

EDUCATION IN RURAL AREAS

Michael Gardiner

**Issues in Education Policy
Number 4**



Centre for Education Policy Development

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Tel: +27 11 403-6131
Fax: +27 11 403-1130

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Preface

The series *Issues in Education Policy* consists of a number of booklets on key issues in education and training policy in South Africa. Each booklet deals with one such issue and aims to give the reader, in plain English, an overview of the topic and its implications for various stakeholders.

The intended readership includes a wide range of people with an interest in the education and training system – members of Parliament or of provincial legislatures, teachers, trade unionists, employers, student and community activists, education department officials, journalists, governors of educational institutions, members of local or provincial education and training councils, and interested members of the general public.

Each booklet gives an outline of the issue that it deals with, explains its importance and why it is contentious or divisive (where that is the case). It summarises current policy and its development– for example, why certain policies were made in the first place and under what circumstances, what the experience of implementing the policies has been, what their supporters and detractors have to say about them, and the main findings of research and policy evaluations. There is also a list of further reading.

After having read this booklet, readers should have a basic understanding of the topic. They should be able to understand more complex material on the issue, participate in public debates and assess new policy initiatives.

Abbreviations and Acronyms

ABET	Adult Basic Education and Training
CEPD	Centre for Education Policy Development
DoE	Department of Education
ECD	Early Childhood Development
EPC	Education Policy Consortium
NEIMS	National Education Infrastructure Management System
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
QIDS-UP	Quality Improvement, Development, Support and Upliftment Programme
SASA	South African Schools Act
SGB	School governing body

Introduction

Policy makers and planners at both national and provincial levels of government face a central question: How can the particular needs of rural communities and their learners be met within the overall state policy of a single educational system?

The education system of apartheid was divided in terms of race and language, and was funded and resourced in ways that favoured white people and disadvantaged black people. Having combined this into a single, democratic system, the Department of Education is determined not to recognise “rural education” as a separate category. There are rural schools, and education does take place in rural areas. However, these schools are governed by the same curriculum, the same conditions of service, the same national legislation and the same policies as all other public schools in the country. It is only at provincial and district levels that realities on the ground, such as conditions in rural schools, can be addressed specifically.

The Constitution, the South African Schools Act and various education policy documents say that all South African learners should have access to the same quality of learning and teaching, similar facilities and equal educational opportunities. However, this is not yet the case. Many people and their schools, particularly but not only in rural areas, struggle with real difficulties such as the lack of classrooms, poor access to services such as water and electricity, no landline telephones and hence no Internet, very few public or school libraries and the like. Many of these problems are linked to socio-economic factors, such as poverty and unemployment, and they also have a direct influence on the quality of education that is available to children.

All of South Africa’s provinces have rural areas, and all are different from each other. However, in order to illustrate what is going on currently in education in such places, this booklet uses examples from three provinces – Eastern Cape, KwaZulu-Natal and Limpopo. There are several reasons why these three provinces have been chosen. First, much of the recent research work carried out by the Centre for Education Policy Development (CEPD) has been located in these provinces, and CEPD researchers have extensive experience of conditions among communities in provinces which are predominantly rural.

Second, about 62% of public schools are situated in these three provinces, and they also contain more than half of South Africa's children between the ages of 7 and 18 years (although not all these schools and children are in rural areas). For example, in 2007 Eastern Cape had 1 715 rural schools with 357 710 learners; KwaZulu-Natal had 2 956 such schools with 1 097 499 learners; in Limpopo there were 2 348 rural schools with 929 188 learners. When the term "rural" is used in educational matters, therefore, the matter of the size and scale of the issue becomes very important.

This booklet first looks at the meaning of the terms *urban* and *rural* and then examines various aspects of education in rural areas – the relationship between schools and their communities; the situation of schools in rural areas; questions of curriculum, language and teacher education; early childhood development; adult basic education and training; farm schools. It draws on recent research, current government documents and other sources to highlight some major policy issues. The main sources are listed in the Further Reading section at the end of the booklet.

What do *urban* and *rural* mean?

The terms *urban* and *rural* have a complicated history in South Africa, and today there is still no agreement about what constitutes urban and rural areas. Urban centres – that is, cities and towns – were declared by apartheid to be the domain of whites (who also owned 87% of the country's land). Black workers were temporarily located in townships near urban centres. The racial policy of apartheid insisted that all African people belonged to one "homeland" or another, all of them some distance from urban areas. That was an apartheid myth used to control the movement and the economic development of black people.

Even today, many people assume that urban and rural areas have their own distinct cultures and concerns that affect their priorities and needs. Terms like "modern" and "traditional" are supposed to be qualities that are exclusive to one group but not to the other. This is also entirely untrue.

Educational and other research today finds that it is no longer appropriate or useful to define *urban* in terms of *rural* or the other way around. To do so

is to create a competitive relationship between them, to the disadvantage of rural areas. Such thinking also generalises situations that are actually very different from each other. Furthermore, a “one size fits all” approach to policy and its implementation makes it possible to overlook and disregard important aspects of the lives and the needs of communities. The realities faced by people in rural areas cannot always be addressed by policy made elsewhere and for everyone. But if this is so, then how can the specific needs of South Africa’s rurality-based citizens and their schools be met?

