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Information Literacy Education in Disadvantaged Schools: A Case Study of Project Work at a Primary School in South Africa

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This article reports on an ethnographic field study of project work in a grade 7 class in a disadvantaged primary school on the Cape Flats, Cape Town, South Africa. The purpose was to explore the potential use of project work (encouraged by the new South African school curriculum with its emphasis on continuous formative assessment) for information literacy education. The study found crucial gaps between official policy and classroom practice. Teachers' conceptions of teaching and learning were found to be the key to effective project work-and, therefore, to its value for information literacy programs.

Introduction

The underlying purpose of the research project I describe in this article is to explore ways of introducing information literacy education into schools that lack the resources usually associated with such education in the developed world. The study took place in a circuit of 15 primary schools on the Cape Flats. This article reports on the first phase of the project: a field study of project work in grade 7 in one primary school, Galant Primary, between July and September 1997. The school is situated in Paradys, a disadvantaged township about 14 kilometers from the center of Cape Town. (The names of the school, its teachers, and its surrounding township have been changed for this article.) The initial aim in this first phase was to take a close look at project work in one school with a view to "building on" to its information literacy education. However, as the study progressed, its purpose shifted to exploring the gaps between curriculum policy and classroom practice. An understanding of these gaps was found to be crucial to any future planning for information literacy education.

Background

Changes in education in South Africa since 1994 signal a more favorable climate for information literacy education. For example, our new curriculum, Curriculum 2005 (Department of Education, 1997a), recognizes information handling skills as one of its eight *critical cross-field outcomes*. Our Western Cape Interim Curriculum (Western Cape Education Department, 1995) allo-

cates one period a week to information skills as well as recommending that information skills should be an "*integrated* part of a teaching and learning approach" (p. 2). The shift, evident in national and provincial policy documents, from examinations toward *continuous formative assessment* by means of *projects and portfolios* should encourage this kind of integration.

It has been claimed that information skills are inherent in project work. Much has been written about the common ground between the project method of learning and information literacy education (Avann, 1985; Wray, 1985; Kuhlthau, 1993). Primary schoolchildren in the United Kingdom apparently spend between 20% to 50% of their week on project work (Long, 1988). No figures are available for South African schools, but the recent changes have meant an increase in project work in all our schools.

In South Africa, classrooms are teacher- and textbook-centered (Kallaway, 1990) and fewer than a third of our schools have any sort of library (Department of Education, 1997b). Significantly, the Western Cape Interim Curriculum argues that the absence of a school library should not preclude information literacy education. It points out that "information resources can be found among the people and in the environment of any community" (p. 2). The challenge in South Africa is to design programs that use the insights of international research, yet are feasible in disadvantaged schools.

The term *disadvantaged* perhaps calls for some explanation. Apartheid, with its 19 racially based education departments, has left huge inequalities in our schools. In 1995, the Western Cape Education Department amalgamated five old departments. About 73% of our schools in the Western Cape Province are ex-House of Representative schools—the historically colored schools. In 1986, a national survey (Overduin & De Wit, 1986) found these to have 2.5 library books per pupil. It found the Department of Education and Training schools, the African schools, had 2.4 books per pupil and the Cape Education Department white schools 10. The annual school fee at the case study school, Galant Primary, is R20 per child. The follow-up survey of other schools in the circuit highlights the significance of the poverty of the Galant parent body for the educational program. The three historically white schools use their fees (at each school over R200 per child per month) to pay for computers, library materials, and several "extra" teachers, including librarians.

Research Problem and Methodology

Put simply, the research problem is to find out more about projects in disadvantaged South African schools. I was genuinely curious about how teachers do them. The questions that framed the study concern both learners and teachers. For example,

- What are students learning in doing projects?
- How do teachers manage project work?
- Do teachers possess the attributes of information literacy?

Teachers' attributes and their teaching styles are crucial to information literacy education especially, as Sandra Olen points out (1993), in disadvantaged schools that are unlikely to have librarians.

Field Study Methodology

The purpose of the study-to explore the links between projects, teaching style, and information literacy in disadvantaged schools-explains the need for a *qualitative, interpretive* methodology. In qualitative research, the key task is to understand the subjective meanings or interpretations participants give to phenomena (LeCompte, Preissle, & Tesch, 1992). The study is *exploratory* because of the nature of existing information literacy research. The construct of information literacy is difficult to measure (Todd, 1995). And research has been done in environments very different from that of most South African schools.

Harvey and Myers (1995), in the context of information systems research, defend ethnography from the criticism that it is too localized by contending that, until a large knowledge is built of many situations, research will remain irrelevant and meaningless. I believe that the same can be said of information literacy research.

