Exploring the Viability of School-Based Support for Vulnerable Children: A Case Study of Two Township Schools in Johannesburg

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Contents

Acronyms

CBO	Community-Based Organisation
CFS	Child Friendly Schools
CI	Children's Institute
COS	Circles of Support
CSG	Child Support Grant
EFA	Education for All
EPU	Education Policy Unit – University of the Witwatersrand
HDA	Health and Development Africa
HSRC	Human Sciences Research Council
MiET	Media in Education Trust
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
NMCF	Nelson Mandela Children's Fund
SASA	South African Schools Act of 1996
SBST	School-Based Support Team
SGB	School Governing Body
SNOC	Schools as Nodes of Caring
UNICEF	United Nation's Children Fund
UPE	Universal Primary Education

Acknowledgements

Preface

In this research monograph which is part of the CREATE Pathways to Access series, Samantha Williams explores the viability of school based support for vulnerable children through a case study of two township schools in Johannesburg, Gauteng Province, South Africa.

One of the features of post apartheid schooling in South Africa is that the legacy of the past continues to pervade all aspects of the ethos of public schooling. Schools continue to illustrate problems in the broader society. This includes an increasing number of children who come from single parent households in many instances having lost a parent to HIV and AIDS, families where unemployment continues to be a feature and where poverty is ever present. In this context, schools provide an important space both as centres of learning and channels through it essential services are provided for children. Schools in rural and township areas face the dual burden of fewer resources and closer proximity to the country's social problems.

This monograph makes an important contribution to the discussion on how to transform schools into caring schools which emphasise health promotion, safety, care for orphans and vulnerable children, quality education, community engagement and respects for rights and equality. Using a qualitative approach, the research explores the degree to which the caring schools philosophy can be translated into practice. The findings are revealing, suggesting that while most educators accepted the caring schools philosophy, they doubted that their schools could serve such a function at present. Some of the main shortcomings in schools included teacher overload, inefficient governing bodies and inadequate training and funding to deal with learners psycho-social issues. This monograph provides a useful and in-depth discussion of schools within a social development framework.

Professor Shireen Motala
University of Johannesburg
CREATE South Africa Project Leader

Summary

The South African Department of Education is working with multiple non-governmental organisations (NGOs) to transform schools into "caring schools" that emphasise: health promotion, safety, care for orphans and vulnerable children, quality education, community engagement and respect for rights and equality. Using a qualitative case study of a primary school and a secondary school in a Johannesburg township, as well as a review of caring school models currently operating in South Africa, this research explores the degree to which the caring school philosophy can be translated into practice. Findings suggest that educators accept the caring schools theory; however, most doubted that their schools could serve such a function at present. Educators named entrenched obstacles such as teacher burden, over-sized classes, inefficient governing bodies and support teams, and inadequate training and funding to deal with learners' psychosocial issues as the main shortcomings in their schools. This research illuminates the realities of transforming schools into sites for children's services, while contributing to the debate about the function of schools in social development programming.

Exploring the Viability of School-Based Support for Vulnerable Children: A Case Study of Two Township Schools in Johannesburg[1]

1. Introduction

Does the school have a role to play in tackling the social issues present in the lives of vulnerable children? Policy and practice across the globe over the past five to ten years have increasingly suggested that the answer to this is "yes." In southern Africa, the rise of HIV/AIDS has contributed to mounting concern for how traditional safety nets (family and community-based) can keep up with the demand for care for children. In light of this concern, schools are receiving greater attention as potential sites to remedy this perceived decline in family and community-based support. However, schools in rural and township areas face the dual burden of fewer resources and closer proximity to the country's social problems.

As such, many practitioners and policymakers have made great efforts to develop schools' unique capability to serve as hubs for children's services. In 1999, the South African minister of education said that:

> The crisis in primary and secondary schools must be dealt with by ensuring that schools become the centres of community life (Asmal, 1999).

At the Southern African Ministers of Education Conference in 2005, all of the attending ministers, South Africa's included:

> … committed themselves to taking the necessary measures to strengthen their educational systems through making schools viable as both centres of learning and channels through which essential services are provided for children (UNICEF, 2005).

The prevailing rationale is that schools are by far the government service most accessible to the majority of children across the country. In 2003, South Africa had roughly 28,000 schools that served 11.5 million children (Giese *et al*, 2003:23). Education for All (EFA), a global initiative to support the Millennium Development Goal of Universal Primary Education (UPE), has also helped to swell attendance rosters by pressuring governments to meet international targets.

The policy-push has led to the development of various models for creating this particular type of service-oriented school, referred to in this paper as the "caring schools movement." Diverse organisations such as UNICEF, Save the Children, and the Children's Institute at the University of Cape Town each support different models that seek to install, support or streamline a "caring function" within schools, particularly in poor rural and township areas. The models embrace similar goals for any school seeking to be a "caring school"[2], goals that emphasise the health, safety and psychosocial well being of all learners. For most models, this means improving school security, remaining committed to child rights, increasing children's access to healthcare, and solidifying linkages with government and community resources. Organisations and schools go about fulfilling these goals through standard interventions like boosting the school feeding programme and helping children secure

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[1] This monograph is adapted from a master's thesis that was submitted and approved by the University of the Witwatersrand in Johannesburg, South Africa.

[2] The term "caring schools" will be used interchangeably to describe the type of school that embraces a caring function. Use of the term, therefore, will not be limited to describing the Caring Schools Project, which is supported by Save the Children UK and the Nelson Mandela Children's Fund.

identity documents and social grants, and through more time-consuming practices such as bringing in community volunteers. Organisations and schools discussing the general aims of the movement use many of the models' names (caring schools, circles of support) widely and somewhat interchangeably.

However, these models are often concentrated around target sites that can be evaluated and monitored, as a great deal of funding, collaboration and coordination goes into their creation. Schools outside of the reach of these models are still grappling to teach children dealing with a wide array of social issues, but without the benefit of a clear model or funding structure. Many schools in South Africa that have been studied by the Children's Institute are coming up with their own ways of helping children, often out of personal funds and other unsustainable sources (Giese *et al*, 2003).

1.1 Can township schools reasonably serve this caring function?

As civil society, government and community elements place greater pressure on township schools to link vulnerable children to community resources (while also providing services of their own), much more examination into the ability of schools to manage this function is needed. For many township schools, fulfilling these expectations will expand their existing portfolios far beyond their current depth and breadth, perhaps to the point of either collapse or paralysation. Therefore, while seeking to understand how schools serve the most vulnerable children, it is necessary to evaluate the wisdom of allotting too much of this responsibility to the schools in the first place.

Research for this paper attempted to understand how two township schools presently provide services, as well as how capable they are of adopting a fully caring function and thus improving all-around social welfare for the most vulnerable children. For the purposes of this research, vulnerability was loosely understood by the researcher and respondents as similar to Smart's (2003) definition, derived from community-based research in South Africa. According to this definition, a vulnerable child:

- is orphaned, neglected, destitute, or abandoned;
- has a terminally ill parent or guardian;
- is born of a teenage or single mother;
- is living with a parent or an adult who lacks income-generating opportunities;
- is abused or ill-treated by a step-parent or relatives;
- is disabled

(Smart, 2003:6).

In the South African context, children defined as vulnerable by this definition are often enrolled in school but at risk of low attainment, poor attendance and dropping out of school. In CREATE's conceptual model, highlighting 'zones of exclusion', these children are referred to as being in zone 3; see Lewin (2007) for more details. Given that South Africa has very high levels of school enrolment (96% on average), it is incredibly relevant to understand how schools provide services for this large subset of children (Proudlock et al, 2008:74). Current levels of service provision were determined through interview and survey data collected from teachers and administrators, as well as through observations conducted inside the school.

Conventional notions of poorly performing schools contend that township schools — particularly ones with limited capacity to serve the primary function of teaching — will obviously struggle to perform any other services whilst the main purpose of the school remains unfulfilled. However, it is within precisely these types of schools that the caring schools models are hoping to make a difference. This report highlights the central challenges that such models will need to overcome in order to be successful in struggling schools.

1.2 Johannesburg's East Rand townships

Katlehong is a township of Germiston, an industrial powerhouse located in Johannesburg's East Rand. It is situated near two other large townships, Thokoza and Vosloorus, which together form the area known as Kathorus. Modern-day Katlehong is an apartheid-era township; the government began moving a previous township's residents and squatters into Katlehong in the 1950s (Bonner, 2000:193).

The Kathorus area became heavily populated during the mid-20th century by workers from Germiston's booming manufacturing industry (Barolsky, 2005:20). Population density in the Kathorus area was further compacted by the slow relaxation of influx laws during the 1980s. As more and more migrants moved into the industrial areas and sought accommodation in the townships:

> … the influx of residents combined with the failure of the state to provide adequate resources to meet the needs of the growing urban population led to severe congestion, deteriorating social conditions and inevitably increased social tensions (Barolsky, 2005:22).

The pattern of migration into Kathorus continued well into the late 20th century (Barolsky, 2005:21). According to the Katlehong Resource Centre's website, today Katlehong has about 1.2 million residents, and is divided into approximately 33 sections (Katlehong Resource Centre). There are six informal settlements around Katlehong, one of which is the home of the primary school studied in this report. Today, the townships of Kathorus are part of the Ekurhuleni Metropolitan Municipality, which produces 23% of Gauteng's GDP and is home to over 3.5 million people—with over a million people living in informal settlements (Ekurhuleni Metropolitan Police Department in Barolsky, 2005:24).

