CHALLENGES OF GRADE PROGRESSION AND PROMOTION IN OUTCOMES BASED EDUCATION AMONG EDUCATORS OF GRADE TEN LEARNERS IN THE WESTERN CAPE. A CASE STUDY OF EMMEROSE SECONDARY SCHOOL

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A mini thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Masters in Public Administration (MPA) in the Faculty of Economic and Management Science (EMS), School of Government, University of the Western Cape

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June 2012

KEY WORDS

1. Education

2. School environment

3. Outcomes-Based Education

4. Grade promotion

5. Grade progression

6. National curriculum statement

7. Revised national curriculum statement

8. Learning outcomes

9. Learner retention

10. School drop-out

ABSTRACT

Within the field of secondary education in South Africa there is currently a major crisis over learners' poor academic achievement. This is a challenge to all role-players, especially the high failure and drop-out rates in Grades 10 and 11.

In this study the problem of grade progression and promotion in Outcomes-Based Education (OBE) in a mixed low, middle and working-class school is addressed. The main question arising from this problem concerns the high promotion and low retention rates at the school. The central focus in this thesis is the understanding of grade progression and promotion on the part of Grade 10 educators. Thus this study investigates the implementation of grade progression and promotion, through observation as to how the actual practices and methods of educators and their Senior Management Team influence this process. Furthermore, the consequences for Grade 10 learners of the practices associated with grade progression and promotion are examined. This includes an analysis of educators' opinions and how their practices of grade progression and promotion have affected or disadvantaged the learning process.

This research is conceptualized in the domain of social, post-structural and constructivist theory, which provides a meaningful framework to help understand and explain educators' multiple perceptions in the classroom. The study starts by exploring whether a poor socio-economic environment has a direct influence on activities in schools. This study also examines whether a poor socio-economic environment contributes to a dysfunctional situation in the classroom and school environment, which unintentionally influences the grade progression and promotion sessions. In addition, the study investigates and determines whether there is a disjuncture between policy (theory) and implementation (practice) when conducting grade progression and promotion. A qualitative research method was used in this study and a qualitative ethnographic design, influenced

by an interpretivist framework, was adopted. Qualitative ethnographic techniques, such as observations, interviews and documents, were employed to collect relevant information for this study. Data was analyzed by using thematic narrative analysis to answer the dissertation questions. Ethical conduct and procedures were strictly observed.

The results show that the socio-economic environment contributed to a dysfunctional condition in the school, which had a negative impact upon, and influenced the learning experience of, both educators and learners. The evidence revealed that the actual practices of educators and the school's Senior Management Team during progression and promotion meetings were influenced by their subjective perceptions, attitudes and opinions. From this, the conclusion was reached that the progression, promotion or retention of learners resulted in positioning and labelling in the classroom, which might eventually lead to low motivation, weak performances and dropping-out.

The significance of this study lies in the practical and academic value it holds for educators and other stakeholders. The findings, implications and recommendations can be used as a guide to provide solutions to problems and barriers which occur during grade progression and promotion in schools, and may offer opportunities for further investigation or study.

DECLARATION

I, the undersigned, hereby declare that the work contained in this mini thesis is my own original work. It has not been submitted before for any degree or examination in any other university, and all the sources I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledge as complete references.

Ismail Kader   November June

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Signed …………………

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank Dr Leon G. Pretorius for his motivation, patience and unfailing faith in me, which gave me the desire to finally complete this thesis. Furthermore, it seems more than appropriate to also express gratitude and thanks to Dr A. Fataar for his advice and assistance.

Through the wisdom, grace and blessings of the Almighty, from whom all good deeds originate, I dedicate this thesis to my parents, wife and children. I fully appreciate and respect everything that they have done to help me in my endeavours and reach my goals.

Many thanks as well to the typists who endured long hours of refining the thesis, thus making it possible to submit it in due time.
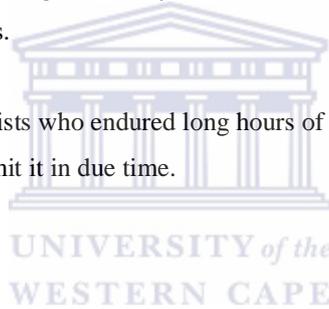
LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ANC	African National Congress
C2005	Curriculum 2005
CASS	Continuous Assessment
CTA	Common Task Assessment
DoE	Department of Education
EMDC	Educational Management and Development Centre
LO	Learning Outcomes
LSM	Learning Resource Materials
NCS	National Curriculum Statement
NEPI	National Education Policy Initiative
NEPA	National Education Policy Act
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
NQF	National Qualifications Framework
OBE	Outcomes-Based Education
RNCS	Revised National Curriculum Statement
RSA	Republic of South Africa
SACMEQ	Southern African Consortium for Monitoring Education
SADTU	South African Democratic Teachers' Union
SAQA	South African Qualification Authority
SASA	South African Schools Act
SES	Socio-Economic Status
SO	Specific Outcomes
WCED	Western Cape Education Department

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND TO THE RESEARCH

1.1. Introduction

In August 1994, the new Minister of Education, Professor S. Bengu, launched a national process to transform the South African education system. This was done within the framework of the democratic, non-racial ideals of the new government, so as to redress the socio-economic inequalities, low achievement levels and low quality of education experienced in the Apartheid schooling system. However the efforts and intentions to transform education were constrained by harsh realities and large but complex challenges, such as high failure rates, undue repetition and drop-out rates from Grades 9 to 12. The concern regarding the unacceptable repetition and exit rates was expressed during the Budget Vote Speech by the Minister when he introduced the Action Program and stated:

> *"An educationally acceptable policy to prevent **undue repetition of grade** will be introduced to curb abuse (especially grade 12) and **ensure** that the young **exit the school system at an appropriate age**."* (Budget Vote Speech, 1998: 5)

According to the Global Monitoring Report (2005), governments faced many challenges as illustrated by the statement below:

> *"As many governments strive to expand basic education, they also face the challenges of ensuring that students stay in schools long enough to acquire the knowledge they need to cope in a rapidly changing world." (*EFA Global Monitoring Report, 2011: 4)

The failure of the education department to address the problems of high repetition and dropout rates in the South African schooling system was later highlighted by Bloch (undated: refer to *Business Day* 2006):

> "*...some 50% of learners do not even make it through the school system and dropout before completion with one recent study claiming that only 32% of 2003 grade 10's actually passed.*" (Business Day, 2006: 3).

Attempting to address the problems of high repetition and dropout rates, the succeeding Minister of Education, Mrs N. Pandor, established a Ministerial Committee on Learner Retention in the South African Schooling System, in April 2007, "to investigate the extent of retention and dropout in the schooling system, as well as the reasons for dropout among learners in Grade 9 to 12 in the period 2003 to 2005" (RSA Government Gazette, 2007: 3). The findings of the investigation stated, "*(a) there is a problem of learner retention which is more pronounced after grade 9. The dropout rate below grade 9 is statistically insignificant but increases from grades 10 to 12 (RSA Ministerial Report, 2008: xi). (b) A proportion of learners starting grade 9 are not in a position to finish secondary school, and that the system does not provide sufficient alternatives. As a consequence, there is a high failure rate, repetition and dropout rate in grades 10 to 12 which is a waste of many years of learning.*" (RSA Ministerial Report, 2008: xii).

In 2008 the Minister of Education, Mrs N. Pandor, during a Council of Ministers Meeting, reported on these findings and reiterated that, "*A significant number of children **dropout** of the schooling system after Grade 9 – a worrying sign.*" (Cape Times, 2008:6). The high failure rate, repetition and dropout rates after Grade 9 became increasingly apparent as a serious problem.

This, however, is not acceptable as a desired outcome for educational transformation in a democracy. The research study therefore focuses on and examines educators' understanding of the implementation and management of grade progression and promotion in a secondary school.

To answer the research problem or question, this chapter has been divided into seven sections. The first section provides a brief introduction, the next outlines the context and background to the study and the third section presents the research question. The fourth section states the aims and objectives of the study. The following section illuminates the significance of the study. The sixth section briefly discusses the research methodology; including the scope, research design and limitations of the study. The last section presents an outline of the structure of the thesis.

1.2. Background to the study

The researcher's academic interests led to a teaching career which began in 1998 and he has been part of the teaching fraternity for more than twenty years. The Education Department introduced 'transformational outcomes-based education (OBE)' processes in schools in 2003. How the policy would work in practice became of great interest to the researcher. OBE replaced traditional teaching methods from Grade 1 to Grade 10. The researcher's current experience in the classroom has been adversely affected because of the large numbers of learners per classroom, disciplinary problems, no access to resources or books, and low levels of literacy and numeracy. Added to this have been the high rates of absenteeism and truancy by learners, low through-put, low educational achievements, high rates of promotion and 'condonations' in the lower grades (8 and 9), with high failure rates in Grade 10.

Jansen (1997: 1) led the critical reaction to OBE with his article *Can policy learn? Reflections on why OBE will fail*, and a later version, *Critical Analysis of Outcomes-Based Education* (Jansen, 1998:1), where he probed the validities and implications of OBE and explained why it would fail in South Africa. This was reiterated in many newspaper articles, (Cape Times, 2008: 3; The Teacher, 2008: 26) and confirmed by other theorists like Chisholm (2003-4) and Christie (1999). According to Jansen (1997: 7), OBE was based on flawed assumptions as to what happened in classrooms, how they were organised and what kinds of educators existed in the system. He claimed that educators had limited access to information about OBE or understanding of OBE even where such information was available. Added to this, OBE did not define the content of learning programmes. What was interesting was that the same set of learning outcomes could be exposed to a wide range of interpretations by educators. Another point he made was that OBE would multiply the administrative burden for educators through continuous assessments. Jansen also asserted that continuous assessment in practice meant little more than assessing continuously in most schools.

Another claim by Jansen (1997: 7-10), was that OBE trivialised curriculum content even as it claimed to be a potential leverage away from the content coverage - i.e. it threatened to atomise and fragment curriculum knowledge. Moreover, he argued that OBE required a radical revision of the most potent mechanism in schools militating against curriculum innovation, the system of assessment. Brandt (1994: 6-7) claimed that few schools re-organised their curriculum and overhauled their assessment and reporting schemes to reflect new higher outcomes. Jansen (1997:10) further argued that OBE as a curriculum innovation had not taken adequate account of the resource status of schools and classrooms in South Africa. He speculated that OBE would further undermine the already weak culture of learning and teaching, by escalating the administrative burden of change when rationalisation was also applied. This inherently limited the human resource capacity to manage the change. Jansen

(1997:10) referred to the weak reception of continuous assessment in schools and the ineffectiveness of the syllabus revision process, and he pointed out that these weaknesses could have warned policy planners and crafters of the implications of OBE.

The terrain of progression and promotion became an interesting area of enquiry when it became clear that this terrain was fundamentally flawed and one of the reasons why OBE was failing in both functional and under-performing schools. Various educators from different schools (Athlone News, 2006: 4) commented on OBE by stating that most Grade 7 learners, when entering Grade 8, could not read and write or count properly and this became problematic, especially when they were taught OBE style. In Grade 10 they were required to write a three-hour final examination and they could not cope. Another educator (Athlone News, 2006: 4) stated that a mere 40% of their Grade 10 learners had passed the June examination that year. In the past the rate had been closer to 60%. A senior educator stated the following: 'the effects of OBE have now become evident and burst out in Grade 10' (Athlone News, 2006: 4). In one instance, in a class of Grade 10 learners, the actual pass rate was only 45%, but the OBE-influenced rate pushed it to 62 % (Davy, Gallie, Moll and Steinberg, 2008: 6). This was an artificial pass mark and pass rates began to rise immediately in all grades at the school.

Experience suggests that learners arrive in Grade 10 with little or no understanding of the basic rules of grammar, mathematics or any other subject because they were supposed to 'discover' these along the way. They have neither little or no background knowledge nor those concepts fundamental to the mastery of the subjects they are doing. Brighter learners succeed not because of OBE but despite it.

Indications suggested that a huge crisis, with tremendous implications, was unfolding in the education fraternity. It was for these reasons that the underlying dynamics and multi-dimensional issues surrounding OBE were explored in this study focusing on grade progression and promotion. Based on educational theory, the researcher's own experience, and the experiences of other educators, this study was pursued in order to answer the following research question and subsequent sub-questions.

1.3. The research question

The question that is central to this thesis asks what the understanding is, amongst educators of Grade 10 learners in a township school, regarding grade progression and promotion, based on OBE.

The research question was divided into three sub-questions.
1. What is the nature and implication of grade progression and promotion in the understanding of educators?
2. What are the actual practices of educators regarding grade progression and promotion?
3. How do these differ from Departmental policies regarding grade progression and promotion?
4. What are the implications of educators' practices in education?

1.4. The aims and objectives of the study

The primary and overall aim of this study is to examine and reflect on the implementation and effect of grade progression and grade promotion in OBE from the perspective of educators in a disadvantaged school in the Western Cape.

The secondary and more specific objectives of the study are as follows:

- to complete a literature review investigating how educators view and understand grade progression and grade promotion;
- to explore how progressions and promotions (practices) in OBE have been implemented in the classroom by educators;
- to determine how the implementation differs from the official policy.

1.5. Significance of the study

This study is significant on various levels. Although the findings cannot be generalized, the depth in which the study was done could inform educators, policy-makers and other stakeholders. Research on grade progression and promotion based on OBE, is seriously lacking and because of this there was a need for further study to fill an important gap. This study illuminates aspects crucial to understanding grade progression and promotion and its impact on learners, especially those in Grade 10.
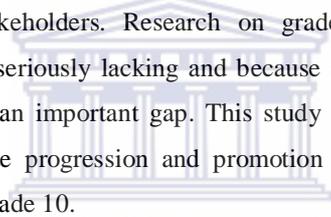
1.6. Research methodology

This research study will utilize the qualitative approach in order to gain detailed, contextual information and obtain a better focus and insight into the research topic.

1.6.1. Scope

The field of OBE regarding the three message systems: curriculum, pedagogy and assessments (Bernstein: 1975), is a very large area to cover in a short thesis. The focus therefore, concentrates mostly on grade progression and promotion to illuminate the understanding, practices and activities emerging from the investigation. The study concentrates briefly on OBE and assessments, in terms of grade progression and promotion.

1.6.2. Research design

Specific methods were used for gathering data; namely semi-structured interviews with educators and learners, completing field notes and observations so that the researcher might get an 'insider' perspective on grade progression and promotion within a classroom governed by outcomes-based practices.

Questionnaires and interviews were used, as well as participant observation, since the researcher saw the need to be 'embedded' or to be part of the 'natural setting'. The methodological issues will be covered in chapter three.

1.6.3. Limitations of the study

The study was confronted with various limitations to the research methodology. The first limitation was the small sample which consisted of only one school and the eight educators who were involved. The sample used was limited because of time constraints and it is for this reason that this study cannot be generalized. The other limitation was the lack of information on grade progression and promotion in South Africa and this was supplemented by international literature.

1.7. Outline and structure of the thesis

Chapter one comprises the introduction and rationale for the study. Included here is the background to the research problem and the research questions, with three sub-questions, on which the study is based. Furthermore the aims and objectives, the significance of the study and an outline of the research methodology are also provided.

Chapter two consists of the literature review, i.e. the conceptual and theoretical clarification of information, discourses and narratives that influence the theoretical framework. The main points of the literature review are drawn and presented with arguments, ideas and opinions from the work of international scholars. The focus of the literature review is on core policy changes, the reform process, schooling and social relations and finally classroom observation and practice.

Chapter three elucidates the research methodology and design. It focuses on the approach applied and the research design instruments; namely observations, questions, interviews and analysis of the data-collection documents. The rationale for the choice of research design, sampling techniques and ethical considerations are also discussed.

Chapter four presents the findings based on data collected in one school. It provides the characteristics of the school investigated. It offers data analysis, interpretation and discussion of the in-depth interviews and classroom observation, as well as document analysis.

Chapter five presents the conclusions drawn from this research. It briefly presents the implications of this study and it offers a number of recommendations for stakeholders and future research.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Introduction

The purpose of the literature review is to reflect on local and international literature readings, discussions, debates and constructive criticism that relate to grade progression and promotion in OBE.

The literature review has a coherent outline, which refers to policy changes, frameworks and theory. This also includes the historical reform process, and educational and social theories that inform the schooling process and classroom practices. The first part deals with core policy initiatives and settings. The second part contextualizes and locates the study within the broad historical reform process driven by the 'political will' of the people. The third part deals with theories of education and schooling. Finally, classroom observation and teaching practices are highlighted.

This distribution of material is there to create the conceptual and theoretical framework required to understand grade progression and promotion in OBE. An analytical lens is provided through which to view and inspect the complex nature of grade progression and promotion in the classrooms of a selected, mixed middle, low and working-class school.

2.2. Background to the study

The primary focus of this study is to explore an understanding of grade progression and promotion in OBE among educators of grade 10 learners in a mixed middle, low and working-class township school. For the purpose of gaining a better understanding, this section relates to the theoretical framework in

order to provide an analytical lens to grasp the nature of grade progression and promotion in a learning context.

In this section the quantified analysis and nature of a merit-based policy (passing and failing) that was previously implemented will be looked at, as well as the subsequent changes introduced, consisting of "progression and promotion". Moreover, the requirements for grade promotion will be provided and the theoretical constructs relating to the types of educator approaches (consequentialist and deontologist) to grading, will be illuminated. Finally, the ethical considerations will be looked at, and the relationship between success and grade promotion will be outlined, as well as the vehement objections to such a policy.

Prior to 1994, South African education experienced substantial infrastructural backlogs that deprived learners of equal opportunities to quality education. The nature of the condition was "*a culture of going to school and the learners persisted even if they failed several times*". These conditions continued for a number of years even after the educational reforms were introduced after 1994. Many of the learners had high repetition rates in primary schooling, with limited access to secondary schooling. The average educator to learner ratio in secondary schools was assumed to be 1:35 by the department but in reality it was over 50 learners per class per educator (RSA Government Gazette No. 25031, 2003: 31, 33, Fig. 10). Overcrowding or large classes could not be avoided, but was aggravated by the high failure rates in township schools. According to the Western Cape Education Department's document titled Human Capital Development Strategy (WCED-HCDS, 2007: 55, Figure 2), the average failure rate for over-age learners in the Western Cape in 1995 was 10% in Grade 1, whereas in Grade 9 it was 31% and in Grade 10 it was 31%.

In the Western Cape the number of repeaters for Grade 10 was 20 935, or 12%. The number of dropouts was 26 653 calculated as 15%, which was a very high percentage (WCED-HCDS, 2007: 54, Figure 1). The drop-out rate was high in relation to the race factor but higher for boys than girls. Bloch (2009: 67) referred to 'progress through the system,' how well schools retained learners and what the drop-out and throughput pass levels reflected; this was another method to measure the effectiveness of schools. To elaborate further, with imputations for the Western Cape Province from the WCED paper titled "Focus on Youth" 2004-2014 (2005: Figure 1, 7-9):

- Between 10 000 to 15 000 young people leave the schooling system annually.
- Some 99 158 learners registered for Grade 1 (in 1995) but only 50 698 reached Grade 10. This reflected that only 51, 1% of learners still remained in the system.

The problem arising from the above is that 48 460 learners were unaccounted for in the system. From 2001 to 2004, on calculation, 201 786 learners did not progress with their age cohorts as expected. The WCED paper (2005:10), 'Focus on Youth' 2004-2014, further stated that the drop-out rate in our schools is around 50%, with most learners dropping out after Grade 9; this is also mentioned in the *Weekend Argus* (2008:18). The Republic of South Africa (RSA) Ministerial Committee on Learner retention (2008: xiii) reiterated that the dropout rate was increasing sharply from Grade 9 onwards. The dropout rate in Grade 10 was 16, 1% and in Grade 11 it was 24.2% (2008: xiii). Bloch (2009:67) claimed that millions of children were not progressing through the school system and "*it is estimated that perhaps only 52 of every 100 who started Grade 1 make it to Grade 12.*" According to Bloch (2009:67), this situation is far from being desirable or palatable. It is for this reason that the 'gap' was seen and further

looked at to view how changes were introduced and implemented in the educational domain.

2.2.1. Accessibility, learning and achievement in schooling

By 1995, South Africa had committed itself to the Millennium Development Goals, which were premised on the right to basic education. However, expanded access has little impact unless it includes regular attendance, enables progression through grades at appropriate ages, and provides meaningful learning, achievement and completion (Motala, Dieltiens and Sayed, 2009: 251).

Lam, Ardington and Leibrandt (2006:2) delivered a conference paper, *Progress through School in Urban South Africa*, which tabled the following figures:

> *"We document large differences in the probability of grade advancement between the White, Coloured and African youth. While 86% of White 9th graders in 2002 had reached grade 12 by 2005, only 29% of Africans and 42% of Coloureds had reached grade 12."*

The post-apartheid government focused its attention on the problem of accessibility for learners after 1995, and according to Stats SA (2006), achieved a near universal enrolment in basic education up to the end of the compulsory phase. As the quote above indicates and as reiterated by Motala *et al* (2009: 262) the problem was, however, not only about 'accessibility' but that the learners attended and completed, within a specified period, a full cycle of good quality basic education. According to Motala *et al* (2009: 253), the intention was one of adopting an inclusive education policy approach, which in their words was:

> *"[O]ne which promotes access for all... intended to deliver a more efficient system through reducing repetition and minimizing under-age and over-age learners by applying age–grade norms."*

Lam *et al* (2006:2) claimed that 'probit regressions' indicate grade advancement, which between 2002 and 2005 was strongly associated with learners' performance on a literacy and numeracy evaluation conducted by CAPS (Cape Area Panel Study) in 2002.

