learners' existing knowledge. Examples used must be related to learners' environment, such as objects found on farms. Learners must also be given an opportunity to reflect on what they have learnt to see whether effective learning took place.

The quality of education is based on learning to know, learning to do and learning to live with others (UNESCO, 2006). Learners should take part in their own learning to achieve quality education. They should work with other learners for quality education to take place, and should learn to master what they have learnt. Given this background and what research revealed, it is important to investigate how teachers manage teaching and learning in multi-graded classrooms.

### **1.3 PROBLEM STATEMENT**

Against the foregoing presentation of the background to the problem the following research question needs to be answered:

How do teachers manage teaching and learning in multi-graded classrooms?

The following sub-problems will help to resolve the main problem:

- How do teachers teach in multi-grade classrooms?
- How do learners learn in multi-grade classrooms?
- How are available resources used in multi-grade classrooms?
- What difficulties are faced by teachers teaching in multi-grade classrooms?
- How can difficulties in multi-grade classrooms be overcome?

## **1.4 AIM AND OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY**

### **1.4.1 Aim**

- To help teachers to manage teaching and learning in multi-grade classrooms.

### **1.4.2 Objectives**

- Determine how teachers teach in multi-grade classrooms;
- Determine how learners learn in multi-grade classrooms;
- Evaluate how available resources are used in multi-grade classrooms;
- Determine the difficulties faced by teachers teaching multi-grade classrooms; and
- Develop strategies to overcome challenges faced by teachers in multi-grade classrooms.

## **1.5 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND DESIGN**

The following is a discussion on the research methodologies that was applied to gather information with regard to this study.

### **1.5.1 Literature study**

In order to conduct an investigation of this nature a literature study on the origins of multi-grade teaching, advantages and disadvantages of multi-grade teaching, teaching in multi-grade classrooms, learning in multi-grade classrooms, the use of resources in multi-grade classrooms, difficulties faced by teachers teaching in multi-grade classrooms and overcoming difficulties in

multi-grade classrooms was done. A DIALOG-search was performed to obtain more information from theses, journals and other primary and secondary sources of information with the following keywords: classroom management, multi-grade classroom, multi-grade teaching, resources in multi-grade classrooms, learning in multi-grade classrooms and approaches to multi-grade teaching. Local as well as international sources were used in order to find more information about the study. Information gathered was evaluated and conclusions were drawn.

### **1.5.2 Research approach and methodology**

A qualitative research approach was used as it better suits a research study of this nature. According to Schulze (2002:11-12), quantitative research design uses statistical calculations with figures for analysing and interpreting results while in qualitative research design words are used in analysing and interpreting data. In this study teachers described and explained their experiences in multi-grade classrooms. People involved with multi-grade teaching used words to describe their experiences.

Leedy and Omrod (2005:134) state that qualitative research studies reveal the nature of certain situations, processes, systems and settings. When qualitative research studies are used the researcher gains new insight on the research problem and discovers problems that exist within the research problem. Qualitative research studies provided the researcher with the means to judge the effectiveness of particular policies and practices. This study judged the effectiveness of the practice of multi-grade classrooms.

Welman et al. (2005:188) state that qualitative research is a descriptive form of research and can be used successfully in the description of groups, small communities and organisations. Qualitative research is thus relevant to the purpose of this study because the researcher obtained information and explanations about what happens in multi-grade classrooms from a small group which is involved with multi-grade teaching. What happens in multi-grade classrooms is described and interpreted. The gathered information is interpreted in words and not numbers.

### **1.5.3 Population and sampling**

Goddard and Melville (2001:34-35) refer to a sample as a subset of the population of the study. The population is a group that is the subject of the research interest. A subset of the population is used because it is not possible to study the entire population. Samples must be representative of the population to be studied. In this study it was not possible to interview all the people who were involved with multi-grade classrooms. A large enough sample to provide the necessary information about multi-grade classrooms was used.

Tustin et al. (2005:346) state that with purposive sampling the sample members are chosen with a specific purpose or objective in mind and the sample is intentionally selected. Purposive sampling was used in the study because the people to be interviewed were chosen to achieve a specific purpose of the study. Participants were intentionally selected to achieve the study objectives. Participants were chosen according to their involvement with multi-grade classrooms.

According to Babbie (1995:225) it may be appropriate to select the research sample on the basis of researcher's knowledge and nature of research aims. Research sample was chosen based on the researcher's judgment and the purpose of the study. Population of the study was drawn from Free State Province, in Thabo Mofutsanyana Education District. The Free State Department of Education, Education Management Information System (2009:51) shows that there are 266 farm schools in the Thabo Mofutsanyana Education District. Forty five percent of the farm schools in the Free State Province are found in the education district where the study was conducted. The participants were from Harrismith and Warden farm schools which used multi-grade classrooms.

Three teachers who used multi-grade classrooms at one-teacher schools were interviewed, as well as three teachers who used multi-grade teaching in a school where there was more than one teacher. Interviews were also conducted with three school principals from the schools that use multi-grade teaching.

#### **1.5.4 Instrumentation and data collection techniques**

According to Tustin, Lightelm, Martins and Van Wyk (2005:119-120), primary data is the original data collected specifically for solving the problem in hand and secondary data is existing data that can be used in solving the problem. Both primary and secondary data was collected and used in this qualitative research study.

Schulze (2002:12) states that a qualitative research design usually involves just a few respondents with the aim of understanding and describing a phenomenon. Participants who were involved with multi-grade classrooms described their experiences and gave their understanding about multi-grade classrooms. Nine people who were involved with multi-grade classrooms took part as the participants in this study.

A phenomenological study was used to examine the research question of this particular study. Phenomenological studies give persons' perceptions of the meaning of an event and phenomenological researchers depend on lengthy interviews with carefully selected participants (Leedy & Omrod, 2005:139). People's understanding, perceptions and perspectives of a research problem were gathered through phenomenological studies. Interviews were used to determine perceptions of people who were directly linked with multi-grade classrooms. Participants were asked about their experiences, beliefs and perspectives about multi-grade classrooms. Participants' opinions on managing multi-grade classrooms were also investigated.

The qualitative method of in-depth interviews was used. Unstructured interviews with basic questions were conducted with teachers and principals. Welman, Kruger and Mitchel (2005:197) state that unstructured interviews are employed for the purpose of identifying important variables in a particular area. The interviewees explained important aspects about their experience in multi-grade classrooms.

Unstructured interviews do not use an interview schedule (Welman et al., 2005:197). Basic questions were used but questions varied from one participant to another. Participants were asked follow-up questions based on their responses. Unstructured interviews were more flexible and

yielded the information that the researcher had not planned to ask for. Comparisons cannot be made from information obtained from different participants because questions were not scheduled.

Face-to-face interviews involve asking questions to a sample of respondents (Tustin et al., 2005:145). The researcher contacted participants to make an appointment for face-to-face interviews. The interviews were held at a time and place convenient to each participant. Interviews were tape recorded and notes were taken during the interviews. The interviews were unstructured but certain key questions were asked. The following are examples of the key questions:

- Can you give me a brief background about your teaching career?
- Can you give me a brief background about your involvement with a multi-graded school?
- Explain how teaching in multi-graded classrooms takes place at your school.
- Explain how learners at your school learn in multi-graded classrooms.
- How are the available resources used in multi-graded classrooms?
- What are the difficulties faced by the teachers teaching in multi-graded classrooms?
- What can be done to overcome the difficulties faced by teachers in multi-graded classrooms?

### **1.5.5 Data analysis and interpretation**

Rubin and Rubin (1995:226–227) state that data analysis already begins while the interviews are still under way. The researcher was able to redesign questions to focus on the central theme while the interviews continued. Constant comparative method was used to analyse data. The collected data was systematically sorted according to content. Standardised procedures were used to decode collected data. Data was analysed to determine how teaching and learning took place in multi-grade classrooms, how the available resources were used in multi-grade classrooms,



what the difficulties were that teachers in multi-grade classrooms face, and how to overcome these difficulties. Finally, the data was analysed according to the Tesch method.

The steps of the Tesch method as presented by De Vos, Strydom, Fouche, Poggenpoel, Schurink and Schurink (1998:343) were followed. After the interviews have been transcribed, the researcher read through all the transcripts and jot down all the ideas that came to his mind. One best interview was selected and questions were asked about it. Thoughts about the meaning of each piece of information were written in the margin. The process was repeated with the other participants as well. Similar topics were clustered together and major topics and unique topics were identified. Topics were grouped together connections and categories were determined. Data for each category was assembled in one place.

#### **1.5.6 Ethical considerations**

The ethical considerations of the University of South Africa (UNISA), designed to guide the conduct of a research study of this kind, was strictly adhered to. As a result, the researcher applied for ethical clearance from the Research Ethics Committee of UNISA. Data was not collected before the committee had issued the clearance certificate.

Confidentiality, anonymity and informed consent were considered as well. Permission to conduct the research was requested from the Director Strategic Planning and Research Directorate of the Free State Department of Education, principals of participating schools, as well as from participating principals and teachers. Participants were given assurance of anonymity and confidentiality and participation took place voluntarily. Participants were also made aware that they were free to withdraw at any stage, and that they may choose not to answer any question that they do not feel comfortable answering. The researcher was at all times open and honest with participants.

### **1.6 VALIDITY AND RELIABILITY OF THE RESEARCH**

According to McMillan and Schumacher (1997:404), in qualitative research validity refers to the

degree to which the explanations of phenomena matches the realities of the world. Data collected for the purpose of this study was valid because the people who were involved in multi-grade teaching were interviewed. Neuman (1997:138) states that perfect reliability and validity are virtually impossible to achieve, but rather are ideals researchers strive at. However, the researcher strived to gather valid data. People who work in multi-grade classrooms are rich in information on the topic of the research study and gave valid information. Decoding was done truthfully and no information was left out to influence the study.

Reliability is the consistency with which the measuring instrument yields a certain result when the entity being measured has not changed (Leedy & Omrod, 2005:29). The research must produce the same results if used again under the same circumstances. Research study will produce the same results if the same study is conducted in multi-grade classrooms in other areas. Human error was eliminated to achieve reliability. Validity and reliability are be dealt with in detail in Chapter Three.

## **1.7 DIVISION OF CHAPTERS**

The **FIRST CHAPTER** deals with the introduction and background to the study, formulation of the research question, aims and objectives of the study, research methodology and design, validity and reliability in research, division of chapters, definition of key concepts and a conclusion.

**CHAPTER TWO** focused on the literature review. The chapter dealt with the introduction, literature review which looked into the origin of multi-grade teaching, advantages and disadvantages of multi-grade teaching, teaching in multi-grade classrooms, learning in multi-grade classrooms, the use of resources in multi-grade classrooms, difficulties faced by teachers in multi-grade classrooms, overcoming difficulties in multi-grade classrooms and a conclusion.

**CHAPTER THREE** focused on the research methodology and design. The chapter dealt with the introduction, research design and methodology, qualitative research design and method, data

collection, sampling, data analysis, ethical consideration, trustworthiness of the study, reliability and validity of the research, and a summary and conclusion.

**CHAPTER FOUR** focused on the discussion and presentation of the findings. This chapter dealt with the presentation, analysis and interpretation of the results, information about the participants, success stories of learners who came from multi-graded schools, the advantages and disadvantages of multi-grade classrooms, the reasons for using multi-grade classrooms, teaching in multi-grade classrooms, learning in multi-grade classrooms, the usage of the available resources in multi-grade classrooms, the difficulties faced by teachers in multi-grade classrooms, what can be done to help teachers to deal with the problems in multi-grade classrooms and a conclusion.

**CHAPTER FIVE** focused on the summary, conclusion and recommendations. The chapter dealt with conclusions drawn from data, recommendations made by the researcher, themes for further study and a final conclusion.

## **1.8 DEFINITION OF KEY CONCEPTS**

There are certain concepts in this study which need to be clarified in order to grasp the main ideas in this study. These concepts are explained in alphabetical order:

### **1.8.1 Cooperative learning**

Muthayan (1999:xii) defines cooperative learning as an instructional technique where students work in a group small enough for each student to participate in a clearly assigned collective task, without the supervision from the teacher.

### **1.8.2 Mono-grade class**

It is a class that the grades correspond closely with the age of the learners and usually comprise

learners who have birthdays within one calendar year; a single teacher usually teaches each class at a given time.

### **1.8.3 Multi-age**

Brown (2008:7) states that multi-age suggest the existence in a classroom context, of variation in age and differentiation among students.

### **1.8.4 Multi-grade teaching**

Multi-grade teaching at a school is the practice of grouping together pupils of several grades in the same classroom due to the limited number of pupils in each grade (UNESCO, 1989:1).

### **1.8.5 Peer tutoring**

According to Miller (1991b:4) peer tutoring is the classroom routine and students' skills in serving as teachers to other students within and across differing grade levels.

### **1.8.6 Resources**

Resources are the materials that the group has to use in the teaching and learning process (Jordaan, 2006:39).

### **1.8.7 Self-directed learning**

According to Vincent (1999d:1), self-directed learning takes place when students are in charge of their own learning. Essentially, they direct their own learning process.

### **1.8.8 Self-regulated learner**

Ertmer and Newby (1996:9) explain self-regulated learners as learners, who are metacognitively,

motivationally or behaviourally active promoters of their own academic achievement.

## **1.9 CONCLUSION**

This chapter provided an orientation to the study by presenting the introduction and brief background to the study, as well as formulating the research problem and discussing the aims and objectives of the study. Following this was a discussion on the research methodology and design, as well as reference to the reliability and validity of the study, although this is dealt with in depth in chapter three. The structure of the study was presented and the key concepts were discussed.

The next chapter presents a comprehensive literature review that aims to find more information on various aspects of multi-grade teaching. The chapter begins with an introduction, followed by a discussion on the origin of multi-grade teaching, advantages and disadvantages of multi-grade teaching, teaching in multi-grade classrooms, learning in multi-grade classrooms, the use of resources in multi-grade classrooms, difficulties faced by educators in multi-grade classrooms and overcoming difficulties in multi-grade classrooms.

## **CHAPTER 2**

# **TEACHING AND LEARNING IN MULTI-GRADE CLASSROOMS**

### **2.1 INTRODUCTION**

The previous chapter provided an orientation to the research. In this chapter the theoretical framework within which this research study should be understood is presented. The theoretical framework provides knowledge that has been used in this study. The literature review attempts to answer all five research questions stated in chapter one:

- How do teachers teach in multi-grade classrooms?
- How do learners learn in multi-grade classrooms?
- How are available resources used in multi-grade classrooms?
- What difficulties are faced by teachers teaching in multi-grade classrooms?
- How can difficulties in multi-grade classrooms be overcome?

This chapter will look into the origins of multi-grade teaching as well as the advantages and disadvantages of multi-grade teaching. In an effort to answer the research questions the literature review will look into teaching in multi-grade classrooms, learning in multi-grade classrooms, using resources in multi-grade classrooms, difficulties faced by teachers teaching in multi-grade classrooms and overcoming these difficulties in multi-grade classrooms. The chapter concludes with a summary of teaching and learning in multi-grade classrooms.

A synthesis of views and perspectives on the origins of concept multi-grade teaching was developed through review of literature and other relevant sources of information. Information gathered from literature provided this study with various experiences and varying perceptions on the multi-grade teaching classrooms. A review is important in order to reach an understanding of multi-grade classrooms. The information discussed in the literature review will serve as a guide when the interviews on how educators manage teaching and learning in multi-grade classrooms are conducted. The literature review will also assist in the interpretation of the research results.

Juvane (2005:3) argues that multi-grade teaching is not new idea and in Africa, shortages of teachers, teacher absenteeism due to illness and budget restraints facing many countries makes multi-grade teaching an option. Beukes (2006:24) differentiates the conditions which lead to the use of multi-grade teaching as characteristics of learners or teachers, choice made by policymakers and/or teachers to improve the quality of pedagogy. In the next section the origins of multi-grade teaching are discussed based on the review of perspective of different authors.

## **2.2 THE ORIGINS OF MULTI-GRADE TEACHING**

Little, Pridmore, Bajracharya and Vithanaphathivana (2007:4) state that multi-grade classes are classes where students of more than one grade are taught together by a single teacher in the same classroom. According to Little (1995:28), multi-grade teaching is the norm for most schools in rural areas, be they multi-teacher or one-teacher schools. As previously mentioned, multi-grade teaching is teaching by one teacher of children working in several grades or age groups (Hargreaves 2000:1). In support of this view Nawab and Baig (2001:166) argue that a number of terms such as multi-grade, mixed year, combination class, vertical grouping, family grouping, composite class, split class, double-graded class and unitary schools are used across the world to describe the multi-grade situation. These terms refer to how the multi-grade situation is described in different parts of the world. However, the preferred term that will be used in this study is multi-grade. Furthermore Muthayan (1999:41) avers that even though the terms *multi-grade* and *multi-age teaching* often are used interchangeably, they refer to different situations. He states that multi-grade classes are established in response to administrative needs such as low enrolment numbers, while multi-age classes is when the grades and teaching curriculum are integrated. Muthayan emphasizes that multi-grade and multi-age terms should not be used interchangeably because they mean different things. In this study multi-grade and multi-age are not used interchangeably because in the multi-grade classroom and mono-grade classrooms the learners are of multi-age, therefore multi-age does not refer to multi-grade.

In congruence Miller (1991b:2) added that in 1918, there were 196 037 one-room schools, representing 70.8 percent of all public schools in United States of America. According to Cohen

and Miller (quoted by Vincent, 1999a: x) multi-grade education dates back to the one-room schools that were the norm until they were phased out in the early 1900s. Multi-grade teaching is not a new concept, but was applied even before mono-grade teaching. Multi-grade schools are most likely to be found in remote rural areas where access is difficult, population sparse, unattractive living conditions for teachers and shortages of qualified teachers prevail (Little, 1995:33). One of the factors identified by Little (1995) for the use of multi-grade teaching is administrative reasons. These factors show that multi-grade teaching does not originate by choice but because of fewer numbers of learners and shortage of teachers. Muthayan (1999:41) concurs with Little (1995) that multi-grade teaching originated in order to address the administrative needs of the education system.

Little (1995:29) identifies factors such as absence of teacher training, lack of resources and cultural and linguistic diversity as factors influencing multi-grade teaching. Teachers, resources, culture and language influence the use of multi-grade teaching. If the number of teachers trained in specific subjects is insufficient, teachers will use multi-grade teaching to address shortage of teachers. Schools use multi-grade teaching when there is lack of physical resources, such as buildings. Learners are taught in multi-grade classes to cater for their cultural diversity and the need to be taught in their home language. While Rural Education Newsletter (2010:4) identifies factors such as, many farm schools often have a limited number of staff members hence the use of multi-grade teaching. Another reason for multi-grade teaching is low levels of learner enrolment. At some of the schools under investigation there were only about 30 learners enrolled. Little (1995), Hargreaves (2000), Little et al. (2007) and Rural Education Newsletter (2010) agree that multi-grade teaching classes are formed due to chronic shortage of teachers, scarcity of pupils, as well as lack of physical resources such as adequate number and size of classrooms.

Wallace, McNish and Allen (2001:15), claim that multi-grades classes are associated with developing countries and exist for a wide variety of reasons. Wallace et al. (2001:8) refer to extreme socio-economic constraints, small population in the surrounding community, inadequate resources and geographical and cultural conditions of the community as reasons for resorting to multi-grade teaching. Juvane (quoted by Palitza, 2010:1) contends that multi-grade teaching is an



economic choice based on social circumstances in Africa. Wallace et al. (2001) and Juvane quoted by Palitza (2010) identify geographic conditions and cultural conditions as the reasons for the existence of multi-grade classrooms.

Little (2004b:4), emphasises that multi-grade teaching arises as a result of the following circumstances, namely at schools in areas of low population density, schools that comprise a cluster of classrooms spread across different locations, schools in areas where student and teacher numbers are declining, schools where enrolments in the expanding upper grades remain small and teacher numbers few, less popular schools with a declining number of students, schools with high teacher absenteeism and schools where multi-grade teaching takes place for pedagogic reasons. Schools may choose to use multi-grade teaching and learning strategies as part of a positive pedagogy (CREATE, 2008:1). Multi-grade teaching and learning strategies are used as a way of teaching and learning. It must be noted that multi-grade situations do not originate only due to administrative problems as argued by most authors, above but originates also in order to enhance teaching and learning. UNESCO (1989:1) argues that multi-grade teaching is not an answer to meeting teacher shortages in the education system but rather a strategy to improve the quality of education in rural communities. According to Hargreaves (2000:1), multi-grade teaching is a means to increase access to education, decrease drop-out rates and to focus on learning acquisition and learning outcomes than just enrolment. Multi-grade teaching does not originate in addressing administrative problems in the education system. Multi-grade teaching is used to increase access to education, improve learning and improve quality of learning.