Given its history of overcrowding, poor service delivery and violence, it is no surprise that service delivery in Katlehong today remains substandard. According to a 2003 survey conducted in the Ekurhuleni Municipality:

> In the formal townships of Katlehong and Thokoza, 1% of households lack piped water, 5.3% of household lack electricity, 10.7% of households reported a lack of sanitation and 5.3% lacked solid waste removal services. The situation in the informal settlement of Daveyton/Chris Hani, is considerably more severe with 25.7% of households reporting a lack of piped water, 48.6% without electricity, 48.6% without sanitation and 25.7% without solid waste removal (Barolsky, 2005:26).

The informal settlement where Khayalethu Primary School[3] is located is reflective of this data. Schools in Katlehong tend to mirror the township's challenging history, and both

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[3] The names of the school and the specific informal settlement in Katlehong have been changed in line with the ethics agreement signed by participants.

Khayalethu Primary School and Mandela Secondary School (the high school studied) are no different. Khayalethu is a Quintile 1 school, which means that it is classified as being one of the poorest schools in the country, while Mandela is a Quintile 2 school. The Quintile system ranks schools from Quintile 1 (Q1) to Quintile 5 (Q5), with Q1 being the poorest and Q5 the least poor. In 2008, more than 50% of enrolled children came from economically disadvantaged homes in 80.6% of Quintile 1 schools and in 86.9% of Quintile 2 schools (Chutgar and Kanjee, 2009:19).

Because of their Q1 and Q2 status, both schools are no-fee paying schools. Under the original provisions of the South African Schools Act of 1996 (SASA), school governing bodies were to be introduced in all schools, and these bodies had the right to decide upon and enforce the payment of a set school fee (Sayed and Motala, 2009:2). Under SASA, families that could not pay the fee were able to apply for an exemption. However, the Norms and Standards document of 2006 amended this provision, making all Q1 and Q2 schools eligible to apply to be no-fee paying schools. Each school is assigned a "poverty score", which is created by assessing "income, unemployment rates and the level of education of the community, which are weighted to assign a poverty score for the community and the school" (Sayed and Motala, 2009:3). This score defines the school's Quintile ranking.

The poverty of the community contributes to the need to make schools in Katlehong caring schools, but also to the potential limitations of successfully installing caring programmes. In schools where far more children (often from economically deprived backgrounds) enrol than the school receives funding for, the gap between government funding and the school's needs could potentially be closed with community support and contributions; however, data collected from the educators at both schools said that this practice was very limited.

1.3 Site selection

I reached out to the University of the Witwatersrand Education Policy Unit (EPU) to explore options for school sites. The EPU was involved in a research initiative in East Rand schools as part of a multi-country study of educational access. After visiting 6-7 schools in August 2008 with researchers from the Education Policy Unit (EPU) at the University of the Witwatersrand, I selected Khayalethu Primary School and Mandela Secondary School by means of purposeful sampling. Of the schools visited with the EPU team, these schools had the most to offer in terms of conditions that could inform the research objectives, along with high levels of principal cooperation. They both had a high self-reported proportion of children affected by poverty, and were based in resource-scarce areas of Katlehong. Khayalethu is situated in an informal settlement by the same name on the far outskirts of Katlehong. Mandela is in the middle of Katlehong, and has a local reputation for being a "dustbin" school (a school that is so bad that parents are effectively "throwing" their children into the dustbin if they make them attend the school). Both schools represent other Quintile 1 and Quintile 2 township schools that are buckling under the challenges posed by enrolling so many vulnerable children. Like so many other schools in similar locations, they also lack the proper internal resources to use school, community and government resources needed to implement a complete caring schools framework.

One secondary school and one primary school were chosen in order to compare the differences in social service provision once Universal Primary Education and the increased emphasis on early childhood education (encouraged by the Children's Amendment Act) are no longer factors. Given these frameworks, one would expect that more services are aimed at younger children. I found this to be accurate; feeding schemes, uniform donations and greater

awareness of social issues in the learners' homes were found to characterise the primary school, while the secondary school struggled to coherently address the social issues the learners were dealing with.

1.4 Research methods

Research at Khayalethu Primary School was conducted between August and November 2008. While preliminary research was conducted at Mandela Secondary School during the same period, the bulk of the interview data there was obtained in March 2009. The target population for interviewing and surveying was the teaching and senior administrative staff. As a variety of qualitative data was needed to uncover the interactions and dynamics of a school that is struggling to provide services for vulnerable children, participant observation, surveys, and semi-structured in-depth interviews were utilised for this research.

Additionally, I conducted a desktop review of the relevant programmatic literature on caring schools models in order to provide the background on the various models in existence and the ways in which township schools might utilise the key tenets of these models. To supplement this review, interviews were conducted with several NGO representatives from CASNET (the Caring Schools Network), including UNICEF, Save the Children UK, and Health and Development Africa, as well as the head social worker from the local customer service centre. These interviews provided perspective on how the caring schools model works from the viewpoint of practitioners, as well as a look at the implications of the movement for ordinary schools.

1.5 Data collection and analysis

Participant observation methods included observing a school assembly, making classroom visits, and travelling to work with teachers via minibus taxis and carpools. Notes were taken during the participant-observation visits where appropriate, such as while sitting in a class or waiting in the school's lobby. A survey was distributed to all teachers in order to establish educators' perceptions of their roles as service providers in light of the belief that they should be held accountable only for classroom duties. Twelve open and closed-ended questions were listed on the survey, with six closed-ended, "yes or no" questions that asked for further explanation depending on the answer given. Where these explanations fit with the themes derived from the data analysis, they are cited as quotations throughout the findings section. The answers were sorted using a spreadsheet to yield total percentages of "yes" and "no" answers to each question. 36 out of 49 teachers returned surveys at the primary school, while only thirteen of the surveys at the secondary school were returned.

At the primary school, 14 teacher representatives from different grade levels and the school principal were interviewed using a semi-structured interview format. The teacher interviews were conducted for about an hour in groups of four to five, while the principal interview was an individual, hour-long interview. At the secondary school, the three primary contacts were interviewed twice: an educator, a member of the School-Based Support Team (SBST), and the school principal. The original interviews lasted for an hour or more, and the second interviews ranged from 30 minutes to an hour. Three more teachers were interviewed individually and as a group, with those interviews lasting more than an hour.

The interview responses were coded using thematic content analysis. They were transcribed and then analysed for recurrent themes, and were initially loosely categorised. After re-reading all of the interviews to become even more familiar with the data set, the responses

were filed under 32 categories. Conclusions and key findings were drawn by reviewing and further cataloguing the consistent themes in each of the 32 categories.

Data for this report was gathered as accurately as possible. Careful attention was paid to duplication of the survey results, which would have led to false representation of the teachers' opinions on their schools' ability to serve a caring function. My non-South African status did not prove to be a hindrance, but instead allowed me greater access into the school. Because I was treated as a novelty, most educators were willing to give up their time to help me to better understand the school's dynamics.

2. Conceptual Framework and Literature Review

While there are plenty of models and papers promoting new ways to integrate children's services into the function of the school, there is a general lack of theoretical information concerning the role of schools in safety nets for children in Africa. Many authors conclude that schools must function as social service providers, yet this is not deeply rooted in the literature. Others advocate a renewed academic debate about the function of schools, given the potential implications for this departure from traditional schooling towards a more social service-friendly school (Kendall, 2007; UNICEF, 2005). This section examines the context in which the caring schools movement took off. Then, it explores research on the purpose of education, as well as examples of how the caring function is expected to be undertaken in schools, the traditional organisation of the caring function in African societies, and other forms of school-community collaboration.

2.1 Government initiatives affecting care in schools

In South Africa, efforts to create linked and inter-sectoral support structures for children have been underway since the mid-1990s. One of the earliest government edicts concerning service provision in schools was the Tirisano Plan (Tirisano meaning "working together"), delivered in 1999 by then Minister of Education Kader Asmal. The third priority of the Tirisano plan instructed schools to "become centres of community life" (Asmal, 1999). Implementation of the plan was not without setbacks, though. Ursula Hoadley wrote that the plan suffered due to "national and provincial departments' lack of access to the expertise of such people as planners, demographers, economists, sociologists, anthropologists and care workers" (Hoadley, 2008:139). Lack of resources at the provincial level in particular is noted as a significant barrier to improving the social functioning of schools (Sayed and Motala, 2009).

The Children's Bill of 2002 called for the minister of social development to create a national framework that would bind all government organs (as well as all organisations working with governmental assistance) to an inter-sectoral plan of action for child protection and welfare (Matthias, 2005:755-56). Particular emphasis was placed on improving services aimed at prevention and early detection, as opposed to triage later in a child's life. South Africa lacked the requisite cadre of social service professionals needed to implement the plan, so the plan relied instead on "child and youth-care workers, community development workers, primary health-care workers and teachers …" (Matthias, 2005:757).

Another document adding credence to the caring function of schools was *Education White Paper 6 on Special Needs Education: Building an Inclusive Education and Training System.* This document provided a full statement on special needs education, which had been missing from the original Tirisano plan. The White Paper brought services for vulnerable children into focus by listing psychosocial disturbances and socioeconomic deprivation amongst its catalogue of "different learning needs" (Hoadley, 2008:138). It became a crucial document for advocates of the caring schools movement because it mandated the creation of a School-Based Support Team (SBST) for every school.

The creation of the SBST placed schools in charge of identifying and helping vulnerable learners in a way that they previously had not been tasked to do. For learners from precarious home situations, the new SBST would be the first port of call in the school building. However, many SBSTs struggle to pull together a cogent response to the overwhelming

number of needy children, and teachers find themselves trying to fashion ad-hoc solutions to the problems presented by their learners. This was evident at the two schools studied.

