1 Schooling in South Africa

1.1 INTRODUCTION

South Africa celebrated 20 years of democracy in 2014. It was also the year in which the founding statesman and first President, Nelson Mandela, passed away. The new South Africa was founded on an idea of transformation as a broad social, political, education and economic project in which the aspirations of the Constitution of South Africa (1996) could be realised. It is with a degree of pride that the Department of Basic Education (DBE) can claim that 'Approximately one in every three people in South Africa is in the school system'.

Education was positioned atop the hierarchy of transformation priorities in 1994 (Chisholm & Petersen 1999; Harber & Brock 2013). But education had also been key to the apartheid policies and strategies designed to encourage segregation and a racial hierarchy that was profoundly damaging for communities in South Africa. Motala notes that 'the strategic importance and determining role of segregated and unequal education policy in disempowering the majority population previously, was now employed as an equally strategic instrument for equitable development of the population at large' (Motala 2001). In the Constitution, access to education was framed as a basic human right, and by implication, access to the support services and infrastructure to enable such access was either to be put in place anew, or restructured to serve a unitary education system. The Constitution guarantees that South Africans will not only enjoy equity of access to quality services (like housing or education, justice or due process), but that all development will

seem and become commensurate with the State's aspirations to non-sexism, non-racism, equal opportunity and dignity.

It was assumed by policy-makers, intellectuals, politicians and activists alike that the systems that existed prior to 1994 were divisive, reactionary and racist, favouring the race and class privileges of the apartheid regime, and before that, of the colonial State. Prior to the demise of the apartheid State there were 19 departments of education in South Africa; each province had its own, each Bantustan (known also as homelands or 'native reserves'; see Thompson 2001) also had its own; and there were examining boards and examinations set by each authority more or less independently of each other even at the highest (pre-tertiary) level. Given that the structure of the education system was designed along race categories, the perpetuation of this system, with its structures, remained unacceptable at a political level, as well as inequitable on material and other grounds.

The preparation work for the transformation project in South Africa began with activists and intellectuals associated with progressive politics in the 1980s (for example, the National Education Crisis Committee). A number of political, academic, social and other movements emerged to resist apartheid, not least of which were the African National Congress and the United Democratic Front, both of which were linked to a variety of trade unions and other movements, including religious and social organisations (Chisholm, Motala & Vally 2003). The groundswell aimed at transformation was thus made up of a broad alliance of organisations. This history of the influence of these organisations in relation to thinking about education in a post-apartheid South Africa is touched upon in Hartshorne's book *Crisis and Challenge: Black Education, 1910–1990* (1992). Certainly, the commitment of the government to education development (schooling, further education and training, vocational education and universities) has been clear and unequivocal throughout all the administrations since 1995. In 2006 the then Minister of Education, Dr. Naledi Pandor, ascribed deficiencies in the system not to under-spending, but to the incapacity of the education system to utilise allocations to 'support full transformation' (Pandor 2005a). The evidently generous allocation on education of 9.7% of the GDP on expenditure for 2005/2006–2008/2009 needs to be contextualised in terms of the systems performance as elaborated in subsequent sections and chapters (National Budget Review 2006, 18).

This chapter takes a broad look at schooling in terms of a range of themes: the first section provides an overview of children in schools in South Africa over the new democratic period (from the perspective of the Department of Education (DoE), first in the Mandela and Mbeki administrations, and later

the Department of Basic Education (DBE) in the Zuma administrations). This section demonstrates substantial growth in schooling and good discipline in terms of children enrolling for, and remaining in, schools. The second section provides two overviews of learner performance in the 20-year period and suggests that while performance appears to be indicated, the analysis of the categories has not remained stable over time and performance is undermined by routine under-performance in international comparative tests and assessments. The third section describes the numbers of teachers in the schools over the period and analyses some of the problems around the provision of teachers depending on locality, region and socio-economic class. This is followed by the fourth section, in which school infrastructural needs are described in terms of the DoE's (Department of Education or Department of Basic Education) progress towards providing for basic teacher and learner support, new schools and administrative support. The fifth section discusses curriculum reform, policy and legislative frameworks.

While the first 10 years of Democracy provided an opportunity for a series of reforms, both in higher education and schooling, that opportunity, considering the impact of the changes envisaged in 1994, and mostly implemented between 1995 and 2005, has only really become possible in the second decade of democracy. It is only in the last 10 years that the impact of the first 10 years' worth of change and reform in higher education and 20 years in schooling can be assessed.

