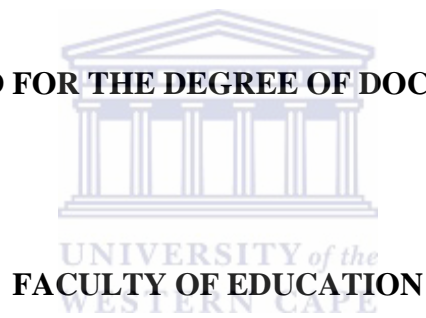


**A CAPABILITY ANALYSIS OF PERFORMANCE IN QUINTILE-1 SCHOOLS IN
CAPE TOWN**

BY

MUNJE PAUL NWATI

THESIS PRESENTED FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR IN EDUCATION



UNIVERSITY OF THE WESTERN CAPE

SUPERVISOR: DR R.F.A.MAARMAN

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DEFINITION OF KEY TERMS

Capabilities: In the context of this study capabilities refers to the various combinations of functionings; that is, what people are actually able to do and to be (Sen, 1992). It focuses on the real or actual possibilities open to a person. Here, one's ability to choose a life he/she has reason to value is paramount. Capabilities can thus be summarised as a kind of opportunity freedom.

Freedoms: It relates to peoples' ability to be able to make choices that allow them to help themselves and others. It relates to how far people are free, or able to use resources around them to live the kind of lives they have reason to value. In the context of this study, salient factors that may detract people from achieving their desired objectives from available resources are very important elements to be considered when evaluating the nature and quality of achievements. The concept thus entails that availability of resources should not at any point be used as a reliable indicator of wellbeing. This stems from the fact that the ability to convert available resources into achievement is a process, and can vary among persons, communities, and institutions, and cannot in any way be spontaneous.

Conversion: According to Sen (1992) is the ability to transform primary goods or resources into achievements or valuable functionings, a process that varies from person to person. This variation is due to the diversities inherent in human beings and institutions alike. As such, there are bound to be remarkable inequalities in the actual freedom enjoyed by different people or institutions, even if they have the same bundle of resources at their disposal. This is because, the conversion process is influenced by a person's or an institution's uniqueness, and the possibility of existing salient factors that are a part of that inherent identity. Thus, uniqueness influences the set of goals put forth, and the strategies implemented and consequently what is achieved. Sen thus upholds that a disadvantaged person will ultimately get less from the same amount of primary goods or resources than those that are advantaged.

Unfreedoms: This concept in the view of Amartya Sen is often exhibited in the form of extreme poverty. It thus portrays an inability to use one's reason to decide about one's values and choices, due to surrounding circumstances. In this kind of set up, choices are made not due to likeness, but out of desperations. Unfreedoms also refer to any limitation or hindrance on human capability or ability to perform a desirable activity.

Functionings: In the context of this study relates to human fulfilment; that is, the valuable activities and states that make up a person's well-being. In fact, it can be summarized as what a person actually manages to do or to be.

Space: Refers to the different settings of individuals and institutions superimposed by the diversity of individuals and institutions. This in fact calls for caution when examining the level of achievement of individuals of institutions. This is especially because, even where inequality in different spaces is similar, the existence of human diversities helps to keep the different spaces far apart, especially in their ability to achieve under existing circumstances. As Sen (1992:23) emphasizes, "The need to face explicitly the choice of space is an inescapable part of the specification and reasoned evaluation of the demands of equality".

Achievement: In the context of this study is a combination of functionings actually enjoyed, and other realized results. This is not considered as output resulting directly from input, but in consideration of the existence of other silent but salient factors that could hinder, or mitigate a person's ability to achieve.

Performance: Performance in this study refers to learners' ability to pass in their class test and exams at a minimum required level. This will also refer to their ability to pass in other provincial and national examinations, such as the systemic examinations, with an acceptable average. Attitudes towards attending classes regularly or irregularly as a comparison over the years would be an important point of departure in this study.

Success: For the purpose of this study success would refer to the ability of learners to navigate from one grade to another and especially their ability to successfully complete their programme. The ability to progress from one grade to another would lay particular emphasis on whether certain policies, for example the progression policy, influenced the progression of learners from one grade to the other.

Cohort: For the purpose of this study would mean a set of learner followed over a period of time. Here, a group of learners that were enrolled in grade R in 2006 are traced up to grade 7 in 2012. This entails measuring the effect of that cohort on variables such as; enrolment, attendance, progression, and pass rate. This method is meant to understand the nature of performance within the three schools chosen for this study. The contrasting variation in

learner performance in the three schools is being considered. Here, physical interaction will take place only with the cohorts that are presently in grade 7 in 2012, and are part of the cohort that enrolled in each of the three schools in 2006.

Quintile: Quintile in this study is a framework used by the South African government to categorize schools in terms of the poverty levels of the communities in which they are located. It emanates from an effort by the government since 1994 to allocate resources to schools and areas that “need them the most”. Schools are thus classified into quintiles 1 to 5, with quintile 1 being the poorest, while quintile 5 is the least poor. More resources are thus located to the poorest schools, while the least poor schools receive the least resources (Department of Education, 2006).



DECLARATION

I Munje Paul Nwati declare that “A Capability Analysis of Performance in Quintile-1 Schools in Cape Town” is my work. It has not been submitted for any degree or examination in any other university, and that all sources I have used and quoted have been indicated and acknowledged through complete references.

Signed.....Date.....

Paul Nwati Munje



ACADEMIC EDITOR

16 Chaucer Road

Claremont

Cape Town 7008

13 May 2015

University of Western Cape

Faculty of Education

To whom it may concern

This is to confirm that I have edited Munje Paul Nwati's PhD thesis: 'A Capability analysis of performance in Quintile-1 Schools in Cape Town'.

The editing included; proof reading, style, improvement, some restructuring, and formatting. It did not include the editing of the list of references.

I have 12 years' experience in editing theses and academic articles and am a full member of the Professional Editors Group (professional-editors-group-south-africa@googlegroups.com).

The authorship and the final responsibility for the edited draft of the thesis lie with my client.

Yours sincerely



Ms Rose Jackson

13 May 2015

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this work to my Wife Enjoh Mary Anye, my son Aggree Michael Munje, and my daughters, Engon McClaire Munje and Ambe Favour Munje.



ABSTRACT

Learner underperformance, especially in poor school communities has been an issue of contestation since 1994, and remains a major challenge in South Africa. Learner performance in this category of schools continues to plummet amidst government efforts to reallocate resources, and adjust policies to meet the needs of these schools, as well as efforts made by researchers to identify the causes of underperformance. The variances in performance exhibited by schools within this category, often within the same community, and with shared features indicate the need for further exploration of the phenomenon. This study examined three Quintile-1 (Q-1) schools within a particular informal settlement in Cape Town using the Capability Approach (CA) pioneered by the economist and philosopher, Amartya Sen as a conceptual framework to understand the nature of learner performance.

An investigation was undertaken in the three Q-1 schools using a qualitative research paradigm. The investigation was underpinned by the constructs of the CA which include; Freedoms, Unfreedoms, Capabilities, Conversion, and Functionings. These components were used in the investigation to understand the nature of learner performance in the schools, and how each of these constructs influenced the gap between available resources and learner performance. This approach was guided by the assumption that these schools accumulate a similar amount of resources, face similar challenges and have learners from similar backgrounds. The investigation revealed that capability limitations and unfreedoms interplay to limit learner abilities to learn and perform. As such, a framework is proposed for understanding learner performance in a Q-1 school community via the capability sets of Amartya Sen.

The findings of the study reveal that learner capabilities, as well as their abilities to perform, were limited by existing unfreedoms present in the school community where role players are challenged to convert resources into valued functionings. Notable was the fact that learner backgrounds and circumstances contributed to unfreedoms experienced in the classrooms. The findings also reveal that efforts made through the reallocation of resources are under pressure, because of the plethora of factors at play in the community, the school and the Department of Basic Education. The study emphasizes the usefulness of the CA in educational spaces, considering its importance in the understanding of significant variables

that are often neglected in performance discourses, with a focus on the explication of capability sets.

Key Words: Education, Education policies, Performance, Achievement, Poverty, Quintile-1, Capability Approach, Freedoms, Unfreedoms, Conversion, Progression Policy, Functionings, Capabilities, Cohort, Analysis and Space.



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ABBREVIATIONS

AIDS	Acquired Immune Deficiency Virus
ANA	Annual National Assessment
CA	Capability Approach
CM	Circuit Manager
DBE	Department of Basic Education (2009-present)
DoE	Department of Education (1994-2009)
HIV	Human Immune deficiency Virus
HoD	Head of Department
LoLT	Language of Teaching and Learning
MSED	Metro South Education District
Q-1	Quintile-1
SES	Socioeconomic Status
SFS	School Feeding Scheme
SGB	School Governing Body
WCED	Western Cape Education Department

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background to the study

South Africa's democratic dispensation in 1994 ushered in a new era of hope, and provided the new government with the impetus to close the gaps that existed within the educational sector, gaps inherited from the apartheid system of government. Education immediately came to be seen as an escape route for many of those trapped in poverty and experiencing appalling socioeconomic conditions (Fleisch, 2008:52). This, together with the Bill of Rights contained in the new Constitution (1996), made radical changes and interventions within the educational sector inevitable; the main issues at stake were creating and maintaining both equity and quality in education (Crouch, 2005; Fiske & Ladd, 2004). This gave rise to policy initiatives by the Department of Education (DoE) that over time were tested and underwent changes, with numerous questions raised by a range of scholars about the impact of these policies on learner performance, particularly those learners in previously disadvantaged schools. The policy initiatives focused on diverting resources from schools that were more advantaged during the apartheid era to the poorer schooling communities that were otherwise disadvantaged, as a way of closing that critical gap. In this context, schools in poor schooling communities were excluded from paying school fees (DoE, nd).

However, such efforts since 1994 to close this gap are yet to yield valuable or meaningful results. What is emerging is an ever deepening gap between input in terms of resources, and expected outcomes (Spaull, 2013). This has raised some highly contentious questions, as to the reasons why learners perform the way they do, especially in poorer schooling communities. This has resulted in the emergence of numerous studies investigating the causes of such patterns of poor performance, as well as a range of policy proposals being made to address the pattern of poor performance of learners at these schools. Despite such initiatives, the gap between what learners are expected to know and what they really know in poor schooling communities continues to grow (Spaull, 2013). According to Spaull (2013), the problem persists and is worsening by the day, thus calling for more robust approaches to understand and address the current problem.

This appalling state of affairs in poor schooling communities is repeatedly attributed to limited school resources, the poor quality of teaching, inadequate teacher training and teacher

content knowledge, and poor management (Spaull, 2012b). Ironically, the inscription of the apartheid legacy is clearly engraved through silent, but salient variables that are often perceived at face value, due to the varying approaches deployed by researchers to analyse the existing causes of underperformance in poor schools (Fleisch, 2008). The distorted approaches adopted towards schooling by the apartheid regime left a persistent and indelible thumbprint, but one that is not clearly visible or is one-dimensional. Therefore, understanding the nature and full extent of the impact of the apartheid legacy requires an approach that looks at learner performances from a fresher, more informed, and multi-dimensional viewpoint. Such an approach would focus on the socioeconomic and demographic contexts of the schools, what they, their teachers and learners, are able to do with what they have, and not simply based on what they have. If this approach focuses on what capabilities the schools have or do not have to convert available resources into functionings, and not only who and where they are currently in terms of academic achievement, or what they have achieved based on existing resources, more comprehensive and useful answers might be obtained as to why learners perform the way they have been and continue to perform.

Furthermore, understanding the realities of the contexts and challenges facing these poor schools, and the freedoms and unfreedoms they experience, could provide this researcher, and other researchers, with a clearer sense of the value of the resources at the disposal of these schools, and the actual effort and time required from policy makers, the DBE, and the schools themselves to elevate certain schooling communities to the desired standards. I would argue that adopting a one-size-fit all approach that classifies schools according to specific categories clouds our understanding and assessment of those nuances specific to individual schooling communities, and the effects these have on learner performance. I argue that to ignore these specificities could mean raising the bar too high for some poor schooling communities, by expecting the unachievable from them in terms of their limited capabilities and existing unfreedoms. The government's failing to take these factors into account could explain why massive investments in education by government continue to yield unsatisfactory results in terms of learner performances. This could also explain the increasing rate of deteriorating performance standards in poor schools. In the context of the quality and quantity of resources in poor schools, clearly there is a need for improvement. Taylor (2008: 2) argues that "unfortunately, how to improve the quality of schooling is far less clear..." This situation is made worse by the fact that attention is currently focused on the amounts of resources poured into the schools, as well as on the one-size-fits-all testing by the DBE

through the systemic testing and the Annual National Assessment (ANA) benchmark testing for Grades 1 to 6 instituted in 2008 (Department of Basic Education, 2011), and extended in 2012 to Grade 9, while ignoring the individual contexts of schooling communities, the socioeconomic backgrounds of learners, and existing silent but salient factors, which collectively limit learner abilities. Although these factors are well known in theory, I argue for the importance of approaching them differently with a view to understanding their manifestations and mutations, in order to arrive at practical and viable solutions. Focusing on resource factors alone has led to the unfair labelling of poor schools as ‘underperforming’, while ignoring the massive achievements of these schools in other domains and under their existing circumstances.

It has become more complicated to debunk such nuances and variables in poor schooling communities because of a distortion in the kind of performances learners at these schools achieve or do not achieve. This is because poor schools located in similar neighbourhoods, receiving and accumulating similar amounts of resources from the state, and having learners with similar backgrounds, show variations in learner performance (Van der Berg, 2007), and the more attempts are made to understand the reasons for these variances, the clearer it becomes that there is a deeper crisis. However, collating the causes, their manifestations and implications in terms of variances in learner performance would seem a risky exercise. The as yet unidentified variables that are unfortunately ignored or overlooked by government and policy makers could form an important marker to understanding the complex and nuanced realities of learner underperformance in poor schools.

Furthermore, many existing studies in this field analyse existing factors related to underperformance either across schools or taking variables into account in isolation, while ignoring the fundamental role history, and other silent factors, play in formatting underperformance, in effect changing or distorting the meanings and implications of these factors. This explains why learner performance, for example, in poor primary schools in South Africa has given rise to varying ranges of different perceptions and interpretations. For this researcher this situation suggests the need to investigate these phenomena through the lens of the capabilities approach (CA), which explicates freedoms and unfreedoms (Sen, 1992, 1999). The CA pays particular attention to those barely perceptible and neglected factors that influence learner performance, that manifest in the form of unfreedoms, and reveal the interconnectedness of variables.

This thesis therefore seeks to extend the investigation into learner performance by critically interrogating the existing causes of underperformance in poor schooling communities using the CA lens, focusing on freedoms and unfreedoms that inhibit these schools in their quest to convert existing resources into learner functionings. I theorise that interrogating the capabilities of those in charge of converting existing resources into functionings, cross-examining existing freedoms and unfreedoms, and looking at how they directly and indirectly impede learner ability to perform could reveal new pieces to fill the gaps in the existing puzzle of learner performance in poor schools. I hope that such data may contribute to the body of knowledge which shapes insights and understandings of the existing disparities and contentions surrounding learner performance in poor schools, both within and outside of South Africa.

1.2 Statement of the problem

Despite massive investments in education, and consistent policies designed to improve education equity since 1994, learner performance has continued to show many of the characteristics of the apartheid education system. This has given rise to popular questions and comments among academics and political commentators and journalists, such as “What’s wrong with South African schools?”, “South Africa’s education in crisis”, “The South African problem”, “The A factor”. These conversations clearly indicate that, after more than 20 years of democracy, combined with government’s efforts to redistribute and reallocate school resources, persistent gaps remain in learner performance between well-resourced ex Model C schools and schools in poor communities, as well as unanswered questions as to the reasons for this.

However, the massive improvement in some aspects of education, such as the significant rise in learner enrolment since 1994, cannot be ignored. Modisaotsile (2012:1) affirms that access to primary education in South Africa has attained world standards, and as such, access to education is no longer the problem because, “...over 98 per cent of South African children attend school”. Despite this remarkable achievement, finding a balance between enrolment and performance, as well as between input and outcomes in these schools, remains an on-going education crisis (Spaull, 2013). In this regard, Van der Berg (2006) posits that, although resources play an important role in promoting learner performance, understanding

that critical link between the two in the context of poor South African schools remains a thorny issue, and one requiring more in-depth research.

The crucial question confronting local and international education researchers, analysts, and observers on a daily basis, is why historically white South African schools continue to outperform historically black schools, the latter being mostly in poor schooling communities (Spaull, 2012a), even though these historically black schools are assumed to amass enormous resources from the government as a result of various policy initiatives since 1994. Considering that these concerns continue to rise (Spaull, 2013; Pretorius, 2014; Bayat, Louw & Rena, 2014), and their manifestations are widely recognisable, it is also tempting to ask why the process put in motion to change the existing statuses in poor schooling communities is so cumbersome and slow. Other related questions arise: Why is it that, even where poor schools exist in the same communities, enjoying similar benefits from the government, and having learners from similar backgrounds, these schools continue to exhibit variances in performances amongst themselves? Why has the educational gap in poor schooling communities remained unresolvable, while continuing to be a bone of contention frequently debated in different spheres? Why is it that, while significant amounts of resources are poured into the schools, the poor outcomes remain static, inexplicable and inexcusable? Are poor schools being unjustly accused for underperforming? Are researchers digging in the wrong patches? Is underperformance in poor schools immune to initiatives towards change? Why does learner performance in Quintile-1 (Q-1) schools continue to be a combative and contentious terrain and a focus for education crusaders and policy makers? In attempting to investigate these unanswered, or unsatisfactorily answered, questions, this study uses the CA framework as its theoretical underpinning as a guide to finding possible answers to these unresolved problems concerning underperforming schools in areas with high poverty levels.

1.3 Focus of the study

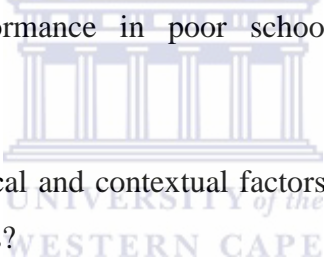
The study focuses on the variances in learner performances in poor schooling communities and on schools classified as and in the study referred to as Quintile 1 (Q-1) or poor primary schools. The study investigates learner performance, focusing on a particular cohort of learners that enrolled in Grade 1 from 2006 up to 2012, when these learners entered Grade 7. The purpose of this study is to unpack the implications of teaching and learning on variables such as attendance and on pass and retention rates in three public primary schools in an

informal settlement in Cape Town. The study also pays attention to those variables that influence learner freedoms and unfreedoms within the classroom, in an attempt to understand how certain variables influence learner performance. As has been mentioned, the CA lens is used to examine these variables and their effect on learner underperformance. Finally, the study comes up with a framework to understand learner performance in Q-1 schools via the capability sets formulated by Amartya Sen. These concerns are interrogated in the course of addressing specific research questions and research aims.

1.4 The research questions

How can the Capability Approach inform our understanding of learner performance in Quintile-1 primary schools?

Sub Questions

- 
1. How is education performance in poor schools understood by scholars and practitioners?
 2. To what extent do historical and contextual factors influence learner performance in Quintile-1 primary schools?
 3. What role do resources play in determining learner capabilities and performance in Quintile-1 schools?
 4. How is the internal efficiency of Quintile-1 primary schools determining learner capabilities and performance?
 5. How can a cohort analysis explain learner capabilities and performance in Quintile-1 schools?

1.5 Research Aims

To investigate how the Capability Approach informs our understanding of learner performance in Quintile-1 primary schools.

Sub Research Aims

1. To investigate how educational performance in poor schools is understood by scholars and practitioners.
2. To investigate to what extent historical and contextual factors influence learner performance in Quintile-1 primary schools.
3. To investigate the role resources play in determining learner capabilities and performance in Quintile-1 schools.
4. To investigate how the internal efficiency of Quintile-1 primary schools determines learner capabilities and performance.
5. To investigate how a cohort analysis helps to explain learner capabilities and performance in Quintile-1 schools.

1.6 Central argument

The main argument presented in this study is that the widening gaps in the levels of learner performance, and the varying performance patterns manifesting between historically white, and historically black (poor) schools in South Africa remains a contentious and unresolved issue. I argue that the contentiousness and lack of resolution of the problem is clearly due to the inability on the part of policy makers and/or the DBE to design a clearer and more comprehensive platform for improving the quality of education in poor primary schools, one that would take into account a range of factors. In addition, as has been mentioned, given that, within these poor schooling communities, there exist variances in performances between schools in close proximity, it would be logical to assume that, if similar reasons for poor performance are being offered over a long period of time, with no significant improvement, despite policy initiatives, initiatives that are at times adjusted to suit research recommendations, there are some hidden factors and dynamics that require a fresh and more nuanced and/or creative investigative approach. For this reason I consider the CA to be an appropriate theoretical lens for investigating those silent but salient dynamics at play in underperformance in schools in high poverty level areas. My literature review reveals these

dynamics to have been either neglected, or simply not given the attention they deserve or demand in the quest to fully understand the current predicament in poor schools.

I am of the opinion that the CA has the potential to explicate the freedoms and unfreedoms within educational spaces, both from the angle of the learners, and that of the communities in which they live, as well as teachers, principals, and other stakeholders. Possibilities exist of uncovering some of those unknowns that may have been repeatedly overlooked by researchers and policy makers over the years knowingly or unknowingly. Also, a process of looking at the capabilities of those in charge of assisting learners at each level/phase in Q-1 primary schools to acquire the kind of education they require, could act as an impetus in the quest to unravel why learner performance in certain categories of schools in South Africa remains below the expected standards. This kind of research represents an opportunity to demonstrate how the lack of certain capabilities to perform some critical duties translates into unfreedoms unequivocally affects learner efforts to achieve certain functionings which has long term implications for their future.

1.7 Significance of the study

The persistence of the underperformance of learners at primary schools in high poverty level areas in South Africa, and the lack of resolution of this problem, has been mentioned (Spaull, 2013). Given that the aim of this study is to use the CA as its theoretical underpinning, the researcher introduces the concepts of freedoms and unfreedoms as a relatively new lens in an attempt to understand the persistent gaps in learner underperformance in poor primary schools.

The CA is thus deployed in an attempt to understand why the phenomenon of underperformance in poor schools diverges significantly from the input-output theory. The amounts of resources provided to these schools have persistently failed to yield the outcome desired and expected by government and other education stakeholders. The CA has the potential to provide a new approach for investigating this discrepancy, thus altering certain common sense perceptions of the phenomenon.

I therefore argue strongly for the feasibility and potential of this study to contribute to existing studies in the literature as well as to the existing body of knowledge on learner

performance in poor schooling communities both within and outside of South Africa. I also argue for the study having the potential to provide comprehensive information on the lived experiences and struggles of learners and of school authorities to convert existing resources into learner achievements on a daily basis in Q-1 schools. I anticipate that the introduction of constructs such as capabilities, individual spaces, conversion, freedoms and unfreedoms into this study will open up new spaces and ways of seeing how to approach and appreciate, as well as understand factors influencing performance in Q-1 schools in South Africa. Most importantly, the study emphasizes the usefulness of the CA within educational spaces, considering its importance in the understanding of significant variables that are often neglected in the school performance discourse. The CA therefore has the potential to introduce new insights and directions for debates on learner performances in Q-1 schools as well which educational needs have been achieved since 1994. In essence this approach will interrogate the trial and impetus of educational policies that have been put in place with the intention of ensuring equity and quality in education in South Africa. It is hoped that the study has the potential to influence the ways in which government renders support to Q-1 schools in the future, as well as the nature of this support.

1.8 Limitations of the study

Although efforts were made to ensure validity and reliability, some data on learner progression could not be obtained, due to management challenges on the part of some school secretaries, together with the laxity or lack of motivation/will on the part of the principals. The unavailability of these documents has however been compensated for by rich data obtained from interviews with principals, focus group discussions with teachers, and classroom observations.

Some of the learners who participated in completing the questionnaires did not take part in the focus group discussions. Although their presence could have introduced new material, or a new angle to the discussions, this shortfall was compensated for by a series of classroom observations which provided an overall perception of learner behaviour and attitudes within classroom spaces.

In addition, although the findings may appear to some extent to be generalized due to the data collection process being confined to three schools within a particular poor schooling

community in Cape Town, the generalization is based on the similarity of unfreedoms experienced by poor schooling communities around the country as shown in the literature. Although data from the studies in the literature surveyed shows that circumstances in poor schooling communities are fairly similar, the possibility exists that in the course of applying the capabilities approach, some factors emerging from this study will challenge these similarities.

1.9 Structure of the thesis and chapter outline

Chapter one: This chapter introduces the study with a presentation of the background to, and the reasons for conducting, the study. Also presented and discussed are the problem statement, focus and aims of the study, the research questions, and fundamental arguments of the study, and the significance and limitations of the study.

Chapter Two: The chapter looks at the conceptual framework used in the study. It interrogates international literature on learner performance. It also focuses on the views and argumentations of various authors around the specific causes, and consequences of factors influencing learner performance in Q-1 primary schools in South Africa. Prominent themes that emerge in the course of the literature review include the role of resources, socioeconomic status (SES), the relationship between input (education resources in particular) and output (academic performance), widening achievement gaps, and varying patterns of performance in Q-1 schools. The chapter concludes by criticizing the approaches adopted by, and the limitations of, many of the studies reviewed in addressing learner performance and under-performance. A common theme emerging from the literature is that learner performance in Q-1 schools is persistent, is deepening, and is proving resistant to change, and that as such, it requires a new perspective from which to examine prevalent concerns around learner performance in schools in high poverty level areas.

Chapter Three: This chapter focuses on the research methodology and approaches used to gather and analyse the data for the study. The methodological issues addressed in the chapter include the data gathering process, including related strategies and tools. The chapter describes and discusses in detail the population sampling process, issues of reliability and validity, and the limitations of the study. The chapter also focuses on ethical considerations and the challenges associated with aspects of the data gathering process.

Chapter Four: This chapter covers part one of the findings and analysis of data gathered from the field work. It contextualizes the CA from the perspective of school performance, and also provides a brief summary of how poverty as a product of history and societal structures influences learner performance in the schools. It uses the capabilities lens to further explicate how various factors influence learner performance in the three schools involved in the study. The chapter elucidates various dynamics emerging from the data that hinder the abilities and efforts of schools and school principals to convert existing resources into functionings. In particular it interrogates the unfreedoms accumulated by learners within classrooms, and how these unfreedoms hinder the ability of these learners to attain certain functionings. This is demonstrated by examining the role of resources within classrooms, classroom dynamics, and the role of the communities in which these schools are situated. The three schools are identified as schools A, B, and C to clearly indicate some of the unique challenges faced by each of the schools, and the efforts made by principals and teachers in each school to ensure learner freedoms to learn, and the varying performance patterns that emerge from these schools.

Chapter Five: This forms part two of the findings and analysis of the data. It highlights the role of the Progression Policy in influencing learner performance, particularly in Q-1 schools in South Africa. It discusses the dynamics of the Progression Policy focusing on its implications on learner performance in the selected schools. It discusses the factors that influence learner progression, and the implications for the Progression Policy. Thus, the chapter elucidates how the Progression Policy, though formulated with good intentions, contributes to formalizing a baggage for learners. In essence, problems accumulated in one grade are carried on to the next grade where more problems await them. The chapter also presents comments on the weaknesses of the Progression Policy, which include; its inability to define the necessary administrative prerogatives, and responsibilities of schools, and the lack of clear cut structures, lack of monitoring and evaluation, laxity and lack of motivation of teachers, and the general neglect, and miscommunication amongst stakeholders. I therefore argue in this chapter that the Progression Policy, rather than maintaining equity and quality in education have created learner unfreedoms within classroom spaces, particularly in Q-1 schools.

Chapter Six: This chapter draws together the capability sets and empirical data presented in chapters 4 and 5, in an attempt to generate a clearer understanding of learner performance in

Q-1 schools. The chapter shows how various capability sets interplay at each point, within each space, to sway learner performance. The chapter emphasizes the need to look at what transpires in Q-1 schools from a contextual viewpoint, when evaluating or judging their abilities to perform. It discusses the need to look closely at the interplay of those involved in driving freedoms, unfreedoms, issues of access, conversion, individual spaces, and the capabilities of all those involved in driving learner functionings. The chapter therefore refutes the current formulae ratings and orderings of schools that are currently based on a one-size-fit all principle, whereby Q-1 schools are considered equal in terms of resources and equality of education delivered, disregarding challenges and circumstances unique to each school, thus an approach which would judge school performance and capabilities based on individual spaces.

Chapter Seven: This chapter concludes the thesis with a summary of the key findings. It brings together key theoretical insights as a reflection of the research questions informing the study. It finally presents the implications of the findings of the study in the domains of practice, policy and further research.

1.10 Conclusion

This chapter situates the performance problem in poor South African primary schools. Based on existing performance challenges and attempts made to resolve these, the chapter positions the CA as a possible theoretical lens to explore and understand learner performance in poor primary schools. The chapter also presents critical questions within the South African education system that are related to the study as well as the research questions and aims of the study. Furthermore, the chapter presents the central argument guiding the research, and also the significance and limitations of the study. The chapter concludes with a synopsis of the various chapters and the main ideas thereof.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses the ways in which existing literature on learner performance, both local and international, offers insights into learner performance in Quintile-1 (Q-1) primary schools in South Africa. The main purpose of this chapter is to investigate how the fundamental causes of learner underperformance are elucidated in this literature. As was mentioned in the previous chapter, learner underperformance, especially in Q-1 primary schools in South Africa, has become a matter of serious concern to a range of stakeholders. Most of the literature reviewed dates from 1994 to 2014. The aim of this review is to set a trajectory for a clearer understanding of why learner underperformance, particularly in poor schooling communities, continues to make headlines, twenty years into our new democracy, despite efforts made by the government, through resource reallocation to ensure equity and quality education in schools around the country. The aim is also to establish the limitations of this literature. In the process, the chapter attempts to illuminate some of the reasons why adjustments in terms of research recommendations by the government, by way of changes to existing school policies and practices have not yielded results worth celebrating.

In this chapter I argue that, although learner underperformance in poor school communities has been covered extensively by many researchers and education analysts, certain threads that connect the realities of underperformance are wittingly or unwittingly relegated to the background or not sufficiently interrogated. Secondly, although the government has provided ample resources in an attempt to ensure equity, and quality education in schools, this intervention has proved to be insufficient to change the current platform and pattern of learner underperformance, especially in Q-1 schools. Thus, as I have argued in the previous chapter, investigating the current crisis from a local point of view, through the lens of the Capabilities Approach (CA), could add new insights to the on-going debates and contestations on learner underperformance in Q-1 schools.

This chapter is organized into five sections. Section one introduces the rationale for reviewing the relevant literature; section two presents the conceptual framework that informs the study. The third section covers the relevant international literature on learner

performance, and the fourth section looks specifically at literature on learner performance in poor primary schools in South Africa. The fifth section sums up and concludes the chapter.

2.2 Conceptual framework: Capabilities and education

This section presents a discussion of the theoretical lens I use to make meaning of issues of learner performance in Q-1 primary schools in Cape Town. Amartya Sen (1992), in outlining his Capability Approach, considers freedoms and unfreedoms as influential elements in the achievement of functioning, and I found these to fit well into the circumstances, and experiences of Q-1 primary schools.

The CA, a central constituent in the writings of Amartya Sen, is underpinned by the following constructs: Capabilities, Functionings, Conversion, and Freedoms and Unfreedoms. Sen (1992) postulates that, even where equal resources are provided, and barriers or constraints to achievements are not considered serious, there are possibilities of variations in outcomes. In this study I argue that, due to the on-going and existing variations in learner performance in South Africa, even among poor schools in similar communities (Taylor, 2009), there is a need to apply the CA as a means of understanding the underlying reasons for these variances, and investigating the real freedoms and unfreedoms of learners in poor school communities. Such an interrogation would incorporate Sen's view that people and communities differ in numbers of ways, and as such, inequalities peculiar to them, may positively or negatively influence individuals' freedoms to achieve in each community and in individual institutions (Sen, 1992). Therefore, the accumulation of resources is not the ultimate determinant of a person's/institution's ability to achieve certain functionings (Sen, 1985, 1999). The ability to convert existing resources into achievable goals is determined by capabilities possessed by the person/institution concerned, and is influenced by both internal and external factors (Sen, 1985). The CA is thus seen as a broad, normative framework for the evaluation and assessment of individual well-being and social arrangements, as well as the design of policies, and proposals about social change (Sen, 1989).

Sen's approach is applicable in the spaces of Q-1 primary schools because it unveils a mode of understanding the nature and causes of poverty and deprivation, and their related influence on, and implications for, educational performance, that differs from and is a shift from the mainstream common sense assumption that resources equal achievement. It argues that

individuals/institutions should not be assessed based on the amount of resources at their disposal without considering the pertinent but silent variables (internal and external characteristics) that influence their abilities to achieve what they value in life relating to education. According to the CA, these external and internal features are considered to differ within spaces, based on the assumption that every person/institution is unique. According to Sen (1985 & 1992), this view influences our thoughts of how human diversity impacts on our assessment of equality and inequality in the domain of Q-1 schools. Sen (1992) argues that diversity enables people/institutions to progress differently even in circumstances where they have the same amounts of primary goods, an approach this study employs to in order to understand the variations in learner underperformance in poor schooling communities. Sen (1992:xi), in attempting to reemphasize the importance of uniqueness (human diversity), argues that it is not advisable to assess or compare two institutions/persons based on the premise that “all men are created equal”, while ignoring many important, salient variables that create the possibilities of other inequalities within and between spaces. Such settings are considered to significantly influence the conversion process. This complements the rationale for choosing three Q-1 primary schools within the same neighbourhood and using those phenomena which form the core of the CA.

Another reason why Sen’s (1992) conversion process could be applied to these schools is the fact that it demonstrates that different people/institutions (schools) with the same amount of resources are more likely to convert them at differing rates within the same time frame. The CA holds that, for resources to be converted into achievable goals, the capabilities possessed by all role players are crucial in determining output (Sen, 1999). The CA in this process introduces the crucial role differences in spaces, and other existing dynamics within individual institutions, play in influencing development or achievement. This can be expressed both between and within communities; hence the reason why variations in learner performance, even in schools within the same community, needs to be interrogated vigorously to better understand existing challenges in their individual spaces and contexts. Consequently, if learner performance among institutions is to be compared with, or measured against, the aim of achieving ‘objective’ results, the yardstick of measurement should take into consideration the existence of different variables that include individual capabilities, human diversities, the conversion process, freedoms and unfreedoms, and those features, unique to the individual/institution. The CA, with its concentration on the relationship between individual capabilities and achievements, and available resources, provides new

insights into how we think about what people do, why they do what they do, and why they succeed or fail to succeed (Terzi, 2005). In this context I chose to investigate the on-going underperformance of three Q-1 primary schools in the same community, using the CA as a preferred theoretical lens.

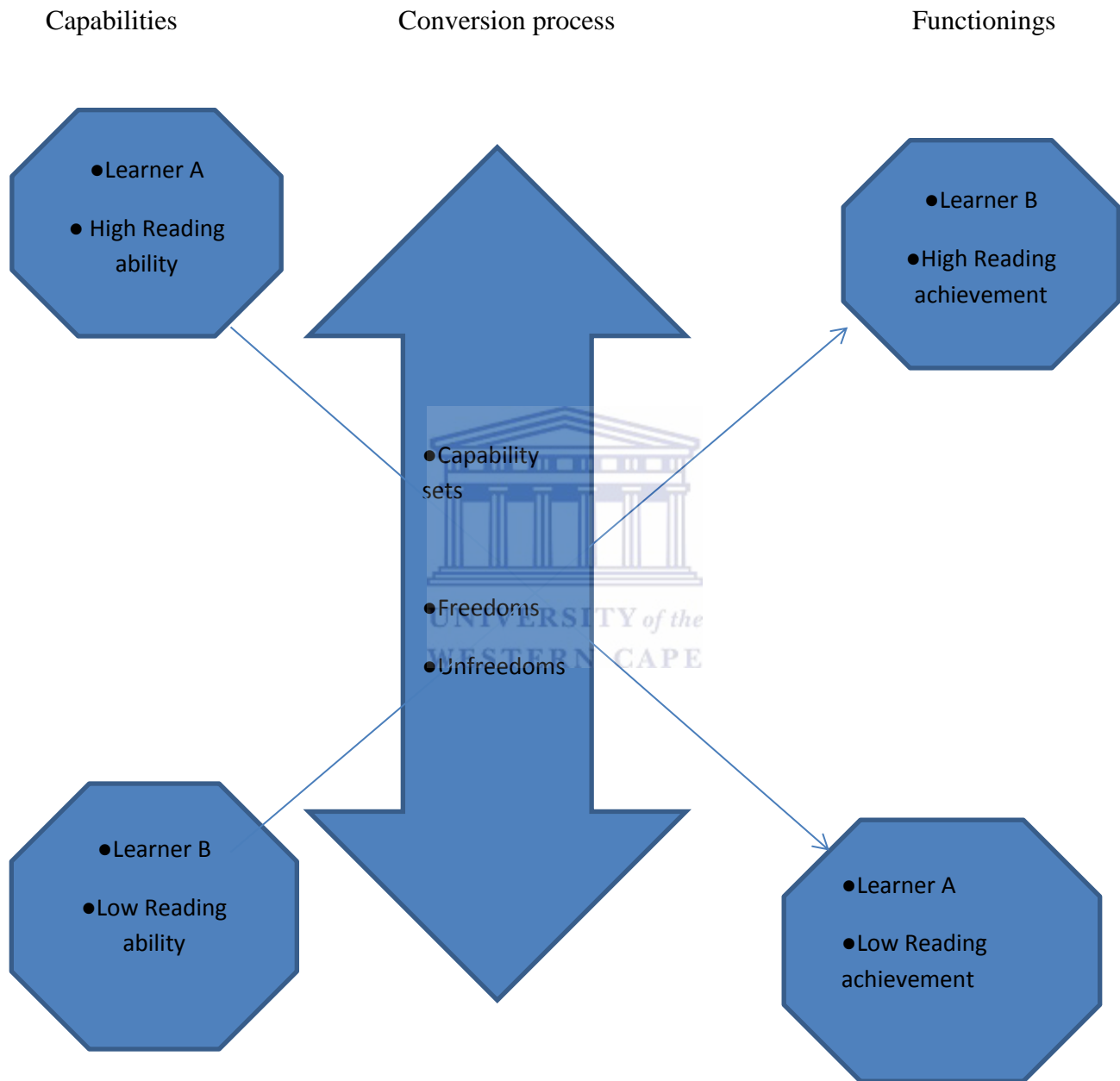


Figure 1: The Capabilities Approach showing existing resources influenced by the conversion process to achieve functionings (Sen, 1992; 1999).

The CA thus suggests that under-achievement could be circumstantial, involving a number of different contextual factors. Therefore, if an assessment of two institutions with equal resources is done and which ignores the particular barriers or constraints operating on learners' abilities to achieve, the probability exists of arriving at ambiguous or biased judgements (Sen, 1992). This could result from a concentration on achievable results based on summative and standardised assessment tools, while ignoring the existence and influence of certain peculiarities (Sen, 1999). This study thus uses the CA as a platform to create a better understanding and awareness of why some Q-1 schools lag behind affluent schools in terms of in learner performance, and on occasion lag behind other schools in high poverty level areas (see Chapter 1: Sections 1.1 and 1.2), and also why some of them perform better than others, even if they have the same amount of resources, and are located within the same communities.

Figure 1 is based on the premise that individuals/institutions may possess similar resources, primary goods or income, but may not have similar capabilities or freedoms to convert them into achievements (Sen, 1992, 1999). The impact of freedoms and unfreedoms, the lack of certain individual capabilities, external and internal factors, diversities in individuals, and constraints within the conversion process, uniquely impact on the abilities of learners to achieve certain functionings, irrespective of existing resources.

Figure 1 clearly shows how learner ability to achieve is influenced more by the processes involved in converting existing resources into functionings than on the amount of resources available. With both learners (A & B) having the same amount of resources, learner A, due to the existing unfreedoms, and the lack of the necessary capability sets, ends up having a low reading level of achievement. This is despite the learner possessing the innate potential to master reading. Conversely, learner B, with a low reading ability, and having the same amount of resources as learner A, is fortunate to have the enabling freedoms and the necessary capability sets to achieve a relatively high reading functioning. The ability to convert existing resources enables learner B to achieve a high reading functioning, despite originally having a low reading ability. Thus I argue that this reflects what transpires in Q-1 schools, but what has been and is sparingly recognised, or taken seriously by the DoE in the past and presently by the DBE, as well as principals, teachers and policy makers.

Thus when the CA is applied it becomes clear that:

The extent of real inequality of opportunities that people face cannot be readily deduced from the magnitude of inequality of incomes [resources], since what we can or cannot do, can or cannot achieve, do not [explicitly] depend just on our incomes [resources] but also on the variety of physical and social characteristics that affect our lives and make us what we are (Sen, 1992:28).

Sen (1992) emphasizes the need for researchers and policy-makers to seriously consider the gap between resources that potentially lead to freedoms to achieve, and the nature of achievement itself. This further interrogates the research question (see Chapter 1) that deals with the role resources play in influencing the performance of learners in Q-1 schools, a role that has been seriously and extensively interrogated by many researchers with no clear cut or definite answers or solutions emerging.

According to the CA, one could argue that peoples' freedoms to achieve are limited not only by the resources in their possession, or at their disposal, but also by the lack of "effective freedom" (Sen, 1992:65) to achieve what they desire in life or for the institution (King, 1962). Therefore, actual freedom is only attained when one has the power to convert available resources to fulfil desired ends. This argument aligns with Sen's (1992) assertion that, rather than viewing and assessing poverty based on societal contexts, it "should better be seen in terms of capability failure than the failure to meet the basic needs of certain commodities" (Sen, 1992:109). The CA thus provides a platform for evaluating in a more comprehensive and nuanced way the achievement of the education system or learner performances in general and Q-1 schools in particular. However, the CA, like any other paradigm, was influenced by different theories, and has over the years gained momentum through its impact on various institutions, disciplines, scholars, and policy makers, giving rise to a variety of interpretations and critiques.

2.2.1 A Critique of the Capabilities Approach

The origins of the CA are to be found in the works of Adam Smith, Karl Marx, and Aristotle, and most importantly the Rawlsian theory of Justice as Fairness (Sen, 1976, 1989 & 1992; Nussbaum & Sen, 1993). Although the CA draws its inspiration from these theories, it is in some respects in conflict with them, especially with regard to the list of functionings that constitute human well-being (Sen, 1989). Although Sen (1989) sees the Rawlsian theory as a

watershed in the CA's development, he does not accept its premise of primary resources being crucial in determining human well-being.

Furthermore, while the CA was established based on a welfare economic and philosophical perspective, it has developed into a broad interdisciplinary, and multi-dimensional framework through policy application, and adaptation beyond the field of economics and philosophy (Robeyns, 2002, 2003, 2005, 2006a, 2008; Nussbaum, 2000; Kuklys, 2005; Walker & Unterhalter, 2007). The CA has developed through the suggestion of a standard set of capabilities (Nussbaum, 2000) as opposed to Sen's proposal of choosing a capability set based on circumstances, space and goals, thus exposing the theory to criticisms, varying interpretations and applications.

The variance in interpretation of the CA arises from its application by people with different scholarly backgrounds and in different fields or disciplines. The CA has been criticised in particular for its inability to provide a clear-cut specific capability set and list of functionings, a gap Nussbaum, a developer of Sen's theory, has attempted to fill (Nussbaum, 2000, 2003). In addition, Robeyns (2005, 2006b) asserts that the limitations of the CA impact negatively on its usability, since scholars and policy makers also encounter difficulties regarding its interpretation and implementation. However, Sen (1999) was aware of such gaps, and acknowledged the existence of discrepancies within the CA.

In Sen's view, the existence of flexibility within the CA should be regarded as a major advantage rather than as a weakness. According to Sen, the approach should serve as an opportunity for its users [researchers] to have a free hand in choosing capability sets that suit their particular milieu, as well as criteria for selection and interpretation. Sen (1989) acknowledged that, by allowing people to select their own set of capabilities based on their specificities, should result in more flexible interpretations and outcomes. Sen (1989:45) reiterates that "in social investigation and measurement, it is undoubtedly more important to be vaguely right than to be precisely wrong". In Sen's (1992) view, since the flexibility of the CA results from the complex nature of the concept, operationalization should be guided by individual contexts and goals, rather than by specifics.

The flexibility of the CA is seen as being at the core of different methods of applications in research using Sen's original CA model, and thus as distorting the actual usefulness of the

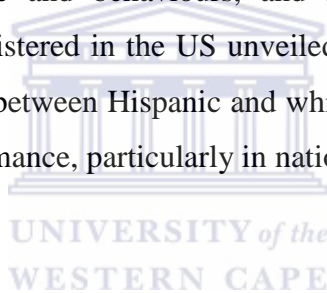
approach in the analysis of social policy due to the lack of clarity in interpretation and operationalization of the CA (Goerne, 2010). Likewise, Ibrahim (2006) extends his criticisms beyond the list of capability sets by identifying the lack of an interpretative relationship between individual capabilities and the social structure. Despite these criticisms, the CA remains an important tool for both empirical and practical application in social policy analysis (Saito, 2003; Mitra, 2006; Walker, 2006). Its core construct allows for its application in different fields of study and in policy design, since its key concepts potentially provide an innovative approach to understanding equalities and inequalities, particularly in the area of education research.

Despite existing critiques of the CA as a theoretical framework for research, it is seen by many scholars as a work in progress that has the potential to afford scholars and researchers an opportunity to develop a variety of applications, based on their particular contexts, approaches and interests (Akire, 2008). The CA, rather than explaining poverty, inequality and well-being, provides concepts and a workable framework for the conceptualization and evaluation of social policies. This explains why Robeyns (2003) considers that the CA should be seen primarily as a frame of thought, a mode of thinking about normative issues, which in effect could be a loosely defined paradigm. This subtle alignment accounts for the adaptation of the CA by various disciplines, including, education, sociology, applied welfare, development economics, development studies, and social and public policy analysts, to suit their interpretations, and the nature of policy implementation. I thus make use of the CA in the current study as a framework for understanding the specific phenomenon of learner underperformance in Q-1 primary schools in Cape Town. In order to gain a more comprehensive understanding of learner underperformance in poor schooling communities in South Africa, as well as the existing global trend in the area of research, I also reviewed past and recent national and international literature on the phenomenon.

2.3 International perspectives on learner underperformance and achievement gaps

Learner underperformance, and its accompanying challenges, is a worldwide phenomenon, often accompanied by disagreements on the extent of the impact of certain familiar factors on underperformance particularly in developing countries and high poverty level areas. In countries where performance disparities, or achievement gaps, are noticeable, learner backgrounds are likely to have a significant inscription (Ladson-Billings, 2006). Within the

United States (US), racial inequality dominates the question of achievement gaps (Scott & Quinn, 2014). Ladson-Billings (2006:3) sees the term ‘achievement gap’ as having gained a lot of popularity and able to make “its way into common parlance and everyday usage”, a phrase that could easily be applicable to the South African context where underperformance is seen as a national problem (Taylor, 2011). Although income gaps dominate the list of factors responsible for educational inequalities, studies in countries like the US seem to have some reservations. In this context, Ladson-Billings (2006) argues that educational inequalities are race bound. Lee (2002), in an elaborate study which investigated the trend of achievement gaps between racial groupings in the US, noted that, although certain causes are common and familiar, there are probabilities that certain factors might provide only a partial explanation for achievement gaps, or be applicable for a specific time period, or for a particular ethnic group, with reading and Mathematics as focus areas. According to Lee (2002), factors in the US that promote achievement gaps in that country include socioeconomic status (SES) and family conditions, youth culture and behaviours, and schooling conditions and school practices. National testing administered in the US unveiled wide achievement gaps between black and white Americans, and between Hispanic and whites Americans. It could be argued that this racial disparity in performance, particularly in national systemic tests in South Africa could be seen as a common trend.



It is interesting, to note that these widening gaps were pointed out earlier by Jencks and Phillips (1998). They pointed out that the differences in mathematical abilities between African Americans and European Americans tended to manifest at a very early age, and carried on into adulthood, what Lee and Burkam (2002) see as built in inequality from the starting gate. In their opinion, a similarity in family income, and the opportunity for black and white learners to attend similar schools could contribute minimally to reduce achievement gaps. Lee and Burkam (2002) argue that, although eliminating achievement gaps between black and white Americans requires more than a generation to achieve, it is important to strive for, because its subsequent attainment would reduce racial disparities in both educational attainment and earning capacity (Jencks et al., 1998:7). Jencks et al. (1998) concur that, although parents need to play a role in attempting to change existing achievement gaps, schools and teachers have a bigger role to play in this process.

In presenting a different perspective, in a study of achievement gaps in more than 46 countries, Akiba, Le Tendre and Scribner (2007) vigorously interrogated the widely held

view that teacher quality in low income schools impacts on learner opportunities to perform in Mathematics. They were of the opinion that achievement gaps go beyond teacher quality, although it does play a fundamental role in learner performance. In my study I argue that this view could be a platform for countries around the world to relook the fundamental factors held responsible for learner underperformance, since in most cases unjustified attention is focused on the wrong factors, while those that really impede learner abilities to perform remain elusive, unnoticed, and unattended to.

Strickland and Alvermann (2004) acknowledge that learners from low income backgrounds are the most vulnerable, a scenario that seems obvious world-wide, including in South Africa. They see substantive funding to schools with intakes of learners from low income families as a move in the right direction towards improving learner performance, although questioning the quality and quantity of such funding efforts. In their opinion such funding should have the potential to offset other numerous dynamics at play in such schooling communities; otherwise it would be a wasted effort. This argument is a strand worth interrogating for the purpose of this study.

From another perspective, Garcia and Cohen (2011), in an attempt to understand variations in student performance in American society, acknowledged that there exist possibilities that learner underperformance could be caused by lack of access to certain resources. In essence, simply providing the necessary resources without taking other factors into account is no guarantee of improvement. In their opinion, looking more carefully at learner schooling communities and classroom settings has the possibility to create a viable platform to achieve certain goals. They see social-psychological factors that have multiple causes and consequences as constituting a deterrent to learner motivation and effort to perform and achieve. The classroom is seen as a milieu with potential social tensions, which are often ignored by educationists (Garcia et al., 2011). Hence, it is worth assessing the silent role unfreedoms play within the classroom in inhibiting learners' efforts to achieve, even where resources are available.

While the US strives to close the achievement gaps between races, other countries, particularly developing countries, have problems that are more intriguing and complex. Latin American countries like Brazil still experience extremely poor results, which Soares (2006), considers both in terms of quality and quantity. He agrees that learner underachievement in

Brazil is not only determined by Socioeconomic Status (SES) or racial factors, but also by region of residence, whereby learners from low income areas perform at levels that could be equated to three times below their standard.

Similarly, Nabuka (1984:36), in a study to understand the achievement gaps between Fujian and Indian learners revealed that home backgrounds play a significant role in learner experiences. These included distance of the school from students' homes, time allowed for homework, number of books in the homes, number of books read, fathers'/guardians' level of education, availability of textbooks, and learner environments. The number of story books at home was also seen as a contributory factor. This was worsened by the fact that learners, despite coming from impoverished backgrounds, had to purchase their own books. Nabuka (1984) saw family as an important support structure contributing to the psychological stimulation of Indian learners' academic development, a factor that was lagging in the Fujian learners, thus their inability to perform well. Nabuka's report however did not eliminate the possible influences of school factors on learner ability to perform.

The challenges of achievement gaps around the world appear both similar and varied, based on peculiarities of region, and approaches by various governments. Apart from the US, Latin America and India, Booth (1996) examined the case of Swaziland. At the time, Booth (1996) saw learner performance in Swaziland to be a reflection of dysfunctional families, which breathe different dynamics that influence learner experiences and performance in the classroom. Although the SES has a notable impact on learner ability to succeed, the effects of parental absence in Swaziland seem to override all other factors. Comparatively, boys are seen to be mostly affected in Swaziland, since in terms of Swazi culture, and traditions, the presence and influence of the father figure on boys is very dominant. A sample from grade results clearly shows the negative impact of the absence of fathers on learner ability to succeed, resulting in high dropout rates, especially in poor rural areas. Since Booth's study there has been a sharp rise in the number of orphans in Swaziland due to the country's having the highest rate of HIV and AIDS in the world.

International literature surveyed shows a persistent gap in learner achievement, which constantly attracts attention. The question that lingers is why achievement gaps or learner underperformance around the world persist despite extensive research being carried out, and consistent government support. I would argue that the problem has been identified all too

often, and that rigorous efforts need to be made to unveil new approaches towards addressing this challenge, thus my use of the CA to explore persistent learner underperformance in poor schooling communities in Cape Town, South Africa. This is an original approach in the education field that is meant to gain an insight into the problem from an angle that is yet to be popularised: looking at people's capabilities, the conversion process, freedoms and unfreedoms, and learner abilities to achieve certain functionings. Research on learner performance in poor schooling communities in South Africa is examined and critiqued as part of that journey.

2.4 National perspectives on learner underperformance

As was mentioned in the previous chapter, the reasons for learner underperformance, especially in poor schooling communities in South Africa and beyond, are being debated in many circles, including those of education administrators, school principals, education researchers, and the wider public. Although a range of different reasons and theories have been offered to explain learner underperformance in South Africa since the demise of apartheid in 1994, and the subsequent adjustment of government policies in response to various recommendations, schools in poorer communities continue to exhibit distressing performance patterns. The most frequently offered reasons for poor learner performance include; Socioeconomic Status (SES), the quantity and quality of resources in schools, management deficiencies of principals in schools and of teachers in classrooms, teacher content knowledge, and the non-participation of parents in their children's learning. Questions arise amongst researchers and policy makers as to the ways in which these factors are being approached by researchers to explain underperformance in South Africa's poor schooling communities. Amongst these questions, that of the role played by learners' SES has been the most prominent, with many researchers and policy makers questioning the degree and nature of its influence on learner underperformance. Research has shown that, while there is a tenacious causal connection between resources and performance, this connection remains elusive and difficult to identify with any clarity. In this context Christie (2008:27) argued that "...for change to take place, we need a more critical approach to [understanding] inequalities..." Researchers and policy makers have also stressed the need to look at the influence of poverty on learner performance from a relative rather than an absolute point of view (Dieltiens & Meny-Gibert, 2012), while Maarman (2009), using the CA lens, argues for the need to interrogate learner performance from the perspective of

capabilities and freedoms. In this study I use the capabilities approach (CA), placing an emphasis on how the conversion process, as well as freedoms and unfreedoms, influence learner experiences within classroom spaces in Quintile 1 (Q-1) schools in a specific poor schooling community. My research draws its inspiration and theoretical perspective from an existing body of literature on learner performance in South Africa and other countries. It is worth noting that theorists in this field present a variety of different approaches, different points of focus, as well as conclusions. These give rise to questions, the answers to which require a comprehensive, rigorous and in-depth approach to the problem. A review of these different perspectives also reveals gaps in research in the area that require probing and (re)filling.

Crouch and Mabogoane (2001) focus on the nature, quantity and quality of resources provided to schools in South Africa, and how these resources do or do not translate into the desired education outcomes. According to these researchers, understanding the nature of learner performance in South African schools is a complex process, since the relationship between resources and performance is almost impossible to define (Crouch et al., 2001). They view the process of resource distribution to schools to be essentially uneven, and to be quantitative rather than qualitative, thus contributing to performance gaps within certain categories of schools. They argue that in South Africa attention is focused more on how well or badly schools perform according to narrow short term quantifiable criteria, criteria which do not take into account the importance of what schools can or cannot do with available resources in a holistic and long term way. Crouch et al. (2001) were investigating and highlighting the need to look at the capabilities of schools and school managers, and the unfreedoms that inhibit their abilities to convert existing resources within their schools into learner functionings. This explains why at the time they were anxious to understand why schools with enormous resources continued to underperform. Interrogating such research and hypotheses holds the possibility of igniting a new strand of debate, and one which may introduce new ways of understanding the specific role resources play or do not play in influencing learner performance. Their argument aligns with a critical research aim in this study, which is that of determining the role of resources in influencing learner performances in Q-1 primary schools.

Furthermore, Anderson, Case and Lam (2001) see the task of understanding the underperformance problem as being particularly difficult if the roles played by learners' SES,

and household incomes in this are ignored or underestimated. They see household incomes as having direct implications on learner experiences and achievements, because parents' investing little or no time and resources in their children has been shown to have a negative effect on their children's ability to attend school regularly, as well as on their children's performance (see Chapter 4: Sections 4.4.5; 4.5.3 and 4.6.3). What one can conclude from the study of Anderson et al. (2001) is that the inability of parents to invest in their school going children eventually translates into certain unfreedoms within the classroom, both directly and indirectly, as learners become less and less motivated to learn and achieve. They illustrated this phenomenon in their study by showing how the lack of solid family structures affects learner ability to learn. Many learners in poor schooling communities live with single parents, and/or grandmothers who are incapable of supporting their children's education, both financially and morally, because they depend on a meagre social grant that is considered barely sufficient to run the household alone. Understanding how these nuances translate into learner unfreedoms within classroom spaces forms part of the journey I undertake in this research.

Motala (2001) argues that contestations regarding poor school quality emanate from the different perceptions, definitions and connotations attached to school quality. He cautions that school quality should be objectively examined taking South Africa's history into consideration, if one sees change as a process rather than a product. This explains why achieving equity in education through public spending is challenging, as huge financial resources are needed to redress the imbalances caused by the apartheid regime. It will be difficult for policy changes to automatically reflect in all the schools, and in all domains of teaching and learning. Motala's view is affirmed by the CA that asserts that institutions that come from different strands should require different amounts of resources and different timespans to produce the desired results. Thus, focusing on investigating and revealing the specific unfreedoms that inhibit the ability of poorly performing schools in high poverty level areas to positively respond to government policies, by way of improving learner performance to the expected standards would seem a valuable exercise. Motala (2001) clearly positions the role of resources, different spaces, and the apartheid legacy in influencing what happens in South African schools.

Building on Motala's (2001) argument that, apart from the plethora of perceptions and factors surrounding quality of schools and schooling, change takes time, I use the CA as a road map

to argue that, apart from different amounts of resources poured into the schools, considerations of creeping unfreedoms, as well as, the capabilities possessed by those in charge of converting existing resources into learner functionings should not be ignored or underestimated. This line of thought influenced a 2006 plan of action by the Department of Education that focused on the ways in which resources were being allocated, and the challenges schools were encountering in their efforts to translate available resources into quality education (Hartley, 2006). The intervention also investigated and highlighted the existence of certain silent but salient barriers within schools that needed addressing to ensure access and quality education for the poorest learners.

Pretorius and Machet (2004), in their attempt to explain the role resources play in influencing learner performance, hypothesize that SES is a key component in determining learner literacy competency within South African schools. They see learners' ability to learn to read, and consequently achieve the required standard of performance, to be based on available resources and exposure to education related activities at home, as well as the nature and quality (rather than quantity) of resources at schools. The study of Pretorius et al. (2004), set within the context of a Grade 1 classroom, indicates how certain teaching and learning practices embedded at this level of schooling influence learner abilities to achieve in the later grades. In essence, these studies show that the correlation between unfreedoms accumulated at home and at school can help to explain the nature of learner functionings. Sometimes the consequences of these unfreedoms are hard to trace in the later grades, as they remain elusive. This aligns with a critical research aim of this study, which is determining the results a cohort analysis will yield when attendance, retention, and pass rate of learner performance in Q-1 schools is evaluated (see chapter 5). This partly elucidates why understanding learner performance in Q-1 schooling communities is elusive, and often beyond the control of individual schools (Howie, 2003).

Chisholm (2004) argues that quality education in poor schooling communities remains problematic despite interventions by the education department to improve the quality of education, due to the tenacious impact of poverty related factors. From Chisholm's understanding, engaging poverty related dynamics could pave the way to a clearer understanding of the predicaments of learners in Q-1 schools. Thus, again what emerges from Chisholm's analysis is the need for a closer examination of a range of existing factors

operating on learner performance, and that failure to do so can result in unspecified unfreedoms.

Many theories have emerged from education researchers as to why learner underperformance in South African poor schooling communities stubbornly persists. Van der Berg and Louw (2006) argue that the existence of two kinds of disparities in learner performance in South Africa is a legacy of apartheid. Taking this line of argument into account, I see understanding how history influences learner performance as critical to my research. Van der Berg and Louw (2006) argue that there exist variations in learner performances within and between schools, an argument that aligns with existing theories and perceptions about learner performance, and a debate in which I engage in seeking to understand some of the reasons for such variances. Thus, I selected three Q-1 primary schools in the same locality that have been seen to perform varying, in an attempt to vigorously interrogate these variances.

Van der Berg (2006) also concluded that continuing underperformance since 1994 is difficult to explain and understand, especially given the huge sums allocated to revamp the educational sector, interventions which are not positively reflected through learner performances. Based on his line of thought, I would argue that this is due to an elusive chain of events. He focuses particularly on learners' SES as a product of history, which to a large extent translates into unfreedoms that influence learner performance, inhibits efforts made by poor schools to convert available resources into learner outcomes, and contributes to parents not taking responsibility for their children's education. Van der Berg (2006) argues that, although resources play a vital role in improving learner performance, this group of factors renders their efficacy and legitimacy questionable.

Similarly, Spaul (2012b), using results from the Southern and East African Consortium for Monitoring Educational Quality (SACMEQ III) for Grade 6 learners, also endorses SES, a persistent remnant of apartheid, as a key player in influencing the performance of learners in poor schooling communities. He also emphasises that learner inability to do homework, attend preschool, as well as the limited number of reading books and textbooks in school as well as in their homes, all of which are related to SES, influence learners' level of performance. Although acknowledging the general philosophy and theory used by many in the education research and policy areas to explain why schools in poor schooling communities are bound to underperform, Spaul (2012b), like Van der Berg (2006),

interrogates the variances in performances exhibited by poor schooling communities, and underscores the need to examine carefully other factors such as school management, parental education, and teacher quality. He suggests the following as crucial in providing possibilities for quality education and improved learner performance in all South African schools:

- Making sure learners have access to at least one year of quality preschool-education,
- Providing adequate access to reading books and textbooks,
- Increasing the frequency of homework in poor schools,
- Improving school management and discipline,
- Improving the ability of teachers to convey their subject-knowledge, and
- Learning from other countries that use fewer resources to produce better results.

Looking at the relationship of these dynamics, as well as how they translate into different kinds of unfreedoms, which impede learner ability to achieve certain functionings within the classrooms, I argue that a suitable combination of these could provide some of the answers to persistent underperformance in schools in poor communities.

Armstrong (2009) argues that, apart from the impact of SES on learner performance in poor schooling communities, teacher characteristics, competence and experience play an important role. Armstrong (2009) argues that all teachers possess the potential to dilute or minimise some of the impacts of SES on learner achievement, and are capable of transforming learner experiences and performance within the classroom. Therefore, employing more senior and experienced teachers in schools in poor communities and with strong performance records, in Armstrong's (2009) view is advisable, because they can be said to possess the experience and wisdom needed to change the future performance and career path of learners. However, considering not only what transpires in classrooms in Q-1 schools, but also the nature and quality of teacher training in South Africa, Armstrong's (2009) point of view needs more interrogation.