The *Norms and Standards for Educators* document addresses the role of educators in caring for vulnerable children. This document specifically places social care in the hands of educators—a term that is used to loosely group teachers, principals and even education department managers and officials (Department of Education, 2000). One of the more problematic documents for individuals and organisations advocating reduced teacher workload, the *Norms and Standards* can be construed as asking teachers to serve children in roles that are ideally filled by social workers, community practitioners and other specialists. Morrow said that the document "inflates the work of teachers beyond the capacity of all but the exceptionally talented and obsessively committed" (2007:96).

2.2 The Caring Schools Movement

According to Lynette Mudekunye of Save the Children, UK:

> One of your strongest institutions within a community is a school, and a school is an institution focused on children. So, if you're wanting to provide care, support and protection for children, it's stupid not to work with a school.

The caring schools movement takes this to heart. The many models encompassing this group must be included in any report on the state of care within schools, as many principals — even those not adopting these models — are increasingly expected to provide similar benefits to their students. Here is a brief overview of the most researched caring schools models in place in southern Africa today. While the models are similar in their goals and desired outcomes, each approaches the provision of care in schools from varying perspectives, and with a range of different interventions and resources.

CASNET

The Caring Schools Network, or CASNET, is a grouping of over thirty like-minded NGOs that organise and advocate for caring schools. Save the Children UK co-ordinates and funds CASNET, and they also created the "flower" model that represents an ideal caring school. The "flower" model has seven "leaves" that stem from a base of child participation: relationships, good governance and leadership, human and child rights, inter-sectoral partnerships, effective and creative teaching and learning, wellness and safety, and infrastructure and services (CASNET, 2008).

Caring Schools

The Caring Schools Project, launched in 25 schools in the Free State, encourages: a nice physical school building; social and emotional support; skills development; social service delivery; and linkages with community programmes (Caring Schools Dialogue, 2007). This model is funded by NMCF and Save the Children UK, and is supported by local NGOs, CBOs, and the provincial and national Departments of Education and Social Development. The overall goal of the programme is to help the school "channel sustainable physical, social and emotional care to orphans and vulnerable children" (Caring Schools, 2007). Save the Children UK has identified hunger and psychosocial support as the most immediate needs schools must fill for children.

UNICEF's Child-Friendly Schools

The child-friendly schools framework emphasises collaborations and linkages to civil society organisations, as well as educator training to provide skills to facilitate this expanded role. A child-friendly school should "act in the best interests of the child…and [be] concerned about the 'whole' child and about what happens to children — in their families and communities — before they enter school and after they leave it" (UNICEF, 2008). According to the framework, a child-friendly school should be: inclusive, effective, safe and protective, equity and equality promoting, health promoting, and focused on building community linkages and partnerships (Mannathoko, 2006:4). In South Africa, the CFS framework targets the 585 lowest performing schools in the country. Through UNICEF, these schools are connected to the resources needed to implement the framework.

Soul City: Schools as Nodes of Caring

The Soul City Schools as Nodes of Caring (SNOC) model is a multi-year initiative joining the efforts of the National Association of School Governing Bodies, the South African Democratic Teachers Union, South African Non-Governmental Organisation's Coalition and the Alliance for Children's Entitlement to Social Security (Soul City: IHDC, 2006:3). The SNOC initiative focuses on "building the capacity of school governing bodies (SGBs) to provide leadership in creating a caring and supportive learning environment for learners rendered vulnerable by HIV and AIDS" (Bialobrzeska, 2007:18). Soul City commissioned a study of six schools to determine how schools successfully implement HIV/AIDS programming; they also created a guide for SGB members and conducted training for using the guide (Bialobrzeska, 2007:20).

Children's Institute: Caring School Communities and Nodes of Support

The Children's Institute defines a caring school as a site that works to include and assist the most vulnerable children in the community. The Institute held a roundtable discussion on how to build these communities, which culminated in the idea of schools as "nodes of care and support" (Giese *et al*, 2003). However, the report expressed several hesitations, including unwillingness to further burden educators, and uncertainty as to whether or not the Department of Education would endorse and sustain such an expansion of the role of schools. This shows that despite government support of the idea, widespread practice is limited.

Media in Education Trust: Schools as Centres of Care and Support

The Media in Education Trust (MiET) model targets a broad range of issues within schools, including HIV/AIDS, health and nutrition. This model is based on the hope that "by expanding the roles and functions of the principal, teachers, learners and parents, the impact of HIV and AIDS can be mitigated" (Bialobrzeska, 2007:22). The strength of this programme is the cluster system, in which several schools band together and work with community service providers to meet the needs of vulnerable children. The "Integrated Service Delivery Teams" that support the clusters consist of "health-care workers, a learning support worker, a community development worker and a councillor" (UNESCO, 2008:23). Additionally, the schools establish care teams of parents and teachers (Bialobrzeska, 2007:21).

Health and Development Africa: Circles of Support

The Circles of Support (COS) programme is a multi-sectoral, multi-country plan for schools. In South Africa, Health and Development Africa (HDA) worked in the Eastern Cape with the provincial department of education to implement the programme in 100 schools. The COS model created clusters of schools that implemented Health Advisory Committees to work with the SGB on bringing health related interventions into the school, and utilised school-based caregivers to make referrals and link children to services (Eastern Cape DoE, 2008). In Botswana, Namibia and Swaziland, HDA coordinated the initiative to bring in volunteer teachers and community members to "identify and support orphans and other vulnerable children" (SADC, 2007:6).

2.3 Academic role of schools

The historical and core role of the school is as an institution of teaching and learning. This immediately problematises the notion of "caring schools," as much of the "caring" will have to be done by teachers who should arguably focus more on teaching than serving as ad hoc social workers. Much education literature today focuses heavily on the academic challenges facing modern schools. Blank and Berg observed that in the education environment today:

> … there is little question that the primary emphasis is on the cognitive domain. Efforts to address … the needs of the whole child … are diminished (Blank and Berg, 2006).

In a World Bank report on educational change in South Africa from 1994 to 2003, the authors devoted the report to the academic changes in the country, with little to no mention of social policy changes in education (Jansen & Taylor, 2003).

Even under the context of Education for All, targets for policymakers are usually related to academic benchmarks and not to community and social goals. Bjorn Nordveit lamented the failure to situate EFA benchmarks in the greater context of poverty alleviation (Nordviet, 2008). Nancy Kendall noted this inattention to school-community interactions in the literature, especially as the debate over quality vs. quantity (EFA targets increase enrolment, sometimes without increasing quality) figures so highly in the academic domain (Kendall, 2007). Other deficiencies in the literature include a lack of exploration of school-based inputs in African schools and lack of understanding concerning the daily workings of schools (Kendall, 2007).

Where social services in schools do arise in academic literature, it is often in relation to the backlash and controversy surrounding the expanded roles of schools. Robert Heslep noted that in the United States from the 19th to the mid-20th century, education focused heavily on "academic subjects, citizenship, and culture" (Heslep, 1995). This was followed first by an increase in non-academic instruction, which was then preceded by outright social service programming. Noel Epstein (2004) suggested that while policymakers focus heavily on academic indicators, the general population's concern with the societal problems that are particularly relevant to schools (teenage pregnancy, violence, HIV/AIDS) has pushed the social role of schools to the forefront. Others have posed more divergent views, disagreeing with mainstream practitioners on the basic premise that schools are able to affect social problems. Rothstein (2002) argued that schools cannot be the "primary instrument of economic and social reform" that reformers would like to believe.

2.4 Caring schools

The other side of the literature focuses on those practitioners and researchers who are convinced that schools as sites for social services are a necessity in poor communities (Maeroff, 1998). There are two main arguments addressing why schools must serve a caring function. The first is that schools have unparalleled access to children and are therefore natural places to reach vulnerable children; the other is that children cannot do well academically while social issues such as hunger, abuse, abandonment or neglect press more heavily.

The first argument is the one most commonly relied upon by educators and NGO practitioners who champion the caring schools movement. In the 1990s, the UN picked up on the trajectory established by the *Children on the Brink* report that led education experts to question the assumption that "schools could operate solely as centres of learning" (Hoadley, 2008:141). Coming out of this framework, which included a particular emphasis on HIV/AIDS, it became widely accepted that schools could address pressing social crises (Hoadley, 2008:142).

In South Africa, the scope and depth of the contact that education systems have with children's lives lends extra weight to the arguments of those who believe that schools are the ideal place to centre services for children, particularly in light of the scarcity of other resources. Lynette Mudekunye of Save the Children UK produced a map of school density in the Free State, where Save the Children works with the Caring Schools Project. The dots representing schools formed dense clusters, representing the hundreds of schools in a given district. While schools are everywhere, government service points are considerably scarcer. Given examples such as this one, combined with a noted rise in the number of orphans and vulnerable children, this argument has become almost unassailable and most literature takes it for granted.

The second point is that children cannot cope with chronic problems and still give full attention to their studies. As Hoadley asks, "Can a child learn if the child is hungry, sick, cold or abused? In all likelihood, no" (2008:151). However, she does question how far the school should go in fulfilling that missing need, and at what cost. Others are more liberal with their support of school-based care, given the limitations hunger and other psychosocial issues place on learning and academic achievement (Giese *et al,* 2003; Olivier, 2006).

Additionally, Sorhaindo and Feinstein (2006) compiled a substantial collection of studies proving how poor nutrition affects children. They related particularly compelling findings concerning memory function, which has been shown to be dependent upon proper nutrition in the morning. Studies conducted by Pollitt *et al* (1998) and Pollitt and Gorman (1994) looking at 11-year olds and fasting "found that an overnight and morning fast among schoolchildren had deleterious effects on memory and attention" (cited in Sorhaindo and Feinstein, 2006:13). In another study, memory and intelligence tests of 180 university students showed that breakfast improved memory function, but did not make an impact on intelligence tests (Sorhaindo and Feinstein, 2006:13). They concluded that retention of knowledge is compromised by inadequate morning nutrition.