According to the Global Monitoring Report (UNESCO EFA, 2008), the national repetition rate in primary education dropped from 10, 4% in 1999 to 8% in 2005 (Motala *et al*, 2009: 258). The emphasis was not on lower grades (1 to 7) but on the upper grades (9 to 10), where repetition rates were increasing at an alarming rate. In these grades learners were retained in order to perform better in Grade 12. The major concern was the drop-out rate, which occurred during the transition from basic to post-basic education (Motala *et al*, 2009: 260). The end result was that learners in the educational system progressed at different rates. This has socio-economic implications with the poorest of the poor progressing very slowly. The RSA Ministerial Committee on Learner Retention (2008: xvi) noted that drop-outs were preceded by unsuccessful school experiences, and the risk of dropping-out was higher for learners who were older than for those at younger ages when they entered into second phase education.

The patterns of slow progression, increased age–range as grades progress, and repetition are important indicators of achievement. Government had insight into the gender patterns (boys dropping-out at a constant rate), rates of retention and age grade norms (Motala *et al*, 2009: 261), hence the government decided to focus on retaining learners in the system until they completed their education. At this juncture the government decided to prescribe a new grading process in OBE, a shift away from merit-based policy to one of Progression and Promotion. This was done to ease the bottleneck between Grades 9 and 10, which carried most of the tensions and the conflict dynamics.

The new educational landscape of OBE was developed to anticipate the 'progression and promotion' phase, but the nature of the new schooling system needs to be explained first. The schooling system was divided into a General Education and Training (GET) phase which included primary (Grades 1 to 7) and junior secondary (Grades 8 and 9), and a Further Education and Training (FET) phase (Grades 10 to grade 12) with learners in secondary schools or in the colleges.

The question then is what is meant by 'grade progression' and 'promotion'? A general interpretation is that it is an ongoing activity throughout the year. In fact, it is all the teaching, learning and assessment that are directed daily towards the progression of learners' knowledge, skill and competencies as stated in WCED, (2007: Slide 9), RSA Government Gazette No. 29467 (2006) and RSA Government Gazette No. 29626 (2007). Progression and promotion is also a key design principle of the Revised National Curriculum Statement, Grades R to 12 which enables the learner to gradually develop more complex, deeper and broader knowledge, skills and understanding (WCED, 2003: 25).

Progression means the learner progresses towards the attainment of outcomes at the level appropriate to a grade throughout the year (WCED, 2007: Slide 2). According to the RSA Government Gazette (2006: 10), progression is applicable to Grades R-8 and promotion applies to Grades 9 to 12. Promotion means a learner is promoted to the next grade on the basis of demonstrating competencies in formal assessments that cover seven subjects (WCED, 2007: 13) and is elaborated further in section 2.5.

Problems became apparent when the government introduced the elements of grade progression and grade promotion into the GET band (Grades 1 to 9). At this juncture there was the intention to; 'show-case' the good results to the broader community and to prove that OBE was an effective and efficient system.

This was an attempt to gain further legitimacy, authority and approval from cabinet, NGOs, unions, Governing Bodies, business, communities and other stakeholders.

2.3. Educational reform progression debate drawn from international literature

Firstly, a historical overview of the development of 'graded schools' is provided, and then the debate between retentionist and pro-promotion perspectives is discussed.

According to Thompson (1980: 36), graded schools gained prominence in the United States in the middle of the nineteenth century, whereas in South Africa this concept started late in the twentieth century. The common notion was that learners progressed through an individual process, by working through texts at their own rate, and educational status was determined by the texts completed. Graded schools served to standardize education. Learners were placed in classes according to their academic achievement, and were required to master all their subjects (1980: 36).

Grade repetition was used to maintain the grade system where those at risk were kept behind. Learners who failed were considered lazy or undisciplined (Thompson, 1980: 36). This system produced a high percentage of failures, about 50%, and the resultant effect was a high drop-out rate. What was not surprising was that schools had holding power over learners' promotion, making decisions around age and maturity, when academic standards were achieved (1980: 36). Later in the United States learner achievement dropped or decreased dramatically. A parallel can be drawn between South Africa and the United States in experiences, understandings, achievements, competency and results. Lehr (1982: 234) stated that schools in the USA witnessed a decline in learner

reading, writing and mathematical abilities. Thus, according to Ebel (1980: 386), it was important to identify and report learners who failed in order for public schools to gain the respect and confidence of the community.

The educators and management of schools need to make decisions on learning achievements, regarding whether to promote or retain learners. At this point the concepts of 'non-promotion' or 'retention' (the opposite of grading and promotion) in OBE will be engaged to underpin the theoretical base and enrich the conceptual framework needed to progress with the research study. The different categories of educators will then be reflected on: the pro-retentionist, anti-retentionist, remediationist, standard-bearers and work ethic moralists will be discussed to enlighten the reader on the theoretical constructs of this research study.

2.3.1. Issues surrounding grade promotion and progression

Because of the lack of literature on grade progression and promotion, the literature on retention is discussed in order to understand the dynamics surrounding grade progression and promotion. The arguments in favour of retention as described by Owen and Ranick (1977: 531-3) will now be illuminated. They argued that the policy of "not promoting" learners until they have mastered the skills at expected grade levels is more acceptable. They claimed that schools work very hard to bring learners up to acceptable and established standards by diagnosing individual strengths and weaknesses, and by providing intensive instructive sessions to meet the needs of slower learners. They suggested that learners should be retained and placed in classes with other learners of their age and 'partial promotion' be given to those who achieve most of the skills of their grade. They further commented that this increases achievement and IQ test results, and decreases drop-out and retention rates. What

was crucial for them is that compensatory or special education should be provided for disadvantaged learners (1977: 533).

The 'pro-retentionists' argue that retention has a beneficial effect on elementary grades, but not junior grades. However, learners placed in compensatory education programmes make huge gains, even larger than those of other groups. Finlayson (1977: 205-6) tried to investigate whether 'repetition' destroyed learners' self-concepts and their future achievements. The findings were conclusive that non-promotion or retention does not create self-concept problems. These also show that self-concept scores of retained learners continue to increase while those who are promoted as borderline-case learners, drops slightly (1977: 205-6).

Other arguments for retention are that (1) it is a means to raise educational standards, (2) it allows learners to 'catch-up' on pre-requisite skills (mastering of basic techniques), (3) they will be less at risk of failure when they move to the next grade, (4) it will ensure competence at the end of the school career, (5) it will lower the drop-out rate of learners with learning deficiencies, given that such situations will not be allowed to accumulate (Shepard and Smith, 1990: 84). Another idea that comes through strongly is that educators accept any improvement during the repeat year itself as proof that retention works (Shepard and Smith, 1990: 85). Enacting retention policies and strategies tends to garner high levels of public support and confidence for district officials, although it has political risks. The major dilemma for educators and management is that if a policy is applied they may fail too few or too many and this may diminish public confidence in schools.

Tomchin and Impara (1992: 202) stated that educators at all grade levels believe that retention is an acceptable school practice, which prevents learners from facing daily failure and motivates them to work harder. Almost 98% of educators

in this study disagree with the statement that "learners should never be retained". They believe that retention is necessary to maintain grade level standards but retention does not prevent classrooms from having a wide range of learner achievements. Both Tomchin and Impara (1992: 204) feel that retaining learners in lower or higher grade levels will not result in permanent labelling. These pro-retention educators feel that: (1) Retention is necessary for future success in the school-state mandated standards for each grade, provided there is a firm basis for promotion criteria. They agree on the view: 'the younger the better' for retaining learners, and that educators do not want to be held responsible for allowing a student to 'squeak through'; through retention they can, however, develop a positive self-concept and strong leadership style. (2) Retention is mandated by the curriculum, which constrains educators' flexibility to make appropriate content-related decisions as to whether learners need more time to learn. (3) Retention reflects educators' adherence to standards – that is how they are judged; but more important, educators are judged by the kind of learners they send on to the next grade.

The "anti-retentionist" or "pro-promotion" educators feel that retention has harmful emotional consequences for learners. They see retention as a traumatic experience which lowers the self-concept and should be avoided because a lower self-concept will result in a lower degree of achievement. It could become a vicious cycle and the learner may not do any better the second year. Bocks (1977: 379-83) concluded that grade repetition is not an effective "device" or measure to ensure greater mastery of subject. Schuyler and Matter (in Overman, 1986: 611) argued against retention as a means of encouraging greater gains in achievement. They discovered that if a child is retained, he or she does not seem to "catch-up" with classmates but more important "*as a group, retained learners are not better off academically than those promoted*", if they do not receive 'special instruction' after retention.

Overman (1986: 610), commenting on Schuyler's research findings, stated that retention is effective only in the short-term in that learners gain in reading increases during the retention year but declines when they are promoted, although not to a level as low as before retention. Although retained learners may initially advance to the middle of their class, their rate of achievement is not high enough to allow them to remain in that position. What eventually happens is that they find themselves in the lowest instructional group. Forty percent of learners actually learn less during the year in which they repeat a grade. Overman (1986: 611) stated that, 'some learners benefit from retention, but most did not'.

Shepard and Smith (1990: 84) emphasized that when retained, learners who moved on to the next grade perform more poorly on average than if they had gone on without repeating. They predicted that the benefit of retention tends to diminish over time, so that the difference between retained and promoted learners disappears in later grades. Anti-retentionists state that a learner who receives a poor quality of teaching and learning the first time will remain ineffective. The learner who fails but merely repeats the same curriculum or instruction is not facing the problem.

According to Tomchin and Impara (1992: 214), the remediationists, who are the majority of educators, believe that retention should be avoided unless the educator "*knew that the child could not succeed in the next grade*". The educator should help the child to mature and develop. They attribute learners' difficulties to deprived backgrounds. They believe that both educator and school must find ways to provide learners with a breadth of experiences e.g. being ready to venture into the communities. Remediationists are not entirely against retention because they feel it can be appropriate and beneficial. A common saying is, "*pushing them on through, that is not solving anything other than getting them out of our hair, but it's not making their lives any better, and that is where education is falling short*" (Tomchin and Impara, 1992: 215). These educators try

to avoid retention through the use of alternate placements or programmes, which are flexible in standards and in which the learner must put in maximum effort. The main question they pose to themselves is, will another year in the same grade result in improved learner outcomes?

The standard-bearer educators have the view that learners should be retained when they do not meet the prescribed standards (Tomchin and Impara, 1992: 215-16). Factors like maturity, effort, and size carry little significance, whereas performance standards are uppermost in their minds. They believe they have the expertise and responsibility to guide learners to attain the target standards. They are not concerned about learners' poverty backgrounds or experiences but they do acknowledge these as realities. They firmly believe retention is not harmful and is a positive step. In fact for them, "*promoting unprepared learners does not teach them responsibility for their own actions*". Their responsibility is to teach learners and prepare them for the future where hard work is required. They see themselves as school gatekeepers and ready to uphold school standards (1992: 216).

The last category in Tomchin and Impara (1992: 216-17) are the work-ethic moralist educators: they attribute learners' problems to home factors like parents' attitudes towards education or personal characteristics such as being lazy, unmotivated, or disorganized. They do believe in retention, but that it might not help the learner because they feel strongly that, "*one must work to be promoted hence those that did not put in effort must be retained*". Learners are not held accountable for a standard of performance. Low academic standards can be overlooked if a learner has a good attitude or acceptable work habits. Properly described, promotion translates into the view that learners "*don't have to do anything and they expect to get something for it*". They battle with learners to finish their assignments or change work habits. They attribute learner problems to factors beyond their control i.e. poverty and family values. They feel frustrated

because they are unable to motivate learners and teach them to be organized, and hence they feel bound to retain learners who do not put effort into their work (1992: 217).

There is a strong debate around retention and promotion but what is significant is the relationship between retained learners and drop-outs. According to Davidson (2004), learners who repeat two grades have a nearly 100% probability of dropping out (Kosiba, 2008: 18). The only way to prevent this high drop-out rate is when retained learners received special intervention (Owen and Ranick, 1977: 531-3 and Petersen, De Gracie and Ayabe, 1987: 107). In the next section schooling in South African is discussed to understand why different schools interpret policy differently.
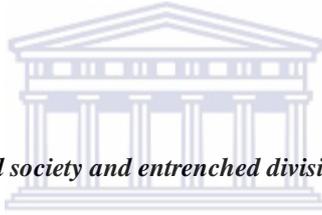
2.3.2. Schooling in an unequal society and entrenched divisions.

In this discussion the researcher will draw on the seminal discussions provided by Fataar and Paterson (1998 and 2002), Kallaway (2009), Bloch (2009), Fleisch (2008), Teese and Polesel (2003), and Chisolm (1996). This is done to explain the "two educational systems" through the analytical lens of the social reproduction process and to highlight the difference between "functional" (fortified) and "dysfunctional" (exposed) schools. Fataar (2008: 10) discusses township schools as "*incubators for social reproduction to entrap young people in place. Schools actually play a deficit role in the reproduction process by making it highly unstable and have precarious environments*." Bloch (2009: 25) concurred that "*education as it stands today continues to reproduce inequalities in society*", inequalities that threaten the stability and comforts of all young people. He added further, "*it is true that these inequalities, and even uneven power relationships, grow from or originate in divisions and problems in the wider society*." Further emphasis was that these inequalities, the marginalization

and exclusion that are created and reinforced, hold back many from looking ahead to a better shared tomorrow. Bloch (2009:25) explained how this happens by saying that when children fail in the system, it penalises them and rationalises their ongoing exclusion from the fruits of democracy and change. He summed it up by saying that education reinforces inequality and shuts learners out rather than being inclusive of their aspirations. In fact schools are reinforcing the social and economic marginalization of the poor and vulnerable (2009: 25).

Kallaway (2009:3) conceptualised South Africa as having "two nations" in education. He describes the first "nation" where teachers tackle the new curriculum in well-equipped schools with libraries and computers. This provides wonderful opportunities and allows for more creative teaching than ever before. In the second "nation" of schooling, for the majority of educators, the lack of resources leads to a perpetual stand-off with education officials who have a tenuous grasp on what is required. Educators are overwhelmed by the formidable demands of the new curriculum and demands on the education system to prepare learners for democratic citizenship and the global workplace. He added that in these schools, where there is little information available and even no textbooks, it is very difficult for educators to engage with intellectual challenges in the classroom (Kallaway, 2009: 3).

Fleisch (2008: 2) expanded this notion by describing the "first system" as being well resourced "Model C" schools, originating from the former White and Indian schools. He added that these learners acquire literacy and numeracy competencies to facilitate their mobility into productive employment sites. Hence the universities are largely filled by learners from the "white middle class" and emerging "black middle class". According to him the "second system" carries the majority of working-class and poor learners who are children of domestic servants, gardeners and self-employed parents. He described the second system as one where children do learn, but acquired a much more restricted set of

knowledge and skills than children of the first system. These children "read" but mostly at a very limited functional level. They cannot read with fluency or confidence (2008: 2-3). Christie (2008) described two extreme conditions which related to both the first and second systems: (a) in the first system, there are educators with a range of pedagogical skills and access to resources, giving active instructions in classes with strong content and knowledge; (b) in the second system, classes are empty with no educators, learners copy notes from the board and each other and they have very little substance. She added that learners have very different experiences of learning in classrooms in South Africa.

Fleisch's and Christie's views were reiterated by Bloch (2009: 59) who described "first economy" schools as providing a good education with optimum resources. These schools represent the 20% of graduates that enter universities and have success stories. About 10% of this graduate corps consists of formerly *"white or Model C schools and the rest (10%) are composed of well-performing black schools which produce better results."* The second economy schools are fundamentally township and rural schools which survive through sheer will and the force of good and committed educators. Bad results, educator brain drain, learner flight and desertion from township schools characterize these schools. Educators have fewer hours on the job, Grades 9 and 10 have huge drop-out rates, and also half of the enrolment population never get to the end to complete matriculation. Learners are failing to "read" and "write" or do simple mathematics at a level that will enable a country to compete. Also, only a small percentage of learners acquire an education of any meaningful quality. These schools play a "warehousing" function or became "sinkholes" (Bloch, 2009: 59).

In summary, rural and poor schools form the second system of education, trapping participants behind the massive blocks of the second economy. These learners are eventually trapped in the second economy of unemployment and poverty, facing severe challenges of being disadvantaged by the existence of two

unequal schooling systems. According to Bloch (2009: 58), these disadvantaged learners require the "space and order" of functioning schools in which to establish consistency and regularity. Bloch (2009: 17) claimed in his book *Toxic Mix* that 60–80% of the schools might be called dysfunctional i.e. where they are not producing the meaningful outcomes that are their priority goals, and these are mostly rural and township schools.

Two additional models, as illustrated by Du Plooy (2010: 15), have been used to clarify the characteristics of both the first and second systems based on their functionality as "functional" and "dysfunctional" schools, which was the first model (Fataar and Paterson 2002: 15-16). The second model was drawn from Teese and Polesel (2003: 123, 197) who explained concepts like "fortified schools" and "exposed schools". It foregrounds the reasons for the failure in working-class schools to properly implement OBE, assessments, grade progression and promotion. It also underscores how schools with different institutional characteristics might react differently to change in the new policy environment (Fataar and Paterson, 2002:15).

Functional schools in the first system according to the constructs of Fataar and Paterson (2002:16) are schools that:

> *"... possess the organised resources, the managerial and leadership capacity and a sufficiently motivated teacher corps to respond with creativity to change. The learning environment in such schools is shaped by systematic order and a universal set of rules and obligations. Teachers at these schools are not unaffected by stress brought about by policy changes, but they operate in terms of institutional culture and leadership structure which enable adaptation and the incorporation of innovation."*

According to Chisholm and Valley, (1996) dysfunctional schools are essentially:

> *"... a disorderly, if not chaotic environment. Teachers are faced with the daunting task of having to innovate and implement system change against a background of numerous socio- economic problems. Schools are characterised by the lack of a "culture of learning and teaching."*

The power and influence of the external environment on working-class schools through gang violence, drug abuse, vandalism, family disruptions, poverty and unemployment misleads or creates barriers and walls to prevent schools from becoming normal, regulated and operating as functional institutions. Bloch (2009: 26) put it very aptly by stating that schools carry a contradictory concept: schooling conveys the values and concerns of a given society at a point in time, but at the same time education holds the potential to go further than the present, to transcend the given and imagine the new. According to Fataar and Paterson (2002: 15) there is currently no particular school that displays the actual characteristics of being either a functional or a dysfunctional type. Most schools have some features of both these types (Fataar and Paterson, 1998: 29). However, there might be ideal types located at the end of the continuum.

Teese and Polesel (2003) enhanced the discussion by utilising concepts like "fortified schools" and "exposed schools" to demarcate the differences between the "first" and "second system" schools. These concepts open up the interrelationship between school culture, governance or institutional dynamics and classroom practices. Hence this study was based on the view that environments, governance, and classroom practice impact directly on the quality of learning and teaching. How the school culture, governance and classroom practice react and position themselves to continuous policy changes, curriculum and teaching practices, is what was studied. This was done to get a better understanding of the dynamics of schooling and the impact that OBE, assessments, grade progression and grade promotion have on working-class schools.

According to Teese and Polosel (2003), "fortified sites" can be viewed as those that service rich communities whereas "exposed sites" are normally associated with working-class and poor communities.

"Fortified sites" are essentially:

> *"Schools where parents of high economic status will choose schools to maximise the advantage for their children. They employ highly qualified and experienced staff, have well stocked libraries and extensive electronic data resources, they employ remedial teachers and councillors, train their students in exam techniques, provide smaller classes, filter and stream intakes, and offer optimum teaching conditions." (Tesse and Polosel 2003: 197)*

"Exposed sites" on the other hand are:

> *"schools where learners struggle with the demands of the curriculum. Schools are marked by multiple disadvantages, poor language skills, fragmented family lives, poverty, low levels of parental education, lack of facilities, and leisure that is distracting rather than supportive of schooling. Effective schools depend largely on the capacity of educators to make up for the gap between what the curriculum assumes about learners and who learners really are." (Tesse and Polosel 2003: 123)*

Chisholm and Valley (1996) had the view that schools are confronted with having to deal with learner welfare concerns, emanating from disadvantaged socio-economic circumstances or disrupted family structures. In real terms it is essentially about survival for schools located in the working-class environment. According to Fataar and Paterson (2002: 17), township schools can be labelled as "dysfunctional". In terms of the researchers' analytical interpretation, township schools have overwhelming traits or features of "exposed and dysfunctional

schools" (Teese and Polesel, 2003: 123) or "second system schools" (Fleisch; 2008: 2), which are associated with working-class and poor communities.

In this study the researcher used Fataar and Paterson's (2002: 18, 19) constructs of "moral minimising" and "moral diffusion" as a framework to understand the "lethargy or slowness" to implement grade progression and promotion in working-class schools. It can be viewed as a barrier or block for educators and learners who are stuck behind the OBE "gateway" and cannot pass through because of their minimal or partial understanding of OBE, assessments, grade progression and promotion.