1.1.1 The state of education in 1994

- Matriculation pass rate of 53.4%
- Adult literacy rate below 70%
- 7.1% of the population had a tertiary education
- 99% of white teachers were qualified
- 93% of Indian teachers were qualified
- 71% of Coloured teachers, and
- 54% of African teachers

1.1.2 Professional staff in the higher education system comprised

- 80% white people
- 12% African
- 4% Coloured and
- 4% Indian

(The Presidency 2014, 40)

1.2 POLICY AND THE LEGISLATIVE FRAMEWORKS FOR EDUCATION

Schweisfurth (2013) suggests that culture plays a part in the success of education reform. South Africa's legislation, from the Constitution to various acts of parliament, has been described as among the most progressive in the world. In this section the purpose and the nature of education policy are described. It can be difficult for people living in patriarchal, traditional societies to meaningfully engage in democratic education if it does not fit with local ways of understanding learning and relationships (Schweisfurth 2013). Naidoo (2014, 70) argues that 'democratic learner-centred education was counterintuitive to teachers' previous methods and training, counter to teachers' own school experience and cultural upbringing, counter to principal-educator management styles, counter to learner home environment and counter to societies' expectations of what schooling entailed'. That there is wide recognition by South African commentators about the gaps between policy and outcomes goes without saying.

It is worthwhile providing the reader with some extracts from the Bill of Rights, from which the South African School Act (1996) and other policies, for example the Language in Education Policy (1996), are derived.

29. Education

1) Everyone has the right

(a) to a basic education, including adult basic education; and

(b) to further education, which the state, through reasonable measures, must make progressively available and accessible.

(2) Everyone has the right to receive education in the official language or languages of their choice in public educational institutions where that education is reasonably practicable. In order to ensure the effective access to, and implementation of, this right, the State must consider all reasonable educational alternatives, including single medium institutions, taking into account equity; practicability; and the need to redress the results of past racially discriminatory laws and practices.

(3) Everyone has the right to establish and maintain, at their own expense, independent educational institutions that

(a) do not discriminate on the basis of race;

(b) are registered with the state; and

(c) maintain standards that are not inferior to standards at comparable public educational institutions.

(4) Subsection (3) does not preclude State subsidies for independent educational institutions.

30. Language and culture

Everyone has the right to use the language and to participate in the cultural life of their choice, but no one exercising these rights may do so in a manner inconsistent with any provision of the Bill of Rights.

31. Cultural, religious and linguistic communities

(l) Persons belonging to a cuItural, religious or linguistic community may not be denied the right, with other members of that community;

(a) to enjoy their culture, practise their religion and use their language; and

(b) to form, join and maintain cultural, religious and linguistic associations and other organs of civil society.

(2) The rights in subsection (1) may not be exercised in a manner inconsistent with any provision of the Bill of Rights.

A number of policy-makers have written about the scope and reach of policy in relation to the lived experiences of teachers, schools, communities and learners in South Africa (Vally & Dalamba 1999, Chisholm 2009, Naidoo 2014, Balfour 2009). Dadwig (1994) suggests that there are tensions inherent between policy intent, advocacy and philosophical orientation. Naidoo (2014) posits that such tensions 'make for a contradictory scenario of interpretation, practice, and attendant outcomes at the point of teaching and learning. The acknowledged disjuncture between policy objectives and praxis creates an academic conundrum in as much as the agents of interpretation of policy and distilling of practices "on the ground" warrant the consideration of an alternate yardstick for measuring policy effectiveness, per se'.

Naidoo surveys critical policy research approaches by Prunty (1985), 'policy sociology' (Ozga 1987), 'policy-scholarship' (Grace 1987), and 'policy sciences' (Deleon 1994). While several scholars have critiqued policy research and teaching in South Africa (Chisholm 2009, and Christie 2006, among others), this section describes education as it applies to schools and schooling. As noted earlier in South Africa, education is a cornerstone of the transformation project. As the DoE noted, 'It should be a goal of education and training policy to enable a democratic, free, equal, just and peaceful society

to take root and prosper in our land, on the basis that all South Africans without exception share the same inalienable rights, equal citizenship and common destiny' (1995, 22). The cornerstone act for schools is the South African Schools Act (SASA, Act 84, 1996). The act allows schools to govern themselves, it defines types of schools (private and public with varieties on these two types), and the power of schools concerning admissions, language policy and maximum class sizes. The powers of schools were meant to provide a degree of autonomy in the system, and recognised that a degree of differentiation given the plethora of official languages, religious and other beliefs should be seen as part of the diversity to be celebrated in South Africa.