However, the assumption that schools are best situated to coordinate services for vulnerable children (and therefore obligated to do so) is not without its limitations and detractions. A review of the literature shows that attempting to bring too many activities unrelated to teaching under the purview of the school — particularly if a school is already struggling with

the functions of teaching and learning — can result in overburdening teachers, or placing interventions in a school with little capacity to implement them.

Firstly, some scholars approach with apprehension the potential compromise of the central role of schools. Hoadley aptly captures this concern, remarking that:

> while other agencies can offer children material, psychological and social care and support, no other can provide children with the crucial access to learning that the school offers. This epistemological access remains children's fundamental right, to be pursued especially if they are vulnerable (2008:153).

Schools, even well-resourced ones, struggle to achieve a perfect balance between the core role and social service provision. In poor schools, educators face the challenge of being pressured to assist every vulnerable child, even though resources for the primary function of the school are scarce. Classes at Khayalethu can sometimes top sixty, and children with pressing material and psychosocial needs are often lost in the crowd. Hoyle *et al* (2007) noted that "schools, by themselves, cannot—and should not be expected to—address the nation's most serious health and social problems". Instead, schools can act as the "coalescing institution" that hosts other social services to support children (Hoyle *et al*, 2007:5). However, many township schools lack the capability to serve as the catalyst for this type of collaboration.

Further, failure to truly examine what teachers should be doing and what they are capable of doing increases societal expectations that teachers can serve what may be too many roles. Morrow (2007) commented on teacher burden as a product of society's expectations that schools are responsible for correcting all of society's problems, while Hammet wrote about the decrease in respect for teaching as a profession, which has led to much demoralisation (Hammett, 2008:344).

There is the additional problem that schools do not fulfil these expectations as universally as some proponents assert. In fact, despite the many programmes and policies in place to ensure that schools attempt to embed this function into their daily operation, the majority of schools remain mired in the same issues. Particularly in townships and rural areas, teachers are expected to pick up the fallout from crumbling social structures. Hoadley suggests that the caring schools movement might "persist in being largely symbolic" given the number of arguments suggesting that not much is changing (2008:138).

2.5 Safety nets and school-community issues

Existing literature on safety nets and school-community collaborations focuses on the needs of children in dire situations and the limits of the traditional safety net, which consists of extended families that provide for children when the immediate family cannot (Foster, 2004; van Wyk, 2001; Kendall, 2007). However, when a tragedy or disaster strikes a family, the community and the extended family most often respond with assistance. In relation to the HIV/AIDS pandemic, a Save the Children report found that families and communities provide the bulk of support to affected households (D'Allesandro, 2006:11). However, this assistance is becoming more and more strained as the number of orphans rise and the number of caretakers falls (Foster, 2004:69). As such, the formal sector is increasingly supplementing traditional arrangements, prompting the need to study this interplay in greater detail.

Parents and other family members are critical to a child's safety net. However, schools face particular difficulties maintaining relationships with the parents of children from informal settlements. Motala *et al* state that:

> … the notion that schools should become the focus of community life hinges on parental involvement, which the phenomenon of migration is reducing more and more (1999:603).

Though Motala *et al* discussed migration in the context of parents placing their children in schools far from the townships, similar parallels can be drawn about parent-school relationships within the township setting. Many of the children at Khayalethu travel five to ten kilometres to school each day. The school is not easily accessible to their parents, which reduces their opportunities to participate in school governing bodies or other mechanisms for family and community participation. This contributes to an unbalanced representation in school governing bodies, where parents with access to transport are unequally represented. As Motala *et al* warn, this type of uneven participation can have "the unintended effect of promoting privilege and exclusion, rather than democratising the educational system" (1999:604).

There have also been many studies conducted on parental and community outreach, mostly focusing on how linking families and community members to the school increases ownership and engagement with the school's functioning, while also raising the child's academic achievement. Blank and Berg (2006) found significant research to demonstrate how connections to the community gave youth "better academic and social outcomes," by linking them to extra-curricular learning and aspirations. Kendall (2007) notes that the bulk of programmes and policies supporting parental and community involvement do so mainly because such involvement increases the number of stakeholders invested in school quality.

Others found that schools could serve a greater community function by serving family members of the students, thus functioning as an agent of change in the greater realm of a child's social life. Van Wyk (2001) supports a framework whereby schools provide training and further education opportunities to parents, which has a spill over benefit for children (2001:130). Lemmer and van Wyk also found that schools in South Africa are fairly good at reaching out to parents, though often still regarded as a tedious task (2004). In the schools they studied, the main focus was on getting parents to care about governance and accountability within the school, and not necessarily on how the school can provide for children whose families were not readily able to do so.

3. Findings

How likely is it that severely resource-strapped township schools can manage a caring school programme? How willing are educators to play their role, and how surmountable are the seemingly entrenched obstacles to implementing such programmes? Becoming a caring school is not a one-step process; it comes as a result of implementing reforms that improve the climate and support available at the school. What a school is doing today is not always indicative of what it is capable of doing a year from now. However, attitudes and systemic barriers are a good predictor of how possible it is for a school to adopt a caring function. Plus, while schools can often handle initial interventions, sustaining changes over longer periods of time is more difficult. The findings below examine the schools' capacity to serve a caring function, a well as factors that must be considered when planning a caring schools initiative.

3.1 Obstacles to implementation

Establishing a caring school, even in under-resourced township schools, is not impossible. While there are some remarkable successes (Delta Foundation, 2004), the bulk of under-resourced schools struggle to adopt the measures needed to earn the distinction of being child-friendly or caring. In this report, the most common obstacles to effectively implementing a caring schools programme are broken up into two broad categories: school-based and institutional. The school-based obstacles are those related to in-house problems that most township schools are grappling with: abuse, pregnancy, overcrowding, lack of resources and the lack of implementation around the SBST, the SGB and the feeding scheme. The institutional obstacles are those factors that can only be addressed by systemic changes related to social welfare, particularly the national shortage of social workers. Educators at both the primary school and the secondary school were acutely aware of the problems facing their institutions, and expressed differing levels of motivation for changing the status quo. This hesitation and institutional dissatisfaction is one contributing factor to the lack of progress on establishing a caring programme within both schools.

3.1.1 Overcrowding and lack of resources

Nearly all teachers expressed displeasure with the high number of students they were expected to teach, know and care for. The average class size at the primary school seemed to hover around 45 or 50. The principal cited 40 as the average class size, but the six Grade 1 and Grade 3 teachers who were interviewed together listed their class sizes as 38, 46, 46, 46, 48, 49 and 56. At the secondary school, teachers reported class sizes of 30-59 (the 59 was in a Grade 10 class).

The primary school principal asserted that new mobile classrooms had helped to ease the burden, but they still lacked classroom space, labs and a library. When data was collected in 2008, the school was supposed to house only 1,200 learners. Instead, it hosted an unmanageable number close to 2,000. According a Grade 7 teacher, this creates multiple infrastructure problems, including health and sanitation issues that arise due to the large volume of children sharing the limited lavatory facilities. At the secondary school, as one teacher noted:

> A poor arrangement in classes is how you'll find there is no furniture for kids to sit on, learners normally stand while they are supposed to be seated, listening, so then they can't pay attention. You can't even pay individual attention.

The overcrowding forces a situation where most teachers are teaching too many children to properly teach them all, much less learn each of their personal situations and stories. A Grade 1 teacher said, "If I had a smaller class, I would take an interest in each child." A secondary school teacher commented, "My classes are 59. You can't even differentiate between those who are naughty and those who really have problems." Another teacher said:

> We have 65 in a Grade 8 class. It's very difficult even to identify [problems] because you cannot even move in the class the way it is congested. Learning names, I don't think it's possible. You don't even have that time of learning names.

Indeed, all classes observed during the research period were filled to capacity, with barely any room to move around or walk while teaching. One Grade 4 teacher said:

> There are too many kids to reach all of them, and sometimes, you can't even notice their problems until mid-year. How do you think it feels sitting from 8:00-2:30 with 50-60 hungry learners?

A secondary school teacher said:

> You see ten learners sitting down and you can't stop to see what they need. We're supposed to be identifying a lot, but we can't sit down and identify them. The fact is 60% of our learners need assistance.

3.1.2 Abuse and violence

When asked about the greatest problems they were dealing with in their schools, teachers nearly universally named abuse before moving on to any other problems. The types of abuse were equally distinct; teachers named sexual abuse as the most prominent, followed by physical abuse, emotional abuse, and neglect. Instances of sexual abuse were widely reported at both schools, but the primary school teachers seemed particularly distressed about the high levels of incidence. A Grade 3 teacher lamented, "Seeing those kids abused on a daily basis...how do we deal with that?" Other stories citing incidents of sexual abuse flowed easily around the interview tables. A Grade 7 teacher related a story about a student who had been raped by her brother-in-law. When taken to the police, the brother-in-law was able to get away "scot-free." One Grade 7 teacher said that the families do not always help the children for economic reasons:

> The mothers deny it when these things happen. They tell the kids that if the father goes to jail, who will provide? The father is the only one working who can provide.

At the high school, worry about sexual abuse was masked by worry about pregnancy. One teacher lamented constitutional changes that allowed pregnant teens to attend school until they could no longer do so safely. Primary school teachers were no less likely to worry about pregnancy and the role pregnant learners played in the classroom. A Grade 7 teacher remarked:

> We see pregnancies in girls aged 12-14. They stay in school, but the teachers don't want to be nurses for pregnant women. They aren't trained for this, nor for how sleepy and moody the girls get.