Moral minimising and moral diffusion, according to Fataar and Paterson (2002: 18), refer to educators' and school managers' behavioural responses in disadvantaged conditions. Moral minimising refers to processes by which educators develop a specific identity, one located in the hopelessness they feel about being unable to change the schooling context in which they operate. They respond in ways that "diffuse" moral responsibility and use the constrained conditions of work to justify their minimum participation in schooling processes (2002: 18). Moral minimising is a coping mechanism, which they use to deal with the dysfunctional environment that encapsulates their work in classrooms. Both Fataar and Paterson (2002: 18) were of the opinion that "the individual coping mechanism" is reinforced by an institutional coping response of moral diffusion. They argued that moral diffusion occurs where the management of the school cannot muster or galvanise the moral authority to recruit educators into a process where the staff as a whole may as a unit engage with the vision of the school (Fataar and Paterson, 2002: 19).

Kallaway (2009: 2-3) explained how this moral minimising evolved or developed. He stated that the safety net was removed because there was a radical confusion between content of education (the knowledge to be taught and

concepts mastered), and the means of teaching (the methodology). This was aggravated when the department emphasised progressive methodology (educator as facilitator rather than educator as expert) thereby doing harm to the education project (Kallaway 2009; 2). In real terms there is a general sense of "hopelessness" permeating or flowing into educational pedagogical and methodological terrain. Compounding the situation is the insurmountable administrative workload, which the educators have in terms of designing learning programmes, learning outcomes, lesson plans, assessment tasks and criteria or standards.

Kallaway (2009: 2-3) postulated that motivation is essential to education and that any good educator must learn how to get learners to engage with problems and promote a sense of "wonderment" or excitement at the nature of knowledge in all its diversity. He acknowledged that "wonderment" must not be achieved through "tricks for teaching", self activity, learner enjoyment and classroom games in themselves, unless the methods are located in a rigorous grasp of the fundamental levers of education. At the end the enterprise ends in frustration or deep disappointment (2009: 2-3). Fleisch (2008: 106-107) related to the methodology in classrooms by stating that educators tend to focus on lower-order cognitive tasks as a way of managing children's lack of mastery of language.

The two tier system, whether fortified or exposed sites (Teese and Polosel, 2003), as well as Fataar and Paterson's (1998; 2002) functional or dysfunctional schools and their constructs "moral minimising and moral diffusion", are useful tools in trying to comprehend the nature of educators' understanding of grade promotion and progression.

2.4. Education and policy reform post-1994

The first stage of initiating and conceptualizing reform was in 1994, with a curriculum review process that attempted to align the old apartheid framework with the new democratic policy and values. The second reform process however, was early in 1997 when the Minister of Education launched the new Curriculum 2005 based on OBE (so named because it was intended to continue until 2005). The rapid deployment of this new curriculum, labelled as Curriculum 2005 (a brand name for OBE), encapsulated the principles of OBE. Later, in January 1998, it was introduced in Grade 1, and eventually it was implemented in the year 2000 for learners in Grade 7. The third reform process was the ministerial review process of 2000. Then, in 2003, there was the National Curriculum Statement which attempted to align General Education and Training (GET) with Further Education and Training (FET), and in 2006 came the "orientation" or "training" of the new Revised Curriculum Statement for both GET (Grades 1 to 9) and FET (Grades 10, 11 & 12).

This section will deal with the debates that have surrounded educational reform processes and policy initiatives in South Africa after 1994. The first wave of reforms was in 1994 when a democratic state was established with a Constitution and Bill of Rights. Section 29 in the RSA Government Gazette No. 17678 (1996: 13) deals with education, stating that, "Everyone has the right to basic education, including adult basic education, in the language of their choice (if this is possible)." A discourse for democratic policy in education was then constructed, implemented and evaluated. Key to this was the South African Schools Act of 1996 (SASA) which represented the legal basis for all schools in the country.

The second wave of reform was in 1997 when the Minister of Education stated that the curriculum and education system as a whole did not meet the needs of learners, resulting in large numbers of failures, push outs and drop-outs (DoE,

1997: 12).This partly formed the background to the adoption of the new OBE curriculum approach with mechanisms like progression and promotion to aid and transform the system.

According to Chisholm (2003: 3)

> "...it was a pedagogical route out of apartheid education, with the emphasis on good results and success, on outcomes, and the possibility of achievement by all at different paces and times rather than on a subject-bound, content-laden curriculum."

The aim was to develop learners with "*a culture of skills, knowledge, competencies and expertise ready to participate in the labour market and to have an economy which competes in a globally competitive market,*" as stated in the Western Cape Education Department's Human Capital Development Strategy (WCED-HCDS, 2008: 31). The new approach recognized problems like diversity, unemployment, the marginalized and those previously excluded, hence it adopted the OBE and Curriculum 2005 approach to establish a fair, equal and empowered society. The intention of the new educational system was to do the following: (a) provide access to basic quality education for all, (b) develop learners who can think critically, be creative and develop their knowledge base (DoE, 2003 NCS: 8), (c) allow learners to acquire the requisite skills, knowledge and values to compete in a globalizing environment (WCED-HCDS, 2008: 31), (d) develop national human resources to be more productive, mobile and employable, (e) meet the business sector needs of providing a skilled workforce, (f) focus more on specific skills required in industry, (g) reduce unemployment, crime and other social ills, (h) recreate normatively framed radical educational policies in a new but anticipated environment.

Jansen (1998: 321-331), in his explanation of why OBE would fail, outlined various problems related to the anticipated educational dispensation: (1) OBE

policy was based on flawed assumptions about what happens in the classrooms, (2) OBE would undermine the already "fragile" learning environments in schools and classrooms, (3) education policy that is not driven by the daily experiences of educators, learners, principals, parents and governing bodies would be exactly similar to the apartheid education which was experienced by the oppressed, (4) any attempt to re-fashion our educational system must work from classroom-level up. The problems associated with OBE were further outlined by Jansen (Jansen and Christie, 1999: 145-154).

The third wave of reform was related to the ministerial review process in 2000. It concerned the refinement and consolidation of Curriculum 2005. This led to the Revised National Curriculum Statement in 2002, implemented in 2004. According to Chisholm (2003: 3-4), this was not what transpired during implementation as it was confounded by: (a) a skewed curriculum structure and design, (b) lack of alignment between curriculum and assessment policy, (c) inadequate orientation, with uneven training sessions as specified for educators, (d) lack of learning resource materials, with some varying in quality, (e) poor use of alternative resources, plus no access to libraries, (f) policy and administrative overload, (g) minimum teaching and learning being practised in classrooms, (h) inadequate recognition of curriculum requirements, (i) acute shortage of personnel in classrooms.

This was followed by a period of continuous systemic testing at both local and international level. Ross and Suze (2004) pointed out that the quality of schooling received by South African learners was below the regional average, once cross-country differences in Social Economic Status (SES) had been controlled. They also gave the opinion that the South African schooling system fared dismally in promoting social equity, which indicates that learners of a low SES are at a greater disadvantage than most of the other Southern African Consortium for Monitoring Educational Quality (SACMEQ) countries. Crouch

and Fasih (2004: 1, in van der Berg and Louw, 2006: 1) indicated that the South African schooling system fares poorly in terms of efficiency and effectiveness.

Bloch (2009: 66) stated that during a Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) test for reading and mathematics, South Africa was at the bottom of the list in comparison to other countries. In literacy, only 10% of South African pupils matched the top 75% of other countries. This, he says, dropped to 6% in mathematics and science. According to van der Berg (2009:11), in a literacy test in PIRLS for 2006, South Africa reached a score of 302 out of 600, the lowest-ever. Van der Berg (2009: 5) further stated that, in the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMMS) test in 2003, the mean mathematics score was 280 out of a total of 700 at the bottom lowest score ever, against all developing countries. The Department of Education found that most of South African Grade 6 learners' Mathematics competency should be at Grade 3 level or below (2009 ; 5-6).

During the period from 1999 to 2002, conflict around governance, curriculum and discipline issues was further exacerbated by the "highly undebatable topics" of rationalization and retrenchments, which were already legislated as part of the administrative procedure.

School Governing Bodies and the broader parent masses were unaware of the unfolding events. A "hybridized OBE curriculum approach" (Fataar, 2006: 648) was to be followed. A pre-requirement for participation in these learning areas was that you had to become "an expert on the subject matter" before any comment could be entertained. Lack of interest, self-confidence and experience amongst the broader stakeholders were some of the reasons why they allowed themselves to forego opportunities for public participation in the unfolding discourse of outcomes-based education. Nor was the political will, with which

administrative and managerial paradigms shifted, enough to ensure the effective and efficient alignment and delivery of outcomes-based education.

Problems became more apparent when the government introduced the elements of grade progression and grade promotion into the GET band (Grades 1 to 9). At this juncture there was the symbolic intention to "show-case" the good results to the broader community and to prove that OBE was effective and efficient as a system. This was an attempt to be granted further legitimacy, authority and approval by cabinet, NGOs, unions, Governing Bodies, business, communities and other stakeholders. This was in line with Jansen's notion of political symbolism where the state introduced powers in order to gain legitimacy but brought about few changes in the schools themselves.

Jansen also referred to aspects of policy borrowing (1997), which could account for why OBE failed. The "father of OBE", William Spady, was an American educationist from Oregon, USA. He was internationally recognized as an authority on OBE. Spady (1994: 9) stated three assumptions in this approach: (1) "…*all students can learn and succeed, but not on the same day and in the same way*"; (2) "…*successful learning promotes even more successful learning*"; and (3) "*.,.schools control the conditions that directly affect successful school learning.*" Thus, by implication, all learners could learn successfully, irrespective of the pace and time at which learning took place.

Spady (1994: 1) stated the following:

> *"OBE means clearly focusing and organizing everything in an educational system around what is essential for all students to be able to do successfully at the end of their learning experiences. This means starting with a clear picture of what is important for students to be able to do, then organizing curriculum, instruction, and assessment to make sure this learning ultimately happens."*

The above quote suggests the setting or planning of outcomes that learners need to achieve at the end of their schooling. For the South African educational system it meant a total overhaul or restructuring of the old traditional system, which was "content-based", to one which was learner-centred, results-orientated and outcomes-based. Another scholar, Battersby (1999, in Naicker, 1999: 47) declared that the outcomes must "*empower the learners to be able to make sense of the world they lived in, recognize and appreciate nature and culture, thereby functioning effectively and thoughtfully in their respective lives.*" Todd and Mason (2005: 11) drew on and concurred with Spady (1994:1-2) that "*the key to an outcomes-based system is developing a clear set of learning outcomes around which all the components can be focused, thus establishing the conditions and opportunities that enable and encourage all students to achieve those essential outcomes*".
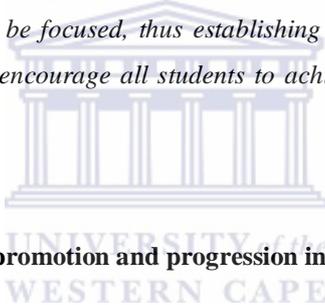
2.5. Requirements for grade promotion and progression in Grade 9 and 10

2.5.1. Requirements for grade promotion and progression in Grade 9 (GET)

In terms of the National Assessment Policy referred to in Circular No. 0111/2003 (WCED, 2003: 3) and in the document on Progression and Promotion 2007 (WCED, 2007: 8), a system of progression should not mean that the learner is pushed through to the next grade every year. It means that the learner progresses towards the attainment of outcomes at the level appropriate to a grade throughout the year. The onus is on the educator, learner and parent to ensure that such progress takes place throughout the year. According to the policy, both learners and parents should be made aware "*in good time that a learner is not coping and therefore needs more time in a particular grade.*" A learner is only allowed to "*repeat once in a phase,*" and be declared Not Ready to be Promoted (NRP)

twice; and with these policies goes the administrative requirement of grade schedules, portfolios and intervention letters.

As a result, promotion now means that the learner is competent and ready to proceed or progress to the next grade (RP). For GET, the compilation of final Learning Area percentage (%) and code across all four terms for the Grade 9 end-of-year schedule is as follows: the end-of-year learning area % and code report in Grade 9 will be calculated by adding the percentages (%) per term for that Learning Area. That will result in a 75% Continuous Assessment (CASS) and 25% Common Task Assessment (CTA) ratio. On the end–of–year schedule, based on Grade 9 promotion requirements, educators will indicate P (Promoted) or NP (Not Promoted), as stated in the National Protocol on Assessment (DoE, 2005: 22). Promotional requirements for Grade 9, as stipulated in the National Policy on Assessment for the GET Band (DoE RSA, 2005: 20), require at least a "moderate achievement" or level 3 rating (40-49%) in one of the official languages offered in Mathematics; at least "elementary achievement" or level 2 rating in another official language; and at least a "moderate achievement" or level 3 rating in the other four Learning Areas. A learner will be promoted if he/she satisfies the requirements both of continuous assessments (75%) and the external assessment (25%) components of the Learning Areas.

2.5.2. Requirements for grade promotion and progression in Grade 10 (FET)

According to the Department's policy (Further Education and Training – Grades 10 to 11) a learner must have seven subjects and meet the minimum requirements for each of these. Four subjects are compulsory and three are choice subjects. When the learner obtains 40% in three subjects including a Home Language, the learner can obtain 30% in the remaining four subjects. The end-of-year subject % and code for the report in Grade 10 will be calculated by adding the marks for the year (75% examination and 25% CASS) for that subject.

At the-end-of-year, based on Grade 10–11 promotion requirements, educators will indicate P (Promoted) or NP (Not Promoted). A promotion schedule is a requirement for all grades and later the schools have a "joint signing off" session with the department as stated in the document on Progression and Promotion 2007: Summary and Case Studies from Gazettes for Grades 9-11 (WCED, 2007: 1, 3, 13). The prescripts in the documentation state that learners may repeat only one grade in each phase of schooling.

South African educational authorities distanced themselves from merit policy grading and repetition, by adopting Grade Promotion and Grade Progression in OBE.

2.6. Assessment, OBE, and how these relate to grade promotion and progression

Assessment is an integral part of OBE because it illustrates what a learner has achieved in terms of what is required. The National Protocol on Assessment guidelines (DoE: 2005: 5) described assessment as " *a process of collecting, synthesizing and interpreting information, for the teachers, parents and departmental officials in making decisions about learners' progress*". Sieborger (1998) stated that changes to assessment are always recognized as an important means of achieving curriculum change, but are rarely integrated with the development process. The National Assessment Policy (NDE, 1998: 12-13 in Maree and Fraser, 2008: 48) identified the trends in educational assessment which (a) are the focus of educational reform on linking standards and assessment criteria, (b) are an integrated part of teaching and learning, (c) must determine whether outcomes have been achieved, (d) must be learner-paced not syllabus-paced, (e) transparency of assessment criteria may enhance learner–

paced assessment, enabling learners to take responsibility for own learning, and (f) acknowledge competence and emphasize performance-based skills.

Three years later we had the Revised National Curriculum Statement (NDE 2001: 21-22 in Maree and Fraser, 2008: 48) which moved away from concepts like performance indicators to learning outcomes and assessment standards. Assessment, which is an integral part of OBE, illustrates what a learner has achieved in terms of what is required. According to Hargreeves (1989) it became a focal point for educational reform and was known as "assessment-led educational reform". In 2004, the Ministry of Education requested a protocol on assessments for schools to be drafted and ready for implementation in January 2006. The National Protocol on Assessment for Schools, Grades R-12, (2005: 2) stipulated the following: (a) from January 2006 all schools should implement this national Protocol on Assessment; (b) learner profiles be implemented in 2007 in Grades R, 1,4,7 and 10; (c) from 2007, educators must provide the annual programme of assessment to the Learning Programme, Learning Area, Subject Head and School Management system at the beginning of the year; (d) that the Subject Assessment Guidelines be distributed to assist educators during the implementation.

Assessment Standards were grade-specific, showing what was expected of learners in a grade and how conceptual progression would take place. Assessment would be performed against the assessment standards for a particular grade. They functioned as a key feature for the progression of learners from grade to grade.

In the National Curriculum Statement (NCS) for Grades 10-12 (2003: 8) and the Revised National Curriculum Statement (RNCS) of the DoE (2005: 4), it was stated that learning outcomes (competencies) and assessment standards were derived from the critical and developmental outcomes which described the

desired type of learner the education and training system should aim to create. Learners were expected to be able to accomplish the following critical outcomes: (a) identify and solve problems and make decisions using critical and creative thinking, (b) work effectively as a team, (c) organize and manage themselves responsibly and effectively, (d) collect, analyze, organize and critically evaluate information, (e) communicate effectively, (f) use science and technology effectively and critically indicating responsibility towards the environment, (g) demonstrate an understanding of the world as an interrelated system.

The developmental outcomes stated in the NCS and RNCS envisaged learners to be able to: (a) reflect on and explore a variety of strategies to learn more effectively, (b) participate as responsible citizens, (c) be culturally and aesthetically sensitive across a range of social contexts, (d) explore education and career opportunities, (e) develop entrepreneurial opportunities (NCS of the DoE, 2003: 8 and RNCS of the DoE, 2005:4).

According to the Revised National Curriculum Statement (RNCS of DoE, 2005: 4), the choice of assessment strategies was subjective and would be unique to each educator, grade, and school depending on the educator's professional judgement. It added that factors such as space and available resources may influence the decision that an educator makes. However, even when resources are similar, educators can make different choices. The method chosen for assessment activities must be appropriate to the assessment standards to be assessed. The purpose of assessment must be clearly understood by all learners and educators involved. Competence can be demonstrated in a number of ways and thus a variety of methods need to be provided for learners to demonstrate their abilities fully.

The Revised NCS states that schools and educators have an overall responsibility for assessment of learners. Each school must develop an assessment programme

based on provincial and national assessment guidelines. It must select a team of representatives from each phase and learning area to facilitate the implementation of the programme.

With regards to Recording and Promotions, the National Protocol on Assessment of the DoE (2005: 4) standardizes recording and reporting for schools (Grades R-12) within the framework of the National Curriculum Statements for the Grades R-9 and 10-12. It also provides a regulatory framework for the management of school assessment records and basic requirements for learner profiles, educator and learner portfolios, report cards and schedules. The School Assessment Policy has a detailed outline of what records are and how the records should be kept. In terms of record keeping each learning area is required to have the following: (a) Educator Portfolio, (b) Learner Portfolio, (c) Progression Schedules. The Educator Portfolios must consist of the following: the school policy, disciplinary code, learning programme, learning areas, work schedule or annual plan, educator's roster, term work with lesson plan, portfolio activities – both formative and summative, forms and methods of assessments, results of assessments, interventions and support activities. The Learner Portfolio is a record of the learner's work for the learning cycle or year. It consists of all four terms' work activities, both formative and summative: exams, tests (control), projects, assignments, role play or questionnaires, the forms of assessments and methods. The marks of both formative and summative assessments are summarized on the index page of the learner's portfolio and showcased to parents for perusal, at the end of each term or year. The Progression Schedule is a summary of information of the learners' progress in a grade at a particular school with the given assessment codes. The principal and departmental official must sign it at the end of the year. Learners can only be judged whether they are competent or not, given the evidence collected. The evidence indicates what learners can do, what they know, what they understand and what their beliefs are in terms of learner performance.

Now that we have looked at issues surrounding grade progression and promotion by illuminating literature on retention, situating this within the broader framework of South African reform, highlighting schooling in South Africa and how assessment should be undertaken in schools, according to policy.

In the next section, learning and OBE learning practices are discussed to understand the constructivist theory of learning in OBE. The intention is to link the learning process to that of grade progression and promotion activities.

2.7. Learning and OBE learning practices

The Constructivist theory of learning is briefly discussed below because it substantially underpins OBE which forms the foundation of the schooling system in South Africa (WCED, Literacy and Numeracy Strategy, 2006: 5).

Learning in education can be considered as complex, advanced and requires a deep level of understanding and commitment to undergo such a process (Bloch, 2009). In this approach the researcher drew on educational theory in Bennet and Dunn, Piaget, Vygotsky et al as to how children learn. Bennet and Dunn (1994) in Moon and Mayes (2001) stated that most theorists agree that learning is the construction of knowledge through educational experiences, whether inside or outside the classroom. Any refutation or disagreement is about the conditions under which maximum learning is optimised, whether it is on an individual or social basis (Moon and Mayes 2001: 52).

Piaget and Vygostky set the foundation for the field. According to D'Arcangelo (2000:8-13), Piaget made contributions to the idea that children's minds develop in an orderly way; they have their own framework for looking at things, and interpret the world through the filter of their own cognitive structures. In relation to adults or educators it is important to note that Piaget posited a principle of equilibration (assimilation and accommodation) which is the constant ongoing development of knowledge that results from learners engaging in the world (WCED, 2006: 9). Piaget promoted "active methods" in education; learners are presented with problems, and they then reconstruct knowledge for themselves (WCED, 2006: 11). He saw educators as having expertise in their subjects and playing a mentor and stimulator or facilitator role in the classroom, by presenting learners with materials, situations and experiences to allow them to discover new learning.

Vygostsky (1929) emphasised social interaction more than did Piaget. He viewed social interaction as being of central importance for the learner; children are not independent problem-solvers but actually learn or acquire knowledge in the course of social interaction with more knowledgeable others, i.e., from adults and other learners (WCED, 2006: 12). He referred to the "zone of proximal development" (ZAP), a gap that exists between two levels of development (WCED, 2006: 12); first is the actual level of development which is what the learners can do on their own and second is the potential for development which is a learner's capabilities with optimal help from knowledgeable others. The concept informs us about the mental constraints and possibilities of a learner at any given time. The educator organises the frameworks of knowledge or the "scaffolding" for the learner, to support the learner's understanding (WCED, 2006: 12) and seeks to mediate cultural knowledge systems and practices. The educator is seen to be an active participant who mediates and shows expertise in practices through joint activities with learners, responding to dilemmas and questions, guiding and encouraging them through the process.