Commenting on education under the apartheid government, Fiske and Ladd (2006) claim that the nature of educational policies instituted during the apartheid regime made the educational sector racially unequal, a situation which, at the time of their study, had persisted ten years into democracy. In analysing the South African government's effort to ensure educational equity, they concur that existing patterns are not substantially different from those of the apartheid era. In their opinion, government efforts to achieve equal education outcomes through various interventions, including school funding, have been far from effective, especially in historically disadvantaged schools. Fiske and Ladd (2006) see these failures as due to learners' existing social and economic local realities, both at home and within communities. Fiske and Ladd (2006:97) posit that educational policies instituted in South Africa since 1994 have been "race blind"; they have failed to take into consideration the realities of racial disparities, often coinciding, or synonymous with, SES, that negatively affect learner experiences in disadvantaged communities. They therefore emphasize the need to look at the actual disadvantages of the schools from a historical perspective, rather than evaluating learner performance *per se*, or separate from these realities. In this context they advocate the designing of more stringent and considered policies to offset the actual imbalances that have existed, and still exist, within poor schooling communities. They argue that what existed on paper up to the time of their study in 2006 in terms of equal educational opportunities was mostly related to access, since unequal educational outcomes was still a reality in South Africa.

The volume of studies questioning the nature of learner performance in Q-1 schools in relation to the role various factors play in impeding learner abilities prompted a massive input by the DoE in its attempt to find a way forward out of the underperformance crisis. Hartley's (2006) WCED report "Setting a strong foundation in literacy and numeracy up to Grade 6 through a comprehensive GET strategy", highlighted gaps existing at the time, and specified the steps to be taken to achieve WCED's goals of educational access and 'quality'. In Hartley's (2006) view, improving teacher working conditions, revisiting the assessment method specified in curriculum 2005 (see Chapter 5), providing enough quality resources, improving managerial capacity, encouraging active involvement of role-players within schools, and encouraging networking between schools, would have the potential to produce good quality education for everyone. Although the policy document acknowledges that resources in some of the schools at the time were underutilised, the reasons were yet to be identified, a gap I argue in this study was due at the time to the existence of unfreedoms and

capability limitations of those in charge of converting existing resources into outcomes, and general school quality. Although Hartley (2006) acknowledged the absence of libraries in many schools, and the scarcity or unavailability of appropriate books for learner use in others, there was no mention of the lack of skilled and/or full time librarians, a crucial setback for schools with skeletal libraries and even for those with adequately stocked libraries (see Chapter 4). Having reviewed such studies and reports, I set out to unravel how such lapses and deficiencies at the time contributed to learner unfreedoms within Q-1 schools, and to obstructing learners' ability in these schools to achieve functionings.

Interestingly, Hartley (2006) emphasized WCED's Progression Policy as focusing on retaining learners within the system while ignoring the unfreedoms it had unwittingly introduced within the teaching and learning spaces, as well as the implications for learners' ability to achieve certain functionings (see Chapter 5). According to Hartley's (2006) policy document, a learner may not repeat a phase or grade more than once, and would be promoted to the next phase or grade even if she or he does not fulfil the required academic competencies. Behind these directives I see the DoE's intention to retain a reasonable or acceptable number of learners within the system, in the interests of reaching its goal of universal access to schooling, and school quality, while ignoring the potential negative effects of the implementation of this policy on physical and human resources in the classrooms, especially in Q-1 schools.

This situation raises difficult and complex questions concerning the precise meaning of quality in education within the South African context. It is the complexity of these questions, I would argue, that crucially informs the elusiveness of answers that could explain, and go some way to address, learner underperformance. I and other critics of the Progression Policy argue that the policy does not consider the ways in which it formalises certain baggage which will burden and impede learners as they journey through progressively higher grades without being equipped to do so, and without the kind of support they require in the new grades, and the impact all this has on the teaching and learning process. In addition the policy does not specify when, how, with what, and by whom the necessary support should be provided to enable these learners to experience a smooth coping process. It is clear that the long-term effects of the policy go beyond teacher content knowledge, ethics, learner motivation, school management, and available resources. These issues and concerns are highlighted in volumes of research attempting to locate the actual causes of underperformance, especially in poor

schooling communities. Ignoring the long-term implications of such policies in classrooms would mean education departments and policy makers shooting themselves in the foot, especially if the DBE expects the same poor schools and teachers to improve and propagate quality education and learner performance under the very circumstances created by its controversial and insufficiently thought through policies. My study aims to unravel those unfreedoms that inhibit learners' ability to learn and to perform at an acceptable level, dynamics that are often ignored or underestimated by researchers and policy makers for diverse reasons.

Taylor, Fleisch and Shindler (2008) argue that the harsh realities underlying achievement gaps within the South African school system are caused by what they consider to be as yet undefined salient factors and weaknesses that need to be addressed in order to achieve the government's goal of providing quality education for all. Taylor et al. (2007:2) reported that, at the time of their study, "while four out of five children in former white primary schools read at the right level, less than half of learners attending former Coloured primary schools can read at [their] grade level, and only four children in a hundred in former DET schools are reading at the prescribed level". They argue that underperformance in schools should not be blamed on the schools, and on school principals alone, because the DoE at the time determined how resources were allocated to schools. In the opinion of Taylor et al. (2007:2), looking critically and carefully at what is required by each school before considering what budget is suitable to cover the basic teaching and learning resources of that particular school, may reduce some of the problems experienced in Q-1 schools at the time (see Chapter 4: Sections 4.5.1; 4.6.1; 4.6.1.2 and 4.6.2.3). It is therefore clear that the decision regarding the nature and amounts of education resources to be allocated to schools is often based on a one-size-fits all principle. While this principle takes quintiles into consideration, it ignores the individual needs and challenges of the schools involved.

Similarly, Taylor (2009), frustrated with the fact that policy designers at the time were adopting a one-size-fit all approach, while he and other researchers saw the causes of underperformance in South African schools as multifaceted, concludes that designing a flexible, transparent and negotiated allocations process as a way of improving school quality would be a daunting task. Although basing his analysis on Mathematics test scores, Nick Taylor (2009) paints a bleak picture of South African primary schools in poor schooling communities. He acknowledges that the variances in performance between schools have

historical origins, and that this can provide education departments with an all too ready justification for the existing circumstances in poor schooling communities. He focuses on the variances in learner performance between formerly White schools and Black schools, and goes on to justify the need to interrogate the reasons for a further divide in learner performance between black schools themselves, even when these schools are situated within the same locality, a phenomenon that makes the relationship between resources and performance in Q-1 schools tenuous at best. He suggests that if issues such as the use of time within the classrooms, the dissemination of knowledge, communication among stakeholders, and leadership management are addressed, learner performance can be improved. Thus identifying the fine threads of connectedness between these variables, and their actual manifestations within classroom spaces in Q-1 schools, could strengthen that supposition.

Christie (2008) also theorises on the existent sizeable divide and the striking inequalities within the South African education system caused by apartheid and impacting on learner ability to achieve. She suggests that, for certain goals to be achieved, the material and social divide within, and between, communities needs to be addressed. Christie (2008) in essence recognises Thabo Mbeki's (1998:4) notion of two nations in South Africa as being applicable to the educational sector, and, like Mbeki, sees poverty, and failure to address it, as impeding any attempt to create equality in all spheres of life in South Africa. She explains what it means to be poor by unveiling critical ideologies and theories that I expand on in my study. According to these theories, poverty is recognised as extending beyond material possessions, because unfreedoms to a family member caused by poverty are passed on, or transfer to, other family members, including school children, in different ways, both directly and indirectly. Christie (2008) argues that, because inequality remains persistent in South Africa, is the crucial challenge is to achieve equity and quality in education. She argues that, irrespective of the kind of schools learners attend, what they bring with them to school from home affects their experiences and performance within the classrooms. Christie (2008:1) sees this to be the core reason for the Freedom Charter's "The doors of learning and culture shall be opened" proving unachievable in the present circumstances in South Africa, especially in poor schooling communities. My study however goes beyond such theorisation to demonstrate in concrete and specific ways how such transferability of unfreedoms practically inhibits learner abilities to perform well within classroom spaces.

Similarly, Van der Berg (2008), in a study of Grade 6 learners, argues that, despite the unprecedented resource transfers to historically Black schools, learner performance in these schools is still comparatively lower than in historically White schools, thus emphasising the need to investigate in depth the actual role resources, and those with access to these resources, play in improving, or not improving learner performance, as well as the nature of resources that are provided to schools in need. He argues that learners at poor schools underperform because these schools struggle to overcome the inherited SES disadvantages of the past, as those capabilities to convert existing resources into achievable goals are lacking in both learners and teachers/principals at these schools. Van der Berg (2008) argues that SES contributes to the lack of parental support in education, together with household resources, all of which directly limit learner abilities and potential to achieve at school. In his opinion, a proper diagnosis of the role SES plays in poor schooling communities could provide a clearer picture of the nature of learner performance at primary school and beyond. His point of departure is a comparison of international test score results, which shows that South African schools are seriously lagging behind in terms of standards. Understanding how existing variables inhibit learner ability to perform would therefore require an integrated and persistent effort on the part of researchers and education practitioners.

Taylor's (2008) view of learner performance in poor schooling communities as being a product of history has been mentioned. Historically it is created and perpetuated through SES, and this often makes it impossible to establish the relationship that ought to exist between financial and other resources, and learner performance, despite the amounts of resources provided to the schools by the DoE/DBE. While being sensitive to the past and current circumstances of poor schools, Taylor (2008) cautions that school management needs to regularly go back to the drawing board whenever learner performance is seen to be at risk. Taylor's (2008) views are based on the conception that, when things go wrong in schools, there is often a tendency for authorities to simplify the causes, or to focus on less relevant or surface factors, while ignoring the realities. Taylor (2008) argues that learner performance is bound to be affected by the fact that principals and teachers in poor schools do not always work together towards a common goal. Things often go wrong when principals allow teachers to come and go unchecked, and to teach without adequate communication between teachers and principals/HODs, without monitoring and evaluation, resulting in arbitrary absenteeism among teachers, in turn resulting in half of the actual teaching and learning time not being used effectively due to laxity and poor planning, and consequent poor curriculum

delivery. Taylor (2008:9), in an attempt to clearly position the consequences of such laxity in schools emphasises that, “ensuring the effective use of time in any institution is essentially a leadership responsibility and it would appear from the available evidence that it is a responsibility which the vast majority of principals abdicate”. Thus there exists an unknown, or unexamined, space between resources and performance, which I would argue, if explored, has the potential to produce answers to the burning ‘South African education question’, a strand persistently recurring in past and existing literature on learner performance. Based on such theorising and on studies conducted, I attempt to deepen the exploration of how existing nuances translate into learner unfreedoms within the classroom.

While Soudien (2007) agrees that the legacy of apartheid plays, and may continue to play, a dominant role in shaping learner performances in Q-1 schools, he argues that radical changes in the field of education should not be expected immediately since the apartheid legacy is destined to linger for much longer than is often assumed or expected, a scenario considered by Taylor et al. (2012) as resilient and resistant to change. According to Soudien (2007), government efforts at addressing the social inequalities of the past have not considered the everyday experiences of South Africans, what Sen (1992) refers to as daily freedoms and unfreedoms that can neutralize any efforts made towards improving learner performance at schools. Soudien’s (2007) stock-taking reveals that, although the educational sector is on some levels gradually improving, learner performance remains questionable and a prominent issue in studies in this area. South Africa’s social challenges in and outside of school that need to be seen within an historical context seem to be ignored at the level of policy formulation, despite the impact of these on learner performance. In principle, Soudien (2007) acknowledges the need for government and policy makers to consider the unfreedoms that confront learners both at home and within the school environment when designing critical policies. Understanding the connectedness and manifestations of these unfreedoms could pave the way to understanding what Soudien (2007:188) labelled “the South African problem”.

On the other hand, as Yamauchi (2011) argues, apartheid has resulted in the spatial distribution of quality education, and with good quality schools out of the reach of poor children for multiple reasons, increasing government subsidies to these poor schools could improve learner performance. In Yamauchi’s (2011) view, employing qualified teachers and having better management in place would provide a better correlation between resources and

outputs in schools, thus restating the important role of human capabilities in the conversion of resources into learner achievement. Thus understanding the big divide between historically white, and poor, schools involves a political rhetoric, complex to either explain or understand, based on the different facets inherent in the situation. As such, Yamauchi (2011) emphasises the need for government to consider local resources within targeted schools if it wants to succeed in its goal of quality education for all, given the lack of balance in the amount and quality of resources possessed by schools emerging from apartheid. In Yamauchi's (2011) view, increasing government subsidy vis-à-vis school fees could improve the chances of achieving school quality. This supposition however contradicts several studies such as those of Van der Berg (2006, 2008), Taylor (2008), Taylor et al. (2012), and Anderson et al. (2001), which indicate the destructive impact of SES on many learners and schools. In this context school fees can be seen as an impossible burden that is likely to limit access to education for many poor learners. Thus, increasing school resources without considering the impact of SES could irrevocably exclude many learners in disadvantaged communities from enjoying the benefits enshrined in the new Constitution in terms of providing quality education for all.

In another dimension, Taylor (2008), although convinced of the role that both SES, and management deficiencies in poor schools, play in influencing learner performance, questions the way teaching and learning is managed within classroom spaces. He argues that teacher content knowledge, accessibility to textbooks by learners, teacher ability to complete the required syllabus, and learner engagement with workbooks within the classroom, are all constellations of the existing scenario, especially in poor schooling communities. Taylor's (2008) views provide a foundation for my study to clearly disclose how these impediments connect to one another, and how they act as capability limitations, as well as creating spaces of unfreedoms, and at the end translate into learners' inability to achieve the desired functionings. I am of the opinion that collating these factors from a capabilities perspective could create a better understanding of what happens in Q-1 schools in particular on a daily basis, and how directly and indirectly that connectedness between these factors translates into learner underperformance. Taylor (2008) sees the ability of schools to convert existing resources at their disposal into desirable learner performance rates as an ultimate path to getting the right answers to the problem. I considered it therefore worthwhile to embark on this strand of argumentation in my research, using three selected Q-1 primary schools to demonstrate how the inability of schools to convert existing resources, either due to

capabilities limitations, or to existing unfreedoms, contributes to the persistence low quality education. Therefore, learner performance can be expressed as resulting from a multitude of interconnected factors. Although efforts on the part of researchers to understand that connectedness, and the ramifications of this has proved challenging, possibilities exist to unravel and obtain the much needed answers to learner underperformance, and the much talked about school quality.

Taylor, Van der Berg and Burger (2012:1) see efforts on the part of government to revamp the quality of South African education through policy initiatives with the coming of democracy as being hampered by what they consider to be “a far more resilient legacy of the past”. Acknowledging variations in the manifestations of the existing SES in high poverty level areas across societies, they interrogate the availability of real schooling opportunities for learners in poorer communities. They argue that questioning learner ability to perform without considering the role of SES could lead to premature and incomplete conclusions regarding learner underperformance. According to Taylor et al. (2012: 2), education expenditure in South Africa shows that up to 80% of the allocated budget is reserved for the acquisition of quality teachers who are unfortunately concentrated in affluent schools, where most teachers unfortunately prefer to work. I see refusal on the part of teachers to work in poorer communities as not merely being a personal decision on the part of these teachers, but one that is undoubtedly connected to the daunting effects of SES on teaching and learning. Taylor, Van der Berg and Burger (2012:1) posit that existing teacher practices, through classroom management styles, and assessment standards in place aggravate unfreedoms accumulated through SES. It can therefore be understood that, if all of the various factors identified by different authors as causing learner underperformance are not collated, the picture would be unlikely to be complete. Understanding the connectedness between these factors, and how each of them translates into learner unfreedoms within classrooms, could yield useful answers.

This explains why Fleisch’s (2008: v), strong emphasis on the fact that underachievement in poor schooling communities cannot be tied down to one cause; he considers the causes as “neither singular nor simple”. Fleisch (2008) points to the fact that, unlike former White and Indian schools, predominantly poor school communities are plagued by the transferability of external baggage into classroom spaces, which then translates into unfreedoms that hamper learner ability to learn and achieve. Such baggage includes health, and family and community

difficulties, which directly and indirectly inhibit learner experiences within the classrooms, despite their desire to learn. Taylor (2008) argues that this baggage is not often seriously considered when evaluating learner performance in poor schools. Thus, without taking these factors and their interconnectedness into consideration, strategies put in place to improve learner performance are far from effective.

Fleisch (2008) argues that the relentless grip of SES makes it impossible to close the achievement gap that exists in poor schooling communities, especially because poverty related matters seep into classroom spaces in many forms, sometimes unnoticed. Based on the extensive body of literature available relating to the relationship between poverty and performance, and the continued existence of underachievement, Fleisch (2008) speculates as to whether enough is actually being spent on revamping the education sector. Here, different views come into perspective, further obscuring existing theorisations about the causes of underperformance in poor schooling communities. This is because within this strand, according to the view of Crouch et al. (2001), enough is in fact being done to improve the quality of education, but mostly from a quantitative perspective. Van der Berg (2008) and Spaul (2012) also argue that enough is being done by government in terms of interventions, but that all effort is diluted by the existing SES of learners in poor schools. In another attempt to interrogate whether enough is being done to support learner performance in poor schools, Fleisch (2008) acknowledges the value and importance of school resources, but questions their actual role in effectively facilitating learners' abilities to learn and perform. According to Fleisch, irrespective of the amount of resources provided to schools, learner performance will not significantly improve if policy makers do not address the impact of SES within communities.

Fleisch's (2008) argument that, apart from the fact that resources alone cannot provide the answers to learner underperformance, suggests, in spite of the necessity for a variety of different research approaches being used by different researchers, these cannot unveil the full range of silent and salient factors needing to be identified and addressed. The lens used to interrogate the relationship between input and output influences the kinds of findings and analysis that emerge. Thus, I consider the CA as being the appropriate lens and methodology, for this study, since it carries the possibility of delving into spaces yet to be exploited in depth. In the case of the research question of this study, these would include the role and manifestations of freedoms and unfreedoms, human diversities, capabilities, differences in

spaces, and the conversion process. I hoped that using the CA would help uncover some of the reasons why certain schools continue to perform poorly, despite efforts by the government to alleviate their plight through resource reallocation.

In the context of resource allocation, Taylor et al. (2008) acknowledge that increasing expenditure on poor schools has to a large extent been based on a nominal increase in school budget allocations. This is because the real value of the funds allocated to schools has declined over the years, and therefore does not take into account the effects of inflation, a reality many poor schools are currently facing (see Chapter 4: Section 4.6.1). Taylor et al. (2008), report that schools are unable to provide basic teaching and learning materials within the classrooms due to budget constraints, often resulting in problematic learner performance patterns. This situation significantly delays the DoE's goal, enshrined in the Constitution, of 'quality education' for all. Taylor et al. (2008:49) also argue that systemic inefficiency is to blame for the underutilisation of funds allocated to various school projects, including those for libraries. The fact that the details and implications of this underutilisation are not explained in detail by Taylor et al. (2008) creates more exploratory spaces for researchers in this area, especially if one looks carefully and in detail at the financial and social realities within poor schools. Underutilisation of resources by schools has been identified by many scholars as a managerial problem contributing ultimately to learner underperformance, another factor triggering debates and theories around the phenomenon of chronic underperformance.

Van der Berg (2007) classifies educational attainments twenty years into democracy as largely quantitative in nature, because there has been a limited positive impact on learner capabilities in poor schooling communities. A consistent empirical researcher on school outcomes in South Africa after apartheid, he reports that, despite the existing differentials in the quality of attainment between the former White Model C schools and poor schools, there also exists a variation in performance levels between poor schools. This explains why Motala, Dieltiens and Sayed (2009:251) consider talks about educational access to be incomplete if the dynamics that influence and hinder access are ignored. They highlight dropout, age-grade progression, and repetition of a grade as instrumental in understanding learner access. My study is informed by all these reports, findings, and perceptions in the process of attempting to understand and establish the specific dynamics that perpetuate the variations of learner underperformance in poor communities.

In the context of persistent learner underperformance in schools in poor communities, Christie (2010), while not explicitly declaring her analysis to be informed by the CA, examines the roles of principals and the constraints they face in their attempt to genuinely transform schools. She confirms the importance of taking into consideration the varying spaces between schools, and the daily experiences that are unique and would in any normal circumstance influence the implementation of any genuine policy initiatives. Her line of thought is in essence supported by Sen (1992). I build on this strand in my attempt to understand the variances in performances between three schools within the same locality with learners with similar SES. Christie (2010) argues that transitional parameters from apartheid to democracy, and changing policy demands, work against what principals actually need to do to solve the underperformance problem, and that this research terrain has not been sufficiently explored. Christie's (2010) study serves as a springboard from which I interrogate how different spaces created by the mismatch between policy and practice translate into learner unfreedoms (see Chapter 5).

Christie (2012) builds on the theoretical model of spaces and describes how inequalities in different spaces contribute to the varying experiences of schools and learners in different schooling communities in countries around the world. She acknowledges that South Africa's formalised learner baggage in classrooms in different schooling environments must be seen in an historical context. She sees this baggage as originating from the differences between policy and practice in South African education both in the school and within individual classrooms. In this context, the importance of social relations within spaces rather than the 'things' (resources), and how that translates into different possibilities for learners in different spaces, is regarded by some researchers, particularly those using the CA lens, as the route to understanding the present predicaments in South Africa's poor schooling communities, a theoretical model Christie (2012) links to Henri Lefebvre's concept of social space. Although Christie (2012) emphasizes the need to consider the variances in different schools and classrooms for the purposes of policy design and implementation, she does not explore this in any depth, and does not indicate the specific kinds of dynamics at play, as well as those factors peculiar to individual schools and classrooms. However, Christie's (2012) analysis and model do provide a focus for examining the different capabilities, freedoms and unfreedoms that do or do not translate into learner performance in different classroom settings in poor schooling communities, through the lens of the CA.

The nature of learner performance makes up a broad spectrum which has been explored by numerous researchers with different approaches, all of which, in the view of Spaul (2012a), serve to distort efforts to obtain clear answers to the learner underperformance problem. Focusing on numeracy and literacy deficiencies as manifested by the performance of learners in the majority of schools in South Africa, he shows how these varying methodological and theoretical approaches have resulted in misleading and questionable data, often based on generalities, and assumptions. Spaul (2012a) argues that it is important for current researchers to consider carefully and holistically how the educational system operated during the apartheid era in order to create a space for reasonable results to emerge, since clearly there were, and in many respects continue to be, two education systems operating. He sees the divisions created within the apartheid education system as continuing to operate, despite efforts by the government to remove racial imbalances, and that these explain the persisting education inequalities. Spaul (2012a) points to certain factors as being incorrectly blamed for these inequalities, taking as an example those findings which assume that teachers are largely responsible for learner underperformance. The limitations of this finding, as identified by Spaul (2012a), reinforces Christie's suggestion that a more critical and in-depth approach towards issues of inequality in education be embraced.

Such limited research approaches to the problem are also pointed out by Dieltiens and Meny-Gibert (2012) who, although they recognise the role poverty plays in learner performance in terms of dropout rates, argue that the poverty issue has been approached from an absolute rather than a relative point of view. They argue that a more comprehensive understanding of how learners individually experience poverty in the context of inequality could break new ground in terms of developing our knowledge of the causes of learner dropout rates. This debate falls within the reasoning of the CA that recognises the individual unfreedoms accumulated as a result of poverty, and how these translate, or do not, into learner abilities at school. In essence, as has been discussed, providing resources to schools does not automatically reduce unfreedoms caused by poverty at the level of individual learners, as there remain possibilities of negative learner experiences, irrespective of the quality and quantity of resources available. This approach could provide reasons for the likelihood of learners from poorer households dropping out of school due to barriers that are poverty related, and not solely or specifically related to the nature of resources available at their school (see Chapter 4: Section 4.6.2.1). It could be that learners without certain basic home or school needs fulfilled have felt excluded among peers, and consequently dropped out of

school. Therefore, if attention is focused on poverty in an absolute sense, to the exclusion of other factors, available resources will be favoured at the expense of pertinent barriers specific to individual learners that may be related to conditions at home, and likely to contribute to drop out rates.

In the context of factors which influence learner underperformance and drop-out rates, Cowie and Crawford (2007) argue that principals play a crucial role in learner experiences and performance. In the opinion of these authors, the lack of individual capabilities by principals has a negative effect on learner performance. Cowie and Crawford (2007) link the present and on-going crisis in a large number of schools to the incompetence of principals, a deficiency they are convinced can be resolved by developing the capacities of aspiring and existing principals. They argue that, even where principals possess the required capabilities, in-service opportunities to practice and develop the skills and abilities they already possess is essential for effective leadership and management. Basing their argument on case studies in England and Scotland, they advocate standard programmes for preparing principals prior to their appointment as crucial for ensuring satisfactory learner performance in schools.

Similarly, Bush, Joubert, Kiggundu and Van Rooyen (2010) argue that, if teaching and learning is inadequately managed, especially in disadvantaged schooling communities, the dynamics associated with existing disadvantages, both in the home environment and surrounding communities, can accumulate to impede learners' experiences and achievement. They agree that the kind of management structure in place, the quality and quantity of resources available, and the way teachers organize themselves and educationally beneficial activities in the classroom, all combine and contribute to the nature of learner performance. Bush et al. (2010) see the management of teaching and learning as the responsibility of both principals and HoDs, who have been and are expected by the DoE/DBE to monitor and supervise teachers. The roles of HoDs include monitoring and giving feedback to teachers through active engagement in the form of observations, while principals monitor the work of the HoDs. According to Bush et al. (2010:165), "HoDs examine educators' portfolios and workbooks and also check learners' work to see if educators' claims are matched by learner outcomes". In this context, understanding what capabilities HoDs have to perform such duties would provide a clearer picture of what actually happens in Q-1 schools in terms of teaching and learning, and how this impacts on learners' abilities to achieve certain functionings (see Chapter 4: Sections 4.4.1.1 and 4.6.2.5). During the research process, I take these roles into

account in seeking to understand how the lack of certain capabilities on the part of principals, HoDs, teachers and learners, perpetuates learner unfreedoms in the Q-1 primary schools selected for my study.

Bush et al. (2010) see poor learner performance in Q-1 schools as managerial linked, often caused by ignorance, negligence, or poor communication among stake holders. In essence, where principals fail to lay down firm guidelines of accountability for their staff, and respect other managerial duties, teaching and learning is likely to be adversely affected. Although Bush et al. (2010) consider that social and educational crises faced by learners in their classrooms and communities can be compensated for by good managerial skills alone, I see this as a highly questionable and simplistic assumption, given the complex realities in Q-1 schools. However, given that authors such as Bush et al. (2010) see principals as having the potential to contribute to the creation of an enabling learning environment by properly monitoring, evaluating and inspiring teachers to work towards common achievable goals, I take this perspective, as one amongst other perspectives, into consideration in my study.

Taylor (2011:3) claims that the solution to “the South African problem” is situated in a tenuous space between resources and teaching and management at each individual school, a theory supported by Modisaotsile (2012). I argue that, in order to truly understand the realities within Q-1 schools, researchers need to embark on a closer, more robust and careful observation because certain practices pertinent to resolving the problem remain elusive. However, Taylor (2011) acknowledges that, although SES is a prime denominator when learner underperformance is put into perspective, it can be controlled even on the home front if schools are properly managed. This argument has also been reinforced by researchers such as Van der Berg (2007), Taylor (2008), Spaul (2012a, 2012b, 2013 & 2014) and Armstrong (2009), who, in addition to identifying and describing leadership and managerial crises, emphasise the lack of accountability, and the need for good relationships between stakeholders in poor schooling communities. Taylor (2011) justifies his view by illustrating the surprisingly good results exhibited by some learners from historically disadvantaged schools who attend historically white schools that are well managed, despite the persistent nature of SES in the homes of these learners. Taylor’s (2011) opinion, although not generally applicable, justifies the necessity for critically examining poor schooling communities. I chose three Q-1 primary schools in an attempt to understand some of those challenges that drive learner performance, apart from the availability and quantity of resources.

Itumeleng and Ldm (2014) also argue that the nature and quality of school management has a strong influence on performance. Their argument is based on the assumption that good management within schools determines how well teachers teach, and that this in turn contributes to how well learners learn, and consequently influences how stakeholders such as the DBE view the support they provide to schools. Though focusing more on underperforming secondary schools in a district in Gauteng, Itumeleng and Ldm's (2014) recent study reveals many of the existing challenges in poor schooling communities, including those in primary schools. Despite the emphasis on SES, and the existing management structures within schools, the debate about learner underperformance in poor schooling communities opens up and deepens daily, as challenges persist.

In contradiction to some of the theories described above, Hoadley (2012) posits that certain factors within classrooms that inhibit learner ability to learn and to pass are under theorised, as their focus has been mostly on management and teacher professionalism. According to Hoadley (2012), understanding the complex realities within classrooms may provide more comprehensive answers to what impedes learner abilities to perform in Q-1 schools. Hoadley's (2012) theory creates an additional exploratory space for my research into learner underperformance at these poor schools.

Studies done in the South African context on learner performance, although underpinned by different theoretical perspectives, generally agree that a problem exists around learner performance despite concerted efforts by government to provide resources and to adjust educational policies to meet recommendations made by researchers. Maarman (2009) looks at poverty from a different angle to that of previous mainstream researchers, using the lens of the CA to zoom into learner performance in poor schooling communities. Based on the broader notion that SES is persistent, he looks at how its existence is directly transformed into learner unfreedoms, and consequently into their inability to achieve certain functionings. He takes this a step further by demonstrating how ignorance of existing learner unfreedoms on the part of researchers and stakeholders serves to neutralise any government efforts aimed at promoting school quality. In Maarman's (2009) view, learners' inability to convert their own capabilities into functionings, for reasons linked to the home front where SES is persistent, exacerbate such unfreedoms. Although Maarman (2009) clearly demonstrates the ways in which learner freedoms in informal settlement schools are restricted, he does not demonstrate how existing unfreedoms are directly translated into learner unfreedoms within

classroom spaces, a task I attempt to undertake in this study. Maarman's (2009) study, although localised, can be said to be distinct from other poverty related studies, due to its ability to unravel a new strand of the poverty debate, a strand which can be duplicated or utilised, to understand learner underperformance in other poor schooling communities within South Africa and beyond.

As has been mentioned, Spaul (2013) sees debates about underperformance in South Africa's schools as being far from over, and that the crisis is in fact deepening. He reiterates the existent increasing gap between resource allocation and learner outcomes across all grades, with specific reference to Mathematics and Science. Using an international comparison, Spaul (2012b) shows the results to be more alarming than previously assumed. He reports that South African school learners exhibit a performance that is two or three grades below their age and normal grade level, a grave situation described in Fleisch's (2008) study. Fleisch's (2008) study reported on the first published systemic evaluation results for Grade 6 learners in 2005 in schools in the Western Cape, which indicated that many learners were performing far below their respective grades. Considering that there has been a steady increase in resource allocation over the last decades, in tandem with a constant change in education policies aimed at improving learner performance, the persistent nature of the crisis is alarming. In Spaul's (2013) view, contributing to the persistence of the learner underperformance crisis and its consequences is the degree and quality of teachers' content knowledge. These conclusions make it tricky to determine whether the appropriate resources and/or policies are being put in place to tackle the problem in Q-1 schools. Spaul (2013) recommends more comprehensive studies on learner performance in Q-1 schools in order to identify more specifically the core of the problem.

Pretorius (2014) also sees learner underperformance in South Africa to be persistent, and in all likelihood, more serious and widespread than assumed by government and the DBE. Pretorius calls for a revamp of the entire education structure, in what he refers to as an achievable turnaround strategy. Pretorius (2014) argues that blaming teachers and school authorities for poor performance and the dysfunctionality of their schools, is incorrect and unjustifiable; government must share the blame. He sees the real and complex challenges of poor schools as not being sufficiently or appropriately addressed.

Bayat, Louw and Rena (2014) in a study of learner performance in high schools, highlighted critical and glaring issues that are easily replicable in poor primary schools. They argue that SES continues to play a predominant role in learner performance especially in townships and informal settlement schools. Although SES influences learner performance within the classrooms, understanding how it disguises itself in the form of unfreedoms to remain persistent and unrecognizable within the classrooms is critical in my study, thus the reason for making use of the CA to inform, guide and deepen my research.

2.5 Conclusion

From the literature reviewed, it is obvious that the persistent achievement gap within the poor schooling communities is far from being closed, or rendered narrower. Apart from the gap between schools in poor areas and those in rich areas, there is a persistent variance in performance between schools in impoverished areas themselves, thus raising the bar and complexity of existing challenges, debates and contestations about the actual causes of learner underperformance in Q-1 schools. Considering that SES has persisted since 1994 in many areas where Q-1 schools are situated, despite various efforts and approaches on the part of researchers to unveil divergent causes of learner underperformance, it is obvious that new strategies are needed to find a solution to the learner performance problem. I therefore argue for an approach to the problem based on existing silent but salient factors that often translate unnoticed into learner unfreedoms within classrooms, inhibiting learner abilities to achieve certain functionings. I also argue that the polarisation of the theories, findings and conclusions of various researchers contributes to the blurring of the lines between the different and distinct challenges, and thus indicates the need to distinguish between these while not losing sight of their connectedness in order to find some means to stabilise, improve and sustain learner performance. According to the CA, understanding the problems of schools based on their localities, education philosophies, their past history and their current situations, what they as individual institutions experience, and whether and why they encounter unique experiences, could be critical to understanding what happens in each individual school to influence learner performance at that school.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

The aim of the current study is to explore the ways in which the capabilities approach (CA) can inform our understanding of learner underperformance in Quintile 1 (Q-1) primary schools in South Africa, focusing on three selected Q-1 schools in an informal settlement in Cape Town. As was mentioned in the previous two chapters, the study's main focus is on the existing variances in the performance of learners in three Q-1 primary schools which receive more or less the same volume and quality of resources.

The study was conducted in three selected Q-1 primary schools located in close proximity to one another within the Metropole South District of Cape Town. The schools were selected from the same neighbourhood on the basis of their all being classified as Q-1 schools, and thus supposedly enjoying the same support from government, experiencing similar socioeconomic conditions in terms of the locale and intake of learners with similar backgrounds (Fleisch, 2008:2). It could be assumed that these schools would be expected to exhibit a fairly similar performance pattern based on the similarity of the above contextual factors, a notion with which Sen (1992: 6) disagrees, based on the CA, which assumes and values the diversity of human capabilities. The CA considers individual spaces of schools, the capabilities of all role players, and the existence of freedoms and unfreedoms as fundamental in influencing the performance patterns of schools along individual, and different or distinctive lines.

This chapter presents a clear description and discussion of the phases of the research including the planning, the methodology, data collection methods, and the analysis of the findings from the data, all of the phases being informed by the research aims and objectives. The research methodology used is described, together with the rationale for its use. The stages of the process involved in choosing the three schools are described, as are the sampling procedure followed in choosing the participants, the data collection method and the analysis of the data. Ethical procedures adhered to at various stages of the research are identified and discussed in detail for purposes of validity and reliability.

I considered the methodology I employed to be appropriate for the purpose of exploring the various freedoms and unfreedoms learners in the three schools were being exposed to on a daily basis, within and outside of the classroom, in their quest for an education they could value. I looked at how these influenced the kind of performance pattern they were exhibiting. The chapter also describes the main aim of the research to explore the capabilities of the principals and other stakeholders in these three schools, as they strive in varying degrees to assist learners to attain certain functionings. The research also seeks to understand how these capabilities played into the kind of variances inherent in learner performance in these Q-1 primary schools. Prompted by what the DoE expects from these schools in terms of performance based on the amount of assistance received from the government, the study seeks to understand the specific role resources play in influencing learner performance in such schools. I therefore set out to establish whether the kind of performance pattern currently exhibited at schools such as those selected for my study, is due to the existence of some peculiar variables which contradict the overreliance on the resource factor (Fleisch, 2008). I took this direction bearing in mind the important role individual capabilities, freedoms and unfreedoms of learners, teachers, principals and other stakeholders play in determining learner functionings in poor schooling communities. In order to properly interrogate these factors I established specific research aims as a guide.

- To establish the extent to which history and environment influences learner performance in the selected Q-1 schools;
- To determine the role of resources in influencing learner performance in the selected Q-1 schools;
- To determine which results a cohort analysis will yield when applied in the evaluation of learner performance in the selected Q-1 primary schools in terms of attendance, retention, and pass rates; and
- To investigate how the CA enhances our understanding of learner performance in the selected Q-1 primary schools.

In order to obtain the data appropriate to answering the stated research aims, a case study was adopted as the research design.

3.2 Research Methodology

A qualitative research methodology has been chosen for this research based on the aims and objectives of the study, and its advantages to qualitative researchers. Qualitative research methodology is also chosen because the research is based on humans and their interpretative notion of the world around them.

3.2.1 A Qualitative approach

The qualitative research method was employed in order to achieve the aims and objectives of a study that required the participation of individual subjects. According to Creswell (1998):

Qualitative research is an inquiry process of understanding based on distinct methodological traditions of inquiry that explore a social or human problem. The researcher builds a complex, holistic picture, analyses words, reports detailed views of informants, and conducts the study in a natural setting. (Creswell, 1998:15)

The qualitative research method gives the researcher an opportunity to extract meaning through interacting with participants and tapping their wealth of experience as actors in the real world (Merriam, 2002). Merriam (1998) argues that qualitative researchers embark on describing and explaining the world based on the experiences of those who live in it. Thus I conducted interviews with principals, teachers and learners. I carried out lesson observations in all of the Grade 7 classrooms in each of three schools in order to gain insights into learner experiences in a natural classroom setting.

Interviews were conducted with the principals of each of the three schools based on their extensive experience as administrators, executors of educational policies, agents of change, and executors of the implementation of the curriculum in the classrooms. Focus group interviews were conducted with teachers, based on the assumption that they interact with learners on a daily basis, share a wealth of experience among themselves about learners at different levels, and understand clearly the freedoms and unfreedoms of learners within the classroom. Limited time and resources made it impossible to conduct individual interviews with teachers. Since learners were unable to adequately express their feelings, and their freedoms and unfreedoms through questionnaires, I introduced focus group interviews and

observations in order to understand how their daily activities and their interactions in the classrooms influenced their ability to perform or not. Rich data was obtained from learners regarding learner unfreedoms in the classrooms in particular and the schools in general. These unfreedoms informed the why, and the how of what they did or did not do in the classroom, and how this impacted on their learning abilities, and on their level of performance. To ensure that such data were sound and trustworthy, observations were carried out several times in all of the Grade 7 classrooms, a procedure Merriam (1998) considers as vital in conducting in-depth and reliable research.

3.2.2 Advantages of qualitative research approach

The fact that the researcher is the primary instrument for data collection and analysis gives qualitative research an advantage in terms of making it possible to adapt this kind research in the context of existing conditions in the field (Babbie & Mouton, 2001; Merriam, 1998). Adaptability therefore makes the process more rather than less reliable and productive (Merriam, 2002). Since qualitative research seeks answers in the real world, and deals with current issues, it relies more on what is seen, heard and read (Rossman & Rallis: 2003; Hatch, 2002) than what is measured statistically, an apt rationale for introducing interviews and observations into this research. It is important at this point to understand that the kinds of questions asked to gain the kind of information sought in qualitative research are often influenced by the theoretical model being used, making the research process an inductive rather than a deductive process that is based on pre-empted hypotheses (Merriam, 2002:5).

In attempting to generate new understandings through studying humans in their natural settings, the qualitative researcher is immersed in the process. Thus Rossman et al. (2003) regard qualitative researchers as learners in the field at every stage of the research, since they are continually learning from data generated in the course of the research. This explains why new meanings obtained in the course of the research are prone to sway conclusions at the end of the study, and to influence the introduction of themes not pre-empted. The strength of qualitative research lies also in its ability to fill gaps that have not been properly addressed by other methods or studies described in the existing literature (Merriam, 2002). The ability to triangulate data obtained through the use of different methods, such as individual interviews with participants, focus group interviews, and observations, all used in order to ‘make meaning’, and strengthen the argument presented throughout the study, gives qualitative

research an added advantage. Qualitative research therefore strives to understand more about the lived experiences of its participants, especially those of the learners who are the focus of the study. In order to capture these lived experiences, different data collection tools were used.

3.3 Research Design

The qualitative research design I adopted is a case study: I selected three Q-1 primary schools in the Metro South District of Cape Town for the study. The research aims and methodology allowed for the selection of three schools all in the same Quintile category and in the same geographical area. Based on the fact that the research deals with contemporary events, I considered a case study to be the most suitable for my research (Yin, 2009). Gerring (2007) summarises the characteristics and delimitations of a ‘case’ in the research process:

A case connotes a spatially delimited phenomenon (a unit) observed at a single point in time or over some period of time. It comprises the type of phenomenon that an inference attempts to explain...A case may be created out of any phenomenon so long as it has identifiable boundaries and comprises the primary object of an inference. (Gerring, 2007:19)

According to Bell (1987), a case study has the potential to give individual researchers the opportunity to study a particular aspect of a problem in detail, even when the time available is limited, targeting an end product that, in the case of this study, will inform the theorization of educational policies and practice and the associated problems (Freebody, 2003). Since the research was aimed at understanding the role resources play in determining learner performance in selected Q-1 primary schools, as well as the variances in learner performances between schools with similar characteristics, these three schools located in the same vicinity answered the criteria of a case study. The sample of the three schools represents a unit of analysis. They are jointly observed in an attempt to understand the trends and variances in learner performance in these primary schools located in a high poverty level area. This choice of a sample accords with Hancock and Algozzine’s (2006:15) description of a sample, my sample of schools being in “its natural context, bounded by time and space”. In accordance with the view of Henning, Van Rensburg and Smith (2004), my focus as

researcher is on the systematic connections among observable behaviours, speculations and causes.

According to Gerring (2007), due to the kind of evidence involved in the kind of research I conducted, it is difficult to associate a case study with any clear cut definition, hence its association with the qualitative research method. It is for this reason that the strategies and tools adopted for this research model are always unique to each research project, as well as to the researcher involved. In the view of Hancock et al. (2006), characteristics common to case studies include their focus on individuals and groups, as well as on phenomena that are in their natural context, that are bounded by space and time, are mostly descriptive in nature, and are grounded in deep and varied sources. Gerring (2007) sees the commonest features of any qualitative research as being embedded in its alignment with the why, what and how questions which are paramount in any in-depth investigation.

This study sets out to understand the reasons for common trends in the performances of learners in a sample of Q-1 primary schools, looking at what causes the existing trend, and, from this sample of schools, gain some understanding of why and how these trends continue to manifest themselves in the way they do, unnoticed or unattended to, within the education system. I consider the process of this particular kind of investigation, using the particular kind of theoretical framework it does, to require a qualitative approach. Given that the research involves humans, I was guided by Yin's (2009) recommendation, as well as that of Hancock et al. (2006), that data for qualitative research is appropriately collected in natural settings. Merriam (1998) sums up the advantages of the utilisation of a case study for research such as mine. "A case study design is employed to gain an in-depth understanding of the situation and meaning for those involved" (Merriam, 1998:19). It is through a case study that a researcher gets to understand the complexity of the phenomenon being studied. Understanding learner underperformance in Q-1 schools in South Africa is complex because so much attention is focused narrowly on what schools possess in terms of resources in relation to the kind of performance exhibited, rather than on how and to what extent they are able to use existing resources to achieve what is expected by them and the DBE of their learners in terms of performance. Thus the use of the CA for this study in order to understand those challenges schools experience in their attempts to convert existing resources into functionings.

For the purpose of understanding existing trends, the reasons for their existence, and their consequences on learner performance, documents on learners' performance were accessed and carefully studied in all selected Q-1 schools. Such a blending or triangulation of data is demonstrated through the use of a range different research tools and data collection methods, including questionnaires, individual and focus group interviews and observations, in a process of deepening and enriching the data and the findings (see Section 3.6).

3.4 Research approach

I adopted the interpretative paradigm as the research approach for this study since the study focuses on the actions, views, thoughts and words of the participants. Denzin and Lincoln (2005) see participants as the most valuable tools a qualitative researcher could use to see and interpret the world and Henning, Van Rensburg and Smit (2005) see them as the central focus of any qualitative study. Thus, I arranged to interact with participants in a variety of ways, including observations and interviews, and both individual and focused groups. According to Henning et al. (2005:20), "Knowledge is constructed not only by observable phenomena, but also by descriptions of people's intentions, beliefs, values and reasons, meaning making and self-understanding". They see the qualitative researcher as locked within an interpretative framework in order to divulge the means to unlock the truth about the world through a sample its participants. I therefore focused on how learners behaved in the classroom, and how they reacted towards the teaching and learning process, in order to extract meaning from the observations and gain more knowledge about the factors that were influencing the learners' abilities to perform within classroom spaces. This process enabled me to make meaning of how certain classroom activities predisposed learners towards unfreedoms, and consequently impacted on how they performed.

The study was guided by the assumption that resources, and the ways in which they are used or not used, are one of the crucial factors influencing learner performance in Q-1 schools. Therefore, in embracing an interpretative paradigm, I was exposed to issues, such as how existing resources were being used or not used to achieve intended goals, and the extent to which capabilities are available to those charged with converting existing resources into functionings. Existing unfreedoms that acted as barriers to learners, teachers, principals, and other stakeholders in their attempt to contribute towards improving learner performance at

these schools were interrogated in order to understand the nature of performance in the selected Q-1 schools.

3.5 Administrative handling of the data gathering process

I approached the Metro South Education District (MSED) offices in Mitchells Plain for clarity and directives on my choice of schools for the research sample. One of the Circuit Managers (CM) showed a keen interest in my project and her interest influenced the criteria I used to choose the schools for my sample (Merriam, 1998). The CM reported that the performance of learners in that particular circuit had been, and remained, a concern, and was being handled with a lot of caution. The CM also reported that the schools identified were at that time constantly in the spotlight, that abortive efforts had been regularly put in place over the past years to remedy the state of affairs, and that there was in fact a need to fully understand why such variances exist in learner performance in schools such as the ones chosen for the sample.

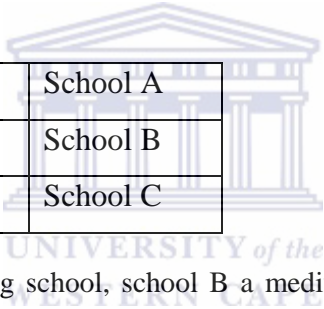
The CM assisted me by selecting three schools that had recorded low, medium and high performing standards, and were located both within the same area, and had been classified within the same quintile. The assumption was that learners in these schools would have similar backgrounds and experiences, and that all three schools purportedly received similar kinds of support from government, both in quantity and quality. The CM had a thorough knowledge of all the schools and their principals, as well as the abilities of their learners, and the general challenges these schools were facing on a daily basis in their efforts to improve the performance levels of their learners. The willingness and capabilities of the principals to assist me in the research process also contributed in the choices I made with the assistance and guidance of the CM.

The CM wrote letters to each of the three principals to solicit their assistance in my research project, although cautioning me that the letters did not constitute a departmental instruction to them to assist me in the research. I was obliged to build a cordial relationship with the principals on my own, without the official support of, or a directive from, the WCED, and to gain their trust. Apart from the suitability of the schools, the CM linked the choice of the principals to the wealth of knowledge and experience she considered them to possess in the

running of their schools on a day-to-day basis, the efforts they had made to ensure learner success, and the CM's personal interactions with them at an administrative level.

When I presented the letters from the CM to the principals all of them were welcoming, showed a high level of interest in the research project, and were willing to assist me in any way possible to ensure that I succeeded in gathering the necessary data. To the principals my research project represented an opportunity to learn and know more about what they may have been doing, or not doing, or experiencing daily as managers of individual schools, and how that was or was not impacting on learner performances and the general wellbeing of the schools. Principal A1 and B1 (see Table 1) in particular made it clear that the performance of the learners at their individual schools was a serious concern for all principals in the area, and one that seemed to have no clear cut answers.

Table 1: Principals at schools A, B & C



Principal A1	School A
Principal B1	School B
Principal C1	School C

Note: School A is a high performing school, school B a medium performing, and school C a low performing.

The research also represented an opportunity for them to change the way they were seeing their learners' underperformance, and to plan new interventions in their schools, particularly in the classrooms. Principal C1 indicated that this research project could become a channel for them to understand more about the context of their schools, and the implications of the SES of their learners. In the course of my discussion it became clear that, due to work pressures, they at times ignored the pertinent findings of previous and current researchers, even when these were made known to them. Thus, they remained stuck with the same challenges on a daily basis (see Chapter 4: Section 4.6.2.5).

Since these principals regarded learner underperformance as a thorn in their flesh, they agreed that they needed a fresh look at, and approach to, issues that were arising and unfolding in their schools on a daily basis in order to find a way forward. They saw their involvement in my research as enriching to them, and indicated their support for the success

of the project. The principals, in addition to being administrators, also had teaching commitments and thus opportunities to understand first-hand their learners' daily challenges as well as some of the silent reasons for their learners' inability to achieve certain functionings. All three principals agreed to participate in filling out the questionnaires and taking part in individual interviews. The questions presented to the principals included, but were not limited to, administrative; curriculum and management issues (see Appendix 3). All three principals and their deputies filled out the same questionnaire. Informal interviews were conducted with principals A1 and B1. Although all three principals participated in the individual interviews, a follow up interview was only conducted with principal A1 with the purpose of filling some gaps and gaining more clarity on certain concerns. The principals referred me to their respective HoDs who became my immediate point of call whenever I needed assistance during the course of the research.

Officially, according to DBE directives, the HoDs liaise directly with the teachers on a daily basis, and therefore in theory understand the challenges teachers encounter within the classrooms in their quest to improve learner performance. As administrators, HoDs' duties included guiding, directing and supporting teachers on issues of curriculum management and delivery. The HoDs at each of the three schools were thus aware of the level of teacher input, the challenges they were facing at the time of the research, and what they did or failed to do in and outside of the classroom, their individual perceptions about learner performance, and their general attitudes and efforts towards assisting learners in and outside of the classroom. Since HoDs are themselves teachers, they possess a wealth of knowledge about the learners for which the teachers in their departments at each of the three schools were responsible, and their individual and unique experiences as administrators and teachers. They were therefore ideally placed to choose teachers to participate in the research and to provide information pertinent to the research. Both the HoDs' and teachers' daily interactions with their learners bring them closer to the real challenges faced on the ground by both learners and teachers, real learner experiences at the classroom level, what learners bring from their homes and communities to the schools in general, and to their classrooms in particular. The HoDs at the three schools were therefore knowledgeable not only about the learners' abilities to perform within the classroom, but also within the entire schooling environment, and the corresponding challenges that were directly and indirectly affecting their endeavours to attain certain functionings.

The teachers were chosen by the HoDs on the assumption that the HoDs understood first-hand the challenges that directly and indirectly impeded the efforts not only of learners to perform but of teachers to teach effectively. These teachers were also aware in varying degrees of what their learners were capable, or not capable, of doing under the existing conditions at these schools. They had also accumulated knowledge and experience which they shared with their colleagues who were teaching different subjects with the same learners, through formal and informal meetings where they often shared their concerns and worries about their learners' performance, thus enriching their knowledge about learner challenges and efforts. These teachers understood in varying degrees the dynamics of school resources and their implications on learner ability to perform, or not perform, adequately. In order to obtain the required information from the selected participants that would cover the broad spectrum of the research, questionnaires were designed to ensure that each group of participants was adequately accommodated.

3.6 Research Instruments

To acquire sufficient data for this study, I incorporated both secondary and primary sources. As far as secondary sources were concerned, books and articles on South African and international education were consulted. Internet searches and research were also conducted as a means of getting in touch with a wider spectrum of publications in the field. This was meant to assist in understanding the current trend of debates on learner performance in South African primary schools, and beyond. However, the focus was on learner performance in poor South African primary schools. In the domain of primary data, information was gathered from participants through questionnaires, observations, and individual and focus group interviews, in order to enrich and deepen the data as well as to triangulate the data gathering process. The schedules and class attendance registers of learners were also analysed to gain information on classroom attendance pass rates, and the nature and extent of progression in place. Merriam (1998:204) recommends the use of multiple sources and/or methods in qualitative research, because they assist “to confirm emerging findings”. These data gathering approaches that enriched each other are described in detail below.

3.6.1 Focus group interviews

Focus group discussions were organised with teachers and learners in the chosen schools. Morgan (1997) sees focus group interviews within the qualitative research paradigm as a preliminary means of data collection to supplement data collected through other methods, including individual interviews and observations.

3.6.1.1 Importance of focus group interviews

According to Hancock et al. (2007), focus group discussions are necessary as research instruments in qualitative research because they give the researcher an opportunity to explore ways in which to understand how participants interact amongst themselves, as well as tolerate the ideas of others. Hatch (2002) posits that focus group discussions both enrich and supplement data obtained from other sources. Thus, data from focus group discussions renders the research findings more reliable and valid. Stewart, Shamdasani, and Rook (2007:11) argue that this supplementation is necessary and desirable because “live encounters with groups of people will yield incremental answers to behavioural questions that go beyond the level of surface explanations”.

Hatch (2002:133) argues that “focus group data can be a valuable source for research triangulation”, since “having data from a variety of sources can be very powerful”. According to Babbie and Mouton (2001:292), focus groups present an avenue where information is shaped, and reshaped based on the different ideas and opinions of the various participants. This blend would depend on how knowledgeable and flexible the researcher is in using emerging ideas to build on the research findings by probing stimulating follow up questions. These arguments prompted the need for focus group interviews with learners and teachers in this research.

3.6.1.2 Focus group interviews with Learners

Between 13 and 18 learners were involved in the focus group interviews in each of the schools, although this number is lower than the initial 20 selected to participate in the research (see Section 3.8.1). The focus group discussions with learners were a means of gathering the different ideas and perceptions they had relating to their ability to perform or not to perform, since they were not in a position to reveal complete data on the topic under

discussion through questionnaires, due to their age and the limitations of their capabilities. The information obtained from them proved to be valuable, because the bigger group of learners acted as a stimulus for those who were shy, but who, at a later stage of the conversation, gained the courage to air their own opinions, facilitated by the participation of others. In order to obtain the desired data from the learners, specific questions were posed during the focus group discussions (see Appendix 1), although follow up questionnaires were distributed based on specific responses. Structured and open ended questions were presented to the learners during the focus group sessions, as an opportunity for them to give their own views on existing freedoms and unfreedoms that they considered were influencing their experiences and abilities to perform.

3.6.1.3 Focus group interviews with teachers

Focus group discussions with teachers were limited to four participants in each school. As mentioned in Section 3.5, I assumed that they possessed extensive knowledge, experience and the capabilities to provide valuable data for the study. The limited numbers of available teachers per group provided them and me with the opportunity to probe deeper into the topic under discussion (Hatch, 2002). Only teachers that were currently teaching Grade 7 had the privilege to take part in the investigation. Many of them had both taught in other classes, and had progressed with the same cohort of learners up to Grade 7, or taught other classes alongside the Grade 7 classes, making them a valuable source of data for this research. Some of these teachers had taught Grade 7 for over a decade in the same school and within the same subject areas, and thus possessed a wealth of knowledge and experience about learners' challenges and capabilities. Thus, they were able to provide important information on learner unfreedoms and learner potential at the various schools.

Although the principals had the potential to share such valuable knowledge with the teachers, the decision to exclude them from these focus groups was deliberate in order to ensure smooth and unselfconscious discussions. Hatch (2002) argues that when people of the same class or professional/hierarchical level are grouped together it is possible for them to open up and discuss certain issues freely and honestly. Teachers on their own had this opportunity, and felt free to reveal certain information that they may have concealed in the presence of the principals, or if the groups had been monitored by the principals themselves for administrative reasons (see Appendix 2 for primary questions presented to teachers during

focus group discussions). Heads of Departments (HoDs) who were teachers themselves brought to the discussions a pool of knowledge from a different perspective to that of an administrator and/or of the teachers. These teachers were teaching a variety of subjects in all three Grade 7 classes (A, B & C), rendering the responses of the representative sample viable for the purpose of my research.

The questions posed to the teachers were mostly opened ended. This was to enable the teachers to fully express their own understandings of the issues. By means of this data collection method, teachers were able to explore and present their perceptions of issues that were crucial to the study, even if they were not directly related to the questions posed. It was therefore easier to introduce follow up questions to gain a deeper understanding of the new strands of knowledge introduced in the course of the discussions.

Information provided by HoDs was categorized together with that provided by the teachers, since the HoDs took part in the focus discussions as teachers. As has been mentioned, these groups of teachers were chosen for the research because of the pivotal roles they were playing in their teaching of Grade 7 learners. In their discussions on the Progression Policy in place in the three schools, these teachers were inclined to give critical opinions and analyses of the kind of learners that were promoted through the various grades up to Grade 7, and the implications of this policy for learner performance levels. These teachers were playing a pivotal role in shaping these learners, although the learners were in most instances progressed for reasons other than academic competence. Since Grade 7 is a transition between primary and high school, and between the General Education Training (GET) phase and the Senior Phase (SP), these teachers were able to provide information and views that immeasurably enriched the findings of the research, answered the research questions, and opened new avenues for further probing.

Although a focus group discussion with the principals of the targeted schools was planned, their busy and clashing schedules compromised such efforts, although they themselves were genuinely interested and willing to participate in such a forum. Hancock et al. (2007) argue that the difficulties in arranging focus groups at certain levels are related to the characteristics of the different people involved. The principals initially hailed and recommended the idea of a focus group discussion because they saw it as a potential avenue to individually and collectively get to know more about the unique challenges of the various schools in their

locale, and the different strategies which could be put in place to ameliorate these challenges. They saw their participation as a potential learning curve in the making. However, unfortunately in the end this did not materialise. Data was therefore gathered from principals only by means of questionnaires and individual interviews.

3.6.2 Interviews

Seidman (2013), Hatch (2002) and Mouton and Marias (1988) see interviews as an important source of data collection in qualitative research, in that they provide participants with an opportunity to speak freely about concerns brought to them by the researcher, and other issues that may arise as a result of the subject. In the view of Cohen and Manion (1980) interviews allow for more in-depth discussion on the subject in comparison to other methods of data collection.

Jonson and Turner (2002) agree that interviews give the researcher an opportunity to create a rapport with the participants, and a space where a series of leading questions can be posed for clarity purposes. In an interview questions are probed based on the current discussions, in contrast to questionnaires which offer none of these opportunities. Individual interviews were conducted mostly with the principals (see Appendix 3 for interview questions for principals). The advantages of interviews as research tools are discussed in more detail in the following sections.

3.6.2.1 Characteristics and advantages of interviews

Interviews are a feasible qualitative data collection tool that assists researchers to collect detailed information not obtainable through questionnaires. They also provide an opening to follow up on important issues that were possibly not pre-empted or planned before the interview, but emanated from classroom observations, or in the course of discussions or based on the participant's body and facial reactions to a particular topic. Hatch (2002) describes how interviewers often enter interview settings with specific questions in mind, but then tend to generate more questions during the course of the interview, usually in response to interviewees' responses, the social contexts being discussed, and the degree of rapport established between the interviewer and the interviewee, as well as the emergence of fresh knowledge in the course of the interview. This gives interviews an advantage over other data collection methods including questionnaires, as follow up questions probed in the course of

discussions often generate greater clarity and new information (Tashakkori & Teddlie:2002). This is because issues with doubt are often tackled head-on and immediately. In order to get more detailed information on issues that were observable in the classrooms, but remained unclear, and those that erupted through impromptu interactions with participants, were given free reign during the interviews. Walcott (1992:20) argues that, “observation and informant interviewing yield complementary rather than comparable data”. Similarly, Hancock and Algozzine (2006:40) see semi structured interviews as being valuable research instruments because they “invite interviewers to express themselves openly and freely and define the world from their own perspectives, not solely from the perspective of the researcher”. The combined perspectives gained from interviews and observations intricately bring out a world of knowledge that adds credibility to the findings, Hence the need for classroom observations in addition to interviews as data collection instruments in this study. As has been mentioned, classroom observations were also used for the triangulation of the data.

3.6.3 Observations

All Grade 7 classrooms (A, B & C) in all three schools were observed, it being impossible to observe in isolation those learners who were selected to participate in the research. Classroom observations created opportunities to obtain certain critical data in natural settings, since learners were able to behave more or less as ‘normal’ among their peers, irrespective of my presence. As far as possible the observations were done in natural settings, so that learners did not feel isolated from their peers.

3.6.3.1 Importance of observations

Observations are paramount in qualitative research since they enable the researcher to “systematically observe and record people’s behaviour and interactions” (Hennink et al., 2011:170). McMillan and Schumacher (2006:346) see participant observation as multi-dimensional, and as comprising “limited participation, field observation, interviewing, and artefact collection”. Based on the nature of the research, observation was embraced as one of a number of data collection tools to be used alone or in combination with other data collection tools, as is the case in this study. Learners in all of the Grade 7 classrooms (A, B & C) were observed more than once to gain maximum clarity in the time available on a number of issues raised during individual and focus group interviews. Merriam (1998) sees the carrying out of repeated observations of the same phenomenon as affording the researcher the

opportunity to gather data over a period of time, which increases the validity of the findings. Pring (2000:33) echoes this view: “The more observations there are which support the generalization, the more confident one might be in the conclusions reached”, hence the soundness and reliability of the data obtained. In the case of this study, I saw classroom observations as having the potential to increase the understanding of the daily struggles of the schools, especially within the classrooms. Grade 7 was chosen for the research because the learners were a part of the cohort under investigation that has been tracked from Grade R in 2005 to Grade 7 in 2012 when the study was conducted. Most available learner schedules were patchy, making it difficult to trace the progress of that particular cohort of learners through the various grades and phases.

3.6.3.2 Significance and value of observations

According to Cohen and Manion (1980), observation is a vital data collection tool for any qualitative researcher attempting to understand how learners and schools alike struggle on a daily basis to achieve certain goals. These authors further posit that observable units under such circumstances would include, but not be limited to, the learners, a class, a school, and the school’s surrounding community. Hancock et al. (2007) suggest that observations should be applicable in qualitative research, bearing in mind that not all data required for the research can be collected through other methods. They caution that, even if the information is collected properly, there is that possibility that, it may be limited in terms of addressing the research aims and objectives, and hence the importance of triangulation. Classroom observations gave me an opportunity to triangulate the data gathered through questionnaires, and via individual and focus group interviews.

Through observation of the implications of teacher attitudes to learner discipline and learners’ motivation to learn, the influence of teachers on the general classroom atmosphere was noted. In the course of each observation I placed particular emphasis on teacher visibility in the classroom, the teachers’ methods of teaching and their interaction with learners, classroom management, and actual time spent on content, and other classroom activities (see Chapter 4, Sections 4.4.1 to 4.6.2). Data gathered in this way was easily correlated with information gathered through interviews, and other casual interactions in and outside of the classroom. The information was compared and cross-examined for credibility.

To enrich the data collection process, detailed field notes were recorded of everything observed within and outside of the classroom for authentication and reference purposes. The reactions of teachers towards certain behaviours of learners were vital data (see Chapter 4, Section 4.6.2), especially in terms of their role in influencing learner behaviour and learner motivation to learn within the classroom. The actions of participants, the way they interacted, what they did or how they responded to certain tasks and questions, my personal impressions about the participants and their activities, even those that remained general or contradictory, were noted for further probing as well as for analysis.

3.6.4 Questionnaires

Questionnaires were administered to learners, teachers and principals in all three schools. To obtain the necessary information, separate sets of questionnaires were designed for each category of participants, based on their different capabilities and responsibilities within the schooling environment (see Appendix 4). According to Tashakkori et al. (2002), questionnaires play an important role in qualitative research if used together with other collection tools. My research which focused on knowing more about learner performance in Q-1 primary schools thus required me to design different sets of questionnaires for learners; teachers and principals respectively (see Appendix 4).