Jordaan (2006:4) supports that multi-grade classes are very common in poor developing countries but are also found in wealthy countries. Rural Education Newsletter (2010:3) concurs that multi-grade teaching is prevalent in many farm and rural schools but also occurs in some urban schools. Hargreaves [sa] also concurs that in rural areas of the developing world one teacher is put in charge of two or more grades of children. Multi-grade classes are found in poor and wealthy countries depending on the reasons for the use of multi-grade classes, and multi-grade teaching is practiced in both rural and urban areas.

This section can be summarised as follows: Multi-grade teaching takes place in schools where there is one teacher who teaches different grades in one class or schools with many teachers but each teacher teaches learners from different grades in one class. Multi-grade classrooms were the first way of providing education. They were replaced by mono-grade classrooms in the 1900s. Multi-grade teaching in different parts of the world is still practiced at present. The three main reasons for making use of multi-grade teaching at present are to address some of the administrative needs of the education system, to increase access to education and for various teaching reasons. Multi-grade classrooms are found in both developed and developing countries, in poor and wealthy countries, as well as in urban and rural schools. The majority of multi-grade classrooms are found in rural areas because of the need to increase access to education for people who live in sparsely populated areas. In urban areas it is used to address the problem of lower enrolments, where the numbers of grades are more than the number of teachers. In other areas it is used because it is preferred as an effective way of teaching because of its advantages which will be discussed below.

## **2.3 ADVANTAGES AND DISADVANTAGES OF MULTI-GRADE TEACHING**

In this section the advantages and disadvantages of multi-grade teaching based on the views of different authors will be discussed.

### **2.3.1 Advantages of multi-grade teaching**

Jordaan (2006:27) identifies the following four special advantages of multi-grade teaching, namely the implementation of flexible schedules, creating opportunities for students to become resourceful and independent learners, a less formal atmosphere in classes, and finally, the natural development of friendly relations between the teacher and learners. UNESCO (1989:4) and Vincent (1999d:x) agree with the above by saying that despite the constraints of multi-grade classrooms, flexible schedules can be implemented and unique programmes developed to meet learners' individual and group interests, learners have an opportunity to become resourceful and independent learners, classes are less formal and friendly relationships based on understanding and respect develop naturally between students and the teacher. In multi-grade classes the

teacher does not follow strict routines but changes schedules according to the needs and interests of his learners because the whole class is under his control every day. Learners can work on their own without interference from the teacher, especially when learners do independent learning. Learners and teachers daily interact on a personal level and friendly relations develop. Further Little (2004b:7) identifies the positive impact of multi-grade teaching as expansion of access, cognitive achievement effect on learners and social and personal effects on learners. Economically and socially disadvantaged areas comprise disproportionate numbers and multi-grade schools give access to education. Learners are helped to gain knowledge and interact with other people.

According to Little (2004b:8), studies revealed that in Burkina Faso and Togo learners in multi-grade classes performed better than those in mono-grade classes. In Columbia, within the Escuela Nueva programme, Grade three learners in multi-grade schools performed better in Spanish and Mathematics and Grade five learners performed better in Spanish. In Turks and Caicos Islands, learners in multi-grade schools consistently outperformed those in mono-grade schools in the terminal grade of primary school. Learners in multi-grade classrooms also performed better in a reading test than those in mono-grade classrooms. In Indonesia learners in a project designed to support teachers in multi-grade performed better in most subjects than other students. The above bear evidence that learners in multi-grade teaching performed better than learners in mono-grade teaching, especially in languages and Mathematics.

Little (1995:57) and Little (2004b:10), present the benefits of multi-grade teaching as; students developing independent work habits and self-study skills, learners cooperating across age groups, learners helping each other and the teacher organising remedial and enrichment activities for low and high achievers more discreetly than in mono-grade classes. Muthayan (1999:136) claims that in his research respondents identified some of the advantages of multi-grade teaching as being a family-like nurturing environment, diversity, role modeling, enhancements to the teaching and learning process. Learners stay with the same group of learners for the whole day throughout the year and they bond with each other. In the same class learners in different grades and different ages are found. When completing tasks and activities, the older learners can be role models for the younger ones. The teaching and learning process is enhanced because learners are

present when the content of different grades is taught. Outcomes are determined by learners' needs and by what they achieve.

In support of the researchers who studied multi-grade teaching (Fyfe, 2001:9) have identified the following positive results of multi-grade teaching:

- Students have a higher self-concept. Students believe in themselves because they work in small groups. When working in small groups learners are not afraid to make mistakes and that boosts their confidence and self-concept.
- Students have a stronger feeling of belonging, especially to the whole class, because the classroom environment is like a family environment. The learners and the teacher know each other personally and care for each other.
- Students express an improved attitude towards school and learning. Students enjoy school because of the prevailing family-like atmosphere in the classroom. Learners are eager to go to school because the atmosphere at school is inviting.
- Learners are provided with more leadership opportunities. The teacher allocates some responsibilities to learners and this improves their leadership skills. Peer tutoring as well as group-work affords learners the opportunity to take the lead in the classroom.
- Learners help each other. Learners who mastered the work will help other learners. When the teacher is absent or is busy with something else, these learners can help other learners by engaging in peer tutoring.
- Self-regulation improves because learners are given the opportunity to help and monitor younger age groups. Learners are able to manage their own learning to be prepared to help other learners. Learners develop independent working skills because the teacher is responsible for many grades and does not have enough time to work with all the groups.
- Younger children are engaged in a complex play as they learn the work done in senior grades. When the teacher teaches the senior grades the learners in junior grades spontaneously learn the work of senior grades since they are all in one classroom at the same time.

- Younger children are motivated and have self-confidence because of the attention they receive from older children. They feel secured in the classroom because they know they will get help from the older learners.
- The classroom situation invites cooperation. Learners cooperate with each other in the use of available resources and completing tasks. They share the resources and cooperate with each other during peer tutoring and group-work.
- Competitive pressure on children is minimised. Learners do not compete with each other because they experience a sense of helping each other. Discipline problems are reduced. Learners respect the teacher and other learners. The personal relationship that prevails in the classroom improves respect and minimises disciplinary problems.
- Flexibility in instructional grouping is allowed. The teacher uses flexible schedules that can be adjusted to meet the learners' needs.
- Learners' relations are improved. Learners relate to each other in a good way. They become friends because they know they need each other in completing different tasks.
- A context for meeting the developmental and social needs of students is created. The classroom environment allows learners to socialize with learners of different age groups. Older learners guide younger learners in class on school work and social life.
- Stability and meaningful relationships are developed. Learners in class relate well to each other. Fighting and bullying are minimised because learners developed good relations with each other.

The advantages of multi-grade teaching can be summarised as follows: flexible schedules, independent learning, expanding access to education, cooperation of learners, remediation and enrichment. The teacher who teaches in a multi-grade classroom can use schedules which meet the needs of the individual learner and will result in effective teaching. Learners learn independently while the teacher is busy with other grades and self-regulation will be achieved. Learners in areas where the population is sparse have an opportunity to access formal schooling.

Learners cooperate with each other in different activities in the class, such as group work and peer tutoring. Remedial work and enrichment take place on regular basis because while the teacher are teaching the junior grade learners, the learners in senior grades have the opportunity to revise work that they did not master in junior grades. When the teacher teaches the senior grades, learners in junior grades are enriched because they are exposed to work that they will study in the next grades. The disadvantages of multi-grade teaching are discussed below in an effort to determine whether the advantages of multi-grade teaching surpass the disadvantages, and vice versa.

### **2.3.2 Disadvantages of multi-grade teaching**

The quality of teaching is compromised in multi-grade classrooms because the teacher's attention is divided between the two groups (Mohlala, 2010:31). Young children want constant individual attention and support but under multi-grade teaching are compromised. In multi-grade classrooms the teacher does not focus on all learners at all times although young children need constant attention. The teacher is unable to give learners individual attention because he or she must focus on learners in different grades with different abilities and different tasks. Vincent (1999d:x) asserts that multi-grade classrooms is labour intensive and requires more planning, collaboration and professional development. The teacher teaching in a multi-grade classroom must plan extensively to meet the needs of learners in different grades in a school day. The teacher must always consult or work together with other teachers who teach in multi-grade classrooms to share good practices which are effective in classrooms. The teacher must attend training on a regular basis although it might take place during school hours and leave learners unattended.

Muthayan (1999:147-150) identifies the disadvantages of multi-grade teaching as:

- Primary and intermediate grade combination. Learners in the Foundation Phase and Intermediate Phase learn in the same class but their needs are different. At some stage learners will not be kept busy but left to idle.
- Increased workload for teachers. Teachers have to teach more grades at the same time and extensive planning is needed.

- A challenging programme for advanced learners. Advanced learners are unable to get more challenging activities because the teacher focuses on a number of grades.
- Parents' concerns and fears. There is concern from parents that learners cannot learn in a class where different grades are combined.
- Children from dysfunctional families. Children carry their family problems to class and the danger is there that the other learners may come to know about a specific problem that might leave the learner vulnerable and embarrassed.
- Teachers may not be specialists in all Learning Areas. Teachers do not master all the subjects because they specialised in certain subjects, but must teach all the subjects in a multi-grade classroom.

According to Mulryan-Kyne (2004:12-16), the disadvantages of multi-grade teaching are time, organisation, instruction, resources and support. Teaching a multi-grade classroom is time consuming because the teacher must plan for learners in different grades and taking different subjects. In order to organise the classroom the teacher must be creative. The teacher must also be able to give instruction in different subjects. The schools also often experience lack of resources and the teachers do not receive regular and relevant support. Song, Spradlin and Plucker (2009:2) and Pancoe (2006:22) note that parents do not find it acceptable that their older children are in the same class with the young ones. Pancoe (2006:22-24) states that parents think that older learners do not learn because they spend more time helping young ones, classes are diverse, older or gifted learners may be neglected, young children may be frustrated, clashes between learners and fellow learners or the teacher can frustrate learners for years, and if the number of learners is small, they might experience difficulty in establishing friendships. Pancoe (2006:22) argues that some of the disadvantages are based on misconceptions, and not on actual practices. In other words, Pancoe highlights an important aspect namely that some of the disadvantages mentioned are not the actual disadvantages found in multi-grade classrooms.

The disadvantages can thus be summarised as labour intensive, divided attention of the teacher; possibility that the teacher may not be a specialist in all the subjects and having to create challenging programs for advanced learners. The teacher's attention might be divided in class but

peer tutoring and group-work can overcome this disadvantage because learners will receive the attention of their peers. Multi-grade teaching is labour intensive because the teacher must be prepared for all the grades and all the subjects. The teacher must also prepare Assessment Tasks for all the grades and all the subjects. The teacher who is not a subject specialist can have a problem in Senior Phase (SP) and Further Education and Training bands (FET) because the subjects need to be taught by specialists. In Foundation Phase (FP) and Intermediate Phase (IP) bands the teacher who studied primary teachers' qualification can teach the three subjects and six subjects in FP and IP respectively because the subjects done were core to the qualifications. Challenging programs for advanced learners might not be a disadvantage within the band because learners have access to work of higher grades while they are still in lower grades. The challenge might arise when the learners exit from the class.

Multi-grade teaching has more advantages than disadvantages. Some of the disadvantages have been discussed in the above paragraph and a number of possible ways to balance the specific disadvantages were presented. The advantages of multi-grade teaching stated above shows that if multi-grade teaching is implemented properly it has more benefits for learners' learning. In the next section teaching in multi-grade classrooms will be discussed.

## **2.4 TEACHING IN MULTI-GRADE CLASSROOMS**

According to Drinkwater (2002:1), classrooms have the following common elements, namely learners, teacher(s), specific goals of teaching and learning, physical setting, specific activities, learning content and a certain classroom climate. In this section the focus will be on how teachers teaching in multi-grade classrooms combine other elements of a classroom to achieve effective teaching. Issues central to the effective use of multi-grade teaching, classroom management, approaches to multi-grade teaching and teaching strategies will be discussed.

### **2.4.1 Issues central to the effective use of multi-grade teaching**

Brown (2010a:32) contends that multi-grade classes are more difficult to teach than single grade classes. In congruence Miller (1991b:5) states that the instruction, classroom organisation and



management are complex and demanding for the teacher. Miller (1991b:4) identifies instructional dimensions affecting successful multi-grade teaching as classroom organisation, classroom management and discipline, instructional organisation and curriculum, instructional delivery and grouping, self-directed learning and peer tutoring. Classroom organisation is about instructional resources and physical environment to facilitate learning. Classroom management also entails classroom schedules and routines which enhance students' responsibility to their own learning.

Instructional organisation and curriculum are about instructional strategies and routines for cooperative and self-directed learning. Instructional delivery and grouping deal with methods to improve quality of instruction and strategies for organising group learning activities. Self-directed learning refers to strategies to bring about a high level of independence and efficiency in learning individually or in combination with other students. Peer tutoring is about classroom routines and students' skills in serving as teachers to other students. It is imperative that teachers teaching in multi-grade classrooms consider these dimensions in their classrooms as the discussion below will indicate.

#### **2.4.1.1 Classroom management and classroom organisation**

Classroom management is a managerial skill which involves planning, teaching, leading, controlling, organising and supervising (Walters, 1991:45). Classroom management is not just ensuring good discipline, preparing and planning the lesson or arranging desks in a different pattern. It entails every action that results in a good learning atmosphere in the classroom. Teachers teaching in multi-grade classrooms should ensure a good learning atmosphere in their classrooms for effective learning to take place. Walters (1991:46) identifies elements of effective classroom management as teachers, classroom environment, resources and pupils. Teachers must plan their lessons. Pictures and charts must be displayed in the classroom and desks must be well-organised. Cleanliness must be maintained at all times and resources properly arranged to allow easy access. It is also very important that learners be given classroom rules which will help to enforce discipline.

Classroom management was another problem observed with regard to multi-grade teaching because while one group is busy with a task the teacher is busy teaching another group (Taole and Mncube, 2012:160). Learners end up completing tasks without the teacher's supervision. Taole and Mncube (2012) refer to the cause of this problem as lack of proper planning. Teachers who teach in multi-grade schools must have good classroom management skills as they must plan properly to avoid having a situation where learners have nothing to do. The execution of tasks that need high teacher-learner contact in a specific grade needs to be done at the same time as tasks that need less teacher-learner contact in another grade. According to Jordaan (2006:36), managing a multi-grade classroom is difficult because there is more than one grade level present in the classroom. The teacher must be skilled in managing instruction to reduce the amount of time during which learners are not productively engaged on a task. Teachers in multi-grade classrooms must be aware of different ways of grouping children and the importance of study areas and centres where learners can go when they have finished their work.

Beukes (2006:36) proposes the strategies which must be considered in a multi-grade classroom as: process approach to teaching, moving from all-knowing facilitator of learning, integrating areas of the curriculum and ensuring flexible grouping within the classroom. In addition Fyfe (2001:10-11) recommends that teachers in multi-grade classrooms must be flexible and use developmentally appropriate curricula for children, consider heterogeneous community of as related to ability and age, support continuous learning, be committed to developing the child as a whole, allow active student involvement, use concrete experiences related to real life examples, operate as the facilitator, role model, monitor and observer, give guidance, provide an integrated curriculum across many subjects, free of rigid instructional structures that impede learning and continuous evaluation using multiple data sources. Teachers teaching in multi-grade classrooms can benefit the learners in their classrooms if they use the strategies discussed in this paragraph.

According to Jordaan (2006:42), good strategies to manage the classroom when working with the differentiated approach good classroom management strategies to use are multi-level activities, learning centres or stations and learning agreements. Multi-level learning centres and stations describe strategies for arranging and organising instructional resources and the physical environment of the classroom. Learning centres or stations are organised areas or corners within

a classroom that provide materials for a variety tasks at different levels for learners to accomplish and tasks within each learning centre can be focused on a specific topic, theme or subject. Multi-graded classrooms must be organised in such a way that there are multi-level centres and learning centres where different resources can be kept.

The Rural Education Newsletter (2010:4) states that teachers in multi-grade classrooms actively work towards establishing a compelling culture of teaching and learning through well organised classrooms that include workstations or corners, charts, pictures, books and evidence of learners' work. Classrooms are organised innovatively in order to allow for effective teaching and learning. An inviting library corner serves as a workstation that meaningfully occupies learners while the teacher is focused on another group or grade of learners. Workstations help to ensure that learners are occupied while the teacher is busy teaching one of the other grades.

Vincent (1999b:1) states that in a multi-grade classroom where multiple activities are likely to occur at the same time classroom organisation is a critical factor in developing smooth, predictable routines. Classrooms can be organised in the form of activity centres where activities takes place. Activity centres are also learning centres, where self-instruction learning activities take place and a subject area resource centre, where students' resources relating to a specific subject are located. Wallace et al. (2001:47) concur with Vincent (1999b) that multi-grade classrooms must have activity centres where materials linked to a particular topic or themes are displayed. Activity centers must be at the corners of the classrooms where they will not be in the way of other activities.

According to Merckx [sa], a multi-grade classroom may look different from a traditional classroom. He identifies the following features of multi-grade classrooms:

- Desks are organised into small groups. The number of learners in a classroom determines the size of groups but groups must not exceed eight learners.
- Some marked spaces around the room where groups can sit on the floor and work.

- Workstations or learning centres where individuals and groups may go to complete activities. The workstations and learning centres are arranged in such a way that they do not disturb any other activities taking place in class.
- Resources are kept in labeled boxes on shelves around the room.
- Boxes or folders for students' work to be kept. These boxes and folders are placed in the classroom where learners can easily access them.
- Classroom space is often re-organised. Re-organisation takes place to meet the requirements of different activities.

Classroom organisation plays an important role in multi-grade classroom management. (Jordaan, 2006), The Rural Education Newsletter (2010), Vincent (1991b), (Wallace et al. 2001) and Merckx [sa] emphasise the use of workstations where learners can do different activities. Activity centres or workstations must have resources for learners to use effectively. Teachers have to be innovative and flexible when they organise their classrooms.

Little (1995:19-21) is concerned that teachers may not be aware of the different ways of organising the classroom, for example subject staggering, subject grouping and a common timetable. Subject staggering is when learners learn different subjects in the same period. Subject grouping is when the same subjects are presented to all groups at the same time. A common timetable is when the whole class learn the same subject in a given timetable period but each group follow its own work that is level appropriate to the specific grade. Teachers must decide whether to use subject staggering, subject grouping, a common timetable or an integrated day when they draw the timetable.

Multi-grade classrooms have fewer learners and a family-like environment; therefore it is more easily managed than a mono-grade classroom. The teacher must possess management skills such as planning, organising, leading and controlling in order to manage the classroom effectively. The teacher must plan how to optimally use the available space in the classroom, plan the lessons and prepare the time-table. Resources used in the classroom must be organised and an atmosphere conducive to learning must be created. The prepared lessons must be presented by

the teacher or the peer tutor. The peer tutor must, however, be guided by the teacher. The teacher must monitor all the activities in the classroom to determine whether they are directed towards the outcomes. Corrective measures must be undertaken in the case of activities that are not directed towards the outcomes.

A multi-grade classroom is a multi-dimensional classroom because learners in the classroom work on different tasks at the same time. The teacher must plan the tasks properly to avoid disturbances during task completion. Learners must be grouped in small groups based on the objectives of grouping. In most cases learners in the same grade are grouped together but learners in different grades can be grouped together depending on the purpose of grouping. Learning centres and resource centres help learners to do individual learning and access resources for learning. Workstations help learners to work in groups and complete tasks while the teacher is busy with other groups. The organisation of the classroom is influenced by instructional organisation and the curriculum. Discussions on instructional organisation and the curriculum in multi-grade classrooms will be presented in the next section.

#### **2.4.1.2 Instructional organisation and curriculum**

Jordaan (2006:38-40) identifies three main approaches to multi-grade teaching, namely whole class teaching, learning in groups and independent working. Whole class teaching must be used at the beginning of the school day, at the commencement of the sessions, when learners are engaged in a project with associated topics and specific aspects of the curriculum, such as poetry, music, storytelling and mental Maths. Learning in groups in a multi-grade classroom takes place when the teacher works with one group while the other groups are pursuing a different task. Independent working should take place when learners show competency of working independently and learners are able to use reference book. Teachers teaching in multi-grade classrooms must know when to use each approach on a daily basis. Wallace et al. (2001:30) agrees on the approaches that teachers use in their multi-grade classrooms, namely two groups approach, whole class approach and mixed approach. In the two groups approach the teacher divides the learners into two groups of grades, i.e. the very high first graders and the very low second graders. In the whole class approach the teacher teaches learners thematically regardless

of the grade level. In the mixed approach the learners in the different grades are engaged in different activities at the same time. Teachers must decide when to use each approach and take care not to mix them.

