# DIDACTIC CAUSES OF SCHOLASTIC FAILURE IN PRIMARY SCHOOLS

BY


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## DECLARATION

I declare that:

*"Didactic causes of scholastic failure in primary schools"*

had not previously been submitted by me for a degree at this or at another university, and that it is my work and that all sources and material used or quoted have been indicated, recognised and acknowledged.

R.REDDY

January 1996

DURBAN

# DEDICATION

This dissertation

is dedicated to

*Mr. and Mrs. C. Reddy*

my late parents

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## SUMMARY

The aims of this study were:

- to investigate the didactic causes of scholastic failure in primary schools; and

- to suggest, in the light of findings obtained, didactically justifiable guidelines for reducing the failure rate in primary schools.

To address these concerns the investigation was underpinned by the following hypothesis: the principal didactic causes of scholastic failure in primary schools centre upon the ineffective application of socialisation, individualisation, perception, motivation and evaluation as didactic principles.

In order to combat the problem of fragmentation caused by an overemphasis on empirical research while theoretically engaging concepts as revealed in recent research findings are often disregarded, this investigation concentrated entirely on literary research. A comprehensive study was conducted of recent primary and secondary sources related to didactic causes of scholastic failure. Data collated from different types of research which were conducted, tried out and tested by other researchers were blended, integrated and analyzed according to didactic criteria articulated in the hypothesis.

The findings revealed that scholastic failure in primary schools revolved around five major causes.

**First: inadequate situation analysis** prevents effective psychological and educational diagnosis of learning disabilities; temporary poor scholastic achievement of average learners are sometimes erroneously diagnosed by the teachers or orthodidacticians as being caused by permanent learning disabilities.

**Second: inattention to language skills** causes many primary school children to be at a learning disadvantage; definite connections have been shown to exist between *scholastic failure and speech deficiencies, defective handwriting, spelling disabilities* as well as reading and writing limitations.

**Third: inefficient teaching styles** *result in inadequacies in the integral, interactive* parts which the child and his or her teacher play in the education situation.

**Fourth: weak classroom management** generates disruptive behaviour, distraction, hyper-activity resulting in corporal punishment which in turn lead to scholastic failure.

**Lastly: lack of teacher self-evaluation** creates a situation in which classroom actions are often not guided by accountable personal teaching theories and didactic principles.

In the light of the above findings, the recommendations flowing from the research include, *inter alia:*

- that bridging module readiness classes be established for children turning five years of age and that professionally qualified educators be placed in charge of these children;

- that more emphasis should be placed on peer group teaching in primary schools;

- that teachers and parents work closer together to help, guide and shape the child's attitude towards school and that self-improvement among teachers should be promoted through in-service education.

# OPSOMMING


## DIDAKTIESE OORSAKE VIR SKOLASTIESE VERTRAGING IN PRIMêRE SKOLE

**Die doelstellinge van hierdie studie was:**

- om die didaktiese oorsake vir skolastiese vertraging in primêre skole te ondersoek; en

- om, in die lig van bevindinge wat verkry is, didakties verantwoordbare riglyne wat die druipsyfer in primêre skole kan verlaag, voor te stel.

Om hierdie sake aan te spreek, het die ondersoek berus op die volgende hipotese: die vernaamste didaktiese oorsake vir skolastiese vertraging in primêre skole spruit uit die ondoeltreffende toepassing van sosialisering, individualisering, persepsie, motivering en evaluering as didaktiese beginsels.

Ten einde die probleem van fragmentering wat veroorsaak word deur 'n oorbeklemtoning van empiriese navorsing (terwyl teoreties aantreklike konsepte soos geopenbaar in onlangse navorsingsresultate dikwels verontagsaam word) te oorkom, het hierdie ondersoek geheel en al op literatuurstudie gekonsentreer. 'n Omvattende studie van onlangse primêre en sekondêre bronne wat verband hou met didaktiese oorsake vir skolastiese vertraging, is onderneem. Data saamgestel uit verskillende tipes navorsing wat uitgevoer is, toegepas is en getoets is deur ander navorsers, is vergelyk, saamgevoeg,
geïntegreer en geanaliseer volgens didaktiese kriteria wat in die hipotese verwoord is.

Die bevindinge het getoon dat skolastiese vertraging in primêre skole rondom vyf hoof-oorsake wentel.

***Eerstens:*** ***ondoeltreffende situasie-analise*** *verhoed effektiewe psigologiese en* opvoedkundige diagnostisering van leergeremdhede; tydelike swak skolastiese prestasie van gemiddelde leerders word soms verkeerdelik deur die onderwysers en ortodidaktici gediagnoseer as dat dit veroorsaak word deur permanente leergestremdhede.

**Tweedens:** **onvoldoende aandag aan taalvaardigheid** veroorsaak dat baie primêre skool leerlinge 'n leeragterstand het; daar bestaan 'n definitiewe verband tussen skolastiese vertraging en spraakgebreke, gebrekkige handskrif, swak spelling asook beperkte lees- en skryfvermoëns.

**Derdens:** ***ontoereikende onderwysstyle*** *lei tot agterstande in die integrale, inter-*aktiewe rolle wat die kind en sy of haar onderwyser in die onderwys-situasie speel.

**Vierdens:** **swak klaskamerbeheer** veroorsaak onderbrekende gedrag, steurnis, hiperaktiwiteit wat kan lei tot lyfstraf, en wat op hulle beurt lei tot skolastiese mislukking.

**Laastens:** **gebrek aan self-evaluering deur die onderwyser** skep 'n situasie waar klaskamer-optrede dikwels nie deur verantwoordbare persoonlike onderwysteorieë en didaktiese beginsels gelei word nie.

In die lig van bogenoemde bevindings, sluit die aanbevelings wat uit die navorsing voort-vloei, onder andere in:

- dat oorbruggingsmodule gereedmakingsklasse gevestig word vir kinders wat vyf jaar oud word en dat professioneel gekwalifiseerde leerkragte in beheer van hierdie kinders geplaas word;

- dat meer klem gelê moet word op portuurgroep onderrig in primêre skole;

- dat onderwysers en ouers nouer saamwerk om die kind se ingesteldheid teenoor die skool te help, te lei en te vorm;

- dat selfverbetering van onderwysers aangemoedig moet word deur indiensopleiding.

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## 1. ORIENTATION

### 1.1 INTRODUCTION

Learning difficulties of varying degrees and duration are a most common phenomenon in the classroom. Dealing with pupils who perform poorly at school must therefore be recognized as an essential concern of all educational professionals. The principles of intervention cannot primarily be derived from didactic theory, teaching experience, the curriculum, or any other set of external considerations, however relevant these may be deemed. In dealing with poor academic performance, an appropriate point of departure is to gain a fundamental understanding of the range and nature of actual problems manifested in particular education situations, as these relate directly to low pupil performance.

The school's effort involves, among other things, helping the child acquire an ethically-acceptable pattern of behaviour. Behavioural patterns include factors such as the acquisition of new skills, habits, interests, attitudes, ways of thinking and ways of perceiving complex phenomena.

It is axiomatic that learning problems may occur as a result of inadequate or inappropriate instruction. The reason a child does not learn may be because the teacher fails to teach effectively. In such a case, the specific deficits in teaching that account for the child's failure should be explored and identified. Once such deficits have been identified, it is the teacher's responsibility to correct them, for he or she should be trained to effectively control the instructional variables that govern learning. The teacher needs to take responsibility for the learning of all children in his or her care, not only for those who are average or above average.

## 1.2 STATEMENT OF PROBLEM

The differential system of education is designed to cater for the ability level of each child. It is also intended to assist the child in attaining the highest academic performance that he or she is intra-individually capable of. Thus it is hoped that the failure rate may be significantly reduced.

The problem of failure obviously has to become the subject of microscopic study if realistic and viable solutions are to be identified. Methods have to be designed to get children more meaningfully involved in the total educational process. In order to do this, educationists have to examine some of the root causes of underachievement and failure.

A didactic understanding of scholastic failure may thus be defined as: insight with regard to the causal and correlational relationships of didactic factors in the educational situation which may contribute to the lack of academic achievement.

Teachers must be sensitive to any difficulty experienced by their pupils that may prevent them from performing at their full capacity. The primary responsibility for ensuring that the various constituents of the lesson continuously synchronize with each other rests with the teacher.

## 1.3 BACKGROUND

Underachievement is defined as a significant and sustained disparity between a pupil's innate ability and his or her actual performance. This becomes obvious when measured intelligence, for example IQ test results, contradict class test results, achievement tests, and teachers' impressions. Teachers who describe children as "lazy" , "lacking in application" , "can do better" , "not working to expectations" etc. are obviously referring to academically underachieving children.

The number of pupils who underachieve or display poor scholastic performances is not negligible. Studies carried out by educators as far back as 1970 and 1978, show that between 13% to 14% of children underachieve in reading and mathematics during their early primary school years. Although the sources consulted are outdated, it gives us an indication that failure can begin as early as class one (Bouwer and Niekerk, 1991: 39-43).

### 1.3.1 The effects of failure on the pupil's self-concept

A child who gets caught up in a cycle of failure gets a poor image of himself. He loses the pleasure of learning. The gap between his latent capacity and actual performance widens with time. It is also believed that the student whose failure to learn is accompanied by emotional problems may be the victim of a continuous cycle of failure to learn and emotional reactions to the failure. In this cycle of failure, the child develops feelings of self-derision, poor ego- perception and anxiety which then augment the failure-to-learn syndrome (Wheldall and Glynn, 1989: 42).

### 1.3.2 The effects of failure on the pupil's future

Pupils with a record of academic failure tend to blame the teachers, or the difficulty of the task set out by those teachers. They seem to think that they do not control their learning ability. Such students tend to approach the learning task in a passive manner. They probably lack interest in learning because past learning experiences have often been dismal exercises in failure and frustration. These pupils often believe that they cannot learn effectively and, in the process, they may not care to adopt techniques that might help them to learn. Failure in school leads to a failure to finish school (Shepard and Smith, 1986: 78-86).

### 1.3.3 The Teacher's role in a malfunctioning education situation

The teacher's task should be one of planning and preparing the ground for the child to move ahead. While the child is mastering one stage, the teacher should

make preparations for the child to embark upon the next. The teacher must not explain academic failure as being due to dullness, apathy on the part of the child, or even laziness. The teacher ought to know about the child's background and/ or emotional problems if any exists. The teacher should not treat such a child with impatience and assume that he/she is being silly. It is expected that the teacher would realize that this child sometimes has little control over his/her emotional state. It is the teacher's task to bear with such a child and help him/her out of this fearful situation. When working with pupils who face failure and learning problems, teachers must look out for background items which include among others: low educational level of the parents, stressful home life, lack of basic skills, previous failure, disruptive behaviour, etc. As professionals, teachers must view the above aspects as indicators of problems and then work to correct them in many flexible ways. Nauman in his book (1985: 61) recommends that teachers build the power to control the curriculum and commensurate teaching methods. They should also treat pupils as individuals and use the curriculum as a way to enhance pupil self-worth.

### 1.3.4 The effects of failure on the parents

Studies have proven that children do not learn when they are emotionally disturbed due to unfavourable home conditions (Cherian, 1990 : 97). Parental disciplinary styles can markedly affect the scholastic achievement of their children. A review of research suggests that working-class parents resort to chastisement of their children most frequently, while middle-class parents tend to resort to reasoning. Research relating to pupils' behaviour and academic achievement indicate that permissive parents compared to authoritative parents exercise less control over their children's behaviour; they demand less achievement and accept behaviour that is relatively unsocialized. On the other hand, authoritative parents, while they may firmly enforce rules and demand high levels of achievement, are warm, rational and receptive to their children's questions and comments (Fischer and Lazerson, 1984:414). Corporal punishment, criticism and ridicule experienced at home are

injurious to the emotional adjustment of children and can result in poor academic performance. Therefore teachers should be aware of home conditions and try to combat this at school.

### 1.3.5 The effects of failure on society and the economy of the country

How does society react to a low achieving person or pupil? Those pupils who have suffered a cycle of failure are often shunned or seen as misfits. Job opportunities to these pupils are at a minimum. If they are employed, it is merely to do menial tasks or to be errand boys/girls. Such pupils are usually unable to climb the social ladder through employment. If all children are expected to grow up being important future contributors to society or the economy of the country, then they must be given the appropriate educational guidance and support on the road to independence.

## 1.4 FORMULATION OF PROBLEM

Against this general background, the major problems which will be examined in this study are:

- What are the principal didactic causes of scholastic failure in primary schools?
- How can these causes be addressed?

## 1.5 HYPOTHESIS

With reference to the problem stated on page seven, I state my hypothesis as : The principal didactic causes of scholastic failure in primary schools centre upon the ineffective application of the following didactic principles:

- the principle of socialisation;
- the principle of individualisation;
- the principle of perception;
- the principle of motivation;
- the principle of evaluation.

## 1.6 DEMARCATION OF THE FIELD OF STUDY

### 1.6.1 Scholastic failure

The focus in this study is primarily on **scholastic** failure and not on other types of underachievement or maladjustment.

Related conditions such as emotional instability, mental retardation, physical disabilities, low socio-economic status of parents, learning problems and general misbehaviour of pupils obviously affect scholastic progress, yet they are not part of this study *per se*. These types of abnormalities will only be touched upon when findings reveal that there exists a close and direct relationship between them and scholastic failure. Throughout the study, however, the focus will be on scholastic issues.

### 1.6.2 Causes

The aim of this study is to formulate the causes of scholastic failure. It will focus on the various reasons, factors or variables which give rise to failure at school but will not dwell on aspects such as statistics, personality disorders, results, examinations, etc. These concepts will only be discussed in so far as they may deepen our insight into causes of failure.

### 1.6.3 Didactic causes

This is a didactic study and will therefore concentrate on the causes of failure within the domains of the school or classroom. It will centre on the didactic negligence of the child and not so much on age, home background, socio-economic status, peer pressure, etc. These will be included in the discussion only if there is a relationship between them and didactic causes of failure.

### 1.6.4 Primary schools

This research study will examine failure in primary schools only. The study will investigate causes of failure regarding pupils of an age range from six years to twelve years – reference is made to the junior and senior primary phases. In addition to failure in certain subjects, attention will also be focused on the pupils who belong to the lower rung of the class; this would mean about 10 to 15 percent of the class population.

## 1.7 METHODOLOGY

This study is based on literature study only. Data will be collated by scrutinising books, recent research reports and scientific articles. Borg (1981:6) states that a literature search for information related to a well-defined local problem will produce information that is more recent and more relevant than one is likely to obtain from other types of research, namely empirical research.

### 1.7.1 Primary and secondary sources

These two types of literary sources are the major means of providing information.

#### 1.7.1.1 Primary sources

The advantage of primary sources is that the person who carries out research,

reports his or her findings and these are published. There is a direct communication between the researcher and the reader. Most primary sources in education are journals but some books also contain original research reports (Borg, 1981: 12).

#### 1.7.1.2 Secondary sources

Secondary sources are publications in which the author is reporting on research that someone else carried out. These are mostly scholarly books and textbooks. The advantage of secondary sources, such as textbooks, is that they give the reader a quick and readable overview of research and opinion related to the educational topics covered (Borg, 1981:12).

The disadvantage of secondary sources is that the author may not accurately report the primary source findings. In such a case, the reader still has the chance of going back to the primary sources to evaluate relevant data.

### 1.7.2 Advantages of literary research

In this study empirical research is seen as one of many methods used to obtain data in educational research. Well-known empirical methods are questionnaires, interviews (person to person), informal dialogues, etc. Whilst empirical research has its advantages in terms of providing "fresh and new" evidence, there is reason to become a bit apprehensive regarding the validity of information obtained. Some interviewees may be biased while others may just answer questions in order to please the interviewer. The danger is that the information obtained may not be reliable enough to solve problems.

Literature study, on the other hand, has the advantage that the reader is able to detect if the researcher is biased through his or her introductory remarks about the study undertaken. Such bias can also be detected in empirical research, but on top of this, reliability may be in doubt.

### 1.7.3 Disadvantages of empirical research

#### 1.7.3.1 Self-report as a method of research

Using information based upon self-report evidence, namely through questionnaires, interviews, etc. has other problems as well. A serious potential weakness of self-report measures is that the subject may tell you only what he or she wants you to know. Such evidence may be distorted or subject to omissions. There is the possibility that the subject may give inaccurate information, for example, if the study is in any way threatening to the subjects, or if they feel that honest answers can harm them.

#### 1.7.3.2 Interpretative research as a method of research

According to Shipman (1985:1) interpretative research based on observation appears to be more practicable for teachers because it needs fewer resources than experiments or surveys and it is focused on the here and now.

Adelman (1974:46) points out that in empirical research it is the observer's version of events that are superior to those of the subjects of study. The observer's version is the only account which can be used as the basis of constructing theory. I disagree with Adelman's statement because this account can be one-sided and it often lacks a historical perspective.

In interpretative research if discrepancies are found in the researcher's accounts they are allowed access to other reports or accounts so that practical differences can be sorted out.

By contrast, in empirical research such involvement of actors(researchers) in validating researchers' accounts is restricted meaning that researchers cannot contest the validity of reports or draw comparisons on the validation of accounts (Shipman, 1985: 48).

### 1.7.3.3 Questionnaires as a method of research

Empirical research done through the use of questionnaires has advantages such as the fact that more persons can be reached to obtain information and the questions may elicit important knowledge. However, questionnaires have disadvantages as well. Sax (1979:56) points out, for example, that when a questionnaire is used, it is not so easy to detect the motivation level of the respondent. It is also very difficult to judge the validity of responses under such circumstances. Another disadvantage is that when questionnaires are posted out, the researcher just assumes that respondents are literate. It may not be such a serious problem, but the method obviously has its limitations.

### 1.7.3.4 Sampling as a method of research

Sampling is another disadvantage in questionnaire research. Each questionnaire that is not returned increases the likelihood of biased sampling. It is often impossible to have a representative sample and the results obtained from the returns on hand, may not be a true reflection of what the researcher really intended to find.

### 1.7.4 *Justification for using literary research only*

The thrust of my argument is that literature study is just as reliable as empirical research. Although it may have certain shortcomings (for instance, data may be too outdated or far back in time regarding the topic on hand), it also has its advantages in that, information recorded is data collated from different types of research already carried out, tried and tested by other researchers.

## 1.8 ELUCIDATION OF CONCEPTS

### 1.8.1 Didactics

In this study didactics indicate the scientific study of teaching-learning actions in formal situations. It is a study field which emphasizes rules, principles, standards of conduct and authoritative guidelines.

### 1.8.2 Evaluation

The type of evaluation on which this study centres is didactic evaluation. It includes two subtypes, viz:

a) product evaluation in which a teacher uses information derived from many sources to arrive at a value judgment of his or her pupils. It is a judgment of merit based on measurements as well as on a holistic awareness of the pupil's potential and the learning context.

b) process evaluation in which the quality of teaching is assessed.

### 1.8.3 Failure

The general understanding of the word failure is to be unsuccessful - to be unable to attain goals. In education it implies a pupil receiving a failing grade. To the pupil it refers to a lack of success in the accomplishment of a school task, small or big. To the educator it is an indication that the pupils were unable to meet the requirements of passing a test, examination or assessment.

### 1.8.4 Individualisation

This term refers to the development of characteristics through learning and motivation, which differentiate one individual from another.

### 1.8.5 Motivation

Motivation is the process of arousing, sustaining and regulating activity. It is the practical art of applying incentives and arousing interest for the purpose of causing a pupil to perform in a desirable way. Motivation is also the act of choosing study materials of such a sort and presenting them in such a way that they appeal to the pupil's interest and cause him or her to attempt the work at hand willingly and to complete it with sustained enthusiasm (Hawes & Hawes, 1982:69).

### 1.8.6 Perception

Perception is a mental image or observation of external reality detected through the senses. It is an insight or intuition that one builds upon seeing or sensing something or someone.

### 1.8.7 Primary school

The primary schools referred to in this study are schools comprising both the "Junior Primary" and "Senior Primary" phases. The junior primary phase refers to classes ranging from Class One to Standard One, while the senior primary phase refers to classes from Standard Two to Five.

### 1.8.8 Principles

In Didactics a principle is a concept or generalization which serves as a guide to teachers in directing learners towards the attainment of educational goals and objectives (Good, 1973:55).

### 1.8.9 Scholastic failure

This type of failure refers to marks in a subject or subjects which are below the

level required by departmental regulation for promotion to the next standard, usually below 50 %. It also refers to achievement attained at a level below the pupil's potentialities.

### 1.8.10 Socialisation

In the present study socialisation denotes the process of educating boys and girls to be sociable and to behave in a socially acceptable manner. Bossert (1980:98) states that children learn norms of independence, achievement, universalism and specificity from the tasks they are expected to do in school.

## 1.9 CONCLUSION

The further course of this study concentrates on the specific causes of scholastic failure. These deficits will then be explored and identified. Once such deficits have been identified, the study will focus on possible remediation and preventative measures that can be employed in trying to reduce the failure rate.

# CHAPTER TWO

# DIDACTIC PRINCIPLES RELEVANT TO SCHOLASTIC FAILURE

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# CHAPTER TWO

# DIDACTIC PRINCIPLES RELEVANT TO SCHOLASTIC FAILURE

## 2.1 INTRODUCTION

Teaching is obviously not an accidental act; it is a purposeful involvement of an adult with a child. After careful consideration of the problems in a learning situation, the teacher should be able to create a specific structure for every specific situation. Thus the organisation of learning activities is the teacher's central problem and it has a direct bearing on the structure of his or her teaching programme. The teacher should organise the learning activities of each situation along didactic lines.

The way in which a teacher creates a learning structure is to use didactic principles as fundamental truths or laws as a basis of reasoning or action. While recognising that scientific knowledge is changing all the time, certain concepts are timeless, and didactic principles are considered to be widely accepted guidelines for teaching. There are many principles which have been identified through the ages by people studying teaching. The following didactic principles will be used as criteria to evaluate the research in this study: socialisation, individualisation, perception, motivation and evaluation.

*There is a strong relationship between the principles of socialisation and* individualisation and it is important that both these principles are applied equally. An effective teacher continuously weighs up the advantages and disadvantages of these two principles. For example: when a teacher plans his or her lesson decisions have to be taken whether the teacher will give the children individual seat-work or group-work. If the teacher decides on seat-work, he or she develops

individualisation, while if the teacher decides on group-work he or she develops socialisation. In this way the teacher has to weigh up which principle to promote at a particular time. If too much seat-work is done the children will become too individualised; if too much group-work is done the children will become too socialised. A similar choice confronts teachers continuously regarding other teaching actions and decisions which forces them to consider how to maintain a balance between individualisation and socialisation.