The principal expressed concern about the note of abuse present in some of the pregnancies, particularly in the very young girls. The girls were being co-opted into relationships with older boys, men and/or family members. Of the girls in Grades 5-7, the teachers expressed sadness because they then had to leave school early.

High school teachers were also more likely to voice the opposing argument, which was that children were taking too many liberties and were claiming "abuse" when they were in fact only receiving punishments.

3.1.3 Community elements

Educators commented that the community environment significantly hindered their efforts to help the children, and was even the cause of certain cases of abuse. The Grade 7 teachers referred to Khayalethu as a "sick community." For instance, most educators interviewed felt that growing up in a one-room shack exposed children to adult behaviours at an early age, leading to unhealthy attitudes about sex and sexual abuse. According to a Grade 7 teacher:

> The informal settlement lifestyle usually consists of everyone living in one room. The children see everything and don't know if it's right or wrong — to them these things are normal because they see their parents doing it.

Speaking about the multiple generations living in one room (mother/father, grandparents, children), the principal posed the question: "What happens at night? Where do [they] wash?

The teachers organised a march around the community to raise awareness about abuse after a learner was raped en route to school. According to them, they have children as young as Grade 1 who have been raped or abused.

However, some educators in Khayalethu expressed mixed views about the role the community played in preventing or perpetrating abuse. While some thought the community should be encouraged to use the school more for social and civic activities (such as the church services that are held on the premises), others were more acutely concerned about the potentially negative influences. The teacher who called Khayalethu a "sick community" cited the area's poverty, illiteracy and unemployment as proof. Several other primary school teachers agreed, noting that the socio-economic issues prevalent in the settlement prevented parents from getting overly involved in their children's work, while also creating a culture prone to allowing negative influences to thrive.

At the secondary school, teachers expressed concern about community influences related to violence and morality. One teacher cited this example:

> … boys belong to groups over the weekend, so over the course of the week you will have strangers come in to take revenge.

Violence is a major reality both in the community and in the school, and evidence of vandalism and theft was all too apparent at Mandela. During one of my initial observations, I counted 19 broken windows in just two classroom blocks. During a tour of the school, one of the main contacts pointed out all of the things that have been stolen or vandalised, including televisions, computers, and even the lights. Another teacher reported that even some doors and circuit breakers had been stolen, and the toilets had been repeatedly vandalised.

One teacher commented on the violent mentality present among many of the learners, saying:

> There are learners who bring weapons to school. Learners, for example, they fight, they will even use ballpoint pens to stab each other. We are also here to be doctors or first aid givers every day.

The main contact, a female, related fears of walking around the school alone because:

> boys could be in the classroom smoking dagga[4] and you just don't know. They could rape you, steal your cell phone … We must lock the doors in the teachers' lounge.

She also discussed learners' criminal activities, stating that many of the offenders are arrested, serve a month or two in jail, and then return to school with that experience having changed them. A male teacher, however, remarked that the school is "safe and secure," though he still lamented the high rates of crime in the community and the negative influence of popular culture and music on the mentality of young people. It seemed that male teachers thought more about the lack of physical security at the school — vandalism and ease of getting into the school through holes in the gates — while female teachers had to worry about personal safety as well.

3.1.4 Feeding schemes under-funded

One of the most important (and most commonly cited) social services the schools can provide is the daily feeding scheme. In primary schools, feeding schemes are sponsored by the government, as many children receive their only full meal during school time hours. However, due to the large number of children attending Khayalethu, the feeding scheme only reaches each learner about twice a week, according to the teachers. Several of the teachers interviewed reported assisting the children by bringing extra lunches or a whole loaf of bread to their classes.

Many teachers commented on the serious problems in their classrooms that are related to hunger. A Grade 4 teacher said that identifying the hungry children was easy, as they:

> have concentration lapses, quietness and are reserved. It turns them to thugs, though, they steal money for food.

A Grade 7 teacher noted hunger as a prime problem in the school, saying:

> the children skip days of eating, don't eat on the weekends and come to school on Monday having not eaten all weekend.

Another Grade 4 teacher longed for a feeding scheme that began in the morning so that the children could concentrate better during the day.

The secondary school also has a feeding scheme, though at the time of research it was not officially in operation. A room filled with dried goods for the feeding scheme sat locked and out of use when I arrived at the school. It was explained that a problem with the volunteers (who wanted pay) and other technical difficulties led the school to discontinue the scheme. When the scheme was first installed, they were providing two meals a day, each day,

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[4] "Dagga" is a common slang word for marijuana.

according to the contact on the SBST. They provided pap, samp and beans[5], though they could not afford meat. They do not have a steady source of support for the scheme, and rely on donations from educators, Christian Ministries, and even learners (who contribute one or two South African Rands, R1 or R2, which is the equivalent of 15-30 cents in USD). He said that they tried to provide sandwiches and juice, but sometimes could only provide instant porridge. According to one of the SBST members, there are about 130 learners who are on the list to benefit from the feeding scheme, out of the 940 learners who were enrolled at the time research was conducted. They started by only including orphans and children whose parents were not working, and so she estimated that 300 kids would be on the plan if they took in all children who demonstrated other qualities of vulnerability, such as extreme income deprivation.

3.1.5 SBST's and SGB's fail to make a difference

The SBST and the SGB are both government-mandated bodies that play a role in identifying vulnerable children and linking them to the proper resources. At Mandela, SBST referrals are meant to be the main protocol through which all resources and outside referrals (to social workers or health clinics) are made. Children at Mandela who are referred to the SBST usually fall under a few general categories, including family and social problems, overage children, and immigrant children, according to an SBST member.

At Khayalethu, educators expressed doubts about the ability of the SGB or the SBST to handle the enormity of the learners' problems. Some teachers seemed unaware of any boards or policies that were responsible for vulnerable learners, like this Grade 7 teacher:

> The school doesn't have a policy, so the teachers do most of the service provision. There's already so much to do in the classrooms to be doing something else. If a child comes in the morning and has a problem, you have to go on to class. You can't get back to him, but you are disturbed by the problem.

Those who were aware of chain of command still voiced reservations about utilising the given structures. One Grade 1 teacher said:

> When we can't help, we refer it to the HOD, who sends it to the principal, who sends it to the social worker, but the process is very slow and takes the whole year. We need experienced people to help learners in the school. They are called counsellors in the white schools.

Those "experienced people" are unlikely to come into the school building as long as their hiring is dependent upon funds from the SGB, or even funding from the Department of Education. According to Bhana *et al* (2006):

> Currently, there is no provision made in the curriculum for counselling or ministering to the emotional needs of students … Under the new funding formula, no provision is made for the employment of school counsellors. Serious problems are referred to provincial departments where staff employed in 'Psychological Services' are on call. Since there are not many psychologists employed at the provincial level, this effectively leaves school teachers to handle counselling issues the best way that they can (2006:12).

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[5] "Pap" and "samp" are popular South African starch dishes.

At the time of research, the SBST at the primary school mostly handled cases on a case-by-case basis. The principal said that they were contemplating creating a formal policy, but that for now it was basically a teachers' committee that handles cases, keeps records, gets some forms completed for learners and referrals, and provides uniforms. However, because the SBST at the primary school was not fully functional at the time research was conducted, many teachers were finding it difficult to manage the issues they observed in their classes. One Grade 3 teacher provided this example about discovering child-headed households:

> We find out about it by asking the child, seeing their performance or absence in class, tidiness, and we hear that 'Mom is staying with so and so.' There are kids slipping through, because we can't notice if the kids are coping, and can only see the problems that show.

The true functionality of the SBST is questionable, as many teachers were not aware of how to harness its resources. Even important information like HIV status and home situations were not always properly documented and so educators missed out on crucial information. One primary school teacher attributed the problem to parents' not revealing their status or the status of their child, but also instances where the parents will "tell the child's Grade 1 teacher, but not the Grade 2 teacher." A fully-functional SBST would keep records of such information, thus eliminating the need for word-of-mouth relaying of critical information.

The secondary school also faced significant difficulties with their SBST. According to the acting principal:

> The school is not able to do enough because of scarcity of resources. We have good intentions, but are not able to do all that we think we should be doing with the learners. The skills of the SBST may not be adequate to deal with what the learners are going through. The department gives crash courses, but it would be better if there were specialists.

It was difficult to ascertain how many children the SBSTs were seeing in both schools. An SBST member at the secondary school could not give a comprehensive number most times he was asked, though once he guessed the number was around 120. This number likely reflects the number of children who are eligible for the feeding scheme. Another SBST member said that while the SBST was established in 2008, they have seen fewer than ten children.

The SGB also has a large role to play in the provision of services for children, but the findings suggest that SGBs also struggle to define and clearly carry out their mandates, which is to promote the best interests of each child in the school (Karlsson, 2002:330). The SGB can not only control the usage of school facilities, but they also set the school fees and school hours. They can also set the agenda for the caring function of the school, and were tasked with developing an implementation plan against HIV/AIDS under the National Policy on HIV/AIDS for Learners, Students and Educators (Bialobrzeska, 2007:12).