Little et al. (2007:1) identify approaches to the curriculum in multi-grade teaching as multi-year curriculum spans, quasi mono-grade and learner and material-centred. In multi-year curriculum spans units of curriculum content are spread across two to three grades rather than one. Learners work through common topics and activities. In differentiated curricular the same theme or topic is covered with all the learners and learners in each grade engage in learning tasks appropriate to their level of learning. In a learner and material centred strategy learners do self-study using graded learning guides. Learners learn at their own pace and the teacher supports them and gives structured assessment tasks. Learner and material centred strategies can be used with either multi-year curriculum span or quasi mono-grade. The teacher must, at the beginning of the year, decide whether he or she will use the multi-year curriculum span or quasi mono-grade approach to avoid confusion. The three broad approaches to small school teaching around the world have been identified as avoidance; quasi-monograde and differentiation (CREATE, 2008:2). The first strategy, avoidance, is deferred entry whereby the entry of an age group is deferred to combine them with the following year's entry. The second strategy is a case of double or triple shifts where the teacher teaches some grade levels in the morning and the rest in the afternoon. The third strategy, abandonment, occurs when the teacher divides the duration of the school day by the number of grades and classes are taught as mono-grade classes.

CREATE (2008:2-3) explains that in quasi-mono-grade teaching the teacher organises a multi-grade class as if it is a mono-grade class. Quasi mono-grade teaching consists of three strategies. The first strategy is when the class is organised into separate spaces and grade groups, and learners work alongside their class grade peers. The teacher divides time between the grades, subjects requiring high teacher-pupil contact may be matched with those requiring little contact. The teacher may teach two or three different grade levels and each group follows its work. The second strategy is multi-year span curricular where learners are taught a curriculum of combined grades. Learners move out of the combined class after spending the years of curriculum and have covered the entire two year curriculum but in different order. The outcomes expected are based

on the grade of the learner. The third strategy is whole class strategy is when the teacher teaches the same lesson to all students in the same way and treat them as if is they were a mono-grade class. This strategy will be an option in subjects where similar inputs and processes are followed and similar learning outcomes are expected from all the students.

CREATE (2008:3) identifies two strategies that can be used in differentiation. The first strategy involves the teacher reconstructing the curriculum for the various grades into one by identifying common learning objectives or topics. The teacher then focuses on common elements and teaches the whole group as one but gives differentiated tasks and activities. The second strategy, graded learning material, is a learner-centred and material-based strategy. The curriculum is not sequenced but the materials are designed to help the learner to progress through the curriculum sequence.

Little (1995:19-21) discusses the following three ways of time tabling, namely the common time table option, the subject stagger option and the subject grouping option. In the common time table option children learn the same subject in a given time table period but each grade follows its own work according to the grade level and work program. In the subject stagger option subjects are staggered on the time table so that learners learn different subjects in the same period. Subjects that require high teacher-pupil contact are matched with those requiring little contact. In the subject grouping option subjects are presented to all the grades groups together at the same time. The teacher in a multi-grade classroom must decide on an appropriate time tabling approach to use. The time-tabling approach must be matched with the teaching approach. The teacher can teach different subjects at the same time or teach the same subject at the same time. Learners can learn the same subject at the given time but each grade will follow its own work.

Learners can be taught together at the same time, learn in groups or learn individually. The learning content can be spread across two or three years, or the same theme or topic can be covered with all the learners. Learners can also be engaged in self-study using graded materials, or multi-grade teaching can be organised as if it is mono-grade teaching. The approach that the

teacher uses in the classroom will determine the method he will use to deliver the content. Instructional delivery and grouping methods are discussed in detail in the next section.

### **2.4.1.3 Instructional delivery and grouping**

Teaching methods and teaching strategies which can be used in multi-grade classrooms are discussed based on the views of different authors. Fraser, Loubser and van Rooy (1994:41-43) discuss the narrative method as the method whereby one person makes certain information available to another person through speech. They identify examples of narrative method as group discussion, debates, stories, panel discussions, guest speakers, teaching by peers and oral reports. The narrative method can be used by teachers in multi-grade classrooms to give information to learners especially at the beginning of the lesson.

According to Fraser et al. (1994:45), the textbook method entails the use of a textbook by the instructor or learner during the teaching experience to ensure effective learning. Learners must be given an opportunity to read from the textbook. The textbook method can also be used to search for information in a multi-grade classroom. Fraser et al. (1994:49) define cooperative learning as a team approach to learning where each member of the group is dependent on the other members in order to accomplish a specific task or assignment. In the school situation grouping may take place according to the achievement, chronological age, mental age, social and emotional maturity, and community interest. Jacobs, Gawe and Vakalisa (2007:63) define participatory methods as methods which focus on the learner playing a central role in teaching-learning activities and learners participate fully in classroom activities. Learners actively take part in their own learning when the cooperative learning and participatory methods are used.

Gunter, Estes and Schwab (2003:257) state that the elements critical to the successful implementation of cooperative learning are positive interdependence, a lot of verbal and face-to-face interaction, individual accountability, social skills and group processing. Cooperative learning will be effective if learners depend on each other, if communication takes place between learners and if every learner does his/her part. According to Lichakane (2005:21), the cooperative approach/group-work encourages learners to help each other, share ideas and



contribute for the good of the group. She further states that learners will perform better and learn more in a caring environment in which they feel free to explore ideas, ask questions, discuss their ideas and make mistakes. In multi-graded classrooms cooperative learning will help learners to perform better and learn more because the caring environment allows learners to freely explore ideas, ask questions, discuss their ideas and make mistakes. Fyfe (2001:13) asserts that cooperative learning is an excellent strategy in multi-graded classrooms because it incorporates all grades, student achievements, diverse subject matter, urban/rural schools, a common goal for students with mixed ability, increased acceptance of others, positive self-esteem and interaction. Jordaan (2006:42) identifies peer instruction, cooperative group work and individualised learning programmes as important instructional strategies in multi-graded classrooms. When peer instruction is used learners act as teachers for each other. Cooperative group work involves small groups which are involved in collaborative tasks. Individualised learning also involves learners doing self-study.

According to Pancoe (2006:5), the organisational strategies useful for multi-age teaching and learning are the following: schedules and routines which promote clear, predictable instructional patterns, those that enhance students' responsibility for their own learning and use of time, use of group learning experiences across and within year levels, developing skills and strategies that allow students to have high levels of independence by learning individually or in combination with others, and developing strategies and routines where children serve as teachers to others within and across different year levels (peer tutoring).

Wallace et al. (2001:25-26) state that multi-grade teaching offers challenges in terms of teaching and organising learning experiences for the students. A wide variety of teaching strategies include teacher-centred instruction, group-work, peer tutoring, self-directed learning, the activity centre approach and the guided discovery approach. However, they also advise that it is best that the teacher choose those approaches that are most appropriate to the circumstances. The teacher will at times use a combination of approaches. The teacher-centred approach is where the teacher is central to all activities (Wallace et al., 2001:26). Direct teaching or lecturing is an example of the teacher-centred approach. Grouping strategies tend to be very useful for managing students who vary in their ability range (Wallace et al., 2001:28-29). The lecture method and groupings

can be used to teach in multi-grade classrooms at different stages of the lesson. They can be used at the same time or separately depending on the type of the lesson.

Teaching strategies that can be used in multi-grade classrooms are: continuous progress, flexible grouping within a classroom, and classrooms that provide for students in a smaller or wider range of instructional strategies (Fyfe, 2001:10). Continuous progress allows learners to be taught at a level and a rate appropriate to their skills and abilities. Students progress continuously throughout the school year. Groupings should be flexible and be based on the instructional needs of learners. Students can be divided into groups for the purpose of projects, interests, content or for social reasons. The instruction strategy is dependent on the vision of instruction. Muthayan (1999:107) reports that instructional strategies such as thematic teaching, various grouping techniques, peer tutoring, self-directed learning, individualized learning, and the use of learning centres in the classroom and team teaching are used in multi-grade classrooms. In thematic teaching the teacher integrates teaching of different grades in one theme and teaches different grades at the same time. The grouping techniques that teachers can use range from cooperative learning, whole class instruction and small group work (Muthayan, 1999:117). Individualised teaching is when the teacher is instructing individual students on a one-to-one basis (Muthayan, 1999: xiii).

The preceding discussions showed that teachers in multi-grade classrooms can use different forms of the narrative method and the textbook method in their classrooms. Teachers can also make use of the cooperative learning and participatory approaches in their classrooms. Fraser et al. (1994), Muthayan (1999), Fyfe (2001), Gunter et al. (2003) and Lichakane (2005) agree that cooperative learning is a teaching strategy that helps learners to learn effectively in the classroom. Wallace et al. (2001) show that teacher-centred approaches such as lecturing are also important in multi-grade classrooms.

Muthayan (1999), Wallace et al. (2001), Jordaan (2006) and Pancoe (2006) emphasize the importance of peer tutoring as a teaching strategy in a multi-grade classroom. Fraser et al. (1994), Muthayan (1999), Fyfe (2001), Wallace et al. (2001), Lichakane (2005), Jordaan (2006),

Pancoe (2006) and Jacob et al. show that group work plays an important role in multi-grade classrooms.

Muthayan (1999), Wallace et al. (2001) and Jordaan (2006) agree on the importance of self-directed learning in multi-grade classrooms. Muthayan (1999) and Wallace et al. (2001) identify the use of activity centres or learning centres as a teaching strategy in multi-grade classrooms. Muthayan (1999) identifies other strategies in multigrade teaching, such as thematic teaching, individualised teaching and team teaching.

In a multi-grade classroom instruction can be delivered by using the narrative method, the textbook method, the cooperative learning approach, the participatory approach and direct instruction. The teacher can use group discussions in a particular grade while he is busy teaching other grades. The teacher can then be called to any group that needs assistance. Debates can be organised for the sake of languages. Older people from the community can be asked to tell the learners stories that are related to Social Sciences and the culture of the community. Learners can use the textbooks to find information on a particular subject. The teacher can refer the learners to a certain book to complete specific class activities.

Group-work can be organised for learners to learn from other group members and for the sharing of ideas. The participatory approach is used when learners take part in group activities or for individual study. The teacher introduces the topics or explains the content to learners using the direct teaching method. Peer tutoring and self-directed learning are also used as the instruction delivery method. The use of peer tutoring and self-directed learning is discussed below.

#### **2.4.1.4 Peer tutoring and self-directed learning**

Peer tutoring takes place when pupils teach other pupils (Wallace et al., 2001:38). Peer tutoring can take place when older pupils (in higher grades) teach younger pupils, when faster pupils help slower pupils (in the same grade) or two friends study the topic together and through discussions help each other to understand the work. Slower learners may also tutor faster learners in areas in which they are stronger, such as drawing. Peer tutoring is peer assistance that is usually initiated

by the teacher who may prompt children to seek the help of particular individuals or prompt individuals to assist others (Muthayan, 1999: xvi).

Peer tutoring can help teachers in multi-grade classrooms to focus on other grades while the learner teaches other learners. Peer tutoring can help learners to get a better understanding of the concepts that they had difficulty with understanding when taught by the teacher. Learners' understanding may be enhanced when they are taught by means of peer tutoring because the tutor will teach them using language and examples that they are comfortable with. The peer tutor masters the content because he knows that he has a responsibility to explain it to his fellow learners. The teacher must rotate the learners as peer tutors to avoid an overburden on some of the learners and learners should be peer tutors of the lessons or content they mastered.

Wallace et al. (2001) define self-directed learning as a process in which individuals take initiative with or without the help of others in diagnosing their learning needs, formulating learning goals, identifying human and material resources for learning, choosing and implementing appropriate learning strategies and evaluating learning outcomes. According to Muthayan (1999: xvii), self-directed learning is when learners individually and independently engage in activities.

Self-directed learning in multi-grade classrooms helps the learners to take responsibility for their own learning. Independent working skills are imparted through self-directed learning. Self-directed learning also helps the learners to become self-regulated and strategic learners. Learners are able to identify their learning styles because they are able to see which way of learning works best for them. Learners are helped to work on their own or with minimal help from the teacher.

## **2.5 LEARNING IN MULTI-GRADE CLASSROOMS**

The American Association for the Advancement of Science (1990) states the following important aspects with regard to learning: learning is not necessarily the outcome of teaching, what students learn is influenced by their existing ideas, progression in learning is usually from the concrete to the abstract, people learn to do well only what they practice doing, and effective

learning by students requires feedback and expectations affect performance. Schools should pick the most important concepts and skills to emphasize in order to concentrate on quality of learning rather than quantity of information presented. This principle can help to minimize the curriculum congestion while learners learn important concepts and skills. This principle can help teachers in multi-grade teaching to adapt the curriculum by concentrating on important concepts across the grades.

The American Association for the Advancement of Science (1990) further states that people have to construct their own meaning. Effective learning requires more than making multiple connections of new ideas to old ones and sometimes requires that people radically restructure thinking. Students come to school with their own ideas not all of which are correct, and it is the teacher's responsibility to dismiss wrong ideas or misconceptions. Young people can learn most readily about things that are tangible and directly accessible to their senses, be it visual, auditory, tactile or kinesthetic. Concrete experiences are most effective in learning when they occur in the context of some relevant conceptual structure. Learning takes place best when students have opportunities to express ideas and get feedback from their peers. Feedback must be analytical and come at a time when students are interested in it. Students are able to learn something if they believe in their ability to do so. Students' self-confidence grows when they experience success in learning. Teachers must provide students with challenging but attainable learning tasks. Teachers must not signal lack of confidence in the ability of students to understand certain subjects because students might lose confidence and consequently perform poorly.

Different learning styles are discussed to improve management of teaching and learning in multi-grade classrooms. Woolfolk in Drinkwater (2002:22) defines learning styles as different ways of learners' perceiving and organizing information. Dunn in Dreyer and Van der Walt (1996:471) defines learning style as the way in which each person absorbs and retains information and/or skills. Oxford et al. in Dreyer and Van der Walt (1996:471) define learning style as general approaches that students use to learn a new subject or tackle a new problem. Woolfolk, Dunn and Oxford et al. show that learners use a variety of ways and approaches to learn new information and learn in a variety of ways. Teachers must vary their manner of teaching in order to accommodate all the learners in the classroom. On the other hand Jordaan (2006:15)

differentiates between learning styles by strengths of the learners, in other words between learners with auditory strengths, visual strengths, tactual strengths and/or kinesthetic strengths. Learners with auditory strengths learn best by talking aloud, listening, discussing and hearing. They also prefer teachers to give verbal instructions.

Learners with visual strengths learn best by seeing. They prefer teachers to engage in demonstrations as they learn easily through descriptions and by remembering what they have seen. Learners with tactual strengths learn best by feeling and touching. They prefer the classroom environment to be welcoming and comfortable, as well as experiencing a secure classroom climate and environment. They learn best when they take notes during a lecture or when they read something new or difficult. These learners do well in hands-on activities such as projects, demonstrations or laboratory activities. Learners with kinesthetic strengths are learners who learn by action. They learn best by doing, simulations, hands-on approach, manipulation and live events. They gain more knowledge by physical involvement and field trips. Because they prefer to do rather than to watch, they lose much of what is said during lectures.

According to Dreyer and Van der Walt (1996:473), the sensory preferences of learners are visual, auditory, hands-on or tactile-kinesthetic. The sensory preferences of learners are the physical, perceptual learning channels with which most learners learn easily. Visually orientated students enjoy reading and need a great deal of visual stimulation. Auditory students are comfortable with lectures, discussions, radio and television. Hands-on students like manipulative and three dimensional materials that are touchable and moveable. Students with a global learning style seek the big picture right away. They are effective in situations where collaboration and social relationships contribute to achievement. They respond with enthusiasm to contexts and activities that are clearly structured.

Hamachek in Drinkwater (2002:22) discusses three basic learning styles, namely visual, aural and physical learning styles. Visual people learn best by reading new material. Aural people learn best by listening to lectures, tapes or discussions. Physical people learn best by doing or performing activities themselves. Dreyer and Van der Walt (1996:471-475) discuss the elements of individual learning styles as environmental, emotional, social, physical and psychological

elements. Individuals respond uniquely to their immediate environment. Some learners prefer low lighting while others prefer bright lights. Learners learn best in a classroom that is emotionally charged, i.e. the teacher uses drama and lively descriptions as well as own involvement and enjoyment. The teacher must allow open discussion and disagreement in the classrooms. Praise and feedback motivate learners to learn. The manner in which learners relate to other people contributes to the selection of a method through which they are likely to achieve best results. Some learners learn best when being alone while others achieve better results when learning among their peers.

In a multi-grade classroom the teacher must vary the activities to cater for the various sensory preferences of learners. Learners can be given work to read while the teacher is busy with other grades to cater for visual learners. The teacher can pre-record a lesson on television or radio to give to learners while the teacher is busy with other groups of learners to cater for auditory learners. The teacher must bring into the classroom the models of real things in the classroom like a model of a heart when teaching about the heart to cater for hands-on learners.

Free State Department of Education (2006:47) identifies groups of learners with the following different learning styles, namely verbal/linguistic, logical, mathematical, spatial, musically/rhythmic, body/kinesthetic, interpersonal and naturalistic. Learners who use the verbal/linguistic learning style think in words and like reading, writing, listening and speaking. These learners do well with books, dialogues and debates. Learners who use the logically/mathematical learning style like to reason, organise and interpret data. Spatial learners think in images and like drawing and observing. Musical/rhythmic learners think rhythmically and in tunes. Body/kinesthetic learners think through sensation, such as sport, drama and movement. Interpersonal learners think best when with other learners, as in group activities and cooperative learning. Intrapersonal learners think best alone, in individual, self-paced and managed activities. Naturalistic learners like to work with nature/resources.

The American Association for the Advancement of Science (1990), Dreyer and Van der Walt (1996), Free State Department of Education (2006) and Jordaan (2006) agree that there are auditory, visual and kinesthetic learners present in a classroom. Teachers should always consider

learning styles of different learners when they plan their lessons. In a multi-grade classroom different learning styles must be considered to ensure that all learners learn effectively. Teachers should match learners' learning style and activities given to learners when different approaches to multi-grade teaching are used.

Teachers teaching in multi-grade classrooms must consider the learners' strengths when they plan their lessons. All learners in the classroom must have an opportunity to learn according to their strengths. The teacher can explain work by lecturing, ask learners to take notes, read information on their own and take part in small group discussion. The classroom must have pictures displayed on the walls to create a warm and welcoming atmosphere. Field trips and laboratory experiments must be organised. The classroom must have enough reading materials and noise must be minimised during discussions and lecture. The teacher must do demonstrations in class. Sound relationships must prevail in class. The use of teaching media can bridge the gap between what learners learn in class and the reality of real life situations. Different resources can be used as teaching media and the next section discusses the use of resources in multi-grade classrooms.

## **2.6 THE USE OF RESOURCES IN MULTI-GRADE CLASSROOMS**

Newby, Stepich, Lehman and Russel in Drinkwater (2002:75) state that teaching and learning media, also called instructional media, can be regarded as different means and ways by which information can be delivered to learners. Newby et al. in Drinkwater (2002:75) state that teaching and learning media have the potential to:

- present the materials in a manner readily perceived,
- used and assimilated by the learner,
- deliver materials in a teacher-independent manner,
- allow learners to experience the material through various senses,
- provide learners with repeated and varied experiences with subject matter enabling them to construct their own understanding or meaning,
- gain and maintain learners' attention to the subject matter,



- motivate students towards reaching a specific goal,
- present information in a manner that otherwise could not be experienced by the individual learner and
- accommodate varying sizes of audiences in an effective and efficient manner.

Fraser et al. (1994: 166) state that sometimes the actual subject of the content that has to be transferred in the didactic situation is not readily available and substitute media have to be used. Reality is brought into the classroom by means of teaching media. Fraser et al. (1994:170) identify the following teaching media: personal media such as the art of speaking and body language, realia and models, auditory media, visual media, audio-visual media and programmable media.

The Rural Education Newsletter (2010:4) states that teachers actively work towards establishing a compelling culture of teaching and learning through well-organised classrooms. Well-organised classrooms have different workstation or corners, charts, pictures, books and evidence of learners' artwork. Library corners serve as workstations that meaning fully occupy learners while their teacher is focusing on another group or grade of learners. The use of e-mail, the Internet and other Information and Communication Technology (ICT) resources that are available at schools also enable help the schools to network effectively and efficiently. Teachers in multi-grade classrooms can even use their smart-phones to access e-mails and the Internet.

According to Vincent (1999b:1), an activity centre is an area in the classroom that the teacher has designated for a specific purpose. Two types of activity centres can be found, namely a learning centre and a subject area resource centre. The learning centre is a self-instruction learning activity area that has been placed in a clearly defined area in the classroom, and the subject area resource centre is the space where learners' resources relating to a specific subject are located. Muthayan (1999:67) states that the range of materials provided must stimulate the various and differing levels of the learners in the multi-grade classes and also allow children access to materials suited to their needs. Multi-grade classrooms must have activity centres

which have relevant resources for learners. Self-study can take place when activity centres have resources which are relevant to learners' activities.