If one wishes to analyse teaching, then one needs to consider the important principle of perception. To understand what is really going on in classes which cause pupils to fail, an indepth study has to be made about factors affecting perception. Very often, for instance, teachers teach words without regard for their meaning. While the bright learner probably would grasp the meaning of words like **sentence, multiplication, numerator, altitude,** etc., the slow learner would only pretend to have grasped the meaning. Slow learners are notoriously shy to question the meaning of the words used due to low self-concepts. They tend to memorise or repeat the unfamiliar words in a robot-like fashion. The whole process culminates when the child is required to apply these concepts and he or she fails utterly because the meaning of the word has never been perceived. As I see it, the problem is that the principle of perception often does not find expression in the classroom.

It might be said that in education motivation is the current or spark that makes learning come alive in every classroom. It is an accepted fact that a smoothly operated classroom is one in which the teacher takes an active interest in his or her pupils. A child may be well developed, may fit into a group quite well, but the child fails simply because he or she does not like the teacher or receives no incentives from the teacher. Obviously this means that teachers must be sensitive to the feelings of students if they want to motivate them to learn. A teacher's relationship with his or her pupils should facilitate their growth and their learning because teachers are important people in the lives of students. What they do has

real impact on the students. A host of other factors will also influence and determine the student's motivational state, but the teacher who converts the classroom into a type of home in which the child feels a sense of belonging and security usually leads to successful education.

Although there are many ways to motivate pupils, a continuing challenge for teachers is to stimulate each child to want to develop his or her own potential.

Teachers and pupils need to have systematic feedback about successes and failures connected with teaching programmes. In order to obtain such feedback an effective teacher needs to evaluate the teaching-learning activity in his or her classroom on an ongoing basis. This makes the principle of evaluation an important process in teaching. Evaluation as a teaching activity helps the teacher to answer important questions about his or her students and about his or her instructional procedures like: Where did I go wrong in my teaching? Did my pupils grasp and perceive the concepts as intended by me? Were the various levels in questioning catered for? etc. Therefore, when evaluating, the teacher should obtain information about the circumstances in which successes and failures respectively occurred. The principle of evaluation should be seen as an instrument which enables the teacher to detect and to institute remedial action regarding misconceptions and learning problems and to fill the gaps in his or her pupil's knowledge.

## 2.2 THE PRINCIPLE OF SOCIALISATION

*In this study the principle of socialisation centres upon the notion that children* should be introduced into the society in which they expect to live without surrendering their own individuality. In this way the child must be made aware that society does not originate purely because a group of people is present without any mutual ties. He or she should be aware that society implies human relationships, human co-existence and self-realisation.

## 2.2.1 Didactic perspectives of socialisation

Du Plooy, Griessel and Oberholzer (1987:150) define socialisation as a process which supports the adult-in-the making in an independent realisation of his or her personal objectives in life within the community. The child must be roused to willingness and preparedness to live, and to live with others in a changing society.

Van der Stoep and Louw (1990:52) stress that the didactic situation is essentially a social situation. It is eminently a situation of interpersonal relationships within a wider social context. The teaching situation is always enhanced through social relationships. It is believed that a child's learning activity progresses in a social climate where certain norms and codes of behaviour are set, which in turn determines the quality of activities and behaviour. Thus a child's relationship with an adult becomes meaningful to the child because he or she identifies with and relates to the adult in a social way.

*Theories on socialisation*

The socialisation agencies in the life of a child are the family, the school, the peer group, religious institutions, media, etc. Ryan and Cooper (1988) state that socialisation is a general process of social learning during which the child learns the many things he or she must know to become an acceptable member of society.

Successful learning through group-work, teamwork, debates, class discussions, etc. seem to be a common view among most writers; for example: Krüger et al. (1988) see socialisation as a situation in which the teacher must purposely strive to create situations in which pupils can associate with one another in the context of their learning. Pollard and Tann (1987:61) are of the opinion that classroom relationships should facilitate learning and provide both teacher and pupil with a sense of self-fulfilment and a basis for establishing a positive working atmosphere.

Krüger and Müller (1988:87) also stress the socialising function of the school. They agree with Van der Stoep and Louw (1990:52) that pupils are introduced to social interaction by means of, *inter alia,* the learning content.

The child finds himself or herself in a social situation from the day of birth and is involved with other people sharing the same rights and responsibilities. If this is valid within the family situation, then it also holds true in the classroom situation. Thus I agree with the above authors that school practices and classroom actions are influenced by the social relationships that give rise to such practices and actions. Once social awareness is developed then the foundation for future social changes are laid and individual responsibilities for professional actions are taken seriously.

Socialisation in didactic pedagogics refers to:

- the transmission of culture from one generation to the next; *viz.* helping pupils to acquire habits, ideas, attitudes and values acceptable to their particular society;

- the assistance which teachers, within formal school situations, give to a child aimed at helping him or her to fit into society and to form effective relationships with other members of society;

- the teaching and learning of knowledge, skills and beliefs which enable human beings to live interdependently in organised communities.

### 2.2.2 The Role of Socialisation in Didactics

It is during the early years of schooling that children of different cultures and background come together for the first time. Hence they are able to share their

views, experiences, interests and goals. It is also a time when they mingle and interact with each other, learning to respect each others' opinions, to criticise and to accept criticism. The value and art of responsibility is instilled in them. It is especially during the primary school years that the brighter pupils often serve as role models to the quieter and shy pupils. Thus, as they grow into adolescence, they tend to emulate their peers and leaders. Since learning is often stimulated through social structures, skills to further this is of particular importance. It is therefore clear that socialisation is an extremely important didactic principle.

#### 2.2.2.1 Socialisation and the family

The family is the first form of community which the child encounters. It is during the pre-primary school phase that children learn to take into account the demands of others, their fellowmen. In this life-world they become acquainted with rules and laws which must be obeyed. Hence the child learns at an early age to:

- behave suitably in the community;
- respect the property and achievements of others;
- accept authority;
- give assistance to others;
- be tolerant to the strengths and weaknesses of others.

In the words of Du Plooy *et al.* (1987:151) "As the child grows older, his experiences become more extensive and he obtains insight into the meaning of fellowmen and co-existence."

#### 2.2.2.2 Socialisation in school context

According to Du Plooy *et al.* (1987:151) the school should continue the socialising

process by preparing the child to participate in the activities of society and to become self-reliant. Working and playing together in groups offer adequate social experience and opportunity to practise virtue and to rise above anti-social attitudes such as self-righteousness, wilfulness and disobedience. The child learns to subordinate his or her own interests to those of the community, and learns to recognise the privilege of working together with his or her fellowmen for their common interests.

One basic function of the school in the socialisation of the child is the development of cognitive (intellectual) abilities. Although the school can provide other aspects of socialisation as well, this is a major function which are often not fulfilled by other socialisation settings (home, church, etc.). While providing a basis for socialisation, the school serves as a mechanism by which individuals are prepared for their adult roles in work and social spheres. The primary as well as secondary schools work to develop in the child the capacity to perform roles and the capacity to be aware of, and to live up to, the obligations of different roles.

### 2.2.2.3 Social relationships

Bossert (1980:53) contends that forms of social relationships – from which social norms are acquired – are derived from the structural characteristics of the institution. In schools the organisation of classroom tasks may influence the types of social relationships which develop between teacher and pupils, on the one hand, and among pupils themselves on the other. One of the teacher's main functions is to control pupils' social behaviour by rewarding appropriate acts and punishing misbehaviour because task differences may account for other differences in a classroom's social organisation.

*Peer group relations*

Peer group relations also have an important bearing on a child's development and

self-realisation. The peer group forms a safe basis for identification and conformity. The peer group relation also provides the place and opportunity for practising independence. The norms of the parents and those of the peer group are practised among equals. Evaluation and acceptance by friends support the development of a positive self-concept (Vrey, 1979:121).

### 2.2.2.4 The process of socialisation

In the process of socialisation it is the function of the school to reflect and mediate the cultural inheritance of a society and any current changes. In some societies schools help to promote desirable social change and reform. One only needs to look at countries like Germany, Russia, India, Pakistan, South America and some evolving societies in Africa to discover the role that schools play in bringing about social change.

### 2.2.2.5 Socialisation and classroom activities

Bossert (1980:12) points out that the structure of task activities (ie. a classroom's organisation of instruction) creates the context in which teacher and pupils interact and social relationships form. This means that the very social, group-centred character of schools teaches and enhances social skills by means of the "hidden curriculum". The organisation of classroom task activities also results in moral socialisation. According to Bossert (1980:98) children learn norms of independence, achievement, universalism and specificity from the tasks they are expected to do in school. He also maintains that children learn to accept universalistic achievement criteria when their work is evaluated, and to evaluate others in terms of their positions in the school structure. In this manner schools introduce children to important social norms which they need to accept in order to participate productively in society.

### 2.2.3 Socialisation and its Effects on Failure

Classroom social relationships which result from particular instructional organisations frequently influence pupil achievement and the process of socialisation directly. Bouwer and Van Niekerk (1991:41) state that children like teachers who are kind, consistent, efficient at organising and teaching, patient and fair and who have a sense of humour. On the other hand they dislike teachers who are domineering, boring, unkind, unpredictable and unfair.

The general thrust of my argument is that the nature of classroom climates and the quality of interpersonal relationships is fundamental in establishing a positive learning environment.

#### 2.2.3.1 Interpersonal relations and its effect on failure

Owing to learning failures, the failing child's faith and trust in other participants in the teaching situation can be seriously harmed. The child often feels rejected and is inclined to blame others for his or her failures and shortcomings. Because such children experience learning problems and disturbed interpersonal relationships, they often become excessively self-centred, which in turn makes interpersonal contact even more difficult. The learning restrained child frequently displays a hypercritical attitude to everything and everyone who are directly or indirectly involved with the learning task in order to distract attention away from himself or herself. In an attempt to overcome problems in asserting themselves in the peer group, the children tend to conform too easily and injudiciously. Through boasting, bullying and other deviant behaviour, the child may attempt to force acceptance from members of the social group (Kapp, 1991:384)

Kapp (1991:385) states that the gifted underachiever is often poorly adjusted,anti-social and critical. Such children frequently function inadequately on the social level. Their poor interpersonal relationships may be linked to their low achievement

levels. They experience themselves as failures and think others hold the same opinion of them. The child sometimes find the conversations of his or her classmates boring and childish and keeps away from the group. This may result in such a child not easily integrating into a group or being able to apply the finer nuances of social interaction. Against this background it is obvious that the principle of socialisation is of paramount importance in understanding the causes of scholastic failure.

Dreyer and Duminy (1983:59) contend that if a child experiences learning problems and is also rejected by the class group, his or her problems will be aggravated. It may happen that a class group generally achieves poorly and has a contemptuous attitude towards any person who tries to do well. In order to avoid rejection by the group, the child may develop a negative attitude towards the teacher and the subject matter. The consequence of this may be reduced academic performance and possible failure. High academic performance is valued by some pupils while others view it with contempt. The influence of peers and group processes which are operating within the classroom thus has a marked effect on the academic achievement of an individual and on learning outcomes.

### 2.2.3.2 Social reasons why children fail

There are some children who end up as failures because they either find school work difficult or are bored and frustrated. Under such circumstances teachers may have to make more specific efforts to develop good relationships.

Then there are children who have special educational needs, them being children:

- who are new to the class or school;
- who have been upset by events in their lives over which they have little control, such as:

- bereavement;
- break-up of their parents' marriage;
- unemployment.

Such children need sensitive and empathetic attention and they may need special help to express their feelings. Empathetic treatment would help them realise that their teacher cares about them and that they have tangible and appropriate targets to strive for (Pollard and Tann, 1987:75). As soon as these children start to take control of their situation together with the support of their teacher, failure can be avoided.

There is one aspect of the social atmosphere which we as teachers must take cognisance of, namely that children often feel vulnerable in classrooms, particularly because of their teacher's power to control and evaluate. This affects the children's school experiences and their openness to new learning. Teachers therefore have the heavy responsibility to reflect on how they use their power and how it affects children.

Clearly, then, a teacher wishing to sustain an incorporative classroom (a classroom which is consciously designed to enable each child to participate fully in class activities) will set out to provide opportunities for children to feel valued and to 'join in'. At the same time they will attempt to eliminate any routines or practices which would undercut such aims by accentuating the relative weaknesses of some children (Pollard and Tann, 1987:74).

## 2.3 THE PRINCIPLE OF INDIVIDUALISATION

Individualised instruction as a technique of teaching, has been an old principle which was stressed as early as 60 A.D. by Quintillian and throughout the ages by great pedagogues such as Comenius, Basdow, Pestalozzi, Froebel and Montessori (Cole, 1950: 328-595).

## 2.3.1 Didactic perspectives of individualisation

The principle of individualisation according to Duminy and Söhnge (1985:59) is based on the idea that every child must be helped to develop according to his or her own ability. In applying this principle, the teacher must be able to appraise or judge his or her pupils in their learning abilities and achievements in a responsible manner.

According to Cohen and Manion (1989:260) the key to effective individualised learning lies in the provision of adequate resources and materials, carefully structured and suitable for a child's abilities.

*Some theories on Individualisation*

Brennan (1985:215) contends that individualised teaching means using the widest selection of available techniques - not just one-to-one situations but in a manner intimately related to the identified special educational needs of the pupils.

Krüger *et al.* (1988:63) draw a comparison between the principles of totality and individualisation. According to them individualisation is the obverse of totality, in that totality emphasizes the whole or unity, while individualisation demands that the parts, the differences or the unique features be given attention.

Most primary schools are organised into mixed-ability classes which assumes a particular view of children and schools. This means that, in a mixed-ability class, children should be encouraged to respond to educational experiences in a uniquely individual fashion. They should stimulate, and be stimulated by, other children. It would be correct to say that, a mixed-ability approach emphasizes the intellectual and social advantages of children of differing abilities, working alongside each other.

### 2.3.2 The Role of individualisation in didactics

Individualisation of instruction is based on recognition of the fact that not all children can be expected to learn at the same rate. This approach is used in both traditional and open classrooms, though its relationship to the content of learning is different in each case.

#### 2.3.2.1 The difference between traditional classroom teaching and open classroom teaching

In the traditional classroom individualisation is achieved by varying the pace or duration of learning, by varying the mode of teaching or by modifying the set curriculum in some way. What these variations have in common is the belief that all children must master a specified curriculum determined by the teacher or the system. As a result there is the need for frequent evaluation and testing to check the children's progress.

In open or progressive classrooms, where individualisation is a key concept, children collaborate in formulating their own curriculum goals. What this means is that the teacher does not decide in advance exactly what each child will study, but rather provides a climate in which individual children can make choices about the curriculum and explore matters of interest to them. This, however, does not mean that the child does as he or she likes, or that the teacher abandons all responsibility in this connection, but that the curriculum is freed from the constraints of the traditional approach and now more appropriately meets the unique needs, interests and abilities of each child. Individualisation is sometimes misinterpreted by claiming that each child works on his or her own in a physical sense. This is not the case. It simply means that his or her individual needs are taken into account (Nyikana, 1990).

Walklin (1990:60) states that the teacher or instructor should try to establish individual ability by carefully framing questions, putting them to the group and obtaining responses from each individual. Once he or she has established this, instruction should be pitched accordingly.

2.3.2.2 Individualisation in school context

According to Hanekom (1989:486-487) the application of the principle of individualisation has affected teaching in several ways and led in some instances to major changes in approach. Thus - according to recent research carried out by her - learning styles can be defined as the sum total of characteristic cognitive, affective and physiological factors which serve as indicators of how a learner observes, reacts to and interacts with his or her learning environment.

In teaching the individualisation principle demands that due attention should be given to the uniqueness and individuality of each child. Recognition of the reality of individual differences between children leads to the demand that teaching should make provision for these differences.

However, there are many problems that can be encountered in applying the principle of individualisation. Some of the problems are:

- cost of programmes
- space
- size of class groups
- availability of specialised teachers, etc.

Individualised teaching entails teaching that is adapted to the aptitude, capability and interest of the child. It also takes into account the child's culture, view of life, language and sex.

With regard to the organisation of the school and the classroom, Hanekom (1989:487) states that pupils with similar interests and aptitudes may be grouped together. Even in terms of scholastic achievement, pupils who are grouped as high achievers should be given enriched learning content and ample opportunity to work independently. When pupils achieve below their potential, differentiation should be based upon their achievements rather than their estimated intellectual potential.

### 2.3.3 The process of individualised teaching

Each educationist has his or her own view of what individualised teaching should entail. But Brennan (1985:220) postulates the following as principles of individualised teaching:

- Develop a general class programme within which sub-goals and topics are organised to allow individualisation.

- Ensure learning materials are sufficient for the range within the group.

- When teaching, think of individuals and not of the class. What is meant here is that, when planning a lesson, the teacher must bear in mind the grading of subject matter.

- Allow each pupil to learn at his or her own pace.

- Keep adequate individual records of learning.

- Encourage self-directed learning by the pupils.

- Establish standards and procedures that enable pupils to judge their own work.

Brennan (1985:221) further states that another aspect of individualisation concerns the integration of pupils with special educational needs in mainstream schools and classes. Individualisation should contribute to the extension of integration. Those with special educational needs should also be able to participate in the common core curriculum of the school.

### 2.3.4 Individualisation and its Effects on Failure

According to Van der Stoep and Van der Stoep (1968:100) the teacher who wants to use the principle of individualisation in his or her teaching methods, must take into account its advantages and disadvantages.

The advantages are that:

- *Individualisation as far as possible takes into account the child's* uniqueness.

- The application of individualisation enhances the possibility that each pupil will take part in the learning activity according to his or her own ability.

On the other hand the disadvantages are that:

- The risk of failure, which is one of the chief objections to class teaching generally, disappears with individual teaching, because the child does not have to compete; the teaching is adapted to his or her own abilities, personality and environment.

- The advantages of groupwork and group effort are lost.

- Intellectual differences may be overemphasized at the expense of qualitative differences.

- If teaching takes too much account of the group and too little of the individual the reverse is equally true of individualisation.

- There is also the danger of over- protecting the individual in the learning situation.

- Individualisation makes heavy demands on the teacher and his or her didactic designs (Van der Stoep, 1968:101).

2.3.4.1 The limitations of individual and class teaching

Duminy and Söhnge (1985:65) compare individualised teaching with class teaching. They state that, since individual differences between pupils exist, individualised teaching would be a great advantage as it would enhance the nature and talents of every pupil. However, one must take into cognisance the limitations that individualised teaching has, as compared to class teaching. It is believed that an individually educated pupil misses the stimulation which he or she would receive from being in the same learning situation as his or her classmates. The lack of motivation in such a situation results in less creative work.

This does not mean that class education has no disadvantages. In this type of education, interaction between teacher and pupil often has only one direction - from teacher to pupil. Duminy and Söhnge (1985:66) explain this as follows: since there was no true point of contact, there was not enough feedback to measure the teacher's success in making real contact with his or her pupils. Therefore it is concluded that this type of class education cannot provide for the great differences between pupils.

### 2.3.4.2 A balance between individualised teaching and class teaching

Most writers and practitioners believe that, since both methods have disadvantages, the best situation would be a combination of class and individual education. This would mean that, while class grouping is maintained, the character of the education is varied from time to time by the creation of opportunities for work to be done in project form by smaller groups or individuals.

## 2.4 THE PRINCIPLE OF PERCEPTION

The most important development facing young children is to learn to function effectively in school by completing necessary tasks with the desired amount of competence. The success of such a skill is dependent on acquiring the correct cognitive skills, one of which being perception. Perception serves as a cognitive mediator between the student and information (Saracho, 1990:177).

### 2.4.1 Didactic perspectives of perception

To perceive means to become aware of something by means of the senses of vision, hearing, touch, smell and taste. Krüger *et al.* (1988:59) state that perception always implies a reciprocal relationship or dialogue between the perceiver (the person) and the perceived (an object).

According to Adelbert Ames (1982:16) we do not get our perceptions from the things around us. Our perceptions come from within us. He explains that what we perceive is largely a function of our previous experiences, our assumptions and our purposes (needs). In other words, the perceiver decides what an object is, where it is, and why it is, according to his purpose and the assumptions that he makes at any given time. A person tends to perceive what he or she wants and needs to perceive and what his or her past experience has led him or her to assume will work for him or her.

*Some theories on perception*

Walklin (1990:122) defines perceiving as the act of attaching meaning to stimuli reaching our senses. The more we attend to a phenomenon, the more we are likely to perceive about it provided that we had had previous experience of it, or of something related to it. Past experiences affect our ability to perceive the nature of a given phenomenon.

Kapp (1991:283) states that this principle resides in the fact that the child needs to assimilate and understand what is introduced to him through his senses. The premise is that the concrete reality should be converted, through understanding and assimilation, into abstract knowledge. The principle of perception is based on the traditional one which stipulates that subject matter should always proceed from the concrete to the abstract.

Apart from the fact that children are always experiencing things, people and situations from an early age, it is during this time that they start to recognise and associate with certain concrete things in their environment. As they grow older, their experiences become more complicated because the children encounter a whole range of other concrete objects in their environment. Hence it can be concluded that perception is not concerned with visual impressions only. Although the importance of sight and hearing is stressed, impressions coming from all the sense organs play an equally important part (Kapp, 1991:284).

### 2.4.2 The role of perception in didactics

At birth, babies are unable to perceive the surroundings as adults do, but after a while they learn to perceive and build meaningful pictures of the things around them. As time passes, they learn more about the environment and people around them.

Postman and Weingartner (1982:31) relate to us Ames's (1982) studies on perception. Since our perceptions come from ourselves and our past experience, it is obvious that each individual will perceive in a unique way. It means that we are also unlikely to alter our perceptions until and unless we intend to, provided that we have available the alternative of changing our perceptions. Perception is also a process which causes us to act. For example, if rain is falling, some people will run for shelter while others might enjoy walking in it. This serves to illustrate how different people perceive things differently.

### 2.4.2.1 Perception in school context

Van der Stoep and Louw (1990:60) point out that illustration is an important medium to realize the child's perceptual ability in the teaching situation. The learning content must be made available for the child's perception. Thus illustrations, with the use of audio-visual aids in teaching, will enhance the child's perceptual ability of the object under discussion.