Despite these powers, there have been strong tendencies towards cultural and other forms of exclusion in many schools, either on the basis of language or class and sometimes even ethnicity. According to Naidoo, the SASA (1996) provision allowing school governing bodies (SGBs) to levy school fees, as a means of 'topping-up', alleviates the limited State financial allocations. A significant consequence of this provision was that formerly privileged schools were able to levy higher fees, effectively commoditising education, thereby maintaining learner enrolment drawn largely from advantaged backgrounds (Jansen & Taylor 2003; Sayed et al. 2013).

Since coming to power in 1995, the State has also banned corporal punishment and from time to time cases in which teachers have been found guilty (either by departmental hearings or through lawsuits) have formed the substance for outrage as expressed in the popular media (see Appendix 2). This, in line with the RNCS (Revised National Curriculum Statement) (2002, 8) 'making schools safe to learn … with the expectation of ridding schools of violence. Despite policy enactments forbidding violence of any sort in schools, corporal punishment is still employed widely, particularly in rural schools' (Maphosa & Shumba 2010; Vally, Porteus & Ruth 2001; Morrell 2006; Naidoo 2014, 44). Simply put, legislation at the national level about schools has focused on the twin aspirations of access and redress with the explicit intention of developing one system of quality education accessible to all people in South Africa, regardless of class or socio-economic capital. These aspirations have been undercut by commentators who suggest that in time South Africa has in fact developed two education systems: the first system is state-controlled and consists mostly of working class children and communities in which post-provisioning, low-fee or no-fee State schools exist (Tikly & Mabogoane 1997). The second system consists of well-funded private and public schools that provide education to a largely middle class elite.

1.3 CHILDREN IN SCHOOLS

To be sure there is a wealth of information available from the DoE, the DBE and the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) concerning the quantitative dimension of the changes implemented throughout the education system. This overview of schooling thus considers the impact of changes made to legislation, and the impact on the effectiveness of the system itself. Typically, measuring impact is assessed in quantitative forms dealing with, for example, teacher attrition rates, teacher supply and demand rates, and learner throughput and learner success rates. However, in order to assess the magnitude and scale of the changes anticipated, it is useful to consider, initially, the growth in education over the last twenty years.

Table 1.1: Girls' Enrolment 1995, 2005, 2013

Level of education	1995	2004	2013
Primary	3 028 826	3 627 631	3 639 211
High School	1 349 259	2 256 852	2 362 230

Table 1.2: Boys' Enrolment 1995, 2005, 2013

Level of education	1995	2004	2013
Primary	3 611 390	3 816 511	3 639 211
High School	1 862 345	2 061 051	2 362 230

Or:

Table 1.3: Total learner enrolments by gender in primary, high school and tertiary education

Level of education	1995			2004			2013		
	Males	Females	**Total**	Males	Females	**Total**	Males	Females	**Total**
Primary	3611390	3028826	6640216	3816511	3627631	7444142	3639211	3424638	7063 849
High School	1862345	1349259	3211604	2061051	2256852	4 317903	2362230	2231267	4593497

Sources: DBE, School Realities 2013/School realities 2004/
Education statistics in South Africa at a glance 2004

Enrolment in Grade R (a pre-school year at primary school) has more than doubled, increasing from 300 000 to 705 000 between 2003 and 2011, nearly

reaching the level of universal access. By 2012, 87.8% of learners in Grade 1 in public schools had attended Grade R (The Presidency, Twenty Year Review 1994–2014, 47).

In 1999 there were 123 138 991 learners at ordinary schools in South Africa. Over 56% of these learners were concentrated in three largely rural provinces (the Northern Province, the Eastern Cape and KwaZulu-Natal). However, in 1999 the teacher-learner ratio was lower than it had been in 2014 (almost 34 learners per educator in South Africa, according to Education Statistics SA) and even lower in KwaZulu-Natal (30.1%), and yet those indicators cannot be relied upon to have correlational value for the quality of education. In KwaZulu-Natal and the Eastern Cape, despite lower teacher/learner ratios, learner throughput and success rates are among the lowest in South Africa. This can be explained by the fact that the majority of under-qualified and non-qualified teachers in the system are concentrated in these two provinces. It is therefore unsurprising that in addition to the above, the same three low-performing provinces also have the highest rates of over-aged and under-aged learners in the system. Thus, Education Statistics SA report that the 'gross enrolment rate' for the Eastern Cape was 20.14%, to over 100% in KwaZulu-Natal and Mpumalanga. Five years into a new democratic dispensation, the system in these provinces had to be geared to address the challenges outlined above, and as might be expected, the turnaround needed in such contexts would be unlikely to occur within the first decade of the new dispensation. Simply put, teacher education, curriculum redesign and teacher qualification upgrading, while being national priorities, would not be felt at a provincial level with any urgency.