3.6.4.1 Types and purposes of questionnaires

Based on the assumed abilities of the learners, straight forward questions were presented requiring fairly simple and straight forward answers. This was meant to ensure, not only that learners were able to understand the questions, but that they developed an interest in continuing with the focus group discussions. The questionnaires presented to the learners were meant to assist me in understanding and gauging the kinds of freedoms at their disposal, as well as those unfreedoms that were preventing them from achieving certain functionings. The intention was to understand their backgrounds, particularly their home environments, and the role these home environments were playing in their educational endeavours. The questionnaires were also designed to elicit these learners' views and perceptions of their classroom environment in order to understand how resources, classroom interactions, and the school environment in general were promoting or limiting their educational capabilities. In order to obtain reliable data for the project, I encouraged learners to write as much information as possible, and not to include their names on papers or any means of identifying

them. In spite of this directive, the learners presented very limited, or no, answers for many of the questions. Considering that they were Grade 7 learners, this inability to provide sufficient responses to the questionnaires could be attributed to low literacy levels, below those expected for the grade.

The type of questionnaire selected for the learners was meant to explore their daily challenges and experiences, both at home and at school. Understanding learner experiences within the classroom, from their own perspective and understanding, based on existing freedoms and unfreedoms, I saw as being crucial to the research. This produced information that became central to the research, especially when some information conflicted with what was obtained from principals, especially regarding resource availability and use within the classrooms.

Questions posed to teachers in their questionnaires were open-ended, factual and opinion related, grounded in their experiences with their learners and in the classroom environment. However, the teachers answered some of the questions out of context, or did not answer them at all. The questionnaires were mostly curriculum related, because teachers as the main executors or deliverers of the curriculum are better positioned to understand the educational capabilities of learners, and the unfreedoms they experience. The questionnaires also covered areas such as classroom management, and resource availability and use within the classrooms, and were aimed at addressing the research question that deals with the role resources play in influencing learner performance. The individual and collective attitudes and perceptions of teachers about learner performance were covered in the questionnaires distributed to them.

A third batch of questionnaires given to the principals was specifically designed to address their many roles that include teaching, administration, and management. Since principals are agents of change within the schools, the questionnaires were designed to obtain information that would cover this broad spectrum, and would also unravel their capabilities, and the challenges they were faced with in transforming existing resources into learner achievements. I saw the questionnaire as providing an opportunity for principals to provide detailed information that corresponded with the actual role of resources and other factors that appeared to impact negatively on learner performance, irrespective of the amount of resources poured by government into the schooling system. Being part of the school resources themselves, it gave them an opportunity to give their sincere and honest opinions

on the actual resource situation on the ground in relation to learner performance. Principals from their professional standing and experience divulged more convincing information than did the teachers on the freedoms and unfreedoms experienced by learners, the roles of teachers within the classrooms, and their implications on learner ability to perform or not perform. The information they provided I considered to be fundamental, and trustworthy, particularly since they were part of the lived experiences of all the stakeholders at their schools.

Similar to the questions included in the questionnaire distributed to the teachers, the questions in the questionnaire meant for the principals were also open ended, factual and opinion related, although they differed slightly in some instances, since the principals were both educators and administrators (see Appendix 3). I anticipated that they would approach the issue of learner performance from an angle slightly different from that of the teachers. In the fact responses from the principals were more elaborate than those of the teachers, and unveiled issues that needed to be investigated further, cross-checked, and triangulated, especially in relation to observation and interviews with other participants. The open ended questionnaires for both the educators and the principals were meant to provide them with an opportunity to expand on their individual opinions or on certain important ideas they wished to raise and/or play with. For enrichment and triangulation purposes, data was also obtained where possible from learner schedules.

3.6.5 Document study

This research which focuses on learner performance warranted an in-depth look into school schedules/report cards of learners in order to gain an insight into their progression, retention and attendance rates, and to understand how they progressed from one grade and phase to another, and the intricacies behind their abilities to progress or not to the next grade. Schedules/report cards of learners who were in Grade 7 in 2012 were traced back to 2005 when they presumably entered Grade R. Learner schedules for most of the grades were not available for various reasons. It was also difficult to trace the cohort because some learners did not gain admission to any of the schools from Grade R, as many learners were often transferred from different schools, especially those from the Eastern Cape Province (see Chapter 4: Section 4.5.1).

In addition, attempts to access soft copies of these records on the school computers were unsuccessful. The schools either made it clear that their computers were stolen with the information on their hard drives (with no back-up), or that they simply could not trace the files. Due to the missing learner schedules, it was difficult to build an accurate or complete profile for the cohort of learners being researched, since it was an overwhelming task to trace back to the date when they entered or disappeared from the cohort and the reasons for this. I had to put bits and pieces together from the limited records available and compare information with that obtained through interviews and observation for analytical purposes. This explains why Grade 6 and 7 records for school A, whose records were traceable and more or less complete, were extensively used in this study.

However, the principal of school A was honest enough to acknowledge the general flaw in the record keeping abilities of the school, especially those of the secretaries. The principal emphasized that, she as manager was obliged to rectify such flaws immediately, because neither of the secretaries nor her could account for the missing documents. To her, it was an opportunity to rectify an error that was never seen to exist. The non-existence of these very crucial documentations raised many unanswered questions regarding the implementation of the Progression Policy in the schools, according to which learner schedules ought to serve as guides for successful implementation (see Chapter 5). Since teachers needed to have the relevant information about learner progression in the previous grades in order to effectively assist them, the implementation of the policy was questionable, since records that were meant to be used to facilitate the process were unavailable.

Those learner schedules which were available yielded answers to some of the critical questions and many probing questions arose justifying the use of other research methods. For example, there was the need to look into the relationships between absenteeism and performance, age and performance, and other factors that needed to be considered when a learner was being progressed from one grade to another. This exercise also created an opportunity to look at present and future implications of the Progression Policy on the education path of a learner in the primary school and beyond. Here, the question of why learners performed better in class tests than in external examinations, such as the systemic numeracy and literacy tests, gained momentum as the gap was always huge. The classroom conditions that influenced learner attitude, discipline and motivation to learn were explored further using other methods to obtain answers to questions that arose from a close

examination of the learner schedules. To obtain a comprehensive and meaningful answer to the research questions, data gathered through the various instruments were systematically analysed.

3.7 Data analysis

The data obtained from the field and from documents were systematically analysed as advocated by Spradley (1980), Ryan and Bernard (2003), and Brazeley (2013). The analysis of the data commenced with the transcription of data collected through both formal and informal interviews, focus group discussions, and classroom observations (Hennink, Hutter & Bailey, 2011). During the observations, I made details notes of happenings within the classroom, since they were an interactive sessions. A comprehensive description of the analysis process is presented below.

3.7.1 Analysis of interviews (individual and focus groups)

I used a thematic mode of analysis for data collected through interviews, whereby data were coded or categorised into major and sub themes (Brazeley, 2013). Ryan et al. (2003:58) argue that “Theme identification is one of the most fundamental tasks in qualitative research”. Boyatzis (1998:161) defines a theme as “a pattern in the information that at minimum describes and organises the possible observations and maximum interprets aspects of the phenomenon”. This mode was used for the analysis of the transcribed data gathered from the individual and focus group interviews. Transcription is seen as an important feature of the process of data analysis in qualitative research since it adds to the accuracy of the data, and thus to the validity of the study.

I first read and re-read the transcribed interviews and focus group discussions in order to understand and/or identify emerging, or underlying themes, all the while taking into consideration the research aims and objectives, the research questions, and the theoretical framework (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006). This process and phase of the research was also meant to identify a trend of occurrences of information obtained from the different interview sessions and participants. Ryan et al. (2003:89) agree that themes are likely to surface more from topics that occur frequently: “the more the same concepts occur in a text, the more likely it is a theme”. Due to the volume of material, and the frequency of similarity in the available data, numerous subgroups emerged. In order to manage this volume, and to

avoid repetition and duplication of information, I identified patterns and themes and marked across all types of data generated for easy identification and cross-matching (Aronson, 1994; Brazeley, 2013). The process of arranging available information into similar piles gave room for conclusions, and indicated where further action was necessary, where gaps or doubts existed (Aronson, 1994; Miles & Huberman, 1994). This process revealed the necessity to conduct a follow up interview with principal A1 in order to clarify doubts that arose after the coding and analysis.

The coding process sprang into motion from the first conversations with the principals and teachers, and from the first visits at the schools. Moments or ideas arising from these conversations that were identified as valuable or important to the study were noted and classified. On the occasion of my introduction, including an outline of my mission, to the teachers and principals who were to participate in my study, they were eager to divulge some critical information in a spontaneous way, although I had not yet asked for it. It seemed they simply could not hold back their excitement and eagerness to explain their challenges to someone they assumed was likely to find solutions to these. Rubin et al. (1995) concur that data analysis in fact commences while the interview process is still under way. This was possible in my study because the information I gathered at this early stage could be correlated with existing literature on school performance, and the challenges schools and school principals themselves face in their attempts to convert existing resources into learner functionings. From this point information gathering proved to be an on-going process, as comparisons and cross matching based on how data gathered through other instruments like observation played out.

3.7.2 Analysis of observations

The on-going process of the analysis of data gathered through observations was also informed and enriched by data collected from the interviews, and focus group discussions. Although observations in the three schools ran concurrently, themes that emerged during classroom observations were noted and compared with those from interviews with principals, as well as from focus group discussions with learners and teachers at other schools. This was mainly to identify common features, challenges, and the capabilities of the different schools, and to understand the reasons for variances in learner performance. The thematic method of analysis made it possible for me to become thoroughly familiar with the data, and also

highlighted the relationship between the theoretical frameworks I was using, themes extracted from literatures, and the research aims and objectives. Each theme identified was supported by evidence from my observations, and linked to the theoretical framework used (Brazeley: 2013). Major ideas that emerged from the data were cut out, and arranged into separate piles for easy identification and analysis, especially as those data collected using other instruments needed to be integrated. This method made it easier to identify similarities in information obtained from various participants through the different instruments employed in the research, in turn making it easier to identify issues of concern that emerged naturally from the data. The research was thus developed and structured to address the research aims that form the pillar of this research. Data obtained from the school schedules were also analysed to complement data collected through interviews and observations.

3.7.3 Document analysis

Those learner schedules which were available were analysed to give voice and meaning to the study. The schedules reflected the existing Progression Policy and its influence on the patterns of learner performance. Since the study focuses on a particular cohort of learners, there was a need to clearly understand how many learners within the cohort had progressed similarly. There was also a need to understand the role of attendance had played in learner ability to progress. This approach provided an opportunity to correlate data obtained from the field through questionnaires, interviews and focus group discussions and observations to discern a clearer thread of data on learner educational capabilities, in the process of answering the question as to why they did or did not progress. The data were triangulated with those obtained from interviews and observations in order to understand the dynamics within the domain of learner performance in the three selected schools.

3.8 Description of participants

The choice of schools used in the study was based on the nature of the research topic, and its primary aim to understand why some Q-1 primary schools underperform, and why poor schools perform varyingly, even when they supposedly amass the same amount of resources from the government, have learners from similar backgrounds, and are located within the same communities. It was therefore necessary to choose schools located within the same vicinity in order to attempt to understand the causes and nature of such variances. To successfully obtain the data required, learners, teachers and principals were targeted as

participants in the research. A description of the population sampling processes for the questionnaires, interviews and focus groups for the three schools is presented below. These details include administrative procedures for the data gathering process, the structure of questionnaires, as well as individual and focus group interviews.

3.8.1 Population sampling for questionnaires, interviews and focus groups

A sample of sixty learners needed to be drawn, twenty from the total Grade 7 learners in each of the three schools. The reason for learners that participated in the research being restricted to Grade 7 was because, everything being equal, the cohort of learners involved in the research was expected to be in Grade 7 in 2012. The purposeful sampling paradigm was adopted in choosing the required number of learners from the total learners in Grade 7 in each of the three schools to participate in the research. This selection was done with an inclusive principle in mind (Babbie & Mouton, 1998).

In school A, where a reasonable amount of data on learner performance was available, a cohort of learners was traced from Grade 3, through Grade 6 to Grade 7, the data for Grades 1 and 2 for this cohort being unavailable. Records of learners that attended Grade 3A in 2008 were also not available. However, out of a total of 134 learners that attended Grades 3B, 3C and 3D in 2008, only 74 of them had successfully progressed to Grade 6. Out of this number, 55 learners had successfully progressed to Grade 7 by 2012.

Since only 74 of the cohort of 134 learners identified in Grade 3 successfully progressed through to Grade 6, it was supposed that part of that cohort repeated either Grade 3, and/or 4 and/or 5 (see Table 2). The missing data for Grade 3A, together with the absence of complete data for Grades 4 and 5 for this cohort of learners, made it difficult to speculate how many of them might have fallen through the cracks, at what point they did, and why.

Table 2: Cohort movement of learners Grades 3, through 6 to 7, school A

Total population in Grade 3B, C and D	Total cohort progressed to Grade 6	Total cohort progressed to Grade 7
134	74	55

With the assistance of teachers, a total of 45 learners were drawn from the 55 learners in Grade 7 in school A in 2012, learners who, according to existing records, belonged to the cohort being researched in this study. These learners received consent forms that needed to be approved by their parents permitting them to participate in the research since they were minors (Silverman, 2000). Out of the 45 consent forms given out to the learners, only 38 were returned. It was from this population of 38 that a sample of 20 learners was carefully selected to take part in completing the questionnaires (see Table 3). In the view of Ogunniyi (1992), choosing a total of 20 learners from a total population of 55 that successfully entered Grade 7 in 2012 is a truly representative sample. Although I expected that the 20 learners that took part in the questionnaires would eventually be part of the focus group discussions, only 18 learners actually took part in the focus group discussions for reasons that were not interrogated based on ethical considerations (Table 3). A similar procedure was followed for schools B and C.

In school B, sampling was carried out based on the total population of 135 learners that were in the Grade 7 classes (A, B and C) in 2012, since completed records could not be obtained for other grades to get a comprehensive trajectory of the cohort of learners being researched. Out of a population of 135, 40 learners were chosen to receive consent forms, of which 30 were returned. Out of the 30 returned consent forms, 20 learners were chosen to complete the questionnaires, although only 13 of them continued into the focus group discussion phase of the research (see Table 3).

Table 3: Learner population sampling for questionnaires for Schools A, B & C

	School A	School B	School C
Total consent forms handed out	45	40	43
Total consent Forms received	38	30	35
Number of learners allowed to participate	20	20	20
Number of learners that participated in the focus group discussions	18	13	14

A similar procedure was followed in school C where a population of 131 learners were in Grade 7 (A, B and C) in 2012. Here, 43 learners were chosen to receive the consent forms

using the purposeful sampling technique. The selection procedure, with the help of teachers, took into account gender and age. Out of the 43 learners only 35 returned the consent forms. A total of 20 learners were then chosen to officially participate in the research process (see Table 3). Although all 20 learners filled in the questionnaires, only 14 of them took part in the focus group discussion phase of the research (see Table 3). Their withdrawal was not interrogated because of their informed right to withdraw at any stage of the research without giving any reasons.

The sampling procedures for teachers to participate in completing the questionnaire and focus group phases of the research was stress-free, since the principals in all three schools instructed their HoDs, who were themselves teachers, to oversee the process. The HoDs identified colleagues that were willing and had the time to assist with the research process, both as facilitators and participants. Three teachers from each of the schools were chosen to join the HoDs as part of the research enabling team. These teachers all showed a keen interest in the research, making it fairly easy for me and them to work as a team, although conflicting timetables posed a problem during the initial stages. The HoDs were often very vocal, and anxious to recount their experiences and express their views from the angle of both administrators and classroom teachers, particularly those at school A. This partly explains why it was impossible to carry out a second focus group discussion with the teachers, a process that could not be forced for ethical reasons.

3.9 Ethical considerations

Since the research involved humans, and especially minors, and had the potential to cause unintended harm, ethical considerations were applied throughout the research. An ethical statement which is a set of rules guiding the relationship between the researcher and the participants was drawn up for the participants. According to Swann and Pratt (2003:189) “Ethical considerations are important for both moral and practical reasons”. The procedures and processes for this are described in detail below.

3.9.1 Letters from authorities to give consent

Consent was initially obtained from the Education Higher Degree Committee (EDUHD) and Senate Higher Degrees Committee (SHDC), at the University of the Western Cape (UWC). Consent letters were also obtained from the Western Cape Education Department (WCED)

(see Appendix 5) to carry out research in the selected schools. These letters were to ensure adherence to the necessary guidelines that would establish an acceptable relationship between the participants and the researcher. After approval from the EDUHD, and SHDC at UWC, and from the WCED, I also sought permission from the Metro South Education District (MSED) head office in Mitchells Plain, which oversees activities in the schools which fall within the area of research.

Copies of these letters for ethical purposes were handed to the principals during consultative meetings to seek their permission to do research in their various schools. This was crucial because; all of the ethical clearances stated that the responsibility for conducting of the research in his or her school rests with the principal and it is her or his prerogative to or not allow the researcher to carry out research in his or her school. It was only after the approval of the various principals that I was given permission to meet the relevant participants in the study; the process was facilitated by the HoDs. The principals were happy and willing to assist me in any way possible to facilitate the research process. Their pledges ranged from filling in questionnaires, and granting interviews, to providing any other materials from their schools that could facilitate the research. One of the principals reiterated that there was always that need to gain more knowledge in order to tackle the many and growing problems that manifest in their schools on a daily basis. This attitude on the part of the three principals fed into their enthusiasm to see the research succeed, and thus stimulated their openness through the entire process. This explains why some of them willingly granted more than one interview during the course of the research, despite their busy schedules. For this reason, information obtained from the principals was classified as reliable, sound and trustworthy.

3.9.2 Consent Letters from Parents for Learners

Owing to the fact that this research involved minors, informed consent was sought in writing from the learners and their parents (Merriam, 1998) (see Appendix 6 & 7). Silverman (2000) considers parental consent to their children participating in any research to be crucial, because children are not sufficiently competent to take decisions on their own regarding whether to participate in the research or not. Parents were thus given consent forms via the learners, which explained to them the essence of the research, and how their children would be treated during the entire process. Learners were encouraged to bring the consent forms back after a week, although some of them took longer than expected, and many more did not

return them. Only those children whose parents endorsed the consent forms were allowed to participate in the research process. This was intended to give them, as endorsed by their parents, an opportunity to exercise their rights as autonomous persons to either voluntarily accept or refuse to participate in the study (Babbie et al., 2001). It was therefore assumed that parents who did not return the consent forms were not willing to permit their children to participate in the research.

All participants were encouraged to participate willingly in the research, and also given the leverage to choose to withdraw voluntarily from the research at the any time without giving prior notification and without penalty. The learners were also informed of their right to ask for the termination of any audio recordings, at any given time, without offering explanations. This explains why learners that did not participate during the focus group sessions were not further questioned because I regarded this behaviour as normal, particularly for children. Christians (2005) considers that human freedom should be respected, and that participants in any research need to be given the opportunity to agree to voluntarily participate in the project without any form of coercion, and that any agreement between the researcher and the participants should be based on one guided by full and open information. Thus an agreement was reached regarding the anonymity of participants, their privacy and identity, taking into consideration their vulnerability to deception.

3.9.3 Openness about participation

During my first visit to each of the Grade 7 classrooms in all three schools, I was given the opportunity to verbally explain to the learners the value of the research and how they would be treated with honesty and respect. The teachers repeated this information in their mother tongue, to ensure that everyone had understood their role in the research, and the value they stood to add both to the research and to the quality of their education. I ensured that participants knew what the research was all about, what was involved, including the times and venues, and the kind of research instruments to be used. Christians (2005) suggests that such a process needs to be free of any form of deception before and during the research. Complete information about the type of research, and the nature of the procedures was presented clearly for the participants to understand. These explanations boosted the morale of the learners who became enthusiastic from the onset to participate in the research

3.9.4 Anonymity

Since research subjects concerning humans are often by nature sensitive, emphasis was placed on the anonymity of responses, and the identity of participants (Babbie et al., 2001). From the start participants were asked not to mention their names when completing the questionnaires, and when giving responses during interviews. Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2011) agree that anonymity should be guaranteed for participants if the possibility exists that they may disclose information that could be of a personal or sensitive nature without bias.

3.9.5 Privacy and identity

To protect the privacy and identity of learners and the institutions, I made a pledge not to disclose information obtained from them to any other person, except with their permission. According to Christians (2005:145) “the codes of ethics insist on safeguards to protect people’s identities and those of research locations”. Thus I put in place measures to keep any information obtained from the participants and the research locations confidential (Cohen et al., 2011). This is why the schools have been coded as schools A, B and C, and a similar procedure was followed for principals and teachers. Christians (2005) advocates that when that agreement of confidentiality is in place, data collected ought to be secured or concealed, and made public only behind a shield of anonymity. Thus, the names of the participants are not used in this research, and those of schools are concealed. It was agreed by me and the participants that the information from the research would be used strictly for academic purposes, and that major stakeholders would be informed of the findings after the completion of the process.

3.9.6 Vulnerability of participants

Cohen et al. (2011:90) suggest that, despite all the formalities put in place about privacy and other ethical considerations before the research, participants remain vulnerable because, “the right to privacy may easily be violated during the course of the investigation or denied after it has been completed”. Merriam (1998:213) adds that, “in qualitative studies, ethical dilemmas are likely to emerge with regard to the collection and in the dissemination of findings”. Although there is no question that information received from participants has to be confidential, it is questionable whether all of the information ultimately circulated to the wider public is made known to research participants or major stakeholders involved. I argue

that ethical considerations are and remain, much more of a contested territory than is often realized within qualitative research. This explains why Christians (2005:145) emphasizes that within the research domain “watertight confidentiality has proved to be impossible”. However, in this research, care was taken to reasonably limit such violations during and after the research.

3.10 Challenges associated with the data gathering process

Challenges encountered during the data gathering process at the schools included incomplete data on learner schedules due to administrative and logistical reasons. The schools experienced record keeping problems, which meant that the unavailability of crucial documents could not be satisfactorily explained. The record keeping abilities of the secretaries were peculiar and inconsistent in school A. During the classroom observation phase of my research a teacher confessed to me that, “the actual work programmed for this lesson could not be done because work that was given to the secretary for photocopying could not be found”. Even though it was clear that the secretaries did not have the proper skills to manage the existing documentation, the principals on their part appeared unaware of such problems. At the same school it was reported that, when teachers collected learner schedules to write reports, they often did not bother to return them to the secretary or the principal’s office, which meant that such documents eventually went missing, and the secretaries did not always have duplicates. It became increasingly clear that, because of the unavailability of these documents, certain administrative prerogatives were being either side-lined or neglected. For example, the Progression Policy that allowed learners to progress to the next grade without having qualified, and who needed extra assistance, required that the records of such learners be readily available and accessible, to allow teachers to easily identify and assist such learners at an early stage. The unavailability of these records impeded, or made this kind of intervention impossible.

In some instances the unavailability of these documents was linked to the regular theft of computers that contained learner schedules, and whose files had not been backed up. This was especially so in School A. School C attributed the unavailability of complete learner schedules to the fact that they had moved offices, and critical documentation went missing in transit. This made it impossible to access important data on learner performance for constructing a full profile of the cohort of learners under investigation in the domains of attendance, as well as retention and pass rates. It was also impossible to draw conclusions on how many learners had progressed through the various phases successfully, or how learner attendance had impacted

on learner performance and progression, as well as affecting retention rates. Despite these limitations, data from other sources used to compensate for and supplement this discrepancy, rendered other kinds of data used in this study durable. Despite these setbacks, a true picture of the capabilities, freedoms, and unfreedoms that shaped learner performance in the selected Q-1 primary schools was described, and highlighted with the help of additional material gathered from individual and focus group interviews, as well as from classroom observations.

3.11 Conclusion

This qualitative case study was conducted in three Q-1 primary schools located in a 'disadvantaged' community or township in Cape Town. The chapter highlights the journey and steps I undertook to choose the schools, to secure permission from various stakeholders, and the tools used in conducting the field work to collect and analyse the necessary data.

The chapter described the gradual process of sorting permission from the University of the Western Cape, the Western Cape Department of Education, the Metro South Education District, and the principals of the three schools involved in the study. In the domain of data collection, three distinct sets of questionnaires were distributed to the learners, teachers and principals respectively. In addition, two sets of focus group interviews were conducted in each of the schools with the learners and the teachers, while individual interviews were conducted with each of the principals. For logistical reasons, focus group interviews were conducted in each of the schools only with the learners and teachers. Data from these sources were complemented by observations in all of the Grade 7 classrooms (A, B and C) in the three schools over a period of time, in order to ensure maximum trustworthiness of the results. The data were analysed using the thematic content analysis method, and the themes that emerged in the course of the research were categorised and used to address the research aims.

The chapter also described the challenges that arose during the various stages of the research journey, and the measures that were put in place to minimize error and distortion and/or to compensate for the absence of crucial data. The ways in which ethical concerns guided the researcher in maintaining the required norms and standards to ensure credibility in the data collected and used during the research have been described. The findings, outcomes, framework for understanding learner performance in a Q-1 primary school via the

Capabilities Approach, conclusion and recommendations of the study are presented in chapters 4, 5, 6 and 7.



CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

4.1 Introduction

The findings of the study are presented within the framework of the Capabilities Approach (CA) and are analysed with the aim of understanding more clearly the diverse nature of the factors influencing learner performance in poor schooling communities. The CA, as was described in detail in chapter 2 (section 2.2) and central to the writings of Amartya Sen (1989, 1992, 1998 & 1999), is underpinned by the constructs of Capabilities, Functionings, Conversion, Unfreedoms and Freedoms. As was described in detail in chapter 2 (Section 2.2), these constructs have the potential to provide more clarity to researchers and policy makers, as well as other education stakeholders, than do traditional approaches, on why schools perform the way they do, irrespective of the quality and quantity of available resources. Sen's (1992) argument regarding capabilities unique to particular institutions/individuals which enable them achieve certain valuable functionings was unpacked in chapter 2 in terms of the variances existing between institutions, and between individuals in the same institutions. The focus of the CA on the freedoms one has to achieve, and the unfreedoms that inhibit one's abilities to achieve functionings was also elaborated on and discussed in chapter 2.

The core thesis of the CA is that the amount or quality of resources accumulated by a school cannot automatically predetermine or guarantee the level of learner performance. As was described in chapter 2, Sen's (1992) view that, even where equal resources are provided to similar institutions, and the barriers or constraints to achieve are not seriously considered, there are possibilities of variations in outcomes that are likely to be ignored. Also examined was Taylor's (2009) more recent view of the likelihood of schools in the same locale performing varyingly based on the diversity of human beings and institutions. As described in chapter 3, this study investigates these theories using a sample of three Q-1 primary schools in the same disadvantaged community in Cape Town. The specific role resources are found to play, particularly in relation to other factors, in influencing learner performance at the three schools is examined using the CA lens and forms the core of chapters 4 and 5. The purpose of these chapters, which deal with the recording and analysis of the collected data, is to illuminate the ways in which, in the selected schools, a range of existing unfreedoms can be translated into learner underperformance, even in cases where adequate and appropriate resources are available.

The chapter is structured according to the schools involved in the study, and organised according to the main themes that emerged from the investigation. The findings from the empirical study are presented and analysed thematically showing how the data collected relates to learner experiences in each of the three schools, as they struggle to adapt within their particular and individual spaces. Although not a comparative study, the choice of the three Q-1 schools was made in order to attempt to understand how the differences in capabilities in each schools influence their abilities to convert existing resources and consequently influence learner performance. The data collection process and the findings of the study are based on the assumption that resources are readily available in all three schools, and that these schools struggle to convert these resources into functionings and satisfactory outcomes. This is due to the limited capabilities they as institutions possess in terms of their commitment to improving the performance of their learners against a backdrop of unfreedoms exerted by what I consider to be ‘silent’, but ‘salient’ factors (Sen, 1992). The structure of the chapter and of the research was also influenced by the idea of the diversity of capabilities possessed by those in charge of converting existing resources into functionings in each school, and the implications of such unfreedoms for learner performance at each of the three schools, on the basis of their being classified for purpose of this research, as high performing (school A), satisfactory performing (School B) and low performing (School C). Learner summative test results as displayed in available schedules were also used as a guide in such a classification.

The chapter is divided into seven sections: section one introduces the chapter; section two situates the CA as the frame work of analysis. Section three looks at the delineations of history and poverty and their influences on the performance of learners at these schools. Sections 4, 5, and 6 examine the nature of the individual capabilities in schools A, B and C respectively, and their individual efforts to overcome their particular challenges in attempting to ensure a high level of learner performance. The final section concludes the chapter.

4.2 Conceptualizing the CA in schooling spaces

As was described in detail in chapter 2 (Section 2.2), the CA is used in the current study to motivate a shift from the mainstream assumption that resources equal achievement to focusing on the particular struggles institutions go through in an attempt to achieve functionings. These mainstream assumptions hold that what institutions achieve in the form

of learner performance is assessed based on the amount of resources at their disposal, while ignoring internal and external characteristics, those ‘silent but pertinent variables’ (Sen, 1992) that influence the abilities of institutions and individuals to achieve what they value. The current study attempts to examine the variety of different challenges encountered at the three selected institutions, although showing different levels of learner performance, situated in the same community. The investigation is based on the CA assumption that every institution is unique, especially given the inherent diversity of human abilities (Sen, 1985 & 1992).

As has been described, the study takes into account the physical environment of each individual institution, the abilities of those in charge of converting existing resources, as well as the likelihood of learner backgrounds influencing their capabilities, and in turn creating possibilities for variances in how available resources are expended, or not, to ensure functionings.

These three Q-1 schools, with their respective levels of academic performance, presented an opportunity to explore how differences in spaces and existing variables contribute to our understanding of the reasons why different institutions in the same neighbourhood, with learners of similar backgrounds, and having similar resources, are likely to exhibit contrasting achievement patterns. Since the CA concentrates on the relationship between individual capabilities and achievements in relation to available resources, it provides a strand of reasoning, or a particular lens, with which to focus on why schools perform varyingly. Thus this study, focusing as it does on why these three schools fail or succeed in different aspects and ways, sees the achievement or underachievement of learners in these schools as circumstantial. The study therefore looks particularly at freedoms to achieve in each school on the assumption that some schools or learners may be restricted in their freedom to choose what they desire from varied functioning bundles based on existing unfreedoms (Sen, 1992).

Thus the CA provides an opportunity to evaluate in depth the achievement of the three educational institutions overall and learner performance in each of the three Q-1 schools which constitute the sample in particular. Thus the aims of this chapter are to establish the extent to which history and the environment influence learner performance in Q-1 schools, to determine the extent to which resources influence the performance of learners in Q-1 schools,

and to investigate how the CA enhances our understanding of the diverse factors influencing learner performances in Q-1 primary schools.

4.3 History and poverty as capabilities limitations

Despite the demise of the apartheid regime and the birth of democracy in 1994, nearly fifteen years ago, Carter and May (2001:87) argued that “significant numbers of the South African poor are potentially trapped in a structural poverty trap and lack the means to escape poverty overtime”, a perception later confirmed by, Soudien (2007), who elaborates on this poverty trap as it applies to education, especially in the domain of learner performance. Soudien, Spaul, Van der Berg, and Fleisch (see Chapter 1, sections: 1.1 & 1.2, and chapter 2, Section 2.4) echo Sen (1992), seeing resource transfers in some cases as being either not enough or irrelevant, because the plight of poor schooling communities remains substantially the same. This assumption is also reflected in Spaul’s (2012) correlation between performance in poor South African schools and the apartheid legacy (see Chapter 2, Section 2.4). Spaul (2012:1) argues that, “The strong legacies of apartheid and the consequent correlation between education and wealth have meant that, generally speaking, poor South African students perform worse academically”. In other words, history, poverty and school performance are entangled in an intricate web often distorted or oversimplified on the basis of a range of different perceptions. The critical question that remains unanswered is why South African poor schooling communities still underperform nearly twenty years into democracy, while receiving substantial material support from the government (Pretorius, 2014; Bayat, Louw & Rena, 2014).

Sen (1992) argues that an education department, in its provision of resources to eliminate such gaps, needs to consider the existence of the dearth and poverty of capabilities in the communities in question, which would at every stage act as direct and indirect limitations to any efforts at improving learner performance. Sen’s (1992) theories can be applied to South African schools that emerged from apartheid with unique challenges, which sometimes ran deeper than commonly perceived, at the level of different households, communities, and schools. When resources are allocated to schools, such challenges are often not considered as imposing unfreedoms in learning spaces, irrespective of the quantity or quality of resources available. A CA would therefore assist a researcher in this area to see that schools emerged from apartheid varyingly, and thus the probability exists that they deserve different amounts

and kinds of resources suited to their particular needs and circumstances, and require different time spans to perform in line with expected standards. The CA can also illuminate other factors operating, particularly the ways in which teachers are or are not using these resources, or have limited capabilities to do so.

In the course of the research process of this study, learners, teachers and principals at the three schools showed significant variations in terms of the interchangeable and interrelated roles history and poverty have been found to play in shaping learner experiences, and resultant learner performance. This and other studies show how the mere location of such schools in a previously disadvantaged community, where relatively low family income shapes the economic and social lives of the people, contributes to how education is perceived, approached, and supported by members of such a community. In this particular community, relatively low family incomes appeared to shape the attitudes, perceptions, interests and kinds of responsibilities shown by the community towards education and schooling, and consequently to have influenced learner performance at the schools. If viewed through the CA lens, the ways in which parents perceive and participate in educational activities is shaped by capabilities poverty, because any zeal they may have to assist the education of their children by providing basic learning resources at home, or assist them with their education development, might be dampened by existing circumstances. The existence of this capabilities poverty in individual households and in the community also plays into how learners behave, learn and perform in classroom spaces. These learners may find it difficult to integrate normally in a schooling environment, since they carry with them the burden of what transpires, or does not, at home into the classroom.

The continuing clear demarcation of schools at the dawn of democracy into two classes: the well-resourced and performing schools, code named “Ex Model C” schools, and the under resourced and underperforming schools categorized as ‘poor’ schools, and located mostly in rural areas, particularly in townships found mostly at the outskirts of major cities in South Africa, including Cape Town, provides a continuing and seemingly ineradicable stigma. These poor schools emerged from the apartheid era with poor infrastructure and limited and smaller classrooms in relation to the increasing number of learners. This negatively affected the teaching and learning process, as both learners and teachers struggled to adapt in these smaller classroom spaces (see Chapter 2: Section 2.4).

Efforts by the government after 1994 to redress the imbalance in the education system have been slowed by a huge backlog, due to the needs of the schools at that time in terms of the needs of the schools and teachers exceeding available resources. Schools built after 1994 surprisingly have limited infrastructure, and smaller classrooms, because there was apparently insufficient land available at the time to build sufficient and spacious classrooms in these poor schools. Principal A1 commented on this insufficiency of land set aside for expanding schools and classrooms to meet this need:

The government allocates a bulk of its land to the building of houses to meet up with 'the housing problem', while ignoring the demanding needs in the education sector. Land allocated to schools is thus limited, and does not provide an opportunity for bigger classrooms; much needed laboratories, libraries and sports facilities. The cramped nature of the classrooms in these schools makes them uncondusive for learning compared to the "EX Model C" schools that were built during the apartheid era on bigger land, with enough resources invested in them.

Principal A1 expanded on her view of the differentials in education resources and infrastructure between ex model c and poor schools:

If you look at those schools that were built during the apartheid era, the environment is academically conducive. The buildings are beautiful, they have laboratories, libraries, play grounds, and even music rooms, with teachers permanently employed to cater for every extra curricula activity. Our schools are different, they are affected by the history of apartheid, we have smaller classrooms, we don't even have play grounds, or sport fields where learners can play, and practice rugby, or play soccer, and practice other sports.

According to principals A1 and B1, this clear differentiation as a result of history and poverty in the poor schooling communities is difficult to reverse, because its impact on their perceptions and their ability on the part of both teachers and learners to improve learner performance is beyond their imagination. These cramped classrooms represented, and continue to represent and create, unfreedoms for learners in different ways. From 1994, and particularly after the passing of the South African Schools Act (SASA) in 1996 (Fiske &

Ladd, 2004), government accepted that the impact of history and poverty on the educational abilities of learners in poor schooling communities should not be denied, particularly given that the challenges they face are real, and that the potential existed for them to reinvent, and superimpose themselves in different ways in the community, with direct and indirect ramifications on learner performance. Although it has been observed by various researchers, through the CA lens, that post 1994, the ways in which schools were attempting to manage the available resources to attain functionings varied according to their unique capabilities, the role of history and poverty undoubtedly impeded their endeavours to do so (Case & Lam, 2001; Motala, 2001).

Thus, based on the assumption that schools in the same neighbourhood, receiving similar support from the government, and having learners with similar backgrounds, often perform varyingly, using only results from summative assessments and systemic tests, I classified the schools which constitute the sample for this study into a high performing (School A), a satisfactorily performing (School B), and a low performing (School C). This classification, however, does not reflect the official departmental or national government's categorization of schools, but was considered to be a convenient way to attempt to explicate some of the reasons why schools in the same neighbourhood perform varyingly, while possessing similar characteristics. The schools are not being looked at from a comparative perspective, but the nature of presentation is intended as an attempt to understand clearly how performance in different schools is influenced by their abilities to convert, or not, existing resources into functionings. The CA lens zooms into the particular ways in which resources in the individual institutions are converted to influence learner performance. This lens also provides an opportunity to better understand how the local community, including its physical characteristics and infrastructure, the parents, and the general population from which the learners come, play a part in shaping how learners perceive and value education, and both learn and perform. The capabilities limitations, freedoms and unfreedoms that emerge as learners struggle to attain the kind of performance they and their schools desire in the three schools are explicated in chapter 4 (Sections: 4.4, 4.5 & 4.5) and chapter 5.

School A

4.4 Introduction

For the purpose of this research, School A is classified as high performing compared to the other two schools involved in the investigation, not because of its exceptionally high performance according to national standards. This is because, its learners perform relatively well compared to the other two schools located in close proximity, and with learners with similar backgrounds. This classification is also based on some administrative prerogatives at the school that have direct implications on learner performance and that are handled in a more progressive manner compared to the other two schools. This kind of differentiation in approaches had been found to contribute to spatial inequalities that in turn influence variances in the results obtained. Since all three schools are Q-1 schools, and enjoying the same kind of support from the government, they are, according to government's formula, expected to perform similarly. From the available findings school A could be seen to be placed far above the other two schools in various ways, including learner performance, based on available learner schedules, the ability of the school authorities to convert existing resources into learner functionings, hence my decision in this study to classify it as a relatively high performing school.

The nature of resources available at the school, and in terms of the CA, the nature of freedoms and unfreedoms, as well as the capabilities of the school in terms of teaching and management appeared to have combined to shape learner performance at the school. Existing limitations were visible both in and beyond the boundaries of the school, and the repercussions of these were both direct and indirect in nature, and, in some cases, persistently ignored or overlooked by the government and policy makers. Features that influenced learner performance at the school included the roles played by teachers, a library, computer laboratory, availability of books and stationery material, and the school feeding programme at the school. Also notable were classroom dynamics such as learner discipline, motivation, absenteeism, the existence of overage learners, and the language of instruction, all of which I identified as important factors worth examining in any attempt to understand the nature of learner performance at the school. The local community in many ways also directly and indirectly influenced how education was perceived and supported at the school, and how learners learned and performed. This was portrayed in the form of family structure, the role

of biological parents and guardians, parental education, and the existence or lack of role models. These features influencing learner performance will be discussed in detail in terms of the findings in the following sections.

4.4.1 The nature of school resources

The nature and kinds of resources focused on in this section include were listed in the previous section as influencing learner performance. I identified these as major resources with the potential to influence the teaching and learning outcomes significantly, although these were unfortunately restricted in some circumstances due to certain unfreedoms. These sections explicate how resources in school A were found to influence learner performance, taking into consideration existing freedoms and unfreedoms in learning spaces, and capabilities limitations that impede teachers and school administrators in their efforts to improve learner performance at the school.

4.4.1.1 The Role of Teachers

Teachers at school A unanimously acknowledged the existence of a gap between what is expected of learners in terms of performance and what actually takes place. They attributed this to either the lack, or the quality, of certain resources at the school. It was revealed that teachers play an important role in assisting learners to achieve their desired goals. According to principal A1, the school's desire to function optimally depended profoundly on teachers who were regarded as an essential resource in the institution. The principal perceived that, apart from existing unfreedoms within the school, the way in which teachers performed their jobs influenced learner abilities to achieve certain functionings. In the view of principal A1, learner's ability to learn and perform largely depended on what teachers did or did not do in the classroom.

Roughly 60% of learning should depend on the teacher, because the teacher is the main resource. Therefore, if all other resources like overhead projectors, computers, and textbooks are available, but there are no good teachers, performance will never be improved, since when a teacher motivates the learners to learn, develops a good relationship with the learners, it creates trust, and in a way makes it easier for learners to work together with teachers, and thus increase their chances of performing well. Good teachers are those that go

beyond the classroom, and curriculum requirements by motivating learners, and creating spaces that breed trust, respect and self-confidence among learners. A good teacher should go beyond the motivation of the learners by being able to follow and monitor what the learner does in class, and beyond the classroom.

The principal considered that more attention needs to be paid to teacher quality, rather than to the numbers of teachers, and teacher-learner ratios, in order to resolve the existing and on-going learner underperformance problem.

However, what is perceived by people such as Principal A1 as being the fundamental role of the teacher in positively shaping learner freedoms to achieve can be hypothetical or idealistic when examined critically. It was revealed in interviews and observations that in fact the lack of certain capabilities on the part of teachers at the school limited their abilities to positively translate existing or available resources into learner performance. As clearly stated by principal A1, the central concern is not how many teachers are employed at the school relative to the numbers of learners or class sizes, but what those employed are able to do, that positively contributes towards raising the level of learner performance. This aligns well with the tenets of the CA, which places emphasis on the quality rather than the quantity of resources, including teachers, who are needed to achieve the desired functionings in any education institution. Christie (2008) in her “Opening the doors of learning”, also places emphasis on teacher quality, or poor quality, as one of the reasons many poor schools struggle to attain certain functionings. Within this strand, Teacher A1 acknowledged that some of his colleagues at the school lacked certain qualities, and at times failed to adequately perform certain duties as expected of them, implying that a major share of the blame for learner underperformance should rest on them as teachers.

I gathered during classroom observations and interviews at the school that some teachers were inadequately prepared when they went to class to teach, and could thus be said to be inhibiting their learners’ ability to learn and perform. This concern was also raised in schools B (Section 4.5.1.4), and C (Sections 4.6.2.6 and 4.6.2.7). What emerged strongly was that some of these teachers did not read up on their subject in preparation for the lesson, and thus often lacked an adequate knowledge or understanding of the subject matter. This limited their abilities to transfer the necessary knowledge to the learners: they did not necessarily familiarize themselves with the subject matter. Principal A1, in an attempt to clarify the

contestations surrounding teacher contribution towards learner performance at the school, while taking account of the ‘necessary material to teach’ (material resources), noted some of the consequences of the lack of preparedness and clarity of aims of teachers:

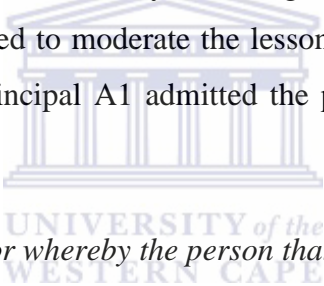
Once a teacher goes to class unprepared, without the necessary material to teach, there are chances that effective teaching and learning will not take place, because the teacher is not aware of what to teach, and what the outcomes of the lesson should be. At this stage the teacher is unaware of what he wants learners to achieve. When you go to class prepared you know what you want, you know how you are going to assess the learners, if they have achieved what you are teaching, but if you just go, just bringing your presence to class, like you are baby seating them, and surely effective teaching and learning will not take place.

Comments such as this show that learner freedom to choose the kind of schooling they desired was embedded in the quality of teachers and the nature of teaching at the school, some of whom, it appeared, tended to be passive and did not take their work seriously, thus leading to serious learning impairments for the learners. In addition, some of these teachers consistently came late to class, and at times completely absented themselves from the lesson even when they were in the confines of the school. Many of those that made an effort to go to class failed to prepare adequately for their lessons, and did not have lesson plans that ought to be a prerequisite for proper teaching and learning to take place. Principal A1 commented on the negative effects of this on learners:

The lesson plan is meant to provide teachers with knowledge of what needs to be done in advance, and especially what needs to be achieved at the end of each lesson. Without a lesson plan teachers go to class unprepared and can easily get confused while in class, especially where to start, and where to end, as well as, aims and objectives of the lesson, and the necessary activities of the lesson. Teachers without proper lesson plans are likely to deliver their lessons poorly, and this is likely to impact negatively on learner performance.

Although the teachers on their part were negligent in this regard, it was observed, and also confirmed through interviews, that the lack of certain capabilities of those in charge of overseeing and ensuring that lesson plans were developed and used effectively in class meant

that they did not play their roles as mandated. Based on the administrative structure of the school and on directives from WCED, the Heads of Departments (HoDs) were required to supervise and monitor the preparation and use of lesson plans by the teachers. Principal A1 observed that the non-provision of lesson plans by teachers was linked to poor monitoring by HoDs, owing to their own lack of the necessary skills to perform such duties. As a result of this lack of certain capabilities on the part of the HoDs, and, according to the CA, one could argue that learners at School A missed out on real opportunities to improve their capabilities and performance. Since lesson plans constitute an important component of an effective teaching and learning process, teachers were required by the school to submit lesson plans one week prior to the lesson for effective monitoring and evaluation. However, due to inconsistencies in the monitoring, evaluation and moderation processes on the part of the administration, most teachers did not take lesson planning seriously. The irony is that, as was applicable in School C, the Principal of School A was doubtful and vague as to the reasons why lesson plans were not presented timeously according to her directives. This is despite the fact that the principal was expected to moderate the lesson plans after the HoDs had played their own part in the process. Principal A1 admitted the presence of inconsistencies in this process:



I think there is another factor whereby the person that is supposed to monitor that doesn't monitor it correctly, creating some kind of inconsistency. Sometimes they (HoDs) collect the lesson plans, sometimes they do not deal with those that do not submit, and I think that is another factor, they must be consistent.

Although delays in the presentation of lesson plans seemed a common practice for some teachers at the school, Principal A1 remarked with concern that:

Teachers exploit the loopholes to their advantage, but with a negative impact on the teaching and learning process. Although it is the responsibility of the HoDs to monitor the submission of lesson plans, that is not always the case. They maybe lack the necessary skills to deal with those teachers that do not submit lesson plans, creating unwanted scenarios that impact negatively on the teaching and learning process, and the performance of learners.

The inability to properly coordinate the lesson plan process should not be seen entirely in terms of negligence on the part of the HoDs, but as due to their lack of the necessary skills to execute such duties, which in fact constitute a capability limitation that impacts negatively on learner performance at the school. The principal however at some stage admitted responsibility for this and accepted that a degree of laxity on her part encouraged such malpractices and dereliction of duty, and in turn impacted negatively on learner performance at her school.

From my observations and interviews it became clear that the HoDs' and the principal's lack of certain managerial abilities led to poor curriculum delivery at the school. According to the CA, the existence of human diversity in different spaces, and the consequent lack of certain capabilities, is a commonality often ignored by researchers and education departments in the assessments of learner achievement in poor schools. Emphasis is placed on examining the role played by physical resources and financial allocations, while ignoring what human diversity and different personalities bring into the conversation. Also significant was that lesson plans at the school were only moderated by the principal after the lesson had been delivered, further questioning the actual role of 'moderation' in improving learner performance at the school, particularly as it was not clear whether this moderation included recommendations by the principal and/or HoDs for how a teacher could improve his or her lesson delivery. This also raised questions as to how 'moderation' was understood by those responsible, and what kind of 'moderation' was taking place, what kinds of criteria were being used, and whether moderation was regarded as a developmental process. This could explain why gaps created by the non-provision of lesson plans by teachers, or by poor lesson planning, remained irreversible, because lessons were always delivered based on the teachers' often shaky knowledge or lack of knowledge of the subject, and/or teaching strategy, thus exacerbating and increasing learner unfreedoms. Principal A1 described the moderation process which was in theory taking place at her school:

At the end of each month we do moderation, whereby we moderate all the lesson plans, moderate the work that has been done in class; we moderate the exercises or tasks that the learners have done. We take the books of learners to actually see if what is in the lesson plan correspond with the learners books.

Apart from the HoDs' lack of the necessary capabilities to execute their duties, I observed that nepotism was rife in the management of the lesson planning process at the school. Attempts by HoDs to favour, or go soft on, colleagues who failed to present lesson plans impeded such efficient curriculum delivery efforts as there were. These practices, and their consequences, while being both common and known to the principal, were often ignored, further impeding the freedoms of learners. Principal A1 indicated that her administration was aware of this nepotism:

Nepotism was also rife in the management of the lesson plan story, because some HoDs were unable to draw the thin line between colleagues and work related duties, this is very unethical and implicating. The need to smokescreen for friends, and colleagues that did not prepare lesson plans often created an opportunity for more teachers to go against stated school rules and regulations, with damning implications on curriculum delivery efforts, we are aware of that.

Although, apart from the initial brief training in the National Curriculum Statement (NCS), HoDs were not given any formal and/or on-going training or support in the execution of such duties, it seemed that the lack of support, inspirational leadership, and monitoring on the part of the principal and her deputy made matters worse. HoDs were full time teachers themselves, and were expected to be in the classroom at every given time, like any other teacher, with no reduction of teaching load, further compromising administrative prerogatives. These multiple duties resulted in serious inequalities in terms of the delivery of quality teaching, which in turn disadvantaged the learners at the school.

The above report and discussion of the findings indicates that, learner ability to pursue the kind of education they value was, as seen through the CA lens, being clouded by the existence of certain unfreedoms. These unfreedoms resulted from the lack of proper monitoring by those responsible, lack of preparation by teachers, absence from class, absence from school, lack of inspirational leadership on the part of the principal and HoDs, lack of work ethic, lack of coordination, and nepotism. This combination clearly shows how teachers as a critical resource at the institution, while being present and available, due to certain unfreedoms, and capabilities limitations, did not have the desired or expected effect on learner performance. Learner unfreedoms at the school were not limited to the role and

quality of teachers. The availability and quality of books, and how these were being used by both teachers and learners, impacted on the abilities of both teachers and learners.

4.4.1.2 Availability and use of books

Principal A1 clarified that books were readily available at the school, but did not seem to contribute significantly to efforts to improve learner performance due the lack of ample library shelving space for learners' use while they were in school. Therefore, the underutilization of available books by learners was not necessarily based on unavailability, but due to the inability to convert them into learner functionings perpetuated by limited capabilities on the part of both learners and teachers. Such lack, according to principal A1, was often not taken seriously or considered as a potential cause for learner underperformance when school performance is being analysed and/or evaluated.

It is commonly assumed that providing text books and library resources to schools automatically leads to an improvement in learner performance, while ignoring other pertinent silent factors that inhibit the achievement of set objectives. The CA in this regard sees that the common sense idea is that once resources like books are provided to schools, they remain a means to assist learners achieve functionings. However, the specific ways in which those books are actually utilized to ensure the achievement of those functionings ought to be the ultimate concern of both administrators and policy makers. Sen (1992 & 1999) places emphasis on the variations that exist between institutions and individuals in terms of their respective abilities to convert existing resources into functionings, which remains the ultimate end for learners achieving the necessary capabilities. Principal A1 commented on the effects on learners of limited shelving space in her school library in relation to the number of learners at the school:

The library space is limited compared to the learner population of the school making it difficult to shelve the books for all learners to make good use of them when at school. As a result, we as a school resolved to follow strictly the government regulation that requires us to give learners textbooks in all the disciplines to go home with.

Principal A1 however emphasized that, although the initiative to allow learners to take books home has been flagged by the department as magnificent, it has its own demerits from the

perspective of the school. Serious questions were raised relating to the accountability of learners for books given to them to take out of the school. The reservation as to whether learners actually made good use of the books while at home came up repeatedly, because many of these learners still struggled academically. Also, in many cases learners reported the books as stolen or missing, and some of them returned the books damaged and/or with many pages missing, making them unusable, pointing to the lack of guidance on how to care for books.

Furthermore, based on the fact that these learners were exclusively from informal settlements, different facets of the CA come into play, further questioning learner ability to make suitable use of these books at home. The lack of motivation to study at home, together with limited study space were areas both the principal and teachers identified as needing interrogation to properly understand existing dynamics. From responses from some of the learners, it appeared that the living conditions at home frequently prevented them from reading their books at home (see Section 4.4.5). Although giving learners books to take home was a commendable innovation in terms of attempting to ensure that learners were constantly in touch with what was being taught in class and with the general syllabus for the year, drawing the thin line between these resources and learner unfreedoms is not a simple process. The general consensus amongst teaching staff was that allowing learners to take books home was no guarantee of improvement in learner performance.

Furthermore, the teachers concurred that the persistent lack of a reading culture in the learner population, and the community, was another factor exacerbating existing learner underperformance. They agreed that policy designers were short-sighted about the practicability of a policy that requires the school to allow learners to take books home, rather than focusing on providing a comfortable library space at the school. Teachers therefore blamed policy makers for undermining the real dynamics in the school that translated into learner unfreedoms and experiences in the classrooms. Based on these discussions, principal A1 thus suggested that a proper library and a trained librarian were necessary at the school to encourage learners to learn to read during and after school hours under supervision. A fully functional library was seen as having the potential to act both as a reading and study space for those learners who did not have such facilities at home, and an interactive space for them to encourage and motivate one another in a process of collaborative learning.

The lack of a proper library at the school was also exacerbated by the lack of human capital that constitutes a key component for the proper running of any library. The lack of a full time trained librarian to ensure that the library ran and was used optimally was regarded as a major setback to any efforts made by the school to encourage learners' engagement with books and other curriculum resources. This highlights the fact that, given the present realities regarding library space and librarian provision, resource availability does not automatically translate into learner achievement, because existing unfreedoms impede efforts to translate available library resources into functionings. Based on the dictum of the CA, resources like books ought to be seen as a means to an end, and not as an end in itself, when evaluating learner performance. This reemphasizes the need to consider carefully the freedoms and unfreedoms involved that act as drawbacks to any effort to improve learner performance. Principal A1 commented on the potential for improved learner performance if proper library facilities were to be provided:

The space in the library is just a part of the problem, because the school does not have a trained librarian to manage the books meant for all subjects, and all classes. It could be possible for us to manage the small library space, and the available books wisely for the benefit of the learners if a trained librarian was readily available to assist us. The problem here is therefore, not only limited to the library space and the books we have, but also the absence of a trained librarian, limiting the chances of learners that might want to read. Although we are not certain that the learners are likely to make good use of the library based on the current learning culture, whereby learners hardly devote enough time for reading, we think that if a librarian is available it can impact positively on learner performance, intellectual growth, and their general abilities over time. They may learn to read here in school, and become excited to do the same thing at home after school, if they have the necessary resources at home.

It was believed that certain characteristics that might be in built in these learners could remain unidentified or unpredicted if the necessary facilities to unleash them were continuously unavailable. The CA focuses on the need to pay particular attention to what people are effectively able to do and to be, not focusing on the amount of resources available (Sen, 1985). Therefore, the CA considers it inappropriate on the part of administrators and policy makers to focus on how schools perform based solely on the notion that they have

been provided with text books, while ignoring how those text books are being used to achieve the desired outcomes. In this regard, the principal and the teachers revealed that learners in school A generally lacked proper platforms to unleash those hidden capabilities that may be embedded in them (see Section 4.4.1.4). Therefore, using the CA, one could argue that the desire to learn was restricted by certain dynamics embedded in the system that translated into learner unfreedoms.

Principal A1 was of the opinion that the learners at her school possessed inner talents that could be easily unleashed with the existence of a fully functional library, with ample space to shelve books, enough chairs for learners to settle down and read, and most importantly, a trained librarian to ensure that learners accessed the right books at the right time, and one who worked in tandem with teachers. Although the school could be held responsible for learner underperformance, the lack of a library was seen as a disadvantage on its own merits. Although, as has been mentioned, the general or ‘common sense’ mind-set is about how much resources are poured into the schools, the CA places more emphasis on the actual impact such resources have on a group of people at a particular place and time and on converting existing resources to create meaningful results.

The lack of ample library space, limited textbooks in certain critical learning areas, the lack of a trained librarian, the nonexistence of a learning and reading culture amongst the learners and many teachers, the numerous restrictions imposed on learners by the home environment, and the lack of learning spaces, all contributed to create numerous unfreedoms for learners, and consequently impeded their performance. This underpins the critical role resources, in a conducive environment, can play in influencing learner performance in Q-1 schools, both directly and indirectly. In certain areas in School A resources were unavailable creating unfreedoms for learners while in others they were available but underutilized due to capabilities limitations. Apart from the lack of a fully functional library, learners struggled to attain certain functionings due to the lack of stationery material.

4.4.1.3 Availability and use of stationery material

Unfreedoms accumulated due to the nature of resources at the school were also observed in the domain of stationery material. However, the learners and the principal revealed contrasting views regarding the availability and accessibility of stationery material. Since resources like pens, pencils, protractors and rulers were always in constant demand by the

learners and teachers in the classroom environment; their impact on learner abilities to perform was glaring during my classroom observations at the school. Although principal A1 did not consider stationery as a major problem on its own in limiting learner abilities to attain certain functionings in the classroom, the learners themselves considered it as a serious threat to their freedoms to achieve. Although the school provides textbooks, workbooks and some exercise books, based on the available budget, the provision of stationery such as pens, calculators, projectors and measuring instruments, which are needed in particular to study Mathematics, remained an area of contestation. This scenario is ironic given that Mathematics is at the centre of conversations relating to poor performance in Q-1 schools (see Chapter 2: Section 2.4). During observations, it was evident that critical stationery materials were limited or unavailable, in turn limiting learner freedoms to achieve. One learner particularly complained:

Because we do not have things like pens, pencil and protractors, it is difficult for us to practice Mathematics.

In the course of observation and interviews with learners it became clear that learners lacked stationery critical to facilitate learning and on a regular and consistent basis. The learners continually maintained that the lack of such stationery material was due to the school not providing it, and their parents lacked the means to acquire stationery items, thus limiting their capabilities in the classroom. It was evident in the classrooms that many learners experienced unfreedoms resulting from the lack of stationery material. Learners were unable to copy notes, and thus did not have the opportunity to revise the subject content at home to prepare for any pending class test or examination, even if they had the motivation to do so.

I observed this to be a serious capabilities limitation based on the enthusiasm many learners displayed in their moving around the classroom to borrow a pen or pencil from those that were fortunate to possess more than one. Although the desire to learn in order to attain the kind of education they valued could be seen as a positive move, the uncontrolled movement of learners around the classroom in search of stationery material became a serious learning barrier. Chaos often erupted in class, disrupting the teaching and learning process and distracting those that had stationery material to copy notes (see Section 4.4.2). This clearly exposed the existence of observed capabilities limitations, whereby learners could not accomplish simple functions in the classroom such as copying notes, due to the lack of basic

stationery. Sen (2009) argues that, in a case where a person is deprived of the necessary commodities to achieve functionings, the actual impact of such deprivation is unquantifiable.

The issue of stationery material at the school remained very controversial, because learner views regarding the provision of stationery material contradicted those of the principal. While the principal insisted that the school provided enough basic stationery material, such as pens, pencils, and mathematical instruments to assist learners learn Mathematics, teachers and learners thought otherwise. Principal A1 noted the financial constraints operating:

Those resources the school could not provide were only those that could be classified as additional resources, that learners may need at home to improve their learning abilities, which, because of financial constraints, we as a school cannot afford, and therefore expect the parents to assist us in providing them to the learners. These additional resources are things like; picture books, and any other materials that can facilitate learning at home.

However, observation and interaction with learners in the Grade 7 classrooms, revealed a clear lack of basic stationery materials like pens and pencils, and many learners testified that pens, pencils and especially mathematical instruments were limited. The few learners who had the money to buy mathematical instruments reported that these were often stolen by other learners, making it difficult for their parents to replace them due to limited family income.

Learners' comments speak to the widening gap between resource availability and accessibility, its impact on teaching and learning, and consequently learner performance. A Grade 7 learner commented on the effect a lack of basic materials were having on their Mathematics learning:

We don't have calculators, measuring instruments, projectors, rulers, pens and pencils. We don't have a dictionary. They give us exercise books, workbooks, and textbooks, some of them. We are given books, workbooks and textbooks. But we are not given pens and pencils. Because we don't have these things (projectors and mathematical instruments), it is difficult for us to practice Mathematics. Our parents cannot buy us a box of mathematical instruments, because they don't have money.

Another learner added that:

I don't have the box of mathematical instruments, because I don't have the money to buy them, they are expensive. Even if we buy the mathematical instruments, some boys steal it from us, yes some boys.

I observed that the actual capabilities of learners to learn were limited by the lack of some basic stationery materials and the implications thereof. In one of the Grade 7 classrooms, many learners relied on a particular girl who had a packet of pens which she lent to other learners to copy notes. The regular scramble to borrow these items often resulted in rowdiness and indiscipline in the classroom, with learners disrespecting the lesson in progress, demonstrating again how learner freedoms were being limited at the school by the lack of basic necessities.

Learners that were not fortunate to borrow a pen or pencil to copy notes often felt excluded from the teaching and learning process, and thus engaged in activities that distracted others. Despite existing evidence of such disruption in the classrooms, Principal A1 again rejected this concern regarding the lack of basic stationery:

Parents assume that since it is a no fee school learners are expected to receive all learning materials from the school, a responsibility which we cannot as a school shoulder alone, due to budgetary constraints on our part.

The parents were constantly painted as deliberately distancing themselves from their obligations towards the learners and the school. According to the principal, parents regarded the education of the learners in all dimensions to be the responsibility of the school, and the government, and therefore did not see any reason to purchase the necessary stationery material, thus depriving learners of critical material to achieve functionings.

The unavailability of these materials deprived those learners who were enthusiastic in their pursuit of the kind of education they desired. It was obvious that they possessed the passion to learn but did not have the opportunity to demonstrate this, or convert it into desired outcomes, because they lacked the basic necessities to do so. Even if learners were capable of passing, they did not have an opportunity to revise and improve on their understanding of the

lesson at home, again demonstrating the silent and persistent effects of capabilities poverty on their freedoms to learn.

Such a contradictory stance between the learners and the principal regarding available resources acts as an invisible barrier that prevents the resolution of this crisis throughout the entire teaching and learning process at the school. This also clouds and impedes the process of the identification of the real problems at the school regarding resource availability, accessibility and impact on learner performance. If the problem at the school concerning stationery material revolves around accessibility, then it should be seen through the lens of the CA as a capability failure on the part of the school administration, not as an inability to meet the basic needs of the learners. Not being aware of or accepting the shortage of critical stationery material at the school constituted a capabilities limitation.

Budgetary constraints faced by the school, the contested stance in terms of the availability and accessibility of writing materials, and disturbances in the classrooms by learners scrambling for writing materials, contributed to the creation of a deeply flawed learning environment. Learner freedoms to learn and achieve what they ought to or desired was further restricted by the lack of resources such as computers.

4.4.1.4 The computer laboratory

The existence of a computer laboratory is considered vital in the teaching and learning process, as well as learner performance in any primary institution around the world. Since different institutions, depending on a range of factors, may need different amounts of resources, and different opportunities to achieve certain functionings, it is impossible to evaluate the kind of impact the lack of computers at this school was having on learner unfreedoms. The lack of computers at the school was clearly hampering the quality of education and learner performance. Principal A1 commented on the necessity of computers to the education of her learners:

The availability of a computer laboratory should not be regarded as a luxury, but as a necessity for these young minds. They need to do research for homework and other projects, something that is seriously lacking in our school. The consequences are there, but we cannot do otherwise.