The way in which sources of information are perceived by students influences the learning process. This then determines the amount of mental effort or cognitive action that the child decides to invest in, in accomplishing the tasks set (Saracho, 1990:190). Hills (1986:55) emphasises that it is very important for teachers to recognise that, when communicating new information to students, they should attempt to ensure that the students have a sufficient understanding of the background and context of the communication.

### 2.4.2.2 The teacher's role in developing perception

In applying the principle of perception, Krüger *et al.* (1988:60) suggest that the following steps are carried out:

- It is the teacher's task to guide his pupils to perceive the world in new ways, that is, to approach it from new perspectives and to gain new knowledge of it.

- In order to achieve this aim, the teacher must not depend upon his verbal exposition alone, he must draw upon his pupils' lived experiences of reality (the pupils' experiences and interpretations of things in action in concrete situations).

- When pupils lack the relevant lived experiences, the teacher should devise methods and create opportunities by means of which the necessary lived experiences can be provided.

These opportunities may not always take the form of concrete action - a representation of reality may suffice.

2.4.2.3 The role of demonstration and dramatisation in perception

The principle of perception can also be applied to demonstrations. Demonstrations are used to help pupils to gain insight into the relationships that exist between the abstract world of values and ideas and the concrete world of objects and actions (Krüger *et al.,* 1988: 61).

Ames (1982:17) states that there are several ways in which learning content can be dramatised to increase the effectiveness of lived experiences, one of these being imitation or miming. Dramatised presentations of poems and historical events have the advantage that pupils become actively involved in interpreting a role and thus intensifying their experiences.

During visits to places of interest pupils can perceive many things concretely and their lived experiences of these things then form a firm basis for further learning.

However, the teacher must prepare his pupils thoroughly for the trip. The teacher must have clarity on what the pupils are to perceive and what lived experiences they are likely to have. Thus he must plan and organise accordingly (Saracho, 1990: 200).

### 2.4.3 Some views on perception

By actively giving meaning the child gets to know reality and his or her own reality relation. During this time of experiencing meaning the child must often be accompanied by an adult. As the child matures, the adult becomes more and more superfluous. The result is that the child is able to increasingly participate in life around him. Thus children are increasingly responsible for the way in which they give meaning to what they encounter (Du Plooy *et al.* 1987: 134).

The quality of perception, according to Walklin (1990:129), is greatly affected by the language available to an observer. If the meaning of an event cannot be explained in words, then the mind cannot interpret the concept elicited by a given stimulus efficiently. Thus language plays a vital role in human perception, thinking and awareness.

Visual perception, according to Nel and Urbani (1990:84), is an active characteristic of perceiving. Seeing, in their view, is the most dominant mode of perceiving. Through his or her eyes a person actively explores his or her environment. There are, however, situations where people may rely primarily on their ears or nose to explore. For example, a soldier on guard at night will actively listen to sounds and try to interpret them. A cook will rely on his smell to determine when food is ready.

Hence we can conclude that, regardless under which circumstances it takes place, our perception of things, objects, people and events will dictate our final analysis of behaviour or actions.

### 2.4.4 Perception and its effects on failure

Sometimes the classroom situation may easily become conducive to passivity – to a point where perception does not take place. A child who does not actively listen to what a teacher says, may easily sit throughout a thirty minute period without hearing a word of the lesson. Perception does not occur when there is a lack of involvement by the child. Thus it is the task of the teacher to make sure that active positive feelings are aroused through the lesson content.

Memory also plays an important part in perceiving. According to Nel and Urbani (1990:84) pupils with a good memory span can recognise aspects and relations at a greater speed and they tend to have an advantage over pupils who have to consciously remember before they can recognise. Children will experience difficulty in attaching meaning to any object if their experiences of the concrete reality is not meaningful to them, for example: a child who has never experienced a train journey would not be able to talk about such an experience. As a result of this, their learning may not be effective and they can actually fail owing to a lack of recall of facts.

If children cannot utilize all their senses in the learning act, and if the emphasis in teaching is on a multisensory approach, they may become more confused than being helped (Kapp, 1991:285).

To conclude this discussion on perception a quote of Vrey captures the essence of the concept well: "Without perception no meaning could be assigned to people, objects or self and no life world could be constituted" (Vrey, 1979: 20).

## 2.5 THE PRINCIPLE OF MOTIVATION

Pupils should continually be encouraged to learn, and their interest and enthusiasm should be aroused. Every teacher is faced with the challenge of what he or she

can do to inculcate in pupils an interest in his or her subject. Teachers ask themselves what they can do to encourage self-exertion and self-activity in their pupils. In other words; how can they awaken the interest of their pupils and motivate them to learn ?

### 2.5.1 Didactic perspectives of motivation.

The word "motivation" is derived from the Latin verbs *moveo* (out of) and *movere,* (to move) (Griessel, 1989:28). Motivation implies to set in motion, stir, work upon, excite, inspire, arouse, etc. (Woodbridge and Manamela, 1992:115). According to Van Vuuren (1988:294), motivation embeds the individual's wish to be and to become someone.

Krüger *et al.* (1988:70) define motivation as the pupil's will to learn. Motivation can be extrinsic, that is, the pupil can be motivated by extrinsic factors. Extrinsic motivation is, for example, when a boy learns because he is afraid that he will be punished or rejected if he should fail. Alternatively motivation can be intrinsic or from within – for example, when the pupil learns out of curiosity or inquisitiveness. It is well known that intrinsic motivation is more effective and enduring than extrinsic motivation.

Maslow refers to motivation as a term relating to the arousal, control and sustaining of behaviour necessary to satisfy a need or to attain a goal. His theory is that only after physiological needs such as hunger, thirst and the like have been satisfied, can people concentrate on needs related to self-actualisation, such as self-fulfilment, prestige and esteem (Maslow, 1943: 370-396).

### 2.5.2 Motivation in school context

Cohen and Manion (1989(b): 153) state that as far as short-term motivation is concerned a teacher needs to establish some kind of common purpose at the

beginning of the lesson or activity. One way of achieving this is to adopt an approach which induces pupils to attend and learn. They also emphasise that at school, pupils' efforts should (a) be treated with respect and (b) experience that it is human to err. They should not experience the school as a place where meaningless facts have to be memorised in order to please the teacher or to pass an examination. The school should rather be experienced as a place where, under the sympathetic guidance of the teacher, meaningful answers are sought to meaningful problems (Cohen and Manion, 1989(b): 155).

### 2.5.2.1 Incentives by the teacher

The chance of successful achievement is greatly increased when materials based on pupils' special interests are used as teaching structures. In addition to selecting levels of teaching materials carefully, the teacher can also make students conscious of success and progress by praising good work, by using rewards as reinforcements, and by displaying records of progress through charts and graphs. Krüger *et al.* (1988:71) discuss teacher incentives as temporary crutches which should assist the child to achieve self-responsibility and also self-responsibility with regard to learning.

### 2.5.2.2 Qualities of the teacher

Krüger *et al.* (1988:73) recommend that teachers should take note of their own qualities when motivating pupils. They postulate the following principles:

- "The teacher should have a thorough knowledge of his subject(s). As pupils become aware that their teacher is knowledgeable, their confidence in him and their willingness to work increases. They derive motivation for learning from their teacher's achievement and stature;

- He should also have a sound knowledge of his pupils, of their potentialities, limitations, aspirations and values in order to adapt his presentation accordingly. When he knows his pupils authentically and what they want to learn, how they prefer to learn and when they want to learn, he will be able to devise a strategy that will increase their willingness and motivation to learn;

- The teacher who succeeds in motivating his pupils also sets a good example. His attitude and enthusiasm inspire his pupils to work and to achieve;

- He continually fathoms and arouses their interest. He attaches greater value to his pupils' interest than to excellent test and examination marks;

- The teacher who succeeds in motivating his pupils also applies sound educational principles. He ensures that his pupils are always actively involved in the teaching-learning situation;

- He empathizes with his pupils. He seldom has to compel his pupils because his stature as a teacher motivates them to do their best."

This argument is then summed up as "Everyone who commits himself to a teaching career commits himself to an ideal and should therefore strive to realise these qualities as fully as possible" (Krüger *et al.* 1988:74).

### 2.5.3 Motivation and its effects on failure

When a child manifests a lack of motivation in the classroom, one should try to establish the reason for this attitude. Placing the blame on the child alone will not solve the problem. There may be a lack of daring. He no longer wants to, or is

able to, venture because his self-concept has been demolished or prevented from developing positively through recurrent failure, (Kapp, 1991).

### 2.5.3.1 Demotivation as a cause of failure

According to Vrey (1979:230-231) repeated and regular failures mean that the child experiences little or no satisfaction. In such cases the motivation to study the subject concerned will dwindle and disappear, even if it was adequate at the outset. From the children's point of view, the study of the subject is not helping them to elevate themselves. In order to maintain themselves, they will choose some other means of self-actualisation, such as pupils not showing interest in their school work, or turning to criminal behaviour like stealing, harming or bullying younger pupils, etc. Thus it can be concluded that, to anyone, including the child, a negative self-concept constitutes the greatest single obstacle to the realisation of a goal. It thwarts motivation.

### 2.5.3.2 Negativism as a cause of failure

Krüger and Müller (1988:178) are of the opinion that negative sanctioning does not work. Teachers and parents who scold, criticise, insult and threaten children mostly attain the opposite of what they intended. The pupil becomes discouraged and demotivated for the learning task. Only healthy and constructive criticism is necessary, providing that it is not accompanied by rejection and demotivation.

The six variables identified by Epstein (1989:261) aimed at helping teachers to organise classroom instruction are relevant here: Task, Authority, Reward, Grouping, Evaluation and Time, which have been heuristically ordered in an acronym (TARGET). These structures help teachers to influence the children's motivation to learn.

## 2.6 THE PRINCIPAL OF EVALUATION

For thousands of years man has used some system to measure achievement. Therefore, an education system that does not incorporate some form of measurement or evaluation is almost inconceivable (Krüger *et al.* 1988:194). In the classroom evaluation is inescapable. The teacher is charged with the responsibility of promoting and developing the intellectual, social and emotional growth of his or her pupils through evaluation.

### 2.6.1 Didactic perspectives of evaluation

Evaluation essentially means attaching a certain value to something. For example, when one valuates one's jewels, then he or she is attaching a certain worth to that piece of jewellery. In the education situation, through the process of evaluation, the teacher is adding worth to or making judgements on his or her teaching and his or her pupil's achievement.

*Some Theories on Evaluation*

According to Bossert (1980 : 195) evaluation is a more complex concept than examining, testing and measurement. In measurement procedure quantity is emphasized, while in evaluation quality as well as quantity is emphasized.

Evaluation is seen by Krüger and Müller (1988:155) as a concept that comprises an assessment of the effect of teaching. It includes techniques like measuring, testing and examining which can be applied in order to obtain a reliable picture of pupils' results.

Welton and Mallan (1988:496) believe that the purpose of educational evaluation is to provide data that enables us to make qualitative judgements about students,

teachers and schools' performances. This means that evaluation is a process that allows us to determine how well students, teachers and schools have performed.

### 2.6.2 The Role of evaluation in didactics

Apart from measuring results, value is also attached to subjective assessment of human characteristics. Nyikana (1990) states that evaluation is a more subjective, qualitative as well as quantitative assessment of a pupil's progress. Evaluation is measurement plus appreciation. She also believes that in every moment of a lesson period the teacher is busy evaluating, appreciating and judging.

#### 2.6.2.1 Evaluation as a process

The distinction between measuring and evaluation is clearly outlined by Krüger and Müller (1988:156). In measuring the only consideration is the mark obtained - there are no influencing factors to be considered - while in testing and examining, achievement is expressed in marks emphasizing quantitative and qualitative considerations. They also state that evaluation is influenced by expected future achievement; for example, if a pupil has done worse than normal, previous test and examination results could indicate whether he has sufficient understanding of the work to recover and even to achieve better later on.

#### 2.6.2.2 Evaluation in school context

Brennan (1985:110) states that evaluation is a complex process concerned with the appropriateness and suitability of curriculum objectives and the sequence in which they are presented. It also deals with the delivery of the curriculum in the classroom in terms of content and learning experience, and with the progress in learning established by the pupil.

Brennan (1985:110) also states that evaluation is a `formative' process which shapes every aspect of the curriculum from the formulation of objectives and their intermediate sequencing to classroom organization and presentations, in a continuous search for improvement and refinement.

But the argument from Welton and Mallan (1988:495) is that evaluation has always been an essential component of instruction and student performance has been its traditional focus. They also state that evaluation is a three-part process that consists of:

- identifying criteria or standards;
- gathering data on the students' performances;
- making judgements about the individual's performance.

### 2.6.3 Types of evaluation

Evaluation has different approaches, each of which provides different information. The different approaches described by Welton and Mallan (1988:497-502) are as follows:

#### 2.6.3.1 Criterion-referenced evaluation

Criterion-referenced evaluation focuses on how individual students perform relative to a specific knowledge or skill. This type of evaluation is keyed to certain knowledge or skills, serving as a criterion which the child is expected to demonstrate. Criterion-referenced evaluation can be used at any point in an instructional experience. It can be used as:

- a pre-test prior to instruction;

- to determine how things are going during instruction;
- to determine if students have mastered the expected behaviours after instruction.

### 2.6.3.2 Norm-referenced evaluation

Norm-referenced evaluation focuses on comparing a student's performance with other students' or groups' performances on the same or similar tasks; but it does not provide information to indicate where the problem lies. Welton and Mallan (1988:499) state that, because the results of norm-referenced evaluation are always stated comparatively in relation to whatever norm is being used, it could at times be very misleading.

### 2.6.3.3 Formative evaluation

Formative evaluation, evaluates students' progress during instruction - instead of waiting until the end. This is a phase of criterion-referenced evaluation that occurs during instruction. The purpose of formative evaluation is to monitor learning progress during instruction and to provide continuous feedback to students and teachers.

While formative evaluation occurs during instruction, summative evaluation always occurs at the end of an instructional period. "Summative evaluation is intended to 'summarise' the changes that have occurred as a result of instruction." (Welton and Mallan, 1988:502).

## 2.6.4 Testing as an aspect of evaluation

It is a well known fact that testing is an essential part of the educational process.

Tests are used to assess the overall efficacy of teaching and learning and to measure the attainment of objectives. Although there is widespread and intense criticism of tests and examinations as reliable evaluation procedures and standards in education, right now these are the only means of evaluating in the school teaching learning situation (Walklin, 1990:160).

To enhance the reliability and utility of an examination, the teacher must fashion his or her programme of testing not so much as to measure how much the students have imbibed from his or her lessons, but to ascertain whether his or her lessons have caused any behavioural changes in his or her students, and the extent to which the changes have taken place. Reliable and valid examinations can be useful to teachers and other educators as forecasts. They assist in identifying students who would benefit or be suitable for further indepth work in various subjects on the curriculum (Van der Stoep and Louw, 1990:159).

### 2.6.4.1 The reliability of examination as a means of evaluation

To ensure that the reliability of examinations is upheld, teachers should take cognisance of the following facts:

- The test or examination must focus upon the areas that have been covered during the month, term or year. It is not a good practice to spring surprises on pupils in examinations.

- Draw up questions that have a great possibility for all to be attempted.

- Give sufficient notice to students about an imminent examination and make the examination time-table public to students in advance.

- Do some revision, if possible, before an examination.

- As far as possible avoid all ambiguities in questions.

- Attempt to answer questions or work out exercises to ensure that they are within the range of ability of students and are also answerable or workable.

- Examinations are not to penalise but to assess, diagnose and reinforce (Van der Stoep and Louw, 1990:160).

To increase the reliability of examinations the students must know at all times exactly what the teacher's procedures are as well as the criteria he or she will use in his or her assessment. These should not be shrouded in secrecy or mystery but open to public scrutiny. Tests and examinations motivate and compel students to study in preparation for them. Studying only for the purpose of getting good results in examinations should be discouraged because learning under such circumstances may not be meaningful to the child. The child must learn that what he or she has studied is not only for the purposes of passing an examination, but for attaining certain thinking skills.

### 2.6.5 Evaluation and its effects on failure

School drop-outs or pupils who have faired badly in examinations rarely make remarkable strides in their vocational life (Rumberger, 1983:199). In attempting to evaluate a child or children, care must be exercised not to trample the feelings and values of students - to do so might impede or even destroy the potential love for learning within students.

When pupils fail a test or examination, especially if they fail in large numbers, the teacher should appraise the test or examination critically to find out how valid it is with regard to its content and wording of the questions. Tests and examinations should not be set with such regularity that it makes pupils become test-addicted.

If this happens, interest and motivation will be so submerged that the intrinsic value of learning is likely to be lost.

2.6.5.1 The need for remedial therapy

Failure in a test or examination tends to place higher demands on a pupil's future achievements. Such higher academic demands may even cause some pupils to drop out of school. Thus it is always stressed that remediation programmes must be carried out soon after a test or examination in order to help and motivate those students who have failed.

When pupils are helped to see the purpose of the evaluation, they feel more motivated to perform well. A teacher's warmth and attitude also influences a pupil's performance. Anxiety in a pupil causes him or her to perform poorly and possibly to fail. All pupils will experience anxiety; therefore it is the examiner's responsibility to ensure that any evaluation session be conducted with as little tension as possible.

Cheating in tests and examinations can be discouraged by clarifying what the behavioural objectives are and how they will be evaluated. It is not advisable to use the same tests or questions all the time as pupils become familiar with the pattern of testing and if previous tests are in the same book, they can always refer to it for answers.

2.6.5.2 Honesty in evaluation

Honesty is an important principle in evaluation. Both teacher and students should know in advance the exact basis upon which evaluation will take place. Teachers must not attempt to reveal to the slow learners or weak pupils the type of questions set - this makes the lazy pupils shirk while it demotivates the hard-working pupil. This is when pupils develop a contemptuous attitude towards

examinations and lose faith in the credibility of the examining body thus leading to failure or poor academic achievement.

However, given the constraints, and the lack of a better alternative, examinations are the only objective mechanisms available to measure student achievement at present.

## 2.7 CONCLUSION

The five principles discussed in this chapter shows particularly how they will be used in this study and how they relate to scholastic failure. There are also other principles which are fundamental to teaching such as: the principle of totality; the principle of authority and freedom; the principle of arranging learning material, etc. It is not practical to use all of them as criteria in a study of this nature since they make the analysis too superficial and confusing; therefore I have identified these five as being most important to this study.

The purpose of using socialisation, individualisation, perception, motivation and evaluation is to show their effects and relationship to scholastic failure. Classroom social relationships frequently influence pupil achievement at school. **Socialisation** is the process through which people interact with each other. Scholastic failure and classroom actions are influenced by the social circumstances within which they occur. Very often poor interpersonal relationships may be linked to low achievement levels or low self-concept.

While **individualised** teaching has the advantage of enhancing the nature and talents of every pupil, it also creates a situation in which the pupil makes slower social progress than the pupil receiving class education and the child may actually miss the stimulation that his or her classmates receive in groupwork. In order to maintain the balance between individualised teaching and classroom education, the

traditional four row class divisions should be made without discrimination in intellectual ability.

Very often failure or a low level of achievement can be attributed to poor **perceptual experiences.** Children who do not grasp the meaning of words or concepts are often too shy to admit this and such learning problems are evident when they are required to apply the skills or knowledge in tests and assignments. Therefore it is important that the factors affecting perception should be properly analysed and studied.

Successful learning can only be accomplished through the concerted efforts of the learner. While it is true that various factors will influence and determine the student's **motivational state**, the children themselves must want to learn and be interested in the learning material. Apart from the fact that only a small percentage of all pupils are truly gifted, it is imperative that each child strives towards the achievement of some ideal or he or she will experience his / her schooling as meaningless drudgery.

An integral part of education is to **evaluate** teaching procedures. The process of evaluation helps teachers to identify their shortcomings as well as their pupils' learning problems. The use of evaluation as a principle in teaching is to guide the teacher in detecting, analysing and remediating the learning problems of the child and to be able to fill gaps in the child's knowledge. The reliability of examinations in schools should be such that it enhances the status, prestige and functional value of education. It suffices to say that if we teach things that cannot be evaluated we are in the awkward position of being unable to demonstrate that we are teaching anything at all. Therefore, whether testing or examining is being used, it is qualitative evaluation which is most important. It is the only reliable means of identifying pupils who achieve poorly and those who achieve well.

# CHAPTER THREE

# CAUSES OF SCHOLASTIC FAILURE IN PRIMARY SCHOOL

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# CHAPTER THREE

# CAUSES OF SCHOLASTIC FAILURE IN PRIMARY SCHOOL

## 3.1 INTRODUCTION

During the past decade we have seen a number of interesting constitutional developments with significant implications for the education system in the Republic of South Africa generally and in the KwaZulu Natal region in particular. The National Policy for General Education Affairs Act (Act No.76 of 1984) made it clear that educational provision is now based on cultural imperatives (way of life, culture, traditions and customs) as opposed to racial considerations (Vos, 1988:79).

Further investigation into Education in KwaZulu Natal carried out by Jacobs (1992:17) revealed that in 1990 there was a total of 1 542 071 pupils enrolled at primary schools in KwaZulu Natal. The same study showed that in 1990 there were 35 659 teachers in primary schools in KwaZulu Natal. It is also estimated that by the year 2000 pupil enrolment in KwaZulu Natal primary schools would rise to 2 199 250, while the number of teachers would rise to approximately 49 268. This means that if the school conditions continue as they were in 1990, teacher/pupil ratios in KwaZulu Natal could, on average, be 1:47. Under such circumstances it is likely that the failure rate of pupils in primary schools will be very high unless timely precautions are taken to raise pupils' achievement levels.

To address these and other concerns, this study focuses on the exploration of the didactic causes of scholastic failure in primary schools.

Children not achieving at a level commensurate with their intellectual capabilities have been the concern of educators for many years. These children have been categorised as children with **learning disabilities**. As stated in Chapter 1, the term

"learning disabilities" in this study refers to that group of children who experience specific learning difficulties caused within the school situation. It is not intended as a generic classification for all children with learning difficulties. The study focuses on the lower rung of the class - approximately 10 to 15 percent of the class population who tend to fail examinations.

The characteristics of learning disabled children vary widely. Some of these children encounter difficulties in one specific area, for example, Mathematics, while others may experience problems with a number of academic subjects.