The principles of constructivism and the implications of Vygotsky's theory for the classroom are summarised as follows: (a) Learning becomes an active process of engagement, interpretation and utilisation rather than the mere acceptance of knowledge that exists "out there". (b) Individuals learn to learn as they learn – constructing meaning and systems for meaning. (c) Construction of meaning is mental; it happens in the mind. (d) We learn by making mistakes; learners are not to be discouraged from making mistakes. (e) Learning involves language; the quality and accessibility of the language influences learning. (f) Learning is a social activity; we work with other knowledgeable people to learn. (g) Learning is contextual; we do not learn isolated facts and theories independently of practices. (h) We need knowledge to learn; it is not possible to assimilate new knowledge without having some structure, developed from

previous knowledge to build on. (i) It takes time to learn. Learning is not instantaneous. (j) Motivation is the key component in learning. It is essential. (WCED: Literacy and Numeracy Strategy, 2006: 14-15)

The fundamental issue for the purpose of this research study is the linkage to what happens in the classroom and how it relates to grade progression and promotion. Firstly, learning is the construction of knowledge and the features are therefore the activities associated with the activities in the classroom i.e., (a) reasoning and critical thinking, (b) problem-solving, (c) retrieval, understanding and use of information, (d) relating learning to one's existing knowledge, belief and attitudes, and (e) thoughtful reflection on experiences (WCED, 2006: 7).

Significant qualities to be considered concerning learners are that all learners share knowledge, experiences and attitudes and not whether the learners are labelled, stereotyped and marginalized when educators apply the principle of exclusion. This translates into labelling learners as 'bright', 'stupid', able or disabled, gifted or noisy, rude and disobedient which casts aspersions on the learners' self-esteem, confidence and purpose in school.

2.7.1. Classroom discipline

To establish a positive environment of learning, a culture of work and a relaxed and peaceful atmosphere with minimal disruption, educators must be consistent regarding rules and punishments and everyone must understand and agree to maintain a positive learning environment.

2.7.2. Behaviour, labelling and stereotyping

All common classroom practices by educators when teaching or facilitating are inhibited or slowed down when they face challenges such as discipline issues.

The tendency is to classify a learner with a particular form of behaviour, whether positive or negative, and this constitutes an act of labelling. This benign labelling connotes category membership and implies derogatory slurs which the learner acquires easily, but is most difficult to lose (Stangor and Schaller, in Macrae, Stanger & Hewstone, 1996: 11). Osterholm, Nash and Kritsonis (2007: 2-3) stated that the labelled individual's self-perception is inextricably bound to others' perceptions and reactions. According to Bernhard (1972: 5), for a learner who carries a negative label, both the label and its expectations result in a learning experience that can be painful and even counter-productive. Osterholm, Nash and Kritsonis (2007: 2-3) claimed that the learner will show reduced effort and that lower achievement may follow.

Any form of disruptive class behaviour by an individual has the potential to influence an educator's evaluation or grading of a learner. This perception sets in and a distinction is made in the classroom with regards to "learners performing to acceptable standards" (Caplan 1973: 8), and those who "transgress or violate norms and standards" in the classroom (Bernhard, 1972: 5). This type of stereotyping or "pictures in the head" (Stangor and Schaller, in Macrae, Stanger & Hewstone, 1996: 3) by educators can be detrimental to learners during the period of their learning experience in classrooms. This particular form of "labelling and stereotyping" can influence the grade progression and promotion exercise, which may eventually inhibit learners' "normal" promotion to the next grade. In fact it becomes a tool and criterion to judge those who need to move on to the next phase.

2.8. Summary

In this chapter literature that is pertinent to the research questions was illuminated. The dynamics surrounding the focus of this study, grade promotion and progression, are multiple and complex. Literature in the international domain

is sadly lacking on grade promotion. It is for this reason that "retention" was referred to as a way to understand grade promotion and progression. Here international literature was drawn on as literature regarding these issues is lacking in South Africa. The conceptual lenses were then narrowed to look at how this fits into the reform process in South Africa, and thereafter moved into the area of schooling, seeking to understand the complexities related to grade promotion and progression. In the next chapter, attention is turned to the methodological issues relating to this study.

CHAPTER 3: IMPLEMENTATION OF THE RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

3.1. Introduction

In the previous chapter the literature pertinent to understanding the research questions in this project was provided. In this chapter the focus is on the research methodology and design. The chapter gives reasons for selecting a qualitative paradigm, and for employing an ethnographic research design.

Firstly, the research methodological paradigm is illuminated, then the metatheoretical paradigm that underpins this study is presented. This is followed by the research design employed in the study, which is an ethnographic research design. This is then followed by instruments used for data collection, with a discussion of the unit of analysis and sampling. A description of the data analysis method is followed by a discussion on reliability and validity. This chapter ends by briefly describing the ethical procedures followed in this study.

3.2. Research methodological paradigms

Babbie and Mouton (2006: xxv) acknowledged that there are three broad methodological paradigms that dominate the social research arena. They are primarily quantitative**,** qualitative and participatory action paradigms. They linked these three to metatheoretical traditions or "philosophies of science". The first one, the "quantitative" paradigm, can be linked to positivism, the second, "qualitative", to interpretivism, and the third, participatory action research, to the critical philosophical tradition. They pointed out that social researchers utilize methods and techniques that are underpinned by assumptions, principles and

values. Both quantitative and qualitative methods are built on assumptions about knowledge and ways of assessing it. They use the same social research lens of inquiry into the "intellectual puzzle" of the social world but have different styles in terms of reaching the outcomes.

According to Robson and Foster (1989: 24) the motivation for qualitative research was that it answers the question "why" and it explains and provides an understanding of the phenomenon relating to the individual. According to Babbie and Mouton (2006: 309), "*the strength of qualitative research is the comprehensiveness of the perspective it gives to a researcher and a deeper and fuller understanding of the research question.*"

Babbie and Mouton (2006: 271) added that qualitative studies were suitable to study behaviours and attitudes, "best understood in their natural settings", and compared with quantitative research where "artificial settings of experiments and surveys" are utilized for final results (2006: 309). A big advantage in doing qualitative research is that the design allows you to modify the research plan at any time, adapt the time frames and methodology, and check responses through validation and generalization. Qualitative studies emphasize process rather than outcome, and enhance objectivity, validity, and relativity within studies in the interpretive paradigm through triangulation, written field notes, and member checks. An important feature of qualitative studies is objectivity**,** which can be viewed as being synonymous with "trustworthiness" (Babbie and Mouton, 2006: 310). Some quantitative studies cannot explain the "why" factor but pursue statistical figures and representations to justify the outcome of the research question. This type of research paradigm is constrained and limited, and hence the "essence of inquiry" through its research strategy, methods, analysis and data cannot explain why and how things happen within the "intellectual puzzle" (Mason, 2004: 1). It is for these reasons that this study was situated within a qualitative paradigm underpinned by an interpretivist approach.

The intention of Figure 1 below is to exhibit the characteristics of qualitative research and to indicate how this study was well suited to qualitative research.

FIGURE 1: Features and applications of the quality research paradigm

Features of qualitative research	How this study fits into the features.
The researcher explicates ways of understanding by interaction with subjects.	The researcher tries to understand how "respondents" or educators understand, account for, take action and normally manage everyday classroom life as regards OBE.
Research is conducted in a natural environment (field) or setting for a long intense period.	A natural setting in classrooms populated with Grade 10 learners and an educator was selected. Intense and prolonged contact with educators was arranged (six months) to obtain a substantial quantity of descriptions and context.
The researcher is focused on meanings once the researcher is immersed in data.	Words, concepts, attitudes, phrases, viewpoints, etc. were focused on to draw out and build accounts of what is happening. The meanings were significant in that these expressed a way of life in classrooms.
The approach gives the researcher a form of comprehensiveness of perspective.	The researcher immersed himself in the natural setting or classroom to get a deeper and fuller understanding of practices and activities.
There is a focus on process rather than outcomes.	One school was visited and both educators' and learners' activities in classrooms were observed over a period of six months so that meaningful insight, experiences and behaviour could be viewed, with note-taking and the drafting and filling of questionnaires.
The approach has a sense of reflexivity.	The researcher reflected on the purpose of the study, and "why". The essence of inquiry was questioned by using a critical perspective. What was being researched, and what was it about?
Objectivity means "trustworthiness"	The researcher gained the respect, trust and confidence of educators and learners during the time spent in settings or classrooms.
The primary aim is in-depth description and understanding of events.	Observations by the researcher in classes were accompanied with detailed note-making when conducting interviews with eight educators.
Analysis is done by assigning codes to patterns and themes in the text.	The researcher looked for patterns, categories, schemes and used codification during the analysis.

3.2.1. Metatheoretical approach

As mentioned above, this study is located within a qualitative paradigm underpinned by an interpretivist approach. Babbie and Mouton (2006), Henning (2004) and Mason (2004: 56) presented three distinct but overlapping theoretical paradigms in which to locate the study. They mentioned positivist, critical and interpretivist paradigms or approaches.

Blaikie (2000: 115, in Mason 2004: 56) described the interpretivist paradigm as:

> *"...concerned with understanding the social world people have produced and which they reproduce through their continuing activities. This everyday reality consists of the meanings and interpretations given by the social actors to their actions, other people's actions, social institutions, and natural and humanly created objectives. In short, in order to negotiate their way around the world and make sense of it, social actors have to interpret their activities together, and it is these meanings, embedded in language, that constitute their social reality."*

According to Mason (2004:56), an interpretive approach not only views people as the primary source, but seeks their perceptions or "insider views" rather than imposing an "outsider view". One of the challenges of this approach (Mason 2004: 76-77) is that it can lead to the researcher misinterpreting the participants' viewpoints. To meet this challenge, the following tasks were carried out during fieldwork: (a) recording as fully and explicitly as possible the route by which one came to the interpretation, (b) questioning of the assumptions made during "interactions" with participants, (c) the making of continuous judgments as to what to write down or record, what was observed, heard and experienced, what one interpreted the meaning to be, (d) ensuring that the records provided the fullest possible justification for the researcher's decisions, (e) ensuring that data

was accurate and perceptions were valid, (f) avoidance of over-estimation of the representational or reflective qualities of transcripts and audio or visual recordings (2004: 76-77).

3.3. Research Design

The research design employed in this study is ethnographic. The term "ethnography" comes from cultural anthropology. "Ethnos" means people or folk, while "graphy" refers to the description of something. Ethnography means "describing a culture" and understanding a way of life from the point of view of its participants. Hence ethnography is the art and science of describing a group or culture (Punch, 1998: 157).

Punch (1998: 157) explained that research uses methods that are sensitive to the nature of the setting and the primary aim is to describe what happens in the setting, how people involved see their own actions, other's actions, and the context. Ethnographers draw on symbolic interactionism, phenomenology (interpretivism) and hermeneutics because they view the social phenomenon as being different from the physical one. Hammersely and Atkinson (1995:1-10) suggested that ethnography is a process whereby the ethnographer participates either overtly or covertly in people's daily lives, for an extended period of time. The ethnographer watches what happens and listens to what is said, asking questions and collecting any other relevant data. This dovetails with the ways in which this thesis was approached.

This study took place in the "natural setting" of the school, or more specifically the working class area. As an observer who was in the setting for a prolonged period of time, the researcher was able to learn the cultures and sub-cultures of the respondents who participated in the study (educators and learners) and came to "learn and understand the world as they do". Inherently there are many layers

of cultural and institutional knowledge embedded in the setting. Critical to the study is the behaviour of a group of people (educators) who have difficulty in understanding and implementing grade progression and promotion in Grade 10. Complementary to this, a group of learners who were dropping out, feeling frustrated, failing continuously and feeling totally marginalized, was also focused on. The "why" factor of the research study was essential to understand and underpin what was transpiring inside the social setting of classrooms and for this an ethnographic design is well suited.

In the following Figure 2 the characteristics of ethnography based on some of the fieldwork are presented and how the research was suited to this design is shown.

FIGURE 2: Ethnographic application

Characteristics of ethnography	Characteristics of the study
1. When studying a group of people the assumption is that the shared cultural meanings of the group are crucial to understanding its behaviour.	The focus of this study was a group of educators and learners. The fundamental question was, "what are the shared cultural meanings?" This refers to cultural meanings they shared and had in the classroom, given a curriculum change towards OBE. In essence it is "what are their shared cultural and educational meanings of OBE, assessments, grade progression and promotion in the classroom? Why do they display deviant and negative educational behaviour?"
2. Ethnography is sensitive to the meanings that behaviour, actions, events and context have, in the eyes of people involved.	Proper arrangements were made with officials to become part of the "educational setting". Trust was earned by providing documents and the researcher was located in the classrooms as an "outsider" observing the process. In the first week only observations were done, so as not to disturb the learning processes and the researcher restricted himself to the back of the classroom. The initial days were spent connecting with the educators and learners to become more familiar with them. The aim was to elicit maximum information by becoming an "insider" through trust and respect.

3. The group will be studied in its natural setting.	The researcher was later accepted as part of the classroom setting, hence regarded as an "insider". The researcher observed activities, events and learning practices of OBE, grade progression and promotion by educators; and how learners responded to practices, assessments and portfolio work. Their interactions, connections and behaviour in a classroom context were observed.
4. Ethnographic study will likely be an unfolding and evolving sort of study rather than being pre-structured.	A pilot study was conducted in the classroom for two weeks through listening, communicating, asking questions and probing. During this time the methods for interviewing techniques, collection techniques and types of analysis to conduct and complete the study were drafted. The process was continuously reviewed, moving cyclically through the processes.
5. Ethnography is eclectic, not restricted in terms of data collection techniques.	Initially the researcher was an observer (direct but non-participant) making field notes on group work, lessons, teaching styles, portfolio work, informal assessments, etc. Later the researcher was regarded as "one of them" and became "immersed" in the setting by assisting the educators with group work. The researcher started with "informal interviews" with one educator at a time to hear their perspectives of OBE and grade progression and promotion.
6. Ethnographic data collection will be prolonged and repetitive.	The researcher became part of the setting (classroom) where he familiarized himself with the learning environment, social and material dynamics, culture or ideology of the institution, the diversity of socio-economic backgrounds, the educators' social frameworks, etc. During this period field notes and interviewing techniques were reviewed., questions rephrased, observation styles, communication and listening methods, the content analysis process, etc. were reviewed. This was done to get a deeper understanding and insight into hidden knowledge, social meanings, perceptions and feelings of participants. Comprehensive and detailed notes were needed to make judgment calls and inferences.

The strengths, weaknesses and challenges will be discussed to indicate why "ethnography" was chosen as a suitable design to direct and enrich the research study. Firstly, it is an active and distinctive approach, considered as being both a product and process. Mason (2004: 56) suggested that it is a researcher's "first-hand experience" of a setting and the process of "immersion" that makes it possible to get an "insider" perspective. As an observer with an education

background the researcher was thus able to become totally familiar with the "setting" in that he could relate to the relationships, experiences, understandings, feelings, and routines. Grill (1998b, cited in Myers, 1999) noted that ethnography involves going "where the action is". In fact it is a form of partial immersion rather than total immersion in the learning process. Partial immersion means going into the setting or school and leaving at the end of every day, and therefore the researcher was not fully "living the research" (Du Plooy, 2010: 42). According to Spradley (1979: 187), it is still possible to familiarize oneself with the setting, develop a rapport with respondents and collect reliable data even though one is not fully immersed in the context. David and Sutton (2004: 104) claimed that ethnography offers a powerful means of data collection and theory building. They stated that "being there" on location on the inside, offers a range of opportunities that are not available to other methodologies. David and Sutton (2004: 104) further stated that field research offers the chance to see what people "really do", not just what they say they do, or what they say in artificial situations.

One of the main arguments against ethnographic research is that it lacks control, transparency and reliability. In defence of the ethnographic method, Hammersly (1998, in David and Sutton, 2004: 104), argued that (a) naturalistic methods are more valid than methods dependent upon artificial situations when researching human beings, (b) field research offers great scope for exploration, (c) it is useful for describing specific cases in detail or depth, (d) the sacrifice of generalization for depth is a legitimate trade-off as long as the loss involved is not ignored. Furthermore the social reality is depicted by "thick" descriptions and notes drawn directly from the natural setting.

Other weaknesses and challenges identified in this type of research are: (1) the assumption "that people will behave naturally in their everyday conditions", even in the presence of a researcher (David and Sutton, 2004: 104); (2) there is too

much romanticizing by ethnographers as regards their ability to show how things really are in the real world; (3) researchers have an effect on the data they collect (2004: 104); (4) Atkinson (1992) stated that there is always selection and interpretation by ethnographers when doing story-telling (narrative) devices and metaphorical (re-description) devices to both construct their "own" experience and when conveying that experience to the reader; (5) the truth of a "culture" cannot readily be transferred into another's "culture" and be studied - this requires a cultural analytical lens (Atkinson, 1992).

For the present research, a major challenge was that more time was spent in the field taking notes, observing and completing interviews, than anticipated. Reviewing and checking of descriptions in notes, analyzing the content from interviews, and writing up the material or text extended the time spent in the field. Despite this, the researcher maintains that "an ethnographic study" still is the most productive research approach to undertake in the learning environment because it has complex social relationships, meanings, and understandings" (Myers, 1999: 7).

3.4. Data collection instruments

In this section the research instruments used to collect the type of data which is used, especially when doing ethnographic research, are reviewed. Field work, non-participant observation, and interviews were used. Direct non-participant observation verified whether the National Curriculum Statement (NCS) principles, beliefs and practices were implemented and related to the outcomes. This was followed by individual (semi-structured) and group (structured) interviews which were executed to gather more information from educators and learners alike (informal conversations) and document analysis, which focused on the research. This evidence was crucial for measuring whether outcomes-based promotion and progression protocol was followed.

3.4.1. Direct and non-participatory observation

The observation focused on the ways and practices of how grade progression and promotion were incorporated and developed in a classroom setting. The aim of the observation was to determine whether the practices in the classroom complied with the principles, premises and fundamentals of OBE philosophy, and in addition how well educators conveyed the learning programme, the lesson plan, the outcomes, the critical and specific outcomes and the criteria within the rubrics, etc. The observation of the OBE phenomenon in a natural setting was crucial so that knowledge or evidence of the learning environment might be generated (See Appendix B for the Observational Schedule). Events and actions were observed unobtrusively as they unfolded, without any intervention or interference. Each of the instruments is dealt with separately.

The core of the observation focus was to observe how learning programmes were being implemented, through paying close attention to interactions in the

classroom as well as the teaching style, the assessment process, recording and reporting process and the grade progression and promotion procedures (interventions and schedules). Educators were invited to reflect on progression and promotion practices and procedures implemented and how well learners understood and experienced these issues, topics and themes.

Observational research is a method that focuses on differences, on the lives of particular people in concrete but constantly changing human relationships (Denzin and Lincoln, 2000: 634). Direct observation was done to verify whether the NCS theory (principles, beliefs and practices) were implemented and related to the activities (outcomes) planned in the classroom. It was necessary to select and identify what, where and when to observe OBE lessons in the classroom. The next consideration was how to achieve internal validity, meaning "*the closeness of fit between data and reality*" (David and Sutton, 2004: 171) and whether the data depicted the reality of educator's and learner's lives, beliefs, experiences, actions and relationships in the classroom.

The researcher wished to direct observation towards the verbal and non-verbal utterances, interactions, accounts and discourse of educators and learners. Through observations the researcher intended (i) to observe the behaviours and meanings, values and beliefs of educators and learner's and (ii) to discover recurring patterns of behaviour, relationships and complex interactions.

In the following Figure 3 the criteria used during the observation sessions are presented, which were focused on one observational area: reporting and recording as regards promotion and progression.

FIGURE 3: Criteria for grade promotion and progression

What the educator should know or do.	What is the focus?	Expectation of what should be achieved.
1. Evidence of learner performance and progress.	Recording of learner performance and progress.	To determine whether the educator recorded each learner's performance. Actual marks and codes provided for each learner achievement.
2. Reporting on learner performance.	Evidence of reporting on learner progress.	To determine whether the educator reported on the forms of assessment used, levels attained for learning outcomes, and comments about learner competence.
3. Reflections and intervention on learning process.	Evidence of reflection and intervention where needed. To consider the OBE philosophy "not all learners will learn at the same time and in the same way but everyone should succeed".	To determine how educators reflected on learners' progress, and what type of interventions were used i.e. creating more opportunities, examples and exercises, making more adjustments, etc.
4. Interventions and feedback.	Implications of large numbers of learners on interventions and feedback.	To determine the implications and effects of large numbers of learners on interventions and feedback in the classroom.
5. Moderation of assessments, mark sheets, etc.	Evidence of moderation of assessments, mark sheets, etc.	To determine whether the educator has evidence of assessments and moderation of mark sheets.
6. Learner reports.	Learner reports to all stakeholders.	To determine whether learners received learner reports for each term.
7. Learner portfolios.	Evidence of learners' portfolios.	To determine the existence of both educator and learner portfolios with method for intervention and support plan.
8. Educator portfolio.	Evidence of educator portfolio	To determine whether the educator portfolio was comprehensive with all records and evidence, e.g. marks and percentages.
9. Learning area recording sheet and progression schedule.	Evidence of learning area recording sheet and progression schedule.	To determine whether learning area recording sheet and progression schedule were aligned or congruent.
10. Final promotion and progression schedule and reports.	Evidence of promotion and progression schedule and reports.	To determine whether promotion and progression schedules were checked as well as reports.
11. Retained and promoted learners.	Evidence of retained and promoted learners on a list.	To determine how many learners were retained or promoted.