One distressing legacy of past policy is that rural areas are usually presented in negative terms. This is largely due to the miserable conditions under which people had to live in those grim former homelands. So today there is the view that those areas where black people live in the countryside are poor and decaying, full of dispossessed people and old-fashioned culture, and that they have become places which are a trap for the old and the young.

Like many social generalisations, this description contains some bitter truths, but it is far from complete. Rural communities have achieved hard-won methods of managing their affairs, and each rural community has developed sophisticated social networks and cultural practices. Most villages have some televisions and cell phones, and a proportion of people who live there work in towns and return over weekends, so creating much interchange between village and town.

The poorest and least-developed rural communities are those that were located in the former homelands, particularly in Eastern Cape, KwaZulu-Natal and Limpopo. The legacy of poverty and neglect in these places is far from being eliminated, partly because of the emphasis in South Africa on urban development.

This booklet shows that conditions in rural areas still have many shortcomings despite their potential, and that the conditions of poverty and under-development are reflected in the quality of education available there. It argues that the achievement of real quality in education in rural areas will only come about when there is significant social and economic development in those areas. Until then, the education provided in rural areas will limit people’s opportunities to lead long, healthy and creative lives, or to acquire knowledge and enjoy freedom, dignity and self-respect.

What is the relationship between schools and their communities in rural areas?

Researchers have learned that in order to have meaningful discussions with people in rural communities about educational matters, it is necessary to begin by looking with them into their main concerns and interests before discussing schooling itself. This is not only because people are preoccupied only with poverty, unemployment, difficulties with access to water and forms of energy, problems with transport and the scarcity of basic services. Formal education is seen as a part of all other important activities, and people understand very well how living conditions affect families, children and teachers. People that we have met through research projects have demonstrated a keen understanding of how learning and education are influenced by socio-economic conditions.

Furthermore, the Department of Education now recognises that improving schooling in rural areas must go beyond “fixing up schools”. A good plan has to address poverty and sustainable development, as well as promoting social cohesion – that is, the need to work together to solve problems.

Emerging Voices: A Report on Education in South Africa’s Rural Communities, published by the Nelson Mandela Foundation in 2005, focused on the poorest areas in former homelands in Eastern Cape, KwaZulu-Natal and Limpopo. In addition to the statistical information that was collected for this report, the opinions (the “voices”) of people in nine communities were gathered. These included parents, teachers, learners, community leaders and, in one case, traditional healers. The report looked at the experience of rural poverty through the lens of education. In addition to revealing starkly the conditions under which schooling in rural areas takes place, it highlighted how eager parents are to ensure that their children, both boys and girls, receive maximum opportunity to gain quality education.

Researchers also recorded problems in the relationship between community members and the schools. For example, children are expected to carry out certain domestic tasks in the early morning and in the afternoon. These duties clash with the routines and timetables of the school. Furthermore, many children go to school hungry, and are unable to concentrate. Some

teachers accused parents of being unco-operative, and some parents found teachers to be arrogant and fault-finding. In other words, neither the communities nor the schools appear to have accepted each other in ways that are mutually supportive.

Since the apportionment of land in rural villages lies within the powers of traditional leaders and their councils, teachers who live in rural communities cannot assume that the houses and plots granted them will be theirs to sell or bequeath. Therefore, they tend to live an average of 36 kms away from where they teach, usually in near-by towns. There, they can use their housing subsidies to buy freehold properties, and it is there that their own children go to school. This affects the teachers' times of arrival at and departure from school, reduces the opportunity for after-hours attention to learners, limits their knowledge about what goes on in the community and reduces their ability to take part in community activities.

Researchers from the CEPD and from the Universities of Fort Hare and the Witwatersrand have together established how little schools draw on the many sources of expertise and numerous possible forms of support to be found in all communities, no matter how poor. In rural villages there are often well-matriculated youths who cannot afford to study further and have no jobs, unemployed graduates without paid employment, as well as retired professionals. Furthermore, there are expert poets, musicians, dancers, historians, cultural interpreters and people skilled in traditional forms of knowledge, all of whom could offer to schools and their learners a wealth of instruction. Rural communities also have material resources which can provide much-needed assistance to local schools. Because of the separation between the school and community, however, little advantage is taken by schools of this wealth just outside the school fence.

In response to these findings, a project was undertaken by the Education Policy Consortium¹ in 2005 and 2006. It studied what the effects would be of establishing a representative Community Education Forum within communities. At the more successful research sites, many improvements in the relationship between the community and the school were achieved, including much greater attendance at school meetings by parents, the sharing of

¹ The Education Policy Consortium (EPC) consists of the Centre for Education Policy Development and the education policy units at the Universities of the Witwatersrand, KwaZulu-Natal, Fort Hare and Western Cape.

information about children between parents and teachers, the use by schools of skills and assistance from community members, and the community's support of teachers and the school with advice, expertise and equipment.