The causes of scholastic failure have proven to be fairly elusive because they are wide- ranging and divergent. In this chapter the causes of scholastic failure will be examined from five perspectives: inadequate situation analysis; inattention to language skills; ineffective teaching styles; weak classroom management and lack of teacher self-evaluation.

## 3.2 RATIONALE FOR SELECTING FIVE PARTICULAR PERSPECTIVES

### 3.2.1 Inadequate situation analysis

From an educational standpoint special learning disabilities must be identified through psychological and educational diagnosis. A child with learning problems may be identified as a potential learning disabled case at any point in his or her educational career. To teach successfully the teacher should be able to determine the situational demands because an accurate analysis of the entry situation improves the prospect of success. Proper diagnostic procedures are therefore necessary to understand the learning disabilities adequately and to guide appropriate educational planning. There is obviously a close relationship between the child's entry situation and the objectives and aims the teacher wishes to accomplish. It is imperative for the teacher to be knowledgeable about the child's entry situation in order to choose learning experiences which would be most

meaningful to the child. Krüger and Müller (1988:25) state that the teacher who disregards learning experiences disregards the child's part in the teaching-learning event.

### 3.2.2 Inattention to language skills

Language is a crucial aspect of a child's environment because of its role in concept formation and the acquisition of scholastic skills. The close relationship between language and learning determines progress in reading, written expression and mathematical acumen. Many children in primary schools do not receive the necessary amount and type of linguistic stimulation for them to develop sound verbal language abilities.

### 3.2.3 Ineffective teaching styles

Inadequate and inappropriate teaching styles appear to be a major cause of learning problems. Many teachers fail to develop the necessary skills to teach basic school subjects. They seem to be ignorant about ways in which children learn and compensate for specific kinds of learning problems. Some methods and materials used by teachers may not be suitable in remediating a child's disorders in understanding, associating and using information he or she is learning. Thus it is important that the child be taught the basic skills required in the acquisition of knowledge.

### 3.2.4 Weak classroom management

Research has shown that poor planning and ineffective instruction lead to behavioural problems in the class, and together with mismanagement it creates learning problems and failure. Weak classroom management is seen as one of the principal causes of scholastic failure. It has been proven that the most important determinant of classroom atmosphere is the teacher's method of classroom

management. The teacher's techniques for keeping the class actively attentive to lessons and involved in productive independent activities creates the environment for stimulating learning. Any form of mismanagement in classroom activities cannot be blamed on the pupils. Poor discipline in the class is a reflection of the teacher's attitude towards his or her role in the class.

### 3.2.5 Lack of teacher self-evaluation

The strength of an education system depends to a large extent on the quality of its teachers. For progress in education to be of any value, teachers, as professionals, must participate in their own intellectual growth enabling them to improve their professional expertise. Without a commitment to continuous professional development poor teaching will be perpetuated, teachers will continue using stale procedures despite the contribution of research and development. Hence it is obvious that a teacher who does not constantly evaluate his or her professional growth will not be able to cope with new demands and thereby be responsible for the poor quality of educational services rendered. In this way lack of teacher self-evaluation is seen as one of the causative factors of scholastic failure.

## 3.3 INADEQUATE SITUATION ANALYSIS AS A CAUSE OF FAILURE

Research has shown that there is a strong relationship between situation analysis and scholastic failure. Inadequate diagnosis of a child's learning abilities prevents a teacher from planning and preparing appropriate subject material suitable to a child's learning potential. The following aspects discussed in this section shows how inadequate diagnosis affects scholastic failure:

- didactic diagnosis
- educational diagnosis

According to Tharp and Gallimore (1988:26) children are learning higher order

cognitive and linguistic skills long before they enter school. Their teaching takes place in the everyday interactions of home life. Within these activities, opportunities exist for the capable members of the family to assist and monitor child performances. It is through these day to day activities that children learn the communicative tools of their culture. They learn to develop skills and generalise these with new problems and grasp aspects of familiar situations.

According to Mandell and Fiscus (1981:136) the first step in identifying children who require a more complete diagnostic study is large-scale screening by teachers, which should provide a quick, relatively easy and inexpensive method of evaluating a large group and identifying those with possible problems.

Many researchers (Skuy,Shmukler and Clark,1983) concur that teachers spend extended periods interacting with children. They have opportunity to observe the pupils and it is through observation that they can obtain an overall perspective of the child's learning potential.

Cohen and Hynd (1986:46) and Skuy *et al.* (1983:8) demonstrated that teacher ratings compared with psychometric testing, are accurate, parsimonious and valuable. Taylor (1984:46) reviewed seven major American screening and readiness tests and found the Metropolitan Readiness Test to be the most valid and reliable. However it was found by the Human Science Research Council (1981) Work Committee that such a test was not suitable for South African children. Therefore it was documented in their report that, there is a need for providing classroom teachers in the primary school with appropriate identification criteria for differentiating among, and specifying the needs of, the large proportion of black South African children regarded as scholastically impaired.

### 3.3.1 Didactic diagnosis

Children with learning disabilities exhibit disorders in basic psychological functions such as perception, recall and conceptualisation. The acquisition of basic academic

such as perception, recall and conceptualisation. The acquisition of basic academic skills is dependent upon these psychological processes. Wallace and McLoughlin (1975:45) point out that some learning disabled children cannot, for example, understand directions, remember material recently taught, organise a meaningful thought, or perhaps write a proper sentence. Many diagnostic and educational practices are based on the hypothesis that such psychological disabilities are causes of, or at least contributors to, interferences in the learning processes.

There is always a need to want more and acquire more knowledge. From an educational standpoint, the urge to acquire more knowledge, is through learning and teaching. According to Krüger and Müller (1988:25), it is very important to take into consideration the child's pre-knowledge when planning a lesson. An illustration from the book by Krüger and Müller (1988:29) is used to emphasize the importance of being aware of a child's entry situation.

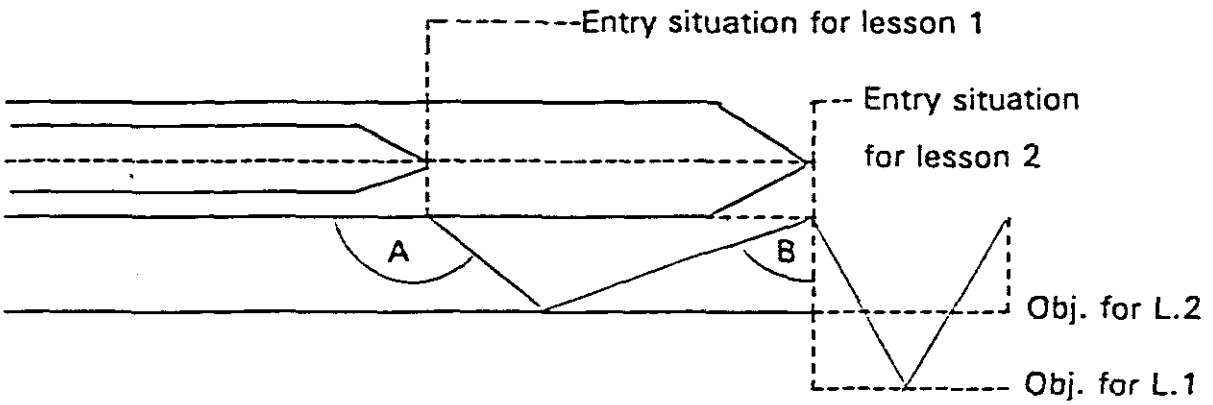


FIGURE 1 : A CHILD'S ENTRY SITUATION
SOURCE : Krüger and Müller (1988:29)

Figure 1 is an illustration of how a child's entry situation changes. With each bit of knowledge added, the learner's entry situation changes. According to the above illustration, in terms of knowledge based on learning experience, the learner's entry situation has progressed from point A to point B during the presentation of lesson

one. Now the pupils at point B have additional preknowledge available and are ready for lesson two. If the teacher has to disregard the pupils' entry situation and the present content, the pupils might not be able to assign meaning to the new learning content, thus there would be no motivation to learn because the gap would be too wide to bridge successfully.

On the other hand, learning content which is too elementary and already familiar to the pupils would offer no challenge, and this would give rise to boredom and frustration. Successful teaching depends on the teacher's willingness to meet the challenges ahead of him or her.

### 3.3.2 Educational diagnosis

Educational diagnosis is intended to produce useful instructional ideas, specific objectives for instruction and the methods and materials to accomplish the objectives. These should be gleaned from the didactic diagnosis.

#### 3.3.2.1 General role of diagnosis

Diagnosis is just one aspect of the total process of treatment for children with learning disabilities. The process involves four phases:

- identification
- analysis
- educational planning
- evaluation

It is during the identification phase where the signs of learning disabilities are usually recognized. The major part of diagnosis is phase two, that is the analysis - which involves the studying, analysing and seeking of solutions of the child's

learning problems. The third phase - the educational planning phase- takes place when the results of the diagnosis are established. Diagnosis is not the same as evaluation, but they are related. Diagnostic information provides baseline data for evaluation strategies. The results of the evaluation, the fourth phase, ought to contain valuable feedback for further diagnosis and instructional planning (Krüger and Müller, 1988:32).

### 3.3.2.2 Purposes of diagnosis

Educational diagnosis serves two purposes. The first one is to use findings obtained to define children as learning disabled and to justify their placement in learning disabled classes. The second major purpose and use of educational diagnosis is to establish instructional objectives based upon diagnostic results.

According to Lerner (1989:351) diagnosis usually includes the following steps:

- determine whether the child has a learning disability
- measure the child's present achievement in basic skills
- analyse how the child learns
- explore why he is not learning
- gather and interpret data into a diagnostic summary or hypothesis about the child
- develop objectives and plans for teaching

Wallace and McLoughlin (1975:61) state that although a battery of tests is frequently used in diagnosing learning disabilities, a typical educational diagnosis contains an assessment of intelligence, medical history, family interviews, overall

measures of academic achievement and specific tests for particular academic problems.

But according to Van Niekerk and du Toit (1994:55) researchers are still disputing the question whether a child's intelligence quotient is a portrayal of his full intellectual ability, and whether it is a valid and reliable norm by which his or her scholastic achievement can be assessed. Van Niekerk and du Toit (1994:55) also state that researchers are still arguing about the relevance of intelligence assessment in the determination of a learning problem, because the global IQ figure is commonly used as an indication of a child's available learning potential in terms of which his scholastic backlog is determined. Thus it is recommended in the research report of Van Niekerk and du Toit (1994) that a child's temporary poor scholastic achievement be assessed by the teacher in the light of the possibility that his intellectual ability is at that stage in a metastable phase and that he may actually be less clever than at a previous assessment. The researchers say this is especially important in the junior primary school stage, when children's intellectual abilities develop or differentiate at different paces. Assessment is necessary so that temporary scholastic achievement is not erroneously 'diagnosed' by the teacher or the orthodidactician as a learning problem, when the child is merely on a lower lever of differentiation, rather than that the child should be guided by the teacher to help him achieve his full available potential again (*Ibid.* 55).

3.3.2.3 School readiness and its effects on scholastic failure

An important concept underlying educational practice and philosophy is that of readiness (DiPasquale, Moule and Flewelling, 1980:4). In all countries, especially developed ones, it is common practice that a child goes to school at a certain age, in other words it is accepted that he is ready for school after reaching a particular age.

In the Republic of South Africa a child may not start school earlier than the year in which he or she reaches the age of six (but he or she must be at least five and a half years of age) and not later than the beginning of the year in which he becomes seven (Kotze and Van der Walt, 1990:39).

Garbers (1969:48) found that twenty- three percent of a representative sample of school entrants were considered by the infant school teachers as being only partially ready for school or not ready at all.

Kotze and Van der Walt (1990:40) mention that various investigations within this field have been done in the RSA but that two of these were of specific relevance. Jooste (1976:24) revealed the following data: From a group of 500 standard 5 pupils admitted at 5 and a half to 6 years of age, 30 percent failed at some time or another; of those admitted at 6 to 6 and a half years, 9,25 percent failed, while of those admitted at 6 and a half to 7 years of age only 6 percent failed. Du Rand

(1980) also indicated the high percentage of failure among pupils who were admitted at 5 and a half of age.

A similar type of investigation on preschool education was carried out in Namibia by Verhoef, Kruger and Engelbrecht (1990:84). One of the findings was that a major issue in the provision of education for blacks in Namibia is the high failure and drop out rates from as early as Grade 1 (19,6 % failure rate in 1986), the main cause of which may be considered as the absence of preschool education facilities.

During this same investigation it was found that of the black six-year old Grade 1 pupils tested using the HSRC Aptitude Tests for School Beginners, less than 1 % performed at average level or above in all of the eight tests given, while no fewer than 70,8 % performed at below average level in five or more of the eight tests.

Among the seven-year olds or older, the performances were better: 12,5 % achieved no scores below average, and only 33,7 percent had five or more scores below average, showing that developmental maturation improves with age and also with school readiness. Among this group there were many repeaters who had failed Grade 1 the previous year(s) (Verhoef *et al.* 1990:84).

The same test was given to Grade 1 white pupils. We are reminded at this stage that almost all white Grade 1 pupils receive one or more years of preschool education before entering Grade 1. The results show that white pupils have a

distinct developmental and scholastic advantage, while the black pupils, because of their developmental retardation, start accumulating a scholastic backlog right from their very first day at school and eventually leading to scholastic failure (*Ibid.* 84).

Hence Verhoef *et al.* (1990:84) concluded that there is a vital need for a pre-formal developmental bridge-year education programme, preceding Grade 1, for all disadvantaged pupils.

## 3.4 INATTENTION TO LANGUAGE SKILLS AS CAUSE OF FAILURE

It is through the medium of language that we can take part in everyday life, communicate with our fellow beings and share their ideas. In classrooms throughout the world teaching is done by means of language - either spoken or written. According to Cosford (1982:88), a child with poor language development will be at a learning disadvantage from the moment he or she first walks through the door of a school. There is a great variety of speech and language difficulties in primary school pupils. It may be difficult for the classroom teacher to ascertain whether a child's language is just slow to develop or whether his speech and language is abnormal. It is therefore very important that the teacher is aware of the normal range of children's language in the primary school.

At this point it may be useful to look at the areas of language which may be affected.

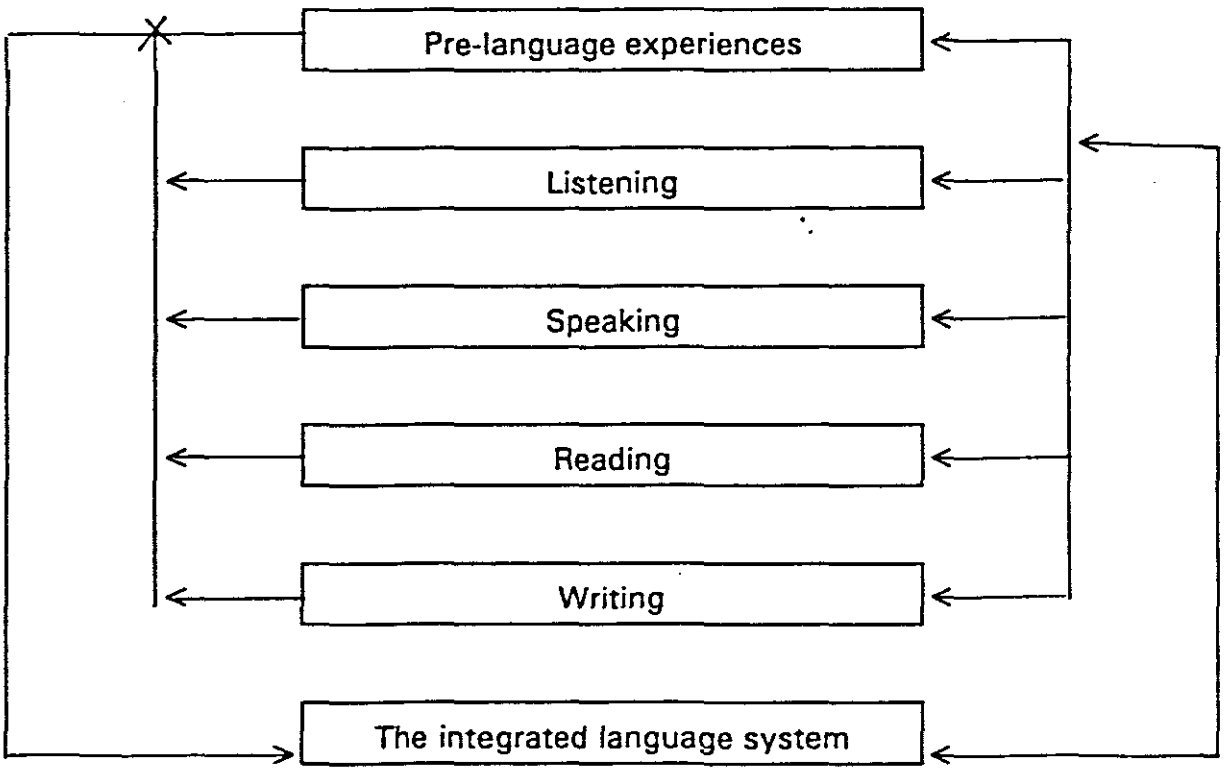


FIGURE 2 : THE FORMS OF LANGUAGE
SOURCE : Lerner (1989:313)

Figure 2 is a diagrammatic representation of the various forms that language appears in. They are all integrated through an underlying language system. As children gain competence and intimacy with language in one form, they also build knowledge and experience with the language system (Lerner, 1989:319).

How does a language impairment affect learning ? At this point we must take note of the fact that, an untreated language deficit may diminish an individual's capacity

to function as a whole person. The close relationship between a language deficit and learning disability is noticeable when children with learning disabilities manifest some aspects of language inadequacy.

### 3.4.1 Language problems of learning-disabled pupils

Language problems of one form or another is the underlying cause of many learning disabilities. Oral language disorders include poor phonological awareness (this is the inability to recognise that words are made up of sound elements), delayed speech (this is a child who takes longer than usual time to be able to speak), disorders of grammar or syntax, deficiencies in vocabulary acquisition, and poor understanding of oral language (Lerner, 1989:320).

Language disorders may also take the form of written language disabilities in reading, writing or spelling. Biggs (1967:49-55) state that many problems in learning to read and write stem from deficits in language related skills. He also states that poor readers have inadequate language-processing abilities. At this juncture it is very important to differentiate between a speech disorder and a language disorder.

According to Lerner (1989:322) a speech disorder refers to abnormalities of speech, such as articulation, voice or fluency difficulties, while a language disorder is much broader. It refers to disorders of the entire spectrum of communication and verbal behaviour which includes problems of delayed speech, disorders of vocabulary, word meanings or concept formations, misapplication of grammatical rules and poor language comprehension.

According to Wallace and McLoughlin (1975:133) language difficulties are experienced in the following areas: inner language, receptive language and expressive language.

Inner language refers to `internalized' language or the language which one uses to communicate with oneself. Children who experience difficulty in this area are unable to attach meaning to specific words. The word "train" for example, may have no particular connotation to a child, even though he is able to hear the word spoken and to express the word himself. What happens here is that the child is unable to transform any experiences with the word or concept into a verbal symbol. This is due to the fact that the child is taught words without regard for their meaning. While the bright learner may grasp the meaning quickly, the slow learner is shy to admit that he or she has failed to grasp the meaning. In such a situation one would say that the teacher overlooked the problem and had neglected to test for reinforcement of ideas or concepts taught in a lesson.

According to Wallace and McLoughlin (1975:133), the causes of failure in this area is that, children usually hear what is said, but are unable to comprehend the meaning of it. These children also have problems in associating names with objects; they are unable to name objects and are poor at recalling names. The most common problem seems to be the inability to understand, localize and attend to various speech sounds. If a child does not perceive isolated speech sounds, then it can be assumed that he or she will also have difficulties with words and sentences. Since success in perceiving speech sounds depends on the child being aware of sounds in general, it is therefore incumbent upon the teacher to begin training by making children aware of sounds (Wallace and McLoughlin, 1975:134).

Words taught in isolation creates more problems for the children because they cannot group words together to form phrases, sentences and paragraphs.

### 3.4.2 Perceiving speech sounds

The basic skill here is to understand spoken language. Learning disabled children with perception difficulties usually have problems in differentiating between two

sounds or choosing a word which begins with a particular sound in a list of words read to them.

Wallace and McLoughlin (1975:135) state that children with receptive language problems should not be taught words in isolation. To obviate any kind of failure, words must be taught in context or as concepts and not just on their own. Lack of such a skill can be seen when a child is asked to write a complete story. The child is unable to group words into phrases, sentences and hence a paragraph.

Alant (1988:70-71) carried out a study on the comprehension abilities of two groups of non-standard language speaking children in a poor 'Coloured' community just outside Pretoria. One of the findings was that major educational difficulties exist in the areas where non-standard language is used. It was also found that there is a basic difference between the child's home and school language or, as Doughty and Doughty (1977:69) express it, as the difference between the 'language of living' and the 'language of learning'. Faegans and Farran (1982:69) are of the opinion that these differences do not pertain only to language structure but also to content and language use as manifested in conversational rules.

Willes (1981:45) suggest that the first six months during the first school year should be devoted to aiding school beginners in becoming familiar with the interaction style required in the classroom. Wells (1981:75) takes the argument further by stating that classroom interaction is of particular relevance in situations where there is some discontinuity between the child's home and school communication styles.

According to Tough (1982:25) conditions of poverty are major factors influencing educational achievement. He also states that in recent findings it was indicated that schools can make a difference, which implies that as teachers we must identify the means by which schools can confer greater benefit on poverty stricken children so that the benefits can be maximized.

### 3.4.3 Reading and learning disabilities

Reading is part of the language system and is linked to the other forms of language, namely oral language and writing. Reading is one of the major academic difficulties of learning disabled students. The inability to read has detrimental consequences for the poor reader.

Das, Mulcahy and Wall (1982:156) state that people who read poorly are also generally slower at recognizing words. They conclude that many individuals have large recognition vocabularies and an adequate word attack skill, but they need an indefinite amount of time to process each word. As a result they proceed so slowly that they cannot effectively understand what they are trying to read.