According to Little (2004b:16), most researchers and practitioners agree that successful strategies for multi-grade teaching depend on adequate supplies of learning materials to support individual and group-based learning. Self-study materials must be of the highest quality and relevancy but should never be seen as substituting the teacher. Conventional school textbooks are learning resources deserving attention because textbooks are written with the assumption that lessons are teacher-led. Resources in the classrooms must not replace the teacher because learners need the teacher's guidance even when engage in individual learning or group learning activities. According to Bisschoff (1992:104-105), it is important that the teacher does not use the board for extensive writing up of notes but rather to summarise and organise the main ideas of the lesson. Teaching media must be used effectively in classrooms. Teachers must use different teaching media to cater for different learning styles of learners in the classroom.

Wallace et al. (2001:40) state that teaching aids include a variety of electronic, printed, visual and audio-visual materials, as well as computers. Community members can also assist when teachers are overloaded. Elderly people can help with research on historic sites or buildings. Other community members can be of value in areas that they are experts in, such as storytelling, science, cake making, tailoring, agriculture, craft work, knitting, traditional dancing and singing. Parents can also be good resources for learners with regard to certain subjects in a multi-grade teaching set-up. Teachers should not underestimate the general skills and knowledge of parents, even if the parents have not received any formal education.

Vincent (1999c:32) states that one of the first tasks of the teacher when entering a new classroom is to take stock of all available resources. Wallace et al. (2001:53) state that teachers also need to be aware of the resources that are available in the surrounding community. The availability of materials will be influenced by the local situation. Multi-grade teaching needs more learning materials because pupils need to work independently (Wallace et al., 2001:53). The teacher must have extensive knowledge about the area where the school is situated, for example knowledge about the weather, plants, animals, culture in the community and other resources in the area.

When the teacher knows about the area teaching can be related to what learners see and experience in their daily environment.

According to Berry [sa: 4] instructional materials are written for mono-grade classrooms. They are produced as grade level textbooks and are designed to be delivered by the teacher to the learners. The teacher must guide the learners when they use textbooks in a multi-grade classroom because textbooks are developed for mono-grade classrooms. According to Brown (2010b:195), in terms of learning resources, materials are developed as self-instructional learning guides for both teachers and learners. Learning and teaching materials must be adapted to suit the requirements of multi-grade classrooms. Berry [sa: 4] states that suitable materials include a self-study element and may be in the form of workbooks with a self-correction key or a small classroom library that can be accessed independently by the learners. Teachers need to be shown how to produce self-study materials in a cost effective way.

The chalkboard is one of the teaching aids that the teacher uses on a daily basis. It should not be used for writing long notes but to highlight important aspects of their lessons. A multi-grade classroom can have more than one chalkboard to be used for different activities taking place at the same time. Charts and pictures must be displayed on the walls of the classroom. Charts and pictures can display definitions of concepts in different subjects, mathematical formulae, language tenses, a chronological occurrence of events in Social Sciences (SS) and accounting equations in Economic and Management Sciences (EMS). The charts and pictures will help learners to learn on their own while other activities are taking place in the classroom.

The classroom must have a library corner where different study resources are kept. Self-study materials must be available in the library corner. The use of different teaching media benefits learners with different learning styles. Visual learners benefit from the use of pictures, television will benefit both visual and auditory learners, models will benefit kinesthetic learners and textbooks will benefit visual learners. The lessons should relate to the school's environment and resources found in the school's area for learners to get a better understanding of the lesson. The teacher must carefully select the study material because study materials are meant for mono-grade classrooms. Publishers must develop textbooks which suit multi-grade classrooms.

Textbooks that are meant for mono-grade classrooms are one of the challenges that the teachers in multi-grade classrooms face. Some of the other challenges will be discussed in detail below.

## **2.7 DIFFICULTIES FACED BY EDUCATORS TEACHING MULTI-GRADE CLASSROOMS**

Taole and Mncube (2012:157) identify the problems associated with multi-grade teaching as lack of support for multi-grade educators, educators who are not conversant with the lesson planning required for multi-grade teaching, lack of commitment on the part of educators in the pedagogy and educators who do not see the value of multi-grade teaching. According to CREATE (2008), the challenges of multi-grade teaching and learning are that the national curriculum development and teacher training programmes are generally based on a model of mono-grade teaching and learners in *de facto* multi-grade schools have to fend for themselves. Little et al. (sa: 11) state that in addition to a need for proper with regard to teaching multi-grade classes, teachers also identified high rates of students' absenteeism, frequent changes in grade combinations and lack of textbooks as challenges that they are faced with in multi-grade schools.

Wallace et al. (2001:21-26) mention the challenges of multi-grade teaching as the following managing teaching and students in a multi-grade environment is not taught at training colleges, lack of support for teachers to be creative and innovative in using existing resources, teachers not knowing and unable to teach effectively different subject areas at different grade levels, and that the teacher has a number of roles. According to UNESCO (1989:5-6), learning difficulties specific to multi-grade teaching are: curriculum design, classroom and teaching/learning processes, space organisation and instructional management, grade combinations, teacher's role perception, existing teacher education programmes and learners' behavioural problems. Vincent (1999a:15) states that teachers in multi-grade classroom face difficulty of organising the national curriculum to suit their teaching and learning needs, teachers are not trained in multi-grade teaching methodologies, drop-out rate is very high, lack of textbooks, bad classroom conditions and pupils languages barrier. Juvane and Daniel in Joubert [sa: 9] add to this by stating that the national curriculum is designed for mono-grade teaching and lacks relevance in multi-grade classrooms.

Difficulties faced by educators teaching multi-grade classrooms emanates from curriculum design, the teachers themselves, learning and teaching processes, school conditions, learners, teacher training, textbooks and support. UNESCO (1989), Vincent (1999a), CREATE (2008) and Juvane and Daniel in Joubert [sa] identify curriculum design as one of the difficulties faced by teachers in multi-grade classrooms because the curriculum is designed for mono-grade classrooms. Teachers in multi-grade classrooms are expected to implement the curriculum for mono-grade classrooms and that creates quite a number of difficulties for the teachers involved.

UNESCO (1989) and Taole and Mncube (2012) identify teachers' perception about multi-grade teaching as one of the difficulties faced by teachers. Teachers do not see the value of multi-grade teaching and as a result lack commitment in the pedagogy (Taole & Mncube, 2012). According to UNESCO (1989), Vincent (1999), Taole and Mncube (2012) and Little [sa], teachers are faced with difficulty regarding classroom learning and teaching processes. Teachers are faced with difficulties regarding instructional management (UNESCO, 1989). Educators also are not conversant with the lesson planning requirements for multi-grade classrooms (Taole & Mncube, 2012). Little [sa] refers to change in grade combinations as a difficulty with classroom learning and teaching processes. Vincent (1999a) furthermore refers to the language barrier as a difficulty within classroom learning and teaching processes.

According to UNESCO (1989) and Vincent (1999a), school conditions are responsible for creating quite a number of difficulties for teachers in multi-grade schools. Space organisation and bad classroom conditions been identified as one of the difficulties relating to school conditions. UNESCO (1989), Vincent (1999a) and Little [sa] also state that learners are a difficulty faced by teachers in multi-grade classrooms. With this statement they refer to learners' behaviour problems, learners' absenteeism and drop-out rate as the difficulties teachers in multi-grade classrooms have to face.

UNESCO (1989), Vincent (1999), CREATE (2008) and Little [sa] state that teacher training programmes are meant for mono-grade teaching and teachers are not trained in the teaching of multi-grade classrooms. Vincent (1999a) and Little [sa] further state that the textbooks that are

used in multi-grade classrooms are meant for mono-grade classrooms and do not necessarily meet the requirements of multi-grade teaching. According to Taole & Mncube (2012), there is lack of support for multi-grade teachers. These are the most important challenges that must be addressed for the effective managing of teaching and learning in multi-grade classrooms.

The difficulties faced by teachers in multi-grade classrooms can be summarised as follows: difficulties emanating from teachers themselves, curriculum related difficulties, higher workload, lacking support, inappropriate training, and resources. The teachers who are not committed to their work create a difficulty in multi-grade classrooms because the learners will progress through different grades without gaining proper knowledge of the content that they were supposed to learn. Since the curriculum is meant for mono-grade classrooms, teachers may find it difficult to adapt it to suit multi-grade classrooms. The teachers end up not covering all the work because of a work overload. They are expected to keep a teacher's file for every subject they teach, containing all contents of applicable to the various subjects and different grades. Teachers must also prepare lesson plans, programmes of assessment and assessment tasks for every subject and grade.

The Subject Advisors who support multi-grade schools are not specialists in multi-grade teaching. The support and monitoring the teachers get thus is the same for multi-grade and mono-grade classrooms and makes it difficult for teachers to cope. Workshops are arranged for different subjects on the same day without consideration for teachers who teach more than one subject. Teachers were trained for mono-grade classrooms and textbooks are also meant for mono-grade classrooms. It becomes difficult for teachers to adjust their teaching strategies and adapt the textbooks to suit multi-grade classrooms. The next section aims to address strategies to overcome the difficulties the teachers face in multi-grade classrooms.

## **2.8 OVERCOMING DIFFICULTIES IN MULTI-GRADE CLASSROOMS**

Vincent (1999a:27) concludes that to meet the varied needs of multi-grade students, teachers need in-depth knowledge of child development and learning, and a larger repertoire of instructional strategies than most single-grade teachers possess. Teachers must be able to design

open-ended, divergent learning experiences accessible to students functioning at different levels and also know when to use homogenous and heterogeneous grouping and how to design cooperative tasks. They must be able to facilitate positive group interaction and to teach social skills and independent learning skills to individual students. According to Vincent (1999:32) teachers must also know how to plan properly and spend more time planning and preparing lessons to be effective in multi-grade classrooms.

Dean, Forester, Larkin, Stone, Taft and Wren in Muthayan (1999:155) believe that it is critical for the teacher to be organised and plan well. According to Muthayan (1999:156-157) teachers must frequently remind learners about the expectations of the lessons. Teachers should use peer tutoring to overcome some of the difficulties of multi-grade classrooms. Teachers' attitude must be positive towards their work.

Muthayan (1999:158) identifies teacher education and supportive principal and parent involvement as factors which can help to overcome difficulties in multi-grade classrooms. Mathot in Nawab and Baig (2001:167) argue that the government must establish a special unit to support multi-grade teaching and multi-grade settings should be given due status and recognition.

UNESCO (1989:17-18) suggests that curriculum planning and transaction, teacher training, institutional planning, classroom arrangement and school supervision can improve multi-grade school. Joubert (2010:6) further identifies six factors to improve multi-grade teaching, namely:

- arranging and organising instructional resources and the physical environment in order to facilitate student learning;
- independence and interdependence;
- developing and implementing lesson timetables and routines that promote clear, and predictable instructional patterns plan;
- develop and implement instructional strategies and routines that allow for a maximum of cooperative and self-directed student learning;
- employ teaching methods that will improve quality of instruction and;

- develop skills and strategies in learners that allow for a high level of independence and efficiency in learning individually or in combination with other learners, and develop skills and routines whereby learners serve as teachers to other learners within the same or across different grade levels.

Ramazan (2009:34) states that the trainees in multi-grade teaching indicated the following factors as facilitating factors in overcoming some of the difficulties of working in multi-grade classes: the small number of students, students' willingness for knowledge and learning, students' sincerity, students' competence to prepare materials and equipment as teachers, and familiarity with the people in villages. Joubert [sa: 10] suggests four guidelines for re-designing basic education content for learners in rural areas. The first guideline is that the curriculum must relate to local content, customs, livelihoods and rural development activities. Secondly, the curriculum must take due account of the teachers qualifications and training. In the third instance, the curriculum must make use of locally available skills, knowledge and other resources, and finally, need to respond to the expressed wishes of the community.

Taole and Mncube (2012:161) recommend that educators in multi-grade classrooms need to be equipped with planning skills. The Department of Education needs to re-train educators to adapt to multi-grade teaching in the classroom, and teaching materials that support multi-grade teaching should be made available. Allen [sa] identifies certain measures to be undertaken to improve the operation of multi-grade schools, for example, appropriate educational policies and legislation should be drawn up with regard to equipment and teaching materials, financial and professional advancement measures should govern the assignment of teachers to these schools in compensation for the isolation and difficulties they experience, and a plan is needed for the theoretical and practical pre and in-service training of teachers.

Muthayan (1995: 155-160) discusses the key to successful multi-grade teaching as: the teachers, teacher education and supportive principal and parent involvement. Muthayan states that teachers must have good organisational and planning skills, have clearly spelt out routines and expectations; possess proper knowledge of children's needs, the curriculum and instructional strategies, make use of peer tutoring, positive attitudes and good, personal qualities. UNESCO



(1989:94) further states that there is a need to develop models and teaching methodologies which are suited to multi-grade teaching, a need to develop a handbook on multi-grade teaching as resource material, provision of support services to multi-grade schools and their teachers, the use of technological devices, and the establishment of resource centres in the cluster schools for helping teachers in planning and teaching.

Mohlala (2010:31) states that provincial and district officials must be trained to enable them to conduct in-service training in multi-grade approaches for teachers in rural areas. Gower (2010:30) states that there should be a national policy on rural multi-grade teaching and it should look at the adaptation of the national curriculum statement to address the needs of these teachers. Teacher training at university should include multi-grade teaching and learner guidelines. There should be learning materials and resources for multi-grade schools. In-service training must be provided for teachers and officials to enable them to cope with the challenges they experience. Government should invest in these schools by providing good infrastructure such as working toilets, buildings, furniture and equipment. Teachers should also be reimbursed for the inconvenience of having to teach at these schools.

### **2.8.1 Issues to be addressed to overcome difficulties in multi-grade classrooms**

When different sources are looked into there are seven issues which need to be addressed to overcome difficulties in multi-grade classrooms.

#### **2.8.1.1 Training**

UNESCO (1989), Muthayan (1999) and Gower (2010) state that teacher education in multi-grade teaching can help teachers to overcome difficulties in multi-grade classrooms. Taole and Mncube (2012) state that the Department of Education needs to re-train educators to adapt to multi-grade teaching in the classroom. Allen [sa] agrees with Taole and Mncube (2012) on re-training the educators but Taole and Mncube goes further by including pre-service training. Mohlala (2010) states that provincial and district officials must be trained in multi-grade approaches. Training in multi-grade teaching can help teachers to overcome typical difficulties

faced by teachers in multi-grade classrooms. The number of Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) that offer programmes in multi-grade teaching must be raised. Teachers who teach in multi-grade classrooms must be encouraged to enroll for a qualification in multi-grade teaching. The Department of Basic Education (DBE) must offer bursaries to teachers to study programmes in multi-grade teaching. A module on multi-grade teaching must be included in every teacher training programme at junior degree level.

### **2.8.1.2 Curriculum**

Gower (2010) states that there must be a national policy on rural multi-grade teaching and it must be adapted to address the needs of teachers teaching in multi-grade classrooms. UNESCO (1989) agrees with Gower (2010) that curriculum planning and discussions for multi-grade teaching must take place. Joubert [sa] further agrees with Gower (2010) that the curriculum must be adapted to be relevant to the environment of the school. In short, curriculum specialists must adapt the curriculum to meet the needs and requirements of a multi-grade teaching set-up. In the long run curriculum planners must develop a curriculum suitable for multi-grade classrooms.

### **2.8.1.3 Support in multi-grade teaching**

Muthayan (1999) states that supportive principal and parents' involvement can help to overcome difficulties in multi-grade classrooms. UNESCO (1989) and Mathot in Nawab and Baig (2001) agree that there is a need for support services to support multi-grade teaching. Taole and Mncube (2012) state that educators in multi-grade classrooms need support with planning skills. District officials must undergo intensive training on multi-grade teaching. The district office must establish a section that deals with multi-grade schools. Multi-graded schools must receive specialised support, in other words, support that is suitable to multi-grade teaching.

### **2.8.1.4 Teachers**

Vincent (1999c), Muthayan (1999) and Dean et al. in Muthayan (1999) agree that teachers play an important role in overcoming the difficulties of teaching in multi-grade classrooms. Vincent

(1999c) states that teachers must meet the varied needs of multi-grade students, have in-depth knowledge of child development and learning, and be able to use a variety of teaching strategies. Vincent (1999c), Muthayan (1999), Dean et al. in Muthayan (1999) and Joubert (2010) agree that it is critical for the teacher to be organised and to plan well to be effective in a multi-grade classroom. Ramazan (2009) and Joubert (2010) raise the issue of learners acting as teachers to other learners and Muthayan (1999) states that teachers' positive attitude towards their work can help to overcome difficulties faced by the teachers in multi-grade classrooms. Teachers who teach in multi-grade classrooms must be supported with regard to planning, classroom management and organisational skills, the use of resources and teaching strategies. This will improve their confidence and their teaching practice. An incentive such as a rural allowance must meet the needs of teachers for teachers to be motivated. Teachers' attitude towards their work must be positive.

#### **2.8.1.5 Teaching methods**

Vincent (1999c) states that the multi-grade teacher must have a larger repertoire of instructional strategies than most single-grade teachers possess. Muthayan (1999) further states that teachers must use peer tutoring to overcome some of the difficulties of teaching in multi-grade classrooms. Joubert (2010) states that teachers must develop and implement instructional strategies that allow for cooperative and self-directed student learning to take place, and employ teaching methods that will improve the quality of instruction. UNESCO (1989) states that there is a need to develop teaching methodologies suited to multi-grade teaching. Workshops showing various teaching methods that the teacher can use and incorporate in multi-grade classroom teaching must be organised regularly. The teacher must use different teaching strategies such as peer tutoring, self-study, group work and the textbook method in the multi-grade classroom.

#### **2.8.1.6 Classroom management**

UNESCO (1989) and Joubert (2010) state that classroom arrangement, i.e. arranging and organising instructional resources and the physical environment, can improve a multi-grade school. Ramazan (2009:34) further states that the small number of students, students' willingness

for knowledge and learning, and students' sincerity can be regarded as important factors in overcoming difficulties of working in multi-grade classes. Muthayan (1995) states that the teacher must have good organising and planning skills, as well as clearly defined routines and expectations. Joubert (2010) identifies developing and implementing lesson timetables and routines that promote clear predictable instructional patterns plan as factors that will help to overcome the difficulties that teachers in multi-grade classrooms experience. The teachers must furthermore be supported with regard to developing time tables for multi-grade classrooms. Learners must be given responsibilities such as the distribution of resources, group leadership, class leadership and time keepers as a way of assisting the teacher.

### **2.8.1.7 Managing resources**

UNESCO (1989:94) states that there is a need to develop a handbook on multi-grade teaching and resource material. Gower (2010) agrees with UNESCO (1989) that there should be learning materials and resources for multi-grade schools. Joubert (2010) identifies organising instructional resources as a factor to improve multi-grade teaching. Ramazan (2009) states the factors in overcoming difficulties of working in multi-grade classes as students' competence to prepare materials and equipment. Taole and Mncube (2012) recommend that teaching materials that support multi-grade teaching should be made available and UNESCO (1989) recommends the use of technological devices and the establishment of resource centres in the cluster schools to help overcome the resource problem. Resources for multi-grade classrooms must be developed. The DBE must develop workbooks which learners can use in all the subjects in multi-grade classrooms. Training must be organised for teachers on how to use the resources.

## **2.9 CONCLUSION**

In this chapter the origins of multi-grade teaching, advantages and disadvantages of multi-grade teaching, how teachers teach in multi-grade classrooms, how learners learn in multi-grade classrooms, the use of resources in multi-grade classrooms, difficulties faced by educators

in multi-grade classrooms and how educators can overcome these difficulties. This chapter tried to answer the research questions and will be used to compare the present situation in multi-grade classrooms in the Thabo Mofutsanyana Education District.

The next chapter will look into the research design and methodology. An introduction, research design and methodology, qualitative research design and method, data collection, sampling, data analysis, ethical considerations, trustworthiness of the study, reliability and validity of the research, as well as a summary and conclusion will be dealt with in detail in the next chapter. Discussions will be linked to literature on research design and methodology.

# **CHAPTER 3**

## **RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY**

### **3.1 INTRODUCTION**

The previous chapter provided the theoretical framework within which the research should be understood. The literature review in Chapter two provided a theoretical framework on:

- The origin of multi-grade teaching;
- Advantages and disadvantages of multi-grade teaching;
- Teaching in multi-grade classrooms;
- Learning in multi-grade classrooms;
- The use of resources in multi-grade classrooms;
- Difficulties faced by educators in multi-grade classrooms; and
- Overcoming difficulties in multi-grade classrooms

The literature review provided information on the five sub-problems of the research as stated in Chapter one. This chapter will present a detailed discussion on the research design and methods, data collection, sampling, data analysis, ethical consideration of the research, trustworthiness of the study, reliability and validity of the research, and a summary and conclusion.