Choice of Site

Several factors influenced the choice of Galant Primary for the ethnographic case study.

- It is an ex-House of Representatives school. These (the historically colored schools) make up about 73% of Western Cape schools.
- It is a disadvantaged school serving a disadvantaged community.
- The principal assured me that projects are routinely undertaken-indeed she told me a departmental information skills specialist had conducted a workshop on projects at the school in the first quarter.
- It is conveniently close to my place of work, the University of the Western Cape.
- A major factor was the quick acceptance by the principal of my request. Western Cape schools have been in a state of turmoil for the past two years and I was relieved to get access so easily.

The field study at Galant Primary was intentionally wide-ranging, with its focus shifting continuously as ethnography allows (Stake, 1994). I spent the third quarter of 1997 in the school: the first three weeks mostly sitting in on the grade 7 program and then widening the focus to follow up themes. The data categories were generated from field notes and recordings of classes and of meetings, from interviews (both structured and informal) with teachers (grade 7 and others) and grade 7 pupils, and from analysis of learning materials.

The *participant observation* of ethnography involves a constant shifting between the two stances of participation and observation (LeCompte et al., 1992). I watched, listened, and interacted with teachers and learners constantly-to understand how they make sense of their world. This interaction did not, however, include any direct intervention in the project work I observed.

The challenge in reporting on ethnography is to turn what Wolcott (1994, p. 10) calls "unruly experience" into a lucid-but short-account. The *description, analysis, and interpretation* of ethnography are difficult to condense. This account thus cuts down on the "thick" description associated with ethnography to allow room for analysis and interpretation.

Description of the Grade 7 Projects: July 16-August 7, 1997

The three grade 7 teachers came across, when I first met them, as a closely knit team. The three are Mr. Moosa, Ms. Abrahams, and Mr. Olifant. Mr. Moosa is the Deputy-Principal, senior mathematics teacher, woodwork teacher, and the grade 7 Head of Department. Ms. Abrahams teaches science and English and Mr. Olifant art, Afrikaans (the first language of most of the pupils and the medium of instruction), and history. They teach other grades as well as grade 7 and have virtually no free periods. Ms. King, the grade 7 geography and needlework teacher as well as the designated teacher-librarian, was absent for the first few weeks of the study, having been on sick leave for some months.

My observation had three main foci:

- Ms. Abrahams' science project on animals;
- Mr. Olifant's history module, entitled *Die Ontwikkeling van die Kaapse Binneland* (the Development of the Cape Interior), which included a project;
- Mr. Moosa's use of groups in teaching mathematics.

Ms. Abrahams' Science Project July 21 -August 4

July 21: First two lessons. As the class was settling down, and having checked my choice with Ms. Abrahams, I approached a group of six girls-to become Group 8-conveniently placed for my tape-recorder. They agreed to be recorded and observed and to meet me every day.

Ms. Abrahams went straight into allocating the topics, walking around the class with an envelope and holding it out for a pupil in each group to take out a card with the name of an animal on it. She then wrote on the board, without explanation, a list of headings: habitat, *liggaamsverdeling* (body parts), *liggaamsvorm* (body shape), *voorbeweging* (locomotion), *asemhaling* (respiration), *voortplanning* (reproduction). She called the group leaders to her desk to receive some instructions. On coming back Charlene, Group 8's leader, took 10 minutes to tear up a sheet of paper into six pieces and write

one of the headings on the board on each. Each girl then took a piece of paper to find out what her work was to be.

By this time, the bell had rung for the end of the period and the class broke up. Ms. Abrahams went from group to group giving out copies of two different textbooks, one for each child.

July 22-25. The next few periods were spent with pupils busily copying word-for-word from the textbook. On my probing their purpose, Veronica said, "We are writing." But Charlene said, "No, we are finding out." Leanne added, "It's just notes." Their methods became clearer the next day in the group interview when they said that they took notes "just to keep in our memory." Whether they understood what they were writing down so industriously seemed doubtful. The issue of the pupils' reading abilities is discussed below. In a later interview, Ms. Abrahams recognizes that the children have not been taught to take notes. By grade 7 she expects them to have somehow picked up the skills (Interview, August 5, 1997, p. 32).

As the bell rang at the end of a lesson on the second day, one pupil staggered into class with an armful of posters and other materials, which she had fetched from Ms. Abrahams' science room. She dumped them on the floor at the front. Ms. Abrahams complained later that nobody used them.