The principal pointed out that the lack of computers at the school was not due to non-provision by the DoE, but was a result of theft, and that learner inability to exploit and enjoy the benefits of computers in a learning environment limited their capabilities. This misfortune was not uncommon in schools located in high crime neighbourhoods. Principal A1 commented on the lack of security measures at the school:

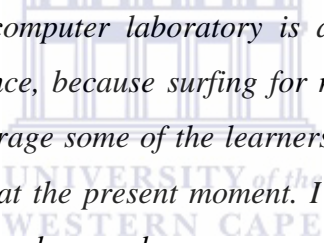
We had two computer laboratories, close to 65 computers in two different laboratories, but because of burglary, all the computers were stolen. Insecurity in and around the school is rife, and at times food meant for the school feeding scheme is also stolen causing learners at times to go on an empty stomach.

According to the principal, the inability to safeguard existing resources, compounded by the location of the school, and the lack of a budget to hire a professional security company, or to afford insurance, makes the school vulnerable to criminals. Although the DoE is aware of the predicaments faced by this and other schools, in the neighbourhood, its principle that once resources are provided it becomes the sole responsibility of the school concern to maintain, and safeguard them is very stringent to the detriment of learner freedoms. The DoE therefore focuses more on results produced by the schools, based on the assumption that they have been allocated resources, while ignoring the particular challenges facing each individual school. Sen (2009) argues that it is imperative to look beyond the analysis of the goods/resources a person/institution possesses when judging results that are supposed to be a product of those resources, due to possible unfreedoms. The principal of school A lamented that, once resources are stolen, there are no guarantees the DoE will replace them. It was revealed that the school may reapply, but the chances of getting any replacements are often very slim, because priority is given to new applicants, based on need, and resource availability.

According to principal A1, maintaining security in and around the school is problematic, because hiring a professional security company requires money that they do not have. Such variations in physical circumstances are not considered by the DoE in its policies. When allocating technology resources to poor schools, without providing security and insurance, the department directly and indirectly limits learner freedoms, causing them to miss out on real opportunities to improve their education through technology. Learner opportunities to learn and perform in order to fulfil their ambitions and desires, through having access to

computers like their counterparts in other schools that have such resources, have been seriously limited. As has been described, the CA takes the role of physical location as influencing learner performance seriously. Sen (1992) argues that different communities offer different opportunities as well as barriers, and that these determine what people can or cannot do with available resources. Therefore equality of opportunity in one space could mean inequality in another, even if these spaces are supplied with similar amounts of resources and located in close proximity.

Learners considered the lack of computers as impeding their educational opportunities and abilities, particularly when compared with other well-resourced schools, as they were deprived of the ability and opportunity to do school projects and homework requiring technology. Teachers concurred, reporting how this limited the kinds of material learners could use and projects they could do. Teacher A2 commented on the advantages access to the internet gave learners at well-resourced schools:



The unavailability of the computer laboratory is a major setback in learner development and performance, because surfing for materials to do assignments on the internet could encourage some of the learners to become more interested in education than they are at the present moment. I think that its unavailability adds to the list of reasons why our learners seemingly perform poorly when compared to other well established schools in areas like Bellville, that have all requirements and even additional resources at their disposal. The existence of a computer laboratory can surprisingly unleash a never expected passion in the learners to learn and probably talents that are never imagined.

Thus one could argue that learners had some hidden talents that were silenced by the lack of opportunities to unleash them. The learners also agreed that a computer laboratory could change the way they perceive and pursue education in their community, as new information would be made readily available to them. The un-freedoms experienced by learners at these schools were not limited to the lack of resources, because some resources were available but failed to impact on learner performance based on capabilities limitations; this applied also to the school feeding scheme.

4.4.1.5 The school feeding scheme as a capabilities limitation

The school feeding scheme (SFS) is considered a positive initiative, because it tackles head-on socioeconomic disadvantage experienced by learners in poor schooling communities (Crouch & Mabogoane, 2008). It emerged out of a raft of policies designed according to the DoE's poverty alleviation model, which includes such policies as, The national Norms and Standards for School Funding (Department of Education, 2007), Learner Transport Policy (Department of Education, 2001) as well as the (National School Nutrition Programmes (Department of Education, 2004), and is expected to play a significant role in the quest to improve learner attendance and performance in high poverty level schooling communities. Learners at school A, like other schools with a similar status, receive meals at least twice a day, indicating the dependency of learners on these meals, and how important the SFS is to their ability to attend school regularly, and to engage fully with, and benefit from, the teaching and learning process. My observation of learners scrambling for the meals indicated how many learners come from homes that struggle to get even one square meal a day. Thus this project can be said to help meet the needs of poor learners at a particular time.

Although the SFS has been an important intervention on the part of the DoE to improve the performance of learners in poor schooling communities in South Africa, I observed that the lack of proper management apparatus has not always enhanced the teaching and learning process for, or performance of, learners at the school. Participants at School A were in agreement that this was the case at their school. It was not uncommon for food to arrive late, often when lessons were in progress, or for it not to be available at all, thus impacting negatively on learners' freedoms to learn and pass.

Many learners who were from poor homes were hungry, and expecting to have a meal at the school at a particular time, as a source of energy to enable them to concentrate on learning for the rest of the day, were at times disappointed. The unavailability of food often triggered anxiety in learners, causing a chain reaction, affecting learner concentration, and consequently their learning abilities for the entire day. The excitement observed when it was time for the meals showed not only the extent of their need, but also the influence the meals have on learners' ability to attain certain functionings. I observed that when the bell rang for break, signifying meal time, learners usually ignored the lesson and other activities in progress, and the presence of the teachers in the classrooms.

The lack of proper management, poor coordination, lack of work ethics, and professionalism, as well as, poor communication between the teachers, school management and the cooks, contributed to the impasse often experienced in the domain of the SFS. It seemed every department at the school was independent, and carried out its own activities as it pleased without coordination or communication with other departments or with the SMT. The causes and consequences of the above capabilities limitations were summarized by teacher A3:

The unavailability of food at the scheduled time is a common occurrence, and at times the kitchen staff tells us just at the time that learners are expecting their meals that they ran out of gas, and as such they could not cook food for the learners. The cooks don't even inform us the teachers early enough about the food so that we can prepare the minds of these poor kids who are keen to get these meals, you know. This at times disturbs the learners who can hardly concentrate in class. We as teachers cannot do anything, because the kitchen is a separate department from us. We know nothing about what goes on in there; they just bring the food, and the learners eat.

Unfreedoms as a result of the poor management of the SFS, and lack of coordination with the teaching and learning process at the school, were plentiful and such scenarios common. Since they were not being addressed by anyone, the same crisis resurfaced on a daily basis.

It was also not uncommon for the food to be brought directly into the classroom in the middle of a lesson, indicating no particular protocol for food to be served. I observed that, when food arrived at the middle of a lesson, some teachers immediately stopped the lesson and allowed the learners to eat, out of empathy, abandoning the lesson in progress. Although the teachers were keen to satisfy the needs of the learners, unfreedoms were imposed on learners because completion and repetition of lessons abandoned in this way had not been planned for. These kinds of scenarios were handled varyingly and in ad hoc fashion by teachers, with unpredictable consequences for the teaching and learning process. Given that the syllabus has to be completed, losing teaching and learning time of that magnitude almost on a daily basis could have severe repercussions on learner performance. These kinds of situations contributed to the non-completion of the syllabus at the school, leaving learners under-prepared, especially for external examinations that were set based on the assumption of completion of the official syllabus.

Moreover, the different ways in which different teachers managed the eating process were contrary to prescribed procedures, thus further limiting learner freedom to learn. The principal noted that their roles in managing the feeding scheme were clearly spelt out for the teachers to follow, and the timetable adjusted to accommodate unpredictable meal times. Principal A1 described how they had allowed for ten minutes eating time to avoid encroaching on teaching and learning time:

The timetable is such that the school closes ten minutes late for the day, every day. The additional ten minutes is to cover the time used up during lessons to allow learners to eat. It is supposed that, if food arrives during a lesson, everything has to go on normally, and learners are given ten minutes after the lesson to eat, as such the teaching time of the next teacher will be safe, because the current class will end ten minutes late as time is needed to eat. Although the next class starts ten minutes late, it is expected to use up ten extra minutes from the next teacher, and that sequence then expected to continue in that manner for the rest of the day.

One would assume from this explanation that the school closes ten minutes late every day to allow learners ten extra minutes to eat in case the food had arrived late or not on schedule during the day. However, I observed that the process from the dishing up of the food to eating took more than ten minutes, especially because the dishing up process was often managed by the learners themselves without teacher supervision, making the process more chaotic and time consuming while learners struggled to agree on a leader to oversee the sharing and distribution of the food. This resulted in instances of bullying, the boys at times overpowering the girls and taking control of the sharing and distribution, causing unnecessary and unseemly delays in the process.

As such, the entire process of distributing and eating the food could not be realistically completed in ten minutes, as specified by principal A1. Also questionable was that lessons in fact often ended at exactly 2pm, with no additional ten minutes to make up for lost time used for eating as noted earlier. Some teachers even allowed learners eat for much longer periods than was required or specified. This was a clear indication of the lack of organization, monitoring and evaluation of what happened in the school in terms of the SFS. If a policy or protocol existed at all, it was merely on paper, probably because the principal did not often

follow up on how various teachers were managing the process or not. In this regard, Principal A1 described the ideal way to supervise the process, while commenting on the chaotic and negative effects on the learning process of teachers not supervising learners during eating times:

I think again it depends upon the school, and again it depends upon the teacher. What I normally do in my class when the food arrives is that, I just say, I ask them to dish the food and then I do whatever I am doing and during the remaining minutes, say about 5 to 10 minutes to the end of the period, I give them time to eat, and under supervision. This is because once you don't supervise them, it can be chaotic. You do it that way so that when the next teacher comes in there will not be a chaotic atmosphere in the classroom. I also delegate the learners to collect the dishes and pack them in front of the class so that the cooks can then collect them even when the next lesson has started.

Based on the discussion, it was clear that, due to restrictions imposed by the irregularities inherent in the running of the SFS, learners were, as Sen (1989) would describe it, missing out on real opportunities regarding their abilities to choose the kind of life they may want to lead. The principal's ambitious strategies for coordinating the process remained theoretical, their implementation being blocked by laxity, inertia, and monitoring on the part of school management. In the principal's view, the implementation of such policies was being hindered by an overreliance on the maturity and sense of responsibility of the teachers, and by their lack of organisational skills, and the fact that they did not possess the abilities required to individually manage and coordinate the eating process, leading to serious repercussions for the learning process.

The eating process was particularly uncoordinated and chaotic when there were disagreements among learners regarding who was to take the lead in sharing and distributing the food. Principal A1 clearly spelled out the teachers' duties regarding supervising and coordinating the eating times so as to ensure minimum disruption in the teaching timetable:

It is the duty of every teacher that is in, or around the class at the time of eating to coordinate, and manage the process to ensure that the food is properly shared. That teacher should also ensure that after eating the plates are arranged for the

cooks to fetch them, or better still some learners can be appointed to take them to the kitchen. The teacher needs to ensure that the teaching and learning environment is in order for the next teacher.

The scenarios differed because, while some teachers distanced themselves and allowed the learners to run the entire process on their own, leading to chaotic scenes, other teachers helped themselves to a portion of the meals meant for the learners. In addition the portions of meals allocated to the learners were highly restricted even when there were left-overs and some learners still needed more. It was thus highly questionable whether learners were receiving sufficient nutrition, especially as portions of food were sometimes restricted to a spoon of rice. Learners often protested unsuccessfully for an extra portion of food, even though remainders were always taken to the kitchen.

Thus I observed that the SFS, though hailed as a significant contributor to learner performance at the school, it or its lack of coordination, supervision, and monitoring was obviously having some negative disruptive effects on the teaching and learning process. This was exacerbated by a culture of poor work ethic, poor leadership, lack of communication on the part of the different stakeholders, the nonchalant attitude exhibited by some staff members, laxity and poor supervision, and poor implementation of school policies. All these meant that the SFS to an extent acted as an impairment to, rather than an enhancement of, learner abilities to perform in different ways. Although the SFS was not seen by the school as a barrier to the teaching and learning process, from an observer's point of view at school A, it was clearly more of a liability than an asset in terms of learner freedoms. The lack of organisation of the SFS is linked to the classroom indiscipline discussed in detail below.

4.4.2 Classroom dynamics

Classrooms dynamics are critical to an understanding of the causes of learner underperformance. They have a bearing not only on the teaching and learning process, but also on the administration of the classrooms. The actual cause, manifestation, and effects of classroom dynamics are often a source of controversy, and are difficult to clearly demarcate. The most common kinds of classroom dynamics identifiable in the Grade 7 classrooms are subdivided into learner motivation, learner indiscipline, seating arrangements, overage learners, poor orientation at the start of the foundation phase, and the language of teaching

and learning (LoLT). These factors combined can act as capabilities limitations in terms of learner abilities to learn and achieve.

4.4.2.1 Learner motivation

Learner motivation in the context of this research refers to the ability of learners to show and sustain interest in the teaching and learning process. It also relates to how well they pay attention in class, participate in classroom activities, and of course their general enthusiasm and interest in any other classroom activities aimed at improving their competencies. According to the teachers at the schools participating in this study, the lack of motivation at home on the part of parents influenced how learners were responding to their education and to educational activities in the classroom. Teachers A1 and A2 observed that, the learners who came to school with a passive attitude were less motivated to learn, paid little attention in class, and did not attend classes regularly.

The lack of motivation to learn accounts to why they (learners) prefer to go outside, and rather play around the school premises during classes. When in class they choose to be unruly and indisciplined, with a primary aim of disrupting the entire teaching and learning process, because they themselves are uninterested to learn (Teacher A1).

Teacher A4 had a similar comment:

They seem not to realize why they should be in the classroom studying in the first place. They are just too unconcerned about the need to learn. They are not hungry to learn, but for other things, yes.

These teachers agreed that, it was a challenging task to embark on a journey of academic achievement with such learners, because the lack of motivation resulted in indiscipline in the classroom (see Section 4.4.2.2). According to the teachers, motivation was something that was hard to instil in the learners for a variety of reasons. They agreed that they did not have total control over their learners' behaviour, and thus could not be expected to play a significant role in assisting them to achieve the desired or expected academic competency. They thought that the learners were probably not fully aware of the long term consequences of their actions.

Principal A1 was aware that many Grade 7 learners were not motivated to learn, but indicated that teachers were not doing enough on their part to encourage their learners:

My observations as a principal are that, sometimes the learner is not interested in learning, and sometimes the teacher doesn't make the learner to be interested or motivated in learning. They need to do more to encourage the learners to gain interest in learning.

Principal A1 however agreed on the difficulty of pinpointing this, there being a very thin line between motivation and discipline in the classroom, a line teachers were always very careful not to cross. In her view, there were times when learners were not motivated to learn, because teachers failed to provide that much needed warmth in the learning environment that could have the effect of giving their learners a constant burning desire to be in class and to learn. In her view the lack of certain capabilities on the part of the teachers themselves directly or indirectly contributed to the multitude of unfreedoms experienced by learners throughout the school, in the Grade 7 classroom in particular. She commented that the presence of the teacher in the classroom was a prerequisite for the beginning of learner motivation to learn:

The atmosphere to learn is when the learner goes to class and the teacher is there ready for them, because if the teacher is not there, he/she is maybe coming late to class, or for the period, the learners are there on their own. There is no atmosphere for learning in this situation, and how on earth will they learn when the teacher is not there making sure that those learners who come late are dealt with. If learners are disciplined for coming late they will feel the need to be in class early, and as such they will be motivated to learn. This will make the classroom a good learning environment that will interest learners to hang in there for much longer, and in the process learn something.

However, how to deal with learners who come late to class to motivate them to learn was a contested terrain due to the revised laws on corporal punishment. Teachers were either not being properly trained, or were not equipped with certain capabilities to enable them to discipline learners to become motivated to learn, and to discover new things outside of their accustomed comfort zone of corporal punishment. The teachers were clearly deficient in

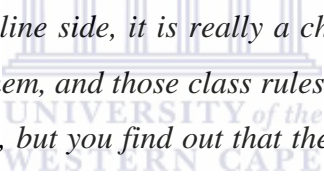
implementing “alternatives” to corporal punishment. This created a situation where teachers preferred not to intervene in learner behaviours or affairs.

Thus one could argue that learner motivation in itself, combined with other factors, impacts profoundly on the quality of education, irrespective of the kinds of resources at the school, including the quality of the teachers and their teaching. The lack of motivation tended to result in learner passivity and boredom in the classroom, together with a lack of goals and ambition on the part of both learners and teachers, which in turn resulted in indiscipline. This vicious circle scenario at the school was exacerbated by the lack of practical or creative discipline strategies as alternatives to corporal punishment, restrictions placed on teachers in terms of disciplinary methods, lack of proper motivation strategies being applied by teachers themselves, general lack of teacher motivation, teacher capabilities limitations, lack of a friendlier more conducive learning environment, and teachers’ irregular and/or late arrival in class. These dynamics contributed negatively to classroom indiscipline and thus to learner ability to learn, and to lead the kind of lives they desired. The lack of motivation to learn on the part of the learners was particularly identified as a core cause of indiscipline, and vice-versa, because bored, unmotivated learners were disruptive, unruly and often found deviant ways to keep themselves busy, even in the presence of the teachers. The scenario generated a repeating vicious circle, detrimental to both learning and teaching. One could argue that the motivation factor is inseparable from learner/classroom indiscipline which is discussed in the following section.

4.4.2.2 Learner Indiscipline as a capabilities limitation

The impact of indiscipline on learner freedoms in poor schooling communities needs in-depth exploration because of its complexity, particularly in terms of its interrelatedness with other factors, and its impact on the abilities of learners to achieve certain functionings. The causes of learner indiscipline in classrooms are difficult to clearly identify due to certain contradictions and contestations. While learner indiscipline has been seen to be related to lack of motivation on the part of learners and teachers, teachers at the school unanimously blamed the official banning of corporal punishment in the South African school system, while at the same time failing to institute appropriate or effective alternatives to dealing with learner indiscipline.

Learners at this school, like many others in this community, experienced social arrangements that contributed to the way they behaved in and out of the classroom (see Section 4.4.5). Although class rules were usually in place, and formulated with input from learners themselves, teachers acknowledged that learners blatantly ignored these class rules that were prominently displayed on classroom walls, supposedly knowing full well that there was nothing much that the teachers could do to enforce them. Classroom indiscipline at the school seemed to be deliberate rather than spontaneous, apparently because the learners knew exactly what they could get away with when in class, although indiscipline and insubordination could also be said to arise from boredom and lack of motivation as discussed in the previous section. Learner indiscipline remained a serious capabilities limitation in terms of sustained learning in the Grade 7 classrooms, and all indications were that the teachers were powerless deal with incidences that arose, because they seem not to have alternative or creative ways of gaining learners' attention and interest. Teacher A1 spoke for the other teachers about the cause of the indiscipline, what they saw as their inability to discipline learners, and their feelings of powerlessness:



When it comes to the discipline side, it is really a challenge because; firstly, we formulate class rules with them, and those class rules are coming from them, they know exactly the class rules, but you find out that they transgress all these rules. Like they break all these rules, they just don't obey these rules. At times we just don't know what to do, because they [DoE] say don't discipline a child in a particular way, and the learners are quite aware of that. Learners in our community can only be disciplined if you use harsher methods on them. I think without corporal punishment they know you can't do anything. A teacher is not even allowed to yell at a child, or threaten him/her just to say maybe, if you do this or that again I will hit you, it's considered a crime, you see; we are powerless. We even see that this child, or that kid is going astray, is going to fail, because of the way he behaves, and other methods don't work, but there is nothing we can do, we just leave them the way they are. They [DoE] make us behave that way; it is the law that restricts us.

I observed many instances of the negative impact of this situation on the teaching and learning process. It was not uncommon for learners to talk continually even in the presence of teachers in the classroom. Teachers often made fruitless attempts to maintain order; learners

always ignored them and moved freely around the classroom chatting with friends during lessons. In one instance a learner who was not comfortable with the classroom temperature jumped on to the benches to adjust the windows without asking for permission from the teacher who was busy teaching, distracting learners from the lesson. The failure of the teacher to reprimand this learner obviously paved the way for similar scenarios in this classroom.

I also observed in the Grade 7 classrooms that learners appeared not to see any reason, whatsoever to ask for the teacher's permission because it was clear to the learners and to me that the teachers themselves did not care much what learners were up to in the classroom. This explains why learners needing to borrow a pen or pencil (see Section 4.4.1.3), did so at their own convenience, while distracting others in the process. They moved freely around the classroom and even bullied others, especially when the teachers were busy writing on the board.

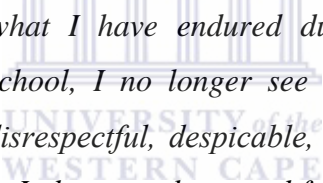
To some teachers, classroom disturbances were a common occurrence they had to endure on a daily basis being, or feeling, powerless to control learners' behaviour, due to the various dynamics at play. Consequently, learners were given free rein to make classrooms ungovernable at the expense of the teaching and learning process, thus deepening the freedoms of those who were eager to learn. Teacher A3 who gave such learners this power admitted frankly and unapologetically that he focused only on those learners motivated to learn, having realized the futility of attempting to discipline those who were not:

I don't want to lie to you, what I do as a teacher is that I talk to them, and if they don't want to listen to me, I just leave them the way they are, and continue with those that want to listen to me. I do so because I don't want to waste my time. For instance, if I can talk to them today, they will do the same thing even tomorrow, so why must I waste my time talking to them, and leave those that are ready to learn, because if I talk to them today, then tomorrow they do the same thing, what must I do? So I just leave them the way they are.

Due to the uncondusive atmosphere in the classrooms, and to time allocated for teaching and learning often being wasted because of indiscipline, the learners at this school were missing out on real opportunities to learn and to achieve certain functionings. Thus the performance and future of these learners was constantly being put at risk, because those teachers who

lacked the capabilities to handle chaotic classroom scenarios became frustrated, and therefore either ignored or allowed them to escalate (see Section 4.6.2.2). It can be argued that most teachers at the school had abandoned their primary duties of caring for and nurturing young minds regardless of classroom contexts. It appeared that many teachers did not make minimum or reasonable efforts to bring learners to order, but instead ignored them, and carried on teaching in chaotic environments that were distracting to those willing to learn. Teacher frustrations sometimes turned into anger, especially student teachers who, due to such unpleasant experiences, were more than ready to retreat from the teaching profession.

Learner attitude and behaviour was particularly scary to a female student teacher on teaching practice at the school. She seriously contemplated abandoning the teaching profession upon completing her degree in education. Her presence in the Grade 7 classroom was constantly ignored by learners who could not have cared less about her lessons. The student teacher described how her experience at the school had killed her desire to make teaching her vocation:



Honestly speaking, after what I have endured during these few months of teaching practice in this school, I no longer see teaching as a calling. The learners are very unruly, disrespectful, despicable, arrogant, I can't even say. After my degree in education I plan to rather enrol for another degree in nursing. Frankly speaking, dealing with learners of this type, to be honest, it is unbearable, I am not sure after experiencing all this that I will want to become a teacher again, although I actually had the calling to become a teacher. I am not sure to follow that calling any longer. What is frustrating is that they don't want even to listen to you while you are actually struggling to teach them, I don't really know, I am tired.

These negative emotions probably came from the lack of support and guidance from the main teachers, who were mostly unavailable to give her the necessary backup, although it is arguable whether their presence would have improved the situation. This situation was further exacerbated by the fact that learners at the school were particularly renowned for undermining female teachers. Teacher A1 confirmed this:

In fact they check on you, you will find out that as a male teacher they will have some respect on us, especially from the start, but for the female teachers they don't have any respect for them. You will find out that when a male teacher comes into the classroom, they just keep quiet, but also even then you will find out they will keep quiet to check for a moment to see how serious you are. But if they see that you are serious, and you stick to what you are exercising for them, then they start to respect you; of course those are things that really happen.

Female teachers often expressed their frustration and anger towards learners who did not want to listen to them. A lot of teaching and learning time was often wasted due to varied instances of learner indiscipline, making it difficult to account for actual impact of these on learner ability to perform.

Teachers unanimously insisted that the escalation of indiscipline in the classrooms was not of their own making, but due to the powerlessness bestowed on them as a result of the banning of corporal punishment. They agreed that there were no clear cut alternatives put in place to deal with learner indiscipline, adding to the difficulties of their work. Teacher A3 echoed the sentiment of teacher A1 (above):

It's like now if that corporal punishment thing is not used; there is nothing that can be done. Yes, they know that there is nothing that the teacher can do to them. Another thing that promotes indiscipline in our classrooms is that they (the learners) know that we don't have an alternative.

The consequences of learner indiscipline at the school were multifaceted. Learners that were undisciplined acted as agencies to deprive those that were disciplined and ready to learn, consequently demotivating the teachers themselves, often resulting in turn in an uncooperative setting in the classroom. In such circumstances, teachers cared less about learner behaviour, as learners themselves were indifferent to the presence of a teacher in the classroom, often creating multifaceted unfreedoms for the learners, as well as a vicious cycle of indiscipline and demotivation.

Learner indiscipline was particularly exacerbated by what learners brought with them from homes: a serious lack of motivation. The banning of corporal punishment without putting in

place clear cut alternatives or substantial support for disciplining learners, the lack of professionalism, motivation, supervision, and guidance for and from teachers made things worse. These dynamics escalated learner indiscipline in the classrooms, making for a far from conducive atmosphere for teaching and learning, with negative implications on learner ability to achieve. Undisciplined learners often made the job of teachers more complicated and stressful, especially in classroom settings where limited space influenced seating arrangements that compromised teacher efforts.

4.4.2.3 Seating arrangements

Another factor that negatively influenced the way learners performed at school A, especially in the Grade 7 classrooms, was the seating arrangements. Insights gleaned through teaching observation show that seating arrangements influenced both learner behaviour, and the teaching and learning process, showing also how the two factors are intertwined. Although classroom sizes were relatively small, and classes overcrowded, thus constituting a negative influence per se on classroom disturbances and indiscipline, this was exacerbated by the way the benches were arranged, often in clusters, giving the impression of a failed attempt at group teaching. However the arrangement of benches placed learners in close proximity to one another, in most cases facing one another, giving them an opportunity to chat to friends across other clusters, without being reprimanded by the teachers, and distracting others while the lesson was in progress. This arrangement was the initiative of a single teacher (Teacher A1) who wanted learners to work in groups, in order to give weak learners a chance to learn with, and from the stronger ones. Teacher A1 (a Mathematics teacher), who was an advocate of the cluster seating arrangement in Grade 7 at the school, pointed out that it was usually a temporary arrangement to facilitate learning, according to certain teaching strategies and particular group activities, but that other teachers failed to alter such arrangements during their own chalk and talk lessons, making it almost a permanent arrangement and not conducive to teaching and learning that is not oriented to stimulating genuinely collaborative group activities. Teacher A1 described this seating arrangement in terms of his well-thought-out group work teaching strategy:

What I did is that I put 3 strong learners with 3 weak ones together. After that I said to them, at the end of the year for each group I will be giving 5% if I see an improvement of the 3 weak ones, three strong ones as well, because of their

improvement, if they assist the weak ones. Secondly the strong ones must also look at the weak ones that they are doing their work, because sometimes you find the weak ones they dodge, you know, they don't do the work, but actually that works a little. I told them that if you are doing group work and you don't work together, then your points will drop, so you need to work as a team, so that is something that I practically started this year, and next year I think I will take it more further, because I can see it works a little.

Although the intentions of teacher A1 in terms of the cluster seating arrangement were genuine, informed, and for a particular purpose, the temporary arrangement unfortunately became permanent and contributed to generating the noise levels, and other forms of disturbance in the classrooms with this kind of seating arrangement and compromised the efforts of other learners who were eager to learn. The arrangement gave learners the opportunity to sit in their own rather than designated groups during the lessons of other teachers, perpetuating mischievous activities, with negative implications on the teaching and learning process. Thus teaching and learning in this scenario was a nightmare, as teachers who were struggling on a daily basis to manage the scenarios in their classrooms seem to have decided, instead of taking control of their own seating arrangements, to ignore learner behaviour at the expense of learner performance.

The seating arrangements that were not properly monitored and supervised in the Grade 7 classrooms provided a means for overage learners who had little desire to learn to show off or act out in the classrooms. They usually grouped themselves together to perpetuate undesirable behaviour, being the focus of attention playing the roles of the 'big boys' in the classroom. This made it difficult for the more serious learners to have control over their own choices, and achieve their desired functionings.

4.4.2.4 Overage learners and absenteeism as capabilities limitations

More than 50% of Grade 7 learners at the school who were overage behaved in various disruptive ways. The teachers agreed that the existence of overage learners at the school was as a result of the enrolment of learners who were already older than the required age, and also as a result of the number of times they repeated a grade and phase.

The teachers considered overage learners to be a burden on their own, because getting them to commit to the teaching and learning process was on the whole an extremely challenging and frustrating experience. These learners usually did not value the educational opportunities at their disposal, and most of them either came to school because of the food they received there, or simply because they were being pushed by their parents. Teacher A1 lamented that, in spite of the school's 'best effort', these learners were proving to be a challenge:

Age is a major challenge at our school, we have got learners who are overage in the primary school, but we expect those learners to be the ones who perform better, because they have the delay, but you find out that they are the ones that don't care, they are the ones who are the weakest, even if you give time to try to assist them, you find out that there is no difference. The effort we do is that at our school we source out other teachers to come and assist with afternoon classes, but you will find out that the first people who are running away from these classes are the old and weaker ones, and the ones who attend them are those that are already better off, or probably younger, that is the challenge that we have as a school concerning overage learners, especially in Grade 7.

It was also noted that there were various consequences of overage learners in the Grade 7, often contributing to indiscipline, together with the nonchalant attitude these learners portrayed towards the teaching and learning process. Principal A1 reported that the worst offenders in terms of not completing work or non-attendance were the overage learners:

To be absent at school can be a factor for a learner not to perform very well, but there are other factors like when the child is present at school and not participating in class, and not doing his or her homework, not doing the assignment, not motivated to learn or undisciplined, these factors can lead to the learner not performing very well, whereas the child comes to school every day. If a learner doesn't come to school regularly he/she is likely to fail as well. We find them mostly in the overage learners. They want to do things their own way.

It appeared that these overage learners were particularly arrogant in class, stayed away from lessons, were usually bullies, were notorious for creating awkward scenes in the classroom, refused to do homework or participate in classroom activities, and often disrupted the

teaching and learning process. From my observation, it seem these overage learners were probably calling for attention, but in a negative way, negatively impacting on their own opportunities and abilities to learn and perform.

Overage was often synonymous with absenteeism at the school, as many of these learners regularly stayed away from school. They chose to remain in the community with non-school going friends, to engage in other activities, since they did not take learning seriously, and thus were unable to attain certain functionings. Absenteeism at the school was therefore identified as a multi-layered problem requiring team work to reverse. According to teacher A1, many of these learners who bunked lessons during normal school hours often refused to attend extra classes organised after school to improve their abilities, and thus missed out on opportunities.

Overage learners therefore represented an unfreedom both to themselves and to their classmates. Despite these circumstances, it was generally agreed by the teachers that the performance crisis was triggered and perpetuated more by what happens to learners at the foundation phase, and that the answer to the overage problem at the school lay in the foundation phase, where many problems arise and are perpetuated.

4.4.3 The role of the foundation phase

The participating teachers were of the opinion that learners were generally poorly orientated towards schooling and to learning during the foundation phase, thus limiting their capabilities, and consequently their poor performance in the later grades, especially in Grade 7. The general consensus was that, since many of the learners came straight from home to Grade R, and many more into Grade 1, foundation phase teachers were placed in a tight corner, often reducing their chances to properly prepare these learners for the later grades. The school located in a poor neighbourhood admits mostly learners whose parents do not have the financial resources to send children to pre-school or crèche prior to their being enrolled at the primary school. This capabilities poverty prevents parents who care from giving their children the kind of education they value, thus underpreparing the learners for the later grades.

However, it was made clear that the kind of services offered at crèches in the neighbourhood were inadequate in terms of preparing these children for primary school education; most of them operated merely as day-care centres for children of working mothers. Here, capabilities

poverty could be regarded as a major contributor to the existing circumstances in the school. Teacher A1 described the shortcomings of local crèches in terms of preparing children for school:

Based on the nature of the environment many mushroom crèches operate, but do not concentrate on the actual teaching and learning process that is required to prepare children for school. They basically perform the role of care givers, by taking care of the children while the parents are at work. This is exacerbated by the unavailability of learning facilities at home, especially for children whose parents cannot afford to send them to a proper crèche. Although not so much learning is done at the crèche in this community, children are still opportune to learn from others, and pick up new traits that can help them at primary school, but the very poor parents cannot afford to send their children to the crèche.

Capabilities poverty in this community has resulted in a critical gap in the educational lives of the learners and one which takes various forms. Thus many of the children at this school were being restricted in terms of freedoms and opportunities, and as a result most of them came to Grade 7 un-prepared or under-prepared, a fact which goes some way to explaining why they behaved and performed, or underperformed, in the way they did.

The teachers were of the opinion that the gap that existed between the crèche and the primary schools could be closed if schools in the neighbourhood got fully involved in the running of existing crèches. They expressed the hope that direct involvement in the running of these crèches could become a viable option to ensure that learners were well prepared when they entered primary school, being equipped with the necessary capabilities and academic competencies. Teacher A2 was anxious for an innovative way to prepare children in the neighbourhood for school, pointing out the beneficial knock on effects for both learners and the school:

There are lots of crèches around, but so much that I did suggest that, our school should adopt a certain crèche around us and support it, knowing very well that those children when they graduate they can come straight here. Maybe they will understand better what the teachers teach in the classroom, especially at the foundation phase. This will help change many things here, including the amount

of time we spend in Grade 7 to ensure that the learners understand what we are teaching, and also how they perform at school. It could become a win, win situation for the school and the crèche involve.

The nurturing of learners to enter primary school was seen to be imperative, particularly as some foundation phase teachers, based their teaching on the assumption that these children possessed a certain degree of understanding, simply because they were of the right age to either be in Grade R or Grade 1. Teacher A1 noted that such assumptions resulted in inappropriate or poor nurturing which produced a knock-on effect throughout the educational career of these children in the primary school, especially when they reached Grade 7. The teachers strongly believed that children who were able to attend a crèche before being admitted in to Grade R naturally had an edge over those that came straight from home. The impacts of these differences were visible in the way they behaved and performed in the classroom throughout the primary school. Teacher A3 concurred with this view:

The lack of this basic knowledge at the early stages does determine a child's level of intelligence, and contributes immensely towards how they perform in the primary school. It is due to the lack of these basic qualities that we have the kind of learners that are currently here in Grade 7. Many of these learners encounter difficulties in many learning areas. This explains why sometimes in Grade 7 we have children that have the reasoning faculty of say a Grade 4 learner, but they are here. Many of them in Grade 7 are unable to do things that Grade 4 learners are expected to do, and sometimes do it perfectly.

Without the possession of the necessary skills upon entering Grade R, and Grade 1 respectively, learners did not have the capabilities to pursue a valued education in the later grades, judging from their academic competencies and results. Thus un-freedoms accumulated as a result of capabilities limitations that were exacerbated by the negative implications of the language of teaching and learning (LoLT).

4.4.4 Constraints on the language of teaching, learning, and evaluation

The “language problem” was revealed to be one of the leading causes of poor performance at the school, restricting learner opportunities in many ways. It was agreed that the Xhosa home language speaking learners were particularly disadvantaged in terms of the Language Policy

adopted at the school compared with the Afrikaans speaking learners, because of the imposition of the English language as the official language of teaching and learning (LoLT) at the school. The teachers often referred to the Bill of Rights section of the South African Constitution in terms of educational rights and freedoms as being a ‘double-edge sword’. They saw that this, together with the Language in Education Act of 1997 (Nkomo & McKinney, 2004), which developed from this, although it specifies that learners be taught in a language of their choice, the ultimate choice of the LoLT rests with the school community. Although code switching of a kind was being implemented in the classrooms, it was not regarded as an ultimate solution to existing learner problems, since it was not applicable in external examinations and not really helping non mother tongue English speakers with their cognitive and conceptual development, particularly in Mathematics and Science. In essence, the process and nature of the implementation of the Language in Education Policy (1997), especially in poor schooling communities, has to some extent ushered in new kinds of unfreedoms for these learners, despite its subtle, and often misunderstood and misapplied innovation referred to as “code switching”. The uninformed manner in which code switching was being implemented at the school resulted in many lost opportunities for the learners to develop conceptually. It was not uncommon for English lessons to be taught predominantly in isiXhosa in the Grade 7 classrooms under the umbrella of ‘code switching’ but in fact placing learners at a disadvantage.

However, some teachers insisted on teaching in English only, ignoring ‘code switching’, even for subjects that demanded a higher level of conceptual understanding and thus required more explanation in the mother tongue, clearly raising existing ambivalences regarding the practicability of ‘code switching’. One of the teachers who ignored ‘code switching’ the most argued that it was a “necessary evil” in poor schooling communities, considering that, while implementing it in the classrooms could give learners an opportunity to understand clearly what is being taught in class, by way of deep explanation of the subject matter in their mother tongue, it was not part of, or catered for by, the external examinations where learners needed it the most. Since these learners were groomed in a system where ‘code switching’ was a norm, and came to rely on it, the teachers perceived that the lack of translators during provincial and national examinations set in the English language put their learners in an alien and unfamiliar zone, often contributing to low performance. During class tests and examinations teachers were readily available to explain difficult questions to the learners in their mother tongue; assistance was not available during external examinations. The teachers

concurred that, while such minor issues were often ignored, the school was labelled as underperforming when learners fail due to their inability to understand examination questions. Teacher A1 explained his reasons for consistently using English rather than isiXhosa as the LoLT:

When it's us we write only in English, why? We don't write in IsiXhosa, even just for the clarity of the question, you know that. I am therefore having problems of using the mother tongue language, especially isiXhosa, for example if the mother tongue language is Xhosa, until where? The learners don't write it in the examinations. Why should we teach in isiXhosa knowing that the learners will be at a disadvantage when it comes to examinations? Although they may not understand English well, I will rather teach in English, because they will write examinations in English, and probably have a future after here.

Teacher A1's main argument for using English as the LoLT was that, although the idea of code switching was important for critical subjects like Mathematics, questions as to its benefit to learners beyond the classroom influenced the attitudes of individual teachers. Also, the question of whether learners genuinely needed teachers to code switch was a bone of contention for many teachers. This was because learners at times demanded that teachers explain certain things in isiXhosa, not necessarily because they were unable to understand them well in English, but because they took advantage of a system that gives them the legal/constitutional right to make such demands. Code switching was therefore considered to slow down the pace of teaching unnecessarily, to the detriment of some learners, because syllabi were often not completed. Teacher A3, like Teacher A1, commented on the issue of the relation of the LoLT to examinations:

Learners compel you to explain certain things in Xhosa, but examinations are strictly in English. It affects them. It does affect the way they perform in their examinations that are set strictly in English. No one will set examinations for them in the home language, and they will not compel the examiners to explain stuff to them in IsiXhosa, same as they compel us in the classroom. It is a very tricky situation in my own opinion.

The nature of code switching at poor schools resulted in both stress and major capabilities limitations for many learners. From observations and interviews it was revealed that many teachers taught at times in the mother tongue, not because they saw it as beneficial to the learners, but because it was a policy obligation, though placing serious limitations on learner freedoms to learn and achieve. Teacher A2 described the complexities and ambivalences surrounding the practicalities of code switching:

It can make a change, because at the end of the day sometimes, when you teach you can explain things to them better in subjects like English and Mathematics, which I am teaching for Grade 7. I can speak English, but the learners also take a chance, and say no teacher I don't understand, but I make sure I speak in English with them. Sometimes you find out that those learners who always say teacher I don't understand English, they are the same kids whom when you ask next year where they are, the others will say they are in Mitchells Plain schools, where they are taught by Coloured teachers who don't speak Xhosa; how do they understand now then, I don't know? I can't teach solely in isiXhosa, because what about the examinations that are set in English, who will explain to them?

The contradictions implicit in the policy resulted in many learners being unfairly assessed, since their full capabilities were seldom unleashed, due to the existing language policy. Since the mother tongue featured prominently in the classroom through code switching, and while code switching was not practised by these learners at external examinations, one could argue that the learners were being deprived of their rights to enjoy the freedoms enshrined in the Constitution. One could also assume that several exceptionally brilliant learners in the school performed poorly in external examinations because of the unfreedoms arising out of the Language in Education Policy and the stakeholders' choice of the LoLT at the school. Not having the opportunity to have examination questions explained to them in the mother tongue for clarity as was happening in classroom settings, limited learners' abilities to comprehend and achieve at that level.

The numerous contestations, debates, ambiguities and disagreements surrounding the LoLT contributed to its poor implementation, and thus to unfreedoms for many learners. Although code switching, as it was understood, or misunderstood by teachers, was regarded as a solution to the language problem in Q-1 schools, the lack of a clear cut LoLT implementation

policy created unfreedoms for most learners. Apart from the role played by resources and by classroom dynamics in influencing learner performance at the school, the surrounding environment also exerted a major influence.

4.4.5 The role of the local environment

The environmental factors outside the school that influenced learner performance include the family structure, the role of, and constraints operating on, biological parents, education constraints on parents, and the lack of role models at home and in the community. These dynamics combined imposed various unfreedoms on learners, and influenced their attitude towards education in the classroom.

4.4.5.1 The family structure

The kinds of family structures that exist in this community also exerted a significant influence on learner education, and well-being. Most learners interviewed acknowledged that they resided mostly with extended family members, especially grandmothers. This kind of family structure represented a significant capabilities limitation, due to the effects this had on their classroom learning and thus on their unfreedoms.

The teachers and the principal acknowledged that these living arrangements were linked to poverty, and the prevalence of HIV & AIDS, and TB in this community. These pandemics had either led to the death of many young mothers, or rendered many of them incapacitated, and therefore incapable of taking care of their own children, who had been relocated to live with their grannies, and/or other extended family members. Teacher A3 revealed that, in addition to this pandemic, early pregnancies were militating against a nurturing family environment; young and single mothers placed their children with grannies while they went to work, or were engaged in other activities.

Although these extended family members were considered to be pillars of support for these children, the kind of care they were able to give them sometimes compromised their choices to obtain the kind of education they could value. This often resulted in capabilities poverty, since many of these grannies are uneducated and/or illiterate, unemployed and/or dependent on a minimal social grant. In the view of principal A1, these grandparents lacked breadth of vision, and/or interest in, or knowledge of, anything educational in the 'modern' sense, and

consequently did not have the capability to control, direct or support the educational future of these learners. Principal A1 described this situation and its effects on learners at her school:

Since most parents are affected by HIV & AIDS, the learners depend solely on their grandparents for support. Here, the support is not available especially in relation to school work. Grannies do not know anything about homework; they do not even know what the children did, or determine whether they were even at school or not. When these children are with grannies they do not take things seriously, because grannies do not follow up on them, which has negative implications on their abilities to perform.

Teacher A1 explained that there were some extended family members other than grandmothers who were also incapable or unwilling to help the learners as would be expected, basically because they were not aware of the importance and value of education. Added to this, learners were given unreasonable amounts of physically tiring household chores, which used up their energy and distracted them from their school work (see Section 4.5.3.1). According to the learners, not completing household chores could lead to difficult situations at home, especially because extended family members made the learners understand that they were doing them a favour by offering them a place to live, since their biological parents were incapable of doing so. Thus, learners had to comply and make household chores a priority over their school work. Being without a sense of belonging, the children were psychologically and emotionally damaged, and unable to concentrate on their school work, even when at school. When viewed through the CA lens, the freedoms, choices and opportunities of these learners were seriously limited. Such learners often came to school without having done their homework, psychologically and emotionally distressed, often lacking motivation and not able to concentrate during classroom activities. Principal A1 described the effects on such children of an unstable home life and lack of love and support:

Unstable family environments where love, hope and support are lacking learners are unlikely to pay attention to their school work, thus reducing their chances of performing well at school. The effects of what transpires at home predetermines learners' attitudes that does not value school work, thus they tend to miss out on some opportunities that could increase their chances of performing well. Many

biological parents either do not know how to assist these children, or simply do not care about their needs.

Teacher A1 reported that such learners came to school needing more than normal attention, which was not realistically possible, due to the lack of appropriate skills of some teachers, together with their overwhelming workload and the number of learners in that bracket in a single classroom. As a result, some of these learners over time developed complicated learning problems that further deepened existing unfreedoms, which went unnoticed and unattended.

In the view of teacher A3, the disastrous effect of these family arrangements in this community on learner education placed many teachers in crisis: at times learners with learning disabilities were identified, but help was not rendered because there was no resident social worker or psychologist or special needs person available to deal timeously with the crisis during the early stages of its manifestation. Principal A1 reported that there was only one social worker responsible for sixteen schools, making it practically impossible for the school to make use of such services when in dire need. Teachers A1 and A3 also noted that the seriousness of the problems regarding learners with learning disabilities required a resident professional to assist learners timeously, before the problems escalated. In the view of principal A1, the absence of a resident social worker or special needs teacher in the school meant it was virtually impossible to professionally assist learners who were traumatised, and those who experienced learning difficulties, irrespective of the causes.

There are approximately 45 learners in our school in need of follow ups at the moment, but getting in touch with the designated social worker to pursue such a responsibility is a task with its own merits. We often struggle to get hold of a social worker, and they often say that they are too busy with other schools. They often say that they have about sixteen schools to cater for, and thus cannot be at each and every school at the same time. That to us is a disadvantage to our learners that need help in order to improve their educational needs. It is a problem, since many of them are in Grade 7.

Due to learners' home circumstances, teachers ended up having to deal with numbers of learners with serious learning problems and academic deficiencies. Since teachers themselves

were unable to provide the necessary specialised assistance, these learners accumulated numerous unfreedoms that seriously limited their abilities to learn and to pass the required grades. Although they were often promoted based on the provisions of the Progression Policy, the actual impact of accumulated unfreedoms became visible only in Grade 7. However, it should be noted that learners residing with their biological parents, rather than with members of the extended family or with guardians, also at times experienced this lack of real care and nurturing.

4.4.5.2 The constraints operating on biological parents in their attempts to improve learner education

Although biological parents are thought to be critical to children's ability to survive and thrive in society, including their children's pursuing an educational career, learner experiences in families in this community proved otherwise. Parents in this community do not provide the necessary educational support for their children in the form of study materials or books in the home, either due to physical and capabilities poverty, or simply due to misplaced priorities. Since the parents worked mostly as cleaners, domestic servants, and general labourers, jobs that required long working hours, and sometimes weekend shifts, they were unable to spend quality time at home with their children, when they could be checking on their children's school progress. However, attempts by teachers to educate parents on various ways to devote a reasonable amount of time to assist these learners in different spheres often turned into an endless and fruitless struggle for varied reasons. Teacher A1 described his attempts to persuade parents to prioritise their children's education:

I am trying to educate the parents that they must choose who comes first, their work or the child. You find out that parents in that order, the work comes first, but I have made a change of that mentality to say it's your child that comes first, because anything that happens to your child means that he/she wouldn't perform very well in class, so it means that your child comes first as a result. However, many of them say I must work. This in many instances means that, the parents spend little time with the children at home; as such they pay little attention to their schoolwork, especially homework.

Such reports from the teachers revealed that the reasons for the apparent carefree attitudes exhibited by most parents towards their children's education were not clear, especially since

in many cases work appeared not to be a serious obstacle to spending quality time with their children. According to the teachers, some of these parents sent children to school, not necessarily because of a desire for them to achieve, but because school was considered by such parents as liberating them from the burden and responsibility of having the children around all the time. Principal A1 agreed that this was the case:

Some parents though not affected by HIV & AIDS, and have flexible jobs, they still don't value the education of their children; they don't see the need to provide the necessary support irrespective of the kind. Such parents just push the learners to school for the sake of doing it, and especially to escape the responsibility that comes with their being at home. Maybe for those that don't work they do not have the necessary resources to cater for the children when they are at home all day. For them school is a place where they send learners to relief themselves of the burden of feeding them, and dealing with them in other aspects of life.

Such parents did not provide the necessary motivation, drive, and facilities for their children to learn and develop at home. Although the school provided the bulk of the learning materials, parents were expected to provide extra study materials and books to read that could not be provided by the school (see section 4.4.1). Without these materials, learners were often disadvantaged in learning spaces both at home and at school. Principal A1 described the absence of home environments conducive for learning:

Most of these parents lack vision when it comes to educating their own children. They are unaware of what it takes to educate a child; they are uninformed about educational issues, and values, thus their inability to motivate the learners to take responsibility for their own education and future. Providing the extra learning materials needed at home by the children is often a challenge.

The teachers generally acknowledged that some of these parents did not bother whether the learners came to school or not, as long as they were not at home. In the view of the principal, school holidays were often a nightmare for many of these parents. The perception of principal A1 was that:

Many parents even get bored, and worried during school holidays, and tend to inquire regularly from us about resumption dates. When the children are at home they increase their burden in all dimensions. They want the children to always be out of the house, no matter where they go to, so long as they do not have them by their sides the whole day, all the time. This is also one of the reasons for absenteeism and drop out.

Such parents regarded education as a pastime, and not as a means for learners to gain the required academic competencies for future employment and social mobility. The lack of support and assistance at home had the effect of these children needing too much attention when they came to school, attention that could not realistically be provided in the classroom.

The lack of guidance and support from parents translated into the manner in which learners themselves viewed education, behaved towards schooling, and how they performed. Thus, these learners experienced unfreedoms in terms of achieving irrespective of the passion they had for education, the support received from teachers, and the kind of facilities that were available at the school. The lack of parental education in this context was perceived by participants in the research, as well as by the researcher, to deepen learner unfreedoms.

4.4.5.3 Parental education

Although the low level of parental education had a significant effect on how learners performed at this school, it remained a contested terrain because it was regarded by some participants in this study as being one of the indirect influences on learner performance, and thus viewed varyingly. It was revealed that, although the nonchalant attitude exhibited by most parents towards their children's education contributed most to unfreedoms accumulated by learners, the lack of parents' education was often used by parents as an excuse for laxity. Teacher A2 recalled vividly the reaction of a parent summoned to the school in connection with the child's inability to perform:

I don't want to lie to you, I don't do anything about this, in fact, and I don't know how to assist my child. I just ask her to look at her books, but I don't have any means to help her; you know I didn't go to school.

Such reasons given by parents for their total inability to assist learners educationally was seen by teacher A1 as a smokescreen, an excuse not to do what was required of them.

I want to disagree with that, why? If you may ask for example, if we look at the children that are in school now in Grade 7, their parents were educated in late 70s, and beyond. During this period education was serious, and many parents went to school to a certain level, and can read and write. What about the help for the children? I say that they are negligent, not uneducated, yes I will always stand by my point, and I always tell my colleagues about this stance. Education to these parents is an excuse whenever we confront them on why they don't do their best to assist the learners at home.

Such strong views were based on the perception that most of these parents were negligent and unaware of what their children were experiencing educationally. Learners themselves acknowledged that the conspicuous absence of their mothers from home compelled them to take full responsibility for house chores, from cleaning to cooking after school and caring for younger siblings, ignoring the importance of both their afternoon classes, and homework, in an attempt to ensure a comfortable life for their parents and siblings. Such learners missed out on real opportunities, as the lack of time to study at home deepened unfreedoms that already existed in the classroom. One learner described with frankness how her time and energy were used up by household chores:

I don't attend afternoon classes, because I don't have time. I don't have time because, my mother comes late at home every day, so I have to clean and cook; my brothers don't assist at home, so I have to do everything at home myself. This makes me to fail, because I am always tired, and I don't always have time to do my homework, and read my books at home.

Teacher A4 lamented that, even if such learners managed to do their homework, it was most often done wrongly or shabbily, because they did not take time over it. However, there were a few cases of learners who managed under such circumstances to do their homework satisfactorily. The continuous lack of time to attend afternoon classes, and to do homework cut these learners off from their education, thus for them, attaining certain functionings was far from a reality. A burning desire to learn could be deduced from the learners during the

focus group interviews, a zeal that was curtailed by existing unfreedoms, which were not entirely or directly linked to the lack of learning resources at school, but were due to the home environment. A learner, who had the zeal to learn, described how she was effectively constrained by what transpired at home:

Because I have too many chores at home, I only do my homework when I have time. I do my homework when I finish my chores. There are times I do my homework, and sometimes I come to school without doing it. I don't do it because I always get tired after doing my house chores.

However, considering that there were many other children who did not go through similar experiences, but were still unable to perform well at school, it was difficult to generalise about the causes of homework not being done, or the effects of this on learner performance, if other learners hypothetically had fewer chores at home, and in theory more time to study, and do their homework. There were in fact some learners without demanding chores at home, and with enough time to study and do their homework at home who still underperformed. This category of learners, apart from having ample time, also had extra learning resources at their disposal at home. The reasons for their failure should therefore be linked to other dynamics at play and not simply to their home situation (see section 4.4.2). One such learner was not sure why he did not do his homework even though he had sufficient time to so:

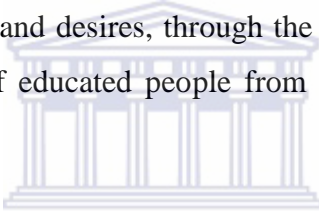
I have enough time to read my books at home, and also do my homework, but I don't know why I fail at school all the time. I also have many books at home. I just do not know why I fail. Sometimes I don't feel like reading my books or doing my homework.

However, some learners were able to marginally or even adequately perform despite their demanding household chores. Sen (1992) posits that the existence of too many choices and increased freedoms often turns out to be a disadvantage, and, according to his theory, learners often need guidance to make the right choices. The role of parents at this point is critical in children's quest to achieve certain functionings. When parents do not diligently perform their educational duties towards their school-going children, there is the likelihood for them to be distracted, and to lose focus on their school work. Where there is no motivation at home and no zeal to learn, regardless of the available learning resources in and out of school,

performance is likely to be negatively affected. Unfreedoms accumulated by learners due to the laxity of their parents were exacerbated by the lack of role models in the community.

4.4.5.4 Lack of role models

The story of the township environment revolves around poverty and unemployment, both associated with the lack of the necessary skills to enable residents to be gainfully employed. The existence of capabilities poverty brings with it a host of different elements with different consequences in and for the community in general, and learners in particular. The environment in which the school is situated is one where different kinds of people reside in close proximity to one another, making it possible for children to associate with undesirable people or with social deviants. The interaction of school children with such people has the potential to influence their attitude towards schooling. The unstable kind of life in this community seems, for reasons which are not clear, to have distracted many learners from their real and beneficial interests and desires, through the imposition of certain unfreedoms. Teacher A3 described the exit of educated people from the area, leaving undesirable role models for learners to emulate:



What causes learners not to perform is the environment that doesn't encourage them to learn. There are not many people who are educated here; that's another problem in our society. If people are getting better, instead to try and plough back in this area, they move out of this community. That behaviour is not healthy for the young minds that need to emulate from those around them all the time.

Based on the perspective of teacher A3, educated elements of the community in question ought to play a leading role in nurturing the young minds, to enable them to benefit from their example. Some teachers were of the opinion that the absence of educated elites within this community created a huge gap leaving learners to interact mainly with negative elements that encouraged negative traits in learners, traits that were hard to identify explicitly, but which often manifested in the classrooms in various ways. Teacher A1 echoed Teacher A3 but emphasised that educated members of the community were defaulting on their obligations to give back to the community, in particular to school-going children, with often disastrous consequences:

When people of this community are educated and obtain a “higher status” in life, the tendency is for them to relocate to richer suburbs. Members of this community seem not to realize the importance for them to plough back into their own communities. This deprives the community of educated elite that could act as a stimuli, and positive role models to the young ones, as far as their learning and performance is concern. They may want to be like them one day, and that can heftily encourage them to learn, you know. Without them many of these children go astray, because they pick up bad mannerisms from school dropouts that patrol the streets. Trying to do things, and behave like them distracts these learners from their school work. When they come to school they do not have any real push in them to learn. They often lack focus in the classroom because of these things.

Contrary to the views of the teachers, principal A1 showed her unequivocal support for the educated and affluent members of this community relocating to more affluent and ‘middle class’ suburbs. In the principal’s view such people need to relocate to protect their own personal interests and their children, and that there is anyway no guarantee that their presence in the community might change the mind-set of the learners.

Having the right role models ‘maybe’ to an extent can influence them (the learners) positively, but I think that it will take a very long time to accomplish that. The thing is also that, when such responsible people live around such an environment their children are likely to be intoxicated like the children of that community. Relocating is an advantage also for them.

Despite this contrary view expressed by principal A1, it was clear that, without positive role models, the learners were left with fewer choices and a higher probability of picking up undesirable traits from negative elements around them. Such traits include indulging in alcohol, and the probability of being infected with, and affected by, HIV/AIDS, and TB, with immeasurable consequences for their educational, and social lives. Teacher A2 described the behavioural traits being encouraged in the community and their powerlessness as teachers to counteract this:

There are no role models; they are moving out; the only role models that you will find is the hooligans, as a result even the way they (the learners) walk, the way

they want to wear their uniforms, they want to wear it like a street boy, in school you always see them like that, but you cannot correct them. And, they want also to put hats on their heads while in class. You find out that while they are in the primary school they are already smoking; they smoke cigarettes, they take drugs like dagga, and there are those who also take alcohol. Those are the realities that are happening, and with that you see that they cannot learn, they are not serious. You see, how can they pass, how can they perform, even if we do our best as teachers to help them?

Principal A1, although not fully supporting the idea of the direct impact of role models on learner attitudes and performance, did concede that the presence of social deviants in the community posed a danger to the children and to their values and academic development:

On weekends many of our learners are in sheebens drinking, smoking and dancing, that is all that interest them the most. The consequences are that they become affected, and infected with HIV & AIDS, and TB, and other diseases. What they copy from the role models in their communities is getting drunk, wearing expensive branded clothing, that is what motivates them within the community, not how to read their books, and pass their exams.

It was agreed that the over involvement of learners with non-school going members of the community opened them up to developing the habit of skipping school, often taking different paths on their way to school, in order to engage in undesirable activities, and in, general, abandoning their school work. Teacher A2 recalled one such instance reported to him by a parent:

A parent that was called to come here to school to be briefed about her child's conspicuous absenteeism from school to our dismay gave us a shocking revelation. According to this mother, the son was out of control, extremely rude to her, and smoked dagga with "the big boys" in the community. He was never at home, he always left every morning for school, but words always circulate that he was always around the community with friends. Attempts to try and talk him out of the habit of hanging out with dagga smoking friends were fruitless.

An attempt to gauge more specifically the implications of negative role models on learners led to responses that clearly indicated how the environment infected the minds of some of the learners and influenced their general attitudes towards education, as well as their perceptions and expectations about what they wanted to be or do in future. Surprisingly, a more mature learner in the classroom who was very enthusiastic, and wanted to be noticed by others declared blatantly that he wanted to become a “hooligan”. Many other learners in the Grade 7 classroom wanted or expected to become cleaners, petrol attendants and cashiers, which are in fact the common low status jobs in which their parents and those around them are employed. This reintroduces the significant role different environments play in influencing the lives and freedoms of people to promote and achieve valued objectives (Sen, 1992). This could also explain why the kinds of thinking these learners acquire when visualizing the world and the future are markedly different from those in well to do communities.

The above discussion shows the ways in which existing family structures, limited support from grannies and extended family members, absence of biological parents, lack of parental education, and the lack of role models were seen by participants in this study to have exposed the learners to unfreedoms that compromised their educational abilities. The negative thoughts and experiences they accumulated in the process were transferred to the classrooms. This contributed to reducing the gap between the learners’ actual motivations and abilities, and their enthusiasm for their school work, thus compounding their inability to perform in the classroom.

4.4.6 Conclusion

Clearly, the performance of learners attending school A was seriously impaired as a result of capabilities limitations, a situation which can be attributed to both in school, and out of school factors. Many of these factors can be seen to be closely intertwined and in cyclical relationships with one another. Although the quantity and quality of resources available at the school to a measurable extent negatively influenced learner ability to perform, the learners’ and teachers’ lack of capabilities to optimally translate existing resources into functionings cannot be ruled out as a factor influencing learner underperformance at the school. In addition to these capabilities limitations, learners’ lack of motivation, and the existence of persistent indiscipline that were seen by teachers and learners as stemming from the home front also contributed to perpetuating underperformance. These dynamics combined to create

serious unfreedoms for the learners in school A. Although similar dynamics existed in school B, the capabilities and conversion processes described in this section in several ways showed variations in school B.

School B

4.5 Introduction

As mentioned in 4.4, for the purpose of this research School B is classified as medium performing, although this does not align with the official provincial or national performance classification. This classification was based on learner results, the challenges faced by each of the three Q-1 schools and the various approaches put in place to resolving these. The classification is meant to clearly delimit the three schools involved in the research, with the purpose of establishing some of the reasons why schools within the same locale, with similar kinds of resources, and shared experiences and challenges, perform differently. Although there are features common to all three schools, they are manifested varyingly, and my classification takes all existing factors and differences in spaces into consideration. As in the case of School A, factors within the school that are deemed to have influenced learner performance include the nature and quality of resources, classroom dynamics, and the socioeconomic conditions of the neighbourhood. As with School A, the socioeconomic context of the neighbourhood within which the school is situated significantly influenced learner behaviour in the classroom, and in turn influenced learner performance. Unfreedoms imposed by these various dynamics on learner abilities to perform are discussed in the following sections.

4.5.1 Nature of resources and enabling factors in the schooling environment

As with School A, resources in the school that impacted on learner performance include the availability of books and stationery, the library, technological spaces, and the role of teachers. The nature of the impact of these resources on learner performance was measured in terms of such dynamics as quality, and quantity of resources, the extent of conversion of these resources into measurable performance, unfreedoms, and capabilities limitations.

4.5.1.1 Availability and use of textbooks and workbooks

Although resources such as textbooks were always available, they tended to arrive late in the year, causing a delay in the completion of the syllabus. Principal B1 blamed such delays on the existing tender system whereby schools were expected to order what they needed for the year, including textbooks, and workbooks, through the school's sole sponsor, the DoE. The late arrival of critical textbooks and workbooks meant that the entire teaching and learning process became distorted and truncated, resulting in insufficient time to complete the syllabus. Principal B1 lamented that the impact of such delays was never taken into consideration when the results of poor schools were being analysed, and wrongly or unjustly labelled as underperforming. Principal B1 described the difficulties of getting the textbooks delivered in time and the consequences of this for teaching and learning as well as for learners in terms of being sufficiently prepared for examinations:

When policies are changed resources are not always readily available. For example, when there is a change of programme the workbooks need to be there on time, but this year the workbooks only arrived at the end of April, which is already the second term. Learners in other schools, especially white schools, already had these workbooks at the beginning of the year, putting them at an advantage over us in many ways, especially in the completion of the syllabus and performance. At the end, we are all expected to write the same examinations, with or without some grades having the workbooks on time. Text books were normally supposed to be delivered at the end of last year in preparation for this year. To be very sincere, one other thing that causes this backlog is the tender system, whereby we have to order our resources through the DoE, this actually causes delay, and they blame us if the learners don't perform well.

However, it was unclear whether the DoE was always aware of such delays on the part of the suppliers. The late and sometimes irregular arrival of teaching and learning resources deprived the learners of the opportunity to experience a smooth teaching and learning process, thus preventing them from acquiring both subject knowledge and basic academic competencies. In some instances the resources were available, but in short supply, leading to a sharing system that slowed down the teaching and learning process, often contributing to learner inability to achieve certain functionings at the end of each year.