### **3.2 RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY**

Tustin et al. (2005:82) state that the research design represents the master plan that specifies the methods and procedures for collecting and analysing the required information. McMillan and Schumacher (1997:33) define the research design as the plan and structure of investigation used to obtain evidence to answer the research questions. The research design describes how the study is conducted and the methods used to collect data.

Tustin et al. (2005:83-87) classify research approaches by data collection method under three categories, namely exploratory research, descriptive research and casual research. Exploratory

research is used to search for insight into the general nature of the problem and is useful for establishing priorities among research questions. Descriptive research is used when the underlying relationship of the problem area is already known or understood. Casual research is used to investigate whether one variable causes or determines the value of another variable. In this study the exploratory research is used because the researcher needs insight on how teachers manage teaching and learning in multi-grade classrooms.

According to Leedy and Omrod (2005:94), many researchers categorise research studies into two broad categories, i.e. quantitative research and qualitative research. Leedy and Omrod (2005:94) state that quantitative research is used to answer questions about relationships among measured variables with the purpose of explaining, predicting and controlling phenomena, while qualitative research is used to answer questions about the complex nature of phenomena with the purpose of describing and understanding the phenomena from the participants point of view.

In this study the qualitative approach was used in order to understand how teaching and learning is managed in multi-grade classroom from the perspective of the people who are working in multi-graded schools.

### **3.3 QUALITATIVE RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHOD**

According to Schulze (2002:56), qualitative researchers aim to understand society and the meaning that people attach to everyday life. According to Leedy and Omrod (2005:133), qualitative research focuses on phenomena that occur in natural settings and the phenomena are studied in all their complexity. Qualitative research was preferred for this study because the researcher was concerned with the social phenomenon from the participants' perspective. The researcher also intended to discover how the participants interpret their working environments, in this study is multi-grade classrooms in Thabo Mofutsanyana Educations District, Harrismith and Warden farm schools. This study seek to elicit data that pertains to views, attitudes of teachers, hence qualitative methods were used to allow participant teachers to provide information without limitations. In this study the people who work in a multi-grade environment attached meaning to

their work. Multi-grade teaching with all its complexity was looked into. The information was gathered from participants teaching in multi-grade schools.

Peshkin in Leedy and Omrod (2005:134) gives the purpose of qualitative research as: description, interpretation, verification and evaluation. In this study people working in multi-grade schools revealed the nature of the multi-grade situation at their schools. The participants enabled the researcher to gain new insight about multi-grade teaching. The theories and assumptions about multi-grade teaching were verified by the participants and the researcher was able to judge the practices in multi-graded schools. Participant teachers working in multi-graded schools described how multi-grade teaching was applied, how learners learnt in multi-grade classrooms, the use of resources in multi-grade classrooms, difficulties faced by educators in multi-grade classrooms and how educators could overcome those difficulties.

### **3.3.1 Characteristics of a qualitative research design**

Schulze (2002:56) states that a qualitative research design has the following characteristics:

- The design is flexible and may change during the research.

The researcher changed the scheduled date of one participant because the participant was ill on the day of the interview. Another participant was not ready on the day of the interview and the date of the interview was rescheduled.

- Qualitative research requires data that is rich in the description of people and places.

The participants were people who are rich in information about the multi-grade teaching. The average years of teaching experience of participants in multi-grade teaching was nineteen years. The most experienced participant had thirty four years teaching experience in multi-grade teaching. The least experienced participant had three years teaching experience in multi-grade teaching.



- More than one method of data collection is used. Triangulation of methods improves the trustworthiness of the data.

Triangulation was not applied in this study but data was collected from three different groups of participants.

- Data collection needs to be continued until the data is saturated. Data collection is continued until the researcher does not come across new information.

In-depth interviews were conducted until the researcher was no more getting any new information from the participants.

- The research does not start with a hypothesis but with a research question. The investigation ends with patterns derived from the responses of participants.

The research question was stated in Chapter one and the responses of the participants were used to develop patterns of the study.

- The researcher is the main data collection instrument.

The researcher was highly involved in data collection by personally conducting the interviews. In other words, the researcher in this study collected data himself.

- Qualitative research is context bound. It is conducted in the natural setting of the participants.

The interviews took place at the schools of the participants for the participants to be in their natural setting, namely a multi-grade environment.

The characteristics of qualitative research as stated above formed the basis of the design of this

study.

### **3.3.2 Qualitative research designs**

Leedy and Omrod (2005:135-143) identify five common qualitative research designs, namely case study, ethnography, phenomenological study, grounded theory study and content analysis. Case studies are suitable for learning more about a little or poorly understood situation. Ethnography is used for gaining an undertaking of complexities of a particular, intact culture. A phenomenological study attempts to understand people's perceptions, perspectives and understanding of a particular situation. Grounded theory study is used when current theories about the phenomenon are either inadequate or non-existent. Content analysis is performed on forms of human communication, including books, newspaper, films, television, etc.

In congruence, Bless, Higson-Smith and Sithole (2013:352-353) identify the following six qualitative research methodologies: content analysis, grounded theory, phenomenological analysis, narrative analysis, discourse analysis and ethnography. Bless et al. concur with Leedy and Omrod (2005) on the definitions of content analysis, grounded theory, phenomenological analysis and ethnography. Bless et al. (2013:353) define narrative analysis as the research method where the researchers analyse stories or narratives people tell about themselves, their lives, and their world, while discourse analysis investigates the relationships between people, the things that can and cannot be said in relationships and specific contexts, the types of language, as well as the choice of words that people use.

Further Zikmund, Babin, Carr and Griffin (2013:136), identify the major categories of qualitative research include phenomenology, ethnography, grounded theory and case studies. Zikmund et al. (2013:136-140) concur with Leedy and Omrod (2005) and Bless et al. (2013) on definitions. In this study the phenomenological study is used because the researcher needs to understand multi-grade teachers' perceptions, perspectives and understanding of their practices and experiences. Leedy and Omrod (2005:139) state that phenomenological researchers depend almost exclusively on lengthy interviews with carefully selected participants. Participants who

are information rich in multi-graded schools were selected. The researcher conducted interviews which did not take longer than forty five minutes per interview.

### **3.3.3 Phenomenological study**

Leedy and Omrod (2005:139) state that the phenomenological study rest as much in the hands of participants as in the hands of the researcher. Further state that a typical sample size ranges from 5 to 25 individuals and the researcher must suspend any pre-conceived notions or personal experiences that may unduly influence what the researcher hears the participants saying. The researcher listened as participants described their everyday experiences related to the phenomenon. The researcher was alert in participants' expressions and questions. The researcher showed interest in the responses of participants when they described their experiences in multi-graded schools. The researcher observed and took note of any expressions from the participants. The researcher was neutral at all the times and did not put words into the mouths of participants. The sample of nine participants was constituted from a population of seventy nine teachers.

### **3.4 SAMPLING**

Herselman and du Toit (2003:40) state that sampling is often used when it is impossible or impractical to consult all the people in a specific category as indicated by the research project. Tustin et al. (2005:337) define a sample as a subset of a population and population as the total group of people or entities from whom the information is required. In this study the population will be all the teachers who are teaching in multi-graded schools in Harrismith and Warden, Thabo Mofutsanyana Education District, Free State Province. It was impossible to interview all the teachers who teach in multi-graded schools in this particular district. A sample was thus used to conduct this research study. Tustin et al. (2005:12) state that a sample is preferred above a census because it is cost effective, and a complete census may result in destruction or contamination of the entire population. Tustin et al. further state that a sample is also more confidential and more accurate.

### 3.4.1 Sampling methods

Schulze (2002:58-59) identifies the different categories of sampling as maximum variation, extreme case, snowball and site selection. In maximum variation sampling the sub-units of the research problem are represented. For an extreme case sampling participants who are rich in information are selected. In snowball sampling the successive participant or group is named by the preceding participant or group. In site selection the people who are involved in a particular event are located and used as the sample.

In this study maximum variation sampling and extreme case sampling was used because sub-units of the research problem were represented and information rich people were selected. People who worked at multi-graded schools were selected, i.e. information rich people. A sample consisted of the principals who work at multi-grade schools, teachers teaching in multi -grade schools where there was more than one teacher at the school and teachers who taught at multi-grade schools where the teacher was working alone. This sample ensured that sub-units of various categories of people who work at multi-grade schools were represented.

Tustin (2006:98) states that the sampling method involves the specification of whether a probability or non-probability approach will be applied to draw the sample. A probability sample plan is a plan in which everyone in the country has a chance of being included in the sample. Non-probability samples are instances in which chances of selecting members from the population in the sample are unknown and sampling relies on the discretion of the researcher. In this study a non-probability sample was used because the sampling relied on the discretion of the researcher and not everyone who taught at a multi-grade school in the Thabo Mofutsanyana Education District in the Free State Province had a chance of being included in the sample.

Tustin (2006:98) identifies and discusses the five non-probability sampling methods, namely convenience sampling (whereby the sample members are chosen on the basis of being readily available or accessible); judgmental sampling (where members of the sample are chosen based on the judgment of the researcher to include them or not); purposeful sampling (whereby the members are intentionally selected with a specific objective or purpose in mind); quota sampling

(whereby the sample members are chosen on the basis of satisfying pre-specified criteria to apply to the population); and snowball sampling (whereby the sampling members are initially chosen judgmentally or through a probability sampling method, and are subsequently asked to identify others with the desired characteristics).

Leedy and Omrod (2005:145) assert that qualitative researchers are intentionally non-random in their selection of data, i.e. they use purposeful sampling. Purposeful sampling is when individuals who will yield the most information about the topic under investigation are selected. In this study, purposeful sampling was used because teachers who were information rich about multi-grade teaching were selected as the participants. The researcher chose the participants according to the way the researcher knew the participants' level of understanding about multi-grade teaching. In this study purposeful sampling was used because the researcher intentionally selected sample members from people who work in multi-grade schools and who were able to answer questions on multi-grade teaching.

### **3.4.2 The sample size**

Schulze (2002:57) states that the saturation point is normally reached after about eight participants have been interviewed. Leedy and Omrod (2005:139) further state that a typical sample size for a phenomenological study is 5 to 25 individuals. The sample of nine teachers who are involved with multi-grade teaching was intentionally selected. The sample of nine teachers was selected based on the teachers' years of experience in multi-grade teaching, from Thabo Mofutsanyana Education District, Harrismith and Warden schools. This sample was considered a representative of the population of seventy nine teachers in fifty nine farm schools. Three school principals at multi-grade schools were selected based on their experiences and knowledge of multi-grade schools. Three teachers who taught at multi-grade schools where there were more than one teacher were selected, and three teachers who taught at one-teacher schools that use multi-grade teaching were selected. The participants were selected because they shared certain characteristics which were significant for the study.

### **3.5 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS**

Schulze (2002:17) states that whether a quantitative or a qualitative research approach is used, it is important for the researcher to conduct research in an ethically responsible way. Ethical consideration is of particular importance in qualitative research where the researcher is the main instrument and becomes immersed in the context of the research. Tustin (2006:14) states that ethics, or what is deemed acceptable or unacceptable in human conduct, has become a key issue in research and is central to the execution of research projects. To ensure that the study's findings were not used to the detriment of those involved, the researcher has to be conscious of the ethical issues that pervade the research process and examine his personal philosophical orientation against those issues (Merriam, 2001:219).

Ethical clearance was obtained from the Research Ethics Committee (REC) of the University of South Africa before the commencement of data collection. Data was only collected once the ethical clearance was granted.

### **3.6 DATA COLLECTION**

Strauss and Myburgh (2000:66) state that collecting data in essence is a meeting between the researcher and the respondent, resulting in the researcher obtaining data from the respondent in the most effective way. Tustin (2006:56) states that once the researcher detects the need for primary research data and has formulated research objectives and data needs, the next step is to decide on an appropriate data collection method. In this study, the researcher collected data by conducting interviews with selected participants.

#### **3.6.1 Interviews**

Interviewer-administered personal or face-to-face interviews involve asking questions to a sample respondent (Tustin, 2006:58). The interviewer contacted the participants, asked questions and recorded the answers. The participants were expected to answer the questions put to them.

Schulze (2002:60) identifies three types of unstructured interviews, namely an open-ended interview, an unstructured interview with a schedule and an in-depth interview. In an open-ended interview pre-formulated questions are carefully arranged and put to all the interviewees in a fairly similar sequence. In an unstructured interview with a schedule, a schedule that contains a small number of themes or topics that the researcher wants to cover during the interviews is prepared. In an in-depth interview there are no questions pre-formulated or themes identified before the interview takes place. In this study the researcher used unstructured interviews with a schedule. A different sequence of questions was used for each interview. Questions that were not part of the schedule and follow-up questions were also asked. The longest interview lasted for 37 minutes and four seconds, and the shortest interview lasted for 18 minutes and 35 seconds. The time spent on all nine interviews was four hours and seven seconds. Interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim. The interview schedule is attached as **Appendix A**.

Ethical procedures considered before organising interviews were observed. Permission to conduct research by interviewing school principals was obtained from the Director of Strategic Planning and Research Directorate in the Free State Department of Education. Permission was also obtained from the principals of the teachers who were interviewed. Participants were requested to sign informed consent forms before participating in the study. Permission to use a tape recorder to record the interviews was requested from the participants.

Participants were given adequate information on the aims of the research, the procedures that were followed, advantages and disadvantages for the respondents, credibility of the researcher and how the results will be used so that they can make an informed decision on whether they want to participate in the research study or not. Participants were told about the aim of this research as stated in section 1.4.1. Participants will be told, in writing, about the procedure that the interviews will follow, the duration of the interviews and the venues of the interviews. Participants will also be made aware that participation was voluntarily and they could withdraw their participation at any time.

The researcher gave the participants all the information they needed before they took part in the study. Participants were allowed to ask for clarity on any information that they were not sure of before their participation in this study. No information that possibly may link the participants to the study was used.

Arrangements were made with the schools of the participants to organise a suitable venue for the interviews to be conducted. The venue was a room where the participants felt comfortable and free to talk. The venues were in such a way that the interviews were conducted without interruptions and distractions. The reason why the schools where the respondents were working were used was because a multi-grade environment was needed and their schools were their “natural setting” where they felt comfortable.

### **3.6.2 The interview process**

The researcher prepared thoroughly before embarking on the interviews. Chapter 1 and Chapter 2 of this study were read before embarking on the interviews. The participants were asked to fill in a consent form and no one was coerced into the interviews (see **Appendix E**). They were made aware that they were free not to answer any question they were not comfortable with answering. The researcher adhered to the following ethics and values, respect for teachers, providing participants with assurance of confidentiality and anonymity. The names of the participants and their schools would not be disclosed, and no leading information that could attach the participants to some of the responses in the study was used.

The researcher began the interview with small talk to break the ice and made the participant feel comfortable. The researcher was courteous at all times during the interviews. The researcher showed interest in the responses of the participants even when the researcher had a different view or opinion, and did not put words in the mouth of the participant. The researcher did not make any judgment during the interviews. Long and complicated sentences were avoided to ensure that the participant understood the questions and answered what was asked.



### 3.7 DATA ANALYSIS

The researcher did not falsify figures deliberately, withheld information, altered research results, or ignored pertinent data. The researcher maintained integrity at all times by giving all the information to the participants. Leedy and Omrod (2005:150) state that a data analysis spiral is equally applicable to a wide variety of qualitative studies. The data analysis spiral involves the organisation, perusal, classification and synthesis of data. Analysis involves breaking up the data into manageable themes, patterns, trends and relationships (Mouton, 2001:108).

According to Schulze (2002:14), the aim of analysis and interpreting research findings is to increase validity of the research by ensuring that errors and inaccuracies are eliminated. Schulze (2005:15) further states that there is no one correct method of qualitative data analysis. The two methods of qualitative data analysis identified by (Schulze, 2002:63-66) are Johnson and Christenson's method and Tesch's method. The method of Johnson and Christenson for data analysis follows a bottom-up strategy by starting with the lowest level categories closest to data. Tesch's method follows steps to analyse data. In this study, Tesch's method was followed.

Strauss and Myburgh (2000:64) state that a descriptive method of analysis as suggested by Tesch (1990) can be used to analyse qualitative research. The analysis is aimed at identifying units of meaning or themes. The steps in Tesch's method as identified by De Vos et al. in (Schulze, 2002:65-66) were followed as follows: The transcripts were read and ideas as they come to mind were jotted down while the transcripts were being read. After reading the transcripts the best interview was selected. Interviews of other participants were read again and were put in a list of different topics. Similar topics were clustered together. Major topics, unique topics and leftovers were identified. The same topics were grouped together. Relationships between categories were determined. The categories that were used were determined. Topics dealing with the same theme were put together. Recoding of data was done. The steps discussed were followed until all data collected had been placed and analysed correctly.

## **3.8 TRUSTWORTHINESS**

According to Bless et al. (2013:236), trustworthiness in qualitative research is done in terms of how much trust can be given to the research process and the findings. Strauss and Myburgh (2000:57) identify measures to ensure trustworthiness as credibility, transferability, reliability and confirmability. Schulze (2002:79) identifies measures to increase trustworthiness as credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability. Bless et al. (2013:238) state that when credibility, dependability, transferability and confirmability are all high the research is highly trustworthy or of a high quality.

This researcher strived to achieve high trustworthiness through credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability.

### **3.8.1 Credibility**

According to Schulze (2002:79), credibility demonstrates that the research was conducted in such a way that the phenomenon was accurately described. Bless et al. (2013:236) state that credibility seeks to convince that the findings depict the truth of the reality under study or that the findings make sense. Strauss and Myburgh (2000:57) state that credibility refers to accountability for the entire research process and includes actions in preparation of the field of research, authority of the researcher keeping a reflexive journal, participants' control of the data, and the peer group evaluation. The researcher wrote truthfully about the findings. The research process followed the planned process and the researcher can defend the design and methodology choices. Data obtained from the interviews will be compared with the data collected from the literature review.

### **3.8.2 Transferability**

Strauss and Myburgh (2002:57), Schulze (2002:79) and Bless et al. (2013:237) agree that transferability refers to the extent to which the results of the research can be applied in similar contexts. In this study the information about the context of the research was given. The research

process was explained thoroughly so that other researchers can follow similar steps when they conduct a similar research.

### **3.8.3 Dependability of the research**

Bless et al. (2013:237) state that when the research describes exactly how data was collected, recorded, coded and analysed and can put good examples to illustrate the process, it is trusted that the results are dependable. Schulze (2002:79) and Strauss and Myburgh (2000:57) agree that dependability refers to whether the findings would produce the same results if the enquiry is replicated in a similar context with the same subjects. Strauss and Myburgh (2000:58) also refer to dependability as reliability. The researcher already explained how data was collected, recorded, coded and analysed. The researcher conducted the research in such a way that even if another researcher conducts it under similar conditions and with the same participants, the same results would be obtained.

### **3.8.4 Conformability**

Schulze (2002:79) concurs with Strauss and Myburgh (2000:58) that conformability is used to prevent the researcher from being biased. Bless et al. (2013:237) state that confirmability requires that other researchers or observers must be able to obtain similar findings by following a similar research process in a similar context. The researcher was not biased during the research project as personal feelings and preferences were eliminated during the research process. Data collected was transcribed as it was and analysed properly.

## **3.9 RELIABILITY AND VALIDITY OF THE RESEARCH**

Bless et al. (2013:221) state that once a researcher has identified the constructs or variables that are important to a particular study, it is necessary that they be operationalised in order to be measured. The principles of reliability and validity are used to evaluate such measurements. Merriam (2001:198) states that in qualitative research, conducting the investigation in an ethical manner ensures validity and reliability. Validity and reliability are achieved when the research

project is carried out according to the identified research design and methodology. Ethical consideration must take place to achieve validity and reliability.

### **3.9.1 Reliability of the research**

Merriam (2001:205) defines reliability as the extent to which the research findings can be replicated. Strauss and Myburgh (2000:56) define reliability as the degree of consistency or stability of data collected by the same or a similar instrument on occasions when theoretically produce the same results. Bless et al. (2013:222) concur with Merriam (2001) on the definition of reliability. Reliability in this study was achieved because the research project was carried out in such a way that even if another researcher conducts a similar research study he/she will achieve similar results if a similar context was used. The research followed a planned research process. The participants were people who were information rich about the phenomenon. The researcher used audio-tape to record data and kept it safely. The notes and all data collected were preserved by the researcher for auditing by an independent person.

### **3.9.2 Validity of the research**

Schulze (2002:79) states that validity in qualitative research refers to the degree to which explanations of phenomena match the realities of the world. In congruence Merriam (2001:201) states that internal validity deals with how well research findings match reality. The researcher ensured that the findings of the study gave the realities about teaching and learning in multi-graded schools interviewing different groups of people working in multi-grade schools. The researcher guarded against his bias when collecting and analysing data.