After the two science classes described here, there was a sudden call for the grade 7 pupils. A bus had come to take them on an outing to the South African Museum in central Cape Town. The visit, sponsored by the Western Cape Education Department, had been timetabled at the beginning of the year, but everybody at the school had forgotten about it. Ms. Abrahams later dismissed the visit as a "waste of time" and grumbled that she was not reminded earlier.

July 25-August 3: The presentations. The project presentations began on Monday, July 25. The pattern for the presentations was that one pupil would read from a section of the textbook while behind her or him another pupil would write the section heading on the board. Another pupil would then ask questions based directly on what had been read. Most groups then produced a numbered chart of the body parts of their animal and would quiz the class. Only three groups had a specimen to hand around, and only one group made use of an overhead transparency to show the class a diagram traced from the textbook.

Mr. Olifant's History Module: July 28-August 7

In the meantime, I had been observing Mr. Olifant's history classes. In observing his module, *The Development of the Cape Interior*, my focus was as much on Mr. Olifant as on the pupils, and I had more freedom to engage with him as the module progressed. The history project evolved out of the same grade 7 museum visit that Ms. Abrahams had dismissed as a waste of time.

July 28, 1997-August 4: Worksheets. The pattern for the history periods for the first part of the module was group work on worksheets. Textbooks were given out and taken in every day. There were not enough books, so some children sat detached from their groups with nothing to do. The Western Cape Education Department has recently devolved decisions about spending what used to be called "textbook budgets" to the schools. Mr. Olifant following a decision by the school-spent the 1997 budget allocation (about R14,000) on books for the teachers to encourage, he says, "more interesting, more creative, more colorful worksheets" (interview, August 11, 1997, p. 35). Here some contradiction is evident. His own worksheets consist of extracts copied from the textbook, and the task is almost always to fill in missing words from the textbook.

Observation of the history worksheet tasks provoked the same questions about reading ability as the observation of the rote-copying in the science project. The reading required for the tasks was mere word recognition. The strategy employed by one group, which had only two books among them, was that Vernon would scan the relevant section in the book and pick out the sentence that matched the question to find the missing word. He would shout with triumph when he found it, and his fellow group members would then obediently write in the missing word on their sheets. Observation of the children, hopping backward and forward through the textbooks, led me to doubt if the context and significance of the isolated facts were being understood.

The question here is about learning as much as about reading ability. The worksheet sentences are used by the pupils to "learn" for regular tests and then an examination. They expect the exact words to be repeated.

Despite recognizing elsewhere in his interviews that project work can teach reading skills, Mr. Olifant favors *practical* projects because his pupils find reading hard. He says, "Books and these things are not important They hate to read up and those things, so I don't like to do things the kids don't like. I rather give them something that is more interesting" (interview, August 11, 1997, p. 27).

History project, July 31-August 7. This explains his choice of project on July 31 when he reminded the class of the diorama in the South African Museum, depicting the lives of the San and Xhosa people. He set them the project of building a model of a village, using whatever they could find around the school or their homes. Mr. Olifant's use of the museum experience contrasts with that of Ms. Abrahams. He attributes the success of his project to the fact that the visit gave his pupils knowledge to build on saying, "they knew everything about the project beforehand" (interview, September 15, 1997, p. 8).

Analysis of the Two Projects

Kerry and Eggleston's (1994) distinction between project work as a philosophy and as classroom management provides a useful lens for analysis of the science and history projects. They point out that, although teachers do not always explicitly articulate a philosophy, a child-centered view of education and a holistic view of knowledge are "indispensable to its [project work's] effective implementation" (p. 190). This point might throw light on some of the questions provoked by the observation of the projects. The most fundamental of these concern the nature and purposes of a project.

Ms. Abrahams' Project

Ms. Abrahams sees the purpose of project work as "Getting the child involved with the whole education to do something well-go an extra mile to do something and-he must be proud of what they present-he must go and find out" (interview, August 5, 1997, p. 13). Here a gap between her intellectual understanding that projects are about discovery learning and her methods in class is clear. Using the textbook as a source of information need not in itself be incompatible with information literacy. However, Ms. Abrahams' allocation of topics and subtopics from the textbook gave the grade 7 children no opportunity to suggest problems of interest to them. The fun of the lucky-dip of choosing a card from an envelope did not disguise the fact that she was allocating topics straight from the textbooks.

As the project progressed, what enthusiasm there had been at the beginning dissipated, perhaps because the children sensed that it just was not important. Group 8 have no idea how much the project will "count" and expect Ms. Abrahams to repeat the work from the textbook when exam time comes: "*Juffrou gaan seker net vir ons een diertjie gee om oor te doen* [Miss will surely just give us one animal to do again]" (Group 8, interview, August 4, 1997, p. 11).