The late arrival of teaching and learning resources often compelled teachers to rush in order to complete the syllabus, thus denying slow learners the opportunities to learn and understand at their own pace. Those teachers who decided to follow the pace of the slow learners to ensure thorough understanding often ended up not completing the syllabus. Therefore, irrespective of the route taken by the teachers, the learners were exposed to unfreedoms that were especially visible during provincial and national examinations, often resulting in the school being unfairly labelled as underperforming.

Apart from the role played by this late arrival of teaching materials and lack of adequate time to complete the syllabus, an undeveloped library at the school also created numerous unfreedoms for the learners.

4.5.1.2 The library

The school had a dormant, non-functioning library that, although considered an important resource centre for both teachers and learners at the school, did not positively contribute to the teaching and learning process. The 'library' had some books that were haphazardly arranged, but not in such a way as to be of use to needy learners. From an outsider perspective, the library could be labelled a "storage facility", or a "sleeping beauty", as available textbooks and other books were not properly organised, and were covered in a thick layer of dust, indicating that the books had been unused for a long time. Principal B1 explained the reasons for this:

The library we have is not a full-fledged library. This is where we just keep our books. It is more of a store room for us, because we do not have a trained librarian to assist learners with what books they need. Here in the townships schools we don't have functional libraries. Where then can the learners get the necessary information to improve their skills?

The state of this library was a clear indication of the challenges experienced by poor schooling communities in their struggles to convert existing resources into functionings, as well as the gap that exists between resources and expected learner performance.

The learners viewed the non-utilization of the library as a hindrance to their efforts to learn and achieve. They considered that their freedoms to use the library were restricted by the

teachers who used the space as a makeshift staff room. Although the library was not fully functional, learners reported that they were still able to use the space to read and prepare for tests and examinations if teachers were not using it for their own purposes. Thus, in the case of the non-functioning library, real choices and opportunities for learning and developing were being missed, with negative consequences for learner abilities to achieve certain functionings. A learner described their lack of access to, or use of the library:

The library is very small; there are not many chairs in there. Many of us cannot use it at the same time. We only go there sometimes when the library is not being used. We don't use the library most of the time, because sometimes we are afraid of our teachers. Because some of the teachers, they meet at the library, so we cannot interrupt their conversation.

Although the library is small, and not fully operational, learners considered that during the times it was accessible to them it served as a base for them to read and improve their academic competencies to some extent. Therefore, in the case of School B, determining the actual potential of the existing library to develop a reading and research culture in the learners, and the implications of teachers using it as a makeshift staff room, is complex and not easily measurable. What emerged was that some ambitious learners were forced to look for alternative spaces to satisfy both their intellectual curiosity, and their ambition to succeed. One of such learners described such attempts to find a reading and research space outside of the school:

I sometimes use the community library, which does not have all the books we need, and is also always full and noisy, so it is difficult for me to read. Sometimes I just stay at home, because I do not know where to go and read.

It can therefore be concluded from this situation that any learner with a passion to learn and to pass examinations was again being severely restricted by the lack of real opportunities to showcase their inner abilities. Not having a quiet and comfortable space to read on their own in the school constituted a capabilities limitation that prevented them from being able to choose to do what they valued, as their inherent abilities were not being nurtured or tested. Learner unfreedoms at the school were further exacerbated by the lack of a computer laboratory.

4.5.1.3 Technological spaces

As with School A, School B identified the lack of computers, or functioning computers, and a science laboratory as a major impairment to learners' abilities to learn and pass, because it placed the learners at a disadvantage when compared to others in "privileged" schools. Computers were regarded as a necessary training tool especially for Grade 7 learners. Principal B1 spelled out the extent of the disadvantage of a lack of a functioning computer laboratory at the school:

Take schools, for example, a primary school in Bellville, and compare it with us here in the township in the domain of resources. At that school there is a computer laboratory, but here there is not even a computer laboratory that is up and running. Those kids have the privilege to go to the computer laboratory to surf the internet for vital information that will help them in their examinations, projects, and homework, but our kids do not have those opportunities. They are disadvantaged.

It was revealed that, although the school is more than a decade old, a computer laboratory is finally being put in place, and hopefully expected to be operational in the 2013/2014 academic year. The teachers agreed that their learners' attitude towards, and enthusiasm for, school is dampened, especially when they compare themselves with learners in other schools, where learners have the facilities to gather the necessary information for projects, and other learning needs. Their aspirations and desires to become what they value were thus being crushed by the lack of these critical resources, thus making it difficult for them to unveil their inner capabilities.

However, principal B1 stressed that, despite the lack of a computer laboratory, the concerns at the school in terms of learner under-performance, like any other Q-1 school, were not limited to the unavailability of resources. What teachers did or failed to do within the classrooms was significantly impeding learner freedoms at the school.

4.5.1.4 The role of teachers

The kinds of teachers employed at school B, the employment practices, together with the nature of their training and specialization, and the ways in which they taught and assessed

learners, influenced learner performance patterns. Disparities in teacher abilities contributed to the process of limiting learner abilities to learn and perform. Teacher B1 described the effect on learners' performance of teachers being undertrained in certain subjects, in particular Mathematics:

The issue of Mathematics stands out very clear in the Grade 7 classrooms; the learners don't cope in Mathematics. The main reason is that many teachers who are not trained in Mathematics are required to teach Mathematics. Some of them did not even pass Mathematics in high school, and were trained for a different discipline at the university, but because they are considered as "trained teachers" they are asked to teach any subject, which is not supposed to be the case in the primary school. That is why our learners sometimes do very badly in Mathematics. The teachers need to be specialists in order to teach well.

Teacher B4 echoed this view:

Sometimes university graduates are employed to teach a subject at the school of which they were trained for something else at the university. Most of them become frustrated when they are required to teach, for example Mathematics, or any other subject that was not specified in the advertised post. This contributes immeasurably to how learners perform at our school. These teachers often teach in a way that may not be convenient for learners that need more emphasis to understand. Someone that stands at the gates cannot see these things well and therefore cannot correctly judge how and why our learners are underperforming.

Clearly, teacher ability, or lack of ability, was a major unfreedom for learner experiences at the school; it was agreed amongst some teachers that the category of teachers employed was being influenced by who employed them, and why. It was also revealed that, as with School A, employment was not based solely on qualifications, but was often as a result of nepotism on the part of teachers on the staff, together with the School Governing Body (SGB). This created huge gaps between what the teachers did in the classrooms and what was actually expected of them, contributing to learner unfreedoms. Principal B1 confirmed the existence of nepotistic employment practices on the part of the SGB and the implications for quality teaching:

When it comes to employing teachers, the SGB tosses its weight behind their preferred candidate without considering the skills of such candidates, and its implications on the learners. Sometimes they prefer a candidate because they know them, not because they are particularly suitable for that position. At the end it is the learners that suffer, because their teaching abilities are not up to date. I also think that primary school teachers should be trained in specials school like before, rather than universities, since what they learn does not permit them to deal with kids at the primary school that need more attention.

She indicated that efforts to sway the decisions of SGB, even when she knew they had made the wrong choice, were often unsuccessful. This kind of corruption and/or uninformed employment practice resulted in situations where teachers were expected to teach subjects out of their speciality, creating serious unfreedoms for learners. It appeared that this kind of situation resulted in teachers teaching what they imagined was the correct content and strategy to use, and not what learners needed in terms of content, or the subject area. It also became clear that those teachers that were unable to deliver the required content consciously or unconsciously lowered standards to suit their limited knowledge in the subjects they were obligated to teach. Some teachers, who were uncomfortable with the content they were required by the curriculum to teach, themselves selected what they wanted to teach, by so doing, limiting learner opportunities to learn and achieve.

However, principal B1 explained that some teachers were lowering standards, not because of their limited knowledge, but because of the kinds of learners in their classrooms who required individual teaching strategies and attention to assist them to understand and to learn in these circumstances. Teachers were forced to bend the rules to ensure that learners understood the content, even if it meant not being able to complete the required syllabus. Thus, teachers found themselves in a constant dilemma, having to choose between completing the syllabus while ignoring learner ability to grasp the content, or taking the slow lane to allow learners understand better and not completing the syllabus at the end. The principal, in describing this situation, revealed more of the persistent unfreedoms inherent within the classroom spaces at the school, all depriving teachers of agency and contributing to the continuing poor learner performance.

In our school, some educators are lowering standards. We are not immune as educators. For example, if a teacher is dealing with Grade 7 learners, and sees that the learners are not coping, instead of sticking there, and looking for possible interventions, they resort to lowering standards. When the systemic examination is set the official syllabus is taken seriously. I know that there is a prescribed syllabus, thus teachers are not supposed to choose what to teach, or do at their own time. But the circumstances in which we find ourselves force us to be selective; I don't blame them. Here, we focus more on learner ability to understand, and unconsciously ignore the syllabus that has to be completed, and the standards that have to be maintained. These are some of the reasons our learners often lag behind, and classified as not coping, or underperforming. I prefer to ensure that they at least understand something at the end of the year, rather than rush over the syllabus, while they understand nothing at the end.

It became clear that the impasse of finding a compromise between teaching learners at their own pace and completing the syllabus was responsible for creating numerous learner unfreedoms.

The policy and practice that required teachers to revise the work of the previous year at the beginning of each year, particularly for those learners who had been 'progressed', added to the creation of unfreedoms, because teachers managed the process varyingly. Although a limited period of time was required or allocated to this process, some teachers took longer than required, thus encroaching on the time specified for completing the official syllabus of that particular grade. In the view of principal B1 various factors prevent teachers from completing the syllabus and the learners failing, but the department does not take these into account when judging the school on its poor performance. According to the principal, since many learners at the school do not understand the work of the previous grade, teachers use different strategies to assist them to understand, and as a result, use more than the time allocated for that purpose. The teachers end up not completing the syllabus. On the other hand, when teachers want to rush to complete the syllabus, there is that tendency for needy learners to be disadvantaged. This dilemma in the view of principal B1 puts the school at crossroads, but is never taken into consideration, as the school is often misjudged as poor performing.

This further illuminates the challenges encountered by teachers at poor schools, together with the unfreedoms experienced by their learners and reinforces the need to take learner backgrounds into consideration when evaluating their abilities to perform, an approach the CA strongly upholds. Therefore, teacher abilities, combined with available resources, are unlikely to positively impact on learner performance without taking into consideration the backgrounds of learners. This explains why improving learner performance in the context of school B would require unique strategies across all grades and that might not be applicable in other schools.

Learner performance at school B was partly influenced by the kinds of teachers employed, nepotism, unsupervised and unmonitored teaching strategies, misplaced priorities, learner backgrounds and standards of teaching and learning. These dynamics combined served to hush learner freedoms and capabilities. According to the teachers, and the summing up of the situation by the principal, some hard choices had to be made based on the kind of learners at the school, and factors arising from this which influenced learner performance at the school. This response from participants at this school clearly indicated how individual spaces and unique circumstances influence people's abilities to achieve (Sen, 1976, 1992). Therefore, to understand the different levels of performance in different learner spaces, unique variables need to be seriously considered, and how the unique nature of learners at school B influenced performance patterns.

4.5.1.5 Nature of Learners

According to principal B1, the kinds of learners enrolled in the early phases, and the way in which admissions were managed, exerted major long-term capabilities limitations on the teaching and learning process. The principal reported that the migration of families, particularly from the Eastern Cape, puts a strain on the way admissions are managed at the school, in all grades and phases:

The school admits learners from different educational backgrounds into different grades, especially from the Eastern Cape. The existing school policy forbids us from refusing a child the right to an education. A number of these learners come straight from home into Grade R or Grade 1, without attending crèche. This prompts the implementation of different strategies and approaches by teachers to assist these learners in the foundation phase, and other classes, resulting to poor

performance. When they start to fail, they always continue, but we must promote them, because the system specifies that no child must repeat the same phase more than once and also, we must promote them along with their cohorts.

Given this situation, teachers were often placed in a tight corner as to how, and to what extent, to nurture these young minds based on their different backgrounds and orientations upon entering the foundation phase or other grades. Teachers under these circumstances struggled to nurture these children and to succeed in bringing these learners up to speed. There were other varied exigencies, which often imposed unplanned limitations on the entire teaching and learning process. Teacher B3 described this situation and how it impacted on teachers and learners:

Especially with the influx of learners from the Eastern Cape every year, parents bring in learners to be admitted into different grades. We cannot deny them an opportunity to acquire an education. Some of these learners did not either attend crèche and/or Grade R, making their ability to cope especially at the foundation stage a stumbling block to most teachers. Sometimes, material meant for the previous grade has to be reintroduced to bring such learners up to speed; what about those average learners who need to be taught something new? They are forced to move slowly because of others, and this also discourages them from learning the same thing over and over when they already know it. This does not motivate them to learn.

Then, in terms of the DoE's Progression Policy, irrespective of how learners performed, they were promoted, especially if they were too old for the current phase/grade, based on the policy prescriptions (see Chapters 2 and 5). Such learners usually performed poorly in the systemic and other competitive examinations, giving the school a poor rating. It was in Grade 7 that very hard choices had to be made, because progressing to high school was considered a totally different ball game. Teacher B1 described the knock on effects of admitting underperforming learners to the school as well as having to promote them in terms of the Progression/age cohort Policy:

We admit learners with different educational backgrounds into the early phases. There are different complexities, because these learners are poorly, or

insufficiently orientated for these grades, and this makes them to obtain poor results. We cannot by law deny these learners admission if they want to go to school. They are always unable to progress academically, but based on the cohort policy, we promote them on account of age, and also because they cannot repeat a phase or grade twice. We promote them even when not academically prepared. This explains the kind of kids we have in Grade 7. Some of them even have the mind-set of Grade 4 learners. When we see that they are not performing we cannot hold them back to nurture them well, even if we want to do so; the law prevents us from making decisions of our own based on learner abilities.

The frequent movement of families across provinces destabilized learners, and created gaps, or lack of continuity, between them and their school work. Moving to new grades and/or schools was challenging and disruptive to young minds. They were often psychologically and emotionally destabilized due to such changes, especially when moving from traditionally rural areas with orientation practices which are very different to those in township schools. Therefore, assisting learners with different capabilities, and taking into consideration other silent dynamics, further deepened existing learner unfreedoms. Such challenges were often related to, and aggravated by, the nature of learning spaces available.

4.5.1.6 The nature of learning spaces

Learning spaces at the school, especially classrooms, were severely limited compared to the number of learners. From observation, there were too many learners cramped into small learning spaces, impeding learners from learning in their varying and individual ways. Limited classroom sizes meant that benches were arranged very close to each other, making it impossible for teachers to freely move around to assist learners in need, as well as to spot those that were not participating in classroom activities. Thus, I observed managing such classrooms to be a huge challenge to many teachers. Lack of individual attention clearly made learners aware of not being identified and they thus engaged in distracting activities that reduced their and other learners' opportunities to learn in any satisfactory way. Teacher B3 described this situation and problems of attendant on it for both teachers and learners:

Overcrowded classrooms are also another problem that we face in this school. For us it is a learning barrier to the kids, because if you have plus, or minus 40 kids per class, and similarly in the other Grade 7 classes (A, B & C), as a teacher

here you end up teaching, or having close to 120 kids to deal with in a day. That is a lot of kids compared to the private schools where the whole class can pass, because they are maybe 16-20 learners. The overcrowding makes the kids not to be interested to learn, because when you are teaching the others are doing other things, like playing. They know you cannot see them all the time, so it is also hampering educational performance at our school. We have got a huge number of learners here, and I think the department is saying that 1:39 and now it says 1:36, but we have roughly 43 learners per classroom which is a huge number. It is very difficult to deal with this number.

The teachers saw, this situation as being a common one in lower quintile schools, often exacerbated by limited resources. The limited learning spaces were a hindrance, both to the learners and the teachers themselves, as they often struggled to manage huge numbers of learners in the classrooms. The teachers were therefore always swamped in terms of meeting learner needs and expectations. Teacher B2 described how this situation militated against identifying or giving individual attention to those learners in need:

Here at our school, the personnel to handle the number of learners in a single class are appalling. In some schools there are less than 30 learners per class. Due to the small sizes of our classrooms educators are cramped inside a large crowd, and unable to move around the class and assist the learners. This makes it impossible to pick up individual problems in class and deal with them speedily. It becomes difficult to know early enough, and pick up on individual problems, and give help where needed. It takes time to identify problems, and to intervene correctly. At times, the year ends without us being able to identify needy learners. This contributes to how they perform, and the slow progression in our school. We maybe by chance discover them, maybe late in June or July, but there is nothing much we can do realistically at this late stage.

It was observed that learners at the back of the classroom did not participate in the lesson because they were often ignored, not intentionally on the part of the teachers, but because there were too many learners to cater for in the cramped space. Although these learners indicated their interest in participating by a show of hands, they were often not identified and/or acknowledged by the teachers among the huge crowd. Such learners were dissatisfied

and showed their frustrations in many ways. While some of them refused to make any further attempts to participate, leading to missed opportunities, demotivation, and a consequent deepening of their unfreedoms, others engaged in conversations with friends, while the lesson was in progress, distracting others and disrupting the lesson. The principal acknowledged that these scenarios intensified the learning problems of these learners, which were sometimes only identified by chance during the course of the year, or at a much later stage, by which time it was too late for any meaningful intervention to redirect their thinking and improve their performance.

In a nutshell, and according to the CA, due to limited learning resources, learners were deprived of the freedom to learn and to be able to pass, even when they were highly motivated to do so. They lacked real opportunities to exercise and develop their abilities in the classroom. It was therefore not uncommon for cramped learning spaces to be linked to and to perpetuate a range of classroom dynamics, including learner motivation and indiscipline.

4.5.2 Classroom dynamics as capabilities limitations

Classroom dynamics influenced learner attitudes and behaviours in the classrooms, as well as their perception of education, and how they learned and performed. Given that motivated, and receptive learners often increases the chances of teachers getting through to them, often with very considerable rewards in the form of improved performances, learner motivation and discipline are critical in establishing a pattern of learner performance at a school.

4.5.2.1 Learner motivation

It was agreed by the teachers at School B that the lack of learner motivation presented a serious learning barrier to learners at the school, irrespective of available resources and of the quality of teacher support. The teachers also agreed that the roots of learner demotivation were varied, complicated, and very difficult to diagnose, resulting in situations where certain problems remained unidentified, and unresolved for very long periods. Principal B2 described the various distractions militating against learner motivation:

Educator effort at the school to motivate learners is thwarted by the age in which we find ourselves. Children of this generation are often not keen to learn. They

are more concern about social networking, things like Facebook and Twitter, and others, but are less concern about their education, making it difficult for us as educators to redirect them. They have their own ways of thinking, reasoning and doing things, which are hardly at the reach of educators. Penetrating that mind-set to enable them focus more on educational issues is the barrier we have here. Sometimes they think that Ok they are already in Grade 7, so they can do whatever they like, not necessarily education related. This makes things very complicated, especially knowing that they are in their final year in the primary school, and should be properly prepared for the task ahead.

Teachers at the school were unanimous in relating learner lack of motivation to the kind of educational, emotional, and psychological support learners were or were not receiving at home. The existing capabilities poverty in the community restricted parents from providing enough or appropriate support to their children thus further deepening their children's unfreedoms. Due to the lack of parental support, and constant distractions present in their communities, learners were generally demotivated, and, coupled with the lack of capabilities to choose or distinguish for themselves what was right, often found themselves in precarious situations both within and outside of the classroom environment (see Sections 4.4.5 and 4.5.3). Teacher B2 expanded on the principal's comment, describing how, together with their parents, learners themselves do not take school or learning seriously enough:

The learners themselves are not motivated to learn. They don't just care when it comes to their own education. Now we found out that there are some social issues that unnecessarily cause learners not to come to school. Parents for example fetch children from school during school hours just to sign papers for social grants. They do not value the education of the children themselves by motivating them. They rather make them understand that school is just a casual place, where you can come, and go as you wish, and therefore paying attention in class depends if the learn wants to or not. Some of the parents stop learners from coming to school for the whole day, for fear that permission may not be granted when they come in the later part of the day to fetch them. This process distracts the learners who at the end don't see any real need to be serious about school. This often affects the way they react towards learning, and all the problems come to us the teachers.

Demotivation created an uncondusive and unpleasant learning environment, made teaching and learning difficult, and discouraged teacher effort. Many of such learners simply ignored the lesson in progress, indulged in activities that distracted other more serious learners, and at times causing frustration in some teachers. Teacher B4 described her anger and frustration:

The issue of the learners not being motivated to learn in my view is a very thorny one, yes it is. As I am sitting here now my brains are boiling, because I have just been through a rough case with a learner that does not take anything seriously in class. The learners don't just care. There seems to be that extreme delinquency in them. Some of them are like they are here for someone else's sake or for us the teachers. They don't know why they are here in reality. They force us to stop the lesson many times to talk to them, and we end up doing very little for the day because of them.

The general view and experience of teachers at the school was that the kind of resistance shown by these 'delinquent' learners to any attempts to assist them to read their books, do homework, or participate in classroom activities and discussions meant they had to be pushed continually to take their school work seriously, in many cases without any success. Teachers agreed that the kind of policies in place, particularly the banning of corporal punishment without a practical alternative, seriously restricted any form of effective discipline, especially curriculum related offences, and was at the core of teacher frustration and feelings of powerlessness. Teacher B2 described how such lapses influenced learner attitudes in the classroom and led to feelings of futility and impotence on the part of teachers at the school:

Even when they are about to start their exams they don't study, we must at every time tell them over and over again to study. They are in Grade 7, and ought to be mature enough to take responsibility. They don't take the initiative nor see a reason why they should study. We as teachers are unfortunately entangled in such a kind of problem with no possibility of an easy way out. The mentality of the kids of nowadays towards education is quite different. We struggle every day to change them, but I don't know until when. We see and know that they are failing, but there is absolutely nothing we can do to help them, especially with the kinds of educational policies we have in place on how to discipline learners that are

not willing to learn. You can't send them out of class if they did not do their homework, or yell at them.

The teachers considered demotivated learners as a serious capabilities limitation to the teaching and learning process. Due to limitations placed on teachers on ways to disciplining learners, the teachers felt they had to stand by helplessly and watch them fail. Unfortunately, the actions of such learners led to serious unfreedoms for those learners who were serious and willing to learn and in the end had the effect of neutralizing teacher efforts in the classroom. Principal B2 described efforts to turn this situation around:

We also at times organise debate sessions to teach learners to understand why they should be in school, and be serious about their school work for that matter. We try to motivate them, and build that love for schooling in them. So far that did not get that far, as such, we are still not there, but we are trying. These learners that are not willing to learn make our lives difficult.

Thus the inability of the school to motivate learners to learn was specifically linked by the principal and teachers to learner backgrounds, seeing these as playing a significant role in learners failing to take education seriously. Therefore, irrespective of what was done or put in place to assist these learners achieve, getting through to them was often a hard nut to crack for the teachers. In essence, one could argue that learner ability to achieve certain functionings was not limited only by the quantity and nature of resources in place, but also by how receptive learners were towards the teaching and learning process. These constraints, which combined to deepen learner unfreedoms in the classroom and limited chances of improved performance, were linked to, and exacerbated by, indiscipline, often perpetrated by demotivated learners in the classrooms.

4.5.2.2 Indiscipline as limitation to learner performance

Indiscipline was common in the Grade 7 classrooms with disastrous repercussions for learner performance. As with School A, the teachers at School B saw indiscipline in the school to be a direct result of the banning of corporal punishment, without a reasonable, workable, and practical alternative, placing them in an unpleasant dilemma. Teacher B3 described the teachers' feeling of powerlessness to remedy both indiscipline and underperformance as a result of this ban:

This corporal punishment thing that was taken away from us is one of the factors that perpetuate indiscipline within the classrooms. Its disbandment has tied our hands as teachers, because the kids are aware that we are powerless, and that there is nothing we can do to them if they are indiscipline within the classroom. For teaching and learning to take place, learners have to first exercise some form of discipline, but they are not. This indiscipline thing goes a long way to hamper their progress educationally, but at the end what happens is that we the teachers or the school is blamed for poor performance without knowing why they are failing. Seriously, they look at us as the bad guys, but we are not the bad guys here. How are we expected to handle kids who know that we can't punish them, we can't even shout at them, and we can't even threaten them if they come late to school, or refuse to do assignments, or even a simple classroom activity?

Teacher B1 echoed this sentiment:

Teachers are trying their best; based on the fact that there is nothing much that they can do to make learners cooperate, because corporal punishment has been abolished. But there is a complete lack of corporation from the learners making the job of the educators difficult. Sometimes learners unnecessarily chat back at teachers in the classroom during lessons; sometimes they do not even pay attention at all when the teacher is teaching. Learners play with mobile phones in the classroom while the teacher is busy teaching. Although we do confiscate some of the phones from the learners, that don't seem to solve the problem, the main problem is still with us. It steers us in the face, and impacts on learner performance, but there is nothing much we can do. They know that, and that is one of the reasons why they seem to look down on the powerless teachers.

It was clear that the banning of corporal punishment, in particular the clause that forbids teachers from disciplining learners on curriculum related issues, contributed to the escalating learner indiscipline in the classrooms. Teacher B3 observed that learners were only too aware of teachers' powerlessness to discipline them and were taking full advantage of this:

Even if the child is disrupting the learning process, you cannot send them out of the classroom, it is government policy. Teachers are especially not allowed to

send children out of the classroom for curriculum issues, which rather tends out to be the most important in the classroom. Before the disbandment of corporal punishment, teachers were supposed to find a way to encourage learners to learn by at least disciplining them, maybe sending them out of the classroom to let them realize the implications of their behaviour, maybe just for a while. But now learners cannot be sent out of the classroom, even if they constantly do not do their homework, or refuse to copy notes given by the teachers. And to be sincere, the unfortunate thing is that they know that we as teachers are powerless by law, they know their rights, and the social workers always come here, and tell them that every time. Such limitations by the law affect their performance, because we the teachers cannot help them improve, we cannot force them to learn.

The leverage given to learners by the law, and learners' awareness of legal backing for their lack of traditional punishment, had clearly escalated a crisis of authority in the classroom, which remained unsolved and often developed into a nightmare for many teachers. Teachers unanimously agreed that it had become the norm for them to watch in distress, as learners turned into unfamiliar characters in their classroom environment, making teachers as authority figures feel uncomfortable and rendering them relatively powerless in front of learners every day. These learners exploited the law, making it difficult for teachers to assist them in their efforts to improve their performance. This often created serious unfreedoms on the part of both the teachers and the learners that destabilized the teaching and learning process, depriving teachers of an opportunity to take full control in their own classrooms and thus to teach effectively. Teacher B4 described the effect this had on her attitude to teaching as well as on learner performance:

Sometimes as a teacher I do not feel like coming to school, because I know that there are lots of things that are going wrong, but my hands are tied. The irony is that these kids know our situation, they take advantage of us. We often look at them do the wrong things, but we are powerless. Because of the way they behave and what they do, they end up failing a lot in their examinations, but what can we do as teachers.

The lack of effective freedom by the teachers to fully take charge of happenings in the classroom directly impacted on learner abilities to learn and perform. The teachers agreed

that the levers of control relating to school politicking were unfortunately placed in the hands of policy makers who seemingly were unaware of the actual circumstances on the ground. The teachers agreed that policy makers unfortunately determined how things were to be done in the schools, while it was the teachers who experienced the reality but were voiceless, and powerless to decide on or contribute to real change.

In an attempt to fight indiscipline at the school, different strategies and mechanisms were fruitlessly introduced, guided by specifications of the DoE. The school thus duly trained its teachers in classroom management in an attempt to effectively implement alternatives to corporal punishment. However, such strategies were in most instances felt by teachers to be unworkable, due to learner backgrounds over which they had no control. Principal B1 explained the ineffectiveness of such courses in classroom management in cultural and historical terms:

As an alternative to corporal punishment we train our teachers through a classroom management programme. However, it is still a challenge, considering the background of our learners. As Africans we are still far from adapting to a system whereby we resolve a crisis with our children through talking to them. They do not actually take the method of talking seriously, unfortunately making corporal punishment a more suitable, and adaptable alternative in our school. For me, that is what can work for a school like ours, considering our backgrounds, because all these alternatives for our own community are very good only on paper. At home learners are not used to being corrected by talking, so how can that work in school when it is new to them. Charity must begin at home.

The teachers and the principal agreed that an improvement in learner behaviour could be possible if parents became more active in the home front, and also became visible intermediaries between the learners and the school authorities. This came out of unsuccessful attempts having previously been made to involve parents in the resolution of learner indiscipline. Due to what teachers and principals saw as a habitual passive attitude on the part of most parents towards school matters, parents did not actively participate as requested. Principal B1 described the difficulties involved in communicating with parents about behaviour matters:

The school code of conduct requires us to notify parents to come to the school when learners are involved in any form of disciplinary problems by issuing letters. Usually these letters are given to the same learners to give to their parents, and in most cases they do not deliver them, especially when they are aware of its contents. We know they always open and read the letters before handing them to their parents. Knowing that they are in some kind of trouble in school deters them from handing the letters to their parents. They read and discard these letters. We are aware, but there is not much we can do, since we can't visit their homes to follow up on the letters, it is the policy of the DoE. The problems remain, and multiply every single day, we just watch and do nothing.

The lack of teachers' effective freedom to fully take charge of their classrooms, even in dire situations, inevitably impacted on learner ability to perform. Teacher B3 described their powerlessness to get parents to take responsibility for their children's education:

With curriculum issues letters are sent to parents notifying them of the child's educational status at the school, whereby they have to sign the same letter, and send back to us through the same learners to indicate that they are aware of the problems. Here it is problematic, because letters are sometimes illegitimately signed by learners themselves, or other relatives who are unaware of the contents of the letter, and the implications thereof. We are always left at crossroads here; there is nothing we can do to resolve this deadlock? We are aware of these glitches, what can we do, because at the end learner performance is at risk.

This kind of situation resulted in the accumulation of disciplinary problems in the classroom, which at times remained unresolved, especially as it was difficult to reach many parents even telephonically. Principal B2 described how the difficulty of contacting parents compounded the disciplinary problem, together with the teachers' powerlessness to punish learners in the way in which they were used to:

Although the school has the profiles of the parents with contact details, most parents often change telephone numbers, but do not upgrade them with the school, making it difficult for us to reach them. The crux of the matter is that the DoE fails us, because it does not give us a practical alternative to replace

corporal punishment. Also, the policy prevents teachers from visiting the homes of learners, making things worse for us. Many learners do wrong things, and go unpunished, because we cannot properly intervene, but they are the ones that suffer, because at the end of the day they fail, not us the teachers.

The inability of teachers to effectively intervene, as they saw it, further jeopardized the educational future of the learners, who themselves were unaware of the long-term impact of their own actions. As a result, teachers at the school were at times forced to break the law, and do illegal parental visitations against policy prescriptions, in an attempt to change the mind-set of parents, and learners alike, and with the hope of improving learner performance. The teachers, although aware of the risk of breaking the law, in the interests of their learners' education, were prepared to take the risk and accept the penalties. The teachers hoped that, by taking such risks, they might shift the position of the DoE regarding parent visitation rights. Teacher B4 summarized this situation and its effects on learner performance:

When letters don't reach the parents, we as teachers have to use our own initiative, and take risks to visit the parents ourselves, against departmental rules. They believe that, you can visit a home and find the parents socialising, or doing other stuff that you are not supposed to see. The DoE also forbids the school from sending letters to the parents of culprits through other learners, since some of these irresponsible learners are bullies. This means that if they refuse to take the letters to their parents themselves, and you happen to send another pupil, you are indirectly waging a war. The bully is likely to hit the child that carries the letter to the parents, and the school will be held responsible. It puts us in a very risky position, making it difficult to solve problems in class. This negatively affects their performance. That is why we break the law sometimes.

However, breaking the law in an attempt to resolve the on-going crisis did not necessarily achieve anything, because some parents were often not at home for various reasons. Participants agreed that the failure of such attempts to redress escalating indiscipline often led to the use of unconventional methods that included 'detaining' learners during lessons, rather than after school, in an attempt to resolve indiscipline crisis. Teacher B1 added that:

Sometimes we as teachers take a risk and visit the parents; sometimes you might be unlucky not to meet them at home, because they come back from work late, maybe 8pm. When we fail to meet the parents we resort to our last option, which is to take the learners to the principal's office, and detain them during lessons, although against the law. When they are detained at the office for a few days without attending classes, it is only then that some learners tend to understand the gravity of the problem, and will be forced to inform their parents of their ordeal. When the parents realise that the children did not attend classes for a few days, they will also be forced to come to school, to find out what the problem is. It is when these parents come to school that they are aware that more than two letters had been issued to them, but the learners did not deliver, which to some parents is normal, because even at home the kids are uncontrollable.

Although such 'unconventional' methods of 'detaining' learners during lessons, rather than after school hours, to an extent yielded positive results, they also had the effect of further deepening learner unfreedoms, since there was no opportunity for them to repeat lessons they had missed. This in essence indicates that detention was clearly misunderstood at School B. The teachers were aware of the unfreedoms perpetuated by this disciplinary practice of detaining learners during lessons, but they insisted such unconventional methods were as a last recourse, further proving their lack of commitment and their unpreparedness to go an extra mile by detaining learners under supervision after school hours. The teachers were also of the opinion that, if social workers did their jobs properly, learner indiscipline could be significantly reduced.

The teachers reported that, apart from policies banning corporal punishment as a disciplinary method, learner indiscipline was exacerbated by social workers themselves, who often orientated learners negatively. The teachers alleged that social workers, instead of finding ways and means of resolving existing disciplinary problems at the school, led the already undisciplined learners into more indiscipline. This in essence shows the lack of collaboration between the teachers and social workers at the school. Teacher B1 described what he saw as a social worker working against the interests of the teachers at the school and sabotaging their efforts to discipline learners:

Worse of all there was a social worker here today who told learners of her role to protect them, and thus encouraged them to call her directly on her mobile phone in case anyone punishes them at school. The learners were asked to call her if teachers threaten, or punish them. Although the social workers are aware of the dilemmas at the school, they choose to turn a blind eye, and only concentrate on what their own job entails; that of protecting the interest of the kids. They ignore the actual logistical problems faced by the school daily. They don't understand that when learners are undisciplined they cannot perform. What does it mean to protect the interest of the kids when they are doing negative things that affect their school work, and no one has the powers to correct them?

According to Teacher B1's perception, although the learners themselves were amazed by the social worker's undertaking to educate them on their rights, they were also keen to know the possible consequences of their provoking the teachers. The social worker apparently reiterated that, irrespective of who was the guilty party in the classroom, by law the learners must always be disciplined using "alternative means" to corporal punishment and physical threats. As the teachers saw it, with no clear elaboration of what "alternative means" entails in practical terms in relation to the existing realities on the ground, this impasse between teachers and learners in terms of discipline was bound to continue, with negative implications on learner performance.

The teachers and the principal alike being aware of the rather shaky "alternatives" to corporal punishment emphasized the need for government to acknowledge the existence of spatial inequalities in their own neighbourhood, which urgently required the introduction of different approaches, and strategies to handle problems of indiscipline in classrooms. They perceived that social workers giving the learners their direct telephone numbers was enough motivation for the learners to be unruly in the classroom, knowing that they had a protector just a phone call away. The teachers saw these rights and powers as being given unilaterally to the learners without consulting the school, and without considering the potential consequences on their performance. Teacher B4 became emotional when describing the ways in which the social worker had undermined and disempowered the teachers at the school:

A child came late to school, and I threatened to hit the child for coming late. I did not really mean to physically hit, or harm the child, but my intention was just to

let the child know that the act committed was wrong, and also to make others know that coming late to lessons was wrong. This was a way to force him to come early to lessons next time. Regrettably, the child phoned the social worker who came the following week and reprimanded me. She told me that threatening a child was illegal, and threatened to report me to the DoE if I did so again. Since then, irrespective of how undisciplined they are I prefer to let it go. I will prefer to let them fail than risk my job, especially after that harsh warning.

This clearly shows how teachers perceived that disciplinary policies restricted their abilities, and attempts to improve their learners' chances of learning and performing. As the teacher saw it, learner capabilities were being gravely impaired by the ban on corporal punishment. The school based on these circumstances decided to come up with a new code of conduct that they hoped would improve the current state of affairs and introduce positive changes. Principal B1 described how crucial it was that all stakeholders in the education community of the neighbourhood commit to this code of conduct:

As a school we have unveiled a very good code of conduct, which would be introduced to parents in 2013. I think that maybe if that has been put in place, so many things may change in terms of discipline, and consequently how our learners will perform. However, the code of conduct is just a document on paper that has to be implemented to the best of our ability. I am not saying that the code of conduct will resolve, or eliminate indiscipline in the school, but it may help to reduce the level at which it is now. To properly implement this code of conduct, all stakeholders including parents, teachers, and learners have to work collaboratively.

Thus teachers felt that limitations placed on their abilities to discipline learners, and the attitude of the learners themselves, protected by existing policies, gave learners leverage over them. The inability to clearly define and delimit "alternatives" to corporal punishment was compromising efforts to improve learner performance at the school. Such dynamics imposed constraints on the teaching and learning process, despite existing resources. Such challenges at school B were being intensified by unfreedoms accumulated from the community and from the homes from which learners came.

4.5.3 The local community acting as unfreedom to learner performance

The local community in which the school is located itself represented a learning barrier due to its ability to make direct or indirect impressions on learner behaviour, thus contributing to the way in which these learners perceived education and reacted towards their school work in and outside of the classroom. Factors in the local environment that impeded on learner ability to perform include; crime, the role of parents, the family structure, parental education, role models, and health constraints, together with their various emotional and psychological implications.

4.5.3.1 The effects of crime

Principal B1 described the local community as “crime ridden”. The crime rate was reportedly high, often on a daily basis, and often visible in the social and educational lives of the learners. The rampant occurrence of crime contributed to some learners turning to crime. Principal B1 described the effects of this on learner performance:

There is a very high crime rate in this community that affect leaners. Almost every weekend there are new incidences that affects the learners; some of them are traumatized, and unable to read their books. Some may be coerced to join the gangs. Even some of them behave in school in a gangster style, very rude and arrogant towards everyone. They tend to pay little attention to their school work, a simple explanation to why they struggle to pass.

It was clear that many of these learners were missing out on their education opportunities due to social and socioeconomic factors and conditions in their neighbourhoods. Sen (1985) posits that, in analysing or evaluating a person’s wellbeing, it is important to consider the physical living conditions of that person, because they are likely to influence certain decisions made or achievements attained. Apart from the psychological breakdown experienced by many learners, it was common for them to pick up negative traits from incidents they witnessed in their neighbourhoods, often with long term negative implications on their ability to learn and perform adequately. Thus these learners were trapped in a crime ridden community that, in terms of the CA, imposed various unfreedoms and ultimately limited their chances to choose the kind of education they desired.

According to the principal, criminals sometimes break into the school premises, causing extensive damage with severe consequences for the learners' education. Principal B1 described that the damage done by these thefts and the school's relative powerlessness to prevent these, or to insure their resources due to budgetary constraints:

Sometimes food meant for the school feeding scheme gets stolen, causing the learners to go without their meals sometimes. This reduces attendance, and learner performance. When we as a school experience a robbery; the DoE does not replace the stolen items. When the DoE provides resources to us, it becomes our responsibility to source for security, and maintenance at our own cost. Our limited and fixed budget restricts us a lot. Although we struggle to insure our resources to minimize such abnormalities, insurance companies hardly pay up, because they say our school is located in a high risk area, with too many break-ins. Some insurance companies do not even accept us as clients.

Thus crime in the area was destabilising learners, traumatizing and distracting them from their school work. These circumstances, combined with the role parents were or were not playing in fostering learning, contributed to increase learner unfreedoms in the classrooms.

4.5.3.2 Parental non-involvement as capabilities poverty

Although, as described in 4.4.2.2, teachers agreed that in theory parents should be the first point of call when a child misbehaved at school, this was not possible in this neighbourhood. The role of parents in the educational lives of learners in this community was generally classified by teachers and the principal as more than inadequate and causing teachers to directly relate learner indiscipline to parental non-involvement. Teachers and the principal considered that, due to a lack of guidance at home, some learners came to school with numerous unfreedoms in the way of learning, making it difficult for teachers to reach them, or for these learners to learn. Principal B1 explained the complexities of tackling parent non-involvement:

Some of these challenges concerning parental none-involvement are just too difficult to diagnose and understand, leaving school authorities at crossroads, and therefore making all our efforts at intervention just a long shot in the dark.

Our struggle to make parents active participants has been challenging. It seems the reasons for non-involvement are deeper than what we see.

The perception of Teacher B3 was that, similar to the situation at School A, parents failed to motivate their children to learn, because they themselves were not educated and therefore were unaware of what was entailed in assisting their children to achieve academically. Most parents therefore sent their children to school simply because they were required to do so and not due to any desire to see them perform well. This mind-set influenced parental perceptions and investment in educational matters, both morally and financially. Principal B1 described this narrow uninformed attitude on the part of many parents in the community towards their children's education:

They just send the kids to come school, which is where their own contribution starts and ends. They don't do any follow-ups, say for example check on their books when they come back from school daily to see what was done, and maybe to assist them with homework where necessary. These parents are not interested in playing their part. This is also because, maybe they don't know the work, and how to assist the learners, or they are just not interested, because they are busy with their own things. Some say they are not educated, and as such do not know how to help the learners study at home, or do their homework.

Given these circumstances, as reported by the principal, it was clear that parents' lack of interest started from whether their children went straight to school from home, or not; they did not regularly check on their children's workbooks to see the work that was done on a particular day, or to pick up any irregularities, resulting in learner unfreedoms and their poor performance. Due to the leverage learners had, they bunked school with impunity, being aware of the lack of supervision, and at end they failed in their tests and examinations. Teacher B4 summarised this situation and the effects on learners' education:

If a learner left home, and did not come to school, the parents are unlikely to know, unless the school notifies them to that effect. We may pick this up if they fail to do their assignments, or are not just serious in class, and decide to call in the parents to talk about it. It is only then that they may get to know the bigger

picture about the situation of the learners, and their constant bunking of school.

This is of course only when parents take us seriously, and come when invited.

The reluctance of parents to fully participate in the education of their children, especially as evidenced by their refusal to come to school when summoned, contributed to the numerous unresolved predicaments, whose result was a diminishing of learner freedoms, irrespective of available resources, and efforts by teachers. Teacher B3 expanded on the complexities of encouraging parental involvement mentioned by the principal:

This is even more complicated because when we invite parents to school, not all of them manage to come. Some always complain of their work schedule, or simply say, I must go to work, so I cannot make it to the school today. We manage to talk to those that come to be more involved in educational matters, but it seems very few comply. The circle always continuous and the teachers are in the middle of it all, to gather all the blames for other people's negligence, or reluctance.

The capabilities poverty in the township, where many parents were not only uneducated but unemployed, could be seen to influence how parents reacted towards educational matters. Many of them being single parents, unemployed, or involved in informal or casual employment that was time and energy consuming with very limited rewards for the family, they had limited time and resources to attend to the education of their children. Such problems were more evident in situations where these learners resided with grannies and other extended family members, a common scenario in poor schooling communities. These family members having to act as replacement parents often induced animosity and passivity, on the part of both substitute parents and children, which in turn limited learner freedoms to learn and perform. Principal B1 explained that the interrelationship between family structures and learner performance in this locality remained a very sensitive issue that most people preferred not to talk about, despite its visible implications, because resentments are considerable and continually resurface.

Teachers B1 and B4 agreed that these learners needed parental love to boost their morale when it comes to life and education, something they were unable to get from grandparents, and other extended family members. This was because these substitute parents, rather than comforting the learners and positively motivating them in their education, instead traumatized

and frustrated them. Such attitudes and behaviours caused these learners to see schooling in a negative light, thus contributing to low levels of concentration in the classroom. This often led to psychological breakdowns with a serious impact on learner education and wellbeing. Principal B2 described the psychological and emotional effects on children of the absence of unconditional love and nurturing:

Most of our learners reside with extended families, mostly grandparents. In most cases, these learners need parental love which they cannot get from these relatives. Sometimes their attitude and behaviour towards these learners traumatizes them to an extent that they do not see any reason to go to school. At times they are made to regard the assistance rendered to them as a favour, and not an obligation. They are regularly informed that their biological parents are incapable to take care of them, often resulting to behavioural problems that hamper their ability to learn, and consequently perform. Many of them are absent minded, often secluded, prefer to be alone and sad, and do not share their problems with others in the classroom.

Teacher B3 described this situation where parents made a clear distinction between school work and household work, considering time spent on school work as wasted:

Rather than encouraging the learners to learn, these parents discouraged them by making them to understand that learning is done only at school, because the home has its own chores to be attended to. Some deliberately gave learners unattainable amount of chores thus ought to be completed before school work comes into the picture. They regarded reading at home as a mere waste of valuable time that could be used for house chores.

The general consensus amongst the teachers was that these parents and grandparents did not understand the essence of education, and the need for learners to read their books and do homework at home. During weekends the learners were involved in prolonged church services that further distracted and distanced them from their school work. Principal B2 commented on the effect of learners spending disproportionate amounts of time in church with parents:

Most grandmothers attend evening church services during the week, and especially weekends, and often return home late, leaving children on their own with little or no supervision. But due to the dangers involved, some of these parents prefer to take these learners with them to church and only return at about 9pm. By this time the learners are tired and barely able to eat and go to bed without taking care of their homework or let alone reading their books..

Such dynamics on the home front increased the distance between the learners and their school work, by eroding them emotionally, and psychologically, and discouraging them from seeing their schooling in a positive light. When they came to school there was no guarantee that they would be able to concentrate on learning because of the negative mind-sets they brought with them from home. Therefore, irrespective of the kind of resources available at school or facilities at their disposal, as well as teacher effort, the poor orientation from home always remained overwhelming, deepening their unfreedoms within the classroom. At the end, the actual impact of school resources, and the real educational capabilities of these learners on their performance was scarcely evident, because existing unfreedoms were impeding their actual abilities. The principal and teachers agreed that, in addition to relative poverty, the role of parental education could not be ignored when the reasons for underperformance are discussed.

4.5.3.3 Parental education as a capabilities limitation to the learners

The principal and teachers saw parents' lack of education as contributing to their inability to assist their children in their educational endeavours as mentioned in the previous section. Most parents did not see any reason to fully engage in educational matters, including assisting their children with homework. Many learners therefore remained wayward, misbehaved, responded poorly in class, and often performed poorly. Principal B1 described this situation and the difficulties involved in contacting parents to attend meetings, and parents making their own lack of education an excuse not to become involved:

The situation is made worse because these parents are uneducated, and cannot read letters sent to them requesting them to attend meetings, briefings and especially to participate in decisions concerning their children's education. Some of them only come to school to participate in the resolution of problems that affect the future of their own children, when they have been refused entry into the

classroom. They assume that they are uneducated, and therefore need not involve themselves in educational matters.

Teacher B1 agreed that any efforts to engage and involve parents in the education of their children in line with policy specifications was often deadlocked, because parents invariably failed to attend activities organized by the school to enable them to witness first hand, and assess, the educational capabilities of their children. Principal B1 reiterated the difficulties and complexities of getting parents involved in their children's schooling:

The inability of parents to read partly explains why a weekend reading programme organized by the 'Give of the Givers', aimed at encouraging parents to attend, so as to understand the weaknesses of their children, and how to give them support at home, is always poorly attended. The excuse is either that they could not read, or understand the content of letters sent to them by the school, or that they were working, which is not always the case. These are just some of the complexities we encounter in our effort to involve parents. Some of these challenges are just too complex and difficult to diagnose, and understand clearly.

In the principal's view, parental non-involvement was at the time of this research a brick wall both the principal and teachers struggled fruitlessly to penetrate on a daily basis, and such non-corporation had often militated against the realization of certain education objectives spelt out by the school. Parents were regarded as potential mediators between the school, and the learners in ensuring that certain problems were detected early and dealt with accordingly, in order to prevent them from escalating to an uncontrollable level in the classrooms, and further deepening learner unfreedoms. Teachers thought that, when learners were allowed to go astray, an awkward situation developed for teachers in the classrooms, and that existing stalemates in terms of resolving this situation could aggravate learner unfreedoms. Apart from unfreedoms that were accumulated by learners from the community, health related unfreedoms also contributed in limiting learner freedoms in the classrooms.

4.5.3.4 Health as a capabilities limitation

As was described in the previous sections, many learners in the community were under the care of grandparents and other relatives for reasons that included; SES and health, especially the consequences of the HIV and AIDS pandemic. Due to the stigma attached to HIV and

AIDS, both affected and infected learners were often maltreated by those family members who ought to have been protecting them. This often resulted in community members regarding them with disdain. Since these learners were always afraid to be identified, singled out, and scorned by others at school, they isolated themselves in the classrooms, and participated minimally in classroom activities. The consequent emotional and psychological implications for these learners on their academic performance were often severe. Principal B1 explained the effects on their academic performance of the stigma of HIV/AIDS on learners whose family members are infected or have succumbed to the disease:

Because of the nature of the community in which they live in, certain things are often considered, and treated differently. Knowing that their biological parents died of HIV/AIDS imposes a traumatic experience on these young kids, who often live with a permanent scar on their minds. The community treats them as abnormal kids, when they know, or suspect that they are themselves infected, affects the way they live their own lives, the way the community treats them, the way they interact in society, and on the school premises. This affects how they learn, and perform in the classroom. With a bulk of our children either affected, or infected with the pandemic, it is impossible to correlate that with the kind of results they could have gotten if they were not in these circumstances.

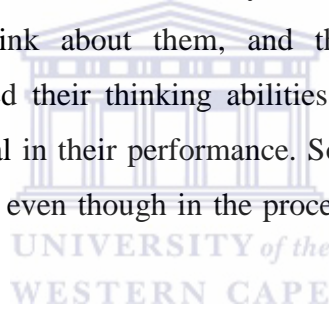
According to the principal, learner experiences of HIV/AIDS were complicated and difficult to pin down. Some learners believed to be infected were often put on a strict anti-retroviral treatment by the school, under the impression that this would ensure some kind of immunization and a stable lifestyle for these children without their knowledge. Some of them often reacted negatively when they realized the actual reasons behind the routine medication given to them by the school. Principal B1 explained the good intentions behind this, particularly in preventing stigma being attached to these children, although it could have negative results:

Many of these kids are given anti-retrovirus drugs regularly, but they don't know the kind of medication they are taking, and why. We try to give it ourselves, since many of them have regular meals at school. This also prevents them from being scorned at home, when others see them take such medication regularly. Grannies may not be able to keep up with the strict programme that is needed in taking

such medications. Most of their minds from the onset develop negatively, especially thinking that they are different from others. Although this kind of thinking contributes negatively to the way they interact with other learners; perceive education, react in class and consequently how they perform, we have to do this to ensure that they are healthy in the long term.

In the principal's view, the trauma learners experience could be avoided if their biological parents were there to assist them, even if sick themselves, since it was thought that the love from biological parents could eventually overshadow the existence of the disease. Without their real parents present to be involved in directing their lives, and to give them the love they need, community members do at times make the situation even worse.

In essence, these children from the outset tended develop an unstable mind-set that militated against their concentrating on their school work. They were continuously worried on what the next person would say, or think about them, and their status. This emotional and psychological trauma destabilized their thinking abilities and their experiences at school, contributing to a downward spiral in their performance. Some of them abandoned school to escape from such circumstances, even though in the process limiting their own freedoms to achieve.



4.5.4 Conclusion

It became apparent that the causes of learner unfreedoms in school B, as in School A, were multidimensional. Both in and outside of school factors accumulated to influence the way learners learned, perceived their education, and performed. Unfreedoms in the school were caused not only by the quality, and quantity of resources, but by the lack of capabilities of both teachers and learners to convert existing resources into achievements. Although the school did not have a computer laboratory, there was a library which was underutilized, due to limited space, and the absence of a trained librarian. While the school was receiving its allocated supply of books and workbooks, they at times arrived late in the year, and as a result the syllabuses could not be completed. Although the school had sufficient teachers, many of them were not specialized in the subjects they taught, and ended up increasing learner unfreedoms by lowering standards, or introducing selective teaching. These circumstances aggravated learner motivation and indiscipline that were also affected by what transpired on the home front and in the neighbourhood in which the school is located.

School C

4.6 Introduction

The reason for classifying school C as low performing has been explained in detail above (4.3 & 4.5). The same in-school infrastructural factors seen to be perpetuating learner unfreedoms at the school related to the nature of resources and encompassed the same as those in Schools A and B, and were complemented by the same list of classroom dynamics (see Section 4.6.2). As with the other two schools, out of school factors revolved around the role of parents and the community.

4.6.1 School resources as a capabilities limitation to learner performance

The quantity and quality of resources available at the school created unfreedoms for learners in many dimensions, due to the varying implications they had for the teaching, and learning process. The complexity of this process emanated from the over-reliance of the principal and teachers on the government for the provision of all resources. Since the school is a no fee school, their inability or unwillingness to solicit any external support, or engage in charity and fund raising activities, compelled the school to run on a tight budget. The principal lamented that money received from the government annually was the only source of income and proved insufficient for the school's needs, especially in terms of purchasing, and maintaining every single resource around the school:

What the state does is that, they do give us a certain amount of money, but that amount of money is not enough compared to what we need to use to buy resources like stationery, copy paper, pencils, pens and many other things needed for the classrooms, to ensure that teaching and learning takes place effectively. With part of that money, we must buy cleaning material, and other things like locks, things that we cannot order from the DoE, so it is a lot. But the DoE also does provide us with materials like, posters, and other things, but it is not enough. In terms of the money that we get, that we must buy things that learners and teachers use in classroom, it is not enough. We are often under a lot of strain to deliver, not because we are not being given resources by the government, but because what we are given is just not enough, compared to the number of learners, and what must be done with that money.

In the principal's view, struggling to manage what funding was available to meet the needs of the learners, with the aim of improving performance, was at the core of the school's problems. Sen (1992) posits that where resources are provided without considering the possible existence of barriers to achieve, there is that possibility for little or nothing to be achieved. From my observations, there appeared to be clear inequalities needing to be considered in order to alleviate this school's budgetary allocation plight. As with the other two schools, one among a range of those resources that exerted an influence on learner performance at the school was the school feeding scheme, or more precisely, the way in which it was being managed.

4.6.1.1 The school feeding scheme

Owing to the value attached to the school feeding scheme by the school community, food was provided to the learners twice a day at designated times slots, usually during break times. However, in the course of my observations it emerged that such times were not being adhered to or respected. As with School A, there were unnecessary disruptions to the teaching and learning process. The reasons given for such delays and disruptions were usually trivial and managerial in nature (see Section 4.4.1.5). The teachers agreed that kitchen staff appeared to be failing to organize themselves well ahead of time, especially on Mondays. The lack of gas was one of the common reasons presented by the kitchen staff for the unscheduled and irregular supply of food to the learners. It was reported that the school only had four gas bottles that needed to be refilled, apparently only after they had all been used up. Teacher C3 described the disruptions to the teaching programme this caused, and, as with School A, saw lack of communication between teaching and kitchen staff as part of the problem:

The cooks usually start late especially on Mondays, maybe due to the weekends, that prevent them from preparing the vegetables beforehand. For these reasons the food either comes late, or is completely absent, with its own consequences on the teaching and learning process. Sometimes break periods are extended to accommodate the food that comes late, and the lessons after break are usually unceremoniously shortened, and there are usually no contingency measures put in place for makeup classes to replace the lost time. The cooks just do their own things; they don't tell us the teachers about the delay. If they could tell us we can tell the children, and also find a way to keep them calm during the waiting

period. Some of them may not even concentrate when they know it is supposed to be time for their meals, but it is not there, and nobody is saying anything to them. There is always no communication.

An attempt to understand the dynamics in the school feeding scheme exposed numerous challenges inhibiting learner freedoms to achieve. Learner concentration rate in class was reduced whenever food was not available or when it arrived unscheduled and disrupted a lesson.

When food was brought into the classroom during lessons, the entire teaching and learning process was disrupted. Often when the food arrived late it was not distributed but left in front of the class, only to be eaten at the end of the lesson, which still disrupted the lesson and took time either from present or from the following lesson. The presence of the food in front of the hungry learners distracted them as their minds were focused on the food more than on the lesson in progress, causing unpleasant scenarios in the classroom.

It was also noted by the teachers that learners did everything in their power, in the form of spontaneous disturbances, to get the attention of the teachers, and to ensure that the lesson was terminated prematurely, to allow them to have their meals. This common practice often resulted in some learners being sent out of the classroom, often cheered by the rest of the class, further disrupting the teaching and learning process. These scenarios gave less motivated learners the leverage to disturb the teaching process in order to be sent out of the class, eventually leading to further disruptions, and an abrupt termination of the lesson. It was clear that this lack of communication between the cooks and the teachers exacerbated the crisis in the classrooms. As with School A, the lack of communication and coordination, between the various departments created unfreedoms in the classrooms, which were seemingly not acknowledged by the school management. As with School A poor management was restricting the role played by the SFS as a contributor to learner performance, thus helping to impose unfreedoms on both teachers and learners.

It was clear that the inability of the SFS to measurably influence learner attendance, and performance, was caused by poor management, lack of communication, especially between the cooks and the teachers, poor planning on the part of the cooks, lack of supervision, and lack of cooperation. These dynamics combined, acted as impairment to learner freedoms to

achieve. These unfreedoms were exacerbated by an increasingly and dysfunctional computer laboratory.

4.6.1.2 The computer laboratory

A computer laboratory had been established at the school in 2009, and became an important component in the promotion of learner capabilities. Apart from introducing learners to basic computer skills, it represented an important means of research for assignments, and other school projects. The principal noted that, although the DoE provided the laboratory, it was the school's responsibility to source security and maintenance for existing resources (see Section 4.5.3.1).

Although the DoE installed an internet service, monthly payments were the sole responsibility of the school, despite its limited budget. This placed the school in a difficult position, as problems experienced with the internet service, together with incidents of breakdown of the computers, remained unresolved for long periods, depriving learners of an opportunity to learn and to do research online. Due to budgetary constraints, the school sourced unskilled technicians; these problems were experienced repeatedly and with increasing frequency. Principal C1 described this seemingly insoluble problem:

The problem here is that the computer lab has its own technical problems. At the beginning the kids used to go to the computer room once a week, but we had some problems, and since the beginning of this year the learners have not been able to use the lab, even once. Although we have made several attempts to solve the technical problems, numerous technicians brought here have failed to give us any positive feedback. We are surely going into next year with the problems of computers, and the internet. Although an internet service was also installed, the school is responsible for the monthly payments, and we struggle for that as well.

Learners were unable to surf the internet for learning materials, for assignments, and school projects, thus jeopardizing their chances to perform well or even adequately. The CA would see the existence of a computer laboratory as a means to an end, not an end in itself. Therefore, what ought to be important is the role available computers play in improving learner performance at the school, and not merely their installation and availability.

Although the computers were not in use, for the learners they were a source of pride; the learners were comparing themselves with neighbouring schools that do not have such facilities in place. A Grade 7 learner expressed both pride in the school's computers and hope that they would be up and running sometime soon:

I think our computer room is great. Although we do not use it again, it is great, because our friends in the other schools in the township do not have computers. Maybe when they fix it we can use it, and do our projects, and homework. Our teachers say the computers will be working well very soon.

However, in terms of the CA, the reality was that the computers, although installed were not promoting learner freedoms to achieve due to frequent breakdowns. Learners were thus unable to choose the kind of education they valued or desired. The limitation of both the school's and the learners' capabilities to convert existing resources into achievement were not limited to the computer laboratory. The library was also more or less non-functional.

4.6.1.3 The Library

As with the other two schools, the library, although expected by both the school community and the DoE in terms of the curriculum to be an important point of contact for learners who were generally regarded as lacking motivation to learn, as well as a core component of the teaching and learning process at the school, was underutilized and minimally functional. Since very few learners had any enthusiasm for school, or for reading or doing homework, the principal described the potential of a functional library for turning this situation around and boosting performance. Although the library was well-stocked with enough books, and all necessary resources needed for a fully functional library, it fell to the school to finance the management and maintenance of the library after a probation period subsidized by the DoE, which however lasted for only 10 months.

The DoE kick started the library by providing two qualified librarians on a temporary basis, for a stipulated period of time, with the task of assisting with familiarizing the school staff with the basic skills and ideas needed to run the library and integrate its resources with the teaching programme. By the end of the tenth month the temporary librarians were unceremoniously ordered by the DoE to pack their bags and leave. The principal assumed the abrupt termination of the library mentorship programme to be due to the exhaustion of funds

allocated for the training programme. By this stage, the temporary librarians had not managed to complete their task because no particular staff member had yet been designated, or been equipped with the necessary knowledge to run the library. As a result, the library remained underutilized, as no one on the staff had the requisite skills and knowledge to guide learners in their use of the library. Principal C1 described the implications for the staff and for the school of the abrupt and premature departure of the librarians:

Their departure was not because their mission had been accomplished, but supposedly because the funds allocated for that particular programme by the government dried up. We did not at the end gain anything from their stay here, but we did not have the powers to stop them, they had to leave, keeping us in the dark with regard to what to do with that stock of books piled up in the library.

Thus, as with the computers, and according to the CA, while the school, in comparison with many others in this neighbourhood, had a reasonable stock of books, these were underutilized by both teachers and learners, due to the lack of certain capabilities to convert existing resources into achievements. Sen (1985, 1992) posited that the amount of resources in the possession of any institution or individual is not necessarily of paramount importance; because the ultimate concern ought instead to be what the institution or individual succeeds in doing with the available resources. Although the school had ambitious plans to use the existing library to transform the mind-sets of the learners, the staff lacked the freedoms to do so.

Principal C1 expressed his disappointment with the DoE's interventions, as the library project was not the only botched programme initiated and prematurely abandoned without prior notification by the DoE, and without having any real impact on the learners and the school. The principal saw the teacher assistant programme in the same light. While it initially contributed immeasurably to maintaining learner discipline and concentration in the classroom, it too was also abruptly terminated after a short while, again without any prior notification from the department, or justification for its termination. Since its termination, learner indiscipline had escalated; especially in the Grade 7 classrooms (see Section 4.6.2.2).

Thus, the abrupt departure of the temporary library staff at a time when the school lacked the necessary manpower to run the library to assist learners proved challenging. A plan for

teachers to take shifts in the library was constrained by their lack of skills, together with their conflicting teaching schedules. Therefore, stationing any staff permanently at the library in fact turned out to be to the detriment of the teaching and learning process. Principal C3 described the constraints operating in co-opting teaching staff to run the library in order for it to be fully utilized by teachers and learners:

When they left we used to have a teacher that sometimes controlled the library, but she can't be in the library full time, because she must be in class to teach. We have a library full with books, but the problem again is that, we don't have the manpower to manage the library effectively to meet the needs of the learners. Although it is a fact that the library exists, and is fully stocked, we are struggling to find someone to assist us in the running of the library. We do not have the money to pay a trained librarian. When we get one, we will be able to fully utilize the library to the benefit of the learners, and teachers alike, but for now we can do nothing with it, and about it. Sometimes the kids go to the library with the class teacher, but some of the teachers have no clue as to what to do with the kids when in the library. They just allow the kids to take any book of their choice and probably read, or play around with it, or do whatever they want to do for the duration of their stay in the library. The teachers do not know how to guide the learners in terms of what to do when in the library. You see there is no need giving the library with books, and the school has to see to it that a person is employed to take care of the library, when it has no money. As a no fee school it is difficult for us to get additional funds to employ a trained librarian fulltime at the school.

According to the CA, the lack of certain capabilities caused by budgetary and other constraints limited the school from fully utilizing the existing library to the benefit of the learners. The inability of the school to hire a skilled librarian, sponsor a teacher to be trained as one, could be regarded in terms of the CA as a capability deficiency. I observed that the unfreedoms that were a consequence of the under-functioning computer laboratory and library make these two resources “sleeping beauties” in the context of School C. However, classroom dynamics also played a role in hindering learner performance at this school.