The importance of participation by community members in matters of formal schooling was also raised in the *Report of the Ministerial Committee on Rural Education*, published by the Department of Education in 2005. This Report stresses that local government and school governing bodies (SGBs) need to work together in the interests of schools. Eastern Cape, for example, has established District Education Forums which promote co-operative management of basic facilities and services for schools and the broader school communities.

Educational legislation in South Africa makes no provision for a committee or council at local level to oversee the welfare and quality of education in an entire village or community, in which there is usually more than one school. Provinces divide themselves into Districts and smaller Circuits, staffed by officials whose function is to ensure the delivery of education in properly functioning schools. These Districts and Circuits, which have no decision-making powers, are the nearest state presence to the schools, and they are often some distance away from the deep rural villages. Limpopo, for example, has only four Districts for so large a province. Each school governing body focuses on its own, individual school.

As the *Report of the Ministerial Committee on Rural Education* points out, "Current governance policies do not take note of existing organisations in communities and therefore do not draw on their expertise". The Report recommends, "The broader school communities in rural areas must be drawn into decision-making through broadly-based participatory processes (Department of Education, 2005: Recommendation 37).

It is very important to bring schools and communities much closer together. This is a complicated and challenging undertaking for both schools and community members. However, one reason why it should take place is that it creates a key link between education and development.

Emerging Voices puts this matter most clearly. It points out that although integrated rural development policies are in place, they do not make any reference to education. And education lies at the heart of poverty reduction.

In its conclusion, *Emerging Voices* says:

A powerful rationale for rural education and a robust political constituency to argue for it are now required. Such a rationale can be provided: it is one that sees education as being able to play a role in rural development alongside and integrated with other social policies aimed at addressing inequality and poverty (Nelson Mandela Foundation, 2005:139).

Both *Emerging Voices* and the *Report of the Ministerial Committee on Rural Education* are essential reading for an understanding of education in rural South Africa.

What is the situation of schools in rural areas?

Villages and rural communities are difficult to reach, the physical conditions in schools are inadequate, and learner performance in comparison to schools elsewhere is weak. Although there have been significant infrastructural improvements since 1994, according to the *National Education Infrastructure Management System: National Assessment Report* published by the Department of Education in 2007, many rural schools still lack clean running water, electricity, libraries, laboratories and computers. More than one-quarter of the schools in Eastern Cape, KwaZulu-Natal and Limpopo have more than 45 learners per classroom. These are not easy conditions in which to provide a sound education for young people.

The Department of Education conducts nationwide evaluations of learners, especially in the learning areas of Language, Mathematics and Natural Sciences. Table 1 shows some figures from 2005.

Table 1. Pass rates from the Grade 6 systemic evaluation, 2005

Type of School	Language	Mathematics	Natural Sciences
	Pass Rate (%)		
Urban	64	46	58
Township	40	26	42
Rural	29	22	35
Remote rural	23	19	30
Farm	34	24	37

We can use these comparative figures to think about how to put together policy to bring the performance of learners in different kinds of schools up to an equivalent standard. However, we also need to reflect on the performance of South African learners compared to those in other countries. The achievements of urban South African learners should not be the benchmark at which rural education aims, because those achievements are actually also at a very low level. For example, in 2006 the Progress in International Reading Literacy Study analysed reading literacy in 40 countries. The results showed that South African Grade 5 learners achieved by far the lowest scores of all when compared to Grade 4 learners in the other countries in the study.

These results imply that there is a crisis in the whole of the South African education system, and that this crisis is most serious among learners in rural schools. Policy that intends to provide South Africans with education of suitable quality has to address the situation in the whole country, as well as the particular needs of schools in rural areas. It will be no favour to rural schools to assist them only to achieve parity with their urban counterparts.

In 2006 the Department of Education published the *Monitoring and Evaluation Report on the Impact and Outcomes of the Education System on the South African Population*. Figures from that study indicate the following:

- A higher proportion of people between the ages of 25 and 34 in urban areas had completed matriculation than their rural counterparts.
- More than double the number of urban people have achieved a post-school qualification than rural people have done.
- Rural learners are more likely than their urban counterparts to leave school early.

These findings, dangerous as they are in comparing rural with urban, give force to the following statement in *Emerging Voices*:

Our study has shown that children [in rural areas] do not have their constitutional right to education realised, and their rights within education or through education are also limited (Nelson Mandela Foundation, 2005:138).

The 2007 *Schools that Work* report by the Department of Education makes the following observation:

Socio-economic background clearly has an over-riding effect on results, as does [which] former Department [of Education under apartheid] the school belonged to. In other words, the school that an individual learner attends has [a] strong predictive effect on results, both in terms of social position and in terms of schools' effectiveness (Department of Education, 2007a:55).

That being the case, fourteen years into democracy the question must be asked: What policies does the state, at national and provincial levels, have in mind to address this situation?