According to Hammill and Bartel (1982:33) some children may experience temporary lags in reading development due to external causes and a few have serious word-learning problems. A child may fall behind in reading owing to the following reasons: an extended absence from school, a temporary failure in vision and hearing, a constant change in schools, a radical change in reading programme or through poor concept formation. Hammill and Bartel further state that in such cases nothing is wrong with the child's central nervous system; neither is the child mentally retarded or emotionally disturbed. If appropriate steps are taken through careful assessment of the child's needs and proper instruction is provided, the difficulty can usually be overcome by using the correct or appropriate materials designed for the child's instructional level. Most of these problems can be handled within the classroom situation.

*Paired reading as a technique to improve reading deficiencies*

Berelowitz and Dawes (1992:367), using a closed interview schedule, carried out 107 random interviews with parents in four junior schools to ascertain parental involvement with reading at home. Results of the study disclosed that the home

background factor which emerged as the most related to reading, was whether or not the mother regularly heard the child read. All other things being equal, children who regularly read to their parents at home were considered better readers than those who did not.

The initial promises of the paired-reading techniques spurred many small-scale studies in Britain. Topping (1984) reports on a survey of ten such studies involving six to 76 children, ages ranging from six to thirteen years. He emphasizes the flexibility of the technique against the diverse backgrounds of children participating in the studies. Although these studies claim to have had successes, Topping states that these impressive successes need to be tempered with some caution. As noted by Pumfrey (1986:89-94) the designs of these studies have many weaknesses. They include the absence of control groups, the lack of follow-up and failure to allow for the possible effects of differential time-on-task. This then implies that most of the remediation and skills teaching lies in the hands of the class teacher, while parents can be used as supplementary helpers at home.

Hammill and Bartel (1982:32) mention the following as the characteristics of a "Poor Reader". Poor readers:

- fail to notice distinctions between letters like b and d; or was and saw; or m and n; or they might only focus on certain characteristics like the beginning of words;

- cannot predict reasonable or possible endings of words, phrases or sentences;

- fail to relate reading content to their own background;

- read to identify individual letters or individual words, or read because they have to;

- approach all reading tasks the same way;
- cannot or do not develop expectations or predictions concerning the directions or main idea of a passage; and they
- become bogged down in attempting to decipher the passage on a letter by letter or word by word basis.

### 3.4.4 Written language and learning disabilities

Written language is considered to be one of the highest forms of language and in the hierarchy of language abilities, it is the last to be mastered. Abilities and experiences in listening, speaking and reading usually precede the development of writing skills. Difficulties in any of these other language areas will certainly interfere with the acquisition of the written form of language. Children with various reading problems usually experience spelling disabilities. According to Wallace and McLoughlin (1975:176) a number of other factors are also related to written language disorders and these include:

- spoken language disturbances
- auditory process problems
- visual process problems
- word analysis deficits, including problems with phonics and syllabification
- speech articulation problems and other deviations
- instructional factors.

#### 3.4.4.1 Handwriting and learning disabilities

Handwriting is seen as the most concrete of all the basic academic skills. Some

of the common handwriting errors described by Hammill and Bartel (1982:34) are:

- Difficulty with alphabet symbols: when the child does not remember how to write certain letters or numerals or when he/she distorts shapes of certain letters or numerals.

- Confusion with direction: the child writes certain letters, numerals or words in mirror image; or erases or overprints habitually to change directions of certain letters or numerals.

- Difficulty in copying shapes: the child distorts simple shapes and fails to close corners. They tend to draw "ears" where lines meet or change direction.

Children who experience problems in handwriting, recognition of letters, symbols and so on, will also experience problems in spelling.

3.4.4.2 Spelling and learning disabilities

Owing to poor recognition of letters and incorrect formation of letters, pupils spell the words wrongly and hence learn them incorrectly. Lerner (1989:405) is of the opinion that spelling is one area of the curriculum in which neither creativity nor divergent thinking is encouraged. Lerner takes the argument further by stating that what makes spelling so difficult, is that the written form of the English language has an inconsistent pattern and that there is little correspondence between the spoken sounds of English and the written form of the language. This makes spelling a difficult task even for those not afflicted with learning disabilities.

According to Wallace and McLoughlin (1975:182) the ability to spell requires an integration of the following skills: auditory and visual discrimination, memory, sequentialization, analysis and synthesis. The cause of failure in spelling among

many pupils is that those who fail have great difficulty in associating sounds with symbols. They cannot translate the sounds they hear into letters and words.

Johnston (1985:160) states that the acquisition of word recognition skills must be acknowledged as an explicit priority in reading instruction. In the case of unfamiliar words, phonic analysis is the strategy most commonly used. Because spelling is a form of language expression that is initially learned at school, spelling problems can usually be traced to shortcomings in the participation of the teacher or the pupil in the teaching event. Some of the shortcomings mentioned by Wallace and McLoughlin (1975:183) regarding the teacher are:

- inadequate and inefficient planning of the spelling lesson;
- inadequate guidance of the child by the teacher during the spelling lesson.

On the other hand the following are noted as shortcomings of the pupil:

- inadequate learning — pupil does not learn according to his or her potential;
- various deficiencies that are present in the pupil. For example: physical problems (illness); sensory problems; perceptual skills; language deficiencies (to name just a few);
- gaps in the pupil's store of knowledge due to changes of school and absence from school.

3.4.4.3 Limited English proficiency: English as a second language and its effects on failure

Differences in language may be another problem that affect school learning. Many

pupils come from cultures where a language or dialect other than standard English is spoken. Language differences can interfere with school learning for pupils who use nonstandard English and whose native language is not English.

In our pluralistic society an increasing number of pupils come from homes where a language other than English is spoken. These pupils often have a limited proficiency in English; they have difficulty in understanding and using the English language. Some of the pupils speak only their native tongue, while others use both English and their native language. There are those who still have learning disabilities over and above their language problem.

In America some linguists suggest that the use of nonstandard English becomes an impediment to school learning because the pupil is not equipped for the kind of language proficiency required in the classroom or for many other challenges of life (Lerner, 1989:326).

Lerner (1989:326) is of the opinion that if pupils are not verbally equipped for the kind of language proficiency required in the classroom, they cannot do well in school. Where English is used as a second language, speakers tend to score lower on their reading tests, hence they tend to fall further behind. These pupils need a secure and broad oral language base before being introduced to more complex written language skills and reading.

## 3.5 INEFFICIENT TEACHING STYLES AS A CAUSE OF FAILURE

When dealing with pupils' poor academic performance, Bouwer and van Niekerk (1991:39) are of the opinion that it is essential to establish and address the dynamics of the particular pupil's education situation holistically. This is achieved by analysing the various constituents of education (that is, the lesson participation of the pupils and teacher and the lesson content) which may cause the pupil's learning difficulty.

Bouwer (1992:39) and Du Toit (1980:40) state that a mere error analysis of a child's work, followed by attempts to remedy specifically the errors which have been detected is not enough. Studies carried out by Bouwer (1992) and Du Toit (1980), reveal that a more dynamic approach is required to analyse all possible inadequacies in the education situation. The teacher must also look very closely at the subject material with which he or she is having difficulty, so that the problem areas may be rectified.

In any education situation where a child is taught by an adult, all pedagogic essences are constantly at play. But according to Van Niekerk (1982:40) these essences are not all actualized to the optimum in educational activities. This fact may on occasion, especially where the essences are frequently or gravely under-actualized, cause a backlog or distortion to gradually accumulate in the child's overall development or his or her academic performance (Van Niekerk,1982:40; Du Toit,1980:40).

### 3.5.1 Deficiencies in the pupil's lesson participation as a cause of failure

Bouwer and Van Niekerk (1991:39) cite the findings of Hallahan and Bryan (1981:40) that the degree to which a child is intentionally in the lesson may be related to the level of his or her abilities, performance and interest in the content. Hallahan and Bryan (1981) in their study found that inadequate pupil involvement in a lesson may be detrimental to their mastery of some of the objectives of that particular lesson. It was found that if this occurs frequently or habitually, or if it manifests in a serious degree over a short period, a pupil may fail to realise his or her potential.

### 3.5.2 Inadequacies in lesson presentation

According to studies carried out by Bouwer and Niekerk (1991:40-41) poor lesson presentation can be the cause of poor pupil performance or even failure. They

mention the following as possible causes: If the teacher consistently fails to pass on information effectively, this may incapacitate some or all of the pupils. They also state that poor performance is then related to factors such as inadequate concept formation, poorly developed or even distorted schemata, a lack of problem solving skills and reluctance to actively engage in problem solving.

In the same study carried out by Bouwer and Niekerk (1991) it was discovered that teachers may also arouse feelings of resistance, dislike and unco-operativeness in their pupils through their relationship with the class or through particular actions - hence resulting in unsatisfactory performance by the pupils.

Dednam and Bouwer (1985:105) mention the following as inadequacies in the teacher's lesson presentation:

- Misjudgment of the level and range of the content during lesson presentation.
- Failure to match the level of exposition to the possible level of comprehension and output of the pupils.
- Negligence in pacing the lesson closely in accordance with the progress of the pupils.
- Failure to teach specifically to the responses of the pupils and to ask sufficient and effective questions to gauge the understanding of the class; and to actually proceed with the lesson regardless of the pupil's understanding.

### 3.5.3 Lesson content and its effects on scholastic achievement/failure

According to van Niekerk (1982:41), when introducing children to new content, the educator helps them to expand the meanings with which they invest their lifeworld.

Pasques (1973:53) states that abstract contents unrelated to social realities can cause pupils to perform poorly. By this is meant that school tuition or teaching is very often completely divorced from the realities of daily life. There are times when the lesson contents taught fail to touch upon contemporary problems such as changing social circumstances. This implies that the school possibly fails in preparing the child fully for contact with the realities of the present day world.

Thus Van Niekerk (1982) states that selecting content themes for teaching is a considerable task. However choice is very important here, because Van Niekerk (1982) states that the content presented in school is determined by the curriculum which specifies the factual content of the subjects, as well as the method of instruction to be used. Coetzee and Du Toit (1986:41) take this point further by stating that the lesson content itself may be the dissonant factor at the root of a breakdown in communication between teachers and their pupils.

In the same study by Coetzee and Du Toit (1986) it was found that subject material which was too advanced for a particular class was the cause of learning problems and their study showed that pupils lacked fundamental knowledge required in understanding new information. It was also found that where the task was too complex, frustration, anxiety and confusion was the result. This is what caused the pupils to perform poorly. The situation can be worsened if the child lacks the frame of reference by which to associate new material with other fields of their knowledge.

Content that is too abstract will also pose problems for the slow learner. Coetzee and Du Toit (1986:41) in their study found that these pupils may still rely on a concrete frame of reference owing to their level of development and may be unable to follow the advanced logic in the argument or explanation. As a result the child will again fall back on rote learning, which would be learning without meaning and understanding.

### 3.5.4 Specific causes of learning problems in Mathematics

In a study carried out by Hammill and Bartel (1982:181) it was found that deficiencies in the instruction of mathematics is one of the causes of learning problems or failure in mathematics. Wallace and McLoughlin (1975:203) firmly support this finding by stating that the child is mainly dependent upon the instruction of the teacher to acquire mathematical skills. This implies that if sequential skills (that is, step by step teaching of certain processes like multiplication or division) is not done properly then there are those children who are prone to failure through lack of skills development.

Stoker (1990:187) carried out a study on the use of structural materials in teaching primary mathematics. He discovered that almost thirty years after the findings of the Mathematical Association, the Cockroft report (Department of Education and Science:1982) also emphasized, as a central issue, the place of understanding, discovery and the use of appropriate apparatus in the primary mathematics curriculum. This means that the Cockroft report firmly supported the thinking pioneered in the earlier documents of the Mathematical Association.

Hart (1981) using the Assessment Performance Unit (APU) and the Concepts in Secondary Mathematics and Science (CSMS) projects as a research method provided evidence of pupils' lack of mathematical understanding in the primary school. Hart first used the APU test on 11 year olds and found that only 33 percent of them were able to obtain the correct answer in a certain skills test. He found similar results with the use of the CMSM tasks on 12 year olds - only 23 percent were able to compute accurately.

By contrast, in a practical test, the 11 year olds were able to derive the answer quickly and more accurately. Thus it is stated that as quoted by Hart (1981:96) the findings from both the APU and CSMS gives a clear indication that children's thinking in practical situations is often more advanced than their skill at performing abstract arithmetical computations.

According to Stoker (1990:187) the Cockroft report also stressed the importance of language in mathematics. Not only does it mention the need to teach the vocabulary of mathematics, but it placed great emphasis on the use of oral language as a tool of thinking and as a means of accurate communication.

Stoker (1990) in his research focused on the value and use of structural apparatus for concept development, basing his findings on the use of "Diene's Apparatus". He states that while mathematics teachers and educators have not accepted the theory in full, they have extracted only those aspects they thought would be most beneficial in the classroom.

Resnick and Ford (1984:126) revealed that the structure-based methods and materials have not been adequately validated by research and very little is known from school practice regarding the quality of children's mathematics learning.

Research conducted by Biggs (1967:190) in England, shows that the quality of the teacher is the variable that has most influence in the classroom. A good teacher using appropriate apparatus will do more to develop understanding than the poor teacher using the same apparatus.

Biggs (1967:191) states that improving the effectiveness of the teacher would be as important as encouraging the use of apparatus. Teachers will need to work together to explore methods that will enable them to develop a teaching style which places more emphasis on the use of mathematical apparatus and less on rote-learned routines.

### 3.5.5 Problems in teaching Science

Munting (1991:152) carried out a study to determine how much hands-on experience children have in science in primary schools. Results obtained prove that difficulties associated with good science teaching appear to be a world-wide

phenomenon but the problem is particularly acute in the Republic of South Africa with its large third-world component. Good science teaching implies teaching by inquiry. In our General Science syllabi, however, not all the components can be taught equally effectively by inquiry and a diversity of teaching strategies is therefore called for (Munting,1991:153).

Munting (1991:153) in his survey sent out 510 questionnaires to 173 schools. 226 respondents completed these questionnaires. An expected, though disturbing, result was that 109 (48 %) of teachers teaching science had no post-matric qualification in these fields. Of greater concern was the fact that 56 percent of the younger teachers with less than five years of teaching experience had no post-matric science qualification, while the older teachers with five or more years of experience were somewhat better, namely, 38 percent. This led to the conclusion that at least in the English-medium primary schools the situation in respect of teacher's qualifications in science appeared to be deteriorating. In the final conclusion of Munting's study a plea is made for schools, colleges and superintendents of education to establish closer links and to work together to develop and pilot appropriate and more effective strategies in the teaching of all subjects, while at the same time interacting with teachers and giving in-service training where this may be requested.

## 3.6 WEAK CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT AS A CAUSE OF FAILURE

According to Montgomery (1990:124) classroom management is of major concern to almost everyone connected with education. But Pringle (1970:56) states that if proper organizational skills are applied in classroom management then poor discipline leading to poor scholastic performance can be reduced.

In a study carried out by Montgomery (1990:127) it was found that fear of failure causes pupils to behave in an improper manner and it is this fear and disruptive behaviour which lead to further failure.

### 3.6.1 Relationship between corporal punishment of pupils and their academic achievement/failure

Cherian (1990:96) carried out a random study among 1021 pupils to test the relationship between corporal punishment and academic achievement. It was found that punishment often causes dislike towards the enforcer and the situation in which it occurs. Research by Lawrence *et al.* (1984:40) has shown that children like teachers who are kind, consistent, efficient, patient, fair and who have a sense of humour. Lawrence's study indicated that pupils would dislike teachers who are domineering, boring, unkind, unfair and unpredictable. In a situation where pupils fear their teachers, they tend to develop a negative attitude towards both teacher and subject and the resultant behaviour most often leads towards poor academic achievement or even failure in the subject.

Child (1981:46) discovered that punishment, instead of acting as a deterrent against repeated behaviour, actually impresses upon the child what not to do, rather than what should be done.

### 3.6.2 Parental punishment and its relationship to scholastic achievement

Empirical research carried out by Cherian (1990) in Transkei showed that there is a strong relationship between corporal punishment meted out by parents and scholastic failure. Results of the study showed that children who were constantly punished for poor scholastic achievement developed a hatred towards both their parents and school-work. These children either ran away from their homes or played truant resulting in poor performance or scholastic failure.

Fischer and Lazerson (1984) reveal that children brought up in a very strict home environment show little curiosity and tend to lack originality and initiative. These children actually develop excessive anxiety which hampers their learning ability and hence leads to some kind of failure (Behr *et al.*, 1986:96).

The results of the study carried out by Fischer and Lazerson (1984) reveals the following information: the academic performance of pupils decreased as the frequency of punishment of different intensities increased. It was also found that the academic performance of pupils of a low socio-economic status decreased as the frequency of their parental punishment increased. This also holds true for pupils of high socio-economic status. Thus, according to Fischer and Lazerson (1984:414), whatever the style of disciplinary styles used, it has a marked effect on a child's scholastic achievement.

Behr *et al.* (1986:97) state that frequent chastisement can create resentment and hostility in children and hence induce insecurity which breeds anxiety, fear and maladjustment. This is what induces unwillingness to learn resulting in poor behaviour and scholastic failure.

### 3.6.3 The effects of corporal punishment on academic achievement

The results of the study carried out by Cherian (1990) shows that punitive measures like corporal punishment, ridicule and criticism are injurious to the emotional adjustment of children and result in poor academic performance. A tension-ridden atmosphere is not conducive to learning, respect of authority and the development of an integrated personality; in fact, it may well cause the child to develop negative attitudes to learning. Consequently, Cherian (1990:99) states that growth in self-concept occurs in an accepting, warm, empathic, open and nonjudgemental environment which allows pupils the freedom to explore their thoughts and feelings in order to solve their own problems. In sum, an environment in which a child is punished can adversely affect the self-concept and hence his/her academic performance.

### 3.6.4 Punishment as a cause of poor classroom behaviour

Good and Brophy (1984:213) are of the opinion that teachers who rely heavily on

punishment can achieve only narrow and temporary success. Such teachers are said to be in continuous conflict with their pupils, who may obey them out of fear when they are present but will go out of control when they are not in the room.

Pollard and Tann (1987:154) point out that children who are constantly punished for poor behaviour may also learn something other than that which the teacher intended when meeting out the punishment. They acquire attitudes and feelings towards themselves, their learning and towards each other. While successful learning may result in gains in confidence, in pleasure and a sense of achievement, failure may result in low self-esteem, apathy, aggression or avoidance. Children might learn how to avoid work they do not like by pacing about so that they can spend more than the expected time on preferred activities.

### 3.6.5 Depression: its effects on scholastic achievement and classroom management

Research by Van Niekerk (1990:280) on depression and learning problems reveals that there is no consensus on whether or not children exhibit a distinctive depression syndrome, but there is general acceptance that some children do suffer from depression. Locally it has been stated that 8 percent of children under 12 and 20 percent of children older than 12 who are seen at child guidance clinics are depressed.

In a study of 100 depressed children (Van Niekerk, 1990:281) found that poor performance at school is the most significant symptom. The impeding effect of depression on the actualizing of learning particularly impairs concentration, interest, thinking and memorizing. This then leads to disharmony in education, which in turn leads to an inadequate command of the subject matter. The resulting feeling of inadequacy could intensify the prevailing feelings of anxiety and depression and this then leads to unacceptable behaviour in the classroom. Such a child will show a distinct lack of interest. Apathy, refusal, rejection and negative criticism of the

learning task are common. The resultant punitive steps taken by the teachers could lead to still more adverse feelings in the child. The child often builds a wall around himself/herself and dwells in failure.

Olivier and Goliath (1994:93) investigated the study habits and attitudes of pupils during collective conflict-orientated behaviour such as "school boycotts". A global perspective indicated that the criterion group which was exposed to school boycotts did not differ significantly from the control group, but did show better attitudes towards study. However, their actual study habits was less effective. The final conclusion was that the study habits and attitudes of all respondents were of average standard.

### 3.6.6 Self-image and its relationship to academic achievement

An investigation into the nature of pupils' self-image and its effects on academic achievements was carried out by Meyer, Pretorius and Marais (1989:708). The finding of this investigation was that specific learning problems could be identified to a larger or lesser degree in those pupils who show signs of poor academic achievement and that these problems would have a negative effect on their academic work.

Distraction, concentration, the search for approval, acceptance and hyper-activity were some of the most important problems the pupils faced. A further result showed that a high correlation existed between self-image and academic problems and corroborated the supposition that self-image and academic achievement have a mutual effect on one another (Meyer, Pretorius and Marais, 1989:709).

The conclusion reached is that greater emphasis should be laid on the emotional development of the pupil in the training programme of teachers in this field and a greater awareness of the role which the self-image plays in human behaviour should be fostered (Botes *et al.*, 1990:198).

## 3.7 LACK OF TEACHER SELF-EVALUATION AS A CAUSE OF FAILURE

It has always been the tendency to look for causes of learning difficulty in the children themselves. Children have been subjected to tests by doctors, teachers and psychologists. Yet it is seldom asked whether what is taught and how it is taught, could be a major cause of children's difficulties.

### 3.7.1 What is teaching ?

Bird and Little (1986:507) view teaching as a complex, humane activity, in which a teacher can grow steadily more proficient over the years, by means of disciplined curiosity, continuous training and skilful assistance. They also state that teachers can be supported and evaluated by persons including principals who join with them in mastering and advancing the craft. Teachers are primarily influenced by the support and recognition that they receive in the course of their teaching.

### 3.7.2 Can teachers and teaching be improved ?

Bagwandeen and Louw (1993:1) stress that a teacher's education does not end with his or her departure from the university or college of education. As long as knowledge about education continues to evolve, and new techniques and devices are established, there will be something new for the teacher to learn regardless of his or her qualifications or years of experience. There is no limit to a teacher's preparation for the art of teaching. In-service education and training should be seen as a necessity of educational life for all educators.

A teacher who graduates out of university or college is just equipped for minimal performance. As time goes on such a teacher may become old-fashioned and rigid in his or her views and methods of teaching. Therefore it is necessary that the teacher maintains professional renewal and experimentation as part of his or her normal duties (Bagwandeen and Louw, 1993:2).

Le Roux (1990:427) in his study on communication in teaching and learning state that teachers must be sensitized to focus on improving their communication skills and thus the efficiency of their teaching. Teachers must constantly evaluate their own teaching practice by asking themselves the following questions:

- What is the nature of my explicit communication in the classroom ?
- What messages are communicated to pupils through my personal example, professional approach, classroom environment, dedication, etc ?
- What self-expectations do I hold about myself ?
- Do I as a teacher realise the inevitable importance of effective communication in teaching and learning ?
- Do I stay an eager student of effective and new communication techniques and strategies and am I constantly trying to improve my classroom communication and thus my teaching ?