3.4.2. Field notes

Field notes are a form of representation, "*a way of reducing just-observed events, persons and places to the written word*". Emerson (2001: 353, in Mason, 2004: 98) stated that "*in reducing the welter and confusion of social worlds to written words, field notes (re)constitute the world in preserved form that can be reviewed, studied and thought about time and time again.*" Mason (2004: 89-90) stated that the researcher must consider how to generate data, in the right place, at the right time, and make meaningful observations and analysis later. She added that field notes are developmental devices to assist the researcher with an understanding of the setting, developing ideas, and giving detailed descriptions of what happened (the feelings, impressions and ideas). As an educator, using the OBE approach in the classroom, the researcher found that observing others and taking note of the characteristics, behaviour and orientation required much effort and concentration, which was very demanding. But this is one of the strong features of qualitative research whereby a "natural setting" is observed, i.e. learners in a classroom finishing an outcomes-based assessment. It is very real and powerful because the researcher has "inside or submerged experience and perspectives".

This is an inductive process where the describing and understanding of characteristics, orientation and social action are focal. The "insider perspective", as researcher and participant, is crucial to overcoming differences and barriers such as language, culture, beliefs, socio-economic status, etc., because these perceived differences between researcher and respondents are thereby narrowed. This inter-subjectivity is thus a powerful way of obtaining quality responses, trust and rapport. In this way the researcher saw the whole context and was able to come close to the "research subject" and to generate credible, legitimate "insider" descriptions.

The field notes were used to catalogue events or roles and were written at frequent intervals and were then "read" in a reflexive and interpretative manner. The field notes would later be the evidence required to verify and determine whether "what educators do and what they say" are out of step or the same when observed.

3.4.3. Interviews

A semi-structured individual method of conducting interviews was used in this study. The individual interviews were with those educators who had expert subject knowledge matter, prominence in the school, were well informed on institutional matters and had the ability to report shared experiences on results, policies and generalizations. The interview consisted of semi-structured and open-ended questions. The one-on-one interactional exchange dialogue allowed for the production of "situated knowledge". The objective was to attain the interviewee's views, perspectives, meanings, interpretations and understandings. This was done to extract the meaningful properties of the social realities in the classroom. The aim was to obtain insight into the broad areas of OBE content knowledge, the premises, the principles and fundamentals applied and the outcomes from the educator's viewpoint. Interactive talking occurred and specific and relevant questions relating to grade progression and promotion were asked. Responses were noted, particularly their accounts and articulations of how grade progressions and grade promotions were implemented.

Any qualitative researcher must have specific themes or areas to start the interview process and thereby elicit appropriate responses from the individual interviewee. Patton (1990: 348-351) outlined types of questions: (a) background knowledge; probing questions that will identify the characteristics of the interviewee, (b) knowledge questions; to focus on the factual information that the respondent currently has, (c) sensory questions; what is observed, felt, touched,

tasted and smelt, and lastly (d) experience or behaviour questions; dealing with what the person does or has done. Spradley (1997: 199) described three types of questions that could be used: (i) descriptive questions - allowing the researcher to collect a sample of participants' language, (ii) structural questions - exploring the basic units embedded in cultural knowledge, (iii) contrasting questions - giving the researcher the meaning of terminology used by the respondent in terms of their language. These questions were asked in a hybridized form to extract the optimum or best experiences from the social reality queried. The individual interview was facilitated to measure and obtain the individual's understanding, opinion, meaning, perspective, attitude and general view of grade progression and promotion and outcome-based education (See Appendix A for the Interview Schedule).

During the interview sessions the respondents were reasonably free of anxiety and caution about being overheard and were at liberty to speak their minds freely, given the semi-structured questions as described by Babbie and Mouton, (2006: 289). These were private and confidential and the respondents opened up new realities in terms of understandings, relationships and meanings. The interviews were done at different time periods but as they proceeded they became more flowing, flexible, less stressful, and continuous. The reason for this was that as experience was gained the respondents were encouraged to speak slowly and amplify their opinions and be heard "*without threatening and intimidating inferences from others*," as mentioned by Robson and Foster, (1989: 50-51). There were some problems during these interviews because it was a complex and advanced process, given the limited experience of the researcher, who had to multi-task whilst listening, comprehending, analyzing and writing down responses from each educator. The interviews were professional, with no intimacy with respondents, which would have led to the possibility of over-intimate relationships and conflict as cautioned by Robson and Foster, (1989: 51).

3.4.4. Questionnaires

Questionnaires were given to a particular segment of the school population, i.e. educators, for descriptive purposes, to inform the questions in the interviews. Both unstructured and structured questions, closed and open-ended, as well as direct and indirect types of questions were used. This was done to learn about the distribution of the characteristics, attitudes, beliefs and deeply held values of educators about grade progression and promotion in OBE. The questionnaire was administered to selected but small groups of teachers at the school. The honesty and reliability of these educator groups was relied upon.

3.4.5. Document analysis

Documents are constructed as particular texts by educators with a particular purpose and consequence, whether intended or unintended. Derrida (1978) argued that meaning does not reside in a text but in the reading and writing of it. He added further that different types of text have to be understood in the contexts of their conditions of production and reading. The recording of marks or codes can be interpreted in many ways and is thus open and capable of transmission, manipulation, alteration, being used, discarded, reused and recycled for different purposes, because it is considered as evidence. The review or inspection of documents is to determine whether they are comprehensive, detailed, genuine, reliable and accurate reflections of classroom practice. The records which every educator must have available are essentially: (a) test scripts, (b) projects, (c) assignments, (d) tasks, (e) examination scripts, (f) schedules of marks, etc. The documents are basically: (a) the educator's portfolio, (b) learner's portfolio, (c) departmental and school policy documents (d) intervention policy documents, etc.

The review of these records and documents is essentially to determine how educators adopt, incorporate and operationalize the OBE principles, premises and fundamentals in their lesson planning, teaching style, assessments, and progression and promotion procedures. A document analysis will be undertaken to establish: (a) the system or method of recording by the educators and learners, (b) how the understanding of OBE, progression and promotion influenced classroom practices. A multi-method qualitative approach made the data more reliable, enriched, valid and accurate.

3.5. Sampling and selection

In this section purposeful sampling will be used and described. Why such types of sample were selected will be explained. Qualitative sampling uses purposive sampling (non-probability samples), meaning to sample in a deliberate way, with some purpose or focus in sight. In qualitative strategies there is a clear principle involved and directed at the validity of the research design, but moreover it emphasizes that the sample must fit with the other components of the study. David and Sutton (2004: 152) stated that the units for sampling are selected by the researcher because of embedded knowledge and the opinions of respondents who carry specific knowledge and information on the topic.

In the study a sampling plan with parameters (settings, actors, events, and processes) was developed and respondents selected who were considered best suited to this study. The reason was that these educators had certain characteristics, such as embedded knowledge, information and opinions relating specifically to the topic. Educators and learners have first hand experiences, opinions and knowledge (day-to-day activities) of the OBE system in a learning environment, and hence they became a natural selection choice. This type of sampling however was located in the purposive or theoretical sampling framework.

3.5.1. School site

The sample focus for the research study essentially consisted of one public, mixed middle, low and working class school that is situated in the Western Cape EMDC - South. This site had to answer the research problem, and therefore it needed to have certain characteristics and be unique to its setting. The school setting and environment had to become familiar, in order to get a "hold" of the natural context. The priority at this stage was to get approval for access to the school site, in order to answer the research questions and sub-questions.

This school is located in a mixed middle, low and working-class area where both parents work to survive and manage to send their children to school, given the bad economic conditions. The school, classroom and educators became my unit of analysis. This school was selected because it is in close proximity to where the researcher works as an educator. This was done to save time and cost and it was of great convenience and benefit.

3.5.2. Teacher sample

The representative sample was eight educators - four females and four males. These educators were from a selected school, a secondary school in Mitchell's Plain. The educators were a mixture of Post Level 1, 2 and 3 teachers who had taught Grade 10 learners for the past ten to fifteen years; hence they were rich in experience, attitudes, knowledge and skills.

Educators had to be interviewed to locate or identify those that were willing to respond to a research study on grade progression and promotion in OBE. Finally a list of names of educators was crafted, containing those who were willing to be participants of a research study and part of the research unit. The representative

sample consisted of eight educators from one disadvantaged school. The focus for the research was specifically on these eight educators (representative sample) teaching Grade 10 learners at the disadvantaged school.

3.5.3. Learner sample

The learner sample consisted of learners who were in Grade 10 in that year. They were located in one mixed middle, low and working class school. This was a public school funded by the government. Class size and ratio were 1:50. Enrolment at the school was approximately 1 360 learners. Learners came from surrounding poverty-stricken areas or townships and spoke Xhosa or Zulu, while those living in the immediate area spoke, wrote and were taught in English.

3.6. Data analysis

This study made use of conceptual analysis which is also known as "thematic analysis" by other social researchers. The steps outlined by Palmquist (1993, in Babbie and Mouton, 2006: 492) were followed. They outlined the eight steps for conceptual analysis: (1) deciding on the level of analysis, (2) how many concepts to code for, (3) whether to code for the existence or frequency of a concept, (4) deciding how to distinguish among the concepts, (5) developing rules for the coding of texts, (6) deciding what to do with irrelevant information, (7) coding texts, and (8) analyzing results.

The first step was to decide on the level of analysis. In this regard, multiple or key phrases were used in the questionnaire. The second step was to decide how many concepts to use and code, and in this regard two broad concepts or constructs, "grade progression and promotion" were utilized. These are the relevant key terms around which the questions were constructed. The third step was a decision to code for patterns or themes. The fourth step was to decide

whether to code, for instance, for the data, or be prepared to generalize around the content of the data. In fact the analysis commenced by incorporating both "incidence and generalizing" to reduce subjective bias given that qualitative research is about understanding meaning. In the fifth step, rules for the coding of texts from interviews were developed by charting or mapping the data on a schedule and drawing pointers or "rules" to guide the coding. In the sixth step simplified parameters were set for coding a set of data in terms of what would be included or excluded around a concept, e.g. promotion. In the seventh step, irrelevant information was carefully reviewed and decisions as to whether this needed to be considered or not were made. Finally,, the actual coding and analysis of the results was completed.

The conceptualization of data is a way of organizing and making sense of it, which is the first step in the analysis. The data is organized into categories on the basis of themes, concepts or similar features. Concepts were linked to each other in a sequence or sets of similar categories, which were then woven into theoretical statements. The process was guided by the research question and generated new sub-questions, motivating the researcher to higher-level thinking. It also led to theory formation. Miles and Huberman (in David and Sutton, 2004: 195) suggested a list of basic coding prompts: (a) themes, (b) cause or explanations, (c) relations among people, (d) emerging constructs, etc. Coding was thought of as reducing data into conceptual frameworks and as instruments, cases and questions that had to be refined. Data was then summarized, coded, and broken down into themes, clusters and categories ready for interpretation and analysis. Miles and Huberman (1994: 56) described coding as "*tags or labels for assigning units of meaning to the descriptive or inferential information compiled during a study.*" Codes were usually attached to "chunks" of varying size; "*words, phrases, sentences, or whole paragraphs, connected or unconnected to a specific setting*," similar to what was mentioned in Punch (1998: 204). Miles and Huberman (1994: 56) noted that "*They took the form of a straightforward*

category label or more complex one." This was done to reduce data (field notes, texts, cards, observations etc) to convenient and manageable proportions and the main goal was to facilitate the retrieval of data segments categorized under the same codes.

The following strategy, as described by Seidel and Kelle (1995: 55-56 in Coffey and Atkinson, 1996: 29), was used: (a) notice relevant phenomena, (b) collect examples of these, (c) analyse the phenomena so as to find commonalities, differences, patterns, and structures (teasing and expanding the data) which are heuristic devices for further discovery. There were three types of material: (a) unstructured questionnaire, (b) field notes (unstructured), (c) documents and circulars, etc.

The former was coded to a certain degree; hence what was required was a close reading to identify aspects that were significant within them. Sapsford and Jupp (1998: 290) stated that the focus of inquiry is clarified over the course of data collection and analysis. In order to make sense of the data, analytical categories were used first. Thereafter, categories to which the data related and had relevance to the research were written down. Any recurrences were noted which illuminated patterns of an individual educator's perspectives, opinions, feelings and understandings of OBE, grade progression and promotion. The third step entailed the gathering together or pulling of segments of data from different parts of the interview record and field notes that were relevant to the same category. Categories, which emerged from the data, had a direct bearing and effect on answering the research questions posed in the structured questionnaire.

These categories were drawn from various strands or sources. At this stage the data confirmed expectations to a certain extent, but more analysing was required to ensure that the research question was fully challenged. A number of categories were generated so that the information or data held could be incorporated in the

content of the presentation of categories, patterns and structure. These categories informed the thesis used in chapter four.

There is an understanding that the results of a qualitative investigation might be checked against a quantitative study. The aim is to enhance the reliability, validity and credibility of the study. This is done through triangulation (Babbie and Mouton 2006: 275-276) and by writing extensive field notes, member checks, peer reviews, reasoned consensus, audit trails (to let the respondent speak freely without distorting what they say while they are interviewed), etc.

3.7. Reliability and validity

Reliability and validity are both central issues in all measurement and are concerned with how concrete measures are connected to constructs. Both are significant in establishing the truthfulness, credibility or believability of findings (Neuwman, 2003: 178). Reliability is a central concept in measurement, meaning "consistency": we have consistency over time and internal consistency (Punch, 1998: 98-99). Consistency over time was ensured during the investigation when the "same questionnaire to the same people under the same conditions but at a different time", was given, e.g., learners were given the same questions in a classroom situation at the selected school. It is said that a good measuring instrument for research picks up differences between people (Punch, 1998: 176). In fact reliability involves the accuracy of the research methods and techniques.

The validity concept is just as important as reliability. Validity is a technical term with specific meanings. Validity in qualitative studies refers to the closeness of fit between "data" and "reality" (David and Sutton 2004:171) or put differently it means "truthfulness" and refers to the bridge between a construct and data (Neuman, 2003: 185). The question is: how do we know that this instrument measures what we think it measures? Punch (1998: 100) said that 'an indicator is valid to the extent that it empirically represents the concept it purports to measure.' Some say there is an inference involved between the indicators we can observe and the construct we aim to measure. The validity question applies to the inference we make from what we observe. These issues are salient aspects because constructs in social theory are mostly ambiguous, diffuse and not directly observable (Neuman, 2003: 178). In this study there was a tight fit (Neuman, 2003: 186 and David and Sutton 2004:171) between the educators' (respondents') understanding, ideas, and statements about the progression and promotion session and what was taking place in reality. Furthermore an attempt

was made to give "*a fair, honest and balanced account*" (Neuman, 2003: 185) of grade progression and promotion practices by educators. The idea was to capture "the insider" view and provide a detailed account of how educators felt about grade progression and promotion and understood events. Strategies utilised by Macmillan and Schumacher (2001: 408), were also referred to in order to strengthen the validation and reliability in qualitative research.

FIGURE 4: The use of multi-methods to verify data

Strategy	Description
Fieldwork – continuous and extended or prolonged exploration or probing.	Space provided for checking recorded data (with findings) with the social reality of respondents.
Multi-method strategy.	Ensuring a triangulation during data collection and data analysis processes.
Low inference descriptors.	Detailed descriptions of people and socio-spatial environments done literally.
Data recorded with tape.	Use of a tape recorder.
Participant observer or researcher,	Utilizing respondents' recorded perceptions in field notes, formal material (portfolios) and informal material, and interviews (questionnaires).
Member checking.	Cross-checking with various respondents (educators) to verify the interpretations and constructs of the reality in the field and during interviews.
Participant review.	Respondents were drawn on to check the notes and equilibration or synthesis of interviews and field work. This was done to create an accurate and solid reflection of reality.
Language, spoken and written.	Acquire verbatim descriptions (statements) of events, activities in the field and inferences or quotations from documents (conferences).

Babbie and Mouton (2006: 275) noted that the importance of triangulation is to enhance validity and reliability in qualitative studies. Denzin (1978b: 28) in Patton, (1990: 247) introduced the concept of data triangulation, which means the use of a variety of data sources in a study.

The logic of triangulation is based on the premise that:

> *"No single method ever adequately solves the problem of rival casual factors. Because each method reveals different aspects of empirical reality, multiple methods of observations must be employed. This is termed triangulation. I now offer as a final methodological rule the principle that multi-methods should be used in every investigation."* (Patton, 1990: 247)

3.8. Ethical issues

Social research involves ethical issues since it is "*the collection of data from people about themselves and others*". In terms of qualitative investigation the intrusion is more in-depth, sensitive, intimate and a "stepping-into" people's private lives. Thus, in this study the respondents to the questionnaire, direct observation and interviews had the right to confidentiality in terms of the information provided. The freedom to express, criticize and disagree was protected at all times, and any mentioning of principal (manager), curriculum advisor or school name or any other type of personal identification was considered a violation of confidentiality. For these reasons the correct ethical protocol was followed. Permission to conduct research in schools was granted from the Western Cape Education Department. To protect the school a pseudonym was used instead of mentioning the school's real name. Teacher participants and parents of learner participants signed consent forms to participate in this study.

Professional conduct and ethical considerations should always be uppermost in the researcher's mind so as to protect integrity and respect for other social researchers. If not, then mistrust and contempt will create negative relationships between respondents and social researchers (See Appendix C for educator participants' copy of the consent document).

3.9. Summary

The research method and metatheoretical paradigm that underpin the research study, were reviewed. A description of and reasons for utilizing a qualitative method and ethnographic research design also includes their advantages and disadvantages. A summary of the features of this study and qualitative research indicates how well they fit together and why qualitative research methodology was selected for this research study. Similarly, the characteristics of ethnography and of this study, shows the suitability of using an ethnographic research design for this study.

The representative sample was eight educators from one township school. The instruments used for data collection include observations, note-taking, interviews and questionnaires. Data collection included the researcher being part of or being "immersed" in a classroom setting consisting of Grade 10 learners with one educator; the researcher was also present with educators during grade progression and promotion sessions; these settings provided the researcher with an opportunity to gain an "insider" perspective. Observations of OBE teaching in a natural setting generated information about the learning practices in the classroom and how grade progression and promotion was implemented by educators.

The questions for the interviews and questionnaires were designed to elicit the information required to answer the research questions of this study. Conducting interviews with educators revealed their perspectives on grade progression and promotion in OBE. Respondents to the questionnaires revealed their characteristics, attitudes and values about grade progression and promotion

The data analysis method and thematic narrative analysis were used to analyse the data collected. The analysis was done by searching for patterns, themes, categories and similarities as well as differences in the text or data and assigning codes to them. The categories which emerged from this data were interpreted to answer the research questions and inform chapter 4. Ethical procedures were closely observed. A qualitative research method and ethnographic research design were found to be appropriate for answering the research questions of the study.

CHAPTER 4: RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

4.1. Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to present the findings relating to the phenomenon under study: the nature of grade progression and promotion of Grade 10 learners in a classroom context. The school conditions and environment inform and shape the way "social practices" and lessons are delivered in classrooms. The study will begin with a reflection on the socio-spatial context and dynamics of the school. As previously mentioned, the researcher had taught at the school, which allowed for an insider view on the setting and context. This is followed by a discussion on the school's cultural setting, the classroom setting, the pedagogical practices (styles) of educators, the availability and use of resources, dominant language usage, and literacy and numeracy levels. The social context of the school can help one to understand the constraints within which educators work, which appears to have an effect on their beliefs, attitudes and ways of doing things.

Following this there is a discussion on the themes that emerged from the data analysis process which are: (1) the actual practices of educators when implementing grade progression and promotion, (2) educators' subjective opinions or their perceptions in relation to grade progression and promotion, and (3) implications of grade progression and promotion practices for the learners.

4.2. Setting the scene: the school and its environmental context

In this section a case study description of the school will frame its socio-spatial dynamics. A full description of the school and classroom context shows why it

appears that this school is dysfunctional. Furthermore, the Grade 10 results of 2008, pertaining to grade promotion and progression, are presented.

Emmerose Secondary School in Mitchell's Plain is 28 years old with a school population of 1 360. The teaching corps consists of 43 educators, mostly female. Most of the educators have more than fifteen years' teaching experience. Eighty percent of learners are coloured and English-speaking, whilst 20% are African, whose mother tongue is isiXhosa. The latter however receive their tuition in either English or Afrikaans.

The area in which the school is located is characterised by high unemployment, gangsterism and drug addiction, and most people live in poverty. The majority of learners have parents who have migrated from rural to urban areas over the last four to five years. The influx, mobility and unemployment factors in the community place a heavy burden on the school's finances and exert an influence on classroom practices, as referred to in "township on the move" (Fataar 2007: 606-607).

A crucial feature of this school is safety and security which has become a central focus and concern for the principal, educators, learners, and parents. These are major issues given that the caretaker was shot dead in the classroom on a Sunday morning. The "Bambanani" project was initially introduced by the Western Cape Education Department to safeguard learners from any form of gangsterism and violence at their respective schools. This project was then proposed as a solution to the challenging problems the school was facing during this time. These contextual factors have the potential to threaten and undermine the value of schooling. The school is constantly vandalised which means that the limited resources of the school are at high risk. Parent-educator meetings were re-scheduled to mid-afternoon because of safety concerns. This is a reflection of the environmental dynamics that flow into the school. What is clear is that whatever

happens in the community boils over into the school. A typical example was a gang feud between learners in two different streets. This became a very complicated issue with parents becoming involved in a fight on the school grounds. The school is often used as a battleground for petty teenage gang fights.