In 1994 the ANC published *A Policy Framework for Education and Training*. There is a chapter called "The Special Case of Rural and Farm Schools". It makes the following policy proposals:

- The state will assume full responsibility for the provision of schooling in rural areas.
- The state will, where necessary, provide transport to schools and establish rights to cross private land to ensure effective access to schooling.
- The physical and service infrastructure of many farm and rural schools needs to be upgraded to ensure minimum standards – for example, provision of water, toilets, electricity, library books, office equipment, sports facilities.
- The work of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) which have specialised in preparing learning materials and teaching aids relevant to rural communities will be developed with the assistance of teachers and rural community workers.
- Where possible, schools will operate as Community Learning Centres with a range of after-school activities linked to the social, educational, health and recreational needs of the community, linked to rural development projects.
- Housing, access to transport, and perhaps other incentives need to be provided to attract and retain effective teachers in rural schools.

Much progress has been made, but much remains to be done to achieve even these modest policy proposals. What kinds of state intervention are needed to ensure that rural schooling has the necessary quality? In the employment

and economic spheres, there have been interventions such as affirmative action and black economic empowerment to make up for past discriminatory practices. Is there not a strong case for specially-focused interventions by the state into schooling and other forms of education in rural areas?

Steps have been taken by government to ease the plight of poor people throughout the country. Of great importance are the social grants available to people in need. At present, 12.4 million citizens receive welfare grants. The Minister of Social Development has plans to relieve the plight of rural children. He intends to do this through the establishment of an early childhood development centre in every village and poor neighbourhood throughout the country. (More will be said about this below, in the section on early childhood development.)

In addition to this, many poor parents no longer have to pay school fees. From 2007, the schools catering to the poorest 40% of learners in the country (urban and rural) have not been allowed to charge fees. This means that the parents of five million children, many of whom are in rural areas, are exempt from paying school fees. It is probable that from 2009 the next poorest category will also be exempted from school fees, which means that then 60% of learners will be exempt from school fees.

Almost all rural and farm schools fall into this sector of the population. This means that many families will not have to use their welfare grants to pay directly for school fees, but can use them for other necessities. However, it should be noted that the cost of schooling has to do with more than school fees. The poor find it just as hard, if not more so, to pay for transport, uniforms and other school necessities. It is important to remember the direct as well as the indirect costs (such as the withdrawal of children from labour) to rural families of sending children to school.

To alleviate the problems that it has identified in rural and other areas, the state established several programmes:

- the National School Nutrition Programme which in 2006 benefited six million learners from Grade R to Grade 6;
- a learner transport system for those living far from schools;

- the Quality Improvement, Development, Support and Upliftment Programme (QIDS-UP) which targets 15 000 of the poorest schools;
- the Foundations for Learning Campaign which, during 2008 to 2011, seeks to create a national focus on improving the reading, writing and numeracy abilities of all South African children and within which the Reading Toolkit provides practical, back-to-basics guidelines on the planning of an effective Reading Programme in the classroom.

More on these and other national programmes can be accessed through the Department of Education's Rural Education Directorate.

What is the impact of curriculum, language and teacher education on rural education?

There are many matters that should be included in a review of education in rural areas. These are, among others, school governance, school financing, school management, further and higher education in rural areas, and the role of District and Circuit officials in supporting rural schools. The booklet focuses on three aspects of schooling:

- the suitability of current schooling for rural children;
- language and cultural values; and
- concerns around educators, the key personnel in the education of rural children.

Curriculum

All school learners in South Africa learn in the context of the *Revised National Curriculum Statement for Grades R to 9 (Schools)*, published in 2002, and the *National Curriculum Statement for Grades 10 to 12 (General)*, published in 2003. Learning outcomes in the National Curriculum prescribe what all learners should know and be able to do, and the Assessment Standards for each grade describe the *minimum* level, depth and breadth of what should be learned in each Learning Area. Broadly speaking, the National Curriculum defines skills and abilities that learners should achieve in order to demonstrate the prescribed outcomes for each Learning Area and grade, *but it does not prescribe the subject content that they should study*

in order to achieve those skills and abilities. The point about this curriculum is its flexibility and hence its ability to be adapted to local conditions and needs. The Department of Education expects that the curriculum will be differently interpreted and implemented in different contexts.

School policies – which are set by the school governing body, principal and teaching staff – decide how this curriculum should be interpreted and implemented in each school. This is a different situation from the rigid following of curricula of the past. Now, children should be enabled to achieve the learning outcomes through engagement with what the educators and parents believe children ought to learn and explore at each grade level. Are schools in rural areas able to take advantage of the opportunities created by the National Curriculum? What policies will encourage communities to discuss the kinds of learning they want their children to experience?

Many parents in rural communities have expressed the desire for their schools to be like those in urban areas. In material terms, this is an understandable demand because urban schools are usually in better condition than those in the countryside. However, though urban schools are often better equipped materially, the quality of education there is far too low to be a measure of what should be the standard for all South African children. We need to be reminded that at one time those in the liberation struggle wanted education for black learners to be the same as that for white learners, until they understood that white education taught racial superiority, a false version of history and an intolerance of diversity. White education only seemed better because of the facilities and support lavished on it by the state.