Ten years into the new democracy, the number of learners in the system was lower, with little over 10 000 000 learners in the system (7 681 324 learners in primary schools and 3 828 705 learners in secondary schools) (see Table 1.3). Combined and intermediate schools accounted for 707 736 learners and 29 229 educators. How is the reduction in learner numbers to be viewed? On the one hand, the reduction of schools regarded as unsustainable explains also the reduction in student numbers. However, school dropout figures in this period remain high. This is illustrated from the data concerning school dropout and retention rates. According to Education Statistics of South Africa (2005), 'Of every 100 learners in ordinary schools in South Africa, more than 31 learners were in the Foundation Phase, slightly fewer than 24 were in the Intermediate Phase, slightly more than 24 were in the Senior Phase, 20 were in the FET (Further Education and Training or secondary school, Grades 10–12) band, and less than one was in the pre-Grade-R Phase

and 'other' combined. Roughly then, only a third of an initial cohort might finish their schooling on time, and of this group, ten learners (i.e. 10% of the cohort itself) would have exited school without completing'.

The introduction of Grade R and pre-Grade R means that families now have the option of enrolling children into ECD centres in South Africa.

The most recent available data for 20 140 registered sites was supplied by DSD for June 2012 and is given in Table 1.4. The largest numbers of sites are located in Gauteng (3520), KwaZulu-Natal (3398), Free State (3002) and the Eastern Cape (2938) respectively (see Table 1.4).

Table 1.4: Number of registered ECD sites, subsidised children, total receiving services and estimated number of practitioners

Province	Registered ECD sites	Number of children receiving subsidy	Total number of children receiving ECD services	Estimated number of ECD practitioners (registered sites)
Eastern Cape	2938	76 000	83 613	3741
Free State	3002	43 700	98 172	4739
Gauteng	3520	57 473	160 241	3354
KwaZulu-Natal	3398	73 291	131 260	5067
Limpopo	2442	56 040	206 728	2810
Mpumalanga	1402	46 558	109 386	2404
North-West	1033	32 890	66 265	2600
Northern Cape	580	25 976	30 839	927
Western Cape	1825	72 601	98 020	4350
TOTAL	20 140	484 529	984 524	29 992

Source: National DSD ECD Statistics March 2012. Provided by Louise Erasmus Social Work Policy Manager: Partial Care and ECD

The 2010 audit of unregistered sites (Biersteker & Hendricks 2012) found that 32% of principals and 58% of practitioners have no qualifications. Levels 1 and 4 qualifications are the most common levels of qualification achieved as shown in Table 1.5.

Table 1.5: Percentage of Staff with ECD Qualifications in Unregistered ECD sites in the Western Cape

Level	ECD Qualification	Principals (%)	Practitioners (%)
None		32	58
Level 1	Basic Certificate: ECD	16	13
Level 4	National Certificate: ECD/FETC: ECD	21	13
Level 5	Higher Certificate: ECD	11	4
Level 5	National Diploma: ECD	4	2
Other	(e.g. N1 - 6, Diploma in Education, Pre-primary Teachers' Certificate, Nursery School Teachers' Certificate)	16	9

Source: Biersteker and Hendricks (2012)

These figures need also to be understood in terms of a growing awareness among communities and families of the qualitative dimensions of education provision. The apartheid era was characterised by stringent population movement controls which were linked also to schools. All groups were compelled to access the schools in their immediate residential areas. Given the differential spending associated with different groups in South Africa on education (historically black children received the lowest proportion of government spending on education when compared to Indian, coloured and white children (see Hartshorne 1992; Gustafsson & Patel 2006), this meant that children of black families could access only those schools located in the areas in which they lived. In these urban and also rural areas (associated especially with the Bantustans, rural and farm schools) the schools, thanks to the low standards of education curricula, the low quality of teachers prepared for the schools, and the low government spending on schools, were abysmal. With the changes after 1995, the Group Areas Act was revoked, with the effect that parents could begin to consider access for their children in areas where they did not reside. Obviously those most mobile (financially at least) were able to take relative advantage of the better quality of education throughout the apartheid era, as offered by private and mostly 'church' schools (in other words, those schools founded, supported and staffed by clerics or religious staff). Between 1995 and 2014 the growth in private education institutions and consortia of private schools and colleges has accelerated. In South Africa, the Crawford Schools and the Curro Schools are all private for-profit organisations offering salaries to teachers that are usually higher than State schools, and a quality of education that is usually better than that offered in the public education system. With greater choice and variety in the system has come a