Whether Ms. Abrahams recognizes that project work entails a shift from content to process is doubtful. She seems to see the purpose only in terms of the final product-the presentation. Although she is the grade 7 English teacher, she dismisses the idea of teaching skills needed for science in her English classes: "It is enough that I do it in science. I don't feel like reading about the frog in English" (interview, August 5, 1997, p. 28).

There was little teacher-whole class interaction in the project classes and also little one-to-one teacher-child work. This might be due to her assumption, shared by her colleagues, that project work always implies group work and a low-key role for the teacher. Ms. Abrahams believes that project work means less work in terms of "marking" for the teacher: "You just give the project and you give the instructions to it. You've just got to monitor the children to see what they have done" (interview, August 5, 1997, p. 14).

Monitoring implies continuous assessment, yet she kept no records of the pupils' progress. The words *what they have done* are revealing. If her role is

only to assess the final product, then there is no room for remediation or consolidation of skills.

Avann (1985) points out that once the emphasis shifts to how children find and process information, the need for the teaching of information skills becomes apparent. With her preoccupation with the product, Ms. Abrahams cannot diagnose that not enough attention was paid to the process of project work. She blames the "playfulness" of the 1997 grade 7 pupils, claiming that the same project had worked well the previous year.

Ms. Abrahams' ambivalence toward project work is evident. She says at first that she approves of it, and then reveals some doubt over whether it is feasible with her pupils:

The curriculum as it is expects project work. Situations at school differ. So I think each school should adapt according to their needs and their dynamics and what works for them You must take the group work and start the project work, analyze it, throwaway what you don't need, add to it or *if you feel you want to discard the whole thing then discard it* ... You are working with the raw material and only you know that person best. (Interview, August 5, 1997, p. 15)

The question is whether she "discarded the whole thing"-making the project a travesty, one in name only-or whether she pragmatically adapted the project method to suit her circumstances.

Ms. Abrahams herself never expresses openly any doubt over the fundamental nature of her project. However it would be simplistic to explain its failure too quickly by saying "she doesn't understand what a project is." In other parts of the interview, she complains about the lack of resources-in the school and in the children's homes. What she sees as resources might be the issue here. She dismisses the class visit to the museum as a waste of time, but did have on her desk piles of pamphlets and worksheets given out by the museum staff. When Ms. Abrahams offered a large collection of charts, transparencies, and posters to the class (dumped on the floor at the front of the classroom), it was for the *presentations*, not as learning and information resources.

The point here is that the question of resources might after all be a question of attitude. Support for this interpretation comes from Ms. Abrahams' description of a workshop she attended at Kirstenbosch, the National Botanical Gardens, a few kilometers from the school. She enjoyed the workshop:

Now that project-that was theme work. There is various groups but each group is a different aspect. Some did the fungus part, some did the medicine part, some did the food part. We had everything, it was good. (Interview, August 5, 1997, p. 35)

Despite this praise, she says that she cannot apply the approach in her classroom, at first blaming her lack of resources:

But, unfortunately, they've got all the specimens-if I come here I don't have the specimens. I've got to go somewhere and find the specimens. I cannot go to the mountain and pick ... we must have money ... nobody is going to drive us. (Interview, August 5, 1997, p. 36)

When asked why she cannot use the University of the Western Cape Environmental Education Resource Center quite close to the school, she avoids the question saying, "You must know exactly what you are going to do there-you can't just take a bus full of children and go do UWC" (interview, August 5, 1997, p. 35). Perhaps the crux of the problem is not resources. Unless she sees why projects are good learning, then there is little point in discussing how to manage them.

The assertion here is that, although Ms. Abrahams believes her grade 7 work to be a project, the reality is that neither its philosophy nor its classroom execution qualifies it for that name. Her strategy to conform to curriculum requirements is to pay lip service to the concept by adapting her own teaching a little and calling the result a "project." There are clear risks for information literacy education being built on such foundations. For example, the obvious ineffectiveness of the learning in her projects might sooner or later encourage a call to return to the "basics"-as apparently happened in the UK after the mediocrity of much project work was exposed (Yeo, 1994).

An analysis of Mr. Olifant's history module throws more light on these complex issues.

Mr. Olifant's Project

The history project was clearly more successful than Ms. Abrahams' science project. However, it was in many ways an adjunct to the "real" work: the worksheets. Its main function was to make a change from the worksheets, to keep the children busy and to entertain them.