4.6.2 Classroom dynamics

As with the other two schools, the classroom environment was being seen by participants in this study to exert a negative influence on learner performance, although the role of certain factors in this environment was viewed varyingly by the learners and the principal. In Grade 7, the impact of certain factors is crucial at this stage of their education, because those learners who had almost certainly had a poor educational foundation were at a transitional stage of their educational career, and now needed special guidance and intervention in order for them to proceed to, and succeed in, high school. As with the other two schools, factors that were seen by participants to influence learner performance included learner motivation, indiscipline, absenteeism, the lack of writing materials, the nonchalant attitude of teachers, poor classroom management, inadequate or no lesson planning, and poor teaching and assessment methods. These factors were of course interrelated, and at various times influenced one another in a number of ways.

4.6.2.1 Learner motivation

The lack of motivation to learn was seen to be as a result of learners' home environment and to be a serious impediment to learner performance. Demotivated learners paid little or no attention in class, and did not positively or actively take part in classroom activities, or follow teacher instructions. Principal C1 described the impossible task of convincing learners of the importance of school and of cooperating with their teachers:

Learner motivation is part of our biggest struggle as a school, in an effort to improve learner performance. Making them to see the essence of being at school, staying there the whole day and actually learning is often like trying to penetrate a brick wall. At times they don't want to listen to the teacher, or do things in the classroom like any other normal kid would do.

According to the CA, this phenomenon is linked to capabilities poverty in learner communities and homes, which translates into unfreedoms in the classroom environment. The inability of parents to take care of the physical and emotional needs of the learners often made them vulnerable to negative influences in the community, such as people who distort their thinking, persuading them of the futility of schooling. Teacher C3 explained this demotivation process:

The lack of certain basic facilities at home added to the over interaction with non-educated people within the community contributed in impacting a certain kind of mentality in them, especially the one that makes them to think that school is not the way to go. When they start thinking like that, they come to school just because they have to be there, with no real interest in what happens in the classroom. They don't focus on classroom activities, they are just there.

Such learners when in the classroom did not show any interest in the lessons, because due to the influences operating in the neighbourhood environment, the needs, interests and desires of many learners were in conflict with classroom demands. Such learners played games, made a noise, and disturbed others that were eager to learn, and in most cases they did whatever they could to disrupt the teaching and learning process (see Sections 4.4.2.1 and 4.5.2.1). Since they cared nothing about failing their examinations, for them being at school was just a routine that had to be followed, with no real objectives. Principal C3 elaborated on the causes of demotivation and the casual attitude of many learners:

These learners in most cases were not motivated in the first place to go school. Not knowing why they should go to school, the future implications of going to school, and probably the gains that will accrue not only for them, but also for those around them, probably deprives them of the craving to learn, and thus the possibility of poor performance. Something they do not care about is their performance. They are there in the class maybe just for the food they get, or just because they were asked to come there to school by their parents. What they care is making noise, and disturbing others, just ways to exhaust the day quickly.

Since they were unaware, or unconvinced, of actual reasons to be at school, it was difficult for them to engage in certain activities of value to them, activities aimed at improving performance. These constituted a huge capabilities limitation, because such learners were highly resistant towards any attempts to reform or improve them, thus making it hard for teachers to get through to them. This often led to numerous unfreedoms whose precise causes, manifestations, and consequences seemed elusive. Principal C3 lamented a situation of non-participation on the part of these learners:

The lack of motivation to learn translates into extremely poor performances by learners at our school, irrespective of the grades in which they find themselves. Since the learners are not interested to come to school, motivating them to stay in school the whole day, and most importantly concentrate and participate in the various classroom activities is a very difficult task to deal with at the school. We are really struggling, but all our efforts seem to go in vain.

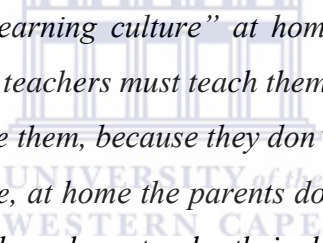
It was agreed that capabilities poverty in this community translated into different kinds of challenges in individual households, and consequently impacted on the attitudes and behaviours shown by learners in different ways in the classroom (see Sections 4.4.5, 4.5.3 and 4.6.3). Unfreedoms inherent in these settings translated into different packages for different learners who came to school with different mind-sets, all with disastrous consequences for their abilities and for how they perceived schooling, their ability or motivation to be focused in class, and their ability to pass their tests and examinations.

The principal noted that, although a school is normally supposed to be the best place for learners to receive proper attention, to express their experiences, feelings, needs and desires, poor schools had learners with different mind-sets that made the teachers' jobs complex and challenging. In the view of principal C1, the lack of sufficient resources to deal with everything that concerned and catered to every individual learner increased teaching challenges, given the large number of learners in need of personal attention. This was a complex situation because whenever these personal problems were not properly dealt with, some of these learners would feel neglected, demotivated, and inevitably become undisciplined. Such learners often questioned why they should be at school in the first place and as a result made an effort to come to school only in order to receive a meal. This explains why any other activities in the school environment were of lesser importance. Principal C1 described this situation:

Some of them come to school in the morning, and after having a meal at about 10am, struggle to jump over the school fence to go home, or into the community to do other things most suitable to them. They don't even think that they can get caught, they just want to go. The thought of sitting in the classroom to learn for the entire day is not considered a priority for most of these learners.

Therefore, learners being in school the whole day did not guarantee active participation in classroom activities, and performing well. Since the urge to learn was therefore generally lacking, teachers found themselves in a depressing situation because their efforts were never enough, or were ineffective. The interconnectedness of events, and the distortions they caused to the teaching and learning process, was considered a common phenomenon in a poor schooling community such as this.

Teacher C2 was of the opinion that the chronic lack of motivation to learn was common among the learners and emanated from the lack of “a learning culture” at home. The teacher explained that there is virtually nothing in place at home that motivates the learners to learn. Parents’ apparent carefree attitude at home did not encourage learners to read, or to engage in anything educational. Therefore making any attempt to encourage them to learn while at school became a huge challenge due to the different mind-sets they brought with them from home. Teacher C1 described this situation in detail:



As a result of this poor “learning culture” at home, they come to school not motivated to learn, so we as teachers must teach them the need to read, and at the same time we must discipline them, because they don’t understand the importance of schooling. This is because, at home the parents don’t tell them anything about school; they don’t show them how to do their homework. They themselves (parents) do not frequently read things like newspapers, as a way of encouraging the kids to develop an interest in reading. Maybe there are also no facilities like picture books, reading tables and other educational materials to encourage them.

These numerous un-freedoms experienced by learners in poor schooling communities, indicate the multitude of challenges that manifest in individual households. The lack of motivation in the domain of education at home was a huge capabilities limitation that learners ultimately brought with them into the classrooms. Teacher C3 considered that most of the blame for the demotivation of learners rested on the home environment rather than on the teachers:

The existence of a condition where learners are not motivated to learn in school cannot in any way be seen as a failure on the part of the teachers, but what they

come with from home. When they come to school demotivated and indiscipline, we don't always know where to start, since they are loose, and hardly listen to us.

Teachers agreed that the lack of motivation should be blamed on the home environment, which they perceived as the epicentre of learner unfreedoms. The consensus therefore in this schooling community was that there existed a strong correlation between how parents viewed schooling, how they reacted towards school matters at home, and how learners learned and performed in the classroom. Principal C1 elaborated on the lack of interest parents had in their children's education:

A large number of our learners struggle. For many of these kids based on environmental influences, their hearts are not in class. They don't have a mind-set of studying. They are here in school just because they have been pushed by their parents. The parents push them not because they are so fanatical about the need for them to study, but because of their own selfish reasons that have nothing to do with the child's future. For some parents, receiving the child support grant is the main reason they should be in school. That is why they come sometimes during school hours to take the child out of the classroom to social development to sign the claim forms. With such lack of educational concern from the parents, the children themselves are not motivated to learn.

Similarly, teacher C4 lamented the lack of seriousness regarding learning and being at school:

There are a few of them who are serious, yes there are a few, very few, the rest are only like they are supposed to be in school, because there is nothing else to do at home. They must be at school, since the parents get the support grant for them, hence they must be here, and again we must also buy food for them, so they are here for all reasons, but not to be educated. That is why it is difficult for them to pay attention in class. They are just not serious about learning.

Observations of the daily activities of learners in the Grade 7 classrooms over a period of time confirmed the concerns of principal C1, and that of the teachers, as many learners proved not to be enthusiastic to be at school, based on their reaction towards certain classroom activities. Their behaviour in the classrooms was often passive and anti-

educational. By 11.30 am some learners were already exhausted, and dozed off for entire lessons, with no respect for the presence of the teachers, nor the consequences when caught in the act. Many learners were only physically present in class, most of them daydreaming during lessons, and/or engaged in a variety of pointless activities. Learners preferred to spend time drawing pictures of animals or humans, rather than copying notes or participating in other classroom activities.

However, despite these ‘negative behaviours’ these learners were never noticed nor singled out or reprimanded by the teachers, thus giving them carte blanche to do whatever they wanted, knowing that no one would be calling them to order. Therefore, whatever learners did in the classroom during lessons had in fact become the norm, since they were unnoticed, or unchecked by the teachers. This passive attitude on the part of teachers exacerbated negative practices on the part of demotivated learners. Ironically the classrooms at this school were very spacious compared to the other two schools involved in the study, and allowed the teachers to move freely about the room to identify learners that were not motivated to learn and were distracting those who were. It was clear that many learners went home from school every day without having any idea of what was taught during the lessons, thus further deepening existing unfreedoms.

I observed that the a bulk of the teachers concentrated on writing notes on the board for learners to copy, and never checked to see how engaged learners were in the classroom. Learners therefore had the freedom to choose to or not to participate in classroom activities. The lack of passion to learn, being perpetuated by the way they were taught and the leverage given to learners to disrupt lessons by the teachers by ignoring indiscipline represented a perfect opportunity for learners to further distance themselves from their school work. Teachers vindicated their passivity by insisted that the law limited the ways they were able to deal with learners regarding curriculum matters; hence they chose to let the learners make their own choices. In the view of Sen (1992) learners in these circumstances are disadvantaged, because they are faced with too much freedom to choose what they want, and as minors there is always that possibility for them to make the wrong choices.

However, learners gave varying reasons for not participating in classroom activities, and why negative attitudes towards learning were common. One 14 year old learner was always inattentive during most of the lessons, and did not generally take classroom activities

seriously. He never copied notes, but had the time and resources, unlike others, to draw pictures that had no bearing on the lesson in progress, though he was never spotted by the teachers. This learner cheekily acknowledged his non-participation in classroom activities, and admitted to having repeated various grades many times, because he consistently refused to copy notes, do his homework, activities which to him were extremely boring. This learner doubted his own ability to pass Grade 7 at the end of the year, and also openly admitted that it was very boring to sit in class the whole day listening to the teachers and/or transcribing notes from the board. This intimate chat with the learner unveiled the different facets of challenges and unfreedoms experienced by learners in poor schooling communities. This casual conversation that took place immediately after a lesson was interrupted by other learners who in chorus shouted:

He drinks too much alcohol, and smokes dagga with the big boys, especially on weekends. Ask him, and he will tell you everything about himself.

This learner looked demotivated, and demoralised, and did not have any dreams of his own beyond the classroom walls. This was a glaring case of how the environment, lack of motivation, lack of monitoring and supervision, the lack of creative or stimulating teaching ideas and strategies, and the lack of goodwill from the teachers contributed to shaping learner perceptions, attitudes and behaviour in the classrooms. This learner was more concerned about life outside the school, where he was noticed and praised, and therefore did not see any reason to invest much effort in his school work.

This kind of negative attitude towards school work was particularly evident when workbooks were handed out during some of the lessons, and some learners did not bother to open them for the entire lesson, an omission ignored by the teachers. It was clear that the concentration rate in the Grade 7 classrooms was approximately less than 50%, as fewer learners actually paid reasonable attention to lessons in progress, or actively participated in classroom activities and discussions. At the end of each lesson, approximately 30% of the learners could be said to genuinely relate adequately to the content taught in class, confirming the pattern of performance described.

Learners who did not have a single book in front of them during many lessons over a succession of days during the observations usually struck up conversations, and distracted

others from the lessons, in all probability because they preferred to be sent out of the classroom. Due to the numerous distractions caused by uninterested learners, sending learners out of the classroom became a common occurrence during this investigation. Thus one could assume that when learners became demotivated and needed a break, they invited their own expulsion, because they knew exactly what to do to be sent out of the classroom, especially because the teachers would not as a rule, issue a warning or interrogate their actions.

These negative practices were not limited to a few learners, nor did they take place during the lessons of a particular teacher. There seemed to be an institutional culture of demotivation, as evidenced by demotivated learners using the classroom as a place for relaxation, unnoticed or called to order. School resembled an extracurricular activity for many of these learners, as described by Teacher C2:

You see, it's almost like they don't care, because they don't understand the importance of education, which is actually what it is. It is almost like they are sitting here to get the day over. It's like being here just for the sake of being here. It is not for them to come and be educated, and to have a goal to go out there one day, and be something or somebody, or want to become this or that. They are just here to do other negative things.

The lack of motivation by these learners was clearly evident in one of the classes where a teacher who had missed a lesson came in only to announce a test due later in the day. Although there were sporadic lessons before the test, there was hardly any zeal, or sign of seriousness from these learners to prepare for the test, even though they were instructed on what particular questions to prepare for. Learners used available free periods to play, shout, and run around the classroom uncontrollably, instead of preparing for the test. I made an attempt to calm them down, to explain why it was important for them to prepare for the test beforehand, but they did not take my words seriously. Although a few learners responded to the appeal, the noise levels in the classroom clearly indicated that there was hardly any serious reading going on, nor attempts to understand the content in the midst of such disturbances. The lack of motivation to learn among these learners was clearly synonymous with indiscipline, representing an endlessly repeating cycle.

This evidence no self-motivation to learn often created an awkward scenario in the classroom, and as a result these learners were never on the same page with the teachers. However, it became obvious that, although most learners were clearly not receptive to the idea of schooling, the teachers appeared not to be aware that young people need closer and constant monitoring, as well as stimulating teaching, affirmation and guidance. Thus, another cycle had been set up, or had always existed: when learners were less motivated to learn, teachers themselves became discouraged and found it difficult to teach, and did not advise, or were no longer able to advise, or convince them of the need to take school work seriously.

Thus, the lack of the necessary push and encouragement from parents, added to other dynamics operating in the classroom, meant that learners on their own, without encouragement, stimulation and guidance, were unable to comprehend the importance of schooling. As a result, they were missing out on important opportunities to achieve their dreams, such as they were, irrespective of the kinds of resources available. Thus learners continued to experience barriers to learning and multitudes of unfreedoms went unnoticed or unaddressed by those who should have been both aware of, and responsible for, the cycle of indiscipline and demotivation on the part of both learners and teachers.

4.6.2.2 Learner indiscipline

Indiscipline at School C, as was described in the previous section, had several causes (see Section 4.6.2.1), that significantly influenced the quality of teaching and learning, and consequently learner performance. The kind of indiscipline that prevailed in the Grade 7 classrooms shaped how teachers taught, together with the way learners perceived education and responded to the learning process. Teachers saw this situation as going far deeper than what was being physically displayed by learners. Many teachers interrupted, or slowed down their pace of teaching, in order to attend to different kinds of classroom scenarios. Thus the teachers perceived that scratching beneath the surface could reveal a lot more about learner indiscipline and unimagined consequences than what was actually displayed or perceived. It seemed the causes of learner indiscipline at the school were too difficult and deep-rooted to diagnose, and the consequences too varied, and thus needing a thorough exploration, and a critical analysis to understand these causes. In the view of the teachers, although there was a host of reasons to explain learner behaviour in the classroom, what they brought from their

homes and their environment was one of the prime causes. Teacher C3 saw the root cause of the problem as being the lack of discipline in the home:

The children do not take orders, they are in fact indiscipline, it's like there is no discipline at home or so, and the parents expect us to discipline the children. That is a big challenge because, we are here to teach, not to discipline children, but we must first discipline them before we can create the atmosphere conducive for learning. But the problem starts at home, and you can see that the environment that they are in make them to behave the way they do in the classroom. Discipline is a very big problem to us as teachers in this school. If the children are not discipline how on earth can we teach them to understand? It's like they just enjoy misbehaving in the classroom.

It was clear during the investigation that indiscipline was a common denominator at the school, and was not limited to Grade 7, because learners from other classes constantly opened the Grade 7 classroom doors, while lessons were in progress to casually chat to friends. Although some teachers reacted to these frequent and inappropriate interruptions by chasing the intruders away, others ignored their presence, thus making this practice a norm. These disruptions distracted learners who were interested in learning, shifting the focus from the lesson in progress to the intruders. Teacher C4 commented on the consequences of the failure of teachers to address indiscipline:

Indiscipline in the school can also be partly caused by the teachers themselves. The teachers for different reasons decide to ignore certain incidences that occur in the classrooms, and carry out their activities like nothing happened. This approach in most cases can encourage disrespect, and indiscipline among learners with many consequences. They will think teachers don't care, and as such will decide to do things their way.

According to teacher C4, the nonchalant attitude of teachers should be blamed for this, because their negligence and inertia escalated learner indiscipline, thus deepening existing unfreedoms. This situation was exacerbated by teachers not being in class at the appointed time, and ready for their lessons, thus giving learners an opportunity to go astray. Teacher C2 agreed with this view:

We as teachers must also put our things in place. We must always be prepared, that's what we must do each time we go to the classroom. If we go into the classroom, and sit down there and don't know what to do, obviously children must become indisciplined, and disruptive. Also if you just write a lot of stuff on the board and children must do the copying, yes, but then there will be a problem. If you just spend your whole period copying notes on the board children behind you will only do nothing, but disturb. Also, some teachers after their lessons just go out of the class while many learners are not even half way through with copying the notes on the board. What happens when the next teacher comes in, and wants to use the board? The learners are not likely to finish copying the notes, and you will expect them to read those same notes to write a test, or an examination. All these lead to disruptive behaviour in the classroom, and many learners may just end up failing.

There existed a contradiction in the approach of such teachers: the same teachers who were not attempting to ensure, or were not encouraging learners to copy notes or take their school work seriously expected them to read those notes to prepare for tests and examinations. This partly explains why teachers that came into a classroom after such lessons had to spend considerable amounts of time bringing the learners to order, and in the process, lost teaching and learning time, thus further deepening learner unfreedoms.

Principal C1 confirmed that indiscipline was one of the biggest problems encountered in the school, particularly in Grade 7, a class that ought to be the face of the institution. In the principal's view, these learners, despite being a step closer to high school than those in the lower grades, continued to produce very discouraging results, and to behave very badly. Participants agreed that indiscipline at the school was hard to pin down, because, although both teachers and learners were to blame, an aggregation of identified factors was at play. Principal C1, in casting about for causes and remedies to the situation, reflected that the botched teacher assistant programme, had it been sustained, could have made things better:

The teacher assistants were very useful to us, because they helped a lot to maintain discipline in the classroom. They don't teach but assist the main teacher during lessons, and when they are absent to maintain discipline. They help to give out tasks, and see to it that all learners are busy doing the right thing at the right

time. When the teacher is late, they ensure that all learners are seated. Now they are no longer there, and that makes things very much unorganized, and it's difficult for us in the classrooms. The learners are very unruly now, and the teachers are not magicians to see what up to 40 or more learners are doing in the classroom at the same time. That contributes to learner indiscipline in the classroom, and many of them fail because they need that personal attention, but it is not always there, because we do not have the means.

Escalating indiscipline led to the introduction of a strategic plan to urgently and aggressively deal with the situation at the school to improve learner motivation and participation in the classroom with the intention of boosting performance. The principal expounded on this plan:

Discipline is a very big problem that we are having in our school. What we did is that we redrafted our code of conduct which we will be giving out to the learners at the beginning of next year. Parents will also be required to be a signatory to this document, as a way of enforcing especially, its implementation. Both learners and parents will be briefed about the content of the code of conduct, and it will be signed and implemented. If this code of conduct goes well, indiscipline can become a thing of the past, and our learners will concentrate on learning and passing their examinations. It is an attempt we are willing to make to see what difference we can make in the coming years. It may be difficult, the process may take time, but maybe it will benefit the school for a long time to come.

The principal agreed that it was a slow and cumbersome process, but plans put in place to cater for any glitches experienced during implementation, and to avoid the experiences of the past years with the current school code of conduct that seems to exist only on paper in order to comply with the South African Schools Act (SASA) of 1996. In the view of the principal, this stringent approach was necessary given the out-of-hand situation in the classrooms. Although such measures appeared over rigorous, the principal considered them to be essential to ensure that learner performance improved.

Indiscipline at school C was obviously destabilizing such teaching and learning as was taking place there. Although I see that this situation was and is generally typical of the kind of environment in which the school is located, a variety of other exigencies in the classroom and

the school intensified this situation. The lack of writing materials contributed to the chaotic scenes in the classrooms, and thus, in terms of the CA, to restricting learner freedoms to learn and achieve.

4.6.2.3 Writing materials

The need for writing materials skewed learner performance at the school. I observed that many learners did not have pens or pencils to copy down notes, and write tests. While some learners had pens that were not writing-functional, others were observed half way into the lesson struggling to sharpen pencils. The scramble for writing materials led to disorderliness, as many learners moved across benches in search of sharpeners, and pens from their classmates. It was clear that many learners did not copy down notes at all, as some of them could be seen doing other things during the entire lesson, which were distracting to serious, and motivated learners, such as leg tapping, and the drumming of benches.

The teachers were either unaware of this stationery crisis in their classrooms, or simply ignored its existence and the consequences thereof. As with the other two schools, the lack of stationery material for copying notes represented a major capabilities limitation, since they could not read or revise the content of the lesson at home, thus increasing their chances of failing. Although the class was often calmer than normal during tests, learners were observed ten minutes into a test struggling to sharpen pencils, while some of them could be seen shouting to friends across benches to borrow a pen or pencil, in the process distracting those that were already busy writing the test. What was disturbing was that the teachers did not take such actions seriously, and did not restrain the learners, rendering such acts as the norm in the classrooms, even during tests. The principal acknowledged the existence of such incidences, and ‘abnormalities’ in the school in general and in the Grade 7 classroom in particular, but blamed the escalation of the stationery crisis on parents who were unwilling or unable to assist in providing learners with basic stationery material such as, pencils, and pens, because they expected the school to provide everything. In the principal’s view, budgetary constraints limited the school’s ability to provide these basic writing materials, despite the enormous consequences for learners’ ability to perform. Principal C1 commented on this situation and the constraints operating on the school’s attempts to supply sufficient writing materials to the learners:

The parents don't want to help the school in buying maybe crayons, pencils and pens for the kids. As a result, the kids come to school every day without pens or pencils, so they expect us to give them a pen or pencil every day. We can't provide it to them every day, but we try as much as possible to provide them at least if we have. However, the kids come to school every day knowing that they must get everything from the school, something that we as a school can hardly afford to do, to all of them, and every day of the year, it is impossible considering the kind budget we operate on, it is limited. The money we are given does not cover all what we have to do, but we try our best to work with what the government gives us. We know that if the learners don't copy notes they can't learn, but what can we do? Our hands are tied.

In an effort to amend this situation, the school attempted to change the attitude of parents by informing them of the advantages of positively engaging, and actively participating in the education of their children, by motivating and encouraging their children as well as providing them with writing materials. It was concurred that any achievement in this direction, no matter how small, had the potential to make a difference to the school, the learners and the parents, besides the level of performance of the learners.

From what I observed, and from reports from the teachers and the principal, those learners who did not have basic study materials tended to develop negative mind-sets towards learning. This in turn contributed to irregular attendance; those learners who did not have basic writing materials preferred to stay away from school, because they considered going to school without these as a waste of time, since they were unable to copy notes, or write a test. This dampened their morale, and as such demotivated them in the classroom and at times caused scenes that made classroom management a frustrating and exhausting experience for most teachers.

4.6.2.4 Classroom management

Classroom management impaired learner ability to learn and to pass in many ways. This was particularly influenced by the amount of lesson time, usually 30 minutes, and how teachers managed the lessons, and classroom scenarios that had become endemic.

The nature of timetabling at the school influenced the teaching and learning process, with the bulk of Grade 7 lessons being 30 minutes long and the same subjects duplicated many times a week. This led to indiscipline in the classrooms, making classroom management and effective teaching challenging for most teachers. Teaching time was often used to resolve classroom discipline, and those teachers who ignored the development and continuance of certain chaotic scenarios, and decided to continue the teaching and learning process under such conditions, achieved very little.

As at the other two schools, I observed teachers being unable to take proper control of their frequently chaotic classrooms. Learners often had reason to go wild, especially when teachers were absent, and there was no one to supervise, and/or monitor them; this situation in turn made it very difficult for the next teacher to bring these learners under control. From all indications, less than half of the lessons planned for the day were usually completed under these circumstances, as teachers used the better part of their teaching time attempting to resolve and maintain calm, and making the classroom conducive to teaching and learning. Some teachers decided to carry on teaching irrespective of how many learners actually followed, or understood what was being taught, rather than wasting the limited time allocated for the lesson period to bring the class under control. Although this was to ensure that at least something was done during that limited time, the end result was to further deepen learner unfreedoms, because those learners who were serious about learning could not follow the teacher due to the noise levels in the classroom.

Furthermore, the unprofessional way in which most teachers handled classroom scenarios encouraged rather than discouraged learners to vent their frustrations in different ways, making classrooms more chaotic. Some teachers unprofessionally wasted valuable teaching and learning time on trivial issues, rather than focusing on the actual business of the day, and ended up creating more problems than solving them. This was borne out by an incident when a learner refused to obey the teacher's instructions to go out of the classroom for disrupting the lesson. Since the teacher was not really interested in why the learner was moving around during the lesson the incident turned ugly when the teacher attempted to physically force the learner out of the classroom. A brawl ensued and the entire classroom went into hysterical mode, with other learners shouting and cheering in appreciation of the on-going scenario and in the end the rest of the lesson was lost. The inability of the teacher to restore calm in the

classroom had the effect of further impeding learner freedoms, especially for those learners who were interested in learning.

The crux of the problem, as I saw it, was that this particular teacher never bothered to find out why the learner had moved to another bench in the first place, before pushing her out of the classroom; this seemed to be the route followed by many other teachers at the school. The way in which both the confrontation and the lesson ended was a clear indication that such situations were common, and likely to continue into the future during the lessons of this teacher, as well as, those of other teachers, because neither the teacher nor the learners learned any kind of lesson from this. After the class, the teacher in question blamed the learners' home background rather than the learner or the way in which the teacher had dealt with the confrontation:

Despite what the learner did, the act should not be seen as a reflection of bad behaviour on the part of the learner, but as an issue that links to their background. Parents do not teach learners manners at home to be polite. They come to school ready to exercise the bad vibes from home. They make it very difficult for us to concentrate on the lesson. But I cannot blame them, it is not their fault.

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According to the teachers, the only way to positively intervene to reduce learner indiscipline was for the parents to be committed to reducing the problem in the home. The teachers seemed not to see the problem as having anything to do with them, although clearly chaotic and disruptive classroom scenarios were exacerbated by the lack of professionalism and classroom management skills of most teachers, together with the will to exert any kind of control.

The limited time allocated per lesson, the lack of classroom management skills by most teachers, the lack of teacher professionalism, low self-esteem of teachers due to frustrations and feelings of powerlessness, and the careless attitude shown by most teachers contributed to chaotic scenarios that negatively affected the teaching and learning process. Learners took advantage of these conditions to perpetuate acts of indiscipline that unfortunately negatively affected the way they learned and performed. In this context, in addition to the various factors

already mentioned, the principal blamed teacher inability to properly plan their lessons as another major cause of chaotic scenes in the classrooms.

4.6.2.5 Lesson planning

As with the other two schools, general lack of effective lesson planning meant that teachers were not able to utilize the limited teaching and learning time constructively or productively. This was exacerbated by the fact that most teachers either arrived late for the lesson, or if they were present in class, failed to achieve anything of benefit to the learners. Some teachers quietly marked assignments that they had set the previous day during most of the current lesson, while learners proceeded to go wild, because they were left unassisted, unstimulated, and without any tasks to keep them busy, clearly indicating that no proper lesson had been planned for the day. Learners were left to make a noise, walk around the classroom at will, and play all kinds of games to entertain themselves, while waiting for the teacher to complete her marking. It was therefore not surprising that such teachers often struggled to maintain order after the completion of the marking process. Clearly for these teachers, as well as, the school authorities, the amount of time invested in the actual teaching and learning process was not a priority, as often less than 50% of the lesson period was being used for the intended purpose.



This existence of such gaps was neither new, nor unfamiliar. Reactions and comments made, during focus group interviews showed that the teachers and the principal were aware of the negative consequences the lack lesson planning had on learners, but did not take any positive steps to address these. Since teachers were not being monitored they felt free to do things their own way, and did not seem to see anything wrong with going into the classroom without a lesson plan, thus further deepening learner unfreedoms. Teacher C4 described this situation:

We don't do lesson plans here. We don't just do it here. Teachers don't report to anybody as far lesson planning is concern. They just go to class every time, and do what they think is appropriate. We like it that way, not too much pressure.

Although this lack of monitoring suited teachers very well, because they considered not being monitored and supervised as a reduction in administrative duties, they did not appear to see that this practice worked to the detriment of those learners who had an interest in learning but were hindered from doing so by such practices.

The teachers agreed that the practice of not having lesson plans gave everyone a free rein, irrespective of the impact it had on learner outcomes. Teacher C2 was aware of the implications for quality teaching and for learning of the absence of monitoring but justified the practice:

Because we do not give our lesson plans to be checked by the HoD, it allows us to have a free rein in our own classrooms. It also gives the HoD an opportunity to concentrate on his own duty of teaching and administration, while we the teachers also concentrate on ours. We are aware that this is a bad practice though, but we merely take advantage of the system to avoid an over involvement in administrative duties that accompany lesson planning, because it will take away much of our precious time. We prefer it this way, but it is left for us teachers to do the right thing when in the classrooms.

Teacher C1 was also concerned about the negative implications of the lack of lesson planning and a culture of laissez faire for learners noted:

Although the practice not to produce, and present lesson plans means less administrative work for the teachers, it is a problem, because we all need to be accountable to someone, but at this moment I just do my own things, which is not necessarily a good approach. Everybody at the moment just do what they want to do. They may or may not be in class, or could just sit in class doing their own things, while learners are there doing their own things. But if the whole planning of everything is in place, automatically things will be much smoother, I think so. The lesson plan will also oblige us to do more.

Seen through the lens of the CA, the lack of lesson planning was disastrous, for both learners and teachers at the school, especially if one takes individual capabilities and variances of human beings into account. Two teachers with the same capabilities, and goals, both teaching the same subjects in similar classrooms, may end up with different outcomes, since different strategies, and tactics are likely to be employed by each teacher, hence the need for the streamlining and monitoring of activities in the interests of consistency.

The principal acknowledged that the lack of lesson planning seriously impacted on the teaching and learning process, and consequently on learner performance. In the principal's view it was the prerogative and responsibility of the HoD to monitor and supervise the planning and implementation of lesson plans in the classroom, in essence exonerating the principal from responsibility for the lesson planning fiasco at the school. All indications were that principal C1 was not in touch or involved with the overall process at any stage, thus not playing the role the principal should be playing, and therefore unaware of the situation and its implications for the learners. However, in an attempt to set the record straight regarding the lesson planning debacle at school C, principal C1 admitted a certain laxity in the system of monitoring lesson plans at the school and indicated his intention to look into it:

I think also as a school we need to be serious, because normally we say teachers need to hand in their lesson plans to the HoD every week, in fact before the week of the lesson. It is being done, but again there is a laxity in that the teachers don't do it, and they go to class on several occasions without a lesson plan, why the HoD did not check on that is another problem we have to look into.

The total laxity of the approach to lesson planning and monitoring at the school was contrary to what was happening in the other two schools, especially in school A, where the principal participated in the monitoring and evaluation of lesson planning, although only after the lesson, thus questioning the actual beneficial impact of such efforts on the teaching and learning process. In the view of principal C1, without a lesson plan, teachers were bound to go to the classroom unprepared, and teach what they felt comfortable to teach for that day. Clearly the lack of lesson planning contributed to the failure of teachers to complete the syllabus at the school, further impairing learner ability to learn and perform.

It was something of a surprise to learn that principal C1 made it clear that lesson planning had been singled out on several occasions as a contributory factor to learner underperformance at the school by previous researchers, but never taken seriously by the school authorities. Principal C1 recounted that this observation had been made by a previous researcher at the school, but had not been followed up, and that this had resulted in a lack of consistency in what was being taught across grades:

There was also a lady here in the past, who raised the issue of lesson plans, but now in terms of what is done in class A is not the same with what is done in class B, because if both of them are teaching Mathematics, say for Grade 7A, 7B, & 7C, there needs to be some consistency in both the content and speed. But this does not seem to happen in our school, maybe because there is no appropriate planning. Maybe we need to take that seriously now that you have also raised the topic again to see how we can make a difference.

Although the reasons for ignoring previous calls to take lesson planning seriously were not clearly outlined by the principal or teachers, the impacts of such oversights on learner freedoms to achieve were obvious. There was clearly an inconsistency in terms of pace of teaching, and in terms of the content taught amongst teachers teaching the same subjects and classes due to the lack of planning. Principal C1 suggested that teachers teaching the same grades ought to meet regularly to discuss challenges, gaps, and possible solutions to ensuring improved learner performance at the school. Clearly, how lessons were planned needed to be prioritized in order to improve learner performance.

The method of teaching adopted by many teachers clearly indicated an absence of pre-planning, resulting in the loss, or wastage, of valuable teaching and learning time: teaching was often unorganized, and haphazardly carried out. Some teachers were observed struggling to summarize notes from text books, while simultaneously copying them on the board for the learners, a procedure that was not only unproductive, but also time consuming. Without adequate monitoring to ensure that lessons were properly planned, teachers had free rein in the classrooms, further deepening learner unfreedoms.

The lack of lesson planning, compounded by the limited amount of time provided on the timetable per lesson, the frequent late arrival in class of teachers, the variation in and lack of consistency of teaching strategies, and the lack of monitoring and supervision limited the amount and quality of content covered during each lesson. As a result of these factors, learner capabilities were being seriously limited, as teachers did different things at different times, and in most cases never completed the syllabus. The lack of will to change this on the part of teachers and the principal further deepened learner unfreedoms.

4.6.2.6 Nonchalant attitude of teachers

Irrespective of the kinds of resources in place, one could assume that teachers, based on their training and qualifications, possessed the necessary capabilities to make or break the young minds in their care. Therefore, whatever teachers did or failed to do had the potential to either negatively or positively influence learner attitude and behaviour, and consequently the way they learned and performed in the classroom and in external examinations. As was described in the previous section it was observed that most of the teachers who taught Grade 7 did not care what learners did or did not do while in their classrooms. They allowed learners to do their own thing, and in their own time, and pace during lessons. Teachers were either not present in the classroom, were late, or were there because they were obliged to be in the class, but were not doing what was expected of them at every given time, thus further exacerbating learner freedoms.

Teacher absenteeism was rife at the school, and, although well known to be by the administration, nothing was being done about it. The principal agreed that it was necessary to check on teachers who were either not in school, or who were in the classroom but not doing what was expected of them, but at the same time they should be treated as adults and, as principal, he had other duties and responsibilities:

Teachers are not small children, that should be followed every step of the way. But surprisingly, they want to be chased around, and someone needs to chase them all the time in and out of class. The problem is that, as a principal I don't have to be up and down the whole day, each and every period to check if each and every teacher is in class, and indeed actually doing what she/he is supposed to be doing at that time. I also have other responsibilities as a principal. Teachers need to be responsible, not behaving like little children.

In the view of principal C1, teachers should be considered to be sufficiently mature to know and do the right without constant supervision and monitoring, an assumption, or excuse on his part that unfortunately impacted negatively on learner performance. The teachers themselves were aware that they were using the lack of monitoring and supervision to their own advantage. Some teachers at times stayed away from school without prior notice, creating unmanageable situations in the classrooms. As a result, learners in classes without

teachers could be heard making a continuous and unchecked noise, disrupting teaching and learning in other classes where teachers were present, and busy teaching.

From the principal's perspective many teachers were unable to complete the syllabus due to numerous absences, and failure to fulfil their duties when at school. Teacher absenteeism was rife, as was evident from the staff register, some teachers being more conspicuously absent than others, often without prior or any form of notification.

Here at our school, another issue that causes this [poor performance] is that teachers are not always at school; absenteeism is rife among teachers. If you look at the teachers' register there are several days that teachers are not in school. Many hours are lost and teachers end up not completing the syllabus. The learners under these circumstances cannot stand a chance to compete with learners from other schools.

Principal C1 indicated that it was difficult to keep the learners under control when teachers were absent, due to the lack of manpower. It was apparently easier to keep things under control when teachers informed the authorities of their intention to stay away from school, so that contingency measures could be put place to avoid rowdiness in classrooms and corridors, and to avoid disturbing teaching and learning in other classes. Principal C1 also mentioned the failure of absentee teachers to make up lost teaching time:

When the school is aware that a teacher will be absent, a parent is brought in as a substitute teacher for that period, not to teach though, but to help maintain discipline in the classroom, so as to avoid unnecessary movements in and out of the classroom disturbing other classes with lessons in progress. When a teacher is absent and the school authorities are not informed, the learners are the ones to suffer, because the same teachers will not take the initiative to find ways and means to make up for lost teaching and learning time by offering extra classes. The syllabus is never completed. This explains why learners always struggle.

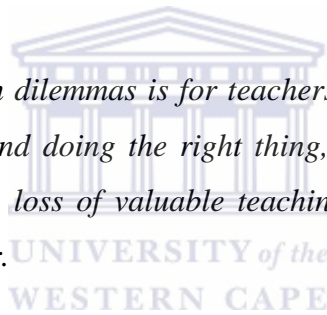
The question of whether such dilemmas could be resolved through extra classes was debatable, as teachers claimed that initiatives taken in the past to organize extra classes, and

other similar programmes in the community to help learners, never materialized. Teacher C2 described the failure of one such initiative:

We have another programme, it's new but currently running with the help of community members, whereby all the children must go after school every day, so that these people can help them. We provide work and they help them. But we identified that many of the learners don't go to them for help, they don't understand the need for such programmes. The need is there, but they don't like to get that help, what can we do?

The principal also acknowledged the lack of a learning culture in the community as a whole as one of the reasons why convincing learners who already struggled to attend normal lessons to attend after school lessons was difficult, which made it all the more important for teachers to be in class at the right time:

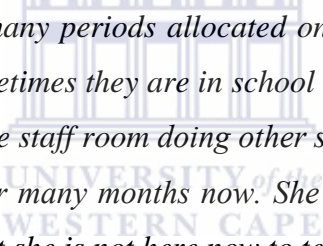
The only way to avoid such dilemmas is for teachers to make sure that they are present in class, on time and doing the right thing, because many of them are usually late, leading to the loss of valuable teaching and learning time, which they can hardly make up for.



The only thing that seemed of any concern to the teachers was their presence in class, and not what they did to benefit their learners, because they usually came in late and did what they pleased, rather than what was of value to their learners' education. This was evident in one of the classes I observed, when a teacher who came in late, used some authority to bring the class under control in a relatively short time, but lost their attention when his mobile phone rang. This teacher unprofessionally answered the call in front of the learners for about five minutes, and later continued with the call outside the classroom for about another five minutes. Although teaching and learning time was being misused, the learners were happy to have ample time and space to continue playing different kinds of games. It could be deduced that the teacher's call was a social call, which wasted more than ten minutes of vital teaching and learning time, especially for a teacher who had arrived late to a 30 minutes lesson. After the call, the teacher again used a few minutes to bring the class under control. It was clear that not even half of the actual teaching and learning time was used productively. The distractions had disconnected the learners from the lesson, and when some teaching finally

took place, their concentration levels were clearly very low. In this situation freedom to learn was gravely curtailed, not by the lack of resources or motivation to learn, or indiscipline on the part of the learners, but due to the nonchalant attitude displayed by one of many teachers who operated in this way.

Furthermore, it appeared that some teachers had abandoned teaching some subjects for months, even though they were physically present in school teaching other subjects, in the same classes. It was difficult to establish their motives for doing this, not to mention the impact on the learners' progress and ability to pass the end of year examinations. Although the timetable was displayed on the walls of the classrooms, with periods allocated to every space on this timetable, there were always many free periods, which teachers seemed unable to explain satisfactorily. Learners themselves could not offer an explanation as to why these teachers were teaching some subjects and abandoning others. A learner described this baffling situation:



Although we always have many periods allocated on the timetable; the teachers are not always present, sometimes they are in school teaching other subjects even with us. They are there in the staff room doing other stuff. We don't know why she didn't teach us life skills for many months now. She was here in the morning to teach us another subject, but she is not here now to teach us life skills.

However, those teachers who were present in class exhibited a very passive attitude, all part of a laissez-faire regime that was common at the school, specifically in the Grade 7 classrooms. Learners, for example, slept in class whenever they felt like it, and played games without being noticed and/or cautioned by the teachers; the teachers failed to notice how absent minded and unfocused many of the learners were during their lessons. It was difficult to determine whether the teachers were merely turning a blind eye to negative learner attitudes in the classrooms, or whether that they were in fact oblivious to such happenings.

Also conspicuous was that during lessons teachers seldom moved around the classroom to see what learners were doing or to assist them, despite the spacious nature of the classrooms at this school compared to the other two schools in this study. There was a tendency for teachers to spend the entire lesson time in front of the classroom, without making an attempt to move around to identify learners who had learning problems or were disturbing the lesson.

As a result, learners with learning disabilities or who were without stationery material, remained unnoticed and unidentified and certain scenarios in the classroom could not be identified and addressed. Teachers were always unable to handle scenarios professionally, because they allowed them to escalate out of proportion and to negatively affect the teaching and learning process. Whenever things got out of hand the teachers responded by expelling learners from the lesson, without any attempt to understand the issues involved.

It was clear that in many cases learners' expulsion was often uncalled for, and in some cases they were allowed to stay out of the classroom for the rest of that lesson. In one particular bizarre incident, a learner who needed a pen from a friend to copy notes was instantly sent out of the classroom by the teacher without any attempt to understand the circumstances. Although the learner did not ask permission from the teacher to borrow a pen from a friend, all attempts by the learner to explain herself to the teacher failed. The teacher simply said, "You talk you go out, end of story". The learner while walking out of the classroom spoke to the teacher using vulgar language out of frustration, because the teacher refused to hear her own side of the story. This created an awkward situation that was exploited by other learners who cheered and shouted in admiration of her courage, further disrupting the teaching and learning process. The learner's unfreedoms were further limited as an effort to acquire a pen to copy notes was frustrated by the uncaring, inconsistent and unprofessional behaviour of a teacher who was expected to assist learners to achieve their goals.

However, some teachers criticized this as unreasonable on the part of the teacher, besides being destructive to the learner's abilities, due to the direct implications it had for her freedom to learn. They considered that this teacher had denied the learner an opportunity to learn and improve her performance. Teacher C1 commented on this kind of casual, inconsistent, uncaring and harsh attitude towards learners, and how destructive it can be:

Teacher attitude contributes to how learners react towards education, learn and perform. We as teachers must do exactly that, teach, we must interact with our learners, we must be there for them, and we must listen to them. This is because the teacher needs to help in motivating the learners to like to learn. Definitely teachers can make or break a child, so if your approach is not right, if you don't teach rightly; if you just go to write on the board that is not teaching. You need to know their problems, because they are children, and may behave otherwise some

times. You don't need to be very harsh on them, but you need to listen to their problems, and solve them in a way that will make them happy, and motivated to learn. You are there as a teacher to nurture them, not a harsh disciplinarian, and we know we cannot just send a child out of the classroom just like that without understanding what is happening.

It was also clear that teachers did not realize or care that many learners in their classrooms were not actively engaged in classroom activities like reading their workbooks, and copying notes from the board during their lessons for various reasons, including not having a pen or pencil. This apparently uncaring attitude on the part of these teachers, suggested that they were without care for their learners, or were unaware that many learners were only physically present in class, rather than actively engaged or doing anything constructive in terms of learning for the entire lesson. Learners repeated these negative behaviours and activities in different lessons taught by different teachers, taking advantage of the laissez-faire attitude of the teachers, and thus, in term of the CA, further limiting their own capabilities and freedoms to achieve.

Due to such frequent incidents of teacher unprofessionalism and their general laissez-faire attitude, learners eventually became arrogant and resistant towards any efforts to assist them. Learners under these circumstances did not see any reason to learn, nor to allow the serious learners to do so. It was clear that many learners did not to take their school work seriously, thus increasing the gap between what they learned and what was actually expected of them, and leading to underperformance. These circumstances were aggravated by the method of teaching and evaluation/assessment practised at the school.

4.6.2.7 Method of teaching and evaluation

The kind of selective teaching and evaluation practised at the school could not be said to prepare learners to think or reason for themselves. The learners were closely directed on what to do and memorise, often limiting their abilities to be creative and competitive, especially with learners from other schools. They were often given questions to study and memorise for class tests, rather than topics to read and reflect on, thereby limiting their abilities to think freely, creatively, and critically on their own. It was therefore difficult to determine their individual potential because they were in fact being guided to be passive rote learners, and were being rewarded for correctness rather than for originality.

Due to the common practice at the school of selective and/or sporadic teaching, the syllabus for many subjects was seldom completed, further depriving the learners of capabilities to achieve and to compete with learners from other schools. The principal acknowledged that, although the learners performed averagely in internal tests and examinations, results obtained were questionable, particularly those in external examinations, due to unprofessional teacher practices that, in terms of the CA, contributed to deepen learner unfreedoms:

Many teachers only set tests and examinations based on material covered, and consequently the standard of their learners, with an intention to see them do well within the classroom, while ignoring the bigger picture that includes the syllabus that needs to be completed, and the knowledge learners are expected to acquire in each grade and phase. When departmental examinations are being set, the broader picture is being considered, and our learners often struggle, because of the fact that the syllabus is hardly completed, and the poor standards that are being encouraged by the teachers. This makes our learners to lag behind all the time, when compared with learners from schools where the teachers are serious and complete the syllabus on time. If the teachers did not finish the syllabus, because they took the slow lane to allow learners to understand, I will consider, but many of them are less serious doing the right thing all the time.

It was common for teachers to be taken by surprise during external examinations based on the prescribed syllabus or national curriculum, and with the assumption that all teachers had completed the syllabus; this was not always the case for poor schools. Since external examinations function as the yardstick for school performance, the school was often labelled by the national and provincial education departments as underperforming. This assessment is based narrowly on learner performance in these examinations, and ignores existing challenges and unfreedoms in poor schools. Principal C1 described this situation, seeing underperformance mainly, although not exclusively, in terms of the undemanding nature of the tests set by teachers in terms of preparing learners for external examinations:

In terms of the examinations, there is a big problem, we have picked up that teachers are not setting quality papers. As a principal, I cannot understand why, but kids perform fairly well at school, but they fail in the external examinations, making their results very poor, and the school is often labelled as

underperforming. We are working to change that perception, but it is hard based on the combination of circumstances at our disposal as a school.

However, teachers at this school viewed learner underperformance in external examinations differently from the principal, and in most cases distanced themselves from the poor results obtained by learners. Principal C1 described the nature of the limitations of the preparation of learners for external examinations:

The teachers complain and mourn that they are not told what is going to be included in the examination papers. This is because, they normally give their kids the 'scope' to study for class test and examinations, but for the external examinations they are not given any clues; rather the examinations are set from the entire syllabus. Since they are selective in their teaching, the learners always find it difficult in these examinations because they meet new things that were never taught in class.

The principal emphasized that, apart from the quantity of material covered by the teachers during the year, the nature of training in examination technique learners received contributed to the kind of results obtained in external tests and examinations. There was also the language question. The external examinations for content subjects are set in English or in Afrikaans, neither of which are the mother tongue of the learners. During internal tests and examinations the teachers were readily available to explain to the kids certain questions they did not understand, both in English and in their mother tongue for clarity purposes, a practice that was never available during external tests and examinations. This practice of assisting learners was generally regarded as necessary in the school based on the implementation of code switching, although, as Principal C1 explained, it could easily be seen as hindering learners from developing their independence in terms of confronting the realities of external examinations in particular, and learning in general:

The teachers assist them to interpret the questions especially in their mother tongue, if need be during class tests and examinations, to ensure proper understanding. During external examinations the learners are expected and required to be independent and do things for themselves by themselves, an approach that is contrary to the method of spoon feeding obtained at the school,

and especially code switching. It is incorrectly assumed at the level of the external examinations that learners in all schools received the same quality of training in preparation for such tests and examinations. The examiners need to know how well the learners were trained at the different schools, and efforts put in by the teachers. That is the main problem that makes our own learners to perform very poorly in these examinations.

Thus, the method of teaching and evaluation practised at the school created a huge gap between what and how learners were taught, and what they were expected to know at the end of the school year, further limiting learner capabilities in several ways. Learners were deprived of the opportunity to learn and think critically on their own, due to the constant spoon feeding approach used by teachers which was handicapping them in competitive examinations. Teachers failed to give learners the knowledge and training required to perform successfully in external examinations, thus ultimately creating numerous unfreedoms. Apart from the school level factors, and existing classroom dynamics, environmental factors also played a role in limiting learner freedoms to achieve.

4.6.3 Environmental factors

The SES in this community severely influenced learner abilities to perform. The existing capabilities poverty in this community translated into how parents viewed, reacted to, and supported, or did not support, the education of their children (see Section 4.3).

4.6.3.1 Parental involvement

It was purported that learner indiscipline, lack of motivation to learn, and consequently poor performance at the school escalated, because the parents themselves were not sufficiently supportive either of their children, or of the school in educational matters. The general laxity and disinterest exhibited by parents exacerbated the challenges faced by learners at the school, which often remained unresolved, resulting in poor performance. Attempts made by the principal and staff to get through to the parents via parent meetings to explain problems contributing to learner underperformance, in particular irregular attendance and lack of motivation to learn, were often ignored. Those parents who made attempts to attend these meetings ended up not taking such advice and efforts seriously. Teacher C2 described the

difficulty of convincing parents to attend to their children's schooling and to support teachers in their attempt to teach effectively:

Yes, we try with the parent meetings, we talk to them about the attitude of learners in the classroom and the fact that many of them do not come to school every day. We also ask them to please help us to see that the homework is done, but most of them either do not come, saying that they are working, or simply do not take our suggestions seriously. We at the end remain with the same kind of issues day in, day out. What I also think will play a very big role is if we can get the parents to let them understand the problems we face here in the school every day with their children, if we can educate them to a certain point, just to understand that they finish can further assist with their homework at home.

The voice of teacher C2 clearly indicates that resources alone were not enough to improve learner performance at the school, as other exigencies contributed to deepening learner unfreedoms, further putting their performance at risk. Teacher C4 described her attempts to convince parents of the importance of their children's education:

For me, I am trying my best to talk about the need to educate the children to the parents. We talk about the goals in life, and also put emphasis on the fact that it's not just going to happen; they must work towards it by helping to educate the children as a way of giving them a future. I tell them that education is the only way out for them through their children, but not all the parents take such small talk seriously, maybe because they themselves do not really understand the importance of education.

Teacher C4 went to describe how, despite the efforts being made by the teachers to persuade parents to take an active role in the education of their children by partnering or collaborating with the school authorities, most often seemed to be unproductive:

Yes, we try with the parent meeting, we talk to them, and we ask them to please help us to see that the homework is done, but most of them seem not to know the importance of educating their children. Since they also complain that they must work, the school makes an effort to provide parents with cover letters to prove

that they were delayed by the school to resolve issues concerning their children, but most parents still complain that they cannot be available because, they have to work. This proves to us that they are not serious.

Due to parents' non-cooperation, teachers often sent learners out of the classroom, excluding them from the teaching programme as a last resort, if their parents could not be brought in to resolve a crisis. Although this strategy proved successful sometimes since it did force some parents to come to the school once they were aware their child had been sent out of class, it had a down side: when learners were sent out of class they missed out on lessons that were never repeated, irrespective of how many days they stayed out of class, a measure which seriously limited learner freedoms to learn and to pass.

It was clear that the lack of support from the parents distorted and undermined teachers' efforts to assist the learners in many ways, with disastrous consequences for their learning. Unresolved crises in the classroom often degenerated into other negative situations that contributed to impeding learner abilities to learn and perform.

4.7 Conclusion

The chapter focused on answering the question: What role do resources play in influencing learner performance in Q-1 primary schools? It also interrogated how the CA enhances our understanding of performance and underperformance in poor schooling communities. It is evident from the data that, in spite of the fact that the South Africa government instituted policies aimed at improving learner access to education by way of resource reallocation to needy schooling communities, the role played by such resources in improving learner performance has generated different strands of debate, due to variances in the nature of performances across regions and communities. The inability to convert existing resources into functionings has in fact been exacerbated by existing policies such as that concerning learner progression, as described and discussed in chapter 5.

CHAPTER 5: COHORT ANALYSIS

5.1 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to present findings on the factors, and circumstances that influenced the performance of the cohort of learners under investigation in the sample of the three Q-1 primary schools. It also aims to determine the results a cohort analysis yields when applied in the evaluation of the performance of learners in Q-1 primary schools looking at attendance, retention, and pass rates, as well as progression. It aims to illuminate the freedoms and unfreedoms experienced by learners in poor schooling communities in their quest to attain certain functionings. The study investigated a particular group of learners that enrolled in the three schools in Grade R in 2006, and who were traced up to Grade 7 in 2012 in order to understand the variety of reasons for underperformance, and the variation in learner performance, in the schools under investigation. As was mentioned in Chapter 4 (Section 4.3), this kind of analysis was considered to be potentially illuminating, given that the study involved three schools located in the same neighbourhood, but found to exhibit widely different variations in performance levels across schools, and for various reasons (see Chapter 4). In theory the progression of learners in a school should reflect these learners' academic competencies. This chapter sets out to address the research aim of the study that deals with determining the kind of results a cohort analysis would yield when applied in the evaluation of the performance of learners in Q-1 schools located in the same geographical area, in terms of progression, attendance, retention and pass rates (see Chapter 1, Section 1.4). All things being equal, the internal efficacy of the school, the usefulness and extent of use by teachers and learners of available resources, the role, competency and attitudes of teachers, and the eagerness of the learners at that school to learn, can in theory be reflected by the attendance, and pass rates, and the cohort progression of learners. This is premised on the assumption that when learners progress to the next grade they have acquired a certain level of competence and are therefore able and ready to cope with the tasks required in the new grade (Department of Basic Education, 2012).

However, the Department of Basic Education (DBE) Progression Policy reveals that the progression of learners in the schools in question is determined more by a policy that purports to focus predominantly on the dignity of learners, rather than on their actual abilities to progress academically, and to meet the requirements of systemic tests and external

examinations. The document defines ‘progression’ in terms of learners being given ‘the necessary support in order to achieve an appropriate level of competence as contemplated in sub regulation (1) in order to progress to the next grade’, while not specifying the nature or extent of this ‘necessary support’ (DBE), (2012:xi). According to the DBE’s Progression Policy:

“A learner who is not ready to perform at the expected level and who has been retained in the first phase for four (4) years or more, and who is likely to be retained again in the second phase for four (4) years or more should receive the necessary support in order to progress to the next grade” (DBE, 2012: 9).

Since the policy allows learners to ‘progress’ to the next grade for reasons other than academic (Hartley, 2006), many learners fail to achieve certain functionings, creating unfreedoms in the later grades for themselves, and for other learners who deserved and qualified for promotion on academic merit, as well as for the teachers. I argue that this situation clearly indicates the gap between policy and implementation on the part of the teachers that failed to provide the ‘necessary support’, resulting in learners being less motivated to learn.

Obtaining learner schedules to provide the necessary information to measure learner academic capabilities based on attendance, retention, pass rates, and progression from 2006 to 2012 was problematic, making it difficult to investigate and come to accurate conclusions regarding the actual exigencies at the schools relating to learner performance, and in relation to these variables. In some instances results were available, but often incomplete. For example, in one of the schools, Grade 3A & B schedules were available, but 3C’s was unavailable, making it difficult to construct a comprehensive profile of the learners in that grade, or to gather sufficient information on the cohort of learners under investigation. In other instances, pages were missing from available schedules, thus presenting an incomplete list of learners for that specific grade. As a result, only records for school A could be used with any validity to measure the influence of attendance, retention, pass rate, and progression on learner performance for some of the grades, as illustrated in the later sections of this chapter. However, data from interviews were used to update, complete and complement information for the schools involved in the study, especially schools B and C, where learner

schedules were patchy and unevenly available in terms of making the results of the investigation robust.

School A

5.2 Introduction

This section looks at the progression of learners in School A, taking into consideration learner progression, as well as attendance, and pass rates, and how policies in place, and/or being implemented by the school, influenced these and in turn influenced learner performance. The section looks at the Progression Policy, and its impact on learner attitudes and experiences, and on the teaching and learning process.

5.2.1 Dynamics of the Progression Policy

The Progression Policy in place was based on a coding system as illustrated in Table 4. Data obtained reveal that the coding system embraced by the existing Progression Policy generates a lot of controversy in terms of implementation by teachers and the principal, which is aggravated by existing conditions in poor schools, such as those being investigated in this study, in turn creating unfreedoms for the learners.

The policy specifies that learners should be progressed on account of their age cohort, and base on the number of times they might have repeated a grade or spent an extra year in a phase, rather than strictly on academic capabilities (Hartley, 2006). This approach generates many unanswered questions, in terms of providing the ‘necessary support’ especially in poor schooling communities that grapple with numerous challenges on a daily basis. The policy in principle allows learners to progress to the next grade without having acquired certain academic competencies or having covered the syllabus content, thus exposing them to ever new, unknown and insurmountable challenges and complexities in the later grades, in turn further incrementally reducing their abilities to perform adequately. It was revealed that the school strictly follows the department’s Progression Policy that requires learners to progress with their age-cohort, irrespective of their actual academic competencies. It was clear that the school had not arranged a ‘catch-up’ programme to render the ‘necessary support’ specified

by the policy. This lack of preparedness on the part of many of the learners for the next grade at this and the other two schools is obviously one of the main reasons for the poor results at the school. While the teachers and the principal were all aware of this, they simply indicated that they were powerless to override the system, which clearly indicates the lack of certain capabilities on their part to implement the policy without seriously disadvantaging 'progressed' learners. According to the school, the DBE was determined to enforce this policy on the grounds that learners cannot be retained for another whole year in a phase, even if they need more time to achieve a particular learning outcome. Thus, such learners were being promoted to the next grade while still needing assistance in the particular learning area(s) they struggled with (Department of Basic Education, 2012). Principal A1 commented on the unsoundness of this policy:

The existing coding system indicates that, if a learner is getting a series of 2s and 1s (see Table 4), which is considered an elementary achievement, it is not considered so good according to the school, but the policy of the DoE allows the learners to pass, to say it is a pass, and depending on how many 2s, 3s and 4s they have. The learner can pass, for instance, the learner must pass languages and other subjects as well, getting even only 2s. So we say they are not performing very well according to the school, but they do perform well based on that kind of criteria set by the DoE. When they get to the next grade they are not always performing any better.

Learners were therefore being promoted, either because they were too old for the present grade, having failed the phase at least once, or were at least able to demonstrate certain minimal competencies, with no clear specification of where assistance was needed and how it could be rendered. According to teacher A3, minimal competencies referred to comparatively below average performance in the eyes of the teachers, although they were aware of the actual academic competencies and challenges faced by the learners they themselves were in theory teaching, and interacting with on a daily basis. Thus it appeared that, in essence, the policy enabled learners to accumulate additional unfreedoms as they were artificially progressed over the years for reasons other than being in possession of the required academic competencies.

Learners with limited academic competencies, or with competencies inadequate to the challenges of the next grade, and not being promoted on academic merit, created numerous unfreedoms, not only for them, but also for other learners in that grade who were promoted based on actual academic proficiencies. These learners being unable to survive the challenges of the higher grade meant that more time was required by the teachers to nurture and support them to the detriment of other learners who had progressed based on genuine criteria, and who were expecting to acquire new knowledge and competencies. Since the way in which the policy was to be implemented was to date not clear, those teachers who cared about the plight of these needy learners adopted a variety of strategies to assist them. Although this support and the amount of time spent on it, was recommended by the principal as a 'necessary evil', in terms of complying with the policy, it in fact resulted in failure to complete the syllabus. In the end, many learners failed both to perform adequately and to pass, not only because of the kind of teachers and resources in the school, but because they lacked the freedoms to enable them to cope, particularly due to deficiencies they carried with them from the previous grades. Learners who were legitimately promoted often failed because they were unfairly denied the opportunity or space to acquire adequate content knowledge in the new grade, as time which should have been spent on covering the syllabus was wasted repeating the content of the previous grade with the aim of bringing the weak learners promoted due to the Progression Policy up to speed, resulting in uncompleted syllabuses. Due to the existing coding system, learners who obtained less than 40% for almost all of their subjects, often obtaining a series of 2s and 1s, were promoted on the basis that they would receive extra support in the later grades (see Tables 4 and 5).

This often led to instances where teachers grappled with the dilemma of assisting needy ('artificially promoted') learners with the content knowledge of the previous grades, while neglecting the need to complete the syllabus of the current grade. The teachers unanimously agreed that this was one of their nightmares that prevented them from completing their syllabuses, and directly contributed to poor learner performance, particularly in external evaluations, such as the systemic examinations, because even the bright, eager to learn learners were deprived of certain freedoms, due to their being held back by the 'artificially promoted' learners, and not being able to complete the syllabus. Although the teachers were aware of the implications of the Progression Policy on the teaching and learning process, and the rupturing effects it had on learner experiences and achievements, they concurred that they were powerless due to policy specifications. However, the teachers failed to consider their

role in being able to assist the learners with the necessary support needed for a smooth transition and for a coping process in the new grade.

Table 4 National Coding System Grades 4-6: Progression Requirements for Grades 4-6, Obtained from the school progression schedule for 2011

Rating Code	Percentage	Description of competence
4	70-100	Excellent
3	50-69	Satisfactory achievement
2	35-49	Partial achievement
1	1-34	Not achieved

Table 5 National Coding System Grades 7-8: Progression Requirements for Grades 7-8, Obtained from the school progression schedule for 2011

Rating Code	%	Description of competence
7	80-100	Outstanding achievement
6	70-79	Meritorious achievement
5	60-69	Substantial achievement
4	50-59	Adequate achievement
3	40-49	Moderate achievement
2	30-39	Elementary achievement
1	0-29	Not achieved

The Progression Policy being implemented at the school in line with the DBE requirements was identified by the principal and the teachers as the core reason for the bulk of the learners who were promoted from Grade 6 to Grade 7 struggling to achieve certain functionings. A large percentage of these learners hovered between rating/codes of 1 and 3, which, according to the teachers, was not encouraging, since the weighting of the codes in Grade 7 was different from that of the previous grades (see Tables 4 and 5). As has been mentioned, these learners were promoted on the assumption that they would receive the ‘necessary support’, although the exact nature of this support was not specified by the policy. Although the policy, based on its conception, had the potential to positively impact on the needs of learners, the lack of a proper structure in the domains of coordination, monitoring and evaluation,

transformed a potentially viable policy into a nightmare for poor schooling communities, as illustrated in the following section.

5.2.2 Implementation of the Progression Policy

Despite the good intentions underlying the conception of the policy, there were discrepancies in its implementation. The laxity and lack of clarity on the part of the DoE and the principals in interpreting and overseeing its implementation dampened any effort to improve learner performance, thus making the policy a liability rather than an asset in poor schooling communities.