The institutional dynamics at this school are tense, vexed, complicated and laced with micro-politics and conflict. The principal has lost his power to assert authority over critical areas of management like moderation, appraisal, progression and promotion. Learners do not comply totally with the school dress code, a problem that is often addressed at school assemblies. Fataar and Paterson (2002: 18-19) point us to the features of most dysfunctional schools, which are borne out by what happens in this school where management suffers from "moral diffusion". Moreover there is an absence of a consistent and stable routine supporting a form of conventional educational practice which is also described by Clarke and Linder (2006: 39) or, as Bloch (2009: 17) and Chisholm and Valley (1996) have suggested, is a feature of dysfunctional schools. This transpires often at this school when there is a conspicuous absence of teachers; when only a few senior educators are present for assemblies to control a crowd of 1 360 learners at a time, while the rest sit in their classes or in the staff room.

The school has 46 classrooms which are used daily by educators and learners. At the school only 24 classrooms are physically in good condition. The other 22 are sprayed with graffiti, the writing boards are painted with tippex making it difficult for the educator to write on, doors are hanging off their hinges, and windows are broken. Out of six classrooms observed, there were only two that could be considered in good working condition. Charts and placards have been torn down and learners are further disempowered by not having sufficient chairs and desks. Switches and plugs were dismantled from their tubing and bulbs were unscrewed to be sold for "tik". Some of the classrooms have a shortage of textbooks and stationery, which became evident during classroom observations.

From classroom observations, it was clear that classroom space is a limiting factor. Educators claimed that class sizes were still too big and there was no space within classrooms to implement group work, which is part of OBE practice. The learner–educator ratio is 1:48, which is very high, as reflected in Figure 5. The amount of children per class is above the departmental norm. Fiske and Ladd (2004: 147-8) discovered through their research that a higher learner-educator ratio was associated with lower pass rates. This was reiterated by Case and Deaton (1999: 1079) who in similar studies found that high pupil-educator ratios reduced the Mathematics score. Fleisch (2008: 88) dispelled Case and Deaton's findings and argued that the evidence cannot be given much weight due to sample sizes being too small and clusters being excluded. Fleisch however draws his argument from a number of studies conducted at primary and secondary level (2008: 96). His research points to the fact that educator costs and lower educator ratios cannot be consistently linked to school achievement levels.

Educators often blame their teaching styles on large class sizes. As one educator put it "some learners benefit through critical thinking and group work (co-operative teaching style) but it can become very chaotic, and therefore it is very hard and extremely difficult due to large class sizes". At this school, the majority of educators still use the traditional chalk-and-talk method, noting that doing group work is highly problematic.

The infrastructure of the school is poor, in that for example, the school has no hall facilities. The school's physical environment indicates negligence on the part of caretakers who appear to display a non-caring attitude towards the playground. The playground, which is often used as a soccer pitch, is a dusty, untidy and dirty place. The school does not have any library facilities. The absence of a library, and the non-operational condition of the internet facility, are constraining factors. One educator asserted that:

"The literacy and numeracy levels are far too low and yet there are no facilities and not all the children have access to the school's internet facilities. Surely the use of a library will be stimulating and educational to promote a culture of learning and teaching."

This view is supported by the Western Cape Education Department (WCED, 2006: 45) as indicated by the statement that "the richer the learning environment the better the children perform on the performance tasks. Where schools have a library or a book collection, an internet connection or a teaching resource centre, the learners tend to score significantly higher." These are all infrastructural jolts which are a manifestation of most township schools.

The school fees prescribed per learner are R700 per annum, which is very low compared to "Model C" schools where fees are R900 per month or more. The school in this study has limited funding because parents cannot pay the school fees as they are mostly unemployed. Chisholm (2004: 17) commented on a similar condition that "poorer schools have found it difficult to collect fees, use scarce resources to do so and [operate] generally with too little revenue to make any difference to the overall budget and school operations."

The discussion thus far is on the social context of the school. Its environment appears to have an effect on the operations and relationships inside the school which shows in the breakdown of authority structures, the despondent attitude of educators and the behaviour of learners. The principal warned learners of the consequences if they failed to comply with the school rules, which means they must bring their parents to school. Learners, however, never inform parents of disciplinary meetings and therefore this is taken lightly by all. Disciplinary issues are not seriously dealt with by the management team and everything is left for the last moment. Reference can also be made to the breakdown in "authority

structures" and discipline whereby the principal has lost total control and this contributes directly to the school's problems, as suggested by Clarke and Linder (2006: 37-39).

These are characteristics of what Fataar and Paterson (2002:18-19) refer to as "moral diffusion" and "moral minimising". Moral diffusion is where the management of a dysfunctional school cannot muster the authority to make demands on the staff due to internal politics at staff level. The other issue is that of moral minimizing whereby educators adapt to deal with the difficult environment in which they work as described by Fataar and Paterson (1998: 32).

Murphy (1992: 367) comments that in some schools, the roles of both principals and educators have been reduced to mere spectatorship which signifies a deep-rooted sense of helplessness and powerlessness. This was evident from observations at this school because whenever the bell rang for classes to resume, the principal had to go to the staff room to remind educators that they must go to their respective classes. Educators would ignore the principal and take their own time to move to their classes. On other occasions the principal would ring the bell signalling the start of the staff meeting but twenty minutes later only a few educators would appear in the staff room. Fataar and Paterson (1998: 32) illustrate how educators respond: "*they end up acting in ways that diffuse moral responsibility and they use the constrained circumstances in which they work to justify their minimum participation in the schooling process.*" The ethos and culture at this school seems to be "in sync" with the environment which places a range of constraints on governance and teaching practices and this is also mentioned by Clarke and Linder (2006: 24). The concepts of "moral diffusion" and "moral minimizing" (Fataar and Paterson, 2002: 18-19) were shown to offer a useful lens to interpret the actions of educators and the principal so as to illuminate the dysfunctionality of the school.

Figure 5 and the narrative description that follows indicate that this learning institution is deprived of basic resources which appear to have a significant impact on learning and teaching. The first significant pointer drawn from the narrative description is that the learning institution is characterized by a sub-theme of dysfunctionality which is also described by Fataar and Paterson (1998: 31 and 2002: 18-19). The attributes of dysfunctionality can be described as being a disorderly chaotic environment, a crisis of authority, erratic and variable educator and learner absentees, and a lack of a culture of learning and teaching. Figure 5 provides a summary of the school's context as described in the discussion above which will assist in understanding the dynamics and physical context of the school.

FIGURE 5: Summary of school context

Descriptors	Description
Name of school	Emmerose Secondary School.
Type of school.	General secondary school.
Physical structure.	One administrative building and two buildings housing the 28 classroom blocks.
Availability of computer facilities.	One a "Khanya Lab", which is not operational.
Number of learners.	1 360
Number of educators.	42 excluding the principal and non-academic staff members.
School fees prescribed per annum.	R700 per annum. Out of 1360 learners, only 600 paid on due time.
Availability of desks and chairs per classroom.	Shortage of desks.
Library facility.	None.

The preceding discussion was concerned with the socio-spatial context of the school and with providing evidence of the school's dysfunction. Now the themes

that emerged during the data analysis process pertaining more specifically to grade progression and promotion, will be considered.

4.2.1. The disjuncture between policy and practices: actual grade progression and promotion practices of this school.

In this section, findings on the grade progression and promotion process within the school context are presented. The purpose of this section is to illustrate the actual practices of educators and the school management team during the grade progression and promotion sessions at the school. This is primarily done to illustrate how grade progressions and promotions are "subjective" acts or "emotionally driven" acts on the part of educators and this will become evident later when one such session is described. The data taken from the first and second schedule illustrating the number of learners who passed (were promoted) and failed (were retained) in 2008 when this study was done, is provided first.

In Figure 6, the total number of learners promoted and retained in Grade 10 at Emmerose Secondary School (EMDC: 2008) is provided.

FIGURE 6: Summaries of examination schedules Grade, 10 December 2008-2009

	Number of learners enrolled.		Number of learners who wrote exams.		Promoted or passed.		Retained or Failed.		Drop-out or inactive.	
Year	2008	2009	2008	2009	2008	2009	2008	2009	2008	2009
Grade 10 **Second schedule**: Adjusted pass rate after consultation with educators concerned.	368	263	361	235	202 (55, 9 % have blanket promotion)	161 (68,5% have blanket promotion	159	74	7 learners 3 of the 7 were pregnant 4 left school.	28 5 learners were Pregnant 23 left school

Grade	Number of learners enrolled.		Number of learners who wrote exams.		Promoted or passed.		Retained or Failed.		Drop-out or inactive.	
Year	2008	2009	2008	2009	2008	2009	2008	2009	2008	2009
Grade 10 **First schedule**: Original pass rate.	368	263	361	235	141 (39,1% have blanket promotion)	93 (39,6% have blanket promotio	220	142	7 learners 3 of the 7 were pregnant	28

					n				
							4 left school.		

From Figure 6 it becomes evident that in 2008, 368 learners enrolled and seven of these learners dropped out before the final exams. It was ascertained that three of the learners were pregnant and the others left for different reasons. This resulted in 361 learners sitting for the final examinations. In the initial phase when the first schedule was compiled, only 141 of the 361 learners passed the exams. This meant that 220 failed or did not meet the pass requirements. This was the first time in the school's history that the Grade 10 failure rate was this high. It then became clear that mark adjustments had to follow since the departmental requirements state that "only 5% of learners are allowed to fail in grade 10," as noted in the MWD paper on OBE (Davey, et al., 2008: 6).

The second schedule, which was sent to the department, was nothing like the first. In the second schedule, adjustments were made by the school management team (SMT) in conjunction with the relevant Grade 10 educators. It was announced that marks would be adjusted across the board. The way in which these adjustments took place will become clear in a later discussion. However, what is clear from Figure 6 is that huge block adjustments were made "blanket promotions". These adjustments can be seen in the second schedule which was sent to the department. As seen in Figure 6, 202 learners passed or were promoted and 159 failed. Whereas 220 failed according to the first schedule, only 159 failed according to the second schedule. This means that 61 learners who originally failed were now promoted to Grade 11.

The following extract was taken from a session in which these schedules were discussed, and this will show how grade promotions and progressions are done in practice at this school.

FIGURE 7: Extract, grade progression and promotion session, 6 December 2008

On Wednesday morning, 6 December, the principal had a message written on the notice board that the progression and promotion meeting would commence at 11 am. The principal then announced over the intercom that all Grade 10 class and subject educators must report to the "Khanya lab" for the promotion and progression meeting. He stated, 'All Grade 10 educators must bring with them the following: completed class lists for each learning area, a summary schedule of the marks of each class, and separate class lists with those learners who are at risk, or border-line cases'.

By 8.30 am, educators were already discussing learners at risk and one educator remarked, 'Half of my class is failing, I don't think the others have a hope of passing but we will see, you never know.' In the administration foyer I overheard the Mathematics and Physical Science educators already committing to allocating marks to learners who were short of five to ten marks. Educator A (Mathematics) stated, 'I will give five marks maximum to those learners who are borderline cases.' (prior to going into the meeting).

Educator B (Physical Science) stated, 'I am still thinking of only giving three deserving learners at least ten marks to ensure they pass.'. Educator C stated, '*Ek gee net vir daardie leerlinge wat opdaag in my klaskamer en my werk doen*, and the rest sweet nothing; they don't deserve it.'("I only give marks to those learners who attend my class and do my work"). Two educators both teaching English were sitting in the staff room drinking tea and they had a conversation which started off like this, 'If you give your learners ten marks in the grammar section then I will do the same for my learners. I will not disadvantage my learners, no way.'

At 10.30 the bell rang for the first interval and the educators streamed into the staff room, while some went to the notice board to read the given instruction. Immediately the staff room was

abuzz with comments and questions. Educator D stated, 'Who do you think should pass? Maybe just the hard-working ones or those that passed the examination?' This stimulated a debate amongst other educators. The deputy principal entered the staff room and stated, 'Learners who do not meet the pass requirements in a certain learning area, we want those learner's names to be entered on a separate class list.' At 11.00 the educators started to enter the "Khanya Lab" but by 11.30 only a few educators were present, hence not all of them reported for the meeting. The principal made the second announcement by ringing the bell three times and made a final call for all Grade 10 educators to report to the "Khanya Lab" because the progression and promotion session was to commence immediately.

By 11.45 the majority of the classroom and subject educators and senior management team arrived to conduct the meeting. The "Khanya Lab" had a long table in the centre with twenty chairs around the sides of the table with the deputy principal and FET (Further Education and Training) co-ordinator sitting at the head of the table. No other educators or learners were allowed into the meeting. The researcher was seated towards the end of the table like the rest of the educators.

The procedure for progression and promotion was as follows:

The co-ordinator was selected by the deputy principal to be the chairperson of the meeting on his behalf. It was agreed that the time for this meeting would be two hours at most and it would be best to start with Grade 10 A, then B, and move on till they reached 10 F and G.

The idea was to review each class in relation to the pass requirement. The co-ordinator started with Grade 10 A and called the names of the class and subject educators to collect copies of the composite class schedule and issued the other copies to the rest of the educators. Eight names were circled, mentioned and highlighted by the co-ordinator and we proceeded by reviewing the first learner in alphabetical order. The co-ordinator then read the name and surname, the marks attained in each learning area, the total marks scored, the average, the number of learning areas failed or passed and how much was required by the learner to pass the grade.

The onus was now on the class and subject educators to be in agreement and collectively decide to motivate in the interest of the learner for either ten or twenty marks as each of the names was read out by the co-ordinator. The meeting was interrupted by the entrance of the principal who spoke only to the deputy principal and the co-ordinator who then relayed the message that we must, '... just do the right thing by allocating ten marks to those learners who are border-line cases and the rest can be looked at again by the committee in order to save some time.'

The deputy principal instructed educators to award marks to learners who only required ten or twelve marks in order to be promoted. The researcher questioned the deputy principal as to the reason for doing this and he replied, 'The department will in any case condone and promote these learners.' A senior educator remarked that the approach was, 'If we don't promote and progress, the department will send the schedule back to review more learners that can be promoted until they are satisfied.'

FIGURE 8: Extract of schedule and discussion

We started off by allocating 10 marks to the first learner and so the process continued until Grade 10 E was reached and a problem arose because the subject educator was not present and the class educator could not motivate alone for 16 marks, given the learner's situation. It was then left to the co-ordinator and class room educator to make a decision on behalf of the subject educator.

Educator E then commented that, '10 marks is not a lot to give to a deserving learner in Mathematics.' This created a huge objection from the Mathematics educator who refused to award the 10 marks and remarked, 'Why don't we look at other criteria instead of just promoting learners willy nilly?'

Educator F (Mathematics) remarked, 'What about school attendance, work (projects and assignments) submitted, the June and September examination marks, learners' attitudes and

behaviour in class?' Educator F then argued with Educator E in terms of the criteria and validity being applied.

Educator F then challenged the co-ordinator as to, "*how could the principal then declare marks to be awarded to those learners who have barriers to learning?*" Two educators expressed outrage and stated, 'If learners cannot achieve and complete their outcomes they cannot progress or pass; instead they must be retained. The principals' should be charged if they progress and promote weak learners knowing they will stumble in Grade 10 because of defective knowledge, experience and low level skills.' Another educator had the following to say about grade promotion and progression, 'This thing [grade progression and grade promotion] is not working for learners because they become very lazy. They know they can be promoted to the next grade if they don't work hard because it happened before, they know the rules, so why should they work hard to pass when you can just be promoted. Expectations are high for promotion and learners have a very relaxed attitude. They say, "*Let's wait till the end to be promoted.*"

The grade progression and promotion process continued and was exhausted after two hours. However, at the end of the process, 40 learners were 'promoted' to Grade 11 but there were a further 21 who required between fifteen and twenty marks and it was left to the principal to make this decision. The meeting was closed and a second schedule now had to be drafted and presented to the principal and the circuit manager. The deputy principal submitted the second schedule to the EMDC district office and co-ordinator of Grade 10 classes. The second schedule was not signed off because the school had to condone the rest of the 21 learners before the Department would sign-off all the mark sheets and schedules of Grade 10\ classes. This required the school to hold the second grade progression and promotion meeting. It was conducted only with the respective class and subject educators who now had to follow the departmental instruction of "promoting" the last 21 learners to the next grade.

The above extracts suggest that grade progression and promotion has become a "subjective and emotionally driven act" by educators when they decide on who

to promote or retain. As was noted before, educators were granted the platform to "open up and let their voices be heard" in this meeting. Any "silent voices" not being present, whether these were the class or subject educator, were definitely not going to be involved in the interest of failing learners who required ten to twelve marks. Educators who are absent during these sessions leave the fate of their learners in the hands of other educators and Senior Management Team members.

What transpired in this grade progression and promotion session was contrary to the prescriptions set out by the Department of Education which stipulate:

> *"The requirements for the Secondary Phase (FET/Grade 10 –11) for promotion is that (a) a learner must have seven subjects, (b) must obtain 40% in 3 subjects, including Home Language, (c) learner can obtain 30% in the remaining 5 subjects, and (d) condonations in ONE subject at 30%. CONDONATION: (1) Learners are entitled to have only one result condoned; only 30% subjects can be condoned, and (2) in order to have a subject condoned the learner must score between 0 –29% AND must have completed CASS Portfolio."* (WCED, 2007: 12).

In other words the Department allows for a learner to be condoned in one subject only. This must, however, not be a core subject. From the extract it is clear that these directives were not followed. In actual practice learners' marks were being adjusted in more than one subject and on more than one occasion. Educators' arguments for why learners should be promoted differed. In this regard the motivation for mark adjustments was based on the following reasons: learners were hard working, well behaved and disciplined, and submitted all tasks on time. However learners who were not attending class, had very disruptive and emotionally unstable tendencies, and who handed in work very late and thereby displayed a distinctly careless attitude, would not be awarded marks. The

Mathematics educator refused to award marks, stating that, 'No marks must be given otherwise we drop the standard.'

The extracts and Figure 6 depict actual practices and highlight that there is a disjuncture between Departmental (policy) prescriptions and actual grade progression and promotion practices. As stated in chapter two, Jansen (2002: 199) was concerned about the policy–practice gap and stated, "*There appears to be very little change in the daily routines of schools and classrooms of the nation.*" Jansen (2002: 200) explained the reasons and argued that the non-change of South African education was largely the consequence of policy being little more than "political symbolism". He commented that "*every single case of educational policymaking demonstrates … the preoccupation of the state with settling policy struggles in the political domain rather than the realm of practice.*" Chisholm (1999: 88), making reference to Tyack and Cuban (1996: 54), supported Jansen's views by reiterating that "*...important changes may occur silently and others heralded with great fanfare, may be implemented only in token, symbolic ways.*" The 'political symbolism' according to Jansen (2002: 201) which was at play in policy development was "*...disconnected from the immediate concerns about educational practices.*" Jansen (2001, in Chisholm, 2004: 15) stated that the reliance on political symbolism "*as the over-arching framework for educational policy making effectively rules out any major transformation of education.*"

Fataar (2007: 600) suggested that to understand policy reforms we need to undertake an analysis of sites where they are taken up – and renovated by the dynamics of space and social networks. Here he referred to the effects of policy and stated that these are to be understood in "*...the complex ways in which the policies are recreated in their environment and the reception of policy at schools that determines the trajectory of policy reform*" (Fataar, 2007: 611). He was supported by Ball (1990: 118) who commented that schools themselves might

give a particular form to policies at the point of implementation: "...*the operational terrain within which policies are implemented, contingencies, institutional structures, cultures, histories and environments may produce very different kinds of possibilities of responses to new policies.*" Ball (1990: 118-119) explained that "...*the impact of policy is best understood in terms of a complex interplay between the history, culture and context of the school and the intentions and requirements of the producers of policy texts.*" She further added that "...*it is important to understand the relationship between policy and practice as a discontinuous albeit linked one.*" Chisholm (1999: 89-90) stated further that there are two main factors at the school level which mediate and condition changes and responses to new policies: one is the socio-economic context of the schools and the other the cultural-political frameworks through which principals and educators make sense of the "process of change".

For this study it becomes significant to reflect on Jansen's (2002: 199) idea of symbolism which gives the reason as to why there is a distance or gap between policy and practice. This has, however, resulted in "...*the failure of educational policy to connect to the lives of educators and learners in schools and classrooms,*" which becomes evident in terms of the implications for learners, of grade progression and promotion.

The gap between actual practices and policy should be viewed through two lenses, i.e. "political symbolism" and "policy renovation", since this could help in understanding the disjuncture between departmental requirements and educator practices with regard to grade progression and promotion. The way educators positioned learners was of interest during the discussions on progression and promotion.

4.2.2. Positioning of learners

In the previous section the disjuncture between policy and practices and how policy gets renovated within the school, was illustrated. Attention is now turned to the effects this appears to have on the "positioning" of those learners who were "wrongfully" promoted to Grade 11. Based on observations of classrooms and interviews with educators, it appears that educators often "position" these promoted or retained learners in a negative way which appears to lead to marking and labelling of these learners; as one educator noted:

> *"You sit there doing nothing, you know that you don't deserve being in Grade 11. Remember you can only be 'put over' once in a phase and you had your chance. This is laziness and unacceptable."*

According to Davies and Hunt (1994: 389), " *being positioned as one who belongs in or is defined in terms of the negative or dependent term, can lock people in repeated patterns of powerlessness.*" Learners who have been positioned in particular negative ways often "act out" or show a disaffection for classroom activities which, according to Rist (2000 in Panofsky, 2003: 419 or 8 online), manifests through their verbal and behavioural resistance to school work or apathy in the form of work not done.