Should rural children be taught more practical skills than children elsewhere in the country? Poor and unemployed people are desperate for their children to find employment after schooling so that they can escape the trap of poverty. Because of this, there is a desire among rural parents for their children to acquire practical skills rather than to study History or Mathematics. The reorganisation and reform of the Further Education and Training colleges has made post-school education of a technical kind more easily available to rural learners and more relevant to the world of work than before, and many of these colleges are located in or close to rural areas. Given that, the argument here is that Grades R to 9 should provide children

with a sound and general educational basis from which they can move into various kinds of career-oriented education and training or else continue with the academic curriculum.

Another big question concerning the curriculum is what forms of education should be offered to learners in rural areas. Recent studies have drawn attention to how classroom teaching styles and the ways in which knowledge is organised determine the atmosphere of the school and how children think about matters such as class and status. These school values reflect class differences and inequalities. For example, the school curriculum as well as the image of teachers and parents are said by some to be based on Western middle-class culture, promoting what is probably a very different set of values from those that many children observe at home. Obvious examples of different approaches between school and home (and this is not confined to rural areas) are attitudes towards children's rights and corporal punishment.

This is how the *Schools that Work* report for the Minister of Education sees the picture:

In South Africa, the popular conception (or 'hegemonic norm') of schooling is set by [the] privileged sector of [former white] schools. Images of these schools provide 'common sense' notions of what normal South African schooling is (or should be). However, this hegemonic norm is not the numeric norm [i.e., it does not constitute the majority of schools]. Most schools are not like this. These are not typical schools of the mainstream (Department of Education, 2007a:29).

Decisions need to be taken as to what model of schooling should shape and influence schooling in rural areas as well as elsewhere in this country. Should the model be the existing town, township or former white suburban schools, or should there be a new model? For example, what about a school that deliberately combines local knowledge with the internationally accepted knowledge which schools usually impart? These two forms of knowledge might be woven together in the curriculum so as to enable rural learners to fulfil themselves in individual and collective ways, to live productively in the twenty-first century, to participate in a democratic society and live according to the values of the Constitution. There are strong arguments both for and against such an idea.

Language

Languages are not only about getting something done or for reaching a specific goal. They carry cultural loads and histories, and they shape how people think and understand the world. In South Africa, current language-in-education policy is to maintain the home language (also referred to as the mother tongue) while providing access to the effective use of at least one additional language.

Most South African children are taught in their mother tongue at the beginning of their formal schooling and then they switch to a different language of learning and teaching in Grade 4. That different language is usually English. It is likely that this policy will change in the near future, and that children will continue to learn in their home language until the end of Grade 6, as has already been decided by the Western Cape Department of Education. This will strengthen their ability to learn, understand, speak, interpret and analyse in that language before switching over to learning through another language. Language-in-education experts argue that this initial acquisition in the language the child knows best is essential to a high degree of competence in later languages.

It is important to realise that when Grade 5 South African children came last out of 40 countries in literacy tests (see above), these children were tested in the mother tongue, not a language that they were still learning. What this tells us is that none of our language teaching at present is producing learners with adequate levels of ability in any language.

In South Africa, English is dominant, not numerically (only 10% of people in this country have it as a home language), but in commerce, the media, politics and international communication. English is seen as a door to certain kinds of further education, employment and privileged status. Many people, including those in rural areas, want to learn English and be fluent in it. However, given the high levels of illiteracy among adults and the infrequent exposure to languages like English at fluent and competent levels, rural children have little opportunity to live, think and work in a language environment beyond that of their mother tongue.

It is very important, however, that all learners, including rural and urban

children, acquire deep skills in one language, preferably their home language, before proceeding to learn another. This is not intended to confine them in a language trap. All languages, including the eleven official South African languages, are capable of dealing fully with the complexities of the past, the present and the future – in life, in education and in the world of work. However, unless the first language is learned very well, people are likely to have very limited and limiting linguistic abilities in whatever language they seek to use in their lives.

The absence of a reading culture in rural communities is very worrying. Information in printed form is difficult to come by – there are very few books or magazines or newspapers in homes or elsewhere, and there are usually no libraries. And questions remain about the language competence of many teachers in rural schools. Therefore, the language environment in rural areas may be rich in one or two languages, but that richness is part of a particular lifestyle which may not include much that is contemporary and modern. Language ability is dependent upon meeting challenges and finding ways of speaking, reading and writing about the well-known, the new and the unusual. An environment that does not make such demands cannot promote language development.

Teacher education

Between 1994 and 1998, the number of teacher training colleges in South Africa was cut from 120 to 50. A high proportion of these colleges had been situated in the rural areas, and they had offered the only opportunity for many rural youth to obtain some form of post-school education with the prospect of employment. Students had been awarded bursaries to study at teacher training colleges, on condition that they would teach after they had completed their training.

A significant number of the teacher training colleges were of poor quality – they were little more than glorified high schools and were very expensive to run. They trained teachers to use rigid, rote-learning methods in the classroom. The educational philosophy that underpinned the training was called Fundamental Pedagogics. This educational philosophy was developed during the apartheid years. It promoted an authoritarian attitude towards the young, and discouraged questioning or critical analysis by learners.

Curriculum 2005 and the Revised National Curriculum Statement were designed to transform these methods through their learner-centred and outcomes-based approaches. Consequently, teachers need a very different kind of training to be able to manage the new learning processes.