These are some of the many important questions that Le Roux would like teachers to ask of themselves when evaluating their classroom behaviour and teaching methods (Le Roux, 1990:429).

### 3.7.3 Reflecting on one's classroom activities

Tharp and Gallimore (1988:259) believe that many teachers reflect little on their classroom actions and are seldom guided by theories or principles of learning or child development. In order for teachers to know what the nature of the problems are in his or her class, the teacher has to reflect on his or her classroom actions. The teacher must engage in an educational dialogue with himself or herself. They ought to ask themselves important questions after every lesson.

### 3.7.4 Reasons for further training

Studies carried out by Hills (1986:26) reveal that, in order for progress in education to occur, it is imperative that teachers as professionals continuously engage in intellectual growth, evaluating their own progress and improving their professional expertise. Good teaching cannot depend on techniques alone. Opportunities must be provided for the teacher to improve his or her qualifications, methods of teaching, approach and attitude towards his or her vocation (Hills, 1986:27). Without commitment to such a programme of continuous professional development, poor teaching will be perpetuated and teachers will continue using stale or old procedures despite new innovations and contributions by researchers.

### 3.7.5 The Triple-I-Continuum of training

The three stages of Initial training, Induction into the profession and In-service training are seen as a career long process for the growth and development of teachers (Bagwandeen and Louw, 1993:9).

#### 3.7.5.1 Initial training

The initial training of a teacher addresses knowledge of the school and its environs, the nature of pupils and the theory of education. During the initial training period, teacher trainees are taught the various skills for entry into the profession such as lesson programming, evaluation of pupils, and classroom control (Bagwandeen and Louw, 1993:10).

#### 3.7.5.2 Induction

Once the training period is over, the teacher's task is to put that training into practice. Once the teacher is inducted into the profession, this phase should set directives for the teacher and should orientate the young teacher to further his or

her professional growth. The environment in which the teacher works should stimulate interest and inculcate a spirit of enquiry. The teacher should be encouraged to commit himself or herself to the loyalty of the teaching profession (Bagwandeen and Louw, 1993:13).

3.7.5.3 In-service education

The third phase of continuous training is in-service education. In-service education counteracts obsolete or defective teaching. It implies the continuation of professional development. In-service education and training help teachers to self-evaluate their performances, assess growth needs and plan their own learning programmes based upon these needs. This is what is often lacking amongst teachers in our schools. Most teachers fail to see the advantages and importance of having professional dialogues with colleagues, members of higher authority (deputy principals; heads of department and senior teachers) and even with themselves.

In a survey by Skuy *et al.* (1988:59-60) on students following the one-year post-graduate course [HED(P)] to qualify as teachers it was found that students feel the more practical aspects of the course are of greater importance to them than the more theoretical aspects of practice teaching. Practical exercises will be of more benefit to these teachers in the classroom situation. They would have knowledge on how to handle situations and they would be coming in with hands-on experience. In this same survey students stated that their initial academic training was insufficient for teaching at secondary level and that they felt unprepared for the job of teaching.

Laslett and Smith (1984:19) suggest that looking back on lessons, teachers should ask themselves the following questions:

- What worked today and what did not ?

- Was the work too hard or too easy ?
- Was there enough variety and change of pace ?
- Were there enough alternatives to fall back on ?
- Was there enough revision ? Did I repeat, rephrase, refresh, restate the concepts, vocabulary and information ?
- Did I ask the right kind of questions ?

Answers to these questions will help teachers to replan and improve their lessons. It will also help teachers to redirect their attitude and behaviour towards the slow learners and pupils with learning difficulties.

### 3.7.6 Recurrent education

Recurrent education implies the need for teachers to further their education and degree of specialization through their careers. It is seen as a vehicle by means of which teachers can influence and guide their own professional training programmes. Recurrent education is seen as a means of extending the knowledge of teachers and providing refresher courses and helping them to keep abreast of new developments in education (Bagwandeen and Louw, 1993:21).

Steyn and Nowlan (1989:731-736) carried out a survey on the problems of "beginner teachers". Their findings indicated the following as problems experienced by the beginner teacher:

- Teacher preparation was too theoretical and during **teaching experience** students did not do enough practical teaching.

- Although each school had its own unique policy, too much emphasis was placed on `window dressing'. Far too much duplication of

preparation and reporting took place to the disadvantage of real teaching.

- Beginner teachers were not adequately prepared either by their college, university or school to draw up suitable tests and examinations. It was also found that the **teaching of reading** in the primary school needed to be emphasized more in training.

Opinions of principals of schools were also canvassed to determine their experience of the problems facing the beginner teacher (Steyn and Nowlan, 1989:733). The principals agreed with the teachers in the sense that they, too, found the pre-service training too theoretical and that teachers were often appointed in posts for which they were not prepared. Principals were of the opinion that beginner teachers lack self-confidence and reluctantly accept assignments that break into their private life (Steyn and Nowlan, 1989:734).

There were fewer points of agreement than one would expect between the opinions of principals and beginner teachers about the problems facing beginner teachers. The key problem areas identified during research carried out by Steyn and Nowlan (1989) formed the basis of a course offered to the teachers who started their teaching careers in January 1988. Emphasis was placed on the teaching and management tasks of the teacher. The purpose of the course was to equip and motivate the beginner teacher to be more effective in the teaching situation but its success has not yet been reported upon.

Stoker(1990:190) in a survey on the use of structural materials in teaching found that teachers may feel threatened and somewhat disconcerted to know that what they have struggled to achieve with the pupils is perceived by others as being not altogether acceptable. In view of this teachers will need to support one another, using their own discussions as a means of learning during a period of change.

Van Niekerk (1990:281) in a survey on depression and learning problems concluded that re-teaching only is not sufficient to rectify inadequate command of subject matter. Attention must be given to the learning potential as a requirement for the necessary preparation of remedial teaching. Interesting subject matter, which appeals to the child, should be selected. There should also be variety in teaching tempo, subject matter and teaching strategies to prevent boredom. Rendering assistance thus is aimed at harmonizing the disharmonious educational dynamics.

## 3.8 CONCLUSION

It is clear that many children at some stage or the other struggle with problems relating to their education and growing up. While some children are able to solve their own problems, others require specialized help. Timely or early **diagnosis** and identification of problems is important for any aid to be successful. Although identifying learning problems is the teacher's task, parents can also share in this process. One must also have a thorough knowledge of the child's experiences and problems in order to make the aid provided successful. Early diagnosis and analysis is the key to the preparation of new teaching programmes.

**Language** is a crucial aspect which requires much attention. Yet many children with speech and language problems are not being helped with their language due to lack of resources. Therefore it is necessary that the class teacher and parents collaborate closely in order to help the child with language problems. In developing strategies to improve language usage, the teacher must take into account factors affecting language. An untreated language deficit may diminish an individual's capacity to function as a whole person, meaning that he or she will either isolate himself or herself or cease to communicate effectively in any form. Therefore it is important that language be considered as an integrated system rather than a

collection of skills. Many kinds of learning depends on the individual's mastery of the language. Teachers of pupils with language disorders must develop a fresh, positive attitude.

**Ineffective Teaching Styles** also has a repercussion on students performances. Teaching and learning problems develop easily if there are shortcomings in the teacher's preparation and planning of lessons. Teachers must not only take the child's intellectual capabilities into account, they must also take cognisance of the child's educational needs. Through his or her lesson planning, presentation and guidance of the pupil, the teacher can either increase and enhance or decrease and destroy these aspirations (the desire to learn), it might even lead to failure. Any learning restraints can only be eliminated if the teacher motivates himself or herself as well as the child to participate in a co-ordinated and purposeful way in every facet of the lesson structure. This is a key aspect of didactic teaching-learning activities.

Approaches to **classroom management** depends on the teacher's attitude towards learning and the relationship they establish with students. It is lamentably true that teachers are often not aware of what goes on in the classroom and this lack of awareness may interfere with their effectiveness as classroom leaders. Teaching is likely to be more effective if teacher's goals and classroom behaviour are in agreement. There is often a gap between what teachers do and what they think they do or want to do. Hence it would be significant to conclude the aspect of classroom management with the following quote from Good and Brophy (1984:177),

> "Trying to control behaviour problems through emphasis on punishment is ineffective and usually counterproductive. It is more effective to focus on desirable behaviour, using

management techniques that prevent problems from emerging, than it is to try to deal with problems after they emerge. The key to success lies in the things the teacher does to create a good learning environment and a low potential for trouble".

Research on **lack of teacher self-evaluation** showed that it is a possible cause of scholastic failure. The best way to get involved in a programme of development is through In-service Education and Training (INSET). It is said that INSET can advance the professional education of teachers more than any other programme. In order to enhance the professional status of the teacher effectively, teachers must be committed to INSET as part of their professional undertaking and as an integral facet of their conditions of service. It is incumbent upon teachers to improve the quality of education in their schools. To be more effective in their posts and to enjoy job satisfaction, teachers must be prepared to accommodate new techniques and discoveries which would also prepare them for promotion.

# CHAPTER FOUR:

# DIDACTIC EVALUATION OF CAUSES OF SCHOLASTIC FAILURE IN PRIMARY SCHOOLS

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# CHAPTER FOUR

# DIDACTIC EVALUATION OF CAUSES OF SCHOLASTIC FAILURE IN PRIMARY SCHOOLS

## 4.1 INTRODUCTION

A criterion is a means or a standard of judging. In this study the didactic principles expounded in Chapter Two are used as criteria to analyse recent research findings regarding the causes of scholastic failure, as described in Chapter Three. The course of discussion will take place under the following sections:

- Ineffective socialisation as a cause of scholastic failure
- Ineffective individualisation as a cause of scholastic failure
- Ineffective perception as a cause of scholastic failure
- Ineffective motivation as a cause of scholastic failure
- Ineffective evaluation as a cause of scholastic failure

## 4.2 INEFFECTIVE SOCIALISATION AS A CAUSE OF SCHOLASTIC FAILURE

The research that is presented in Chapter Three has shown that the principle of socialisation seemed to be violated in at least two respects. To shed more light on the infringement of this principle, the following aspects regarding socialisation are discussed:

- The effect of inadequate language skills on human co-existence.
- Society's failure to enhance professionalism among teachers.

### 4.2.1 The effect of inadequate language skills on human co-existence

The growth of speech and language is one of the most fascinating aspects of children's development. Language is the most important tool for social communication between human beings. Language also functions as a means of becoming aware of one's own identity through individual expression. Language serves to heighten awareness of one's thoughts, feelings and personal qualities.

In Chapter Two of this dissertation it was stated that a major function of the school is to introduce children to important social norms which they need to accept in order to participate productively in society (See Section 2.2.2.5). One essential group of social norms cluster around the teaching of language skills to children. From a didactic point of view language is tightly intertwined with the value-structure of the society in which the child is educated. In the words of Van der Stoep and Louw (1984:66):

> "language is an intrinsic aspect of the teaching form; it is seen primarily as the determining factor of perception, experience and objectification the child is so intent upon....(language) is a revelation or disclosure of reality surrounding the child which ensures his active involvement in life".

Yet the research evidence listed in Chapter Three (Section 3.4) suggest that a large number of pupils fail to develop adequate language skills. On the contrary, inadequate language development appears to be a principal cause of scholastic failure in primary schools. To shed light on how the ineffective teaching of

language skills leads, firstly, to scholastic failure and, secondly to an infringement of the principle of socialisation, let us examine language as a catalyst for socialisation and the research evidence linking scholastic failure to five language-related skills, viz. speech, handwriting, spelling, reading and writing.

#### 4.2.1.1 The significance of language as a catalyst for socialisation

It has previously been established that society implies human relationships, human co-existence and self-realisation (see Section 2.2). Whenever there is human society, there is language. Most forms of human activity depend on the cooperation of two or more persons and language enables them to work together in an infinite variety of ways. Children who have difficulty in communicating effectively with other human beings are, therefore, severely disadvantaged. They are relatively unable to express their needs, frustrations and misunderstandings to their family, their teachers and their peers. Typically, the less such children communicate, the more alienated and maladjusted they become. Their unexpressed awareness of reality impinges on the quality of their human relationships and their ability to fit into a well-functioning society.

#### 4.2.1.2 Discussion of research linking inadequate language skills to scholastic failure

**(a) Speech deficiency as a cause of scholastic failure**

A connection between speech deficiencies and scholastic failure has been shown (see Sections 3.4.1, 3.4.2 and 3.4.3). The research of Willes (1981), Tough (1982) and Alant (1988) is particularly relevant (see Section 3.4.3). Alant's finding that major comprehension difficulties are experienced by children from non- standard language groups indicates that speech deficiency is a causative factor when pupils fail. Since a large percentage of pupils in South African primary schools speak non-standard or different languages at home than what

they speak at school, Willes' suggestion (1981:64) - that the first six months during the first school year should be spent on familiarising pupils with classroom speech – makes sense. In South Africa, however, this has not been put into effect. If the above results are read in conjunction with Tough's finding (1982:25) that conditions of poverty aggravate speech problems and poor academic achievement, it becomes clearer to which extent speech difficulties could be a contributory factor in causing the high failure rate at many South African schools. The detailed speech abnormalities of low-achieving pupils identified by Wallace and McLoughlin (1975) and Lerner (1989) are even more enlightening. Many children who fail at school struggle with the articulation of sounds, voice projection, fluency, delayed speech, vocabulary and other disorders which impede their inner language, receptive language and expressive language. In the final analysis spoken language disturbances lead to deficient concept formation which has a potentially devastating effect on the learning process.

**(b) Defective handwriting as a cause of scholastic failure**

The ability to write legibly is a fundamental requirement for scholastic success. Research by Hammill and Bartel (1982) and by Wallace and McLoughlin (1975) ascertained that handwriting disabilities play a decisive role in widening the gap between pupils who fail and those who pass (see Section 3.4.4.1). Children who fail frequently have difficulty with the formation of alphabet symbols, the direction in which they write and the copying of shapes. Thus, to combat high failure rates, teachers need to diagnose and remedy handwriting problems as early in the child's school career as possible.

**(c) Spelling disabilities as a cause of scholastic failure**

Previously it has been shown that there is a strong correlation between scholastic failure and the incorrect spelling of English words (Lerner, 1989:405;

Johnston, 1985:160; Wallace & McLoughlin, 1975:182; see Section 3.4.4.2 in Chapter 3). Although it is true that there is a weak correspondence between the spoken sounds of English and its written form, it is equally true that the majority of children manage to translate spoken sounds into correct letters and words. But children who fail almost invariably do not possess the skills to discriminate, memorise, sequence, analyse and synthesise written alphabetical symbols efficiently enough to produce written work of an acceptable standard.

(d) **Reading and writing limitations as a cause of scholastic failure**

We have noticed that Hammill & Bartel (1982) identified reading and writing disturbances as a significant cause of failure (see Section 3.4.3.). The poor reading abilities of children suffering from scholastic failure surface as an inefficacy to distinguish between similar-looking letters, to predict word-endings or sentence-endings accurately, to discriminate between different reading tasks and to break free from the habit of deciphering letter-by-letter (Hammill & Bartel, 1982:32). These findings confirm earlier research by Wallace & McLoughlin (1975) that reading and writing deficiencies go hand-in-hand - not only with each other, but also with other language difficulties such as spoken language disturbances, auditory and visual process problems, word analysis deficits and syllabification problems (see Section 3.4.4). Such handicaps tend to have an accumulative effect on a child's scholastic performance. Inaccurate articulation leads to incorrect spelling and illegible writing which in turn lead to incompetent note-taking, the faulty interpretation of texts and, eventually the memorising of incorrect subject matter. Low-achieving pupils thus find themselves in a vicious circle of producing and reproducing erroneous words and facts causing them to be left increasingly behind by their better-performing classmates.

4.2.1.3 <u>The didactic consequences of inadequate language skills</u>

Language is such an integral part of the didactic situation that deficiencies in this

area make it extremely difficult for a child to comply with the norms which are valid in a modern society. Take, for example, a classroom situation in which a teacher teaches a Health Education lesson on the topic, **The value of potatoes,** to a standard three class. Let us examine the specific situatedness of Eddie, an imaginary boy who has inadequate language skills. The teacher strives to unfold this aspect of reality through an explanation of (a) the growing and harvesting of potatoes, (b) the cross-section of a potato and (c) the nutritional properties of potatoes. Yet Eddie's receptivity to the presentation of the teacher is severely impaired due to defective speech sound recognition and paucity of vocabulary. He resorts to being existent in the social setting of the classroom without being part of the didactic relationships. His speech deficiencies and poor self-confidence prevent him from answering questions or asking for clarification when he is puzzled by the teacher's explanation of the value of potatoes. When the teacher instructs the class to copy notes from the board, Eddie scrawls only a portion of the notes in an illegible handwriting, thereby spoiling his chances of studying the work successfully later at home. His problem of inefficient notes could have been overcome if Eddie were able to read the section on potatoes in a textbook but his weak reading skills block this avenue towards greater control over his future social role. The next blow to Eddie's desire to become a respectable, fully-developed member of society comes when he is required to write a test on that aspect of reality taught to him, viz. the value of potatoes. His combined language inadequacies make it glaringly obvious to the teacher and to his classmates that he has failed to comply with the norms which are valid in the didactic situation and in the world at large. In the test his **reading** limitations obstruct his comprehension of the task he is expected to perform; his weak **vocabulary** negatively influences his ability to communicate his inarticulated understanding of potatoes; his **spelling** defects prohibit him from transmitting his knowledge in a socially-acceptable manner; his poorly developed **writing** skills prevent him from displaying the little knowledge of potatoes which he does possess; finally, his untidy, illegible **handwriting** portrays an apparent incapacity to perform even that most basic skill which is essential to all members

of a literate society. On the surface Eddie's failure to learn the value of potatoes appears to be insignificant to his eventual selfrealisation. But if we consider that Eddie experiences hundreds of self-defeating processes like this throughout his primary school years, it is evident that his inadequate language skills would deal a lethal blow to society's hope of helping Eddie to realise his potential. Moreover, every year in South Africa there are thousands of primary school pupils who suffer a similar fate as the one sketched above. The negative didactic and social consequences of neglecting inadequate language skills in primary school children are therefore incalculable.

From a socialisation perspective the tragic cumulative effect of disregarding inadequate language skills in a child is that the humanness of the human being cannot be realised. Not only does the child obtain a biased view of reality, but society also obtains a biased view of the child. Not only does the child fail to meet the demands of the school, but society also fails in its cultural task to develop the child into a responsible, productive member of society. The socialisation of the child is incomplete. Therefore, the underlying reason why inadequate language skills are a major cause of scholastic failure is that it constitutes a serious infringement of the principle of socialisation.

### 4.2.2 Society's failure to enhance professionalism among teachers

Teaching is a complex, humane activity, in which a teacher can grow steadily more proficient over the years, by means of disciplined curiosity, continuous training and skilful assistance. Parents and teachers must equip children with certain knowledge, skills and values that will enable them to be physically, spiritually and morally fit enough to help society to survive and progress. An awareness of why teachers teach will have a profound effect on a teacher's attitude towards his or her profession. Knowledge of the purposes of teaching prevents professional burn out.

In Chapter Two of this study it was stated that the main objective of the teacher was to provide opportunities for children to feel valued and to join in (see Section 2.2.3.2). Teachers therefore have the responsibility to reflect on how they use their power and how it affects a child's performance and growth.

Research evidence listed in Chapter Three (see Section 3.7.4) suggest that without a commitment to a programme of continuous professional development, poor teaching will be perpetuated and teachers will continue using stale or old procedures despite new innovations and contributions by researchers.To shed light on how a lack of professionalism leads, firstly, to scholastic failure and, secondly, to an infringement of the principle of socialisation, let us examine the research evidence linking scholastic failure to three related skills, viz. insufficient teacher training, poor qualifications of teachers and lack of further in-service training by teachers.

### 4.2.2.1 The significance of professionalism as a catalyst for socialisation

It has been established that the didactic situation is essentially a social situation (see Section 2.2.1). Whenever people come together, a circle of wider social and interpersonal relationships are formed. A child's learning activity progresses in a social climate where certain norms and codes of behaviour are set. A child's relationship with an adult becomes meaningful to the child because he or she identifies with and relates to the adult in a social way. Once social awareness is developed then the foundation for future social changes are laid and individual responsibilities for professional actions are taken seriously.

### 4.2.2.2 Discussion of research linking professionalism to scholastic failure

#### (a) Insufficient teacher training as a cause of scholastic failure

A link between insufficient teacher training and scholastic failure has been

established (see Section 3.7.6). The research of Steyn and Nowlan (1989:731-736) is especially relevant. Steyn's major finding is that the inability to draw up suitable tests and examinations by beginner teachers is a causative factor of pupils failing. Lack of proper comprehension skills on the part of the pupils makes it more difficult to understand the questions. Principals are of the opinion that beginner teachers lack self-confidence and reluctantly accept assignments. Since each school has its own policy, `window dressing' takes precedence over real teaching. Thus the idea of a more practical pre-service education makes sense as this would equip and motivate the beginner teacher to be more effective in the teaching situation.

(b) **Poor qualification of teachers as a cause of scholastic failure**

The quality of the teacher is the variable that has the most influence in the classroom. Research by Hammill and Bartel (1982) shows that deficiencies in the method of instruction is one of the causes of learning problems or scholastic failure (see Section 3.5.4). Children are dependent upon the teacher's method of instruction. If sequential skills are not properly done, then there are those children who are likely to fail through lack of skills development.

(c) **Lack of further / in-service training as a cause of scholastic failure**

Hills (1986) has shown us that continuous intellectual growth is the basis for progress in education (see Section 3.7.4). Good teaching cannot rely on techniques alone. The absence of professional dialogues among teachers is one of the many causes of defective teaching leading to scholastic failure. Initial training alone is insufficient for professional growth of all participants in the teaching learning situation. Bugwandeen and Louw (1993:22) suggest that once a teacher has been inducted into the profession, he or she should set directives and work towards greater professional growth. The fundamentals of in-service education is to help teachers to self-evaluate their performances, assess growth

and plan their own learning programmes based upon these needs. We have noticed that Bugwandeen and Louw (1993:9) identified this lack of professional growth as a significant cause of defective teaching and one of the causes of failure (see Section 3.7.5.1-3.7.5.3). In view of this teachers will need to support each other using their discussions as a means of learning.