According to principal A1, the assumption behind the policy was that each school put in place a unique, individualized learner support strategy to cater for individual learners in need. I observed that, although conceptually a clever and worthy innovation, how the idea of the learner support programme (LSP) has been perceived, embraced, and implemented by individual schools in general, and teachers in particular, has been a paramount deciding factor in determining the kind of freedoms and unfreedoms learners accumulate in an attempt to acquire the kind of education they need or desire. The principal and teachers were in agreement that, although they were compelled by the department to follow policy directives, the lack of follow up strategies made the execution of these challenging. Teacher A1 commented on the lack of concrete support and monitoring from the DBE in the process of moderation, in addition to the lack of clarity in terms of the kind of support required for learners in need of it:

Even the DoE doesn't follow up on the policy; it just allows it as it is, like now, when we last saw them looking at the schedules, it was last year for the promotion of this year, and now we saw them now for the promotion of next year, do you see that that is only happening now, you see, there is nothing concrete that is coming up. They look at the schedules to see how many learners have been promoted, not trying to know the structures that are in place to help the learners as they want them to be promoted needing assistance. They don't see to it that what they specify is followed every day in the schools, and in the classrooms. Even when teachers do not follow the policy no one looks into that. Where there is no enforcement there is no practice.

As a result most teachers tended to follow their usual daily routines in the classrooms without paying special attention to those learners who had been promoted on the basis of needing and expecting assistance in terms of the knowledge and competencies they had failed to acquire in previous grades, since, although these teachers were under strict obligation to provide this support, no one questioned or monitored their actions, thus creating numerous unfreedoms for the learners. Some teachers were in fact unaware of the imperatives of the policy, and as such ignored its existence and requirements, and often conducted their lessons as usual without taking into consideration academically disadvantaged learners who needed special support. It became clear that many teachers at the three schools, who were for diverse reasons unable to assist the needy learners in terms of the policy directives, ended up lowering standards for all learners in their class, and in the end not completing the syllabus.

However, lowering standards in the course of teaching and assessment was no guarantee of an improvement in learner levels of understanding, and in turn learner performance, because these learners were in fact being conditioned to be less competitive. Learners were instead being trapped in a cycle of underperformance, and in fact remained at the same level or retrogressed. It was thus clear that progression was not synonymous with how learners were taught, or how much they were able to understand. Principal A1 described how both the Progression Policy and the low standards set and expected by the DoE/DBE led to a downward spiral of learner performance in terms of the standards they set for themselves as well as the lowering of expectations by teachers:

The criterion adopted by the DoE sets very low standards for the learners. A learner with coding of 1s and 2s in most subjects was seen as underperforming, but was capable to be progressed to the next grade needing assistance. I think the criteria that the DoE uses for the learners to progress makes them to think that they are doing very well, thus setting a very low standard for themselves. At the end they actually achieve lower than what has been set for them by the DoE, because they are groomed not serious. That contributes to underperformance in our school, and I think in other disadvantaged schools as well. The teachers try to make sure that the learners understand, and many of the teachers lower the standards by concentrating on work that is meant for the previous grade, most of the time to make sure that those learners that are slow can at least understand something, but the other learners are disadvantaged.

Teacher A1 described the effects of lowering standards and expectations:

During the first term we are still dealing with the work from the previous grade, basics, and then add a little bit in the second term, but by the third term when we base more on the work for the current grade, we find out that the standard drops for all of them, because now we are taking them to the next level as well. When we teach, we don't teach in their level, we take them to this level and the next level, and then you find out that they drop like anything. This is because, they were not ready for that grade; you know the system allows that.

Teacher A4 echoed this concern:

What we are saying is that, because we know our learners we start with the work of the previous grade. We try to give them that confidence, a little, but you find out that those who are really weak they still can't catch up with last year's work. What can we do as teachers to change them, to make them perform well? As time goes on you end up adding the work of the real grade in which they are, and that is when you get a problem with how they understand, but we just over look it. But there is something that we are doing, we are retrogressive a little, for two consecutive terms, it's where you try to make them feel that there is something at least, but now when it comes towards the end of the second term to the third term, it's where now you start with serious business of their actual grade. It is now you find out that it varies, you see, that is when they drop, because the workload is becoming complicated and heavier for them, but it is the actual work they are here to do.

It is clear that the Progression Policy, despite its good intentions, created room for numerous unfreedoms for learners who were unable to achieve the required or expected functionings at the end of each year. Although the policy was applied in all schools, its counterproductive effects were felt more keenly in poor schooling communities where other dynamics were at play in terms of learner underperformance. This was exacerbated by the fact that learners in disadvantaged schools were often overwhelmed with a workload that was often beyond their capabilities. The learners encountered new and bigger challenges in the new grades, often exacerbated by the lack of the proper structures required by the policy for the teachers to take

care of their individual needs, and clearly indicated in their report cards (schedules) upon promotion from the previous grades. Teacher A1 expanded on the retrogressive effects of the Progression Policy:

The Progression Policy in place affects performance negatively, because I don't understand what the DoE is doing. The previous grade has got its own work load which is in a certain standard, and then now if that child cannot perform well in that standard, you take him to the upper level what do you expect? Do you expect that child to do miracles when he can't understand the previous grade? When he goes to another grade, now it's becoming heavier, so we just frustrate that child, we frustrate them, as a result. Honestly what I have noticed, and what I have just discussed with my other colleagues is that in the first term and second term you find that their results are better as you deal with work of the previous grade, but when you start the actual work for that grade, their results start to deteriorate.

The lack of standardized strategies, as well as monitoring and evaluation mechanisms on the part of the DoE, the principals, and HoDs meant that teachers were left on their own to implement the Progression Policy. According to the teachers, there were no clear cut strategies for doing this; as a result, they either ignored all of the policy prescriptions or individually tried out strategies they hoped would work. Teacher A1, for example, in 2012 tried out a self-help system, whereby he placed weak and more competent learners in groups to give them an opportunity to teach one another, with a credit value attached to group efforts to encourage team work. At the time of my observation, this teacher reported that the strategy was still in its preliminary stage and that there were possibilities to involve other teachers if it was successful.

Apart from the lack of appropriate structures to direct and implement the policy, there were no facilities readily available at the schools to support the demands that come with the implementation of the policy. Allowing learners to progress to the next grade without having acquired the required academic competence merely on the basis that they were to receive some kind of vaguely defined support in the next grade, was a practical nightmare, and an unattainable dream, especially for poor schooling communities. These deficiencies made the coping process for learners a nightmare, especially because such challenges differed among

subjects as well as individual learners. Teacher A2 described the constraints operating to prevent teachers giving learners individual attention and adequate support:

The Progression Policy is another problem that I am having with the learners, the first problem is that these things are nice on paper, and talk of that when it comes to practicality it doesn't work, because firstly the number of pupils in the classroom are too many. Within a classroom you find out that three quarters of the learners came to the present grade needing support; they need support in one learning area or the other, which is why we don't even implement that policy, since we can't do it to each and every learner. We have more than one class to take care of (A, B and C), and that amount is a big number. What we do is that we lower the levels to try to fit all of them, you know, the individualism thing is difficult. Sometimes we end up not completing the syllabus by the end of the year.

Out of a total of approximately 142 learners who were in Grade 6 in 2011, 130 of them progressed to Grade 7 and needed assistance in one or more subject area. Of these learners, 91 had partially achieved in more than 5 learning areas out of 9. Out of this number 18 of them partially achieved or did not achieve in all 9 learning areas, but were promoted to Grade 7 on the understanding that they would receive support, as shown in Table 6. The support was expected to enable them to adapt in the Grade 7 context by starting with what they had not understood in Grade 6 and below, and at the same time getting them ready for high school by teaching them the actual Grade 7 content. This meant that these 91 learners failed to obtain an average of more than 50% in any of the 9 learning areas in the four terms combined, but were promoted to Grade 7. The breakdown of learners who partially achieved in more than 5 learning areas in Grade 6 in 2011 is shown in Table 6.

Another challenge arising from the policy was the schools' laxity in following up on the implementation process. Teachers were in theory expected to provide a list of learners who they considered needing assistance, for easy identification and support. However it appeared that teachers did this at their own leisure, and in most cases ignored the whole process. Since the school did not consider monitoring and evaluation a priority, teachers deliberately ignored the policy, and often assumed that it was the principal's responsibility to tell them what to do, and where, when and how. This situation served to deepen learner unfreedoms in the midst of other exigencies.

Table 6: Grade 6 learners in School A who partially achieved in more than 5 learning areas in 2011: This information is extracted from Grade 6 Learner schedules 2011, obtained and used with the permission of the school principal.

Number of learning areas partially achieved	Number of learners in the support bracket
5	13
6	21
7	20
8	19
9	18

By implication, most learners who needed support were never identified from the start of the year, and therefore did not receive the necessary assistance. In instances where teachers identified learners by chance, probably during the latter part of the year, limited time and resources made implementation even more difficult or unattainable. The lack of proper structures to facilitate the implementation of the policy increased learner unfreedoms and orchestrated the usually poor performance levels that were only too common in disadvantaged primary schools. Teacher A1 reported on the lack of clarity and information regarding learners in need of timely interventions:

The list of those learners coming from Grade 6 to Grade 7 that need support should be given to us so that when they come to any class, I must know who needs support. I should know them as soon as they get to my class. Then I must know that, for example, 20 of these learners need support in what subjects, so that it can be easier for me to easily identify the learners. From the beginning of the year I should know that this or that learner needs this and that, so that I can help them.

This brings to light the question of who was responsible in each school to ensure effective implementation of the Progression Policy, and, in seeking to find solutions to this problem, what tools and structures ought to have been put in place to set viable precedents. Although the DoE had designed the policy, it was obvious that it did not have a clearly thought out plan

of action in terms of implementation, and did not regularly check on the policy's functionality in individual schools. This situation made for contradictory interpretations, and approaches by teachers in different schools, thus perpetuating varying degrees of unfreedoms for the learners. Thus it was clear that the policy was being minimally implemented, if at all, in many poor schools.

In addition, the lack of collaboration, and a breakdown in communication between teachers themselves, between teachers and HoDs, between HoDs and principals, and between principals and the DoE, was a primary reason for the poor implementation of the Progression Policy at the school, thus limiting learners' freedoms to learn. Teacher A3 stressed the importance of collaboration in implementing the policy successfully:

It is not easy to implement this policy to the advantage of our learners, but it is easy if we can sit down and plan as the teachers, not as an individual teacher, for instance Grade 7 teachers will sit down and tell all the other teachers that are teaching Grade 7 about the learners that need help. They can sit down and speak to the Mathematics teacher, Xhosa teacher, and the teachers of other subjects that here is the list of learners needing support in your subject area in this grade, so that each and every teacher can prepare himself for those learners. It can be easy like you can see, but not as a class teacher because, it is not a single teacher that teach all the subjects in Grade 7. This can increase the chances of success.

Although the HoDs were meant to manage the teachers, there were no indications of efforts being made to check on teacher abilities to, or progress in, implementing the Progression Policy. The principal also failed to monitor HoDs, apparently due to the lack of follow up mechanisms from the DoE, which in theory should be readily available to support and monitor the implementation of its own policies. Since it was clear that the policy merely existed on paper, albeit with significant repercussions on learner capabilities no one attempted to seriously consider its existence and/or implementation process.

It was clear from those schedules/reports made available that many of those learners being promoted needed support in the next grade. However, due to the lack of necessary support, apparently due to lack of collaboration among teachers, many learners failed to accumulate the necessary competences to cope with the challenges of the later grades. Such learners were

probably promoted because they were either overage, or may have already repeated a grade in that phase, since learners were not allowed to spend more than four years in a phase. It was clear from the information provided by the school that many learners promoted from Grade 6 to Grade 7, and needing support, performed even more poorly in Grade 7 than they did in Grade 6, orchestrated by the lack of support (see appendix 8 and 9).

The irony was that some tenets of the Progression Policy were not applicable in Grade 7. As a result, learners who progressed from Grade 6 to 7 for reasons other than academic competencies, and then struggled to achieve the required functionings in Grade 7 and could not be promoted to high school because, the Progression Policy was not applicable in high school. Learners were therefore held back in Grade 7, in theory to gain more knowledge before progressing to high school, or preferably were referred to the school of skills, which in fact did not have the effect of levelling the playing field for the learners concerned. However, learners who performed poorly in Grade 7 and did not, in terms of their results, warrant promotion to high school, were promoted because they could not be held in Grade 7 for any longer based on the age-cohort policy, and the need to create space for other learners from Grade 6.

In Grade 7A, out of 40 learners who completed the 4th term successfully, only one learner progressed to high school without needing support during any of the school terms or subject areas, while the rest needed support in at least one or more subject area. In addition, four learners needed support in all the terms in and all subject areas, while ten learners needed support in three of the terms, and in at least three subject areas. Statistics obtained from the school records revealed that many learners who obtained only a series of 2s (elementary achievement) and 3s (moderate achievement) were promoted to high school. They were promoted, not because they met the required academic competencies, but because the DoE allows them to progress on account of the age-cohort policy. Many of these learners who were struggling in Grade 7 were among those that had been promoted from Grade 6 supposedly on the basis of receiving support to cope with Grade 7, support which was unfortunately not forthcoming and never did become practically available. Some of these learners performed worse in certain subject areas in Grade 7 than they had done in Grade 6 (see Appendix 10). The tenets of the Progression Policy that undermined the important role of academic competencies in terms of real learner progression and development also made it

difficult to determine with any accuracy the role attendance played in determining learner ability to progress.

5.2.3 Implications of class attendance on learner experiences

It was generally believed by the principal and the participating teachers that attendance negatively swayed learner performance, especially in poor schools. Although its impact on learner experiences in school A were not particularly visible, contradictory views arose regarding its actual implications. This was evident from the data gathered through questionnaires, and interviews with participating teachers, and the principal, together with learner schedules containing information on learner attendance and progression. The principal and participating teachers indicated that learner attendance was a weighty determinant of learner functionings. However, data obtained from the learner schedules indicated that some learners, although they had a higher absentee rate than others, were promoted even with limited academic competencies, while some learners who attended school regularly with a slightly average academic competency were also considered not ready to progress. This showed the possible dominance of the age denominator over academic competencies.

It was therefore clearly evident that the Progression Policy in most instances waived the implications of learner absenteeism. It appeared that, although a learner had performed poorly, but was able to do some things or had shown her or himself to possess certain competencies as specified by the Progression Policy, but was not over age, and had not repeated the phase/grade before, was held back to repeat the phase or grade in order to acquire more content knowledge. Conversely, learners who were over age, had gained limited academic proficiencies, but had repeated the phase or grade, were promoted irrespective of how many times they were absent from school. Therefore, the ways in which attendance affected pass rate, progression, and retention remained controversial and difficult to gauge with any accuracy, and were exacerbated by the vague nature of the Progression Policy, which contained too many options to choose from when promoting a learner. By implication, learners who had stayed away from school for longer periods, and had gained few academic competencies were promoted, thus creating a growing pool of unfreedoms in the later grades. Such learners struggled to cope with the challenges of the later grade. The ambiguities contained in the Progression Policy created a lot of bitterness among teachers, who at times

reluctantly promoted learners whom they knew all too well lacked the required academic proficiency and content knowledge.

When teachers were asked to comment on learner attendance, and its implications for learners' experiences, particularly their pass, progression and retention rates, there was very little consensus. Some teachers agreed that learner attendance varied, and the impact of this was generally glaringly obvious in their results. Other teachers agreed that many learners did come to school on a regular basis, and that absenteeism was limited to about twice a week, with a regular pattern for Mondays and Fridays. This latter group of teachers generally agreed that the bulk of the learners had justifiable reasons for not attending classes regularly, and that there were only a few without reasons for their absenteeism.

Teacher A3 noted one of the long term implications of absenteeism as being dropout; after weeks and weeks of falling behind in class work, such learners often became demotivated, and at times decided to stay away from school permanently. In essence, when an accumulated workload was added to the already existing unfreedoms of learners, learners' chances of passing were drastically reduced.

However, learner schedules for Grades 6 and 7 showed no clear evidence of learner dropout due to the perpetual absenteeism of some; very few absences were recorded for learners who had dropped out, and these learners were usually deregistered, usually at the end of the second term, for reasons which were not always specified in the attendance records. It is clear that learner absenteeism did not substantially influence learner progression because the bulk of learners who were irregular attenders performed relatively better than others whose attendance was regular. As a result, understanding the relationship between absenteeism and learner performance from a practical point of view is challenging.

Although the causes of learner absenteeism are many and varied, the lack of parental support, and learner laxity/demotivation were identified as being the most likely causes. Teacher A1 commented on the lack of parental supervision in terms of their children's school attendance:

So far attendance is good whereas [as] there are those who are not attending continuously, because their parents are at work, and they leave their kids alone at home thinking they will come to school.

In this regard, according to most teachers, the lack of parental support perpetuated learner absenteeism, and consequently impacted on their experiences and achievements in the classroom. The level of parental education and current socioeconomic circumstances were seen as impeding the ability of parents to provide the necessary financial and emotional support to their children (see Chapter 4, Sections: 4.4.5; 4.5.5 and 4.6.3). It was generally agreed that many parents kept their children at home to do household chores and run errands when they ought to be at school. Teacher A4 reported on this and on some learners' preferring to engage in economically profitable activities to improve the financial situations of their families:

Some learners do the babysitting when their parents need to do something in the neighbourhood or have a business to attend to in town.

Participants agreed that parents did not always give tangible or legitimate excuses for keeping learners at home. Teacher A3 also reported that irregular attendance at times resulted in learners dropping out altogether, especially in a community where learners were expected to get odd jobs to improve the financial situations of their families. Since the school is a few kilometres away from wholesalers, it was assumed some learners preferred to work as grocery carriers to obtain money to improve the wellbeing of their families, but further reducing their chances to be at school, and to learn and pass.

According to the teachers, the negative implications of absenteeism for learner experiences and academic development were exacerbated by the lack of extra lessons for those who missed out, and the inability of the parents to afford tutors for extra classes at home, as well as the unavailability of teachers to offer extra classes after school hours. It was also revealed that these categories of learners relied on information transmitted in the classroom through their classmates, which was already diluted. Teachers also concurred that, if such learners were ever to benefit from the same lessons from the teachers, it would only be during revision time, which was often at a different pace, and took place under different circumstances compared to normal classroom lessons.

The good intentions of the Progression Policy were thus diluted by various factors operating at the school, and thus negatively impacted on learner experiences and capabilities. The policy was in fact counter-productive, depriving learners of kinds of freedoms needed to

acquire certain academic competencies. Learners accumulated numerous unfreedoms because they were artificially progressed through the grades for reasons other than academic merit. This situation was exacerbated by the lack of support to enable them to cope in the new grades, a phenomenon common to other schools in this community.

School B

5.3 Introduction

As with School A, this section focuses on the dynamics that characterised learner progression in School B, taking into account how policies influenced variables such as attendance, retention, pass rate and consequently learner experiences in terms of existing freedoms and unfreedoms. This section also zooms in on how the roles and perceptions of various stakeholders involved in implementing the Progression Policy impacted on learner experiences and performance in the classrooms. Although complete learner schedules were not available to provide sufficient data to meet these objectives, the analysis of available schedules was combined with data gathered through interviews and questionnaires in order to make the information credible and reliable.

5.3.1 Dynamics of the Progression Policy

As with School A, learner progression and performance at school B was seen by the teachers and principal of School B to have largely been influenced by the Progression Policy, its lack of clarity and its many unanswered questions, which generally resulted in inadequate implementation and in poor quality learner experiences in the classroom. The requirements of the Progression Policy and the problems associated with its implementation are described in detail in sections 5.1, 5.2.1 and 5.2.2. Principal B1 described similar problems to those experienced by School A in terms of the policy's retrogressive effects:

In the new grade educators struggle to complete problems carried over from the previous grades, before starting with the new programme for the current grade. Therefore, a backward trend is always constantly in motion, that we call retrogression. Teachers are always behind schedule making it difficult to meet up

with the normal programme for the year with learners in the same grade in other schools. Learners that were promoted normally are forced to monotonously go through what they already know, rather than proceeding with the work of the current grade, unfortunately withholding their chances to acquire new knowledge at a particular time. At the end of it all, the bright learners may not do very well in say provincial and national examinations, not because they are not knowledgeable enough, but because the syllabus was never completed, due to the amount of time used to bring learners in need to speed.

An honest attempt on the part of some teachers in School B to help learners in need of extra support to cope with Grade 7, as specified by the Progression Policy, appeared in fact to have had the effect of demotivating the more able learners who were forced to go through the boring routine of repeating material they already knew. Therefore, those resources that were in place in the school were unlikely to provide the freedoms this category of learners needed to perform well. Although, as was described in sections 5.2.1 and 5.2.2, the policy was originally formulated on the assumption that in all schools those learners who had been promoted on account of age and needed interventions for them to cope with Grade 7, would receive individual assistance when progressing to Grade 7 or when already in Grade 7. In terms of the CA, not receiving that needed intervention served to create unfreedoms for these learners. Some teachers, in an attempt to implement the policy, repeated large sections of the syllabus to all learners in the classroom. In terms of the CA, this approach in fact served to create unfreedoms, not only for these learners, but also for their classmates who had been promoted on merit, and therefore expected to be taught the content of the new grade from the first term, thus revealing the shortcomings inherent in the Progression Policy.

5.3.2 Implementation of the Progression Policy

As with School A (see 5.2.2), the process of implementation of the Progression Policy in School B was marred by major shortcomings that included the partial/incomplete representation of the needs of learners in the various learning areas in which they needed support, poor communication between teachers, between teachers and the HoDs, as well as between the HoDs and the principal. This was also due to the lack of monitoring and evaluation on the part of the HoDs and the principal, the huge number of learners that needed assistance, the lack of an agreed-upon workable plan of action, and the lack of will/inability

on the part of the school to implement the Progression Policy in a committed and whole-hearted way. From a practical perspective, all learning areas where learners needed support needed to be presented in detail for other teachers to be informed of the degree of learner need in each learning area, including motivation for why a teacher needed to take time out, or devote extra time, to help certain learners. However, emphasis was placed primarily on languages and Mathematics, although not to any great depth, while ignoring other subject learning areas, even if learners struggled to cope in these areas. It was also difficult to identify the particular section of the learning areas in which the learners needed support, thus creating space for confusion and inconsistency, and consequently limiting learner freedoms to acquire assistance, and in turn, the necessary capabilities for coping in Grade 7.

Hypothetically, teachers were expected to repeat the entire syllabus to accommodate certain learners, without knowing exactly what the exact problems and needs of ‘at risk’ learners were, since deficient areas were not usually visible in the work schedules. For example, in some instances, the schedule indicated that the learner needed support in English without specifying in which aspect of English, thus perpetuating lack of clarity and laxity or inconsistency in implementation of these ‘catch up’ programmes. Principal B1 commented on the difficulties involved in deciding or defining, from the records available, the exact nature of support needed by learners who had been ‘progressed’:

Progression to the next grade with support means that learners deserve to be given that support, but practically it is unfounded. It is difficult to know what kind of support is needed and where. The report cards themselves are inconclusive; because it does not tell the teacher exactly what part of that particular learning area that child is struggling with. How then can the teacher help properly in the midst of ambiguities?

Learner report cards carried inadequate information, or vague comments such as, ‘The learner needs support in all learning areas’, ‘Needs support in English and Mathematics’, ‘Needs support in Mathematics and Languages’, but did not directly, or clearly reflect which section of the learning area/subject the learner was struggling to cope with. This created an awkward situation because teachers assumed they had to repeat the entire syllabus for all such learners to enable them to catch up, a process they considered boring, time consuming, futile, and obviously a waste of time for all concerned. This situation and the attitude of teachers

prevented learners from receiving their deserved support, further deepening existing unfreedoms.

Furthermore, the teachers perceived that the sheer number of learners needing assistance, together with the large class sizes, compelled them to abandon the idea of assisting learners on an individual basis, irrespective of how urgent and/or profound those needs were. Clearly, these exigencies imposed unfreedoms that prevented even the positive minded teachers from implementing the Progression Policy in the way in which it had been intended by the policy makers. Teacher B1 elaborated on the constraints class sizes imposed on the proper implementation of the policy:

The class size plays a big part because, there are some classes with 47 learners, making it difficult for teachers to deal with issues in the report cards among other things. The normal class ratio in the primary school is 1:39, which is huge, but we still exceed that number. Although the excess is not that much, paying that individual attention to all learners in need could be problematic. Most of our learners fall under this bracket, making the whole process a complex one. Teachers are forced to start with the work of the previous grade for all learners irrespective of how and why they were promoted to that grade.

Teachers also acknowledged that it was practically impossible to assist a set of learners in a particular grade without placing those that had progressed on academic merit at a disadvantage because they needed to acquire new content knowledge in their new grades from the first term. It was revealed that teachers were aware of the individual academic competencies, or lack of competencies, of each learner, and the challenges this posed when it came to promoting them to the next grade, but were often powerless to take any 'reasonable' decision, because they were not, or did not see themselves in a position to use their own professional judgement when dealing with learner progression, as they considered that many of the decisions regarding promotion and catch up programmes as being propelled by policy prerogatives.

The policy's lack of clarity regarding these programmes, as was mentioned in 5.2, kept school authorities and teachers in the dark, and in fact creating more spaces for learners to accumulate unfreedoms. In essence, the Progression Policy formalised and perpetuated

learner incompetency baggage within the system, and increased the chances of learners having no hope of achieving the required educational competencies. Principal B1, like Principal A1, commented on the retrogressive effects of the policy and the powerlessness they as a staff felt to remedy the situation:

The system that is being used is problematic. The teacher is expected to pass the learner that does not perform well, but make a comment in the report card that the learner is promoted needing support in the next grade. The comment could maybe indicate that the child has been promoted because he/she already repeated a grade in the present phase. This does not show the specific needs of that learner in the learning areas where they need attention, how can the teacher of the next grade help that learner. Also imagine that now you don't even know how to write your name, but because of your age we must take you to the next grade. We need to take you to the next grade, whether or not you can comprehend, whether you achieve or not. The child at this stage is not ready to progress, but because of the system itself the child has to be promoted. Teachers could be aware of the child's inability to progress, or inability cope in the next grade, but we are powerless to hold back that child.

The irony was that two learners could have some close similarities in their results in all four school terms, but one of them would be promoted on account of age cohort, and the other held back because he/she was young enough to repeat that grade in order to gain more knowledge before proceeding to the next grade. If the learner who is asked to repeat the grade does not show any improvement in a second attempt, he/she is then promoted on the basis of having repeated a grade in that phase, or being old enough to be pushed up to the next grade, not necessarily because the learner warrants promotion based on academic competencies. In essence, withholding a learner in order for her/him to acquire certain functionings did not always yield the desired results, due to the lack of clear structures and directives to provide the necessary support.

It was noted by the principal and teachers that the policy also kept parents, particularly those with low education and literacy levels, in the dark, because they were given distorted information on their children's progress, due to the way information on report cards was presented, making it difficult for them to understand why learners were progressed, and/or

asked to repeat a grade. They were led to believe that the learners had achieved certain academic capabilities that unfortunately did not exist in the real sense, making it challenging for parents who possessed the resources and potential to give the necessary support to learners. Learners who had been given false or inflated educational capabilities on the schedules and report cards were always shattered when they competed with learners from other schools in the same grade. The policy therefore implanted a culture of laziness and demotivation in learners who did not see any reason to take their school work seriously, since there were other reasons for them to be promoted whether they had studied hard or not. In principle, the policy further plunged the learners into spaces of unfreedoms. Teacher B1 explained how this artificial inflation of marks and way of recording results is confusing to both learners and parents, often giving them a false sense of security regarding the learner's performance:

The system of education does not create awareness for learners to make them work harder. In the Bantu education system for example, the method of issuing numbers to identify learners within a class informed parents and learners of their academic capabilities within the class, and thus the need to improve. But now on the report cards nowadays what is written is just promoted, or promoted with support. This does not give learners and their parents a good summary of where they are within the class academically. If for example a child is rated 43rd out of 45 in a class it will signal to them, and their parents that something needs to be done, but the current system puts everyone on the same page, hence there is nothing much to worry about. Where the current reports indicate that learners need support is also unclear, because it does not say what kind of support they need, and the parents do not understand the codes in the report cards either, and consequently the kind of support they can give the learners if possible.

Although learning areas where learners needed assistance in the next grade were marked as 'needing assistance', there were too many discrepancies and inconsistencies embedded in the policy for parents, as well as teachers to be able to make any real sense of this. In some learning areas, for example, learners obtained codes of 1s and 2s, and were promoted without any indication as to whether they needed support or not, although that symbol clearly showed that they were not doing well. This was common with learning areas like Mathematics, Second Additional language, and Economics and Management Sciences.

Furthermore, the policy did not give clear cut directives on how information provided on learner reports ought to be transmitted, and used by teachers in the classroom. Although there was some indication in terms of those learners who were promoted on the basis of age needing support, there were often no structures in place to ensure that the necessary support was given to learners who needed it in order to cope with the next grade, nor was it specified who ought to alert teachers to their specific responsibilities for providing this support, thus making the implementation of the Progression Policy in the classroom a voluntary affair, leading to laxity. Principal B1 described the availability to teachers of profile information on learners which could inform the nature and extent of the support they could be providing to individual learners:

There are nine learning areas including science and maths. Let's say John has code 2 in life orientation and Mathematics, and is not failing, all things being equal. Now the teacher will report that John progresses to the next grade with support in the following learning areas, say life orientation and Mathematics. This information is included in the report card, and is kept in the profile. This profile should be accessible to the teacher of the next grade. It is now left for that teacher to make time to look at the profile of the learners, because there is a lot of information in those profiles that could influence the way teachers deal with, or teach the learners in their grades. However, we as educators are not immune to certain things; I am not saying that educators are good, because educators are also not doing enough in accessing that information. If educators could make time to study this vital information about the learners, it could help in a way to influence learner performance.

While Principal B1 reported that information on learners that needed support was readily available for teacher to access, the teachers were adamant that this information was insufficient and were of the opinion that much could have been achieved if the information contained detailed instructions, strategies, or a complete plan of action for them to follow in providing sufficient and appropriate support. The confusion surrounding who ought to provide information about learners who need assistance in the next grade, to whom, and what precisely needed to be done to achieve the intended objectives, inhibited the policy from positively impacting on learner performance. The lack of appropriate structures and poor

coordination, as well as the lack of capabilities to manage the entire process deepened learner unfreedoms.

While teachers argued that they needed to be given the necessary information, as well as a clear streamlined way forward, the principal was categorical that such information was readily available, thus indicating a breakdown in communication among those who were charged with implementing the policy, and in turn perpetuating learner unfreedoms. Despite such words from the principal, it seemed strange that no one noticed, or reacted to teacher non-compliance with the policy, in the process seriously limiting learner freedom to learn and achieve. Teacher B1 complained about the lack of substantial information and support for teachers in the implementation of the policy:

If the necessary information was given to teachers in the next grade, on what kind of support the learners needed, it could facilitate the process. The teachers of the previous grade need to inform the teachers of the current grade of the kind of intervention needed. We need to be told where to start with a particular learner to ensure that progress is maintained. If we are told that this child needs assistance in life science, for example, it is very complicated, because we cannot teach the entire life science syllabus to that learner alone, even if there are many learners in need of similar assistance, we have a syllabus for that class that has to be completed. We need to know exactly what aspect of life science the learner is not coping with. Also, learners may have different kinds of challenges, which also border us as teachers to implement this policy; it's too broad and vague.

The vagueness of the policy, the mismatch of information, the lack of clear cut directives on how to implement the policy, and variations in learner needs made the apportioning of responsibility and blame for the non-implementation challenging. Learner freedom to learn was restricted in the process, because they did not receive the necessary assistance as specified, although not clarified, by the policy, thus impeding their freedoms to learn and pass. The policy in fact misled learners who were being promoted with the expectation of receiving individual support; this support was never available in practical terms, and consequently problems carried over from the previous grades remained unresolved, only to be incorrectly identified by teachers in the latter part of the year. Teacher B2 described the difficulties of implementing the policy:

It is difficult to implement the policy, because some of the learners can only be identified to need support at the end of June, since they are many in the classroom. There are about 120 or more kids in Grade 7 (A, B & C). This is worse if the previous teacher did not identify the kind of need of that particular learner. If that was done, it is easy to keep that kind of learner on the spotlight, somehow. Sometimes the report cards are just vague. Although the baseline assessment is used at the beginning of every year to identify the competences of learners that came from the previous grades, it is sometimes ineffective, or does not give convincing information, because the children are just fresh from holidays, and might not be able to demonstrate their true abilities. This is added to the fact that there is limited time available to be able to give the necessary individual support, because the learners are too many. These reasons combined actually make it difficult for us to practically implement the policy.

Another problem with the implementation of the Progression Policy was the manner in which learners were progressed from Grade 7 to high school. Since the policy was not clear on this, the school had to make certain decisions that created yet more unfreedoms for the learners in high school. Principal B1 commented on the problems involved in ‘progressing’ learners from Grade 7 to high school and the slim likelihood of them surviving high school:

One major problem with the Progression Policy is that learners cannot progress with support from Grade 7 to high school. They either remain in grade 7 for psychological evaluation, or subsequently referred to a school of skills or dropout on their own. However, some learners are pushed to high school as a matter of chance, based on the age-cohort. Although a few survive the chance, some find it challenging and dropout of school completely, because the system did not prepare them well for high school. We had a case concerning a learner that was promoted to high school not on academic basis, but because the learner could no longer remain at our school. This learner got admitted into a neighbouring high school. The high school came to inquire from us about the child’s inability to cope educationally, and the circumstances under which he was promoted to high school, because he was not coping.

As with School A (see 5.2.3) the argument regarding the constraints and practical problems operating in the implementation of the Progression Policy, include the lack of clarity, as well as of proper monitoring and evaluation. Thus, as with School A, the vagueness of the Progression Policy, noncompliance and general inertia on the part of teachers, together with the many challenges faced at the school in practical terms made attendance rates a less useful tool to measure learner performance.

5.3.2 Implications of class attendance for learner experiences and achievement

Irregular attendance, though not reaching alarming levels, was unequivocally linked by the principal and teachers to extreme delinquency in the learners, together with the passive attitude exhibited by their parents towards educational activities, as well as the kind of neighbourhoods in which the learners resided. All these contributed to the numerous unfreedoms to learn and pass (see Chapter 4, Section 4.5.3).

It was reported that learners often changed their route on their way from home to school, in order to bunk classes and to associate with non-school going friends in the community. Teachers agreed that, in order for school resources to have any noticeable impact on learner performance and freedoms to achieve, there needed to be a change in the SES of learner homes and neighbourhoods. Teacher B1 considered poverty to have a decisive effect on learner performance:

The performance of learners in our area differs, because of circumstances, and many factors that enforce bad performance in our area. Bad performance in our area is hardened by poverty.

Understandably, SES was seen by the principal and staff as a direct cause of capabilities poverty in individual homes in this schooling community. In the view of the participants in this study, and, as was described in the previous chapter, 'Family Structure' (4.4.5.10 and 'Parental Education' (4.4.5.3), members of the community were unable to react or behave positively towards education matters, not because they were naturally disinclined to do so, but because existing unfreedoms limited their abilities to do so. Thus, keeping children at home to do house chores, rather than being at school was due to ignorance of the consequences of this, as parents were more concerned about activities that were destined in

the short term to improve the immediate living conditions of their families, even though these ultimately impeded learner freedoms to achieve. Teachers and the principal observed that when learners who had bunked lessons eventually returned to school, they struggled to cope, irrespective of available resources and teacher effort, because lessons lost were never repeated. This strengthens the CA's view that the school on its own, irrespective of the quantity of its resources, cannot determine learner performance, since different kinds of unfreedoms creep in from different angles to limit efforts to achieve the desired functionings.

However, despite the narratives emerging from interviews, learner schedules combining to present a picture fraught with contradictions, attendance at the school was encouraging as shown in Table 7. More than 80% of learners in all Grade 6 classes combined had zero absences, although the positive attendance records did not appear to have had a positive influence on learner performance. It was therefore clear that learner unfreedoms to learn and perform were aligned more to other factors, in and outside of the classroom, that were not directly related to absenteeism or attendance rates.

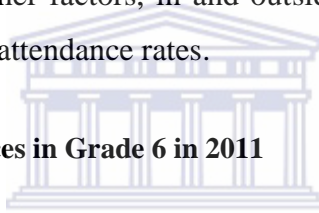


Table 7: Highest number of absences in Grade 6 in 2011

Grade	Highest number of absences per learner
6A	7
6B	9
6D	35

Data obtained schedules and used with the permission of the principal from school

5.4 Conclusion

From the above discussion, the Progression Policy, as it was interpreted and being implemented in School B can be described as vague and lacking in clear cut structures and recommended strategies to fast track implementation. The failure of the policy in the school was perpetuated more by logistical challenges that included the lack of communication and cooperation between stakeholders, and the lack of the necessary capabilities by those charged with the implementation of the policy, together with poor management of learner records. This was clearly evident from the lack of clear reporting in learner schedules: records did not specify the kind of support learners needed and in which specific subjects/learning areas. In

addition, no clear responsibilities had been assigned to respective stakeholders, and there was evidence of a breakdown in communication between teachers and HoDs, the principal and HoDs, as well as between principals and the DoE relating to the transferral of the necessary information. This situation created a space for potential unfreedoms for learners who already grappled with many other challenges, a scenario that was not significantly different from that in school C.

School C

5.5 Introduction

This section follows the same procedure as that for the other schools in focusing on the impact of pass, attendance, and retention rates on learner performances, as well as on the influence of the Progression Policy on these variables. As with Schools A and B, this section examines those aspects of the policy and its implementation which contributed to teacher and learner unfreedoms. The section also looks at the extent of the impact of attendance on learner experiences and performance in the classroom.

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5.5.1 Dynamics of the Progression Policy and its implementation

As with Schools A and B, the Progression Policy in School C exercised a significant influence on the promotion of many learners across grades for reasons other than academic. At all three schools this was found to be exacerbated by the lack of the school's provision of support to these learners in the form of a smooth coping process as specified by the policy (see 5.1 and 5.2.1).

The consequences of the non-implementation of the policy's objectives in terms of increasing unfreedoms for the learners have been described in 5.3.2 above. The reasons given for non-implementation of the policy by participants in the study at School C were similar to those given at the other two schools (see 5.2.2; 5.2.2 and 5.3.2), ranging from non-inclusion of clear structures and implementation plan, logistical problems on the ground, the large number of learners needing the support specified by the policy, and general negligence and

misinterpretation of the policy by stakeholders, all of which made it difficult for many learners to attain desired functionings.

The lack of clear-cut structures that specified duties in the implementation chain created room for laziness, negligence, incompetence and noncompliance. Learners missed out on real opportunities because they were being deprived of a smooth coping process in the new and challenging grades. Learners therefore accumulated problems and carried them through the phases up to Grade 7. Principal C1 commented on a situation which applied to all three schools in the study:

The policy itself is contradictory, because a lot of things come into play. In terms of the age-cohort, at a certain age a learner is considered as too old for a particular phase, and so must be allowed to move on. Also, the policy specifies that when a child fails once in a phase, she/he cannot be allowed to fail a second time in the same phase, and this contributes to the backlog that we have on performance. They can't cope in the next grade. For example, if a child fails in Grade 1, he/she cannot fail either Grade 2 or 3, because these all fall in the same phase, irrespective of the child's performance. When they struggle to cope in these grades, and are promoted based on policy, too many challenges await them in the new phase, because they did not understand all the content for Grades 1, 2 and 3, though different, they are seen by the policy as similar.

The principal considered that the confusing features of the policy that demanded the promotion of too many learners for the school's capacity placed the school in a precarious position. This was because, in addition to the baggage from the previous grade(s) carried by these learners, other unknown contributory factors were at play. Teacher C2 commented on the impossibility of rendering individual assistance to the numbers of learners needing the 'necessary support' stipulated by the policy:

The number of learners in each class makes it impossible to assist those in need. I say so because, too many learners need that individual support that we as teachers cannot give to all of them. Individual assistance will mean extra teaching time and resources that we don't have, especially because the needs of some of the learners are very deep. Teachers do try to give general assistance to

learners, but not focusing on the actual individual needs that are on the report cards, although at one point that could be crucial to the way they perform.

Apart from the large classes and diverse needs of learners in a class, teacher attitude contributed to the non-realization of the policy demands, because teachers did not make use of information provided in learner schedules. Ironically teachers claimed that they ought to be told which learners in their classrooms needed assistance, and what kind of assistance was required. Thus the misinterpretation of the policy and the lack of communication added to learner unfreedoms.

In the view of the principal, the non-implementation of the policy, despite existing challenges, could be narrowed down to the lack of commitment from the teachers to assist in implementing the policy. Principal C1, like Principal B1, insisted that the details of learners and their status upon promotion were readily available for teachers to access at their leisure, but they consistently failed to do so and seemed not to take the policy seriously:

At the beginning of the year we give a copy of the schedule to all the teachers for all learners moving into their respective grades. For example, each teacher that teaches say Grade 7A will be given a list of learners promoted from Grade 6A. To the best of my knowledge all the teachers are informed in that manner. They have all that information relating to the status, and specific needs of each learner in their classes. Despite these efforts to make them aware of what is going on around them, they may not put the policy into practice, because of other factors, not the lack or unavailability of the necessary information. Teachers seem not to be too familiar with the policy demands. They see that it is there, but do not take it seriously.

Principal C1 went on to outline the long term effects on these learners of not providing them with timeous support:

I will be honest to say that I doubt whether the teachers or some of the teachers look at the issues in the first place. For example, let's say that Peter was in Grade 6 and was promoted to Grade 7 and needs attention in Mathematics. I think the kids do not receive this kind of attention from the teachers. Maybe the

teachers don't look at the schedules in any case. As a result the learners are not being empowered for the current grade as specified by the law, and their needs. They may just sit there and add more problems to the ones they brought from the previous grades, and are later promoted at the end of the fourth term, because maybe they are too old for that particular grade, or are considered at least capable of doing something "reasonable" to warrant promotion.

The concern of principal C1 regarding the non-implementation of the policy that teachers were not interpreting the policy in a uniform and consistent way, and related to it in their own way, at their own leisure. Teacher C3 confirmed this perception, describing her faith in her own approach to diagnose learners in need and to providing this:

At the beginning of the year as a person I don't look at the schedules, so I just start teaching. As I go on, then I will see how the learners are, because sometimes children perform by you this way academically, and I have a different approach for example. In that case, that poor learner is not so poor when it comes to me, or someone else. This is because, the approach and the teacher as a person matters when it comes to learner performance. This is because, even if the child comes over to the next grade needing support at the beginning of the year, maybe by April or May they don't need support any longer for the rest of the year, because of the way the teacher teaches them. Personally for me I don't truly know those coming over needing support to the classes I teach, I just discover them myself as the year goes by, and I try to help them the way I can.

The differences in perception and approach between the teachers at the school and the principal in terms of interpreting and implementing the policy, played a significant role in creating and perpetuating learner unfreedoms at the school. However, teachers were adamant that the non-realization of the aims and objectives of the policy, and the resultant consequences on learner performance, was due not to negligence and noncompliance on their own part, but to the lack of clarity and substance in the policy itself. It was therefore clear that miscommunication, and differing interpretations of the policy, contributed substantially to creating a pattern of learners carrying incompetency baggage with them through subsequent grades. Teacher C1 expressed the view that not allowing a learner to repeat a year

at foundation level could generate problems incrementally as the learner progressed towards high school:

What the policy say that we cannot fail them in Grade 1 contributes to how they perform in the grades preceding Grade 1. The DoE looks at the dignity of the child rather than the critical role Grade 1 plays in that child's future educational career. According to the DoE, it will be cruel to fail a child in his/her first year in school, a grade we as teachers see to be a critical starting point for any learner. I suppose a learner should be allowed to go to Grade 2 only if they deserve to do so base on academic competencies. The policy assumes that, since the child has three years in the foundation phase it is unfair to fail them in the first grade, because they still have time to cover up by the time they are in grade 3. But, the problem here is that, even if they are unable perform well, other reasons based on the policy will allow them to progress. When the problems increase what then do they expect us teachers to do?

In the view of teacher C3, allowing a learner to progress from Grade 1 to 2, even when he/she is not sufficiently academically competent signifies the beginning of learner underperformance. The Progression Policy therefore overburdened already challenged learners by pushing them up into new grades where bigger challenges awaited them, especially in an environment which played an important role in their motivation and learning. Teacher C2 described the long term effects of unwisely promoting a learner in Grade 1 who is not ready to take on Grade 2:

They (DBE) feel that the child has three years for the foundation phase, and as a result they have three years to do all the foundation phase work. That is why the DoE thinks that to just start by failing a child in grade 1 is unacceptable, because the child still has two more years ahead for that particular phase. This is not true, because they are expected to learn new things in each grade. For me sensitivity is the guiding motto for such a policy. When the child is pushed from Grade 1 through up to grade 7 we cannot do any miracles to help that child because now the problem is deep and it's too late. Even to add to that, each grade has its own work load and challenges. What they face at home also affect them.

According to the teachers, giving assistance to such academically challenged learners was similar to “chasing a shadow”. In their view, attention needed to be refocused on Grade 1 where learners inherit unfreedoms and carry these along with them incrementally throughout their primary school career, and even beyond. The teachers agreed that any real attempt to redress learner unfreedoms with the intention of improving performance in poor schools requires a complete overhaul of the Progression Policy, especially the clause that prohibits learners from repeating Grade 1, which in their view was the beginning of unfreedoms.

The teachers were adamant about the need for children to repeat Grade 1, because among other reasons, some of these children came straight from home without having done Grade R, and as such needed a great deal of individual attention to kick start their academic career. It was also reported that many learners who come straight from home to primary school are often overage by the time they are admitted into the lower grades, making it more difficult to hold them back based on policy prescriptions. Such learners, according to the policy, needed to be fast tracked through the system, which imposed undeserved unfreedoms on them, because they were being pushed to the next grade when they were not yet ready. Teacher C1 pointed out the knock on effect of pushing a learner into Grade 2 when he or she has not acquired the required academic competency:

If the child didn't get something right in Grade 1 and is pushed to Grade 2, it is problematic, because Grade 2 has its own curriculum to cover, but then the gap is already there. They now go to Grade 3 with Grade 2 unfinished, and Grade 1 is not also really finished, but the Grade 3 has a workload that child must also comprehend. They continue like that and the problems increases as they go through every other grade and phase. That's why we sit with what we have in Grade 7 at the moment. Every child must pass, because the DoE doesn't want us to fail them. If they can do 'something reasonable', the DoE thinks there is no need to fail them for the whole year. As a result, a lot of the children will just pass, and go on every year. They then enter Grade 7 with a lot of difficulties already, and a lot of gaps which we cannot fill. When they are in Grade 7 we must do what is required in Grade 7 to prepare them for high school. The truth is that our learners have a problem; the intellectual level of many learners in Grade 7 is only about that of a Grade 4 learner at this stage, maybe.

The teachers were of the view that learner challenges and competences were not the biggest problem hindering their learners' development and performance, but their inability as teachers to positively assist them, due to their being disempowered by policy demands. According to the teachers, repetition would assist learners to accumulate the requisite academic capabilities for them to succeed further up the line. They saw, the current Progression Policy as not being properly thought through, especially in its failure to consider the foundational critical role Grade 1 plays in building learner abilities in the primary school. Teacher C2 echoed this view:

If we are given the opportunity to decide where to fail a child definitely the best place for any learner to fail is Grade 1. So if the DoE can give us the opportunity to fail the kids in Grade 1, it can make a difference in the later grades. I think Grade 3 is not a good place to fail a child, because they already come from Grade 1, passing through Grade 2 with a backlog. For me that policy where they say the child is promoted needing support is highly theoretical. If we are allowed to keep the children behind if they fail in Grade 1, I think this way the child's foundation can be thorough, and future performances guaranteed. But the policy says that from Grades 1, 2, and 3, the teacher must do their best, and it is only in Grade 3 that we may fail them if they don't perform well, but we cannot fail them in Grade 1. Even in Grade 3 we cannot fail them more than once, even if they do not have the potentials to progress to Grade 4.

Here, what was considered as an adequate level of performance for a learner to progress to the next grade was in dispute, especially between the DoE and the teachers. While the DoE considered that learners who accumulated only codes of 1s and 2s, meaning they did not achieve above 50% for any of the 9 learning areas, to be ready for promotion, the teachers differed from the department. The teachers saw this as unacceptable. However, they were often powerless in terms of the policy to hold these learners back, even if they thought the learners needed more time to develop the required foundational academic competencies. Teacher C4 described their efforts as teachers to overcome this problem which was however more than they could cope with:

We as teachers also sit with each other, and we know that the gap is actually much, it's actually deeper, it's in Grade 2, they are already there with that gap,

so it is very difficult for us as Grade 7 teachers to really fill that gap, that's why we ask people from outside to help us to do that work, and we even go backwards to Grade 4 and Grade 3 work most of the time just to help them, but we cannot do that all the time on our own.

Teacher C3 described an initiative to enlist the help of the community:

Because of this gap we started a community programme to help children that need to go to high school now by us in Grade 7. People from the community come in to help us, and I sit with them and we work out strategies, like I identify the kids that are now really poor in performance then I give him/her over to them and then they work with them. When they come back we remain in contact all the time concerning how the learners are now progressing, since they want to make them ready for high school. As you can see they are really not coping, they need help.

According to teacher C4, the Progression Policy affected their use of available resources, because a lot of the kids were not at the level they were supposed to be for resources appropriate to that level, making it almost impossible for teachers to make use of these resources to disseminate the required knowledge to these learners.

It was thus clear that the cohort progression at School C was not solely influenced by learner ability to pass and move up to the next grade, but also by government policies. The lack of proper structures, the lack of proper checks and balances in place to ensure that needy learners were properly accommodated, together with poor communication between the department and teachers, between teachers and the principal and amongst teachers, together with teacher attitudes, contributed to denying learners a smooth coping and transition process, and thus increased their unfreedoms in the classrooms. The Progression Policy focused more on the age of the learners, and how many times they might have repeated a grade in a phase, irrespective of the knowledge and competencies accumulated, or not, in the process. Even learners who were obviously not ready to progress, and demonstrated laxity/demotivation through perpetual absenteeism, were at times allowed to progress, which appeared to represent a contradiction of the policy's specific requirement that a learner should fail if she or he consistently stayed away from school, and struggled with the work required at that

grade level. This contradictory clause made it difficult to evaluate and gauge with any accuracy the role played by attendance in learner performance at the school.

5.4.2 Implications of class attendance for learner experiences and performance

Absenteeism of learners was identified by the principal and the teachers as a common phenomenon at the school and also, in varying degrees, as leading to serious capabilities limitations. Absenteeism was regarded as the rule rather than the exception, because some learners were often absent from lessons for a week or more at a time. This trend varied greatly from those in schools A and B, where the average absentee rate was 2-3 days a week. Strangely, most absences could not be explained by the teachers, learners, or parents, even though this had numerous repercussions on learner performance (see Chapter 4: Section 4.6.3). Principal C1 confirmed the endemic absenteeism, the difficulty of establishing acceptable reasons for this, and the repercussions in terms of making up for time lost:

Many of these absences were without reason, and for most of them the reasons were trivial, and unreasonable to be considered as warranting. Learner absenteeism is a big problem, because there are no provisions for catch up classes for those that have been away irrespective of their reasons for not being in school. When learners miss out on work done, they do not have any other chance to catch up, and this contributes to how they perform in class tests and examinations, especially because absenteeism is common.

It was generally agreed that poor attendance accounted to a large extent for the poor level of performance at the school. Ironically learner absenteeism did not negatively affect the progression throughput, because the Progression Policy specifications gave learners the leeway to move on to the next grade irrespective of their academic performance. According to teachers C1 and C4, the failure of parents to regularly check on whether their children were actually at school every day led to unfreedoms that unfortunately added to those imposed by the Progression Policy. Teacher C4 echoed the principal's comment on the negative effect of absenteeism on learners' being able to complete the syllabus:

Children absent a lot. Yes, absenteeism plays a very big role, because there are a lot of them that absent for a week, sometimes more than 2 days a week, without a reason. When they stay away for long they miss out on the work done, and we cannot go back and teach them what they missed out on. If they miss out on something, that is it.

Absenteeism was seen as an age old problem at the school, with alarming repercussions on learner capabilities, although unfortunately not directly reflected in their progression. The more learners stayed away from school, the more they became demotivated and undisciplined in the classroom, thus increasing the gap between them and their school work. The teachers agreed that the leniency afforded by the Progression Policy encouraged the passive demotivated attitude exhibited by learners, because they knew that, irrespective of their status or results, progression was guaranteed based on reasons other than regular attendance or satisfactory results. Although the policy in fact condemned learner absenteeism, it contradicted itself with the age variable, and the number of years to be spent in each phase. According to the principal, the school had attempted to reduce learner absenteeism by educating parents about the importance of pushing learners to come to school at all costs, but that this was fighting a losing battle, the much needed parental support being non-existent (see Chapter 4, Section 4.6.3.1).

Thus, as with Schools A and B, the amount of resources available at School C, as well as the individual efforts of teachers, did not appear to have a bearing on the actual educational capabilities of truanting learners. When learners stayed away from lessons, it further deepened their challenges, since there no provision had been made by the school for learners to repeat the lessons they missed. Although the school was motivated to reduce unfreedoms accumulated by learners through absenteeism, the powers of the principal and staff were limited in terms of keeping back learners who were not able to achieve certain functionings.

Thus, principal and teachers agreed that, although one would expect there to be correlation between the rate of learner absenteeism and performance, the effect of absenteeism on progression to the next grade was diminished by the specifications of the Progression Policy. Principal C1 explained the workings of this process at the school:

Although when learners absent and fail they ought to repeat, the law has been modified to say that if a child is not coming to school regularly and happens to fail, but is over age, the cohort policy will not be applicable. If this was the case, attendance at this stage can put some brakes on the cohort policy, but this does not make a big difference in the domain of promoting learners that are not coping. This is because, there are cases where children are not performing, and do not attend classes regularly, but are pushed to the next grade, because of the age cohort, or because they already repeated the grade or phase. It is very confusing sometimes. The results of the problems are often only clearly visible in Grade 7, because they pass through all the other grades very easily, based on what the Progression Policy says. So we do our best to let them attend classes regularly to actually gain knowledge.

The common consensus at the school was that absenteeism did not have any of the direct negative implications for the cohort movement of learners it was naturally, or traditionally, expected to have. It seemed that learner dropout was more of an individual decision on the part of the learners, especially when they realized that they were unable to cope with the new knowledge and the work load of the new grade. As has been described, this is because, when learners are pushed to higher grades on the basis of age rather than on academic merit, or on the number of times they have repeated a grade in a phase, irrespective of their actual academic capabilities, cracks are likely to occur in any smooth progress, particularly if there has been no support forthcoming for a smooth coping process in the new grades, due to structural deficiencies in, and vagueness of, the policy and/or the school's incapacity to provide this support.

Participants were of the view that when learners were continuously absent from school the possibility existed for an increase in the gap between them and their school work. When they returned to school they did not take learning seriously, often exhibiting a diminishing concentration rate in the classroom. Teachers agreed that increased unfreedoms for learners emanated from the lack of time and resources to give them individual attention, not necessarily because they as teachers were unaware of existing predicaments.

It was clear that the Progression Policy was more theoretical or idealistic than practical. Although class numbers and other unexpected exigencies were blamed for the none-

implementation of the policy, the lack of clear cut structures and monitoring seemed to be at the core of teacher laxity and negligence in finding solutions to implement the policy constructively. The provision of general assistance of learners by teachers, while ignoring individual learner needs, increased learner unfreedoms, and incrementally influenced underperformance at the school, particularly in comparison to other schools in the same community.

5.5 Conclusion

The chapter mainly focused on addressing the question: What results will a cohort analysis yield when applied in the evaluation of learner performance in Quintile-1 schools in terms of attendance, retention, and pass rates? In this regard factors and circumstances that possibly influenced the progression of learners in the chosen cohort were examined from a capabilities perspective. Although the Progression Policy that is the focus of this chapter was part of a series of strategies presented by the post-apartheid government to ensure access to education, in particular maintaining a reasonable retention rate, and achieving its goal of equity and quality education, its actual contribution to learner competencies and freedoms in the classroom is debatable.

The existing Progression Policy is fraught with contradictions and contestations, particularly in the context of the challenges faced by Quintile-1 schools in high poverty level areas. The lack of clear structures, and strategies for implementation, and the policy's over-reliance on abstract directives rather than on practical realities, created numerous unfreedoms for the learners. I, and participants in this study, would argue that the policy focuses more on how many learners are progressed to new grades and phases, and/or retained in the school system, than on learners' actual abilities to cope with a new grade. In the process the policy ignores the capabilities of the learners themselves, creating a tension between the intentions of the policy and its actual implementation by individual schools located in a variety of contexts. Although the policy relies on 'learner support' to be provided by teachers in the new grades, it fails to take into consideration issues such as existing resources on the ground, the expected coping process required by learners, its actual impact on the teaching and learning process, learner experiences, the different subjects and grades involved, and variances in the degree of learner needs and challenges. Its designers fail to acknowledge the vagueness of the policy, its contradictory demands, and lack of clarity regarding the roles of stakeholders in the

implementation process. This in effect incrementally formalizes and perpetuates learner baggage, since, inherent in the policy is the potential for learners to accumulate unfreedoms as they progress through the various grades based on age rather than on academic competencies. From my observations, this situation had created instances of laziness and laxity on the part of teachers and learners, as well as misinterpretation, noncompliance, and miscommunication amongst stakeholders in the three schools, thus forcing learners to miss out on real opportunities to achieve desired functionings. This validates the need to use the capabilities approach as a framework in this study to understand learner performance in Q-1 primary schools.



CHAPTER 6: CAPABILITIES APPROACH: ANALYSIS OF LEARNER PERFORMANCE

6.1 Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to develop a framework for investigating and understanding learner performance in poor schools using the Capabilities Approach (CA). For a clear understanding of the framework, the applicability of capability sets according to Amartya Sen (1992), as well as an explanation of capability sets is presented. Additionally, the ways in which the framework underpins and provides a lens for the research questions, as well as the ways in which it helps in understanding underperformance in Q-1 schools, is outlined. The chapter's conclusion positions the CA as an important component in understanding learner underperformance in poor schooling communities.

6.2 Applicability of Capability Sets according to Amartya Sen

Capability sets are those variables embedded within the CA used in this study to explore and explain the nature of learner capabilities and experiences in primary schools in high poverty level areas. The CA has been widely criticised by researchers for its lack of a standard set of capability sets and functionings (Nussbaum, 2000 & 2003). Many scholars and policy makers believe that such a gap hinders the usability and validity of the approach, in terms of its method of interpretation and implementation (Robeyns, 2005 & 2008). Sen (1989 & 1999) acknowledges the existence of such gaps and shortcomings, but argues for the value of the flexibility the CA provides researchers in choosing their own capability sets based on the individual spaces, goals and circumstances of a particular subject of study. According to Sen (1993), a researcher's having the free will to choose capabilities based on individual specificities can lead to more flexible and comprehensive interpretations and outcomes for research based individuals or individual institutions than can quantitative research, particularly in the Social Sciences. Sen (1989:45) emphasised the value of this kind of flexibility in research: "In social investigation and measurement, it is undoubtedly more important to be vaguely right than to be precisely wrong".

As discussed in chapter 2 (Section: 2.2), and practically demonstrated in this chapter (Section 6.5), because the approach focuses on variables such as freedoms, unfreedoms, human

diversity, interpersonal relationships, internal and external influences, differences in spaces, the conversion process, capabilities, and barriers or constraints to achieve, it can be said to be applicable within the field of education, particularly in the context of Q-1 schools. Sen (1992) argues that inequality in people's opportunities cannot with any accuracy be determined by the amount of income or resources at their disposal, because what we can do and cannot do, and what we can or cannot achieve is not determined solely by income or resources; our physical and social characteristics contribute to constructing our present and evolving identities. Since we possess different levels of capabilities, different efforts on the part of ourselves and others are required in order for us as individuals to attain certain levels of achievement.

6.3 Explanation of Capability sets

Capability sets are sets of criteria used to assess and determine what a person or an institution is able to do and to be. These capability sets include; freedoms and unfreedoms, interpersonal and inter-social variations, personal diversities, systematic contrasts between groups, the relationship between primary goods and wellbeing, spatial inequalities, and particular needs, interests and desires at a particular time (Sen, 1992:27-28).

Freedoms in terms of the CA are those opportunities or choices that a person/institution has that influence his/her ability to achieve certain objectives. Conversely, unfreedoms are those circumstances that hinder such abilities and efforts to achieve, and may vary from person to person, as well as between spaces (see Chapter 4). Existing unfreedoms hinder a person's/institution's capacity or ability to achieve, and as such, certain choices are made by the individual/institution not because they are limited by available resources and/or capabilities, but because of the circumstances in which they find themselves (Sen, 1992). Also, humans have different abilities and characteristics that in turn influence the way they see and do certain things. These differences in abilities and personal characteristics are shaped by differences in personalities and physical environments, and in turn influence the way in which certain resources are converted into functionings. Within the realms of the CA, these differences are important because they clarify, such as in case of the current study, why each of the three Quintile-1 schools demonstrates varying abilities in converting existing resources in similar circumstances (see Chapter 4, Sections: 4.4, 4.5 & 4.6). This is because, equality in one space might mean inequality in another space, even where similar primary

goods are available and the individuals concerned have similar challenges and desires, due to differences in the human abilities required to convert available resources into achievements (Sen, 1992).

6.4 How the framework responds to and underpins the research questions

The CA framework specifically underpins the intricacies of how freedoms and unfreedoms play out, with a focus on capability sets. The framework illuminates what happens in Quintile-1 school spaces and provides a perspective on factors operating to influence learners' education by looking at the educational experiences of learners in terms of conversion factors. The following research questions (see Chapter 1, Section 1.4) relate directly to the framework;

- Question 3: what role do resources play in determining learner capabilities and performance in a sample of Quintile-1 schools?
- Question 4: How is the internal efficiency of a sample of Quintile-1 primary schools determining learners' capabilities and performance? And
- Question 5: How can a cohort analysis explain learner capabilities and performance in a sample of Quintile-1 schools?

Although the findings from the current study cannot be generalized, this framework has the potential to be of value in assisting our understanding of learner performance and/or underperformance in Quintile-1 (Q-1) school communities in that it relates specifically to the uniqueness of dynamics that exist within Q-1 schools, and demonstrates their relationship to the capability sets and influences on learner capabilities and performance in such schools.

The following section presents a summary of the capability sets and how they influence learner ability to learn and perform in Q-1 schools.

6.5 Framework for understanding learner performance in a Q-1 school community via the Capability Set

This section demonstrates how the CA can be used to understand learner performance in Quintile-1 schools via the Capability set.