Very importantly, the SGB fundraises. Township schools are certainly at a disadvantage in this regard, as the SGBs generally do not have wealthy parents to fall back on, nor do they necessarily know about all of the resources available to them. Despite efforts by the Department of Education to assist poor schools through higher per pupil spending, "spending inequalities remain because of the high costs required to achieve fiscal parity in education" (Sayed and Motala, 2009:1). The department attempts to offset this inequality by providing more funding to no-fee paying schools to compensate for the missing school fee income. In

2009, Q1 schools were eligible to receive R809 per learner, while Q5 schools received R134[6] (Sayed and Motala, 2009:3). The funding gap persists, however, and one teacher was adamant that the government's decision-making process as to which schools would be no-fee paying had set schools up for failure. He said:

> The government pronounces in the media that there will be no learners denied the right to education because he doesn't have school fees or money. Even if they say it is free, how do they expect the school to work with no money?

In the absence of fees, the SGB was the primary target for the lack of income being generated on behalf of the school. The local customer service centre social worker commented on the schools' financial management, saying:

> They do get some funding, even from business, depending on how the school can market themselves, how they're able to fundraise. Some schools have more resources, more funding, and that's because of how they market themselves. Even the parents market themselves.

A teacher at Mandela commented:

> This school, it is very difficult to fundraise … parents are supposed to govern. SASA says parents are supposed to call a meeting and that is where school fees will be discussed. There is no representation, now, the parents aren't aware that they're supposed to be the ones who are running the school.

Overall, educators at the secondary school expressed dissatisfaction with the functioning of their SGB. One teacher said, "The SGB is there but it is not working. They attend the meetings but you don't see the result of those meetings." Referring to the SGB's lack of initiative, one teacher commented on the perceived low levels of interest SGB members have unless there are dramatic school-related events to discuss (such as potentially truant teachers); another remarked that SGB members lacked awareness of the power the SGB is supposed to hold over fundraising. One teacher spoke of the difference between schools with functioning and non-functioning SGBs, saying:

> The difference is that their governing bodies are doing their jobs. You will have 10-12 companies sponsoring one school because the SGB is working. They know their job descriptions and use people who are having skills.

3.1.6 Social worker shortage and lack of department support

There is no doubt that schools, particularly those in challenging township areas, need access to social workers and other forms of social service support. However, the country's social development system has not been able to provide the resources necessary to handle the number of cases presented in schools and communities. One particularly troubling aspect of this crisis is the chronic shortage of social workers in all levels of operation. In order to provide all of the children's services allowed for in the Children's Amendment Act by 2010/11, the Department of Social Development and other non-governmental organisations would need 16,504 social workers to provide the most basic services, and 66,329 to implement the higher level services (Department of Social Development, 2008). However, in

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[6] R809 and R134 are equivalent to 116USD and 20USD, respectively.

2005, the Department and all NGOs only employed 5,063 social workers country-wide (Proudlock *et al*, 2008:19). Educators at Khayalethu demonstrated great awareness of the shortage and longed for better services; nearly every interview group proposed bringing a psychologist and a social worker into the school to manage the issues children bring forth.

Lynette Mudekunye expressed doubt that the country's children could wait until the Department of Social Development filled all of the vacant posts. She gave the situation in Limpopo Province as an example, where there are 300 social workers for the thousands of schools in the province.

> When you look at those numbers – 300 social workers for the whole province, 1000 schools in one district – you are never going to get there by saying we need social workers. You are never going to get them. We don't have them.

The national social worker shortage has had a profound effect on social service delivery in the East Rand. The head social worker at the local customer care centre said:

> The norms say there should be one social worker for every 5,000 citizens, and here we have about 1 million. So, there's a big shortage.

Additionally, she noted that the social workers are not able to attend to clients as often as they are required. Though social workers are meant to work at the clinic three to four times a week, they end up only having time to service a clinic once a week. They also see far more than their recommended caseload; she estimated that they served about 20 clients per day, when the norms, she asserted, suggested that they serve six.

Much of the work needed in schools revolves around getting important documents that facilitate access to support grants for children, such as birth certificates and IDs. This type of service provision is much more technical than counselling or providing food and clothes, and many schools are without this important service as a result of the shortage. At Khayalethu, a teacher said:

> They can't have just one psychologist for the whole district. There are not enough social workers. They are all stationed in Germiston and only come on certain days, which leaves gap times.

The head social worker said that she is looking forward to the day when social work is done in the schools. She has been asking the Department of Social Development to have one social worker for every 3-5 schools, but they say they do not have the funds. She expressed frustration that the shortage leaves schools to deal with so many problems without the proper resources. She also commented that the schools themselves could do more, but choose not to. She said:

> You have to follow up for them to roll out programmes. Otherwise, you send them and they're not interested to follow up. We need to sit down and find out what they've been trained on, see what they need to learn, run extra classes, etcetera.

Additionally, she mentioned that the school does not seem to refer a lot of children, either, as most of the children come into the centre on their own.

3.2 Views on fulfilling the caring school function

The data suggests that teachers have mixed feelings about standing in the gap between the children's needs and the insufficient structures that are meant to support them, and that those feelings vary according to the school level. Primary school teachers expressed a desire for the model to work and be implemented, but only under conditions of proper training and better pay. Secondary school teachers were much less likely to embrace the idea; they expressed a firmer conviction that their primary function was to teach. Given the large number of obstacles teachers face, one thing was made clear by nearly everyone who was interviewed or completed a survey: help, in some form or another, was desperately needed.

3.2.1 Teachers to the rescue?

An SBST member at Mandela Secondary School said about pastoral care at the school,"This is a public school. There is none of that here, just chalk and talk".

Survey and interview data show that it is primarily teachers who are working to meet the needs of children who endure home and community deprivations. Indeed, this research shows that structures for care and support are faulty, and individual educators' efforts sometimes make all the difference to a child. However, teachers showed a tenuous relationship between the need to help and the need to teach, as well as between the ability to help and the need for professional intervention. Many recognised that schools had the best access to children, thus requiring them to take responsibility for more than just education. The acting principal at the secondary school said:

> School is the best place. We are expected to make the learner a future responsible citizen, who must be spiritually, emotionally and physically well. It's not just about maths, we are dealing with a human person in totality.

However, teachers also expressed frustration with the enormous scale of the social problems they were expected to address while still being a full-time teacher. A Grade 7 teacher commented:

> The caring schools model could work if they reduced the number of learners in the school and in individual classes, and had social workers and psychologists based in the schools. But, I'll go berserk if I have to go that extra mile for 60 learners. Twenty is more manageable. And, the teachers must want to serve this function, or else no amount of money will help.

Remuneration was consistently raised as a point of dissatisfaction during interviews with the primary school educators. Many educators felt that teachers would perform outside roles, but only with an increase in pay and recognition. As the aforementioned Grade 7 teacher said, "If we do after school work, we should get paid for that because it's extra." A Grade 1 teacher said, "If we are asked to do more, we are looking for greener pastures. It is draining us financially." A Grade 4 teacher chimed in, saying:

> Teachers become 'all of the above' and need a break. The pay is low and it is a profession of mothers. Mothers are not paid, by the way. We are paid peanuts and have our own children to look after.

Teachers had varying but mostly similar perspectives on the feasibility of making their school a caring school. A Grade 7 teacher said:

> It's a good idea in theory. Ideally, the model would make sense, but it can't work now because we are under-resourced, underpaid and overcrowded. Any plan for this would have to make it worthwhile for the teachers, and then they would do it gladly.

Another teacher said,

> It's difficult to keep the learners safe since we can't do anything except report it. One must be trained to handle these things, but we are not.

Another Grade 7 teacher, however, quickly interjected, "Even with training, it is not our role."

3.2.2 Khayalethu Primary School

Forty-two percent of educators at Khayalethu indicated that they had referred a child for a social service, with health-related referrals being the most common. Sending a social worker to the home was the second most common referral. However, when asked if they had ever directly provided a child with any social service care, 83% responded "yes." Most of these occasions arose from noticing a need in class. Teachers demonstrated a willingness to help when a problem was presented to them clearly: one teacher decided to "save some of the learners food and clothes because they were needy," while another "accompanied [the child] to his mom's place because he had a blackout in class." Slightly more than half of the teachers responding to this question provided services for children within the last three months.

Teachers mostly provided basic needs fulfilment to needy learners. Eighty-nine percent of educators considered providing care and/or referring learners as a part of their job. During her individual interview, the principal noted instances of teachers bringing two lunch boxes or a bag of bread with them to school. However, 43% of educators wrote that providing these services for children represented various types of stress or strain in their lives:

> As a teacher, I consider myself as a mother, a pastor, a care giver and a lot more, and that leads to depression which costs money.

> It causes me a lot of tension headaches. Most of our parents are unemployed; hence I am liable to help with finances.

> It is part of my job but sometimes it stresses me mentally because of lack of training and resources.

Next, teachers answered the question "do you believe that the school should serve as a site for children's services in addition to its academic pursuits?" This question was designed to ask educators if they believed that providing services was an official function that the school should perform. Eighty-nine percent responded yes. The eleven percent (four) who responded "no" did so for two reasons—insufficient resources and additional burden on teachers.

The "yes" answers were more varied, but they all revolved around the premise that the "teacher" and the "school" loom so large in the lives of children that schools are almost

required to take care of children who are in need. Essential to this idea was the knowledge that learners in the community come from very under-resourced situations

The next two questions show the diversion in thinking around the school's ability to fulfil this role adequately. Eighty-eight percent of respondents indicated that they thought that their school served as a site for children's services. However, one question later, eighty-nine percent responded that the school does not have enough resources to serve this function. The distinction comes into focus when examining what it is that educators thought the school was already doing for needy learners. The school feeding scheme and uniform donations were the main reasons educators listed for believing that their school was providing adequate services.

One teacher who replied with both yes and no said:

> Sometimes children are given food parcels to go home with and those who are in need of school uniforms are also provided with, but that's not enough considering the large number of these needy children.