Mr. Olifant's views on project work are hard to unravel. Having at first said that projects are a "good thing," he then reveals doubt about the integration that a thematic approach implies:

The theme work-housing, housing of the Khoisan, housing of this, housing of that-that is a bit difficult, but the module system is easy because I just do the one, finish it off.... you can't do thematical approach on everything then you confuse the kids Whereas the module system, obviously it is history, it is chronological, you know it follows from one day to another and how it happened. (Interview, August 11, 1997, p. 22)

Asked what the purposes of projects are, he says, first, they are "more fun" and, second, "it is for a mark ... that counts for the end of the year" (interview, August 11, 1997, p.15). Like Ms. Abrahams, he is chiefly interested in the end product as a means of providing marks for year-end assessment.

It is difficult to reconcile Mr. Olifant's often-expressed belief that history should be about discussion and critical thinking with the tasks in his classes. His second interview throws light on the discrepancy. He claims that the worksheets are an alternative to "chalk and talk" where he tells the class everything. He sees hunting for the right word as reading for understanding: "They will understand and find an answer. That is why there is a lot of that in the question sheets I give to them-so that they can read up and give the answer" (interview, September 15, 1997, p. 10).

It could be, however, that in reality the value of the worksheet tasks for Mr. Olifant is that they bypass the poor reading abilities of his pupils. He says, "That is the best way I can see to get them to read, you know ... Basically, their reading is very poor" (interview, September 15, 1997, p. 10).

Mr. Olifant's preoccupation with marks reveals a gap between school practice and stated policy, as well as a gap between what he does and what he thinks he does. These gaps show how the policy statements in the new curriculum, which recommend, for example, continuous formative assessment, can become mere rhetoric if teachers lack insight into their underlying pedagogical aims. The existence of a gap between what he does and what he thinks he does is not unusual. Studies in the UK (Delamont, 1987) report the surprise of "progressive" primary school teachers when confronted with lesson transcripts that reveal how traditional their classroom management still is.

Toward the end of the field study, Mr. Olifant almost casually divulged a piece of information crucial to the understanding of the grade 7 project work. He is talking of the one-day workshop on projects run by the departmental subject advisor that Ms. James organized at the beginning of the year. He then admits that he and other grade 7 teachers had met and had decided to ignore it:

What we did, we come together and then we decide what is good for [Standard] Fours and Fives [grades 6 and 7]. We found that the method the school was trying [project method] was not going to work with our kids and then we did our own thing, you see. (Interview, September 15, 1997, p. 4)

His words here throw light on the less direct comment of Ms. Abrahams, referred to above, that teachers might discard new methods if they do not suit their circumstances. The reason he gives for the decision is the expense of projects. However, his words elsewhere suggest that, like Ms. Abrahams, he does not really approve of the open-endedness of projects. He believes, for example, that Galant children need structured input from their teachers:

I said to her [a retired teacher], look, the way I see it, it is not going to work for the youngsters. You can't give the youngster nothing and ask them to give something. It is like a computer. *If you want information out, you must put information in.* (Interview, August 11, 1997, p. 13)

His comparing a child here to a computer is symptomatic of what Paulo Freire (Robinson, 1994) calls the "banking" conception of teaching.

Mr. Olifant's description of the purpose of the teachers' resource center, which he has been entrusted to establish with the textbook budget, supports this interpretation. It calls to mind Beswick's warning (1984) that the "tyranny" of the worksheet might replace that of the textbook:

[We are planning] a resource center, but not a library. It is for all the teachers. So the teachers can use these books only. [The] library is for the kids, and the teachers will be in the resource center where they can be more creative. If they want to do that subject, say housing, there is a lot of books, so they can choose. So it is not one book but five or six that they can use, and they can use them more creatively. It is cheaper that way than buying for the kids you see Now let me explain why we did that. We are going to buy a risograph [a copier] ... Now to have a risograph, obviously you need to have these nice pictures and nice books and more interesting things. So a teacher must build up a sort of a project or a module, and you must have the resources for that. So we are going to have all those things here for the teacher. (Interview, August 11, 1997, p. 33)

His words lend support to Beswick's distinction between resource-based *teaching*, in which teachers retain control of the learning experience, and resource-based *learning*.

Widening the Focus: Conceptions of Teaching at Galant Primary

To make sense of the "unruly experience" of the field study, further exploration of how teachers "make sense of, adjust to, and create the educational environment" (Pope, 1993, p. 22) at Galant is needed.