In 2001, the remaining 50 colleges were incorporated into the country's 27 universities, where all teacher education now takes place. (The exception is training for most early childhood education practitioners.) The shift of teacher education to universities may well have advantages in terms of improving the quality of teacher education in the long run. However, in the short term it has caused some problems. For example, because universities lack experience in training teachers for the lower grades, this is having a negative effect on the education of children in rural and poor urban areas. The *Report of the Ministerial Committee on Teacher Education* said:

Moving initial teacher education from Colleges of Education to higher education institutions has impacted particularly negatively on the capacity of the system to train Grade R and Foundation Phase teachers, including the teaching of basic literacy and numeracy, and the role of mother tongue teaching in the early stages of schooling. In general, the institutional capacity of the system to train Foundation and Intermediate Phase teachers has deteriorated (Department of Education, 2005:10).

Teacher education courses at higher education institutions are unlikely to be able to address the needs of rural communities, or those of the rural and urban poor. A main problem is how universities use language in the training of teachers. University coursework is exclusively in English, but the education of some students has not equipped them to read deeply and reflect on educational issues in that language. Furthermore, the university courses do not teach future educators how to translate the concepts and ideas of their training into the everyday reality of learners and their parents. Another shortcoming is that universities train individuals to look for ways in which they can make changes at schools and in classrooms, instead of teaching them how to work as part of a team at schools. Although training institutions do offer workshops for teachers in rural areas, there is little or no transfer of new ideas into classroom practice. Outside of the urban areas, there are few sources of reference or support for teachers other than their colleagues at the school. Despite occasional courses offered by the Departments of Education, teachers in rural schools often work under conditions that are solitary and without much material or human support.

Only the exceptional teachers grow and develop as educators under these circumstances.

At the moment, the Department of Education, with the support of the Royal Netherlands Embassy, is supporting an ongoing programme of research – the Teacher Education Programme in South Africa – which includes twenty projects on a variety of topics. The themes being researched include the supply of and demand for teachers, the governance and culture of teacher education institutions, the design and delivery of teacher education programmes, quality improvement of teacher education programmes, improving school management, literacy in schools and teacher development. This research programme is intended to shed light on how better education of teachers can be designed and managed. Particular attention is being paid to the situation of the initial and professional development of school educators in rural areas. Further information about this research programme can be obtained from the Centre for Education Policy Development.

The policy implications of teacher education have a number of impacts on rural education, and these aspects must be studied more closely. This must include attention to early childhood development (ECD) practitioners, what kinds of teacher and teaching the education programmes seek to achieve, in-service support for teachers, as well as the roles of District and Circuit officials in supporting educators in their schools. Is there a case, however, for special attention to the education and the retention of teachers in rural areas? How can teachers of high quality be drawn to work in rural schools? What incentives can be offered to young people to qualify as Foundation Phase teachers in the mother tongue? These are some of the questions that have to be answered in the process of establishing in rural schools what has been called “one of the most contributory (and potentially transformational) factors” in rural education – the impact of appropriately educated and trained educators on the quality of education.

Early Childhood Development

There are many kinds of early childhood development in South Africa. An ECD site can be anything from a squatter shack in which a woman looks after her neighbours’ children while they go to work, to a well-equipped day

care centre in the suburbs, to a Grade R classroom in a primary school. There are varying levels of organisation, resources, and quality of care and teaching in all these kinds of ECD centres.

There is a very wide range of issues that affect early childhood development, and this booklet cannot deal with all of them. However, this section refers to some of the issues that particularly affect ECD in rural areas .

Overall, 40% of the ECD sites in this country are found in rural areas. In Eastern Cape and KwaZulu-Natal, 62% of ECD sites are rural, and 85% in Limpopo are in rural locations.

ECD policy is the responsibility of more than one government department. For example, the Department of Social Development has overall responsibility for ECD, but the Department of Education is responsible for Grade R and the following years of schooling. There are also matters of health, safety and welfare when it comes to the interests of little children.

Different government documents define ECD differently. The most recent definitions establish the period from “birth to school-going age” as “early childhood”. Early childhood development, therefore, has two main areas of focus – 0 to 4 years of age, and Grade R, that single year which is meant to prepare children to enter formal schooling.

The Minister of Social Development has announced his Department’s intention to establish an early childhood development centre in every village and poor neighbourhood in the country. There, children will receive preschool education as well as two meals a day in a safe and secure environment. The need for this kind of intervention tells us much about what is not available now for children in poor communities. This is a devastating acknowledgement of the effects of poverty, for example:

- Children in the 0 to 4 age group constitute almost 10% of the population, but only 15% of this number have access to ECD services.
- Between 58% and 70% of rural children live below the poverty line.
- In rural communities, 75% of children under the age of five suffer from malnutrition.

Policy for Grade R learners applies to all children. Grade R is intended to be universal and compulsory by 2010. Many but not all Grade R sites will be attached to existing primary schools. Given the current shortage of appropriately qualified teachers in rural schools, there is concern over whether there will be sufficient numbers of trained Grade R teachers available in these schools. It is estimated that 33 000 will be needed nationally by 2010. At present, there are 7 000 such teachers.