## **3.10 SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION**

In this chapter the research design and methodology, qualitative research design and methodology, sampling, ethical considerations, data collection, data analysis, trustworthiness and reliability and validity of the research were discussed. This chapter gave an extensive account on how the research process unfolded and on the trustworthiness of the results.

The next chapter will look into a discussion and presentation of the findings based on data collected. The results will also be analysed and interpreted.

## **CHAPTER 4**

### **DISCUSSION AND PRESENTATION OF THE FINDINGS**

#### **4.1 INTRODUCTION**

In Chapter 3 the research design and methodology, qualitative research design and methodology, sampling, ethical considerations, data collection, data analysis, trustworthiness, reliability and validity of the research, a summary and conclusion were presented. It also provided a clear plan on how the research was conducted. This chapter presents, analyse and interpret the findings of the research. This chapter presents or discusses issues, themes that were identified during data analysis. The following themes, issues on multi-grade classrooms teaching unveiled the prevalence of divergent views or perspectives. The advantages of multi-grade classrooms, the disadvantages of multi-grade classrooms, the reasons for using multi-grade classrooms, teaching in multi-grade classrooms, learning in multi-grade classrooms, the usage of the available resources in multi-grade classrooms, the difficulties faced by teachers in multi-grade classrooms, what can be done to assist teachers with the problems in multi-grade classrooms and a conclusion will be dealt with in this chapter. The next section provides information about the participants and their schools.

#### **4.2 PARTICIPANTS IN THE INTERVIEW**

In this study, as indicated in chapter three (cf. 3.4.1) purposeful sampling was used as a strategy for selecting the participants. Information about the participants gives an understanding about the experience of participants, their qualifications, training in multi-grade teaching and the subjects taught by the participants.

##### **Participant 1**

The participant had been teaching at the same school since completing her studies at an institution of higher learning. She was trained as an FET school teacher and specialised in

teaching English and Life Orientation (LO). She was teaching Mathematics and English in grade four to grade nine, and LO in Grade seven to Grade nine. She was also previously responsible for teaching Sesotho and Afrikaans in Grade four to Grade nine. The participant was not trained for the phases she was teaching. She was also teaching one subject she was not trained in and in the past has taught more than one subject without being trained to do so. She had been exposed to multi-grade classrooms since starting her career as a teacher.

### **Participant 2**

The school she was teaching at was the second school she worked at since completing her studies at an institution of higher learning. She was trained as a primary school teacher and specialised in teaching Geography, History, Biology and Southern Sotho. At the first school she was responsible for teaching all Foundation Phase (FP) subjects. At the school that she is currently employed at, she was teaching all the Intermediate Phase (IP) subjects. The participant was not trained in multi-grade teaching or all of the subjects she was teaching. She was trained in teaching Southern Sotho, Social Science and one part of Natural Science and Technology (NST). At the time of the interview the respondent was teaching Mathematics, English, Life Skills and the Technology part of NST which she was not trained in.

### **Participant 3**

The participant was appointed as a teacher without a teaching qualification. He enrolled for part-time studies and specialised in teaching Mathematics, Life Skills, IsiZulu and Natural Science. He was teaching all the FP and IP subjects. Other subjects he taught in the past are Afrikaans and Economics and Management Sciences. The participant was not trained in multi-grade teaching. He was teaching all the FP and IP subjects while he specialised in teaching Mathematics, Life Skills, IsiZulu and Natural Science. He was also teaching Social Science, English and the Technology section of NST without any training in these subjects.

#### **Participant 4**

She was appointed as a teacher without a teaching qualification. She later completed a three years full-time qualification at a teacher's college and specialised in teaching English and Social Science. She was teaching all the FP and IP subjects with the result that she had to teach a number of subjects she was not trained in. The respondent received an award in 2012 for being the best teacher in multi-grade teaching and another award in 2014 for assisting teachers in multi-grade teaching approaches for IP English. The participant attended in-service training workshops in multi-grade teaching but did not have a formal qualification in multi-grade teaching. She taught all the subjects (Life Skills, IsiZulu, Natural Science and Technology and Mathematics) in the FP and the IP while she specialised in teaching English and Social Science.

#### **Participant 5**

The participant was appointed to work as a teacher while he did not have a teaching qualification, but was studying part-time. He was trained as a primary school teacher and specialised in teaching Zulu, English and Mathematics. In the past he taught all the subjects from Grade one to Grade six. He was teaching English, Economics and Management Science (EMS) and Zulu from Grade seven to Grade nine. The respondent also attended a Canadian project on multi-grade teaching. He trained other teachers in multi-grade teaching although he had no formal qualification in multi-grade teaching. The participant started to work as the principal at the current school in 1999. The school has FP, IP and SP and four teachers. He was teaching EMS which he was not trained to teach.

#### **Participant 6**

The participant was trained as a secondary school teacher and specialised in teaching History and English. He taught all the subjects that were offered at the school where he was currently teaching. Currently, he was teaching English from Grade four to Grade six. He has been the principal at the current school since 1988, and the school offers FP, IP and Secondary Phase (SP) teaching. The participant was never trained in multi-grade teaching and in the past taught



subjects he was never trained to teach. Currently he was teaching the subject he specialised in, but not to the phase he received his training in.

### **Participant 7**

The participant had worked at the same school since completing her studies at an institution of higher learning. The participant trained as a primary school teacher and specialised in teaching English, Mathematics and Physical Science. She was currently teaching Zulu and Mathematics in Grade four to Grade six. In the past she taught History in Grade seven and Grade eight and Biology in Grade ten. She teaches Zulu which she was not trained in and she also had no training in multi-grade teaching.

### **Participant 8**

The participant had worked at the same school since completing her studies at an institution of higher learning. She is qualified as a secondary school teacher and specialised in Guidance and Afrikaans. She stated that she was a specialist in multi-grade teaching and helped other teachers in multi-grade teaching approaches. She was teaching all the subjects in Grade one to Grade six. She was responsible for teaching all the subjects although she specialised in teaching Guidance and Afrikaans. She was not trained to teach the phases she was teaching and had no formal training in multi-grade teaching.

### **Participant 9**

The participant had been employed at the same school since completing her studies at an institution of higher learning. She trained as a primary school teacher and specialised in teaching Mathematics and Physical Science. She continued her studies and qualified to teach Mathematics in secondary schools. She taught all the subjects in Grade four to Grade seven. She was teaching Mathematics and Natural Sciences in Grade seven to Grade nine. The participant taught Sesotho and Social Science which she was not trained in and she also never received any training in multi-grade teaching.

From the above it is clear that the participants were teaching many subjects and many grades, and were also responsible to teach subjects that they were not qualified to teach. The participants were also not exposed to any formal training in multi-grade teaching. One participant attended in-service training in multi-grade teaching and another attended Canadian Project training on multi-grade teaching. The findings confirm earlier research by UNESCO (1989), Vincent (1999a) and CREATE (2008) cf. 2.7, they indicated that teacher training programmes are meant for monograde teaching and teachers are not trained in multi-grade teaching. Three participants stated that they trained other teachers in multi-grade teaching.

Leedy and Omrod (2005:139) state that phenomenological researchers depend on information rich participants. The teaching experience of participants is important because the information from their past and present experiences is used in this study. Table 4.1 indicates the teaching experience in years of each participant.

**Table 4.1 Teaching experience in years**

<b>Years of experience</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>	<b>Cumulative frequency</b>	<b>Cumulative percentage</b>
3-10	<b>1</b>	<b>11.11</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>11.11</b>
11-20	<b>4</b>	<b>44.44</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>55.55</b>
21-30	<b>2</b>	<b>22.22</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>77.77</b>
31 and above	<b>2</b>	<b>22.22</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>100</b>

Table 4.1 indicates that only 11% of participants had teaching experience of less than ten years. The table indicates that the study was conducted with experienced participants. Table 4.2 indicates the teaching experience in years in multi-grade classrooms of each participant.

**Table 4.2 Teaching experience in years in multi-grade classrooms**

<b>Years of experience</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>	<b>Cumulative frequency</b>	<b>Cumulative percentage</b>
3-10	<b>1</b>	<b>11.11</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>11.11</b>
11-20	<b>4</b>	<b>44.44</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>55.55</b>
21-30	<b>3</b>	<b>33.33</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>88.88</b>
31 and above	<b>1</b>	<b>11.11</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>100</b>

Table 4.2 indicates that only 11% of the participants had experience of less than ten years teaching in multi-grade classrooms. The table indicates that the study used information rich participants. The comparison of Table 4.1 and Table 4.2 indicates that eight of the participants have worked only in multi-grade schools.

Table 4.3 indicates the number of learners at participants' schools. The number of learners at each school was important in order to understand the comments made by participant.

**Table 4.3 Number of learners at participants' schools**

<b>Number of learners at the school</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>	<b>Cumulative frequency</b>	<b>Cumulative percentage</b>
1-20	<b>3</b>	<b>33.3</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>33.33</b>
20-40	<b>1</b>	<b>11.11</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>44.44</b>
40-80	<b>1</b>	<b>11.11</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>55.55</b>
80 and above	<b>4</b>	<b>44.44</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>100</b>

According to Jones (2012) the national norm for pupil-teacher ratio in primary schools is 40:1 and 35:1 in secondary schools. Forty four percent of multi-grade schools in this study had pupil-teacher ratios which were below the national norm. Participant 2 stated that there were eleven learners in Grade one up to Grade six at her school and the school had two teachers, which

means on teacher was in excess at the school. Participant 4 stated that there were only seven learners at her school in Grade one up to Grade six. Participant 8 had twenty two learners at her school in Grade one up to Grade six. In the next section, the participants share success stories of learners from multi-grade classrooms. The success stories of learners in multi-grade classrooms are important in this study because they will prove that if multi-grade teaching is managed well the learners can be successful in life.

### **4.3 SUCCESS STORIES OF LEARNERS WHO CAME FROM MULTI-GRADED SCHOOLS**

Participants were asked whether they have success stories about their schools or learners who were in multi-grade classrooms and became successful in life. The multi-grade schools that took part in this study each had learners who succeeded in their studies after they finished school. The success stories of participants' schools or learners are shared below.

All the transcriptions in this study have not been changed and are presented as the actual true words spoken by the participants. Certain information has been omitted to ensure that the participants cannot be identified. Names which can linked to participants and make it easy to identify them have been omitted to uphold confidentiality.

*“I heard a lot of success stories about this school. There were learners before I came who excelled beyond measures coming from a school which is disadvantaged like this. There is another guy the only thing that prevented to go ahead with his studies is because he didn't have an ID. He was the best student ever from ... We got another one at ... in ... They even wrote us a letter not believing that this guy come from the farm school, he excelled”.*

It is clear from the extract above that Participant one is very proud about the performance of former learners of her school.

*“I have two learners. The first one is in ... now working. He finished grade 12 in ... and I was involved in his education, because I found that school for him and I paid hostel fees for him, the*

*school fees as well. He passed grade 12 with distinctions, he got eight distinctions in ... Now he is working but he was studying at University for four years. He is the captain at the sea; I don't know he even went to London”.*

Participant two eagerly shared the successes of two of the learners, one of which she was directly involved with regard to his education.

Participant three said that one of the highlights of his career is that most of the learners he taught were progressing in life and were not depended on their families. One of the learners even became a manager at his place of employment.

Participant four had helped a learner, who repeated Grade one five times, to progress in his school career. One of the learners she taught graduated as a teacher. Two learners were studying to obtain teaching qualifications at a university. One learner is employed at the Human Science Research Council (HSRC).

*“One is ... who is the manager at ... company and he also service me. The other one is a well-known police who is in ... I just forget his name”.* These were the words of respondent five when he talked about people he taught in multi-grade classrooms.

There were a number of learners whom Participant six taught who became successful but for the sake of this study only the learners he taught in multi-grade classrooms are mentioned. The participants said he had a few learners from his multi-grade classroom that joined teaching profession.

*“There are learners, one of them is working at factory of ..., he was studying at ... at university. Another is in ... he was doing law at ... University”* These are the words of Participant seven about the learners she taught in multi-grade classrooms.

Two learners who were taught by Participant eight in multi-grade classrooms became qualified teachers. One of the two learners travelled overseas as an incentive for good performance.

Participant nine said the following: *“There are so many things I can talk about, but presently, I can just say last time, or let me say during the beginning of this year, I was so proud that I met one learner I taught. She is a qualified doctor. She said she liked Maths the time I started teaching her Maths”*. This was one of the learners that the participants taught in a multi-grade classroom.

The progress made by learners who came from multi-grade classrooms showed that multi-grade classrooms played an important part in changing some people’s lives. The next sections report on themes and emerging themes from the study. In the next section the advantages of multi-grade classrooms will be discussed.

#### **4.4 ADVANTAGES OF MULTI-GRADE CLASSROOMS**

The participants were asked whether multi-grade teaching have the advantages. This question was asked to get the advantages of a well managed multi-grade classroom. The participants indicated that multi-grade classrooms had advantages for both the teachers and the learners.

##### **4.4.1 Advantages of multi-grade classrooms for teachers**

In the multi-grade classrooms the same topic or a common topic is taught in all the grades. This practice minimises the workload of the teachers, because they do not have to plan for every grade. Re-teaching can take place while learners progress to the next grade. The teachers are able to re-emphasise the topics that learners did not master in the junior grades. The participants mentioned these two advantages of multi-grade classrooms for teachers. The two advantages are new emerging information in this study, they are different from the advantages as discussed in chapter two (cf. 2.3.1). The participants further indicated that multi-grade classrooms have more advantages for learners than for the teachers. This is evident in the discussions below.

#### 4.4.2 Advantages of multi-grade classrooms for learners

The advantages for learners are the same as discussed in chapter two (cf. 2.3.1). Learners are taught the work of more than one grade at the same time with the result that they excel when the work is repeated in the next grade. Learners become more knowledgeable in the content of different grades. The learners can acquire the same knowledge from one teacher for more than one year.

Learners in multi-grade classrooms have the opportunity to learn the content of different grades in one year. Learners are exposed to the work of the previous grade and the next grade at the same time. They are thus afforded an opportunity to revise the work that they did not master properly in the previous grade. Learners in lower grades are able to answer the questions of higher grades.

Little (2004b:8) concludes that in Colombia, grade three learners in multi-grade classrooms performed well in Spanish. The participants stated that the language skills, especially in English, of Foundation Phase learners in a multi-grade classroom develop are better developed because they are exposed to the language content of Intermediate Phase learners. They become interested in the work of senior grade. Learners like to read and listen to stories because they are given more opportunities to read. Because learners in a multi-grade classroom have to work on their own at some stage their language skills are better developed.

Multi-grade classrooms afford learners the opportunity to be independent learners and cooperative learning is encouraged. Learners are able to cooperate with other learners when the teacher is busy with other grades or when the peer tutor is teaching them. This finding is supported by Jordan (2006:27), Vincent (1999d:x), Little (1995:57), Little (2004b:10) and Fyfe (2001:9). Participant eight said “*learners are able to work in teams even in real life where cooperatives are encouraged*”. This statement indicates that learners also learn life skills in multi-grade classrooms. Learners become independent learners because they are given the opportunity to work on their own.

Leadership skills among learners improve because learners debate among themselves without the teacher interrupting. Fyfe (2001:9) states that leadership skills for learners are enhanced.

*“If your class environment has been planned accordingly they also accidentally learn because you have some pictures on the wall and all that kind of stuff”* according to participant five. This participant further highlighted the importance of pictures displayed against the walls in multi-grade classrooms.

Learners in multi-grade classrooms acquire independency skills by working individually, cooperation skills by working in groups and leadership skills by teaching other learners and debating among them, the finding is supported by earlier research by (Fyfe, 2001:9). They are able to revise content that they did not grasp in the previous years. Learners in lower grades are able to tackle the questions meant for higher grades. Learners’ language skills are developed while they are in junior grades.

In a multi-grade classroom the content is dealt with in depth because learners are exposed to the content of the next grade. Participant three and Participant four both emphasised that the learners are exposed to the activities of the other grades and when they go to public schools they do well. Learners who are not performing well in a lower grade can progress to the next grade because the teacher will still have time to focus on the weaknesses of the learners in the next grade. The teacher has a chance to re-teach the topics that learners did not grasp properly in the previous grade. The discussions in this paragraph are the new emerging findings about the advantages of multi-grade classrooms.

Participant five emphasised that multi-grade classrooms have advantages if multi-grade teaching is done properly. Participant six stated that he does not see any advantages of multi-grade classrooms. Participant six mentioned the disadvantages of multi-grade classrooms; the other participant who mentioned the advantages of multi-grade classrooms also mentioned the disadvantages of multi-grade classrooms. The next section discusses the findings about the disadvantages of multi-grade classrooms.



## **4.5 DISADVANTAGES OF MULTI-GRADE CLASSROOMS**

The disadvantages for the both the teachers and the learners are discussed according to the views of the participants.

### **4.5.1 Disadvantages of multi-grade classrooms for teachers**

All the participants stated what was earlier concluded by Mulryan-Kyne (2014:12) and Vincent (1999b:x) in chapter two 2.3.2, that teachers teaching in multi-grade classrooms are overloaded with work because they teach many subjects. All the participants further stated that preparation of learning for all the subjects is hectic, this statement is supported by earlier research done by Muthayan (1999:147-150) cf.2.3.2. All the participants state that they are also unable to cover all the work that is prescribed for each grade. Teachers furthermore have to teach subjects that they often are not good at and that frustrates both the teachers and the learners.

Participant two said what is in the work of Mohlala (2010:31), that teachers do not have enough time to give individual attention to learners or supervise all the activities of learners. All the participants confirmed earlier findings by CREATE (2008), and Juvane and Daniel in Joubert [sa:9], cf.2.7, that the department officials treat both multi-grade classroom teachers and mono-grade classroom teachers in the same way. Teachers who teach in multi-grade classrooms are expected to use the same pace-setters as for mono-grade classrooms. Participant one stated that the requirements for different subjects make it difficult for teachers to use one topic because every subject has its own pace-setter and range of topics to be covered over a certain period of time.

Participant three identified a new emerging topic which the systemic problem of having to use a curriculum that was designed for mono-grade schools only puts a lot of pressure on teachers teaching in multi-grade classrooms. There is overcrowding in Grade one to Grade three at schools where there is more than one teacher who teach at the school. Schools accommodated all learners in Grade one to Grade three in one class because of lack of staff. Participant three said: *'Since there are no pre-schools on farms, we have to spend a lot of time teaching basic skills to*

*Grade one learners and the learners in higher grades are neglected, when you are busy with the young ones' and we don't have time to accommodate slow learners.*

This section highlighted that teachers are overloaded with work because they teach many grades and many subjects. Frustration levels are high because they have to teach subjects they are not comfortable teaching as they have not been trained in these subjects. Curriculum coverage is low in all the grades. Teachers have to spend more time on Grade one learners because there usually are no pre-schools in these areas. The subject advisors expect teachers teaching in multi-grade classrooms to do the work in the same way as their colleagues in mono-grade classrooms.

#### **4.5.2 Disadvantages of multi-grade classrooms for learners**

The following is a discussion on some of the disadvantages that multi-grade classrooms pose to learners. Participant one said: *'Learners are distracted from the activities or tasks they have to do because they end up listening to what you are saying to the other grades instead of concentrating on their work. When you give them work to write while you are busy teaching the other grades they write what you say in class which is irrelevant to what they write but relevant to other grades'*.

Participant two said: *'Learners do not receive quality education and end up with little knowledge of every subject and we add to this by teaching only the topics we know'*. This is confirmed by earlier research by Pancoe (2006: 22-24).

Participant two, Participant six and Pancoe (2006: 22-24) further states that learners are taught the curriculum which is not intended for them, e.g. Grade five learners are taught Grade six curriculum. Learners get bored when the same content they were taught previously is repeated. If the learner does not understand the teaching approaches of the teacher the learner is stuck with that teacher for a number of years and the learner's progress may be hampered.

From the above discussion it is clear that multi-grade classrooms have disadvantages for both the learners and the teachers. Learners lose focus of the work they do when the teacher is busy with other learners. The teacher teaches the topics he is comfortable with and learners are not exposed to all the topics in different subjects. Learners are taught content of the curriculum of a different grade. Learners are stuck with the same teacher for a number of years even if they do not understand his teaching style. Multi-grade classrooms have systemic disadvantages because the curriculum used is planned for mono-grade classrooms. Topics in different teaching plans are not structured in a way that will allow for a thematic approach in multi-grade classrooms. The classrooms are overcrowded because of a shortage of teachers.

Schools still use multi-grade classrooms while multi-grade classrooms holds the disadvantages discussed above. In the next section the reasons why schools still allow multi-grade classrooms are discussed.