Three themes or refrains run like threads through the complex "web of meanings" (Harvey & Myers, 1995, p. 17) of the interviews and observations of the field study. These are:

- "We know 'our people'";
- "We are social workers here";
- "We're doing it already."

Constructivist research (Pope, 1993) has revealed the significance for innovation of teachers' "personal constructs" --deeply held assumptions rooted in personal, historical, and environmental factors. The grade 7 teachers see new ideas, for example, continuous assessment or projects, through what D. Pratt (1992) calls the "lenses" of their own conceptions of what teaching and learning are.

"Our people": Paradys-Enclave or Ghetto?

The isolation of the school, arising from its geography and its surrounding poverty and crime, seems to have engendered a sense of camaraderie among the teachers. Their talk is laced with references to "our people." For example, "We know how to do things here-because we know our people-they know us and we know them" (grade 1 teacher, field notes, July 21, 1997).

The principal and deputy-principal like to portray Paradys as a closely knit community protective of the school: "I can leave the door of my car open-they know I'm a teacher at the school and will leave me alone" (Mr. Moosa, July 21, 1997).

An incident a few weeks into the field study contradicts their optimism. After an outbreak of shooting in which a young child in a nearby school was killed, the school, after much debate in the staffroom, took part in a march protesting against gangsterism. The next morning, eight large young men arrived at the school gate and hung around all morning. The continual break-ins-there were five in the course of the fieldwork-might also throw doubt on the optimism of the school staff.

"We are social workers here": Conceptions of Teaching at Galant

At our first meeting on July 16, Mr. Olifant told me, "We are social workers here." In the weeks that followed "teacher as social worker" came to encapsulate for me the Galant teachers' conception of their job.

Ms. Abrahams, for example, felt uncomfortable in her first job in a more affluent school because they didn't *need* her and kept nagging the principal of Galant until he offered her a job. There is, at times, an almost missionary zeal to their words. For example, "He [the principal who had interviewed him for the job] said, '*jy is gelei deur God om hier te wees*' [you are led by God to be here], and when I came to the school I could see what he meant.... Paradys is like the outcast" (Mr. Olifant, interview, August 11, 1997, p. 6).

The teachers' conceptions of their role clearly affect their teaching choices. Typical of their comments are the following: "Our children won't be lawyers or doctors. We need to educate them for their reality. Bright children will rise to the top anyway. We are different, we cater for the others" (Mr. Olifant, field notes, July 21, 1997).

Ms. Abrahams, though herself brought up in Paradys, believes that new approaches will not work with township children as they "are different":

Forget what you have been taught at college and take the child the way he is now ... The children don't need it [what she was taught at college]. Maybe it will work in a more affluent school but not here in our townships. Children from townships are different-you can't get away from it. (Interview, August 5, 1997, p.9)

Ms. Oliver, the remedial teacher, makes explicit how attitudes to the community are intertwined with attitudes to teaching. She suggests that the teachers' attitudes lead them to neglect the processes of learning:

I think it is more that the teachers feel sorry for the children, where they come from, and they sort of want to give-to let the child feel good about himself or to feel happy-because we know what the set-up is at home. With the result we

don't really go into what is going on in the child's mind. (Interview, September 16, 1997, p. 11)

The constant provisos linked to new ideas that they will not work with "our kids" are a warning that that any new program at Galant will need to convince teachers that it is relevant to the needs of their pupils as they perceive them.

"We are doing it already": Galant and Educational Change

The isolation of Galant Primary, referred to above, is perhaps reflected in a sense of alienation from the front of educational change. The teachers portray Education Department officials as head-office bureaucrats out of touch with the classroom reality:

Somebody comes with an idea, I don't know who. Somebody from the top says, "Listen here, we are going to change the system now to theme work," which is all they say. They don't say, "Listen here, this is the way to do it." (Mr. Moosa, interview, August 12, 1997, p. 21)

At the end of the day you got a child that is supposed to go out in this world. That is your main aim, not what Bengu [Minister of Education] says about this or Zuma [the Minister of Health] says about that. That is not important. You are working with the raw material and only you know that person. (Ms. Abrahams, interview, August 5, 1997, p. 16)

It is hard to reconcile the teachers' anger with their frequently expressed belief that they are already undertaking many of the changes recommended in the new curriculum. These claims were so persistent that they became a data category in the field notes: "already doing it." Mr. Moosa, for example, sees nothing new in Curriculum 2005 and claims that the challenges of working in a disadvantaged school have put Galant teachers at an advantage. They have had to be resourceful:

To me the method of teaching [outcomes-based] has been there all the time. To me it's not news. That's why I feel that [Curriculum] 2005 will work much better in a school that hasn't had all the facilities The reason I say so is because you as a teacher have been more creative-and improvising more than the one that had the machine ... Now we didn't have it, we don't have enough paper so I have to create something to keep my children busy To me 2005 is just a label. Whoever wants to take credit for it, he can take credit, I don't mind. (Mr. Moosa, interview, August 12, 1997, p. 6)

Meyer and Newton's study (1992) of the implementation of resource-based learning in some Canadian schools finds similarly that some teachers claim always to have done resource-based teaching when clearly they have not. They attribute this phenomenon to a basic misunderstanding of the concept. An additional factor at Galant could be the extraordinary pressures that confront the Galant teachers: for example, a new curriculum, new teach-

ing methods, new governance structures, new discipline rules, and staff cutbacks.

Teachers' Information Literacy

One of the fundamental assumptions of the field study was that teachers' personal information literacy is crucial to effective project work and to the development of information literacy programs, perhaps especially in disadvantaged schools which, on the whole, do not have qualified librarians. What, then, are the implications of the prevailing conceptions of teaching and learning at Galant Primary for information literacy?

The teachers' beliefs about learning are revealed to be connected to their attitudes toward information. As discussed above, teachers at Galant see learning in terms of Paulo Freire's banking model: something they give to their students. Similarly, information is not seen as a constructive process, but as something, an entity, that they have to give.

Attitudes to the community and the influence of Mr. Olifant's own background might explain his dismissal of the local community as a potential learning and information resource. Thus

You have to give them a lot of info first, especially our kids. Because our kids are located in this area where there is actually no information So that when we want something from them, we can know that we are going to get something out, because you have given them information, you. You will find out if you ask them to write a composition about, say, a visit to the doctor, they can tell you about the day hospital only. We expect a private hospital or private doctor. (Mr. Olifant, interview, August 11, 1988, p. 13)

A section in the teachers' first interview protocol attempts to investigate more directly their information literacy by measuring use of teaching and learning resources and exploring the factors that influence their use. The responses confirm the classroom observations that few resources are used. Personal contacts-relations and teachers in other schools-are the most frequently used sources, mostly for loans of worksheet material. The only outside source mentioned is the public library, although all agree that the gangs have made the nearest library in Hilltop out of bounds to Paradys children.

The school "library" of about 1,000 books, originally in a small storeroom off a classroom, has been locked up since 1996. The school has received no new books for the past 10 years. Mr. Moosa often hints at conflict between him and the "librarian," Ms. King. She is angry at the erosion of her position as librarian since 1993. Staff cutbacks have meant that she has had to take on more and more subject teaching. She admits (interview, August 18, 1997) that she has lost interest in re-establishing the library, especially as she gets no support from her colleagues.

The Galant teachers make no use of the many potentially useful information sources of the city, not even the Western Cape Education Department's teachers' library. They know that they exist, but do not see them as sources of useful information. Several factors might be responsible, for example, the geographic and psychological isolation of the school discussed above and the fact that the old curriculum was textbook-based. The analysis of the two projects has pointed to another fact of the teachers' conceptions of learning and teaching. That this is the key factor is lent support by other qualitative studies in Canada (Meyer & Newton, 1992), Australia (Phillips, 1988), and the UK (Thomson & Meek, 1986) that uncover the interdependence of teaching style and information literacy. As Brown (1988) puts it, "to ask teachers to change the materials they use for teaching, and the teaching approaches they use, is to require a change in their basic beliefs about how students learn" (p. 13).

The assertion here is that there are resources within and outside the school, but they are not exploited because the teachers' conceptions of learning do not allow them to recognize the need for a wide variety of information and learning resources.

Reflections on the Galant Case Study: Its Implications for Information Literacy Education

I list the key findings of the exploratory field study in the form of five assertions:

- teachers' conceptions of teaching are crucial to information literacy education;
- stand-alone information skills programs should be considered;
- reading abilities require urgent attention;
- effective teacher development programs are needed;
- the value of the qualitative approach is confirmed.

Conceptions of teaching are crucial for information literacy education. There has been some comment (Flanagan, 1991; Walker, 1991) on the failure of teacher training in South Africa to empower teachers to reflect on their practices. It is significant that the Galant teachers struggle to answer the questions in the first interview protocol on their teaching methods and views of learning. They are not equipped to see teaching in terms of choices from alternative techniques, each of which will have an impact on their pupils' learning. Several international studies (Laursen, 1996) have similarly found that teachers lack awareness of learning processes, perhaps because of the emphasis on content and subjects in teacher training.