When it comes to extra services, however, teachers related a barrage of problems that are commonly regarded as entrenched in township schools, such as lack of infrastructure and materials, as well as overcrowding (Christie, 1998).

3.2.3 Mandela Secondary School

Interviewed teachers confirmed that their school had a reputation for low academic achievement and was viewed negatively by the community. According to one of the main contacts there, "the community acts like you don't know what you're doing if you're from [here]. You come here if you've failed from other schools." She cited an unconfirmed statistic that the school is ranked 14th out of 15 local schools in terms of academic performance. More than one teacher blamed the types of children who end up at the school, saying that they received kids who are not motivated and have serious social problems, or are from other countries and do not understand the South African educational system. One teacher blamed their attitudes and actions, saying:

> We are forced to take learners who have been naughty, problematic…those learners are brought to us and we are expected to turn those learners into good learners, which is not fair. Those learners aren't in the streets for no reason, they brought it on themselves. They are rascals, hooligans, and at the end of the day, [the district] expects us to produce the same results as the good schools with the learners from good backgrounds.

Additionally, another teacher commented on the short shelf life of administrators, saying that they usually only stay for two or three years.

At Mandela, individual teachers did not appear to take on as much of the burden of providing care for children as they do at the primary school. Most social problems were referred to the school's SBST, regardless of whether or not the SBST followed up. The act of referring often relieved the teachers of their duties.

From the thirteen surveys collected at Mandela, eight respondents confirmed that they had referred a child for social service. Of those referrals, most were for counselling, or to request that a social worker visit the home. Nine out of thirteen teachers had themselves provided a

service for a child, with the most common service being to provide a learner with clothing. However, the bulk of these instances occurred either between six months to a year before the time of the survey, or not within a year of the survey (5 out of 8 responses to the date of last service provision).

When asked if they thought that providing services for learners was a part of their job, 54% said yes, 31% said no, and 15% did not reply. In defence of their "no" response, one teacher wrote:

> I don't want to add any other burden because NCS [National Curriculum Statement] is already a burden with a lot of paper work and a lot of marking.

Other teachers wrote that providing services for children causes financial strain, and is burdensome in light of the many responsibilities they already have in the school.

In response to the question "Do you believe the schools should serve as a site for children's services in addition to its academic pursuits?" 54% said yes and 46% said no. The teachers who said that the school should not serve this function mostly did so because of lack of resources, although a few teachers disagreed with the premise entirely, saying that "it disturbs us from giving quality teaching to our learners." Another teacher suggested that "the government should employ professional or people qualified for this job to assist learners."

The teachers who supported the caring schools premise suggested that considering the child's needs proves that the school does have a role to play. According to one respondent:

> A school is a place for children, it's where they are more comfortable and where they spend most of their lives. Schools are also central places known to everyone. I think they should serve as a site for children's services.

In response to the question "do you feel your school serves as a site for children's services?" 38% said yes, 47% said no and 15% said both yes and no. Those who replied "yes and no" did so largely due to the presence of a school feeding scheme. One respondent wrote:

> For learners receiving food, yes, but for social and educational challenges, NO … there are a lot of learners who need attention socially and educationally, but they are not attended to.

One respondent provided a unique interpretation of the term "disadvantaged," saying:

> We are very disadvantaged in terms of management. We have had more than three principals in a period of five years.

The final question on the survey asked "do you feel that your school has enough resources to serve as a site for children's services?" Ninety-two percent said no, while 8% said yes. Supporting their "yes and no" response, one teacher wrote:

> Yes in terms of availability of classes, but no because there are not enough plates and relevant furniture and equipment necessary for some services.

The teachers who responded "no" did so for a variety of reasons, including vandalism, lack of resources, and previous failures. One teacher summed up the problem by saying

We need a serious injection of capital to initiate and sustain this [caring] function long term.

4. Discussion

The general aim of this study was to better understand how schools function as sites for children's services, using what means and under what frameworks. From this information, we can gather evidence concerning how schools work to support and increase the welfare of the most vulnerable children.

First, one must look at the schools' functions as community institutions. The term "community institution" means different things to different people. At Khayalethu, community members were allowed to use the school on the weekends for church services. According to some models of school-community collaboration, that would be an example of a successful partnership. However, the reality is that many of the educators expressed such deep disdain for the grimmer aspects of community life that they focused heavily on the property damage church-goers inflicted on the school, and related stories about the "sick" mentality in the community that propagated abuse, rape and neglect.

Another item of note is that the majority of the educators interviewed at both the primary and secondary school did not reside in Katlehong, but commuted to the school daily from other parts of Johannesburg. Many of the teachers expressed negative views of the community, particularly the informal settlement. The term "dust-bin school" was used by one of the educators who commuted to the informal settlement; as a mother, she said that she would not allow her own children to attend such a school.

At Mandela, not only did many of the educators not live in the community, but they felt shunned and angry because of the reputation the school had for being a place for failures and children who were unwanted by all of the other schools. According to the head social worker at the local customer care centre:

> Usually, we call [Mandela] a place where people go for leisure; we call it Sun City. We see learners going over the fence during school time, see them go over the fence instead of the main gate.

This reputation is consistent with a local interpretation for the school's actual name, which implies a place where one goes to lose their way (Bonner, 2000:188).

The schools also struggled with parental involvement. Despite much research showing that parental involvement is strongly related to parental empowerment and support for the efforts being undertaken at the school (van Wyk, 2001:116), the teachers interviewed at both schools focused heavily on the demanding aspects of increasing parental participation. One teacher said that parents contribute to the financial difficulties of the school because they do not trust the teachers. The principal at Khayalethu was the only educator who voiced contentment with parental involvement; she said that parents do participate, and that they come to meetings when called. However, the teaching staff expressed a different opinion of the parents. One teacher contradicted the principal's assertion by saying, "While there are parents who are involved, others wouldn't come [to the school] to a meeting if one was called right now." Many commented that parental education levels were too low for them to assist their children. Their commentary is consistent with observations in the literature that parental involvement strategies are often more about correcting the behaviour of errant parents than creating a community- and family-friendly school (van Wyk, 2001:121).

Many educators linked the failures of the SGB with failures within the community to manage the body adequately. However, perhaps the SGB's lack of efficacy could be related to the attitudes that educators have towards the community. Particularly at Khayalethu, educators limited some community and parental participation on account of perceived weaknesses in the community. Even at Mandela, educators thought that parents were too busy worrying about food and shelter to think about helping their child with schoolwork. Therefore, community obligation was minimised in the minds of most of the teachers interviewed.
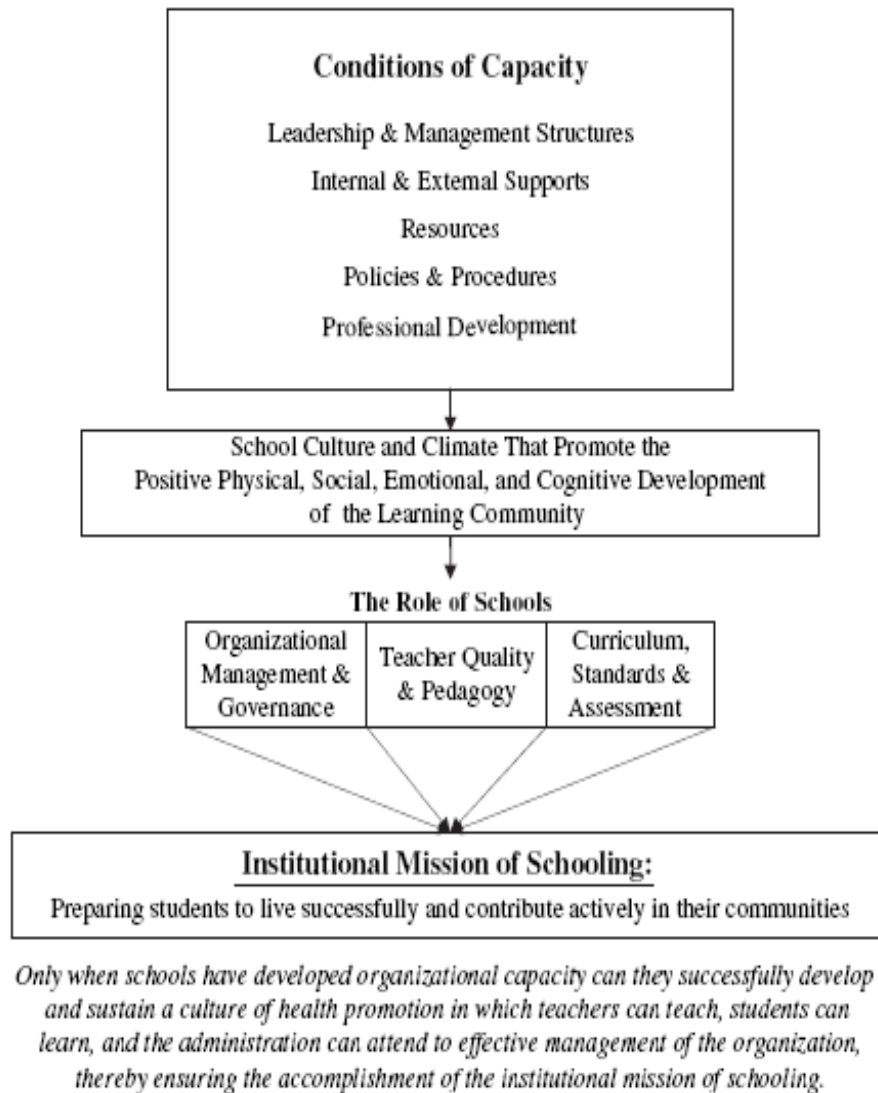
At both schools, the principals were hard-pressed to name community organisations that were contributing to their school, though they did mention that some organisations were assisting with the feeding scheme or donating uniforms. Formal linkages that could create the safety net vulnerable children are lacking simply were not present. This is consistent with observations made by Lynne Perry of the Johannesburg Child Welfare Society. On the topic of social workers and their interactions with the school and community, she noted that fewer social workers were achieving community buy-in due to failure to properly network and build relationships with and between community organisations (interview, May 2008). She also lamented the increasing loss of community mentality in the Johannesburg area. The teachers' responses also provided a glimpse of the problem with community outreach plans. At Khayalethu, teachers felt that because the school was based in an informal settlement, it would never be possible to "remedy the problem" of lack of community interest in caring for the children. It would be worthwhile to conduct further investigation into the merit of this assumption.