In addition to the fact that ECD in South Africa is not yet well co-ordinated, there is concern about what *kind* of ECD is likely to be best for the child. Once again, is there a need for special solutions and policy for certain situations, such as rural communities, without violating the principle of a unitary, national system?

Adult Basic Education and Training

Because of the absence of previous opportunities to learn and because formerly there was no need for some people in rural areas to do so, many people in South Africa still lack basic skills in reading, writing and using numbers. They are considered to be “illiterate”.

A recent research study was undertaken in the poorest parts of Eastern Cape, KwaZulu-Natal and Limpopo. It used the most common definition of literacy – the ability to read and write. The study revealed that among female household respondents to a survey, the literacy levels were 69% in Limpopo, 59% in KwaZulu-Natal and 70% in Eastern Cape. However, in the parts of Limpopo that had been in former homelands, 23% of women had received no formal schooling at all, 19% had left school below Grade 7, and 16% had stopped schooling after finishing Grade 7.

This year (2008) the Minister of Education launched the implementation of a mass, mother-tongue literacy campaign (which includes numeracy). The aim of the campaign is to enable 4.7 million adults to become literate by the end of 2012. This includes people who are disabled, deaf or blind, as well as those who are able to see. The campaign is called *Kha ri Gude*, TshiVenda for “Let Us Learn”.

This campaign, which aims to mobilise society to wipe out illiteracy, is of

great importance to thinking about education in rural areas, for a variety of reasons:

- All people, regardless of their age, are entitled by the Constitution to basic education. The ability to read, write and calculate are at the heart of such education, because such skills enable people to function in a modern society. It is in the rural areas that there is most need to create opportunities for adults to acquire the skills and abilities that education provides. The *Kha ri Gude* campaign does not go beyond the achievement of basic literacy and numeracy. However, the government's Adult Basic Education and Training (ABET) programme offers the opportunity to go as far as the equivalent of Grade 9.
- Many of the literacy instructors trained by this campaign will continue to be located in their villages and communities. They could play a continuing role in achieving higher levels of literacy, using the method of the *Kha ri Gude* campaign.
- Once the adults who head many rural households can read and write, they can help learners with their school homework and other matters. They could be helped to do this by local schools.
- When entire communities can use print materials and other sources to learn about local, national and international affairs, people can become citizens who have information and understanding about the issues of the day. This assumes the provision of library and information centres for each community as well as the availability of various print media such as newsletters, newspapers and the Internet.

In the past, even when middle-aged and elderly adults have had some formal education, it has rarely gone beyond primary schooling. With the spread of ABET centres, there is increasing (but far from enough) opportunity for such adults to involve themselves again in formal education, to a somewhat higher level. The problem is that if adults seek education for the purposes of employment, a likely intention given the high levels of unemployment in rural areas, then such adults are in competition with unemployed matriculants and youth with degrees.

It is clear that both literacy and ABET are essential to the development of society, both urban and rural. However, even if ABET were available to everyone who wants and needs it, it cannot in itself be enough to ease the unemployment and poverty that are so common in rural areas. Furthermore, the mere acquisition of abilities up to Grade 9 is hardly the only sort of education that mature adults need. They are involved every day with complicated and very important matters concerning their lives and those dependent upon them, as well as with issues involving the entire community. A number of these responsibilities involve documents of various kinds. It is argued here, therefore, that we should not be educating people for mere survival, but for human and social development. It is important to develop policy for ABET that goes beyond basic levels.

Farm Schools

Farm schools are located on privately-owned commercial farms. They provide primary education, and very occasionally secondary education, mainly to the children of black farm workers. In the past, such schools were controlled entirely by individual farmers. Up until the mid 1990s, farmers had the power to open and close schools, to decide which learners were allowed to attend and what grades the school could offer, and to control school funds. Children from neighbouring farms were allowed to attend the school with the permission of the farmer, and farmers advised the Department on the appointment, control and discharge of teachers. This was the situation even though the schools were largely funded by the state, which actually employed the teachers. For decades children on farms were used as labourers, although it became illegal in 1988 to withdraw children from school to do work. The poor quality and limited availability of education has created a legacy of illiteracy among farm workers, a situation which the pro-poor policies after 1994 have not been able to change in any significant way.

Section 14 of the South African Schools Act of 1996 (SASA) was supposed to end the joint control of schools by the Department of Education and land owners. The Act endorsed the state's responsibility for all public schools on private land, including farms, church land, mines and hospitals. Provincial departments of education were supposed to establish contracts with property owners. The aim was to ensure that farm schools would provide

good education and function normally as public schools. These contracts were meant to protect both the rights of the farm owners and the rights of the children attending these schools. SASA also provided other options, such as the closure of such schools or the expropriation of the land for educational purposes.

None of these options has yet solved the problems of farm schools as a troublesome aspect of the South African educational system. By 2005 there were so many unresolved matters concerning farm schools that the Department of Education's *Report of the Ministerial Committee on Rural Education* devoted an entire section to them. Many contracts between provinces and farmers have not been finalised, making the operation of these schools technically illegal. Because of this unresolved situation, improving the deteriorating state of these schools has been very difficult.