Most learners are constantly reminded that they have been "put over", as the researcher observed in one class. According to Davies and Hunt (1994: 390), when children are marked or labelled, as this educator did by reminding the learner that he was "put over", this is seldom visible since it can become taken for granted as the way things are in the classroom. However, if learners are seen as "doing nothing" by the educator they will be acknowledged as learners not knowing "how to behave" and in doing so do not become,' *"members of the social scene where the educator is positioned as authoritative educator and they are positioned as co-operative learners*" (Davies and Hunt, 1994: 390). They commented that, "*those who disrupt this order are problem learners and are*

marked as such." In fact they stated that, "*the problem is seen to lie in them and is read in terms of their difference from others*" (Davies and Hunt, 1994: 390, 391). The "positioned" learner now becomes a "problem" learner as described by educator B, "*Learners are not ready for the grade they are promoted into. These are problem learners for everyone.*"

Hebding and Glick (1987: 136) stated that according to labelling theory, the labelling of learners as "different" with a negative connotation may create a distorted reality for someone associated with the label, as well as for their educators, parents and peers. They explained further that a labelled learner would be associated with a new form of identity, role and also a new set of expectations. Rist (1977, in Allyn and Bacon, 2001: 153) noted that when the expectation is made known to a particular learner, it may become a self-fulfilling prophecy: "*...an expectation which defines a situation [that] comes to influence the actual behaviour within the situation so as to produce what was initially assumed to be there.*"

It is accepted that "*the effects of labelling are powerfully demonstrated within an academic setting, and are also proven to be a reality within the social and behavioural settings*" (Bernhard, 1972: 5). Most times labelling can also lead to deviant behaviour when the person becomes "the thing" he is described as "being" (Tannenbaum, 1938: 21 in Bernhard, 1972: 5). He becomes a person "*whose life and identity are organised around the facts of deviance*" (Lemert, 1972: 62). "*If the deviant behaviour occurs in a learner's school, it will affect the expectations educators have of him and this will consequently result in him trying to realize those expectations*" (Bernhard, 1972: 5).

Labelling can affect the academic potential of learners who are predicted as "even becoming weaker". This was confirmed by Ercole (2009: 6) who stated that learners who are continually rewarded by their educator begin to see

themselves as good learners, and become motivated to learn and do well, while those ("problem learners") who do not receive positive feedback inevitably abandon their motivation to do well, causing their academic potential to suffer, hence becoming the very individuals their educators expect them to become, "drop-outs".

The labels learners are given whether positive or negative imply that learners will be encouraged to live up to expectations. Bernhard (1972: 7) stated that a poor or low ability learner will work to reach the limited expectation that others have of him, thereby "*performing at lower levels in academic settings*". "*The classification and labelling among learners in schools, plays an increasing role in determining learners' progress and academic success*" (Bernhard, 1972: 1).

Learners who have been labelled as "bad" learners are more likely to feel "disengaged" or "detached" from the schooling process. The feeling of not belonging due to negative labels can lead to low performance as a result of this labelling. It can lead to isolation, or "*disengagement from the educational experience.*" (Trout 2001: 46) What is understood from the process of labelling and its effects is simply that learners become disconnected from classroom learning, which creates a sense of hopelessness and boredom. The ultimate result is the expression of emotions through negative and disruptive behaviour.

Labelling can however, be an enabling factor if it is positive, but also has the potential of being limiting and can hold disastrous consequences for the learner's academic potential.

Educator D commented on his experience of learners who are "wrongfully" promoted:

"Learners become lazy and cannot cope with the demands of Grade 11, and eventually they become weaker. They represent a false sense of achievement. We cannot apply the idea "one size fits all". They don't understand, and perform poorly, they lose interest and face with peers, are seen as stupid and start failing when they feel totally lost."

He furthermore noted that, "*I just write them off*." What this suggests is that those "marked" or "positioned" learners are treated differently within the classroom. As Panofsky (2003: 12) noted, this differentiated treatment "*often translates into differential instruction. Learners that have been placed over could experience differential instruction from educators, thereby marginalizing them further*".

The aim was to show how the negative perception of educator D induced the "marking" of the promoted learner when he was reprimanded and how it was played out in the classroom. Furthermore, the reaction of these learners and how they act out their feelings and emotions will be looked at briefly.

At one point during a field work session, educator B was asked, 'How do promoted learners cope with the new workload?'

He remarked:

"*The promoted and rude learner does not participate or do activities like tasks, projects and assignments. Some cope with the tasks because they want to get out of the crisis they are in. The rest sit in silence and give blank stares.*"

Davies and Hunt (1998: 405) stated that these marked learners "*...do not find it possible to speak at all or in ways that they can be heard as legitimate.*" The comment educator D made earlier reflects in part that learners who are "marked" operate on a level of silence to cushion or hide their incompetency and inability to complete the task assigned. The silence practised by these promoted and retained learners seems to be a shield to avoid becoming more active in class (Clark and Linder, 2006: 95). It is also a way of minimizing pressure to perform or meet task goals like homework and class work exercises not done (Clark and Linder, 2006: 83). The silence of promoted or retained learners is a mechanism to avoid the conflicting situation, which seems to be very easy at times. Clark and Linder (2006: 84) stated that the classroom could be thought of as being like a stage hung with "curtain walls of silence" behind which the learners can conveniently withdraw.

It has been shown how grade progression and promotion practices can lead to positioning, marking, and labelling practices of learners who are "wrongfully" promoted and how these can marginalize learners even further. In the next section retention and the dropout of learners will be discussed as an outcome of Emmerose's grade progression and promotion practices.

4.2.3. Possible retention and drop-out:

In the previous section, the positioning, marking and labelling of "wrongfully" promoted learners by educators and how this negatively impacts on those learners, especially the "wrongfully" promoted and retained learners, was considered.

The retention of learners can be described as 'repeating a grade level or delayed entry to the next grade.' as stated in the Report on Grade level Retention (Texas Education Agency, 1995: 2, 5) and "dropping-out" as 'a learner who left school before completing grade 12.' (Masitsa, 2006: 166). The concern at the school under study was the high promotion, retention and drop-out rates

During the research observation and interview, educators E and H were asked, 'What are your opinions of promoting and retaining failed learners at your school?' Educator E commented: *"Promotion is a fair measure to give learners a second chance if it is applied properly because if we don't we will get bottlenecks in the system."* Educator H similarly stated: *"Keeping learners behind is not practical. If they fail the classes will just be bigger, they will not cope, and just drop-out later."*

Theorists like Overman (1986: 609) argued against retention. He posed the question: does achievement actually improve when learners are retained? Overman (1986: 609) goes further by questioning, *"Can we hold a learner who does not demonstrate a minimum level of proficiency in skills taught in a given*

grade?" This question is answered by Labaree (1985, in Overman, 1986: 609) who argued against retention of learners by emphasising that promoting on merit holds learners solely responsible for their success or failure and ignores other significant factors in learner achievement, e.g. class size, educator quality and school climate etc. According to Overman (1986: 609), most of the early researchers concluded that educators should not retain learners because they learned less during the second year in a given grade than they would have learned if they had been promoted.

Jackson (1975: 613) suggested that educators who retain learners do so without sound evidence that retention is preferable. Kosiba (2008: 39) cautioned us with regards to retention and suggests a new intervention instead of placing the learner in the same classroom situation. She has the same opinion as Delisio (2004: 2) who stated that, "*Research has shown that if a child is retained and you do the same things, he or she will be further behind than ever*". Shepard and Smith (1990: 85) stated, "*Researchers of the dropout phenomenon have found a significant relationship between grade retention and dropping out – in the opposite direction. Dropouts are five times more likely to have repeated a grade than are high school graduates*".

Here they suggested that if learners are retained, as educator D suggests later, it will eventually lead to them dropping out of school. This is reiterated by the RSA, Ministerial Committee on Learner Retention in the South African schooling system (2008: xv), where it is stated that "*Grade repetition has been identified as the single most powerful predictor of dropping out*." According to this document the dropout rate is highest in Grade 11 (2008: xiii). Another educator noted that, 'Learners should be promoted in order not to have a bottleneck of failures in Grade 10.'

What became apparent from the interviews is that grade promotion and progression holds certain negative consequences for those learners "wrongfully" promoted. As educator D stated:

> *"Struggling and weak learners are promoted. They are not prepared for the next grade. I strongly disagree that learners should be promoted especially in my subject where they are struggling to meet the requirements. They need to know Grade 10 notes in order to understand Grade 11 and since it forms the basis of Grade 12. Eventually they end up failing or leaving Grade 12."*

Educator G provides further evidence of the negative consequences of grade progression and promotion for learners "wrongfully" promoted:

> *"Learners are not ready for the grade they are promoted into for the following year. They read without understanding, some can hardly read or write. Only 25% passed in June in that year. These are 'problem learners' for everyone as they are even weaker. Learners are confused and do not know what is happening to them."*

According to Allensworth (2005) in Kosiba, (2008:13), educators discovered that students demonstrate a decrease in knowledge and skills when they were socially promoted and it did not decrease their self-esteem, because students did not realise they were losing their academic skills.

Others like Tomchin and Impara (1992: 211-212), however, noted that (1) retention is necessary for future success in the school – they can however develop a positive self–concept and develop strong leadership style; (2) retention is mandated by the curriculum, which constrains educators' flexibility to make appropriate content-related decisions as to whether learners need more time to learn; (3) retention reflects educators' adherence to standards – that is how they

are judged; but more important, educators are judged by the kind of learners they send on to the next grade. According to Owen and Ranick (1977: 531-3) and Peterson, De Gracie, & Ayabe (1987: 117), benefits to retained learners have been reported if they receive special interventions. McAfee (in Overman, 1986: 611) added that learners who receive remedial instruction make greater gains than either retained learners or promoted learners who do not receive special help. Frymier (1989 in Tomchin and Impara, 1992: 200) supported this notion by claiming that schools that do not provide special interventions for retained learners thereby reduce the chance of positive outcomes for retained learners.

From observations at Emmerose it became apparent the school did not offer retained learners any extra classes, as part of remedial instruction. This was noted during the observations of lessons given at the school. Overman (1986: 611), referring to research done, stated that:

"As a group, retained children are not better off academically than their promoted counterparts, which applies to children who do not receive special instruction following repetition."

In essence those learners who were promoted or retained at Emmerose School did not receive the expected support, such as specialised instruction, to help them overcome problems. What is apparently clear is that there are arguments both for and against retaining learners in Grade 10.

Remediationists, however, as mentioned in chapter two, are not really against retention because they feel it can be "appropriate and beneficial" for the learner. They argue further that retention should be avoided unless the educator "knew" that the child could not succeed in the next grade. However educator D commented:

"We need to get them through the system but just 'pushing them through' is very unhealthy and frustrating for everyone in the system; creates failures and dropouts in the system."

Beck (1991: 13) stated that without new approaches to instruction that connect to the needs and learning styles of learners, many will continue to fail and are likely to drop out of school. Marshall (1992: 26-29), supported by Troob (1985 in Simmons, 2001: 6), stated that learner "connection" to the school is the most salient protective factor against "acting out" behaviours, and learners who feel a part of the life of their school are more likely to stay in school and maintain good grades and good attendance.

Fischbein and Folkander (2000: 264) indicated that for those drop-out learners the school is unable to adjust to their needs, and hence it is not for them. Bridgeland, John and Balfanz (2009: 23) noted in their research that "nearly half of dropouts indicated they left school because they found it boring and uninteresting and did not see the relevance of school to real life. What is essential is to have a curriculum that connects classroom learning with real life experiences" (Bridgeland, John and Balfanz 2009: 24- 26).

Fischbein and Folkander (2000: 264) argued that learners have low motivation, feel powerless and have no possibility of influencing the school condition. What is of significance in retention and promotion is that learners do not make the "connection" between classroom learning and real life because they are weak, and hence the learners become bored and uninterested in their schooling. This however contributes to learners dropping out eventually.

It becomes significant to look at the RSA Ministerial Report of 2007 to get a perspective on the dropout problem. The RSA, Ministerial Committee on Learner Retention reiterated that the dropout rate was increasing sharply from Grade 9

onwards (2007: xiii). The dropout rate in Grade 10 was 16.1 % and in Grade 11 it was 24.2% (2007: xiii). One of the reasons could be "wrongful" promotions in Grade 10 (Progress Report to the Minister of Education, RSA, Ministerial Committee on Learner Retention in the South African School System, October 2007). Denton (2001) stated that automatic promotion, as a practice, is unfair to learners and is detrimental to society. He further pointed out that low-performing learners who are promoted, typically fall further and further behind their classmates and ultimately leave school without the basic skills and knowledge every adult needs in order to be a productive member of society (RSA, Ministerial Report on Learner Retention, 2007: 93-94). Denton (2001) further noted that if children are retained they should be promoted with 'better opportunities to succeed.' (RSA, Ministerial Report, 2007: 94). Christtenson and Thurlow (2004, in RSA Ministerial Report, 2007: 99) stated that dropout is a national concern and poses significant challenges for schools. They found that effective intervention programmes can identify and track youth at risk for school failure, maintain a focus on learners' progress towards educational standards across the school years, and are designed to address indicators of learner engagement and to impact enrolment status and not just the predictors of dropout.

4.3. Summary

The evidence of grade progression and promotion sessions, including that taken from Figure 6 clearly depicts the negative practices relating to grade progression and promotion at Emmerose High School. But the evidence does more than this: it opens up discussion about the disjuncture between departmental policy on grade progression and promotion and actual practices, and how grade progression and promotion negatively impact on learners who are "wrongfully promoted". In the final chapter recommendations that emanate out of these findings, will be considered.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1. Overview of the thesis

This study focused on exploring the educators' understanding of grade progression and promotion. In Chapter I the objectives of the study were outlined as follows.

The primary and overall objective was to examine the implementation and effect of grade promotion and progression in OBE from the perspective of educators in a disadvantaged school.

To achieve the primary objective, the study was divided into secondary and more specific objectives as follows:
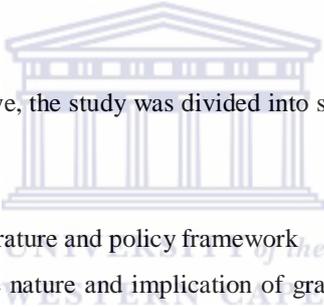
- Review the relevant literature and policy framework
- Identify and discuss the nature and implication of grade progression and promotion as understood by the educators
- Document the actual practices of educators regarding grade progression and promotion
- Indicate how the practice differs from departmental policies on grade progression and promotion
- Discuss the implications of educators' practices in education.

The introduction and rationale for these objectives was provided in chapter 1. The transformation of education post-Apartheid and the introduction of OBE is briefly mentioned and followed by a short criticism of OBE. The challenges experienced by learners and educators in the classroom in implementing grade progression and promotion, as well as the high failure and dropout rates are

briefly discussed. The research question and objectives were stated, as mentioned above, and this was followed by the significance and limitations of the study. The significance of this study is in filling a 'gap' in knowledge regarding grade progression and promotion. This knowledge would inform stakeholders including policy makers and educators.

Chapter 2 offered the theoretical and empirical framework for this study. In chapter2, international and local literature was drawn on to understand the phenomenon under study: grade progression and promotion. This was situated within the broader context of South African social reform. Following this, the models illuminating South Africa's two-tier education system, which were used to understand the dynamics surrounding grade progression and promotion were looked at. This chapter was ended by looking at various ways learning could be understood and linking these to the focus of this study.

In chapter 3, the methodological issues that related to the research methodology and design were dealt with. A qualitative ethnographic design influenced by an interpretivist framework was adopted. Qualitative ethnographic techniques such as observations, interviews and documents were employed to collect relevant information for this study. The collected data using the above-mentioned tools was then analysed by using thematic narrative analysis. The reason for using multiple methods in collecting data was in order to triangulate the information to prove validity. Due to the nature of the study, the ethical procedures were closely observed. For the purpose of this study, a qualitative method and analysis was used and found to be appropriate.

In chapter 4 the findings were presented and a discussion on this was offered, as well as linking the actual findings to theory. This chapter's outcomes are based on detailed and comprehensive data analysis using a thematic approach to

transcribed interviews, study of various documents, classroom observations and all the researcher's own intensive field notes.

5.2. Evidence of the research study

The evidence emerging from the different chapters is summarised below and demonstrates that the objectives described above were achieved.

5.2.1. Literature review

Chapter 2 reviewed international and local literature and provided the conceptual and theoretical framework to underpin grade progression and promotion. The background to the study consists of an overview of the challenges facing the education system, that is, the high failure, repetition (retention) and dropout rates.

The focus of the study then moved to the Millennium Development Goals for increasing access to basic education, which was achieved through universal enrolment. The essence of these goals was that learners attending school completed, within a specific period, good quality education. The problem was to reduce the bottleneck in Grades 9 and 10 which reflected high repetition and failure rates in the severe socio-economic conditions experienced by the poor. Patterns of slow progression and repetition complicated matters and therefore OBE was developed to anticipate the progression and promotion phase. At this juncture the government decided to choose a new grading process, which moved away from merit-based to a grade promotion and progression system.

The concepts, requirements, and issues of grade progression and promotion were introduced and discussed. The lack of research and literature on grade progression and promotion changed the focus to literature on retention or non-

promotion (the opposite of grade progression and promotion). The arguments for and against retention as well as the different categories of educators, that is, the pro-retentionist, anti-retentionist, remediationist and standard bearers are also presented.

An outline of schooling in an unequal society in South Africa, with entrenched divisions in the schooling system, is provided. The different models used to describe the two education systems, one advantaged and the other one disadvantaged, are discussed and analysed. The concepts "fortified" and "exposed" sites, "two nations" of education, two education "systems", "functional" and "dysfunctional" schools, as well as "moral minimising" and "moral diffusion" are introduced. These concepts provide useful tools to explain how learners and educators respond in these environments, to comprehend the nature of educators' understanding of grade progression and promotion, and to explain why different schools may interpret policy differently.

A review of policy reforms, introduced post-apartheid, to transform education and address inequalities, includes the introduction and criticisms of OBE. Assessments, grade progression and promotion and how these should be done in OBE are described. This is followed by a discussion on the NCS and RNCS, including a description of the learning and developmental outcomes.

The constructivist theory of learning, which underpins OBE and forms the foundation of the schooling system in South Africa, is discussed and provides a linkage to what happens in the classroom and how it relates to grade progression and promotion.

This is followed by a brief discussion on labelling and stereotyping of learners. The consequences and negative impact of labelling and stereotyping on the

learning experience and achievements of learners, as well as how it may influence the grade progression and promotion exercise, are briefly discussed.

5.2.2. Implementation of the research design and study

In Chapter 3, the research methodological paradigm and metatheoretical paradigm that underpin the research study, were reviewed. A description of and reasons for utilizing a qualitative method and ethnographic research design also includes their advantages and disadvantages. A summary of the features of this study and qualitative research indicates how well they fit together and why qualitative research methodology was selected for this research study. Similarly, the characteristics of ethnography and of this study, shows the suitability of using an ethnographic research design for this study.

The representative sample was eight educators from one township school. The instruments used for data collection include observations, note-taking, interviews and questionnaires. Data collection included the researcher being part of or being "immersed" in a classroom setting consisting of Grade 10 learners with one educator; the researcher was also present with educators during grade progression and promotion sessions; these settings provided the researcher with an opportunity to gain an "insider" perspective. Observations of OBE teaching in a natural setting generated information about the learning practices in the classroom and how grade progression and promotion was implemented by educators.

The questions for the interviews and questionnaires were designed to elicit the information required to answer the research questions of this study. Conducting interviews with educators revealed their perspectives on grade progression and promotion in OBE. Respondents to the questionnaires revealed their characteristics, attitudes and values about grade progression and promotion.

.? Something left out here was used to analyse the data collected. The analysis was done by searching for patterns, themes, categories and similarities as well as differences in the text or data and assigning codes to them. The categories which emerged from this data were interpreted to answer the research questions and inform chapter 4. Ethical procedures were closely observed. A qualitative research method and ethnographic research design were found to be appropriate for answering the research questions of the study.

5.2.3. Research findings and discussion

Chapter 4 presented the findings relating to the nature of grade progression and promotion of Grade 10 learners. The school conditions were shown to influence the way lessons are delivered, the assessments and grade progression and promotion sessions. A description of the school, the socio-economic settings and dynamics reflected why the school appears to be dysfunctional. The school's cultural setting in an area with high unemployment, gangsterism, drugs and the classroom setting where the lack of resources, low literacy and numeracy levels, learners attitudes and behaviour in the classroom have been shown to present challenges and contribute to the dysfunctionality.

The social context and the environment of the school appears to affect the operations and relationships inside the school, resulting in the breakdown of authority structures, through moral minimising and moral diffusion, leading to the despondent attitude of the educators and the bad behaviour of learners. The social context of the school thus helps one to understand the constraints within which educator's work, which affects their beliefs, attitudes and ways of doing things.

The themes that emerged during the data analysis process are: (1) the actual practices of educators when implementing grade progression and promotion, (2)

educators' subjective opinions or their perceptions in relation to grade progression and promotion, and (3) implications of grade progression and promotion practices for the learners.