#### **4.6 THE REASONS FOR USING MULTI-GRADE CLASSROOMS**

Participants were asked why they use multi-grade teaching at their schools. They said that there are quite a number of reasons why multi-grade teaching is still practiced in schools. Participant One and Participant nine said of the reasons is the lack of space. Participant two to Participant eight said the learner numbers was the reason, this was stated earlier by Little (2004b:4), Rural Education Newsletter (2010:4) and Wallace et al. (2001:8). Participant six said: *'The number of grades that a school offer increase but the facilities stay the same. In other schools the number of learners who attend school is relatively small but the learners are in different grades'*.

Participant three said: *'Because of the low number of population on farms, schools have a shortage of teachers and have to resort to multi-grade teaching'*.

Participants mentioned three reasons for using multi-grade classrooms, namely the number of learners, the number of teachers and the lack of space. Number of learners affects the number of teachers allocated to a school. If the number is low the Department of Education allocates few teaching posts to a school and the school is compelled to use multi-grade classrooms. It is also

true that if there are many learners, but the school buildings are insufficient, schools opt for multi-grade teaching to ensure that all the learners are accommodated in classrooms. The next section will look into how teaching takes place in multi-grade classrooms. In schools of all the participants, multi-grade teaching was not practiced for pedagogical reasons in contrast with what is stated by CREATE (2008).

## **4.7 TEACHING IN MULTI-GRADE CLASSROOMS**

One of the sub-questions of the research is to determine how teachers teach in multi-grade classrooms; the aspects related to it are discussed below. Chapter two cf. 2.4 discussed this sub-question.

### **4.7.1 Classroom organisation and arrangement**

Drinkwater (2002:1) states that one element of classroom is physical setting. Miller (1991b:4) identified classroom organisation as an instructional dimension affecting successful implementation of multi-grade teaching. All the participants said learners in multi-grade classrooms sit in groups. The classrooms have learning stations where different activities are done and a reading corner for learners to sit and read. Participant one, Participant two Participant five, Participant six, Participant seven and Participant nine said Grade one to Grade three learners are in the same class, Grade four to Grade six learners are in the same class. Participant one, Participant five, Participant six and Participant nine said Grade seven and Grade eight learners are in the same class and Grade 9 learners in their own mono-grade class at schools offering three phases. Participant three, Participant four and Participant eight said in one-teacher schools Grade one to Grade six learners are all in the same class.

When participant eight was asked how teaching takes place in her class, she responded as follows: *“Firstly, I will talk about the sitting arrangement of the learners. Learners are seated in a circle in a small group where the direct attention and observation of the teacher is available. With this type of sitting arrangement the learner get the opportunity to look at the teacher directly. Two, the horseshoe. This one is for direct teaching it pays to learners’ attention.*

*Learners have to direct the questions at each other. Three, mat, sometimes there is a mat. During the story telling, singing, news exchange the learners are divided according to their skills. Here, learners are grouped*". These discussions concur with the works of Merckx [sa], Wallace et al. (2001:47), Vincent (1999b:1) and Jordaan (2006:42).

Participant eight organised her class in a circle of small groups, a horseshoe and a mat. Learners are taught as a whole class and sit in their grade groups. Other multi-grade classrooms have a resources corner where learners can access resources for various subjects.

#### **4.7.2 Time tabling**

The participants stated that the time-table is prepared in such a way that there is one period for a particular subject for all the grades in one class, i.e. English period number four for Grade four to Grade six. All the learners are taught the same subject during the same period. Taole and Mncube (2012:160) concluded that lack of planning affects multi-grade teaching, and the conclusion is evident in these discussions. Participant two said that she does not follow time table, she teaches what she thinks she is left behind with. She said that she focuses on English and Mathematics because the Department of Education is focusing on these subjects.

Participant three, Participant four and participant eight said that in cases where there is a Foundation Phase and an Intermediate Phase in one class the periods for the Foundation Phase are at the same time as those of the Intermediate Phase, and they are taught by one teacher. When the subjects are the same they are taught at the same time but when they are different the teacher concentrates on the Intermediate Phase.

Participant four stated that, the time-table was available but it did not work well - it was there just for the sake of having it. The teacher takes two hours for every subject in the Intermediate Phase but during that time, learners in the other phase are not kept busy. Time tables are available and schools with more than one teacher do follow these time tables because every teacher must know when to attend a particular class. The school of Participant nine, a school with many teachers sometimes does not follow a time table because everyone wants to catch up.

From the above it is clear that the time table poses problems in a multi-grade classroom for various reasons. One reason is that every grade is not allocated its own time. Sometimes the time table cannot be followed because of slower learners.

### **4.7.3 Approaches to multi-grade teaching**

Teachers use different teaching approaches in their classes to achieve learning objectives, but Little (1995:19-21) claim that teachers may not be aware of different ways of organising the classroom. Participant five said that at the beginning of the year the staff come together to look for common topics in different subjects and different grades. All the participants stated that the thematic approach was helping if the topics were the same for different grades because if they had to teach individual topics they would not manage, this concurs with Muthayan (1999:107). In this approach when a number of learners from a particular grade do not understand the work, the teacher will pay special attention to that grade and that becomes waste of time for other classes.

Little (1995:19-21) discusses the approaches to multi-grade teaching and the participants said that when different topics need to be discussed the teacher will ensure that the other groups are kept busy while he is teaching a specific topic to a group. Another approach is to share the time allocated to the subject between different grades, although the focus will be on the lower grades because it is assumed that learners in higher grades will easily grasp the information.

Another option that a teacher can follow is the quasi-mono-grade approach as discussed by CREATE (2008:2) and Little et al. (2007:1), where the teacher starts with the lower grades and progress to the higher grades. The teacher teaches the classes as if they are mono-grade while they are multi-grade classes. The topics of different grades are taught during one period and each grade focuses on its work only.

Participants who teach at one-teacher schools stated that they follow the same pattern every day, namely starting with Mathematics.

The participants showed that they prefer the thematic approach, but at times they are unable to use it because the topics are not the same or not linked to different grades. They also make use of the quasi-mono-grade approach when the topics are different for each grade.

#### **4.7.4 Teaching methods**

Following is a discussion on the application of various teaching methods in multi-grade classrooms. Gunter and Schwab (2003:257) assert that communication must take place between learners and all learners must do their part. The Question-and-answer method is used to introduce the lesson. The teacher uses this method to determine the exiting knowledge that learners may have regarding a specific topic. The teacher then proceeds to the lecture method where learners are given information. The teacher uses the lecture method for comprehension in English and Social Science. The participants concur with Fraser et al. (1994:45) that the lecture method is also used in combination with charts and textbooks. Learners take notes while the teacher is using the lecture method. The teacher uses charts to explain what he is saying and uses the textbook to refer the learners to information discussed in class. The textbook method allows learners to read about a specific topic and answer the questions.

The emerging method from this study is that the teachers use gallery walks as a teaching method. Learners are given topics to study in groups and write their findings on flip charts. Each group put its chart up against the wall and other groups visit different charts to see what has been written. The groups will comment on the work done by the other groups and each group will make the necessary changes as suggested by the other groups.

Participant seven did not have anything to say regarding teaching methods. The teaching methods used by the other participants were mainly the question-and-answer, lecture, textbook and gallery walk methods.

#### **4.7.5 Curriculum coverage**

All the participants said that they the schools did not manage to cover the curriculum for the different grades as per the curriculum statements of the various subjects. Teachers did not teach the content as it appeared in the teaching plans of the various subjects. The teachers taught the topics they preferred and the subjects they regarded as important, i.e. those that were prioritised by the Department of Education. The schools of Participant one, Participant six and Participant nine organised Saturday classes to cover the outstanding work but the classes were not attended well because learners travel long distances to reach the school. Extra classes were disturbed by extra curricula activities. All the participants said that time did not allow the teachers to cover the curriculum.

The different requirements for each subject made it difficult to cover the curriculum. To add to this is the fact that in a multi-grade classroom the teacher was touching the curriculum of different grades at the same time. One respondent estimated curriculum coverage at sixty to seventy percent per year.

Participant five commented that multi-grade teaching is learner-centred and that made it difficult to cover curriculum.

Teachers teaching in multi-graded classrooms did not manage to cover the curriculum for different grades in a year. Long distances hindered learners' attendance of extra classes.

#### **4.7.6 Assessment**

All the participants said that learners in different grades are assessed differently even if the topic is the same. Each grade is assessed on the content for that specific grade. The level of assessment is varied according to the complexity of different grades. The textbooks guide teachers on questions for different grades.



In some instances when the class engages in informal activities the teacher uses the same activities for the entire class if the topic for all the grades is the same. Participant two, Participant three, Participant four, Participant seven and Participant nine said that some learners in the lower grades are able to respond to the questions of higher grades and some learners in higher grades struggle to respond to questions aimed at lower grades, which allows the teacher the opportunity to revise the content. Learners who are struggling to respond to questions are asked questions related to their grade.

Even when the thematic approach is used learners are assessed on the work appropriate to their respective grades. Learners in lower grades are able to respond to questions meant for higher grades Learners in higher grades at times are unable to respond to questions meant for lower grades.

#### **4.8 LEARNING IN MULTI-GRADE CLASSROOMS**

Learners have their own learning styles and it is important that the teacher ensures that he reaches all learners by applying various teaching methods. The teacher may use the learning opportunities that will be discussed below to reach different learners in class.

##### **4.8.1 Peer tutoring**

Muthayan (1999:1070, Wallace et al. (2001:25-26), Pancoe (2006:5) and Jordaan (2006:42) contend that peer tutoring is very important in a multi-grade classroom. Learners learn from their peers. The teacher may use peer tutoring when he is busy with something or in case of absenteeism. The teacher allows learners to learn from their peers while he is busy teaching some of the other grades. Peer tutoring takes place during shared reading and learners who struggle to pronounce words are helped by other learners. Fast learners are used to assisting other learners and some learners learn best when they are assisted by peer learners.

All the participants except participant six agreed that teachers in multi-grade classrooms cannot do well if they do not make use of peer tutoring. Peer tutoring exposes learners to styles different

than the teacher's. Learners learn freely from their peers. Peer tutors ensure that all the learners in the group do their work while the teacher is busy with other groups. Older learners are usually used as peer tutors. Peer tutoring helps the tutors to master the content and be responsible learners as they cannot teach the others if they had not mastered the content.

Participant nine said '*When we use peer tutors we must consider the pace of the learner, because learner can be very good working slowly and not complete his work*'. In one school the selection of peer tutors is a formal activity and the parents have to sign consent forms to allow their children to be peer tutors.

Participant six stated that peer tutoring did not work for learners.

#### **4.8.2 Independent learning**

Wallace et al. (2001) and Muthayan (1999:xvii) assert that independent learning is good in multi-grade classroom learning. Participant two and Participant two said independent learning is applied when learners have to practice reading. Learners read by themselves and give feedback to the bigger group. When the teacher has a double period of one hour, learners are given an opportunity to learn on their own and after thirty minutes they have to report on what they have learnt. If necessary, the teacher will correct the learners as they present the material they have learnt, but in most cases learners are able to grasp the content properly.

Learners use the library corner's books to learn independently while the teacher is busy teaching some of the other grades. Each learner is given a topic to read about and at the end each learner presents information on the topic that he had to read, to the class. The problem with self-directed learning is that learners often are noisy when they learn independently.

#### **4.8.3 Learning from family members**

Wallace (2001:40) recommends that teachers should not underestimate the community and parents. Participant one said that Grade six learners are heading their families, and since they are

the oldest persons in the family, they do not have older family members to learn from. In other cases parents cannot assist their children with homework because the parents are illiterate. Participant three said *'It is also true that many learners learn from their mothers because their fathers are not around they work away'*. Participants said that learners also learn from their elder brothers and sisters, especially subjects like English and Mathematics. Learners in most cases rely on the teacher. They learn about Zulu, Mathematics, History, dance, politics, and their culture from their family members.

#### **4.8.4 Cooperative learning**

Fraser et al. (1994:49) and Lichakane (2005:21) discuss cooperative learning while Fyfe (2001:13) elaborates on how cooperative learning is used in a multi-grade classroom. Participants stated that they use cooperative learning, learners learn in grade groups while the teacher is busy teaching other grades. Learners learn from other learners and they help each other. Group-work is predominant in multi-grade classrooms. Groups are formed according to learners' skills and class grade. Other groups are mixed with learners from different grades; learners are grouped according to their abilities.

#### **4.8.5 Learning styles**

Learners have different learning styles. Some learners learn easily through hearing information, others by seeing and others by doing. Learning styles used in multi-grade classrooms are discussed below. The discussions below confirms what has been presented by Jordaan (2006:15), Dreyer and Van Der Walt (1996:473).

##### **4.8.5.1 Visual learners**

Learners are allowed to use magazines to see pictures and create their own stories. Pictures and charts are used for learners with a visual learning style. Learners participate in gallery walks to see what other learners have written and done on their posters. Learners learn through reading in English and seeing the shapes in Mathematics.

#### **4.8.5.2 Auditory learners**

Participant one said that auditory learners are the learners who benefit more in class because the teachers talk in most cases in class. Participant three uses a radio in class for learners to learn. Teachers would like to have radio and tape recorders to cater for auditory learners. The lecture method addresses the needs of auditory learners.

#### **4.8.5.3 Kinesthetic learners**

Kinesthetic learners are learners who learn by touching objects. Participant nine and Participant seven said that shapes such as squares, triangles, rectangles and circles are used in Mathematics to cater for these learners. Participant two said that kinesthetic learners were the ones who were suffering in her class because she did not have time for that.

Participant nine said that learners had a Technology resource kit with a number of apparatus they can touch. The teacher gave the kinesthetic learners an opportunity to go in front of the class to demonstrate to other learners how things are done in Mathematics. Learners used thermometers and measuring scales to learn mathematical concepts and some learners even built their own prisms in the Mathematics class.

### **4.9 THE USAGE OF AVAILABLE RESOURCES IN MULTI-GRADE CLASSROOMS**

Participant one remarked as follows when asked how the available resources are used in multi-grade classrooms. *“They share, Sir, they share. Even if we do have textbooks, they are little, they are not enough. So they share. That is why we encourage group work, so that they work in groups so that the resources we have can be enough for all of them when they share”*.

The participants shared the same sentiments as the above on sharing of resources. Learners were all sharing resources even if the resources were meant for a particular grade. Participants said

they had enough textbooks provided by the DoE. Participant five concurs with Little (2004b:16) that resources were the pillars of multi-grade teaching. The Participant further stated that they were shared and learners knew that they had to take care of the resources. Participant six said that resources in multi-grade classrooms were scarce and neglected.

Schools had a library and a reading corner in each class. Libraries were used for reference purposes when learners wrote their assignments. Rural Education Newsletter (2010:4) and Vincent (1999b:1) recommend that multi-grade classrooms must have activity centres. All the participants said that the reading corners were used for independent learning. Participant six further stated that learners were using them to read for leisure. The learners used the reading corners to read and after that, they reported to the teacher individually.

The schools of Participant four, Participants five and Participants nine had old books which the farm owner donated and they are stored in a library for reference purposes. Participants seven said that the school had a library but learners did not use it because of lack of time. The school of Participants six had a library which was not used because of lack of chairs. The library at Participants nine's school was also unused and learners were unable to read books from the library.

Charts and pictures were used in the classrooms during the Life Orientation and the English periods to enhance learners' understanding. The teachers used a poster of the world map to teach Social Science to learners in all the grades but differing according to the levels of learners. The pictures were used in a Natural Science lesson when learners were taught about different types of cells.

Three schools had computers but they were not used because they were not installed. The school of Participant one, Participant four and Participant nine use their personal internet and e-mails to conduct their school work. Other participants said they used their smart-phones to access the internet and personally bear all the costs. The schools of Participant two and Participants eight had laptops which the teachers had access to and they used them to access information for teaching in classes. Participant nine said that she used a computer in NST when she was busy

teaching the learners about herbivores and carnivores. Learners used the computer to check whether a specific animal was a herbivore or a carnivore. In Life Orientation the learners used internet to search for the latest case studies.

Five of the participants' schools had a globe which the teachers used when they discussed the continents in the subject of Social Sciences. Participant seven said that the counting abacus was used in Mathematics to count, even as extra practice by the learners in higher grades who had difficulty counting. Three schools had science kits that were used to do experiments in Natural Science.

Multi-grade classrooms do have resources but they must be used optimally. Participants demonstrated how different resources can be used in different subjects. Teachers teaching in multi-grade classrooms even used personal resources to complete and enhance their work. The next section looks into the difficulties faced by teachers in multi-grade classrooms.

#### **4.10 THE DIFFICULTIES FACED BY TEACHERS IN MULTI-GRADE CLASSROOMS**

All the participants said that the workload of multi-grade teachers was too much because the teachers taught many grades and many subjects at the same time. Teachers also had to teach many subjects across the phases. The paper work necessary was too much for teachers and quality teaching was not taking place. Teachers spent more time on administrative work than on teaching. The workshops and meetings which are attended during school time affected teaching and learning because when the teacher attended a workshop the school had to be closed. Learners who experienced barriers to learning were not given any attention.

Participants indicated that learners fell behind because teachers focused on pace-setters and covering teaching plans. The Subject Advisors expected teachers teaching in multi-grade classrooms to be on par with their colleagues in mono-grade classrooms. Teachers teaching in multi-grade classrooms are also expected to use the same teaching plans than teachers in mono-grade classrooms.

Wallace et al. ( 2001:21-26) claim that multi-grade teaching is not taught at colleges, Taole and Mncube (2012:157) claim that there is lack of support for teachers in multi-grade classrooms and Vincent (1999c:15) claims that teachers are not trained in multi-grade methodologies. The participants concur with these authors, the state that teachers are not trained in multi-grade teaching approaches and lack the necessary skills to handle multi-grade classrooms. Teachers also have to teach subjects that they had not been trained in. Another problem was planning for multi-grade classrooms and the proper use of time tables. Participants six commented that the DoE was appointing incompetent officials to manage multi-grade classrooms. The appointed officials appointed were not familiar with the multi-grade setup because they never taught in multi-grade classrooms and they were thus unable to support the multi-grade teachers.

The teachers were unable to supervise all the activities of all the learners. Teachers ended up spending more time on the content of one grade and as a result neglected the content of the other grades. Participants nine said that teachers who did not master multi-grade teaching often told learners in other grades to go and play outside while they were teaching one of the grades, and some learners ended up not receiving any teaching for a full school day.

Scholar transport was unreliable and learners were often left behind. Learners also often arrived late at school and by that time some topics have already been discussed. It was difficult to organise extra classes because of the long distances learners had to travel to school. Resources such as computers, photocopying machines and laptops were not readily available to minimize the paper work. Some classes were overcrowded because fewer teachers were available at schools.

The above discussions indicate that the teachers teaching in multi-grade classrooms experience have difficulties originating from various causes. The next section discusses the suggestions by multi-grade teachers on how to overcome the specific difficulties they face as teachers in multi-grade classrooms.

#### **4.11 WHAT CAN BE DONE TO OVERCOME THE DIFFICULTIES FACED BY TEACHERS IN MULTI-GRADE CLASSROOMS?**

The following is a discussion on the participants' answers to the question of how to overcome the difficulties they, as teachers in multi-grade classrooms, have to face. They first of all stated that multi-graded schools must have more teachers. The participants in agreement with Taole and Mncube (2012:161) further stated that more training opportunities in multi-grade classrooms must be made available and teachers should attend courses and workshops on multi-grade teaching. Another very important aspect is that teachers should only teach subjects they are qualified to teach.

Two participants said that the Department of Basic Education (DBE) can build a centre school for multi-grade classrooms in each of the sub-districts (cf. 2.8.1.1). Learners should be brought to such a centre during school holidays to be taught by different teachers. Participant two remarked as follows when she was asked what can be done to overcome the difficulties faced by teachers in multi-grade classrooms: *"I am not positive at all, what I think is that the department should do away with it"*. One of the other respondents said that if multi-grade classrooms are closed learners would end up dropping out of school.

Multi-graded schools must be provided with laptops, data projectors, computers and photocopying machines (cf.2.8.1.7). The textbooks used in multi-grade classrooms must be specially developed for multi-grade classrooms. The pupil teacher ratio must also be attended to in an effort to relieve some of the pressure on multi-grade teachers. There should be at least two teachers at farm schools, one concentrating on the Foundation Phase and the other one focusing on the Intermediate Phase

Quasi mono-grade classrooms must be changed to multi-grade classrooms (cf. 2.8.1.2). The DBE must appoint specialists in multi-grade teaching to support the schools. Three participants said that the DoE must appoint dedicated persons to develop strategies for a curriculum for multi-grade teaching. Teachers should also be provided with lesson plans for teaching in multi-grade classrooms.



Participant indicated that multi-grade classrooms must not be closed to increase access to education. Multi-grade classrooms must not be treated in the same way as mono-grade classrooms. Teachers teaching in multi-grade classrooms must be trained in multi-grade teaching approaches and technological resources must be made available for use in multi-grade classrooms.