Capability sets	Main ideas of understanding capability sets in terms of Q-1 schools
<p>1. <i>Interpersonal and Inter-social variations (IPV & ISV)</i></p> <p>❖ Performance:</p> <p>➤ Motivation: (4.4.2; 4.5.2; and 4.6.2)</p> <p>➤ Indiscipline: (4.4.2; 4.5.2; and 4.6.2)</p>	<p>IPVs and ISVs are related, and find expression in learner motivation and indiscipline, because they vary in terms of learner spaces, and can therefore be understood differently in the context of a Q-1 school community.</p> <p>Learners at the selected Q-1 schools varied in terms of how they behave and pay attention in class. This affected the ways in which they learned and performed. Demotivated learners did not do homework, or read their books at home, and paid little attention in class. They were consistently undisciplined and disruptive during the teaching and learning process, which further reduced both their freedoms and those of others within the classroom who were keen to learn and to pass the grade. They often made teachers frustrated and demotivated, and at times teachers felt forced to act unprofessionally to the disadvantage of learners; ultimately learner capabilities were generally inhibited within the classroom.</p>
<p>2. <i>Relationship between primary goods & well-being/freedoms</i></p> <p>❖ Performance</p> <p>➤ Stationaries:</p>	<p>The inherent diversity in the relationship between available resources and achieved functionings in terms of learner spaces can provide a different, more nuanced and complex understanding of a Q-1 schooling community.</p> <p>Stationery in theory was expected to be supplied to learners by the various schools, but in fact access and use of stationery within the</p>

<p>(4.4.1.3;4.5.1.1 and 4.6.2.3)</p> <p>➤ Books/workbooks: (4.4.1.2 and 4.5.1.2)</p> <p>➤ Libraries: (4.4.1.2; 4.5.1.2 and 4.6.1.3)</p> <p>➤ Computers: (4.4.1.4; 4.5.1.3 and 4.6.1.2)</p>	<p>classroom seemed to be a learner responsibility. The consequences of this within classrooms were numerous, and varied between schools, because the scramble for stationery by learners had varied ramifications on their capabilities, and created different kinds of unfreedoms within the classroom that negatively affected the teaching and learning process, and consequently learner capabilities and performance.</p> <p>In instances where books and workbooks arrived late in the year, efforts to complete the syllabus were inhibited, in turn preventing learners from achieving certain functionings.</p> <p>In relation to libraries, there was a variation in the status quo across the three schools. In school A, there was no library available to shelve books provided by the department for learner use, thus limiting access to knowledge, and their freedom to achieve certain capabilities and functionings. In school B, a few books were available in a small space, but were not being utilized, because there was no trained librarian to assist learners, and teachers were using the space as an impromptu staff room, since one was not available. Learners were therefore deprived of the use of this space even to read their own notes to prepare for tests and examinations, as a quiet space away from the noisy and disruptive classroom spaces. In school C, a fully-fledged library was available, well stocked with books, but underutilized, because there was no trained librarian to assist learners to make good use of the library.</p> <p>In the domain of computers, School A did not have a computer laboratory, because all its computers had been stolen, due to the crime ridden nature of the community, while at School B plans were still underway to put a computer laboratory in place. School C had a well-equipped computer laboratory that was being used intermittently, due to frequent breakdowns of the computers, together with a lack of funds to source a professional company to do the</p>
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	<p>necessary repairs, thus limiting learner freedoms by depriving them of an opportunity to develop skills, to study for examinations, and to do assignments, and class projects.</p> <p>It is therefore clear that available resources in these poor schooling communities could not be consistently or concretely translated into learner freedoms within the various schools, for very diverse reasons and according to circumstances. Thus demonstrating that people's freedoms to use available resources, and abilities to convert these resources into achievement varies from person to person, community to community, and from school to school, and therefore applies uniquely and would have different implications in a Q-1 school community.</p>
<p>3. <i>Personal Diversities (PD)</i></p> <p>❖ Performance</p> <p>➤ Nonchalant attitude of teachers: (4.4.1.1; 4.5.1.4 and 4.6.2.6)</p> <p>➤ Management: (4.6.2.4)</p> <p>➤ Lesson planning: 4.4.1.1 and 4.6.2.5)</p> <p>➤ School feeding scheme: (4.4.1.5 and 4.6.1.1)</p>	<p>Since humans are diverse in their personalities, and capabilities, as well as in their ways of reasoning and doing things, one could say that PDs find expression in learner performance, because PDs varies not only in terms of individuals, but also in terms of spaces, and therefore has a different meaning and understanding and influence in the context of a Q-1 school community.</p> <p>Teachers in the selected Q-1 schools differed in several aspects in the ways in which they perceived the learners, how they taught them, and also in terms of tackling learner unfreedoms within the classroom. Some teachers looked at the learners from a negative perspective, as a bunch of losers who had no chance of ever improving, irrespective of efforts invested in teaching and developing them. For this simple reason, these teachers neglected serious learner unfreedoms within the classroom, sent them out of class during lessons without good reason, and acted unprofessionally in various ways, further jeopardizing their learners' freedoms to learn and pass.</p> <p>Responsibility for classroom management by teachers, and its</p>

monitoring at the level of the HoDs, and the principals was unclear, and inconsistent, and varied from school to school. While some teachers totally neglected learner unfreedoms within classrooms, and taught learners in uncondusive learning environments, thus further crushing their hopes of learning and passing, other teachers physically forced learners out of the classroom, leading to chaotic scenes, and premature termination of lessons. Such incidences further deepened learner unfreedoms and limited their capabilities and abilities to learn and perform, particularly, since no extra time was allocated for repeating lessons or making up time lost.

The important role of principals in coordinating, monitoring, and evaluating teaching and learning activities within the schools and classrooms was inconsistent, varied, and questionable. While some principals often wrongly assumed that certain prerogatives fell within the duties of the HoDs, some were unaware of how some critical activities within their schools and classrooms were run, because those in charge did not possess the necessary capabilities. Here, it can be concluded that principals were negligent in identifying the diversity in human capabilities within the institutions concerned.

Management, monitoring, and implementation of lesson planning were not consistent and varied among the three schools. In School A, a lesson planning system existed, but was only monitored and evaluated by the principal after the lessons had been presented, and the HoD unfortunately did not consider the implications of the content and quality of lessons for learner capabilities and ability to perform when this was not taken seriously either by the HoD or the teachers. Thus, teachers who did possess the necessary skills took advantage of this absence of monitoring and quality control and did not practice or implement lesson planning. Although the principal blamed the HoDs for the general lack of the necessary skills to guide and insist on teachers fulfilling their professional duties in this area, there was no evidence of attempts to redress such lapses, thus leading

to a further impairment of learner freedoms to achieve. In Schools B and C lesson planning appeared to be an individual affair, and as a result, teachers, HoDs and the principals did what they thought suited their individual dispositions. Consequently, teachers went to class unprepared, and did whatever they pleased, for example, marking assignments when they ought to be teaching, and/or often practiced selective teaching. As result of this conspicuous lack of monitoring and evaluation on the part of HoDs, and principals, syllabuses were never completed, further deepening learner unfreedoms.

In addition to inconsistency in monitoring lesson planning and quality, management of the school feeding scheme was inconsistent and varied among the schools. Due to poor management of the scheme, it became a liability rather than an asset to the learners, particularly in schools A and C, where it was the norm for food to be brought into the classroom when lessons were in progress, disrupting the teaching and learning process, and also distracting learners from lessons in progress. For the cooks, in the absence of other instructions from management, it was the right thing to do, even though this practice jeopardized the teaching and learning process and exacerbated learner unfreedoms within the classrooms. This was worsened by poor communication between the cooks and the teachers, and the lack of monitoring and evaluation of the scheme.

<p>4. <i>Systematic group contrast</i></p> <p>❖ Performance</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ SES: (4.4.5; 4.5.3 and 4.6.3) ➤ Role of parents/ parental education: (4.4.5.1; 4.4.5.3 and 4.6.3.1) ➤ HIV/AIDS: (4.4.5.4) ➤ Role models: (4.4.5.4) ➤ Language, and method of teaching and evaluation: (4.4.4.4 and 4.6.2.7) ➤ Nature of learning spaces: (4.4.2.3 and 4.5.1.6) 	<p>Systematic group contrast finds expression in learner performance when related to SES, the role of parents, role models, and selective teaching, these factors vary in terms of learner spaces and, therefore have different meanings, understandings and implications in the context of a Q-1 school community.</p> <p>The socioeconomic background of the learners compromised their educational chances, as they carried this baggage from home with them into the classroom spaces in many forms. Their level of capabilities therefore required more effort in assisting them to perform well. SES and its effects also determined the way parents perceived, and responded to educational matters, thus compromising learner freedoms, directly and indirectly. In a community where poverty is rife, learners were predisposed to interact, and learn from those around them, which shaped how they learned and passed within the classrooms in negative ways. This added to the negative attitude and orientation towards education by those that surrounded the learners within the community. Also, because selective teaching and evaluation was common within this poor schooling community, learners tended to accumulate certain unfreedoms, because syllabuses were often not completed, and thus learners were not sufficiently prepared for competitive tests and examinations.</p> <p>The nature and quality of their learning experiences also created for learners’ multiple, but varied challenges, and unfreedoms within the classrooms. Due to limited learning spaces, and overcrowded classrooms, some teachers were unable in any consistent way to take and maintain control of their classes for different reasons. Learners with learning disabilities could not therefore be identified within an appropriate period of time. Learners also took advantage of these learning spaces to be undisciplined, further disrupting the teaching and learning process.</p>
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<p>5. <i>Spatial inequalities</i> (SI)</p> <p>❖ Performance</p> <p>➤ Progression Policy: (5.2.1; 5.2.2; 5.3.1; 5.3.2; 5.4.1 and 5.4.2)</p> <p>➤ Classroom sizes and seating arrangements: (4.4.2.3 and 4.5.1.6)</p> <p>➤ Language of teaching and learning, and method of evaluation: (4.4.4 and 4.6.2.7)</p>	<p>SI can therefore be expressed in terms of learner progression because; its application varies in the context of poor schooling communities, based on the particular prevailing dynamics at these schools. Learner ‘progression’, although formalised in a national policy, means different things in different contexts, since it varies in terms of spaces, and therefore is open to different interpretations in the context of Q-1 schooling communities. Learner unfreedoms in the schooling community where the current study was conducted were not limited to experiences within the classroom and the community.</p> <p>Although the Progression Policy is applicable in all schools, its application in Q-1 schools is not consistent and varies among schools, due to challenges that are sometimes unique, adding to the inadequacy of efforts put in place by schools to implement the policy. Therefore, the cohort progression of learners represented more of a baggage to learners in Q-1 schools than in other schooling communities, because of the impact it had on their capabilities and abilities to perform, often exacerbated by the lack of a smooth coping process for learners to make the transition. The inadequacies of the Progression Policy also include the lack of a proper structure for implementation, often exacerbated by varying interpretations and implementation of the policy by the teachers. Apart from structural inadequacies at these three schools, limited time and resources militated against teachers dealing with the ever increasing number of learners in need of support, thus limiting their capabilities and freedoms to achieve. Those learners who needed new knowledge and competencies were at a disadvantage, because more time was needed to repeat the content of the previous grade in order to bring struggling and needy learners up to speed, and as a result, the syllabus was never completed. This was exacerbated by the lack of monitoring, poor collaboration, and poor communication between teachers and HoDs, HoDs and principals, and principals and the DBE in the process of</p>
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	<p>implementing the policy.</p> <p>Small classroom sizes prevented teachers from moving around freely to identify and assist learners with learning disabilities. This was conducive to indiscipline and a variety of disruptive classroom scenarios that further deepened learner unfreedoms.</p> <p>Furthermore, although code switching of a kind was instituted to assist learners to better understand the content being taught in their mother tongue, it in turn generated unique challenges peculiar to Q-1 schooling communities. Although code switching was adopted during lessons and class tests, it was not part of competitive and systematic examinations, and thus deprived learners from practising what they had been taught, and thus depriving them of the opportunity to achieve. Their real capabilities were in most cases misrepresented by the results of such examinations, since learners' local contexts are not taken into consideration in such examinations.</p>
<p>6. <i>Particular needs, interests and desires at a particular time</i></p> <p>❖ Performance</p> <p>➤ Role of parents: (4.4.5.1; 4.4.5.3 and 4.6.3.1)</p> <p>➤ Teacher desires:(4.5.1.4)</p> <p>➤ Alternative punishment: (4.5.2.2)</p>	<p>The particular needs, interests and desires of a people or institution vary at a particular time. In terms of education these dynamics find expression in learner performance, because their meanings and understandings vary in terms of learner spaces, and therefore have a unique meaning in the context of a Q-1 school community.</p> <p>The needs, interests, and desires of parents in a poor schooling community, such as the one where this study was conducted, contributed to the way they viewed, valued, and supported the education of their and other children. Since their concerns were to cater for the immediate needs of the family, learner educational needs were neglected. Learners were sometimes prevented from going to school in order for them to do house chores, and at times engage in income generating activities for the wellbeing of the family, further deepening their unfreedoms when they come back to school. This</p>

was worsened by the fact that lessons missed during their period of absenteeism were never repeated.

Based on the backgrounds and varying abilities of learners at the schools, and the impact of the Progression Policy, teachers in poor schooling communities had different needs, interests and desires in relation to learner performance. Owing to the bulk of learners being academically deficient in terms of performance standards, teachers were predisposed to focus more on ensuring that learners at least gained some basic knowledge, to the detriment of completing the syllabus. This meant ignoring the needs and desires of those learners who progressed according to the performance standards required by the curriculum. Learners were not therefore afforded the opportunities to accumulate the content knowledge required by their grade, even if they had the abilities to do so. This limited learner capabilities, increased existing unfreedoms and exposed them to challenging and dispiriting experiences in competitive systemic examinations.

Although the desire on the part of the teachers to resolve crises within the classroom by sending learners out of class, or keeping them in detention (in the principal's office during school hours, instead of after school hours) were seen as some kind of solution at that particular time and in those circumstances, it often created numerous unfreedoms for the learners, because they missed out on lessons that were not repeated or make up for.

6.6 How the CA sets framework helps the study understand performance in Q-1 schools

Although to date in government schools, performance in education is commonly measured by the outcome of examinations and continuous assessments within the classroom, these kinds

of assessments do not clearly indicate how or what is tested or which particular aspects of a learners' development and knowledge are taken into consideration. Thus, this kind of performance measurement cannot be said to measure or represent the actual competencies or capabilities of the learners. In the view of Spaul (2014), the results of test and examinations used as the primary indicators of school-system performance are inefficient because several factors are ignored, and thus do not portray the actual picture of performance within the schools. According to Spaul (2014), rather than focusing on examination results, more attention should be refocused on the quality of schooling. It is within this thread that this study relates learner underperformance to underachievement, achievement gaps, and capabilities failure.

6.7 Conclusion

This chapter used the capability sets to demonstrate how varying nuances within poor schooling communities translate into learner unfreedoms, limiting their abilities to learn and perform, especially when compared with learners in same grades in other neighbourhoods. The capability sets clearly demonstrate that differences in learner spaces matters when examining the abilities required, and the challenges involved when converting existing resources into functionings, and looking in a more nuanced way at the general implications of school resources on learner performance. The chapter refutes the one-size-fits-all generalization used to assess school level performance based on existing resources, and on examinations and tests. Instead, the CA requires collating those 'silent but salient' factors unique to poor schooling communities and that perpetuate learner unfreedoms, although not visible, common or known in other schooling communities, that do not undergo experiences common to learners in poor schooling communities. It is these factors that constitute the focus of this study.

CHAPTER 7: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

7.1 Introduction

The primary question driving the research is: How can the Capabilities Approach (CA) inform our understanding of learner performance in South African poor (Q-1) primary schools, especially in an era where school level resources are commonly used as a yardstick to measure learner performance, and as a barometer of the general abilities of schools to improve learner performance?

As has been described (see Chapter 1, Section 1.1), academic performance per se has to date overshadowed what schools can or cannot do with available resources, and in so doing, has created huge gaps between what actually happens on the ground in poor school communities, and the perceptions held by education departments and policy makers about the supposed inabilities and existing underperformance rates of learners at these schools. Embarking on an empirical journey to answer these questions exposed me to data that shaped not only my understanding of the realities in Q-1 schools, but also my knowledge about the underperformance problem, as well as, developing a deeper understanding of my personal, academic and professional self. The chapter presents an account of the journey of the research and its outcomes by integrating the literature surveyed, with empirical data from the field, and with the theoretical framework used, in order to shape my and others' understandings of the key factors and dynamics that result in learner underperformance in Q-1 schools. In this chapter I also present the implications of the research for teachers, school principals, the DBE, and education stakeholders involved in improving learner performance, with the hope that this represents a contribution to the existing body of knowledge on learner performance, I also offer suggestions for further research in this area.

7.2 Conclusions

The journey began by locating the research problem that revolves around the main determinants of learner performance in a Q-1 school community. This emerged from the fact that, despite massive investments by the post-apartheid government in education, the quality of schooling, in particular in poor communities, remains questionable, and ways of amending this situation remains unclear (Taylor, 2008). What is clear is that disparities in learner

performance go beyond race and geographical and/demographic regions or factors (Van der Berg, 2007). The emergence of a variation in learner performance between schools in poor schooling communities was determined, using the CA, by various silent factors that interplayed varyingly to influence school outcomes (see Chapter 2, Section: 2.4). As was described, this often resulted in the dilution of the predictable impact of available resources on learner performance.

An in-depth engagement with local and international literature shows that learner performance in poor schooling communities seemingly revolves around, and is affected or determined by, the remnants of apartheid, particularly by the SES of learners and their communities. While it cannot be denied that SES imposes unfreedoms on these communities, these unfreedoms often go unnoticed by education stakeholders, or are neglected despite the repercussions of these for learners. It was clear that literature that focused on such causes of unfreedoms was often generalized and failed to show in any specific way how they implicitly translated into learner unfreedoms within the classrooms (Christie, 2012). Despite varying perceptions about learner performance in the available literature, there is general consensus regarding the worrying trend of the decreasing quality of education in South Africa. Generally, the inclusion of the actual role of resources in influencing learner performance, and the actual relationship between resources and performance, cut across the board (Taylor, 2008 & 2011; Fleisch, 2008; Maarman, 2009; Spaul, 2013; Pretorius, 2014; Bayat, Louw & Rena, 2014), raising crucial unanswered questions about how quality education for all learners can ultimately be achieved in South Africa. Some of these questions emanate from the relatively new trend in the investigation and analysis of learner performance, one that has shifted from looking at variations between schools in different communities, to focusing on variations in performance between schools in similar neighbourhoods (Van der Berg, 2007). This shift has resulted in further deepening uncertainties among education researchers and policy makers regarding factors influencing learner performance, as well as raising the bar for what needs to be done to resolve the problem of learner underperformance. Thus, several issues and insights emerged from the findings of this study:

- It is clear that government's effort to revamp the educational system in poor school communities which it expected, through policy initiatives, in theory would ensure quality education for all, has not fulfilled its promise, partly due to the persistent legacy of apartheid that has metamorphosed itself into different kinds of unfreedoms through SES.

In the view of Sen (1992), the problems experienced by these schools would have originated from a variety of different strands, and thus the impact of that transition needs to be diagnosed and analysed based on individual school spaces if one is to understand the specific challenges particular to individual schools. The negative forces of poverty manifest in various ways, besides the quantity and quality of resources, to influence learner performance in poor schools in the form of management deficiencies, quality of teachers, quality of teaching, teacher content knowledge, parental perception of, and participation in, learners' education, and learner attitudes towards schooling.

- Looking at the key arguments and debates surrounding learner performance in poor schooling communities, it is clear that collating the various studies and theories in the literature, identifying the fine and complex thread of connectedness between them, and further zooming in to focus on specific school communities, could produce some interesting and valuable results. One would argue that, while these studies have the same or similar aims; they unfortunately approach and attempt to deal with similar issues varyingly, based on the epistemological underpinnings of the researchers (Fleisch, 2008; Spaul, 2012a). Investigations into the problem of learner performance can therefore be seen as being, and taken beyond history and the legacy of apartheid and its SES, given that emphasis on the persistence of this legacy, despite numerous scholarly inputs and government policies to reduce its impact (Spaul, 2013; Bayat, Louw & Rena, 2014; Pretorius, 2014).
- Those key 'silent but salient' factors that can be used to explain learner underperformance that emerged from my own study were found to revolve around those unfreedoms imposed by poor learner motivation and indiscipline, the inability of schools to convert existing resources into functionings, the nonchalant and unprofessional attitudes of teachers that often impacted negatively on learner capabilities and experiences, unfreedoms imposed on learners by the language of teaching and learning, the nature and quality of teaching and monitoring and evaluation thereof, the nature of learning spaces, the lack of lesson planning, unfreedoms that emerged from the home front and unfreedoms imposed by the Progression Policy within Q-1 schools (see chapters 4 & 5).

- The Progression Policy that forms the basis for learners to be either retained in a grade or phase or promoted, contains within it a level of vagueness and lack of specificity in terms of understanding and gauging learner capabilities and performance in Q-1 schools, and is a cause for concern. Though a national policy applying to all schools, irrespective of their particular circumstances, I would argue, using the CA framework, that the circumstances in Q-1 schools, and the lack of proper structures for the smooth or effective implementation of the policy, have seriously impeded learner functionings. The Q-1 school's obligation in terms of the policy to ensure that learners progress with their age cohorts, based on a supposed support programme for these learners in the new grades and, one aimed at raising their academic competencies, has created yet more and heavier baggage that negatively affects learner capabilities. This baggage has been created and has increased as a result of the non-practicability of the Progression Policy. Thus, at the three schools where this study was conducted, some learners who were promoted with their cohorts performed even worse in the new grades due to the lack of a smooth coping process at the school, thereby providing grounds for the Progression Policy to be revisited (see Chapter 5). In essence, the cohort progression in these three Q-1 schools created numerous unfreedoms for the learners and teachers, as well as for the parents who consistently failed to understand or gauge the actual academic competencies of their children.
- Bearing in mind what emerged from my study through the lens of the CA, the following prerequisites appeared to be critical to improving learner performance at these schools:
 - (i) teachers need to be more committed to their 'calling', by coming to class on time and doing the right things at the right time to enhance learner freedoms to learn and perform,
 - (ii) teachers need to be more vigilant in observing learners within the classrooms in terms of identifying those unfreedoms that may constrain their capabilities and chances of performing well,
 - (iii) principals in their capacity to convert existing resources into learner functionings need to become more dedicated, and prepared to monitor and evaluate their teachers and HoDs alike to ensure the smooth running of all departments within the schools, and thus raise the quality of teaching in the schools,
 - (iv) principals need to enhance learner freedoms by carrying out impromptu checks to see that teachers are in class, and doing the right thing, as a way of enhancing learner freedoms,
 - (v) parents need to be sensitized to assisting in reducing learner unfreedoms by being more educationally oriented and focused. They need to know and be sensitive to the value of

education, and how their emotional involvement with their children can enhance their freedoms when in the classroom, (vi) the DBE need to be hands on deck to see that its policies, rather than turning into ‘white elephants’ possess the capacity to contribute to learner freedoms and abilities to achieve desired functionings, (vii) the DBE needs to become more aware of the unfreedoms inherent in poor schooling communities, and use them as a guide when providing resources to a particular school. This might also give them a reason to follow up to establish whether schools have the capacity and abilities to convert available resources into learner functionings, and (viii) the DBE needs to be clearer about its policies, including and particularly those on code switching and the Progression Policy in Q-1 schools by looking at their possible implications for learner functionings. These CA considerations guided me in my collation of the relevant data in order to contribute to the on-going debate and contestation concerning the reasons for learner performance in Q-1 schools continuing to lag behind, despite scholarly inputs and government efforts since 1994 to ensure equity and quality education for all. In this context, Fiske (2006) acknowledges the efforts on the part of government to provide equal educational opportunities for all in South African schools, but expresses his concern regarding the inability of such equal opportunities to correlate with equal educational outcomes. This gap, and how to narrow or close it, forms the crux of debates and contestations within the sphere of South African education, thus justifying the need to look at learner performance using the Capability Approach instead of, or in addition to, the more conventional theoretical research models.

- It is clear that reducing learner underperformance in Q-1 schools is a complex and prolonged process requiring more than a resource input approach. According to Sen (1992), understanding what individual schools can and cannot do with available resources to change the lives of learners is a major first step. Therefore, knowing and/or gauging the capabilities of those in charge at schools, and what is already available in terms of resources, should form the basis for decisions regarding interventions to facilitate as far as possible the proper and effective conversion of resources to ensure, or at least increase and enhance, learner freedoms. The central need to establish a relationship between school resources and learner performance based on individual school spaces has been highlighted in several recent studies (Van der Berg, 2006; Christie, 2012; Taylor et al., 2012). Such a route would provide clarity as to why some schools, for example, Q-1 schools, are unable to employ a full time librarian, or why they

struggle to meet their daily needs with the budgets allocated to them by the DBE (see Chapter 4, Sections 4.4.1.2 to 4.6.1.3).

- Thus, I restate my argument that judging learner performance simply by looking at the resources provided to the schools by the DBE, while ignoring contextual factors, is unwise; in terms of the CA schools are unique and have different circumstances and experiences influencing teaching and learning on a daily basis. Clearly, identifying how learners accumulate unfreedoms by looking at issues that vary from school to school, such as classroom sizes, varying levels of learner motivation, and teachers who behave unprofessionally, inhibit learner abilities to perform, because they are not monitored and evaluated, and teachers that go to class and do not teach, or do what pleases them because lessons are not pre-planned, would provide some valuable answers to the failure of learners to achieve certain functionings in Q-1 schools. It is also clear that the degree and intensity of each of these factors varies across schools. Therefore, although learners in each Q-1 school underperform, they carry different sets of baggage.
- Learner progression is considered by policy makers in terms of pursuing educational equality, while ignoring the baggage accumulated by learners through the various grades due to their incremental lack of certain capabilities. Learners at the three Q-1 schools were often being promoted on the basis of age and the number of times they might have repeated a grade and/or phase, in an attempt to pursue government's aim of equity and quality education for all (Hartley, 2006), while ignoring the implications of this for the teaching and learning process. The problems created in terms of the teaching and learning process and the implications for the future of these learners have been described in detail in Chapter 5, Sections 5.2.2, 5.3.2 & 5.4.2). How this varies between schools has been described in chapter 6.
- The internal efficiency of schools and the lack of capabilities at management and leadership levels, as well as the tendency of role players to blame each other and the effect of this on learner unfreedoms has been described in detail in chapter 4 (sections: 4.4.1.1 to 4.6.2.5) and Chapter 5. Clearly this situation could be resolved if principals become more active, and effectively fulfilled their roles of ensuring that resources are adequately converted into learner functionings through monitoring and evaluation. The school feeding scheme as an example of an asset that turned into a liability has also been

described in Chapter 4. While Taylor (2009) emphasized the importance of strong leadership in any institution, many principals, particularly in Q-1 schools, seem to abdicate their roles, often creating multiple unfreedoms within the classrooms for both teachers and learners (see Chapter 4, Sections: 4.4.1.1 to 4.6.2.5) and Chapter 5.

In my view, educational equity and quality is an achievable goal in South Africa in the near future, providing that cognisance is taken of unfreedoms within individual school contexts. Thus, targeting challenges that manifest in unfreedoms within classrooms would mean dealing with problems at their source. Thus, any attempt to establish the reasons for plummeting rather than positively rising performance requires an attempt to investigate the trend of performance variations between schools within particular neighbourhoods, despite increasing support from the government. This approach has the potential to provide some answers to the persistent problem of learner underperformance in Q-1 schools. This may require a refocus of attention, and revisiting existing strategies aimed at improving learner performance in poor schools. Looking at rates of inflation, should raise questions as to whether allocated budgets to schools do in fact cover their daily needs based on current prices (see Chapter 4, Section 4.6.1). I echo and expand Christie's (2008: 27) view that "...For change to take place, we need a more critical approach to [understanding] inequalities..." by stressing that educational inequality is more visible in poor schooling communities than in other communities, and that insufficient cognisance has been taken of the resilient legacy of the past (Taylor et al., 2012).

7.3 Recommendations

The significant number of studies indicating that learners in Q-1 primary schools are consistently under-performing makes it impossible to deny what is in fact a general South African problem (Soudien, (2007). Persistent learner underperformance in poor schooling communities, despite various approaches adopted by researchers, and despite government efforts, would indicate that the road to reversing the present situation remains unclear and a long one (Taylor, 2008). Turning the tide will require putting in place what Pretorius (2014) considers to be an achievable turnaround strategy that would require a relook at the entire education structure, especially those facets relating to poor schooling communities. While teachers and school authorities have over the years shouldered the blame for poor performance, and the dysfunctional nature of schools, no major or decisive changes have

been effected. I would agree with Pretorius (2014) in seeing the futility of this tendency. Bayat et al. (2014) argue that the answers to learner underperformance lie in our ability to aggressively interrogate the persistent nature of SES, and the dominant role it continues to play in determining learner performance especially in township and informal settlement schools. I would argue that this recently recommended approach should include looking in highly specific ways at how SES translates into learner unfreedoms. According to Spaul (2013), the on-going performance crisis in Q-1 school communities is deepening, rather dwindling in spite of, and in response to, government policies and interventions. Most significant is the growing tendency for learners to perform below their expected grade standards (Taylor, 2009; Spaul, 2012). Given this disturbing trend I present the following practical, policy, and research suggestions:

- Although volumes of literature exist regarding learner underperformance in South Africa's poor schools, the problem persists. The common issues identified as influencing learner performance have been described in detail in Chapter 2, Section 2.4 and include; SES, environmental factors, and teacher lack of content knowledge, poor management and teacher absenteeism, the lack of resources, learner absenteeism, and poor parental education and support. These variables could be used by the DBE as a basis for exploring and coming to understand why the problem persists despite the department's efforts to respond to these factors in several ways. I strongly believe that understanding existing unfreedoms in particular communities, and how they manifest, and the ways in which they inhibit the capabilities of school managers in their effort to convert existing resources into learner functionings, may lead to clearer answers. In addition, understanding the variations in individual capabilities and how these are influenced by the environment may provide a clearer explanation as to why particular school communities are noted for poor management.
- I have argued throughout that any understanding the problem of learner underperformance needs to go beyond the apartheid legacy and while taking into account the persistence of the legacy, requires an alternative theoretical framework and methodological approach, such as the CA. There should be more of a focus on empirical research that illuminates the freedoms and unfreedoms of learners, the capabilities of school managers, the interplay of elements of human diversity, as well as that of special differences, rather than identifying and analysing discrete factors

that could be said to contribute to learner underperformance without linking them with each other and to these variables. Researchers, rather than generalizing existing factors and consequences, should dwell on the nature of individual school spaces since, according to the CA, the manifestation of certain factors is often a response to a particular environment and particular circumstances. I argue strongly that such an approach would assist in the identification of those gaps that exist between resources and performance, and the nature of the performance itself (Sen, 1992). In essence, engaging in this kind of qualitative research may give researchers an opportunity to immerse themselves in the daily running of schools, as well as in learner experiences, freedoms and unfreedoms on a daily basis; this has the potential to provide a clearer picture of the challenging experiences within individual schools spaces.

- In this regard, I would suggest that the DBE, when allocating resources to schools should take into consideration components of the CA, such as the conversion process, capabilities of principals, learner freedoms and unfreedoms. Having the conversion process in mind will enable concerned officials, not only to consider what they provide to poor schools, but also what capabilities and opportunities the schools in fact possess to convert these resources into measurable learner functionings. This has the potential to ensure that instances where books are provided but are not accessible to the learners, or computer laboratories unused because the school cannot pay for internet subscription or pay for maintenance, are avoided. Therefore understanding the extent of the capabilities of principals and other stakeholders, as well as the challenges particular to individual schools, would provide the department with a picture of the nature and extent of management deficiencies and how to ameliorate these. In this context, understanding the concept of learner freedoms and unfreedoms, and how they influence the teaching and learning process, as well as the functionality of poor schools in general, would inform the DBE as to why certain expectations are unachievable in poor school communities. In order to understand these realities, the DBE needs to thoroughly involve itself in the running of the schools through constant developing, monitoring and evaluation of both management and teachers/teaching. This would give the DBE a sense of what schools can do and cannot do with their available resources and within the constraints of their circumstances. These points to the need to empower and develop concerned stakeholders based on their individual needs and capabilities.

- Educational performance can be improved if teachers come to be more conscious of, and committed to, their roles and responsibilities, and are aware of the long term implications of certain of their actions in their classrooms on learner freedoms and learners' ability to achieve certain functionings. This could involve a major shift in teacher attitude, which could be a slow process. Nevertheless, enhancement of learner freedoms would suggest that teachers do the following; (i) perform the duties of guardians and counsellors within the classrooms (November, Alexander & Van Wyk, 2010), (ii) make themselves more visible within the classrooms, in order to be in touch with the real unfreedoms faced by learners, and thus assist in averting certain circumstances that may become irreversible if not attended to in time, and (iii) check and be aware of what learners are doing during their lessons, in order to identify those who are less motivated and disruptive, as such acts impede the freedoms of serious learners. For example, identifying those learners who are not copying notes or completing writing exercises due to the lack of stationery would provide an opportunity for teachers to diagnose the causes of such unfreedoms within the classroom. If the lack of basic needs such as stationery is identified by the teachers, I am of the view that they will become more aware, and contribute towards finding creative ways of averting unfreedoms that arise from such circumstances in the classroom (see Chapter 4, Sections: 4.4.2, 4.5.2 & 4.6.2). By implication, this would restore learner confidence, reduce indiscipline, and to a great extent bring back much needed learner motivation in the classroom. Sen (2010:205) considers weak motivation and the lack of accountability as likely contributors to low quality education.
- Learner unfreedoms are in many cases perpetuated by the lack of visibility, monitoring, and evaluation on the part of the principals (Bush et al., 2010; Taylor, 2009). Principals therefore need to be more conscious of their administrative prerogatives, such as overseeing what learners, teachers and kitchen staff ought to be doing at any given time, and whether they are doing this regularly and on a daily basis. Therefore, the ability of principals to do impromptu visits to all departments, doing spot checks, arriving unannounced during certain lessons, would provide them with some idea of what is or is not happening and put everyone on the alert. This would enable the principals to gain insight into some of the critical realities within the classrooms, and open up both the lines of communication and collaborative initiatives

with teachers and kitchen staff on how to deal with immediate crisis, as well as improving the quality of teaching. Bush et al. (2010) agree that strong leadership and management remains one of the core functions of principals, and that the implications on learner outcomes cannot be overemphasized. By implication, kitchen staff would be more conscious of their roles and duties, and the need to respect the time to serve food to the learners instead of bringing food in the middle of lessons; teachers would see the need to be in class on time and to be doing the right thing during each lesson, and therefore use teaching and learning time judiciously and productively to promote learner freedoms. By implication, learner unfreedoms would be reduced, paving the way for much needed improvement in learner performance in poor schools. Sen (1999:3) saw sources of unfreedom as including the neglect of public facilities by those entrusted to cater for them. This clearly indicates that if everyone comes to the party and performs the duties expected of them; both learner freedoms and performance in poor schools would be enhanced. In this regard, principals as agents of change need to become more proactive and thoroughly immerse themselves in the process of school management by seriously taking into consideration the need to institute change in areas that are lacking, especially those highlighted by researchers. It seems that sometimes principals are aware of certain undesirable practices in their schools that hinder learner capabilities and abilities to perform, but for unknown reasons allow these practices to continue unchecked (see Chapter 4, Section: 4.6.2.5).

- Principals need to become more conscious of, and to involve themselves in, the teaching and learning process. One of the two ways they can do this is by ensuring that lesson planning is practised by teachers, monitored by HoDs (Bush et al., 2010), and implemented in the classroom in order to avoid teaching and learning time being wasted and learner unfreedoms enhanced by teachers who often do not know what to teach when in the classroom (Taylor, 2008). Undesirable classroom scenarios result from such incidences, and as a consequence inhibit learner freedoms. Here, principals can also relook the issue of timetabling of lessons, as time is often wasted through the practice of duplicating the same subjects many times a week, in slots of 30mins, many of which are often left unused or neglected. Due to this limited time slot per lesson, teachers often struggle to present proper lessons because time is often needed to settle learners and bring the class to order before proper teaching and learning can take place. Restructuring the timetable to approximately 45mins a lesson, and fewer

lessons and repetitions a week could lead to more productive teaching and learning during a single lesson. November et al. (2010:789) agree that the duties of principals include giving guidelines (for workable) timetables that would assist in the enhancement of learner functionings

- Principals could become more creative in soliciting corporate funding that would cater for critical resources not covered by funds received from the government (Mestry & Bisschoff, 2009). Involvement in fundraising activities could assist with the procurement of basic and sufficient stationery which is in chronic short supply in poor schools. The indiscipline and disruption caused by lack of stationery and the demotivating effects of this has been described in Chapter 4. Fund raising could also provide schools with an opportunity to source funders that could provide computers, assist in building libraries, and provide books. This has the potential to motivate parents and help them understand that their involvement in the education of the learners is not merely about pushing them to go to school, but also about participating in providing such basic necessities as stationery.
- School principals could also resolve some of the crises which generate learner unfreedoms through mutually beneficial partnerships with schools in their neighbourhoods, as well as with universities in the province. Engaging with neighbouring schools could create an opportunity to share experiences, and engage in joint strategic planning, since neighbouring schools share similar challenges, even though they may adopt different approaches to resolve them (see Chapter 3, Section: 3.6.1.3). Sharing openly what does and does not work in each school may help to reveal why certain challenges are persistent and peculiar to individual schools. Therefore, if Sen's (1992 & 1993) notion of interpersonal variations is given serious consideration, there exists a great need for persons with different skills and abilities, but with similar goals and experiencing similar unfreedoms, to come together for, and commit to, a common purpose. Sen (1999) saw the possibility of the cultivation of such initiatives materializing in mutually beneficial solutions that could assist in solving learner performance problems in poor schooling communities. Sen (2009 & 2010) agrees that numerous positive outcomes could emerge if different people's efforts and strategies were to be combined. These schools would also stand a chance to profit extensively if they enter into mutually beneficial partnerships, possibly in the

form of research partnerships, with universities, as a way of solving problems that persist due to the lack of resident social workers and psychologists. Through such partnerships, universities may send student social workers and psychologist to serve their internships in these schools to assist with the high number of needy learners, thus closing the waiting gap for many of these learners who may be timeously referred to the school of skills or other related facilities in order to avert certain negative repercussions. Clearly, such efforts would assist in the early diagnosis of learners in need, and provide timeous assistance where needed, thereby reducing learner unfreedoms and contributing towards stabilizing learner performance in poor schools.

- The sensitization of parents towards actively involving themselves in the education of their children at all levels, and in all ways goes beyond the responsibilities of the schools alone (Singh & Mbokodi, 2004). Serious educational campaigns within and around affected communities are required to inform parents about the need to participate in encouraging learners not only to go to school, but to do homework, to read at home, to actively participate during lessons, and to stay in school for the duration of the school day. A joint venture between the DBE and affected schools in this direction could have positive outcomes in terms of improving learner capabilities and performance; otherwise schools on their own would be fighting a losing battle. Parents need to be aware of the need to cut down on household chores for learners, especially during the school week, and to see to it that learners have and do their homework (Spaull, 2012). Parents also need to come to school regularly for updates on the progress and conduct of their children, or when requested by the school, and to check on learners' books to see if they were at school, and to inform school authorities if a learner is absent, and provide reasons for why they did not attend school. This would assist the schools to deal within certain learner unfreedoms in a practical and systematic way.
- Given that performance levels are plummeting in many schools, the DBE needs to be more involved in the daily running of those schools that are labelled as “underperforming” through constant monitoring, evaluation and support, rather than assuming that principals and School Management Teams (SMTs) are capable of running the schools on their own (November et al., 2010). This would make them

aware of what is actually needed to deal in realistic ways with learner unfreedoms within the classrooms, and assist in driving the machinery needed to improve learner performance in poor schools. Getting in touch with existing learner unfreedoms and with the challenges schools face in converting existing resources into the expected outcomes on a daily basis could provide the DBE with a reason to return to the drawing board in terms of reformulating some of its critical policies whose lack of specificity and flexibility negatively affect poor schools in particular. For example, understanding the challenges and implications of implementing the Progression Policy in its entirety would make the DBE more conscious in terms of unfreedoms that exist within individual schools as a consequence of the department's one-size-fits-all policies. Also, understanding why books and libraries, among other resources, are underutilized or non-existent (Hartley, 2006), or why learners do not have access to certain critical resources like stationery, could sensitise the DBE to the unique plight of poor schools. This would illuminate the reasons for their struggle to convert existing resources into learner functionings, and thus sensitise them to the need to look into existing capabilities, or the lack thereof. In another dimension, a closer involvement with poor schools would enable the DBE to get a sense of the budgetary constraints of these schools in their effort to achieve certain desired objectives, such as employing a trained librarian, or using an already stretched budget to build a dedicated library space. This would provide them with an opportunity to understand why the resources provided are unavailable or inaccessible, possibly due to theft or vandalism, due to the inability of schools to afford professional security from their already stretched budgets, or because of the nature/SES of their communities. By implication, a general sense of why resources are either not available or are underutilized in many poor schooling communities would be established (Taylor, 2008) and the problem addressed.

- Similarly, a closer involvement with poor schools could bring to the attention of the DBE the reasons for the Progression Policy falling far short of ensuring quality education (Hartley, 2006), when examined in the context of individual Q-1 schools. This may require closer attention on the part of subject advisers who may want to further investigate why learners in certain poor schools perform poorly compared to learners in other schools, particularly in systemic examinations. In this case, rather than coming to the schools once a year to see how many learners have been

promoted, or to influence the promotion of more learners, the DBE should be more engaged in attempting to understand the implications of the policy in individual schools (see Chapter 5, Sections: 5.2.1, 5.3.1 & 5.4.1), and what it takes to implement such a policy in poor schooling communities. This would also help the DBE to understand the need to put in place workable structures, and a functional structure to ensure the smooth implementation of the Progression Policy, notably and specifically the coping process needing to be in place for learners needing support to be assisted, thus enhancing learner freedoms in Q-1 schools. In this context, the CA could be used as a tool for policy makers to better understand the implications of their own policies in terms of learner unfreedoms imposed on both teachers and learners in poor schools.

- A closer look at the cohort progression of learners in Q-1 schools using a Capability Approach is required by the DBE to understand how learner unfreedoms are enhanced both directly and indirectly. Although the idea of retention and repeating of a grade is highly debatable (Alexander, Entwisle & Dauber, 2003; Picklo & Christenson, 2005), based on its positive and negative implications on learners, exploring existing freedoms and unfreedoms using a Capability lens would assist in the proper monitoring and management of the entire process and procedure to enhance learner functionings. The schools may also be given powers and freedom when dealing with learner progression, since they are better placed to understand the real capabilities and needs of the learners, as well as the respective unfreedoms they are likely to encounter if they are either progressed or retained.
- From a CA perspective, the coding system used to determine learner ability to progress simply enhances learner unfreedoms, since learners are not given any reason to invest reasonable effort in their school work. The policy does not give an accurate or comprehensive picture of the academic competencies of such learners. The DBE could consider the numbering system that ranks learners within the classroom according to their academic competencies, thus giving learners a reason to rise above their current capabilities and improve their academic competencies, with the help and encouragement of the teachers. Even if learners are to be promoted with their age cohort for reasons other than their academic competencies, including the fact that they might have repeated a grade or phase, they will be compelled to know their real

academic standing within that cohort through the numbering system, a system that most teachers strongly advocate for its reinstatement (see Chapter 5, Section: 5.3.2). The numbering system is perceived by many education stakeholders to give parents a clear understanding of the academic competencies of their children, and the need to provide the necessary assistance if and where possible.

- I consider my study to have succeeded in positioning the CA as a lens through which to better understand the plight of Q-1 schools in South Africa and beyond. The study has shown that the ‘silent and salient’ factors that inhibit learner freedoms can be more clearly and comprehensively revealed using the CA. Therefore, popularizing the CA in research in education, especially educational performance, could lead to a better understanding of the on-going concerns about learner underperformance, particularly in poor schools in South Africa.

7.3.1 Recommendations for further research

In order to gain more knowledge about the nature and complexities of learner performance in poor school communities in South Africa, I suggest that the following research remains to be conducted:

- Exploring the role of the Progression Policy from a Capability Approach perspective, looking specifically at the policy’s structure and implementation within poor school communities, and the various ways in which it enhances and/or inhibits learner capabilities and ability to perform within the classroom.
- Looking at leadership, management and accountability in Q-1 schools from a Capability Approach perspective, and in relation to the role in, and effect of, these on learner capabilities and performance.
- Understanding the relationship between the concepts of motivation and indiscipline from a Capability Approach perspective, and how these factors enhance learner unfreedoms within Q-1 schools, and their implications on learner capabilities and performance.

7.4 Conclusion

This chapter concludes the thesis by reintroducing the research question that gave rise to and propelled the research, and how it influenced the journey and path pursued through the study. The chapter revealed the key findings that emerged from both the literature reviewed and studied during the research, and from the field. Theoretical insights that emerged from these key findings have proved instrumental in efforts to improve learner performance in poor schooling communities. This is especially so because the role of the CA is reemphasized as a crucial starting point in the process towards understanding learner performance based on existing realities in the schools, realities that form the core of this research. The chapter concluded by presenting suggestions that might be valuable to poor school communities, principals and teachers, education administrators, policy makers, and the research fraternity.

The researcher embarked on a journey to understand why performance levels in Q-1 schools continue to sink despite enormous efforts by the government since 1994 to ensure equity and quality in education. These efforts need to be seen against a backdrop of the research fraternity consistently identifying gaps between quantity and quality of resources, and performance in poor schools. My engagement with those studies in the literature that focus on learner performance in poor schools revealed a pattern showing attempts to explain persistent learner underperformance as being resource focused, often propelled by the existing one-size-fits all principle or model while ignoring the spaces in, and the unique challenges faced by, individual schools. This gap in the literature created space for the Capabilities Approach, an approach that encourages the need to look at learner performance from a perspective that takes into account where schools come from, who they are, and specifically what they are and not able to do, with resources available to them in their attempts to achieve what they desire, particularly in terms of the development of their learners and their learners' achievements. In essence, the CA as a framework introduces freedoms, unfreedoms, and the important role of the conversion process as a way of understanding in more complex and deeper ways the concept of learner underperformance in Q-1 schools. It is for this reason that these variables were engaged with intensely in a process of attempting to understand the many and complex reasons why learners in the three poor schools involved in this study continue to perform, or underperform, in the ways that they do. This in essence creates a platform for continuous engagement to understand the realities within poor school communities.

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APPENDIXES

Appendix 1: Focus group discussions with learners

	Question title
1	What are some of the things that make you not to pass well in class?
2	Can you name the learning materials that you receive from school?
3	What are the learning materials that you do not have that influence the way you perform?
4	Do you attend afternoon classes?
5	Do you study at home after school?
6	What are some of the things that prevent you from studying at home?
7	Do you use the library and the computer laboratory to study for you test and examinations?
8	Why is it that many of you do not pay attention in class or listen to the teacher?
9	How important are the meals you receive from school daily?
10	Do you always feel OK to come to school every day, why?

Appendix 2: Focus group interview questions for teachers

	Question title
1	What in your opinion are some of the reasons for learner underperformance?
2	What possible strategies do you put in place to motivate learners?
3	Can you explain some of the drawbacks you face as teachers in an attempt assist learners within the classroom?
4	Do you as a teacher have sufficient teaching material in your classrooms necessary to ensure efficient teaching and learning?
5	How do you identify and handle indiscipline within the classroom?
6	What impact does the progression policy have on your curriculum delivery efforts?
7	Briefly explain learner performance in class test and examinations when compared with the systemic examinations?
8	Do you think parents play a genuine role in assisting the learners?
9	Does the language of teaching and learning in your school influence the way learners learn and pass?
10	Briefly describe the role of the surrounding community on the ability of your learners to learn and perform.
11	Briefly explain teacher preparedness in your school in the classroom, looking specifically at lesson planning.
12	How would describe the role of the school feeding scheme on learners in your classroom?
13	Do you think the presence or absence of major resources like the library and laboratories, computer and scientific, has an impact on the way learners in your classroom perform?

Appendix 3: Interview questions for principals

Question	Question title
1	How would you as a principal elaborate on the performance of learners in your school?
2	What in your opinion is the role of the government redistributive programme, from the angle of learner performance in your school?
3	How would you describe the resources you as a school receive from the government in terms of your agenda to maintain a certain level of learner performance?
4	Apart from the provision of resources to the school, what other roles does the DoE play towards the improvement of learner performance?
5	In what ways do you think the environment in which the school is located influences the way learners in your school perform?
6	How would you explain the role of major resources like the library and the computer laboratory on learner performance in your school?
7	How important do you think the school feeding scheme is to learner ability to perform?
8	What role does language play in the performance of learners in your school?
9	How do you comment on the level of parental support in the provision of basic support to the learners?
10	Can you as a principal explain the progression policy in relation to the performance of learners in your school?
11	What strategies do you put in place as a school to implement the progression policy?
12	Briefly explain management strategies put in place to ensure effective teaching and learning in your school.
13	How would you comment about lesson planning in your school?
14	What do you think are some of the possible causes of learner lack of motivation to learn and indiscipline in the classroom?
15	Do you think classroom sizes and class numbers in your school negatively affect the way teachers and how learners learn and perform?

Appendix 4: Questionnaires for Teachers, Learners and principals

Learners	Teachers	Principals
Do you live nearer to the school?	How would you explain learner performance in your class?	In your opinion what is school performance. How would you express the performance level in your school?
If you live further from school, what means of transport do you use to school?	What strategies or tactics do you put in place as a teacher to ensure that learners perform the way you want?	How would you compare the general view of performance in South Africa to your school?
Do you always arrive at school late, why?	Do you have the necessary resources at your disposal as a teacher to train learners towards achieving the desired results? Briefly explain the drawbacks that exist in your context.	As a manager, which of the following would you consider to best define learner performance in your school; Learner attendance, pass rate, retention and why?
Do you always come to school early, why?	Describe the challenges you encounter as a teacher within the classroom to achieve desired standards?	Does your institution benefit sufficiently from the government redress programme? Briefly describe the impact of resources from the government redress programme on learner performance.
Do you come to school every day?	Do your learners attend classes regularly? If not, briefly explain the reasons you think might contribute to hinder regular attendance.	What are the major categories of resources received through the government redress programme?
How many times a week do you stay away from school?	Briefly explain how irregular attendance affects the performance of learners in your school.	Do available resources correspond with and address the needs of the school and learners. Briefly elaborate if the quantity and

		quality of available resources meet your expectations and needs as a school.
Do you have all stationaries that you need at school?	Do you think irregular attendance lead to drop out?	Are learner resources always available on time? If there are any irregularities, briefly explain impact on the teaching and learning process.
Is there a library in school, and do you use the library often?	Do you as teachers attempt to follow up on learners that are irregular in class?	Briefly explain whether available resources assist you to meet your goals as a manager towards ensuring an improvement in learner performance.
Do you enjoy learning?	What kind of on-going support do you have as a teacher that makes your dreams of improving learner performance achievable?	Apart from resources, what other factors do you think influence learner effort to perform well in your school?
Do you always do your homework at home? Do you have anyone at home that helps you to do your homework?	What do you think should be the proper way of assessing learners; through the end of year examinations or systemic examinations, and why?	How do you describe learner attendance in your school? Briefly explain if learner attendance influences performance the dropout rate in your school.
Do you always study for your test and examinations?	What do you think teachers fail to do in the classroom that impact on learner performance?	What factors in your opinion contribute to learner dropout in your school and community at large?
Have repeated any grades? How many grades? Name them.	Do you think lesson planning is an important component of the teaching and learning process? Briefly explain how lesson planning is	Does your school follow up on learners known to be irregular at school?

	perceived in your school.	
Do you enjoy the way your teachers teach and support you in the classroom?	What are some of the issues that influence your curriculum delivery efforts in the classroom?	How does the classroom environment influence learner performance in your school?
Do you always have free periods, what do you do during your free periods?	In your own understanding, what are the issues around learner motivation on the classroom, both curriculum delivery and their ability to perform?	Briefly describe the cohort movement of learners in your school taking into considerations the realities on the ground.



Appendix 5 Approval Letter from the Western Cape Department of Education

Audrey.wyngaard2@pgwc.gov.za

Tel: +27 021 476 9272

Fax: 0865902282

Private Bag x9114, Cape Town, 8000

wced.wcape.gov.za

REFERENCE: 20120222-0089

ENQUIRIES: Dr A T Wyngaard

Mr Paul Munje

92, 7th Street

6th Avenue

Kensington



Dear Mr Paul Munje

RESEARCH PROPOSAL: "SUCCESSSES OF QUINTILE 1 SCHOOLS IN CAPE TOWN: A COHORT ANALYSIS OF CAPABILITIES"

Your application to conduct the above-mentioned research in schools in the Western Cape has been approved subject to the following conditions:

1. Principals, educators and learners are under no obligation to assist you in your investigation.
2. Principals, educators, learners and schools should not be identifiable in any way from the results of the investigation.
3. You make all the arrangements concerning your investigation.

4. Approval for projects should be confirmed by the District Director of the schools where the project will be conducted.
5. Educators' programmes are not to be interrupted.
6. The Study is to be conducted from **01 April 2012 till 28 September 2012**
7. No research can be conducted during the fourth term as schools are preparing and finalizing syllabi for examinations (October to December).
8. Should you wish to extend the period of your survey, please contact Dr A.T Wyngaard at the contact numbers above quoting the reference number.
9. A photocopy of this letter is submitted to the principal where the intended research is to be conducted.
10. Your research will be limited to the list of schools as forwarded to the Western Cape Education Department.
11. A brief summary of the content, findings and recommendations is provided to the Director: Research Services.
12. The Department receives a copy of the completed report/dissertation/thesis addressed to:

The Director: Research Services

Western Cape Education Department

Private Bag X9114

CAPE TOWN

8000

We wish you success in your research.

Kind regards.

Signed: Audrey T Wyngaard

For: **HEAD: EDUCATION**

DATE: 23 February 2012

Audrey.wyngaard2@pgwc.gov.za

Tel: +27 021 467 9272

Fax: 0865902282

Private Bag x9114, Cape Town, 8000

wced.wcape.gov.za

REFERENCE: 20120222-0089



ENQUIRIES: Dr A T Wyngaard

Mr Paul Munje

92, 7th Street

6th Avenue

Kensington

Dear Mr Paul Munje

RESEARCH PROPOSAL: "SUCCESSSES OF QUINTILE 1 SCHOOLS IN CAPE TOWN: A COHORT ANALYSIS OF CAPABILITIES"

Your application to conduct the above-mentioned research in schools in the Western Cape has been approved subject to the following conditions:

13. Principals, educators and learners are under no obligation to assist you in your investigation.
14. Principals, educators, learners and schools should not be identifiable in any way from the results of the investigation.

15. You make all the arrangements concerning your investigation.
16. Approval for projects should be conveyed to the District Director of the schools where the project will be conducted.
17. Educators' programmes are not to be interrupted.
18. The Study is to be conducted from **04 February 2013 till 30 March 2013**
19. No research can be conducted during the fourth term as schools are preparing and finalizing syllabi for examinations (October to December).
20. Should you wish to extend the period of your survey, please contact Dr A.T Wyngaard at the contact numbers above quoting the reference number?
21. A photocopy of this letter is submitted to the principal where the intended research is to be conducted.
22. Your research will be limited to the list of schools as forwarded to the Western Cape Education Department.
23. A brief summary of the content, findings and recommendations is provided to the Director: Research Services.
24. The Department receives a copy of the completed report/dissertation/thesis addressed to:

The Director: Research Services

Western Cape Education Department

Private Bag X9114

CAPE TOWN

8000

We wish you success in your research.

Kind regards.

Signed: Dr Audrey T Wyngaard

For: **HEAD: EDUCATION**

DATE: 04 December 2012



Appendix 6: Consent forms for parents

Dear Parent:

My name is Munje Paul and I am a Postgraduate student from the Faculty of Education at the University of the Western Cape. My supervisor, Dr. Maarman and I would like to include your child, along with his or her classmates, in a research project that aims at learner performances in disadvantaged schools. The research has been approved by the Western Cape Education Department and the Metro South Education District Head Office. The school authorities will monitor their participation and make sure it does not interfere with their studies. Some of the sessions may be recorded but not videotaped.

Your child's participation in this project is completely voluntary. In addition to your permission, your child will also be asked if he or she would like to take part in this project. Any child may stop taking part at any time. The choice to participate or not will not impact on your child's grades or status at school. It may inform authorities concerned on the needs of the school and learners and probably encourage them to come up with strategies to improve the school system and consequently learner performance. The information recorded will be transcribed and coded to remove children's names and will be erased after the project is completed. The results of this study may be used for a dissertation, an educational report, journal article and presentation. Codes will be used to substitute the names of children and the school. This helps protect confidentiality of both the learners and the schools.

In the space at the bottom of this letter, please indicate whether you do or do not want your child to participate in this project. Ask your child to bring one copy of this completed form to his or her teacher by the02.....2012. The second copy is to be kept for your records. If you have any questions about this research project, please feel free to contact us either by mail, email, or telephone. Please keep a copy of this form for your records.

Sincerely,
Munje Paul, PhD Candidate, University of the Western Cape.
Email: 3079853@uwc.ac.za/munjepaul@gmail.com
Tel: 0834035654

I..... parent of (.....) I agree that my child be part of the research and have been informed of his/her rights to or not to take part.

Date 02.05.2012 Place.....

Signature.....

Appendix 8: Grade 6 results 2011 showing progression status for learners A, B & C, for terms 1-4

	Terms	Subject 1	Subject 2	Subject 3	Subject 4	Subject 5	Subject 6	Subject 7	Subject 8	Subject 9	Progression Results (RP)
Learner A		% code	% code	% code	% code	% code	% code	% code	% code	% code	
	1	37 2	37 2	16 1	54 3	47 2	30 1	32 1	63 3	52 3	Needs support in languages and maths
	2	47 2	8 1	16 1	18 1	29 1	30 1	40 2	20 1	21 1	Needs support in all learning areas
	3	44 2	35 2	32 1	58 3	78 4	43 2	38 2	40 3	50 3	
	4	43 2	38 2	37 2	14 1	56 3	16 1	36 2	20 1	50 3	
	Final code	2	2	1	3	3	1	2	2	3	RP
Learner B	1	44 2	34 1	17 1	48 2	10 1	22 1	57 3	40 2	8 1	Needs support in languages and maths
	2	28 1	37 2	4 1	38 2	14 1	30 1	37 2	40 2	20 1	Needs support in all learning areas
	3	51 3	46 2	41 2	40 2	58 3	40 2	20 1	53 3	50 3	Needs support in maths

	4	43 2	35 2	37 2	21 1	35 2	35 2	37 2	47 2	72 4	
	Final code	2	2	1	2	1	2	2	2	2	RP
Learner C	1	26 1	24 1	13 1	42 2	53 3	32 1	50 3	34 1	17 1	Needs support in all learning areas
	2	36 2	19 1	34 1	38 2	22 1	33 1	40 2	25 1	38 2	Needs support in languages and maths
	3	52 3	35 2	36 2	57 3	36 2	33 1	36 2	37 2	45 2	
	4	37 2	35 2	35 2	46 2	43 2	40 2	7 1	36 2	72 4	
	Final Code	2	2	2	2	2	1	2	2	2	RP

RP=Ready to Progress Data obtained from school schedules and used the permission of the principal

Appendix 9 Grade 7 results 2012, showing learners A, B & C that were progressed from Grade 6 to 7, but struggled to get promotion to High school.

	Terms	Subject 1	Subject 2	Subject 3	Subject 4	Subject 5	Subject 6	Subject 7	Subject 8	Subject 9	Progression Results (NRP)
Learner A		% code	% code	% code	% code	% code	% code	% code	% code	% code	
	1	52 4	41 3	3 1	52 4	20 1	70 6	37 2	20 1	10 1	Needs support in maths
	2	49 3	29 1	18 1	53 5	28 1	36 2	71 6	10 1	52 4	Needs support in maths and English
	3	36 2	31 2	13 1	27 1	41 3	38 2	36 2	33 2	42 3	Needs support in all learning areas
	4	48 3	56 4	52 4	23 1	40 3	45 3	61 5	66 5	58 4	
	Final code	3	2	1	2	2	3	4	2	3	NRP
Learner B	1	57 4	18 1	14 1	22 1	20 1	34 2	46 3	10 1	33 2	Needs support in maths and English
	2	50 4	29 1	8 1	49 3	11 1	36 2	88 7	16 1	64 5	Needs support in maths and English
	3	47 3	26 1	15 1	59 4	31 2	50 4	30 2	40 3	39 2	Needs support in maths and English
	4	48 3	57 4	23 1	16 1	12 1	62 5	78 6	46 3	34 2	Needs support in maths
	Final										

	code	4	2	1	2	1	3	5	1	2	NRP
Learner C	1	69 5	17 1	29 1	60 5	20 1	34 2	22 1	20 1	43 3	Needs support in maths and English
	2	35 2	21 1	18 1	27 1	28 1	36 2	42 3	10 1	46 3	Needs support in maths and English
	3	17 1	45 3	8 1	6 1	34 2	42 3	30 2	40 3	26 1	Needs support in Xhosa and maths
	4	61 3	39 2	23 1	38 2	8 1	45 3	40 3	40 3	30 2	Needs support in maths and English
	Final Code	3	2	1	2	1	2	1	1	2	NRP

NRP=Not Ready to Progress



Appendix 10: Learner progression

Grade 7 results of selected learners that were allowed to progress on account of age cohort and those with similar results not allowed to progress.

	No Of absences	Subj ect 1	Subj ect 2	Subj ect 3	Subj ect 4	Subjec t 5	Subj ect 6	Subjec t 7	Subj ect 8	Subj ect 9	Progress ion Results (RP/NR P)	Year s in phas e
		% code	% code	% code	% code	% code	% code	% code	% code	% code		
Learner A												
Term 1	0	40 3	13 1	31 2	22 1	10 1	36 2	41 3	13 1	43 3		1
Term 2	5	40 3	25 1	16 1	17 1	32 2	40 3	26 1	30 2	13 1		
Term 3	1	47 3	22 1	12 1	49 3	28 1	45 3	46 3	33 2	52 4		
Term 4	5	56 4	37 2	46 3	37 2	10 1	35 2	30 2	47 3	38 2		
Final	11	6	1	1	2	1	2	2	2	3	RP	
Learner B												
Term 1	0	40 3	25 1	11 1	45 3	20 1	36 2	36 2	47 3	47 3		1
Term 2	1	34 2	14 1	14 1	35 2	27 1	40 3	88 7	40 3	52 3		
Term 3	2	35 2	10 1	15 1	18 1	26 1	21 1	38 2	40 3	15 3		
Term 4	0	43 3	38 2	46 3	38 2	28 1	45 3	78 6	53 4	62 4		
Final	3	3	1	1	2	1	2	5	3	3	RP	
Learner C												
Term 1	1	51 4	20 1	13 1	56 4	10 1	38 2	34 2	16 1	3 1		1
Term 2	8	40 3	28 1	29 1	21 1	42 3	26 1	58 4	32 2	35 2		
Term 3	10	37 2	32 2	34 2	19 1	36 2	21 1	30 2	40 3	8 1		
Term 4	3	61 5	23 1	41 3	37 2	16 1	45 3	48 3	40 3	58 4		
Final	22	3	1	1	2	1	2	3	2	1	RP	
Learner D												
Term1	1	40 3	34 2	21 1	8 1	10 1	36 2	35 2	30 2	17 1		1
Term 2	6	26 1	26 1	17 1	16 1	20 1	36 2	94 7	23 1	42 3		
Term 3	7	22 1	24 1	21 1	9 1	38 2	21 1	30 2	40 3	2 1		1
Term	8	41	41	41	30	4 1	46	84 7	40	44		

4		3	3	3	2		3		3	3		
Final	22	2	2	1	1	1	2	5	2	1	NRP	
Learner E												
Term 1	0	49 3	13 1	36 2	60 5	10 1	38 2	40 3	43 3	50 4		1
Term 2	3	66 3	20 1	9 1	31 2	33 2	28 1	58 4	41 3	12 1		
Term 3	10	13 1	21 1	34 2	52 4	28 1	47 3	38 2	60 5	46 3		
Term 4	8	47 3	35 2	45 3	37 2	12 1	35 2	48 3	40 3	10 1		
Final	21	3	1	2	3	1	2	2	3	2	NRP	

RP=Ready to progress/NRP=Not Ready to progress