The majority of farm schools are small, and many have multi-grade classes – that is, children of different levels of schooling are taught in the same room. They are the worst off in terms of their physical conditions, infrastructure, access to services and teaching resources. Of the 4 657 farm schools surveyed by the Human Rights Watch in 2004, 1 273 did not have toilets on site and almost none had libraries. Few offered classes beyond Grade 7. In 2000, 20% of these schools were one-teacher schools. Those farm-school educators, in addition to being inadequately qualified, seldom benefit from development programmes because the schools tend to be isolated and far from towns. Not surprisingly, farm schools are also noted for their inability to retain learners at school for lengths of time during which real learning can take place. School attendance is either for short, interrupted periods or else learners drop out altogether.

The number and size of farm schools have been deeply affected by changes in the agricultural sector. Since 1994, land and labour legislation, smaller state subsidies for farmers and other factors such as drought have resulted in a number of changes – the severe reduction of full-time farm workers, the expulsion of black families from farms, and a decrease in the number of commercial farms. These and other conditions, including migration to towns and cities, have led to a more than 60% drop in the number of farm schools in South Africa.

Several provincial departments of education have embarked on a strategy of building hostels to accommodate children who have been moved from farm schools (and other small and scattered schools) to larger public schools located in towns. Normally the learners are transported to and from their homes each quarter, receive board and lodging and, in some cases, receive free clothing.

Conclusion

A major challenge facing policy makers and implementers of policy is captured in the *Schools that Work* report. Apart from pro-poor funding policies, the equalisation of teachers' salaries and the upgrading of infrastructure in poorer schools, the present education policy tends to treat all schools as being "the same". The same outcomes are expected from schools that operate under very different circumstances, and this is simply not realistic. Schools are not the same, particularly in terms of social, economic and linguistic conditions. We need to accept that equal treatment of learners from unequal backgrounds may give the appearance of treating everyone fairly, but it is likely to maintain inequality. Equal treatment cannot, under such circumstances, bring equal opportunities, let alone equal outcomes.

After the publication of *Emerging Voices* and the *Report of the Ministerial Committee on Rural Education* in 2005, the Minister of Education met with members of the Nelson Mandela Foundation and the Education Policy Consortium and said that she wanted to establish a forum on education in rural areas. This forum met only once, in March 2006. However, the need for such a forum, where matters such as those highlighted in this booklet can be explored thoroughly, is clear. It ought to be led by the Department of Education, with strong representation from the provinces. In addition, other departments of state – such as Agriculture, Health, Safety, Social Development, Home Affairs, Water and Transport – should be represented in such a forum. Researchers and research agencies involved with rural communities should also be included.

In response to the recommendations of the Ministerial Committee on Rural Education, the Department of Education has established a Directorate of Rural Education. It has developed a *National Framework for Quality Education in Rural Areas* which focuses on several areas: improving the

quality of teaching and learning in rural and farm schools; attracting and retaining learners; planning, restructuring and improving infrastructure; building effective school governance and management; advocacy and promoting sustainable partnerships to implement programmes directed at broader rural development and community participation. The Directorate has developed guidelines on merging small schools in rural areas and signed agreements between provincial education departments and land-owners (mainly commercial farmers) regarding public schools on private property. The latter includes procedures about the expropriation of land, teacher development of multi-grade teachers and a hostel strategy.

It is clear that the Department of Education has taken seriously the insights and recommendations of the *Report of the Ministerial Committee on Rural Education*, the Nelson Mandela Foundation's *Emerging Voices* as well as other recent research on schools and communities in rural areas. However, despite this progress in policy development – and to some extent implementation – much more thinking about priorities and policy direction is needed to address the needs of education in rural areas. Research and policy development will require perceptive and creative attention to real issues and concerns. As Graça Machel observed in Siyandhani, Limpopo, when she launched *Emerging Voices* in February 2006, what we in South Africa get right in the education of rural communities will be of enormous value to all other African countries as well.

Further Reading

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Centre for Education Policy Development

Department of Education

South African government information website

This is one of a series of booklets on key issues in education and training policy in South Africa. Each booklet deals with one such issue and aims to give the reader, in plain English, an informed overview of the topic and its implications for various stakeholders.

The intended readership includes a wide range of people with an interest in the education and training system – members of Parliament or of provincial legislatures, teachers, trade unionists, employers, student and community activists, education department officials, journalists, governors of educational institutions, members of local or provincial education and training councils, and interested members of the general public.

Issues in Education Policy, Number 4 Education in Rural Areas

The Constitution, the South African Schools Act and various education policy documents say that all South African learners should have equal educational opportunities. However, this is not yet the case. One of the central questions faced by policy makers and planners at both national and provincial levels of government is: how can the particular needs of rural communities and their learners be met within the overall state policy of a single educational system?

This booklet first looks at the meaning of the terms urban and rural, and then examines various aspects of education in rural areas – the relationship between schools and their communities; the situation of schools in rural areas; questions of curriculum, language and teacher education; early childhood development; adult basic education and training; farm schools. It draws on recent research, current government documents and other sources to highlight some major policy issues.