#### **4.12 CONCLUSION**

This chapter attempted to highlight the important findings of the study based on the interviews conducted with participants. The chapter aimed to answer the research question and its sub-problems. The chapter presented the participants by providing more information on them. Furthermore, this chapter also presented the findings on the success stories of learners who came from multi-grade classrooms, the advantages and disadvantages of multi-grade classrooms, the reasons for using multi-grade classrooms, teaching in multi-grade classrooms, learning in multi-grade classrooms, the usage of the available resources in multi-grade classrooms, the difficulties faced by teachers in multi-grade classrooms and what can be done to help teachers to deal with the problems in multi-grade classrooms.

In the next chapter the researcher will summarise the study, draw conclusions and make recommendations.

# **CHAPTER 5**

## **SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **5.1 INTRODUCTION**

This research study looked into how teachers manage teaching and learning in multi-grade classrooms. The study tried to help the teachers to manage teaching and learning in multi-grade classrooms. The main objectives of the research were to (Section 1.4):

- determine how educators implement multi-grade teaching in their classrooms;
- determine how learners learn in multi-grade classroom;
- evaluate how available resources are used in multi-grade classrooms;
- determine the difficulties faced by the teachers teaching in multi-grade classrooms;
- and
- develop strategies to overcome the challenges faced by teachers in multi-grade classrooms.

As this is the final chapter of this research report, it focuses on the conclusion drawn from collected data, recommendations, themes for further study and a final conclusion. Chapter one provided an orientation of the study. The literature review was presented in chapter two as a means of providing a theoretical framework on teaching and learning in multi-grade classrooms. The third chapter presented a detailed discussion on the research design and methodology. The preceding chapter discussed and presented the findings gathered through the interviews. The next section will discuss the conclusions drawn from the data.

### **5.2 CONCLUSIONS DRAWN FROM DATA**

The following section will present the conclusions drawn from the data collected. In the following paragraphs each of the five research questions is answered by referring to the research findings.

### **5.2.1 How do teachers implement multi-grade teaching in their classrooms?**

The conclusions in this section are based on the findings (Section 4.8) and supported by the literature review (Section 2.4).

Grade one to Grade three learners are in the same class, Grade four to Grade six learners are in the same class, and Grade seven to Grade nine learners are in the same class. In one-teacher schools Grade one to Grade six learners are in the same class. Learners in multi-grade classrooms sit in grade groups.

Multi-grade classrooms have learning stations where different activities take place. The classes have reading corners where learners may sit to read. There are also resource corners where the resources for the different subjects are kept.

Time-tables are available at multi-graded schools also. However, time-tables are not followed in one-teacher schools. The time-tables are drawn in such a way that the same subjects appear on the time-table for all the grades in one class at the same time. In one-teacher schools the periods for the Foundation Phase classes and Intermediate Phase classes appear at the same time on the time table. In one-teacher schools when the teacher teaches one phase the other phase is left idling. Time allocation is not according to the instructional time as stated in the Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS) documents.

The thematic approach is used by teachers when the topics are the same or related in different subjects or when the topics are the same or related in different grades. The teachers spent more time on the topics of “struggling” grades. When the topics different for each grade, the teachers use the quasi-mono-grade approach where learners are taught in turns as if they are in a mono-grade classroom. When the quasi-mono-grade approach is used the other grades are given different work to do so as to keep them busy while the teacher is teaching a specific grade. In one-teacher schools every day begins with a Mathematics period.

Teachers use the question-and-answer method to introduce the lessons. The lecture method is used to give information to learners. The textbook method is used when learners have to read for themselves and answer the questions from the textbooks. The gallery walk is used when learners work in groups and make charts which other groups study and comment on.

Schools do not manage to cover the curriculum as per the annual teaching plans for the various subjects. Teachers are not teaching the content as it appears on the teaching plans of different subjects but they teach the topics they are comfortable to teach. The available time does not allow the teachers to cover the curriculum as stated in the teaching plans of the different subjects.

When learners who are in different grades are assessed formally the activities are different. Learners' formal assessment must be grade specific. Activities used to assess learners are found in grade specific textbooks. When learners are assessed informally the questions for the different grades may either be the same or grade specific. Learners in lower grades sometimes manage to respond to the questions which learners in higher grade struggle to respond to.

### **5.2.2 How do learners learn in multi-grade classrooms?**

The conclusions in this section are based on the findings (Section 4.9) and supported by the literature review (Section 2.4 and 2.5).

Peer tutoring, whereby learners learn from fellow learners, is often applied in multi-grade classrooms. Learners are instructed by their peers when the teacher is busy with something else. Fast learners, who have mastered the content, are used as peer tutors. Eight of the respondents confirmed that peer tutoring yielded the desired results. Only one respondent remarked that peer tutoring did not yield any positive results at the specific school.

Self-directed learning affords learners the opportunity to learn on their own. Learners learn by themselves and explain to other learners what they have learnt. When learners are explaining what they have learnt the teacher fills the content gaps and correct the learners when they present

incorrect information. Self-directed learning helps learners to read with understanding and master what they are learning.

The participants said that learners do not learn from family members but some responses indicated otherwise. Learners learn about languages and Mathematics from their brothers and sisters. Parents help learners with dance and cultural aspects which are taught in Creative Arts, and with politics which is taught in Social Sciences.

Cooperative learning plays an important part in multi-grade classrooms. Learners learn from their grade groups and class groups.

Teachers who teach in multi-grade classrooms have a misconception that learners solely rely on them for their learning. The discussions above indicate that learners learn from peer tutors, learn on their own, learn from their family members and learn from the group members as well.

Learners in multi-grade classrooms have different learning styles, *i.e.* there are visual learners, auditory learners and kinesthetic learners. Magazines, pictures and charts are used in classrooms to cater for visual learners. The textbooks and the writings on the chalkboard also cater for the needs of visual learners. The shapes which are used in Mathematics, science kits and measuring scales give kinesthetic learners an opportunity to learn in a beneficial way. Auditory learners are the learners who benefit most in classes because most of the teachers use the lecture method which suits auditory learners best.

### **5.2.3 How are the available resources used in multi-grade classroom?**

The conclusions in this section are based on the findings (Section 4.10) and supported by the literature review (Section 2.6).

Learners share all the resources available in a multi-grade classroom, even if the resources are grade specific. Learners have to take care when using resources because resources are not

replaced often and must be used for quite a number of years. However, there are learners who fail to do so.

There are libraries available at schools with more than one teacher but the libraries, and books, are unused. Teachers made excuses for not using libraries. They complained that there were no chairs, there was no time and they did not have librarians. Reading corners in classrooms are used as libraries.

Charts and pictures are used in the classrooms to enhance learners' understanding. A world map poster and globes are used to teach Social Science. A counting abacus is used to help learners to count and science kits are used to do experiments in NST and NS.

Schools with computer centres often do not use them because they have not been connected. At schools where there are no computers the teachers use their personal laptops to look for information needed in class and they share their laptops with their colleagues. Other teachers use their smart-phones to search for educational information.

#### **5.2.4 What are the difficulties faced by teachers in multi-grade classrooms?**

The conclusions in this section are based on the findings (Section 4.11) and supported by the literature review (Section 2.7).

The workload of teachers teaching in multi-grade classrooms is too high because they teach many subjects and many grades. These teachers also have to deal with the administrative work of many grades and many subjects. Teachers attend many workshops for different subjects and different phases.

Teachers are not trained in multi-grade teaching approaches and lack skills to handle multi-grade classrooms. They teach all subjects, regardless if they had been trained in a subject or not. Lesson planning and the use of time-tables are problematic. Teachers end up teaching more of the content of one grade creating an imbalance. There are instances where teachers who are new

in multi-grade schools end up teaching learners for fewer hours than the instructional time dictates. Teachers are furthermore unable to supervise all the activities of the learners because of time constraints.

The same CAPS documents that are used in mono-grade classrooms are used in multi-grade classrooms. Learners often fall behind because the teacher is more concerned with covering the teaching plans and pace-setters. Teaching time is lost when the teacher attends workshops. Learners who experience barriers to learning are not given individual attention.

The department officials who support multi-grade schools often are incompetent to manage multi-grade classrooms because they do not have proper knowledge regarding the setup in a multi-grade classroom. The Subject Advisors expect teachers teaching in multi-grade classrooms to be on par with their colleagues who teach in mono-grade classrooms.

The classrooms are overcrowded in bigger schools due to lack of teachers. At schools offering three phases Foundation Phase classrooms have many learners who are taught by one teacher in one classroom.

Scholar transport is not reliable. The vehicles used by service providers often break down or do not arrive at schools on some days. This causes learners to arrive late or not come to school at all and miss some of the lessons.

### **5.3 RECOMMENDATIONS**

Based on the responses captured during the interviews with the participants, the following recommendations are made:

#### **5.3.1 Teaching in multi-grade classrooms**

The DBE must design a curriculum that is aimed specifically at teaching in multi-grade classrooms. Curriculum planners must plan the content for multi-grade classrooms in terms of

themes that incorporate different subjects and different grades. The content for multi-grade classrooms must be planned in phases, i.e. specific content for Grade one to Grade three, Grade four to Grade six, and Grade seven to Grade nine. Teachers must be given common lesson plans which they must use in their classrooms. The curriculum planned for multi-grade classrooms must not differ from the curriculum used in mono-grade schools in order to help learners with a smooth transition from multi-grade classrooms to mono-grade classrooms.

Together with the designing of a curriculum for multi-grade classrooms textbooks which are meant to be used in multi-grade classrooms must be developed as well. The textbooks must be in line with multi-grade curriculum. Textbooks must have activities of good quality for teachers to use instead of teachers developing the activities.

The post provisioning model for multi-graded schools must be different from the one for mono-grade schools. The pupil-teacher ratio for multi-grade schools must be relaxed. There should be no one-teacher schools, and learners in one-teacher schools must be taught by at least two teachers, one teacher each for FP and IP.

Teachers must follow the time-tables to allow all the subjects to receive their allocated time. The DBE must draw a common time-table which will be used by all multi-graded schools which have two or less teachers and two or less phases. Time-tables must be drawn per phase. Common time-tables will help department officials to monitor whether the instructional time allocation is being followed.

Teachers must be trained in classroom management. They must plan that the tasks that require high teacher-learner contact be done at the same time with tasks that need less teacher-learner contact. Predictable patterns of doing certain activities must be developed for learners in multi-grade classrooms.



### **5.3.2 Learning in multi-grade teaching**

All multi-graded teachers must know how to use peer tutors. Schools must use peer tutors to help learners to learn from a different person. Learners must be given time for self-directed learning. Peer tutoring and self-directed learning must not be used when the teacher want to keep learners busy but they must be part of daily activities. Teachers should not underestimate the knowledge of learners' family members and they must afford learners the opportunity to learn from them.

The different learning styles of learners must be considered when lessons are planned. Teachers must not be biased towards a particular learning style.

### **5.3.3 The use of available resources**

Teachers must take stock of available resources at their schools and in the community. Activities given to learners must relate to the available resources. The teaching context must relate to learners' environment.

Teachers and learners must look after the resources. The resources must be used by learners in different grades as long as they are relevant to the work done. Libraries and computer centres at schools must be used. Teachers must not make excuses for not using libraries and computer centres but rather develop strategies to make them usable. All the available resources at school must be used optimally. Each classroom must have a library corner or reading corner and learning stations where different activities can take place.

### **5.3.4 The difficulties faced by teachers in multi-grade classrooms**

The teachers must plan their activities to minimise their workload. Teachers must cover content as expected because learners will not cope when they go to other schools without being exposed to all the content. Subject Advisors must advise the teachers on how to manage teaching and learning in multi-grade classrooms.

Workshops for multi-grade schools must include all the subjects and must take place once per school term per phase. The DBE must organise these workshops which will be for a longer period of about twenty days in a year or offer bursaries for teachers to enroll for a qualification in multi-grade teaching.

Department officials who support multi-grade schools must be grounded in multi-grade approaches.

The Provincial Education Department (PED) must get rid of unreliable scholar transport.

### **5.3.5 Overcoming the difficulties faced by teachers in multi-grade classrooms**

The recommendations in this section are based on the findings (Section 4.12) and supported by the literature review (Section 2.8).

Training opportunities in multi-grade teaching must be made available. Teachers must register for a course in multi-grade teaching. Teachers must teach only the subjects they have been trained to teach. Teachers must be re-trained to help them to handle multi-grade classrooms. Learner-centred approaches must be used in classrooms to relieve the teachers from being overloaded with work. Teachers who teach in multi-grade classrooms must be specialists of the subjects they teach.

A centre can be built in one farm by PED where a number of multi-grade schools can form one school. Learners from different multi-grade schools can form clusters of schools where learners can attend for one week in every school term to be taught by different teachers. A centre must be built in different sub-districts where learners from different multi-graded schools can be taught. Learners should be brought to a centre during school holidays to be taught by different teachers.

Resource centres for teachers in multi-grade teaching must be established, where they can deal with planning, teaching and assessing.

Textbooks specifically aimed at multi-grade teaching must be developed. Multi-graded schools must be provided with laptops, data projectors and photocopying machines to be used for teaching and learning.

A policy on multi-grade teaching must be developed. Multi-graded schools must not be treated in the same way as mono-grade schools.

The number of teachers teaching in multi-grade schools must be increased. Pupil-teacher ratio must be relaxed to lessen the workload. In a one-teacher school there should be two teachers, one responsible for FP and the other for IP.

The DBE must appoint specialists in multi-grade teaching to support the schools. Strategists must be appointed to restructure multi-grade teaching and teachers must be given lesson plans for multi-grade classrooms.

Participant two said that the solution to help teachers in multi-grade schools is to close multi-graded schools. However, most of the participants agreed that multi-graded schools must not be closed but must be treated differently from mono-grade schools. Multi-graded schools must not be closed because learners drop out of schools when they are supposed to study in other areas.

#### **5.4 FURTHER RESEARCH**

Continued research has to be done to determine how the management of multi-graded schools impact on managing teaching and learning in multi-grade classrooms and the use of multi-grade classrooms for pedagogical reasons. Research on the impact of closing multi-graded schools must be done to determine how access to education will be affected.

#### **5.5 FINAL CONCLUSION**

In this study the researcher used the qualitative research approach to attempt to answer the research question. The researcher attempted to determine how teachers manage teaching and

learning in multi-grade classroom (see 5.2). The researcher also made recommendations (see 5.3) on how teachers can manage teaching and learning in multi-grade classrooms. Furthermore, the researcher also made the recommendations to the DBE and PED on what can be done to help teachers to manage teaching and learning in multi-grade classrooms. The findings can help the teachers teaching in multi-grade classrooms to improve their current practices.

It is hoped that if the findings in (Section 5.2) and recommendations in (Section 5.3) are implemented the management of teaching and learning in multi-grade classrooms will be manageable.

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## **APPENDIX A**

### **INTERVIEW SCHEDULE**

1. Can you give me a brief background about your teaching career?
2. Can you give me your brief background on your involvement with a multi-graded school?
3. Explain how teaching takes place at your school in multi-graded classrooms.
4. Explain how learners learn at your school in multi-graded classrooms.
5. How are available resources used in multi-graded classrooms?
6. What are the difficulties faced by the teachers teaching in multi-graded classrooms?
7. What can be done to overcome the difficulties faced by teachers in multi-graded classrooms?

## APPENDIX B

### LETTER TO THE DIRECTOR STRATEGIC PLANNING AND RESEARCH DIRECTORATE OF THE FREE STATE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

P.O. Box 295  
Harrismith  
9880  
Tel: 058 623 2223  
Cell: 082 706 5464  
Fax: 086 623 5547  
E-mail: mothofela@internet-sa.co.za

The Director: Strategic Planning and Research Directorate  
Free State Department of Education  
Private Bag X20565  
Bloemfontein  
9300

Dear Sir/Madam

#### **RE: A REQUEST FOR PERMISSION TO CONDUCT A RESEARCH AT THE SCHOOLS**

I am a registered student at the University of South Africa for the M. Ed (Didactics) Degree.

I am doing a full dissertation on the following topic: *Managing teaching and learning in multi-graded classrooms in the Thabo Mofutsanyana Education District, Free State.*

This research will be in a form of interviews with the principals of multi-graded schools, teachers teaching in multi-graded schools where there is more than one teacher at the school and teachers

teaching at one-teacher multi-graded schools. The interviews will be conducted with the people from schools which fall within your jurisdiction. The interviews will be conducted after the tuition time so as to avoid disturbance of the normal smooth running of the schools. Participants will participate voluntarily and can withdraw their participation without reprisal. The interviews will be kept confidential; the names of participants or the names of their schools will not be revealed.

I therefore request your permission to undertake this research at the schools.

I hope my request will receive your favourable consideration.

Yours faithfully

Mr M.R. Msimanga

*as signed* \_\_\_\_\_



**APPENDIX C**

**LETTER TO THE PRINCIPAL OF THE SCHOOL**

P.O. Box 295  
Harrismith  
9880  
Tel: 058 623 2223  
Cell: 082 706 5464  
Fax: 086 623 5547  
E-mail: mothofela@internet-sa.co.za

The Principal

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

Dear Sir/Madam

**RE: A REQUEST FOR PERMISSION TO CONDUCT A RESEARCH AT YOUR SCHOOL**

I am a registered student at the University of South Africa for the M ED (Didactics).

I am doing a full dissertation on the following topic: *Managing teaching and learning in multi-graded classrooms in the Thabo Mofutsanyana Education District, Free State.*

This research will be in a form of interviews with one of your staff members. The interviews will be conducted after the tuition time so as to avoid disturbance of the normal smooth running of

the schools. Participants will participate voluntarily. The interviews will be held at your school premises.

I therefore request your permission to undertake this research at the school.

I hope my request will receive your favourable consideration

Yours faithfully

Mr M.R. Msimanga

.....

**CONSENT OF THE SCHOOL PRINCIPAL**

Authorised signature: .....

Date: .....

## APPENDIX D

### LETTER TO THE PARTICIPANT

P.O. Box 295  
Harrismith  
9880  
Tel: 058 623 2223  
Cell: 082 706 5464  
Fax: 086 623 5547  
E-mail: mothofela@internet-sa.co.za

Dear Sir/Madam

#### **RE: A REQUEST FOR YOUR PARTICIPATION IN A RESEARCH**

My name is Mothofela Richard Msimanga, and I am a registered student at the University of South Africa for the M ED (Didactics) Degree.

I am the principal researcher conducting a research on the following topic: *Managing teaching and learning in multi-graded classrooms in the Thabo Mofutsanyana Education District, Free State.*

Participation in this research will entail being interviewed by me at your school. Participation in this study is voluntary. The interviews will be conducted after the tuition time so as to avoid disturbance of the normal smooth running of the schools. The interviews will approximately last for forty five minutes and sixty minutes. You will be free to refuse to answer any question and free to withdraw from the interview at any time without prejudice or penalty. The interview will be kept confidential; your name or the name of your school will not be revealed. The interview will be tape recorded.

Your participation in this study would be greatly appreciated. This research will contribute on managing teaching and learning in multi-graded classrooms.

If you choose to participate in the study, please sign this letter to show that you read its contents and you agreed voluntarily to take part in the study.

I hope my request will receive your favourable consideration

Yours faithfully

Mr M.R. Msimanga

.....

**CONSENT OF THE PARTICIPANT**

Participant's signature: .....

Date: .....

## APPENDIX E

### LETTER OF CONSENT

#### CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE AS A RESPONDENT IN THE RESEARCH PROJECT

I hereby authorise Mr M.R. Msimanga, the student at the University of South Africa to involve me in the study, *Managing teaching and learning in multi-graded classrooms in Thabo Mofutsanyana Education District, Free State*. This study is designed to explore how teachers manage teaching and learning in multi-graded classrooms.

I understand that I have been asked to participate because I am a teacher at a multi-graded school and I have valuable information that can properly inform the investigation. I understand that if I participate I will not be asked questions which will be longer than sixty minutes. Mr Msimanga will come to my school to interview me once, and will come back for debriefing. I understand that an interview schedule will be used and some questions will emerge as the interview proceeds. The interview will be tape-recorded and my permission is granted. The tape recordings will be destroyed after the research is complete. This procedure has been explained to me by Mr Msimanga himself.

I understand that the study described above will not impose pressure on me, but some of the questions may seek personal information. There is no risk whatsoever I undertake that will result from my participation. I understand that I have the right to refuse to participate or withdraw from this research at any time without prejudice or penalty. I have been informed that my identity will not be disclosed except as specifically required by law. I understand that the name of my school will not be identified in any way.

I understand that I will not receive any cash benefits from being involved in this study but I will have access to the findings. I understand that Mr Msimanga may be reached at 082 706 5464 and will answer any query I may have about the study.

Participant's signature: .....

Date: .....

Witness: .....

Date: .....