4.2.2.3 The didactic consequences of the failure to enhance professionalism among teachers

The quality of teaching is such an integral part of the didactic situation that deficiencies in this area make it extremely difficult for the child to comply with the needs of the lesson content. Take, for example, a classroom situation in which a teacher teaches a Science lesson on the topic, **The purification / filtration of water**, to a standard two class. Let us examine the case of a teacher who has insufficient qualifications in the teaching of Science. The teacher strives to unfold this information through an explanation of (a) the need and importance of water, (b) the method of purifying water (without using proper apparatus and experiments). If the teaching is ineffective, many of the pupils - especially the slow learners - would feel alienated in the social setting of the classroom because there is insufficient didactic accompaniment. Their learning deficiencies and poor self-confidence prevent them from answering or asking questions. The teacher on the other hand may be reluctant to admit his or her lack of skills to transfer knowledge meaningfully. When the teacher instructs the class to complete worksheets or tasks set, slow pupils tend to write anything that comes to mind as a means to conceal their lack of understanding. They are unable to identify and label the various apparatus applicable to such an experiment. The teacher's problem of insufficient subject matter could have been overcome if he had updated his knowledge on the subject. His unwillingness and lack of interest in professional development will obstruct his move towards greater control over the situation. A further detriment to the teacher's desire to become a more competent teacher, becomes apparent when he is required to assess and

evaluate both his pupils' work and the quality of his teaching. His lack of qualifications in the subject frustrates himself as well as his pupils. Thus all participants in the didactic situation experience a sense of social failure because they are unable to comply with the norms which are valid in the didactic situation.

From a socialisation point of view the desperate need for upward mobility is not satisfied. Neither parents nor pupils can really respect education when they become disillusioned by realising that the subject expert who is supposed to open up a wide field of knowledge for the child is unable to keep up with developments.

## 4.3 INEFFECTIVE INDIVIDUALISATION AS A CAUSE OF SCHOLASTIC FAILURE

The principle of individualisation is based on the idea that every child must be helped to develop according to his or her own ability. Yet research evidence listed in Chapter Three of this study indicates that an infringement of this principle is a major cause of scholastic failure (see Section 3.6). To shed more light on this aspect, ineffective individualisation will be discussed under the following sections:

- The effect of low self-esteem on individualisation.
- The impact of authoritarian parents on the cultivation of the mind.
- The effect of incompetent teachers on individualisation.

### 4.3.1 <u>The effect of low self-esteem on individualisation</u>

The development of a "self-concept" (what a person believes himself to be) is a process which begins with one's earliest social experiences. This is a continuous

process which becomes relatively fixed and permanent. From here an individual now works on building a "self-esteem" (the value that one places on oneself). When a person has formed a self-image it obviously influences his or her behaviour. Thus prevention of a negative self-image is very important. It is the function of a leader to create a positive self-concept / image within the group and in individuals.

4.3.1.1 The significance of self-esteem as a catalyst for individualisation

It has previously been established that there is a relationship between self-esteem (concept) and academic achievement as early as the pre-primary and junior primary school years (see Section 3.6.6). Wherever man exists, there is the task of developing a self-image. Most forms of human activity depend on the cooperation of two or more persons and it is the worthwhileness that one holds of oneself which helps to build a firm relationship. Children who have ego difficulties are disadvantaged in their growth. Some of the problems that these children experience are a degree of distraction. There is a direct relation between what a person believes himself or herself to be and his or her performance or achievements. The boy who believes in himself or his abilities, will achieve more, provided that he knows his limitations than the boy who doubts himself. A person who has a negative self-image will not have the urge to accomplish much and will tend not to perform as well as he/she could.

4.3.1.2 Discussion of research linking low self-esteem to scholastic failure

A connection between low self-esteem and academic achievement has been shown (see Section 3.6.6). The research of Meyer, Pretorius and Marais (1989:708) is of significance. Meyer's finding indicates that low self-esteem and its negative effects on academic work is a contributory factor in causing failure. The findings of Kokot and Jacobs (1988) has shown that relationship problems negatively influence the self-concept of the child and adversely affect the self-

actualization of the child, leading to poor scholastic achievements (see Section 3.6.6). Since self-concept is considered a critical variable in education, it is clearly evident that children with a low self-esteem will perform poorly in classroom activities or in any task set in school, hence leading to poor academic achievement or failure.

4.3.1.3 The didactic consequences of low self-esteem

Self-image is the inner world of an individual and a positive self-image is a prerequisite for optimal learning and the realisation of potential. It has already been shown that a high correlation exists between self-image and academic problems. The search for approval and acceptance is more acute in pupils with a low self-esteem. Take for example, a child who is always performing poorly in tests and normal class activities. Such a child who is continuously " picked on" and reprimanded will feel pressurised and have a low opinion of himself or herself. The child tends to push himself or herself into a self-centred corner. Let us examine the example of an imaginary pupil whom we shall call Pamela. Pamela has a low self-esteem and poor self-confidence. The teacher strives to teach Pamela proper conversational tones in an **English Oral Communication Lesson**. Pamela, due to her lack of self-confidence, shies away from participating in the lesson. When pupils are put into groups, Pamela is still at her seat, unsure whether she will be accepted by fellow pupils, thus portraying her sense of insecurity. Even if the teacher compels her to join a group, she withdraws from the situation and does not take part in the discussion. Her low self-esteem blocks her individualisation.

From an educational point of view, as far as individualisation is concerned, greater emphasis should be laid on the emotional development of the pupil. Thus it is important that teachers should acquire greater awareness of the role which self-image plays in human behaviour.

### 4.3.2 The impact of authoritarian parents on the cultivation of the mind

A child's relationship with his or her parents is obviously extremely important. The parents have authority and ideally they provide the secure basis from which the child initiates other relationships. The child still depends on the parents and is strongly influenced by them. The child's increasing involvement with the world outside the home entails new perspectives concerning the parents. From this perspective, parents are seen as people comparable to other adults and the child's individuality unfolds to a large extent as he or she looks at the self through the eyes of the adults in his or her life-world.

#### 4.3.2.1 The significance of parental involvement as a catalyst for individualisation

In Chapter Two of this dissertation it was stated that the principle of individualisation is based on the idea that every child must be helped to develop accordingly to his or her own ability (see Section 2.3.1). As stated earlier, from the time of birth, a child is involved in relationships. The first and most important relationship is the one with his/her parents. For example: A mother gets to know her son through his identity and progresses until she correctly interprets the boy's gestures, cries, groans, food preferences and other behaviour. Each child being unique, the mother who raises seven children realises she is in fact raising seven individuals. Thus children's relationship with their parents forms a vital anchorage point for their relationships with other people.

#### 4.3.2.2 Discussion of research linking authoritarian parents to scholastic failure

A correlation between parental punishment and scholastic failure has been established ( see Section 3.6.2). The finding of Fischer and Lazerson (1984) that children brought up in a very strict home show little curiosity and lack originality and initiative indicates that parental authoritarianism is a cause for poor

scholastic achievement. Since a large percentage of pupils in South African primary schools come from authoritarian homes, Fischer and Lazerson's (1984:414) finding that parental punishment and authoritarianism cause a decrease in scholastic achievement makes sense. Although not much research has been done on the causes of teenage suicide, media reports, daily experiences and incidents suggest that some matriculants and university students commit suicide because of possible failure and fear of chastisement at home. If this is true of older students, the breeding ground for such fears may be primary schools. Frequent punishment creates resentment and hostility in children and induces insecurity which breeds anxiety, fear and maladjustment. Parents who set high goals for their children expect to see its fruition; if the child fails, they make known their disappointment and may even reject the child. The detailed analysis of parental punishment and its effects on scholastic achievement conducted by Cherian (1990) and Behr (1986) are extremely enlightening.

4.3.2.3 Didactic consequences of authoritarian parents

The primary attitude all children develop is on the continuum, trust versus mistrust. The relationship between mother and child in the bonding situation is characterised by security (breeding trust) and frustration (breeding mistrust). These two conflicting emotions are evident, for instance, between mother and child during feeding time. Within this situation there is always some degree of frustration and, as a result of this, some degree of aggression is generated. Conflicting feelings arise - `love' of the person who gives security, nourishment and comfort. Yet at the same time a feeling of `hate' of the same person who withholds these things may develop. As the child grows up there are numerous similar experiences related to the trust versus mistrust continuum. This is the basic source of that ambivalence or double feeling which colours in later relationships.

In a child who hails from an authoritarian home, however, there is a preponderance of emotional experiences falling on the mistrust end of the continuum. Parents who are too rigid and domineering over their children often develop a sense of mistrust, anxiety and aggressiveness in their children which hampers their learning and leads to failure. Such parents tend to underestimate the harmful effects of any punishment on their children. Even verbal abuse or punishment through insults, chastisement and derogatory remarks causes a child to distrust his or her parents for a brief period. Yet if punishment is continuous, the child may become permanently distrustful. The moment a child loses trust or respect for his or her parents, behaviour changes set in and these have a direct effect on his or her learning abilities. The tragic consequences which may result are illustrated in a case I have recently encountered. Fagus, a twelve year old boy, comes from a home where both his parents are of a low socio-economic status. Fagus's parents were raised by very domineering parents themselves and have forced the same disciplinary policies onto their son. Fagus, living in a totally different environment from which his parents came, has total disregard for what society expects of him. He is a constant truant from school, is smoking and taking drugs, tends to stay away from home for a number of days. He lies frequently. The constant punishment from his parents has caused him to lose interest in his school work. As a result he has failed many times and, in the process, Fagus has developed hatred towards both his parents and school.

### 4.3.3 The effect of incompetent teachers on individualisation

It is unthinkable that a builder will start building a house before a complete plan has been drawn up and all activities or aspects has been carefully planned. Neither can a teacher expect to achieve perfect results without planning his or her activities and organising a lesson. For example: a teacher
cannot present a lesson in which he makes use of transparencies without having made prior arrangements for an overhead projector to be in the classroom. A teacher must be ready to improvise when unforeseen factors beyond his control

disrupt his planned activities. It is important that his pupils should realise that he, as an expert in his field, is able to correlate and conduct the teaching and learning acts to the best of his ability in a planned, orderly and systematic manner.

Yet the research evidence listed in Chapter Three (Sections 3.5.1 - 3.5.5) indicates that a large number of pupils fail because of poor lesson presentation, disorganized or poorly organised lesson content and lack of pupil participation. To shed light on how ineffective teaching styles lead to scholastic failure, let us examine the significance of effective teaching and research evidence linking scholastic failure to incompetent teaching.

4.3.3.1 The significance of effective teaching as a catalyst for individualisation

Effective teaching requires one to address the dynamics of the particular pupil's education situation holistically. It is already stated that a mere analysis of a child's work is not enough ( see Section 3.5). An important concern of any teacher should be: what is the child's learning potential and are there any limitations which might hamper his or her development ? Thus the view of Duminy and Sohnge (1985:59) that the teacher must be able to appraise or judge his or her pupils in their learning abilities and achievements in a responsible manner is most relevant. The principles of effective teaching outlined by Cohen and Manion (1989b) and Brennan (1985) are even more enlightening. Effective teaching means using the widest selection of available techniques in order to identify the special educational needs of each pupil.

4.3.3.2 Discussion of research linking incompetent teaching to scholastic failure

This section deals with a discussion of the following aspects as causes of scholastic failure:

- inadequacies in lesson presentation;
- poor lesson content.

(a) **Inadequacies in lesson presentation as a cause of scholastic failure**

A positive relationship between poor lesson presentation and scholastic failure has been shown (see Section 3.5.2). The research of Bouwer and Van Niekerk (1991) indicates that persistent or continuously poor and ineffective teaching methods could be a contributory factor in causing a higher failure rate among pupils. Children who perform poorly have inadequate concept formation, poorly developed schemata, a lack of problem solving skills. They are reluctant to actively engage in problem solving. Studies carried out by Dednam and Bouwer (1985) and Bouwer and Van Niekerk (1991) (see Section 3.5.2) indicate that poor lesson presentation may arouse feelings of resistance, dislike and uncooperativeness in the pupils resulting in unsatisfactory performance or failure.

(b) **Poor lesson content as a cause of scholastic failure**

The introduction of new content and concepts is an expansion of meanings upon which the child must build his or her lifeworld. Pasques (1973:21) found that abstract contents is a cause of failure. Lesson content is often divorced from the realities of daily life and there are times when the content taught fail to touch upon the contemporary problems stemming from changing social circumstances. In such a situation the individualisation of the child becomes impaired because elementals cannot be transformed into fundamentals. The learning content cannot be applied by the child in a unique, individual way that gives meaning to his or her personal life. Research also showed that the difficulty level of content may cause a breakdown of communication between teacher and pupil. Coetzee and Du Toit (1986) proved that subject material which is too advanced for a particular pupil could cause failure. Subject material which is too complex causes

frustration, anxiety and confusion. We have noticed that pupils tend to become agitated when they are unable to associate new material with existing fields of knowledge (see Section 3.5.3).

4.3.3.3 Didactic consequences of incompetent teaching on individualisation

Effective teaching is such an integral part of the didactic situation that deficiencies in this area make it very difficult for a child to be actively and fully involved in the lesson. Let us examine the situation of a mathematics lesson in a standard three class. The topic of discussion is **Fractions**. It is an accepted fact that the child is dependent upon the instruction of the teacher to acquire mathematical skills. The teacher tries to teach this lesson through the use of pictures showing the divisions or segments. What the teacher ought to have done was use the demonstration method of teaching. He or she should have shown the pupils how to divide a whole object into equal pieces (fractions). During this demonstration the teacher has to define the concept fractions, so that the pupils can perceive the lesson in a more meaningful way. The teacher's lack of concept definition and formation and the absence of suitable audio-visual aids makes the lesson almost meaningless to the slow learners.

Hammill and Bartel's research (1982) showing how deficiencies in the instruction of mathematics lead to a high failure rate among pupils is therefore convincing (see Section 3.5.4). Slow learners who do not grasp the method of dividing objects into fractions and who do not understand the meaning of words or concepts being discussed may be too shy to admit their problems. However, when the children are required to write a test on the content, their combined learning deficiencies and inadequacies in concept formation make it obvious to both the teacher and the pupils themselves that they have failed. Yet to the incompetent teacher the "cause" of the problem is often seen to be the children themselves.

From an individualisation point of view the tragic effect of disregarding a child's learning problems is that the specific needs of the child cannot be realised. Not only does the child fail to meet the requirements of promotion, but the teacher, who caused the failure, blames the victim for the teacher's inadequacies.

The underlying reason why ineffective teaching styles are a major cause of scholastic failure, is that they cannot be readily diagnosed and addressed. The teacher as an agent of society is **unable** to give expression to the principle of individualisation. He or she places his or her own interest above the interest of the child and therefore gives the pupil the faulty example of being selfish and opposed to the child's individuality. There cannot be high achievement in an environment where there is such a gross distortion of the principle of individualisation.

## 4.4 INEFFECTIVE PERCEPTION AS A CAUSE OF SCHOLASTIC FAILURE

The principle of perception plays an important role in the causes of failure. An infringement of this principle will be examined under the following headings:

- Defective concept formation and perception
- The effect of the degree of abstraction on perception
- The impact of low English proficiency on perception

### 4.4.1 Defective concept formation and perception

Relationships with objects and ideas in a child's world depend on their ability to assign meaning to the concepts of space, time and quantity in regard to the

concrete world. The child's understanding of the objects depends directly on the permanence of their meaning of them. Concept formation is very important because abstract thoughts is developed through formal education. The lack of meaningful education in the life-world of the child will hamper the adequate development of abstract thought.

It was stated earlier that it is very important to realise a child's perceptual ability (see Chapter two: Section 2.4.2.1). The ability to perceive and learn meaningfully centres around the lesson content. Effective learning is linked with the value of teaching effectively and perceiving meaningfully.

Research evidence listed in Chapter Three (Sections 3.5.2 - 3.5.5) indicate that a large number of pupils fail owing to poor or deficient concept formation. Inadequate concept formation seem to be one of the causes of scholastic failure in primary schools. An investigation into ineffective teaching of concepts showed that the following aspects are related to scholastic failure: viz. poor concept formation, weak problem solving abilities and content which is too advanced.

#### 4.4.1.1 The significance of concept formation as a catalyst for perception

Research has indicated that perception implies a reciprocal relationship between the perceiver and the perceived ( see Section 2.4.1). The act of perceiving comes from within us, not from the things surrounding us. Our understanding of something (a person, object, situation, etc.) is a function of our previous experiences. Successful learning depends mainly on effective perception of lesson content. Pupils who experience problems in perceiving abstract concepts are at a disadvantage. They are unable to communicate effectively with other members of society. Not only are they afraid to admit their inadequacies, but are also shy to do so. Insufficient communication skills drives them further away from learning.

4.4.1.2 Discussion of research linking defective concept formation to scholastic failure

(a) **Defective concept formation as a cause of scholastic failure**

The ability to understand concepts is a fundamental requirement for scholastic success. Research by Hallahan and Bryan (1981) proved that an inadequate mastery of skills such as concept formation play an important role in widening the gap between pupils who fail and those who pass (see Section 3.5.1 in Chapter 3). Children who fail frequently have difficulty with the understanding and application of concepts taught in a lesson. They pretend to understand the work and do not want to ask any questions. But when they are asked to apply the same skill in another aspect they fail to do it. To combat a high failure rate, teachers need to diagnose and remedy comprehension problems as early as possible.

(b) **Advanced lesson content as a cause of scholastic failure**

Coetzee and Du Toit (1986:41) proved that there is a strong correlation between subject material being too advanced and scholastic failure (see Section 3.5.3 in Chapter 3). Whilst there may be doubt about the effect which lesson content has on failure, it is true that, when the content is too advanced pupils lack the fundamental knowledge required to understand new information. Children who fail almost invariably do not possess the skills to break down, analyse and assimilate information which they regard as too difficult, and the result is that they do not produce written work of an acceptable standard.

4.4.1.3 Didactic consequences of defective concept formation

Concept definition is an important part of the teaching learning situation. Pupils who experience problems in this area find it extremely difficult to meet the

demands of the teacher. Let us analyse the example of a **History** lesson on **Democracy** in a standard four class. The lesson is taught under the following sections (a) the primitive way of life of man, (b) the rule of one man and (c) the struggle for power and freedom. Jerry, a slow learner, finds it very difficult to keep with the teacher's pace and level of the lesson. His role in the lesson is a passive one. This is due to the fact that he experiences problems in comprehension and language skills. His poor self-confidence prevents him from asking questions. His chances of successful learning is further hampered owing to the teacher's negligence in explaining difficult concepts and terminologies. Failure on the part of the teacher to ascertain which pupils have not understood the concepts taught, creates more problems for Jerry. He just follows the line and tries to get through the day without realising that he is not making any progress towards a better future.

### 4.4.2 The effect of the degree of abstraction on perception

Individuals differ with regards to their aptitude for learning different aspects of different subjects. Successful learning also depends upon the degree to which the learner understands the nature, content, methods and procedures of the subject concerned. In the didactic situation one of the conditions for understanding and for successful learning to take place, is that the teacher and pupils must be able to communicate effectively. The level of knowledge of the class must be such that they are able to understand the new information. The pupil's level of vocabulary has to be such that the words used by the teacher do not raise problems. When teachers use words that are beyond the level of comprehension of the class, the pupils simply pretend to understand what is going on. They are too shy or afraid to ask questions or admit that they have not learnt anything. While there are some pupils who will not be able to understand the material taught, the majority of the class will understand and make satisfactory progress.

Research evidence listed in Chapter Three (see Section 3.5.3) suggest that content which is too abstract is one of the causative factors of scholastic failure. In addition to this problem, children who have defective language skills, face further problems in their school work as well as communicating in society.

4.4.2.1 The significance of concreteness as a catalyst for perception

It has already been shown that perceiving is a kind of relationship (see Section 2.4.1 in Chapter Two). Wherever and whenever man exists, relationships and experiences must come into play. To perceive, one must be involved in an association with what is being perceived. Perception is an act in which all senses (touch, taste etc.) reflect a measure of solidarity. In the didactic situation the pupils expect concrete evidence of subject matter when they are being taught. A child will not, for instance, understand the use of concord in a language lesson unless he or she is taught the use of concord within a concrete context. Teaching the child singular and plural concords is not enough. The teacher needs to demonstrate through the use of sentences (in context) how singular and plural concords are used or applied. Even the slow learner is able to understand quickly when subject matter is concretized.

4.4.2.2 Discussion of research linking abstract content to scholastic failure

The didactic situation is a two way process involving teaching and learning. Selecting content themes for teaching is a considerable task and content chosen can be a contributory factor in scholastic failure (see Section 3.5.3). Poor perception and comprehension is the root of a breakdown in communication between teachers and their pupils. The findings of Coetzee and Du Toit (1986) suggest that abstract content is a decisive factor in scholastic failure. When pupils cannot understand what is being taught, they cut themselves off from the lesson and rely heavily on a concrete frame of reference owing to their level of development. Hence they are unable to follow the advanced logic in the

argument or explanation. Such a child will fall back on rote learning, which would mean learning without meaning and understanding.

#### 4.4.2.3 Didactic consequences of abstract content

Understanding of content is crucial in the didactic situation. Problems in this area make it difficult for the child to complete a given task successfully. Take, for example, an **English lesson** on the topic **Singular and Plural**. Imagine that there are at least five pupils who are slow learners and who also have language problems. The teacher tries to teach this lesson by explaining the meaning of the 'headings' only. The slow learners would have only learnt the meaning of the headings. A lack of definition and examples illustrating what is meant by singular and plural bears no meaning to the pupils. When it comes to applying the rules governing singular and plural these pupils will not be able to complete the exercise as expected. Poor comprehension abilities together with insufficient instructions places these pupils at a greater disadvantage. On the surface these minor failures might seem insignificant, but a continuous streak of such failures would eventually cause that these pupils to have a bleak hope of attaining their proper place in society.

### 4.4.3 The impact of low english proficiency on perception

From a South African point of view, English proficiency is extremely important. Since we are living in a pluralistic society, it is necessary that one common medium of communication be used. Since English is spoken by almost everyone, it makes sense to suggest that English be the main language of communication in most schools. Proficiency in English is an absolute necessity in order for children in English-medium schools to read, understand and communicate what they have learnt.