The actual grade progression and promotion sessions and practices were examined and showed that a large number of learners were promoted after failing in Grade 10. Extracts taken from a session revealed how grade progression and promotion are actually done in the school. It is evident from the extracts that grade progression and promotion has become "a subjective and emotionally driven act" by educators when they decide on whom to promote or retain. Learners' attitudes to their work and classroom behaviour were also a factor. The directives from the department of education were not followed, including the stipulation of 'condonation' in one subject only, thus showing the disjuncture between policy and practice. Political symbolism was clearly illustrated in the decision making process when introducing new directives from the department.

The effects of grade progression and promotion in classrooms led to the "positioning" of learners who were "wrongfully" promoted or retained and also resulted in negative connotations including labelling, marking and stereotyping by educators. This was successfully related to the literature on problems regarding high learner retention, failure and dropout. The high retention and dropout rate is a national concern and effective intervention programs were suggested to identify learners at risk and provide them with additional support.

The research study through observations, interviews and questionnaires clearly indicates that educators' understanding of grade progression and promotion at this school are limited. This however influences the implementation of such practices which become subjective and impact negatively on learners in the classroom.

5.3. Recommendations

5.3.1. Recommendations for educators and classroom practices

Educators could attend workshops on grade progression and promotion before participating in these activities to prevent the "subjective act or emotionally driven" decisions from unduly influencing the retention or promotion of learners. This would allow educators to follow protocol, rules and criteria established by both the Department of Education and the Senior Management Team (SMT) so as to create an enabling environment in which to conduct grade progression and promotion.

A good strategy is to have Structured Intervention Meetings in June. These should involve educators, parents, learners, SMT members and the Link Team to inform all parties of practices, rules and regulations. This will then inform the purpose, nature and form of intervention strategies that need to be applied to each learner who is at risk of failing. Both the SMT members and educators must apply acceptable criteria for both promotion and retention which must be based on legitimate, legal and acceptable reasons to ensure consistency and uniform practices in the school. This will in turn create more confidence and boost the morale of both educators and parents when pertinent decisions are made regarding learners' futures.

Educators who are trained in remedial teaching should be ready and available to introduce learners to structured intervention courses to assist those learners who have challenges in terms of specific barriers to learning.

The professional judgment of an educator, in terms of the mark given for a learner per subject or learning area, after moderation, must be respected. If, however, the mark should change then full consultation must be done with the

teacher by the SMT, parents and Department of Education. This consultation will serve to avoid moral minimizing and diffusion. There should be limited year-end progression and promotion sessions for educators, but educators must also make themselves available for the appeal process that needs to take place at the end of the year.

Educators should refrain from differential treatment given to learners who were either promoted or retained - hence the need for workshops on diversity, race and cultural differences. Subjectivity in the classroom and during the grade promotion and progression process can also be reduced by informing educators about the harmful effects on learners of labelling and stereotyping. Conflict resolution meetings or workshops are necessary for both educators and learners, given the tension in the environment. The grade progression and promotion process can be made more objective and consistent by having mechanisms in place that ensure uniformity and transparency, for example regular moderations, inspections and interventions.

5.3.2. Recommendations for learners especially in Grade 10

All the learners who failed or who were retained should be supported through Structured Intervention Programmes. The purpose is to identify learners who are 'at risk' earlier on in the process. These learners will then have six months to undertake remedial courses in the learning areas where they failed. If learners still do not meet the Grade 10 pass requirements as stipulated by the department, and after all forms of intervention with parents and learners have been undertaken, then these learners should not be allowed to proceed to the next grade. This will eliminate problems like drop-out increases in the next grade, as was evident in this research.

Those learners who are retained must not be placed in the same class with the same teacher who taught them the previous year but be placed in a class with fewer learners who have similar needs and be instructed by a different teacher to prevent labelling and stereotyping.

The learners, who are the most important stakeholders, should be probed with a questionnaire on their experiences, knowledge and feelings about grade progression and promotion.

5.3.3. Recommendations for Senior Management Team and policy makers

The members of the SMT must be properly orientated and trained to play an enabling role in the grade progression and promotion sessions. They should respect, encourage and support the grade progression and promotion process and act as guiding agents and not as enforcers who do not respect the professional judgment of educators when awarding marks to learners. SMTs must implement what is in the best interest of learners, academically and morally and not be driven by what merely appears good on paper like overrated pass percentages and statistics.

SMTs must not be too lenient by just allocating and manipulating marks from between 10 to 30 marks only across two subjects, which is contrary to the requirements for 'condonation' that allow an allocation of marks in one subject only. This clouds the professional judgment of educators who know the learners more intimately than does the SMT.

The SMT, school governing bodies, the department, the parents and community must form a partnership and focus on building and improving the infrastructure of the school to acceptable standards by repairing classrooms, overseeing the playground, and maintaining clean toilets and proper fencing to ensure the safety

of learners. Resources matter in each and every school. It becomes important that desks, books, libraries, and computer facilities are provided and accessible to all learners. This will help to change the attitudes, perceptions and feelings of both educators and learners.

The Further Educational and Training (FET) system must be made more learner-friendly and suitable to meet learners' needs and prevent the isolation of struggling learners. The SMT must have early detection mechanisms in place to ensure that learners do not drop out from the system but are directed towards remedial teaching, 'career-pathing' and guidance courses that will ensure learnerships or apprenticeships.

The grade progression and promotion process cannot be watered down because of the large numbers of learners involved in the education system. This practice needs to be reviewed and refined.

5.3.4. Recommendations for parents

Parents need accurate and proper information regarding their children's subject choices, extra tuition and problem areas in specific subjects. Parents should be invited to attend meetings and workshops where educators explain the reasons why children are at risk. Educators should then inform parents on ways to help children.

The academic progress must be disseminated to parents very early in June during the Structured Intervention Meetings whereby they can make the necessary arrangements and plans for extra classes for their children. Parents are often in a state of denial concerning their children's academic performance. Instead of accepting that the child has an academic learning problem, they attribute it to laziness. Parents must be more open towards their children's problems and be

ready to confront the reality of the situation. The parents' attitudes will change if the school's attitude changes regarding the concern for the struggling child, not leaving it to be a matter of concern only at the end of the year.

5.4. Conclusion

The practices of grade progression and promotion by educators who participated in this study did not follow the protocol as prescribed by the Department of Education. Educators and the SMT's actual practices during grade progression and promotion sessions were found to be influenced by their subjective opinions and perceptions.

These negative perceptions and opinions held by educators were greatly informed and shaped by the dysfunctional school's social context and environment. Educators unintentionally practiced moral minimizing and diffusion given the dysfunctional terrain they are obliged to operate in.

The majority of educators were in favour of retaining weak learners so that they could consolidate their learning of new skills, knowledge and experience and be fully prepared for the next grade by becoming more mature. Only a few educators were in favour of promoting learners to the next grade.

The outcome of these practices however had negative influences and implications for learners who were promoted or retained. These learners were subjected to different forms of alienation or isolation in that educators labelled, stereotyped and insulted learners who repeated a grade or were promoted. Differential treatment by educators created a form of discrimination and affected learners concerning both status and esteem.

Another negative implication was that academic standards were found to be decreasing as learners were promoted to the next grade. As a result, learners eventually dropped out because they became weaker and could not cope with the greater demands in the new grade. Poor learners were entrapped in an environment of low status, poor self-esteem and marginal opportunities for success.

Educators have a limited understanding of grade progression and promotion policy. They therefore experience difficulties and hence apply policy inconsistently and incorrectly. The education department's requirement that only 5% of learners may be retained in a grade has made the implementation and management process more problematic. Both the SMT and educators still need to undergo intensive training to better understand grade progression and promotion and how to implement these effectively in the classrooms and school.

Further studies may include examining international literature and doing research relevant to grade progression and promotion which focuses on: (i) policy matters pertaining to implementation, monitoring and evaluation as well as practices of grade progression and promotion, (ii) learners' opinions of grade progression and promotion. This will add significant value to the limited knowledge on the topic.

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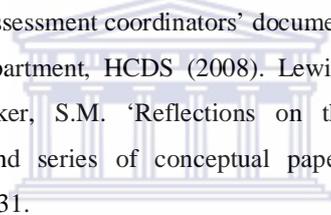
APPENDIX A: GRADE PROGRESSION AND PROMOTION

Interview schedule (people interviewed) NTERVIEW SCHEDULE (PEOPLE INTERVIEWED)

	PERSONS INTERVIEWED	POSITIONS	PLACE	DATE	REMARKS
1.	EM 1	Post Level 1	Mitchell's Plain	09/06/2011	Names can be obtained from original scripts by agreement only.
2.	EM 2	Post Level 1	Mitchell's Plain	16/06/2011	Names can be obtained from original scripts by agreement only.
3.	EM 3	Post Level 2	Mitchell's Plain	24/05/2011	Names can be obtained from original scripts by agreement only..
4.	EM 4	Post Level 1	Mitchell's Plain	26/05/2011	Names can be obtained from original scripts by agreement only.
5.	EM 5	Post level 2	Mitchell's Plain	12/07/2011	Names can be obtained from original scripts by agreement only.
6.	EM 6	Post level 1	Mitchell's Plain	14/07/2011	Names can be obtained from original scripts by agreement only.
7.	EM 7	Post Level 3	Mitchell's Plain	22/06/2011	Names can be obtained from original scripts by agreement only.
8.	EM 8	Post Level 1	Mitchell's Plain	28/04/2011	Names can be obtained from original scripts by agreement only.

Educator interview questions guide schedule: [50 to 60 minutes]

Context

Permission was obtained prior to conducting an interview with each respondent to get their co-operation and willingness to participate in informal discussions relating to the grade progression and promotion topic.

Interviews were conducted with eight educators after lessons to gather in-depth information and to provide a natural setting for the respondents. Questionnaires were given to each respondent to complete and notes were made as they responded orally.

Section A: Questions; General

What is your opinion of grade progression and promotion?

1. Do you agree with promoting learners during grade progression and promotion-? If not, explain why?

2. How did learners react when they heard that they had "failed" but were "promoted" ?

3. What are the consequences for learners and educators when they are promoted in large numbers?

4. What is your experience of "wrongfully" promoted learners?

5. Do learners give better performance after they have been promoted to the next grade?

6. How do "promoted" learners cope with the new work load?

7. What is the level of participation in classroom activities by the "promoted" learners?

8. Do the promoted and retained learners give any problems in the class?

9. Do you provide any remedial teaching or extra classes for struggling learners?

10. What do you think are the effects of labelling and marking "promoted" or "retained" learners at your school?

11. How do you react when "promoted" or "retained" learners "act out" negative behaviour in the classroom?

12. What are the short-term and long-term implications for learners if they are promoted?

13. What is your opinion of learners who drop out in Grade 10?

14. How does this impact on the school and community?

Section: B Questions on the grade progression and promotion process

15. Explain the progression and promotion session at your school for Grade 10 learners.

16. What is your opinion of this particular progression and promotion session?

17. Do you agree with block promotion of Grade 10 learners? Substantiate your answer with reasons.

18. Do you feel comfortable about the mark allocations given to learners who struggle? For example, 10 to 20 marks per learner?

19. If not, give recommendations or solutions as to how the mark allocations should be done.

20. Do the Senior Management Team and educators follow the Department's prescriptions for grade progression and promotion?

21. Give recommendations as how to solve this problem?

Section C: Questions on the school's environment: educator

1. Describe the area around the school. Is it a wealthy or poor community?

2. Do you experience gang violence or drug abuse in the school? Explain.

3. What is your opinion of learners' and educators' safety at school?

4. Is the school environment suitable for learning and teaching?

5. What do you think of the condition of the classrooms in the school?

6. How many classes are functional and not in use currently?

7. Does the school have a library?

8. Is there a "Khanya Lab" for students to use to complete their work or tasks?

9. Can the school be regarded as "functional" or "dysfunctional" as a learning institution-? Explain.

10. Mention some positive achievements at the school during the last 20 years.
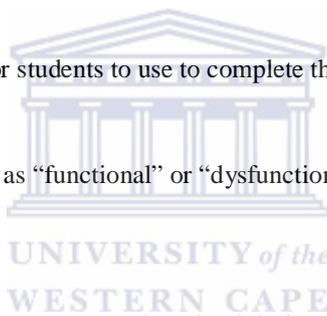
APPENDIX B: OBSERVATION SCHEDULE

The purpose of the observation schedule was to guide the researcher during the observation session. It was used as an instrument or mechanism to guide the researcher with regard to specific things to observe, what to write down or record, what was heard and experienced. It was used to obtain in depth descriptions and context in order to get a deeper and fuller understanding of the research question.

Criteria for grade progression and promotion in the classroom during observation:

What the educator should do or know.	What is the focus?	Expectation of what should be achieved.
1. Evidence of learner performance and progress.	Recording of learner performance and progress.	To determine whether the educator recorded each learner's performance. Actual marks and codes provided for each learner achievement.
2. Reporting on learner performance.	Evidence of reporting on learner progress.	To determine whether educator reported on the forms of assessment used, levels attained for learning outcomes, and comments about learners' competence.
3. Reflections and intervention on learning process.	Evidence of reflection and intervention where needed. To consider the OBE philosophy: "not all learners will learn at the same time and in the same way but everyone should succeed".	To determine how educators reflected on learners' progress: what type of interventions were used i.e. creating more opportunities, examples and exercises. Making more adjustments etc.
4. Interventions and feedback.	Implications of large numbers of learners on interventions and feedback.	To determine the implications and effects of large numbers of learners on interventions and feedback in the classroom.
5. Moderation of assessments, mark sheets etc.	Evidence of moderation of assessments and mark sheets.	To determine whether the educator has evidence of moderation of mark sheets.
6. Learner reports.	Learner reports to all stakeholders.	To determine whether learners received learner reports for each term.

7. Educator Portfolios.	Evidence of educators' and learners' portfolios.	To determine the existence of both educator and learner portfolios with method for intervention and support plan.
9. Learning area recording sheet and progression schedule.	Evidence of learning area recording sheet and progression schedule.	To determine whether learning area recording sheet and progression schedule were aligned or congruent.
10. Final progression and promotion schedule and reports.	Evidence of progression and promotion schedule and reports.	To determine whether progression and promotion schedules were checked as well as reports.
11. Retained and promoted learners.	Evidence of retained and promoted learners on a list.	To determine how many learners were retained or promoted.

Criteria used at year-end grade progression and promotion observation session

What the SMT and educators should do or know.	What is the focus?	Expectation of what should be achieved.
1. Protocol observed by SMT and educators.	Evidence of grade progression and promotion meeting attended by SMT and educators.	To determine whether SMT and educators attended the grade and progression promotion meeting concerning their learners' future.
2. Departmental requirements.	Evidence that Departmental requirements were read out and followed.	To determine whether Departmental requirements were read out and followed during the process
3. Class teacher list.	Evidence of class or classroom teacher list and number of passes or failures.	To determine whether the class teacher had a copy of passes and failures indicated on their list, e.g number of passes and failures.
4. Learning Area recording sheet.	Evidence of Learning Area recording sheet and its completion.	To determine whether Learning Area recording sheets were available and used for discussion.
5. Progression and promotion Schedule.	Evidence of progression and promotion schedule.	To determine whether progression and promotion schedules were perused and made available by all present.
6. Input and discussion.	Witness whether educators made input during progression and promotion session.	To determine whether educators made constructive input with regard to progression and promotion

7. Mark allocation.	Evidence of mark allocation to learners at risk of failing.	To determine whether marks were allocated to learners at risk of failing.
8. Grade progression and promotion schedule.	Evidence of grade progression and promotion schedule.	To determine whether grade progression and promotion schedules were adjusted after discussion during the meeting.
9. Verification and validation of grade progression and promotion schedule.	Evidence of presenting grade progression and promotion schedules to the Department for verification and validation ("signing off").	To determine whether grade progression and promotion schedules were presented to the Department for verification and validation ("signing off").

Criteria and questions used as a guide during observation: outcomes–based education practice:

What the educator should be familiar with or know.	What is the focus?	Expectation of what should be achieved
1. Educator's understanding- of OBE and whether it is practiced in the classroom.	Whether the educator understands and uses the principles, premises and fundamentals of OBE.	To implement the learning outcomes as a guide for lesson planning.
2. Classroom arrangement.	How learners must be seated.	To determine whether learners are seated for OBE lessons. Is seating conducive? Does it allow learners enough space? Is it comfortable for participative learning? Is the seating learner focussed? Is there any evidence of group work activity?
3. The utilization of resources.	What type of resources do educators use in the classroom?	To ascertain whether educators are using suitable, relevant and learner- friendly resources. Is the classroom a well-resourced environment?
4. The level of learner participation.	What is the level of learner participation?	To determine whether there is evidence of expanded opportunities and support for learners. Does success breed success through this type of learner participation?

5. Teaching strategies.	Which teaching strategies do the educators implement?	To ascertain whether the educator uses traditional or OBE strategies. . Is the educator still playing a dominant role in the classroom or did the required changes take effect?
6. Class room discipline.	Learners' behaviour with self-discipline, control and management.	To determine learners' levels of behaviour with self discipline, control and management.
7. Multi-method strategies (Bloom's Taxonomy)	Which strategies and applications do they follow for each learning activity?	To determine whether educators use different learning strategies and applications to promote higher and lower level order skills.
8. Language utility.	How do learners utilize language in the classroom?	To determine the level of language utility and development in the classroom.
9. Educator-learner ratio.	How many learners are there in the classroom? The implications of large numbers of pupils on the implementation of OBE in the classroom.	To determine the learner-educator ratio. To determine how large numbers of learners impact on the implementation of OBE.
10. Level of participation and large numbers of learners.	What are the implications and effects of large numbers of learners on the level of participation?	To determine the implications and effects of large- numbers of learners on the degree of participation by all learners.
11. Implications and effects of large numbers of learners.	How do large numbers impact on OBE (by the outcomes achieved), and whether the teaching style is appropriate?	To determine whether large numbers of pupils have a positive- or negative impact on OBE (the outcomes achieved). How this affects the teaching style and whether this is appropriate.

Observation and criteria of assessments in the classroom:

What the educator and learners should be familiar with or do.	What is the focus?	Expectation of what should be achieved.
1. The learning outcomes achieved.	The specific learning outcomes and critical outcomes.	To determine whether the critical and development learning outcomes were achieved by learners.
2. Assessment strategies	How do educators assess learners' work?	To determine how educators assess learners work.
3. Forms of assessment.	The different forms of assessment	To determine which forms of assessment educators use in the

	used in the classroom.	classroom.
4. The principles of assessment.	Understanding of the principles of assessment (transparency, authenticity and consistency).	To determine whether educators understood and implemented these principles of assessments.
5. Assessment criteria or standards.	Understanding of assessment criteria and standards by learners.	To determine whether learners understood and implemented the assessment criteria and standards. Did these vary in terms of methods and context?
6. The programme of assessments.	Planning a programme of comprehensive assessments with a homework policy.	To determine whether the educator in each learning area planned a comprehensive assessment policy with homework activities.
7. Completion of the forms of assessments.	Responses of learners in submitting the forms of assessments.	To ascertain the degree of responses by learners in submitting their different forms of assessments.
8. Feedback	Timing of feedback to learners on assessments.	To determine whether educators provide sufficient feedback to learners. What are the learning barriers discovered by the educator? Is there any reinforced learning?
9. School assessment policy.	Distribution of school assessment policy.	To determine if there is a school assessment policy being followed.
10. Rubrics and memorandums.	Clarity of rubrics and memorandums.	To determine the level of terminology applied to rubrics and memorandums.
11. Implications and effect of large numbers on assessments.	How do large numbers of learners impact on assessments and marking?	To determine what the effect and implications are of large numbers of learners on assessments.

Grade progression and promotion context:

Grade progression and promotion (GP and P) session.	Intervention measures and remedial assistance for learners	Determine value seen in learner portfolios.
1. Educator's opinions of grade progression and promotion.	Determine extra measures implemented to assist learners with barriers to learning.	Determine if evidence seen in learners' portfolios is a good method to assess an entire class.

2. Whether grade progression and promotion assists learners with better performance.	Educators' opinions on retained and promoted learners.	Determine the opinion of educators as witnessed by learners portfolios.
3. Determine whether educators treated promoted learners differently.	Determine support from curriculum advisors for learners at risk.	To determine the portfolio progress of learners "wrongfully" promoted to the next grade.
4. Determine whether grade progression and promotion is educationally sound for the promotion of learners.	To determine how promoted learners cope with the new work load. To determine the experience educators have of "wrongfully" promoted learner	
	To determine the experience educators have of "wrongfully" promoted learner	

APPENDIX C: CONSENT FORM

To the participant: as a participant in this research project, your signature is required on this consent form to show that you have agreed to participate in this research project. In compliance with research ethics, your permission is required by us in order to proceed with the interview and the completion of the questionnaire. Please read the following paragraphs and, if satisfied, sign to attest your consent. Thank you.

1. I have read and clearly understand the purpose of this research project as set out in the Respondent Information Sheet or Consent Form.

2. All queries have been satisfactorily answered and I therefore have no objections
or reservations towards participating in the research project and the collection and use of data.

3. I understand that the research study is confidential and that agreed rules of disclosure of information will be upheld and will not be breached in any way.

4. I hereby give my consent to participate in this study.

5. Participant: Name:
…………………..
.Signature: …………………………Date: …………………………....................

6. Name of Researcher:
…………………...
.Signature: …………………….............. Date: ……...................…………………

6.