The field study finds that it cannot be assumed that projects, as they are undertaken in our schools, provide a climate suitable for information literacy education. Their value as vehicles for information literacy depends on the teachers who manage them. This study lends support to Cordon's (1996) finding that there needs to be consonance between projects and "ordinary"

classroom approaches. The philosophical basis of good projects—a belief that the best learning comes when children construct it themselves—is as important as the classroom management issues. The study suggests that the conceptions of teaching of the Galant teachers are influenced by their attitudes to the surrounding community, their training, their historical situation, their feelings of isolation, and their perceptions that they lack resources. And their perceptions serve as filters as they interpret educational concepts such as *projects, themes, learning, and information*.

A stand-alone information skills program education has to be considered. If the only way to teach information literacy is to make it part of subject teaching via projects and portfolios, then the study at Galant is bad news for information literacy education. However, there have been suggestions that the widespread belief that information skills have to be integrated at all costs is based on conventional wisdom rather than empirical evidence. Chris Pratt (1991) suggests that, in environments where resource-based learning is not the norm, as in his own college, structured courses might be a sensible strategy. A close look needs to be taken at the research into the effectiveness of general study skills courses. Bruer's (1993) review of such research concludes that “general” skills teaching (as opposed to domain-specific) can succeed if children are taught explicitly the metacognitive skills not only of knowing what learning strategies to use, but also *when* and *why* to use them. The maligned traditional library skills courses perhaps fail for the same reason as do other general skills courses, because they overestimate students' ability to generalize from one learning situation to another. The study at Galant suggests that a structured stand-alone information skills program might be the path to follow in the next few years of educational transition. The implications here are that the information skills program of Curriculum 2005, which is at present a skeleton program, urgently requires expansion and promotion and that innovative teacher-friendly learning materials must be developed.

Reading abilities of the students require urgent attention. In my observation of the grade 7 projects, I speculated that poor reading abilities are hampering learning. Rote copying has been found to stem from shallow comprehension of information in a text (Bertland, 1986). Both Ms. Abrahams and Mr. Olifant agree that there is a problem, but neither seems willing to address it in their language lessons. Mr. Barry, the grade 4 teacher, estimates that 75% of his class have reading problems. They are unable, he says, *to distinguish between what is important and what is not.* Like Mr. Olifant, he believes that the solution to their problems is to give the pupils short sentences and passages in worksheets rather than books.

Earlier this year, READ Educational Trust (1998), a South African NGO, warned that the reading level of rural grade 8 South African children is so low that they are unable to access the information in their textbooks (1998). The study at Galant Primary might indicate that the problem is not confined

to rural South Africa. The school urgently needs to consider the reading interventions of organizations like READ, which have shown that book-based programs can dramatically improve reading within a short time.

The policy at Galant not to provide each child with the same textbook but to buy several titles initially sounds promising for information literacy. However, at Galant the children are not to be allowed direct access to the new books. Mr. Olifant's classes show that worksheets need not be any more imaginative than a textbook and indeed might hinder the acquisition of reading and information skills.

Effective teacher development programs are urgently needed. Neither Ms. Abrahams' nor Mr. Olifant's preservice training included project work. The gap between the grade 7 teachers' intellectual understanding of the purposes of project work and the reality of their classrooms underlines Wray's (1985) warning that the integrated approach to teaching information skills puts great demands on the teacher.

The Galant experience supports Fullan's (1991) conclusion that one-off workshops, although widespread in teacher development, are ineffective. The Galant teachers' responses to the departmental workshop on projects and to the Kirstenbosch workshop reveal how new ideas can be distorted when they are not really understood. The information skills specialist of the Western Cape Education Department, responsible for the Galant circuit of schools, has 400 schools under her wing and is booked up for months at a time with one-off visits to schools (personal communication, April 22, 1998). Careful thought needs to be given to an inservice training program that encourages teachers to reflect on their practices and philosophies and that, above all, provides ongoing support for them as they experiment and adapt. This points to a role for other stakeholders, for example, my own Department of Library and Information Science at the University of the Western Cape.

The field study confirms the value of ethnography. The strength of the qualitative methodology—the combination of in-depth interviewing and fairly long-term observation—is that it uncovers contradictions and disparities. These in turn point to the deeply held assumptions the teachers have about learning and teaching. Any new program can surely succeed only if it starts "where the teachers are." I have built here a unique picture of one school that is, after all, the point of a case study. However, this picture also raises pertinent questions relating to project work in disadvantaged schools and so forms a framework for the design of the next phase of the research study: the broader survey of the other primary schools of the circuit.

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