Though the school may struggle to maintain community linkages, nearly everyone interviewed at both schools expressed a strong desire to have greater access to social workers and other experts to treat the psychosocial issues their learners were grappling with. However, interviews with the head social worker at the local community service clinic revealed that the school rarely followed up with programmes initiated by the centre, and that the centre itself received very few referrals from the schools. Most learners came in to see the social workers of their own volition. Perry also commented that they were receiving fewer and fewer referrals from the schools. This apparent disconnect could result from poor organisation at the top level; without a consistent, firm policy on community relations, it is unlikely that schools such as Khayalethu and Mandela will readily tackle the large task of building a community outreach programme. This challenge is also a reflection of the general fragmentation of the social service sector in South Africa.

One must also understand educators' views regarding social service provision as a function of the school. This varied, with the primary school educators feeling more favourable and the secondary school educators feeling less so. However, most teachers doubted that the resources for intensive care would be made available anytime soon. This lack of resources included lack of funding for teacher pay, which was an incredible point of contention at the primary school. Teachers felt as if they would soon be required to do even more work outside of teaching (in addition to a purportedly heavy paperwork load), and consistently vocalised their discontent with that arrangement.

There was also a significant shortage of institutional capacity to provide social services. The following diagram shows where social and health support/promotion fits into the greater goal of successfully educating a child:

Figure 1: Building Capacity to Achieve the Institutional Mission of Schooling

Conditions of Capacity

Leadership & Management Structures

Internal & External Supports

Resources

Policies & Procedures

Professional Development

School Culture and Climate That Promote the
Positive Physical, Social, Emotional, and Cognitive Development
of the Learning Community

The Role of Schools

Organizational Management & Governance	Teacher Quality & Pedagogy	Curriculum, Standards & Assessment

Institutional Mission of Schooling:

Preparing students to live successfully and contribute actively in their communities

*Only when schools have developed organizational capacity can they successfully develop
and sustain a culture of health promotion in which teachers can teach, students can
learn, and the administration can attend to effective management of the organization,
thereby ensuring the accomplishment of the institutional mission of schooling.*

(Hoyle, Samek and Valois, 2007)

Both Khayalethu and Mandela were missing large chunks of the critical "conditions of capacity" box. Without stable leadership and management structures (Mandela teachers lamented the "revolving door" nature of their principals), internal and external supports, resources and good policies and procedures, the category of "school culture and climate that promote the positive physical, social, emotional and cognitive development of the learning community" cannot begin to be expanded in the school.

One of the most pivotal aims of this research was to understand where the motivation to serve a caring function came from within the school. The original hypothesis was that most interventions were being scheduled on an ad-hoc basis by teachers who happened to notice a particular child struggling. This was found to be correct; the SBSTs were unable to handle a full caseload, and social workers were not a consistent resource at either school. Educators related stories of giving the children and their families everything from food to money to time spent attending court cases. However, formal organisation of such assistance was lacking in general from both schools.

As far as understanding the role of leadership in promoting a caring school environment, principals at both schools were eager for their staffs to teach the "whole learner," which required attention to the psychosocial component. However, a range of factors prevented their eagerness from translating into a school culture driven by "child-friendly" guidelines. There was a considerable disconnect between the words spoken by the principals and the more cynical perspectives expressed by the staff. The poor staff morale, particularly at the secondary school, was indicative of their deep dissatisfaction with their working conditions. They felt overwhelmed by the amount of paperwork that Department of Education policies mandated, and distressed by the high class enrolments and lack of resources. Taking on extra roles outside of the classroom had not yet been made an enticing prospect. While many educators were helpful to children out of a real desire to protect and assist them, there was much consensus that the teaching and learning aspect of the school was being lost to paperwork and performing services that should be done by professionals.

Teachers aren't without culpability in the problems facing South African schools, of course. Many of the teachers I observed led uninspiring lessons, and missed their classes in order to give their interviews. One member of the SBST at Mandela told me that he could not attend his interview that day because he had class for an hour. However, he still proceeded to sit with me for more than thirty minutes, during which his class went unattended. Another teacher at Mandela told me that he had to go attend to his class before he could sit for his interview, but then quickly returned after handing out a few papers, commenting that he had "done his job already."

In general, the teachers at both schools expressed dedication to the craft of teaching and concern for the learners, but they were highly disgruntled and displayed a serious lack of motivation and grit. A Grade 4 teacher commented that "teachers have become 'all of the above' and we just need a break." Teachers at both schools said that they would not encourage their learners or their own children to join the profession. Most of the teachers would be resistant to increasing their responsibilities at the school in order to implement a caring function. Aside from being genuinely worn down by daily struggles that seem to never end, teachers also seem to have adopted mental fatigue and demonstrated a fatalistic type of unwillingness to initiate change within their schools.

That township schools are struggling to meet the challenges inspired by such daunting realities is nothing new. Over ten years ago, Pam Christie (1998) described in detail the breakdown in township schools, while exhorting policymakers and educators to move beyond the practice of continuing to research the same social issues without examining the underlying cultures within township schools. The caring schools movement could be thought of as an acknowledgement of this conundrum, as the end goal of almost every caring school programme is to produce a fundamental change in the way the school engages with the child and his/her community. However, lack of caution when implementing could ignore these institutionalised issues in the haste to make tangible differences in service provision. It should be noted that schools that consistently struggle to operate at a high level should not be expected to implement complex programmes without assistance and support. Hoadley noted this particular dilemma in Caring Schools Project schools that hired youth facilitators, remarking that "those schools with the most challenges were also the ones least likely to be able to manage the youth facilitators effectively" (2007:12).

Looking at the difficulties schools face on a daily basis, while also noting the deficiencies in government and community services, it may be of more use to focus resources on strengthening the social services that children need in order to be healthy and learn while in

school. Instead of making teachers social workers, resources could focus on closing the gap between the number of social workers needed and the current number that are registered. Programmes that allow individuals to enter the school for the sole purpose of identifying resources that children need (like the COS model) would also be a valuable next step, though managing volunteers and institutionalising care in that manner is difficult and time-consuming. It would be useful to increase training opportunities for teachers to recognise issues that require referrals.

However, do not expect teachers to create a perfect school where every child's needs are catered to. It's almost guaranteed that such a school will not be a place where every child can learn, as well, since teachers will be only further removed from their primary purpose. By not looking at teacher burden, programmes run the risk of lessening the quality of schools in response to a structural deficiency in social service provision. Especially in developing countries, where educational attainment and future economic advancement are unevenly provided, one must be particularly careful to not rob the future in order to meet a need today. Given the current state of school funding and service provision, straining schools to provide these services without an influx of resources will only see schools continuing to struggle to teach, as well as failing to create social worker- teachers. According to UNESCO:

> Consensus seems to be emerging that schools will be stretched far past their capacity if expected to provide all HIV services themselves. However, what is far more realistic is for schools to tap into existing resources and to act as a link between service providers (or expertise in the community) and people who need those services (UNESCO, 2008:12).

However, which individuals in the school will work on making those linkages? And at what point will the dysfunction within the government-mandated bodies be addressed?

This is not a call to give up on the caring schools movement. Viviers optimistically noted:

> In one school, the deputy principal started to attend school, for example. Some schools start on time and finish on time. Some schools start to form partnerships, to have computer labs and stuff like that in their schools. Some schools have cleaned their terrain. Which are simple, insignificant things, but things that have been there for the past ten years and haven't changed, but have changed now. And I think the reason for this because they start to understand what they need to do, and in terms of the Child-friendly model, also because there is an intervention happening. (Interview, 2008)

The figures are real and in the South African context, a school building is an omnipresent and powerful symbol of the government's reach. However, schools should see the support structures surrounding them (health care, community development, family support and counselling) built up so that the school is not the last man standing, the final facility that can mount a response to the growing challenges facing the poor in South Africa. Any failure to improve social services across the board will only result in increasingly overburdened schools, burned out teachers and a continuance in social service failure that exacerbates the problem today.

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Create

Consortium for Research on Educational Access, Transitions & Equity

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Report summary:

The South African Department of Education is working with multiple non-governmental organisations (NGOs) to transform schools into "caring schools" that emphasise: health promotion, safety, care for orphans and vulnerable children, quality education, community engagement and respect for rights and equality. Using a qualitative case study of a primary school and a secondary school in a Johannesburg township, as well as a review of caring school models currently operating in South Africa, this research explores the degree to which the caring school philosophy can be translated into practice. Findings suggest that educators accept the caring schools theory; however, most doubted that their schools could serve such a function at present. Educators named entrenched obstacles such as teacher burden, over-sized classes, inefficient governing bodies and support teams, and inadequate training and funding to deal with learners' psychosocial issues as the main shortcomings in their schools. This research illuminates the realities of transforming schools into sites for children's services, while contributing to the debate about the function of schools in social development programming.

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