Research evidence listed in Chapter Three suggests that language differences

does interfere with school learning and it plays a decisive role in causing scholastic failure ( see Section 3.4.4.3).

4.4.3.1 The significance of English proficiency as a catalyst for perception

Proficiency in English as a second language helps a child to communicate easily and more confidently with fellow beings. Children who have problems in using English proficiently suffer such problems because of dialects or languages other than English. Pupils who use nonstandard English and whose native language is not English are greatly disadvantaged. These children are unable to express their needs, difficulties and problems to other members of society. Their unexpressed awareness impinges on the quality of their relationships and their ability to grasp learning material.

4.4.3.2 Discussion of research linking poor English proficiency to scholastic failure

A relationship between limited proficiency in English and scholastic failure has been established ( see Section 3.4.4.3). Limited proficiency by children from nonstandard or different language groups is a causative factor in scholastic failure. Since a large percentage of pupils in South African primary schools speak their native language more than English, it does make sense to spend the first school year on familiarising pupils with classroom speech. Lerner's (1989: 326) belief that children who are not well equipped for the kind of language proficiency required in the classroom suggests that children with poor language development are apt to fail.

4.4.3.3 Didactic consequences of poor English proficiency

In South Africa English is an important part of the didactic situation. Problems in this area make it difficult for a child to associate with other South Africans.

Take, for example, a classroom situation in which a teacher in an English-medium school teaches a **Health Education lesson** on the topic, **The value of a balanced diet**, to a standard two class. Bernie, an imaginary boy who has a limited proficiency in English, belongs to this class. The teacher tries to teach this lesson through an explanation of what a diet is, and its importance. Bernie's reaction to the teacher's presentation is severely impaired due to a limited or poor proficiency in English. Because Bernie already has a language problem, and together with his poor vocabulary, he cannot participate in the lesson. When asked to copy notes or read from a text book, Bernie feels frustrated and loses interest, thereby spoiling his chances of studying the work successfully. When asked to write a test, Bernie's English deficiency blocks his avenue towards becoming a learned member of society. Limitations in his reading and comprehension levels negatively influence his ability to communicate confidently with members from other language groups in South Africa, thus severely restricting his chances to become a respected, well-paid member of society.

## 4.5 INEFFECTIVE MOTIVATION AS A CAUSE OF SCHOLASTIC FAILURE

Motivation is the will to learn. It can be intrinsic (coming from within a person) or extrinsic (outside factors which are used to instill in pupils a desire to achieve a particular goal). An infringement of this principle causes the reverse to happen, that is, demotivation takes place. This section will be discussed under the following headings:

- The effect of inadequate language skills in teaching Mathematics
- Effective pupil participation and motivation
- The effect of depression on motivation

### 4.5.1 The effect of inadequate language skills in subject teaching (Mathematics)

Any deficiencies in language will not only hamper a child's scholastic progress but may be the cause of his or her alienation from society. The use of language in a subject like **Mathematics** is particularly important. The Mathematics teacher's language must be easily understood by his or her pupils because numerical literacy is essential in modern society; without basic mathematical skills it is almost impossible for a person to lead a rational, accountable life in a modern-world environment.

In Chapter Two of this study it was stated that motivation relates to arousal, control and sustaining behaviour necessary to satisfy a need or attain a goal (see Section 2.5.1). The success of motivating depends on the lesson content and presentation. From a didactic point of view school should be the place where, under sympathetic guidance of the Mathematics teacher, meaningful answers are sought to meaningful mathematical problems.

#### 4.5.1.1 The significance of language as a catalyst for teaching Mathematics

Motivation plays a particularly important role in the learning of mathematical concepts because Mathematics is an important subject in many careers and it promotes the ability to think logically, critically and analytically. Children who have difficulty in comprehending mathematical concepts are therefore greatly disadvantaged. They have no way of grasping abstract numerical concepts and arguments which inevitably impinges on their perception of mathematical learning material.

#### 4.5.1.2 Discussion of research linking inadequate language skills in Mathematics to scholastic failure

A connection between instructional deficiencies and performance in Mathematics

has been shown (see Section 3.5.4). The research of Hammill and Bartel (1982) and Wallace and McLoughlin (1975) are of particular relevance. Hammill and Bartel's (1982) major finding was that deficiencies in instruction is a causative factor when pupils fail. This finding was supported by Wallace and McLoughlin (1975) who stated that the child is largely dependent upon the instruction of the teacher to acquire mathematical skills.

4.5.1.3 Didactic consequences of poor language content in Mathematics

Language and proper instructional methods are the key to successful teaching. If sequential skills is not properly done then there are usually a large number of pupils who fail. The following is a discussion of a classroom situation in which a teacher teaches a **Mathematics lesson** on the topic, **Subtraction**, to a standard two class. Shaun, who is a slow learner, experiences inadequate language and development skills. The teacher strives to teach this aspect through an explanation of the concept **subtraction**. But Shaun's understanding of the lesson is severely hampered due to the fact that lesson was not taught through the sequential skills developmental process. This means that had the teacher used the method of sequential skills development, Shaun would have been able to understand the concept of subtraction more easily. This now implies that the method of instruction used by the teacher was not of a good standard. It has been stated earlier (see Section 3.5.1 - 3.5.3) that inadequacies in lesson presentation is a major cause of scholastic failure. In this case lack of step-by-step teaching made it more difficult for Shaun to compute accurately because he does not understand the process of subtraction. Terminology such as "decomposition", "digits" and "subtraction" is beyond Shaun's level of comprehension. He spends much time trying to understand what a word like "decomposition" means and as a result he has no time to complete the task on hand. To the teacher, Shaun is unable to do simple subtraction, and he is categorised as a slow or weak pupil in Mathematics.

### 4.5.2 Effective pupil participation and motivation

The rate of successful teaching and learning depends on all participants in the teaching-learning situation. Inadequate involvement in a lesson may be detrimental to the child's mastery of some or all of the objectives of that particular lesson. Children must not see school as a place where they have to memorise facts in order to pass an examination Active involvement by the pupils helps a teacher to determine at what level the child is learning and progressing. It is through pupil participation that a teacher can ascertain whether the child understands what is to be done and whether the lesson content is leading to the child's development.

#### 4.5.2.1 The significance of pupil participation as a catalyst of motivation

When a child learns out of curiosity or inquisitiveness, the learning is more effective and it motivates the child intrinsically. Children who have difficulty in learning are hampered if they are not inspired to take part in a lesson or encouraged to organise little activities on their own. When children's work is treated with respect and they are assured that it is only human to err, they become motivated to learn, knowing that their work is acceptable.

#### 4.5.2.2 Discussion of research linking pupil participation to scholastic failure

A link between poor pupil participation and scholastic failure has been shown (see Section 3.5.1 and 3.5.5). Inadequate participation in a lesson may be detrimental to the child's mastery of some or all of the aims of a particular lesson. Hallahan and Bryan (1981:40) suggest that should such a deficiency occur frequently or habitually, over a short period of time, a pupil may fail to realise his or her potential. Active pupil involvement in any lesson is an indication to the teacher of the pupil's progress. It is also a means of motivating both teacher and pupils to delve further into a topic.

#### 4.5.2.3 Didactic consequences of weak pupil participation

Lesson participation is an essential ingredient to motivate pupils. Take, for example, an imaginary situation in which Paul, an average learner, sits in Miss Davis's classroom but does not get involved in the lessons taught because Miss Davis does not create opportunities for slow and average pupils to participate in the lesson. She allows bright pupils to monopolise discussions. Her teacher-centred approach consists almost entirely of explanations and, now and then, a few questions. She permits a minimum of written work during her lessons and leaves no room for groupwork and games. Consequently, Paul becomes increasingly bored during Miss Davis's lessons. He develops coping mechanisms such as playing with his toy car, distracting other pupils, day dreaming and generally displaying restless behaviour such as going to the toilet frequently. As he applies these methods to escape the boredom, he falls more and more behind with his work. His achievement drops from average to poor and his examination results are far below average. Miss Davis might interpret these poor results as Paul's unwillingness to learn. Then comes the punishment and Paul starts to build an even more negative attitude towards Miss Davis and the subject. Paul's performance in the classroom and in tests worsens and a whole process of poor attitude towards schoolwork begins.

### 4.5.3 The effect of depression on motivation

Depression can come about as a result of many different events in one's life. The symptoms of depression in a school-going child can be detected through his or her performance. Pupils' who are undergoing a period of depression usually sit very quietly in class. They are not forthcoming or willing to participate in classroom activities. Their minds are wandering and not focused on the teacher's instructions. These children need special care and coaching from the teacher and their peers. Instead of reprimanding a child for not being involved in the lesson, the teacher has to find out why the child is withdrawn and create

means and ways of addressing the cause of depression or getting the child involved in the lesson.

#### 4.5.3.1 The significance of depression as a catalyst for motivation

Most forms of human activity depend on the cooperation of two or more persons and the ability to show interest in reality. Children who have problems with motivation are often left behind. Those who are shrouded in depression need to be coaxed into getting involved in reality by their teacher. They need to be motivated via simple classroom activities, activities in which they find joy, to be involved in the lesson. These children find it very difficult to explain and discuss their problems, frustrations etc. As a result they shy away from their friends and are afraid to be active, lest they are laughed at or teased. These pupils are also afraid that their problems may be spread throughout the school and others would look at them as a problem child. Hence their motivation suffers.

#### 4.5.3.2 Discussion of research linking depression to scholastic failure

There is a connection between depression and scholastic failure (see Section 3.5.5). The findings of Van Niekerk (1990) show that there is a strong correlation between childhood depression and underachievement at school. A large number of pupils display their bouts of depression through poor academic performance at school. The impending effect of depression on the actualizing of learning particularly impairs concentration, interest, thinking and memorising. This kind of disharmony in education leads to inadequate command of the subject matter. The greater the gap between pupil and learning potential, the greater the chances of a deviant behaviour developing. Thus it is necessary that pupils problems be detected as early as possible and some alternative programmes be arranged for such pupils.

#### 4.5.3.3 Didactic consequences of depression

Teachers are always asking the question:" How can we awaken the interest of our pupils and motivate them to learn ?" Children who are classed as slow learners and who suffer depression have feelings of inadequacy which intensify the prevailing feelings of anxiety and tension which often lead to unacceptable behaviour in the classroom. Children who are depressed and unmotivated show a distinct lack of interest, apathy, refusal, rejection or they even tend to pass negative criticisms about a task given in class. The resultant punitive measures taken by the teacher could lead to more adverse feelings in the child. When it comes to written tests, the limitations these children possess restricts them from developing and realising their potential. Insofar as society is concerned these children fail to meet the requirement of being productive and useful.

## 4.6 INEFFECTIVE EVALUATION AS A CAUSE OF SCHOLASTIC FAILURE

Every education system needs some form of measuring its level of achievement. It is inconceivable that any education system would avoid incorporating a system of evaluation and measurement. Evaluation in the classroom is applied in order to obtain a reliable picture of a pupil's results. The system of evaluation is used to provide data that enables us to make qualitative judgements about students', teachers' and schools' performances. An infringement of the principle of evaluation will be discussed under the following sections:

- Ineffective diagnostic analysis and evaluation
- School readiness and evaluation
- Inadequate teacher self-evaluation

### 4.6.1 Ineffective diagnostic analysis and evaluation

A child's teaching and learning takes place in the everyday interactions of home life. Within these activities, opportunities exist for the members of the family to assist and monitor child performance. It is through the day to day activities that children learn to communicate and to develop skills and generalise these with new problems. Thus it is imperative that in school it is the task of the teacher to carry out a complete diagnostic study which would provide a quick, relatively easy and inexpensive method of evaluating a large group and identifying those with possible problems.

Research evidence listed in Chapter Three (Section 3.3) suggests that inadequate diagnosis is a principal cause of failure together with failure to provide immediate academic assistance where necessary.

#### 4.6.1.1 The significance of diagnostic analysis as a catalyst for evaluation

From a didactic perspective it is absolutely essential that special learning disabilities be identified through educational diagnosis. To teach successfully the teacher should be able to determine the situational demands because an accurate analysis of the entry situation improves the prospect of success. Diagnostic procedures are necessary to understand the learning disabilities adequately and to guide appropriate educational planning.

#### 4.6.1.2 Discussion of research linking ineffective diagnostic analysis to scholastic failure

It has already been shown that ineffective educational diagnostic analysis affects scholastic failure (see Section 3.3 - 3.3.2.2). Research findings indicate that

teachers should carry out large scale screening in order to identify those pupils with possible learning disabilities. Moreover, teachers in South African schools must be provided with appropriate identification criteria for differentiating among and specifying the needs of the different pupils (see Section 3.3). Children with learning disabilities exhibit disorders in basic psychological functions such as perception, recall and conceptualisation. I have shown that psychological disabilities are causes of, or at least contributors to, learning deficiencies and scholastic failure. If the above findings are read in conjunction with Kruger and Muller's argument (1988:25) in support of analysing the entry situation, it becomes clearer to which extent ineffective diagnostic analysis can aggravate the problems of underachievers.

4.6.1.3 Didactic consequences of inadequate diagnostic analysis

In the didactic situation it is always stressed that successful teaching depends on the teacher's willingness to meet the challenges ahead of him or her. Consider a classroom situation where a teacher is unaware of the abilities of the different pupils in his/her class and simply teaches new content every day. The teacher would be oblivious of the slow learner's problems and either assume that the child is disinterested in learning or categorise the child as a failure. The teacher who has disregarded the process of identification would not be able to pick out the signs of learning disabilities in the pupils and he or she would continue to teach new concepts and content. In the meanwhile the pupils concerned would just sit there, not indicating to the teacher that they have not learnt anything. When it is time for them to write a test, these pupils cannot meet the requirements of a pass. Their low self-esteem prohibits them from seeking help and asking questions. If they continue to experience such defeats, it is obvious that these pupils will have very little chance of realising their potential.

### 4.6.2 School readiness and evaluation

School readiness refers to the total readiness of the child to benefit from formal education (see Section 3.3.2.3). It is the stage when the child is cognitively, socially, physically and emotionally ready for formal schooling. Readiness refers to the child in his totality who has achieved a level of independence in his relationship that enables him to meet the requirements of school with the least amount of stress, anxiety and insecurity.

#### 4.6.2.1 The significance of school readiness as a catalyst for evaluation

In a child's becoming and learning the adult has a specific role to play. School entry is seen as one of the main events in the life of the child and therefore it is important that he or she is ready for it. The child's readiness for formal learning, as it appears in the school situation, forms the basis for the way in which the child becomes involved and gives meaning to the formal learning situation and exercises an important influence on the future course of their learning and becoming. In the words of Moore and Moore (Derbyshire, 1991:186):

> "early childhood education must take into account the development of the child's brain, vision, hearing, perception, emotions, sociability, family and school relationships and physical growth".

Yet research evidence listed in Chapter Three (Section 3.3.2.3) suggest that a large number of pupils are only partially ready for school or not ready at all. Let us examine the relationship between school readiness and scholastic failure.

#### 4.6.2.2 Discussion of research linking school readiness to scholastic failure

A relationship between school readiness and scholastic failure has been shown

(see Section 3.3.2.3). The research suggest that twenty three percent of the pupils at infant school are either only partially ready or not ready at all for school. In South Africa a large percentage of pupils who enter school at the age of five and half years fail at some time or another, especially between infant classes and standard five. In other African countries like Namibia, studies showed that there was a high percentage of failure and drop out rates from as early as Grade 1, again the main cause of failure being the absence of school readiness even at preschool level. Thus it has been emphasised that there is a strong need for a preformal developmental bridge-year education programme, preceding Grade 1, especially for disadvantaged pupils.

4.6.2.3 Didactic consequences of ineffective school readiness

It is an accepted fact that the first and main educators of the preschool child are his or her parents. Through parental support the child is gradually made ready for school - psychically, linguistically, affectively, socially and cognitively. Yet according to Reilly and Hofmeyer (1983:4) the causes of non- school- readiness may, in many instances, be traced back to the home. Where the coherence between family members is absent, the family is incomplete or the parents do not fulfil their educational task regarding the preschool child, it can delay the child's school readiness. This will have a detrimental influence not only on his or her school entry, but on his or her whole disposition toward school and school work. A child who does not have any preschool training will be severely disadvantaged. Such a child would find it very difficult to adapt to new people, situations and relationships. Although the pre-primary school is not a place where formal teaching occurs, it makes a valuable contribution to the child's initial school readiness. The aim of the pre- school is not to replace the home, but to supplement it in order to facilitate the child's gradual transition from childhood to adulthood.

### 4.6.3 Inadequate teacher self-evaluation

The strength of an education system depends to a large extent on the quality of its teachers. As the main influence in the classroom, the teacher must strive to grow steadily more proficient over the years by means of continuous training and learning. There is no limit to a teacher's preparation for the art of teaching. In-service education and training should be seen as a necessity of educational life for all teachers.

#### 4.6.3.1 The significance of self-evaluation as a catalyst for evaluation

It has been shown that a teacher's education does not end with his or her departure from the university or college of education (see Section 3.7.2). There will always be something new for the teacher to learn. New innovations and technological devices will make it necessary for every individual involved in the act of education to extend his or her knowledge. A teacher with a basic College or University qualification, will in time become old-fashioned and rigid in his or her views and method of teaching. Thus it is necessary for that teacher to maintain professional renewal and experimentation as part of his or her normal duties.

#### 4.6.3.2 Discussion of research linking inadequate self-evaluation to scholastic failure

Inadequate self-evaluation does have a strong influence on scholastic failure ( see Section 3.7 - 3.7.6). The findings of Le Roux (1990:427) suggest that teachers should be sensitized to focus on improving their communication skills and efficiency of their teaching. It seems from this viewpoint that if a teacher does not attempt to improve his or her teaching skills and methods, they would fail to comply with the demands of society and their pupils. The effect of rigid teaching would obviously not help in directing a child towards selfrealisation. A

teacher who does not reflect on his or her classroom actions, would be oblivious of his or her pupil's learning problems and achievements. While the bright pupil may be able to learn on his or her own capacity and through discovery, the slow learner would depend entirely on the teacher's instruction and methods. The slow learner would only learn what the teacher teaches and be disadvantaged in a situation where he or she is expected to learn through selfdiscovery. Such a child will be content with knowing just the bare minimum and avoid being questioned. Low achieving pupils thus find themselves in a vicious cycle of reproducing work and facts that creates a gap between them and their better performing classmates.

#### 4.6.3.3 Didactic consequences of inadequate self-evaluation

Generally when one wishes to make progress in one's activities, one has to continue to strive hard. In education in order for progress to be of any value, it is imperative that teachers as professionals continuously engage in intellectual growth. Only through constant evaluation of his or her progress, can a teacher improve his or her professional expertise. Some teachers fail to see the advantages and importance of having professional dialogues with colleagues and members of higher authority such as the head of department, the deputy principal, etc. Opportunities must be provided for the teacher to improve his or her qualification, methods of teaching, approach and attitude towards his or her vocation. Without commitment to such a programme of continuous professional development, poor teaching will be perpetuated and teachers will continue using stale or old procedures despite new innovations and contributions by researchers.

## 4.7 CONCLUSION

Research has shown that the causes of scholastic failure are wide and divergent. Failure cannot be pinned down as the fault of the pupil only. Teaching is not an

accidental act, it involves an adult (educator) and an adult-in-the- making (educand). The organisation of learning activities is the teacher's central problem. This organisational skill has a direct bearing on his or her teaching programme. Hence the teacher has to structure his or her learning activities along proper didactic lines. In this chapter the tragic results of the infringement of didactic principles have been discussed.

The analysis once again confirms that learning disabilities of pupils need to be addressed continuously. The didactic principles outlined in Chapter Two are tightly interlinked and if one of them is disregarded or neglected it has a domino-effect on all the other principles. For example, language deficiencies (socialisation) lead to low self-esteem (individualisation), defective concept formation (perception), weak pupil participation (motivation) and readiness for the next standard (evaluation). In similar fashion all the research findings discussed in Chapter Three have multiple effects on pupil performance. Although the principles and research findings have been categorised in this dissertation it must be constantly borne in mind that these distinctions are theoretical; in real-life situations all the principles manifest themselves simultaneously.

Teachers' relationships with weaker pupils should facilitate the pupils' growth and learning. They should always be alert about the pupils' entry situation when planning the lesson and choose learning activities which are most meaningful to the child. Scholastic failure can be remedied and avoided if the necessary steps and measures are taken. These measures are complex and it is simplistic to imply that they depend on only one person (namely; the child or the teacher). Hence the development and nurturing of didactic principles are imperative for educational growth and self-development.

# CHAPTER FIVE

# RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

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# CHAPTER 5

# RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

## 5.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents recommendations and a conclusion. Having analysed and discussed the causes of scholastic failure I shall now present some recommendations and a model lesson illustrating the different didactic principles discussed in Chapter 2 of this study.

Both the adult and the child are to be held responsible for the success of the child's education. The adult, being the more responsible person, is the one who should mainly be called to account for any dysfunction in the dynamics of teaching-learning actions. When the adult does not take care that the conditions for adequate education are met, the child may be affectively, intellectually and normatively neglected, though this neglect is not always intentional. But it is possible that the adult's appeal to the child is not sufficiently clear and unambiguous, and is misunderstood. This may mean that the pedagogic relationship of understanding is not adequately constituted. If any of the pedagogic relationships such as trust, understanding and authority are absent from the pedagogic situation, it will result in a dysfunction in the dynamics of the education situation (Nel and Urbani, 1991).

## 5.2 RECOMMENDATIONS

There are obviously numerous recommendations one can make to reduce the failure rate in South African primary schools. I shall, however, limit myself to six

major recommendations which arise most forcefully from this investigation. The discussion of each recommendation will consist of :

(a) a brief rationale and
(b) a description and justification of the proposed action.

### 5.2.1 Bridging module readiness classes

#### (a) Rationale

A bridging module readiness class is a pre-school facility provided within normal school hours at a primary school. It is a readiness class for pupils at the age of five who will be entering formal school in the following year.
In order to avoid learning problems that children encounter on entry for formal schooling, problems that result in repeated failure, high drop-out rate and other social misfortunes, children require a structured and academically orientated education programme. This is necessary to bridge the gap between home and school.

#### (b) Recommendations regarding bridging readiness classes

The recommendations regarding a bridging module are:

- that bridging module readiness classes be established at primary schools where there are no pre-primary school facilities;
- that children who turn five years during the course of the year be enrolled as a bridging module readiness class pupil;
- that professionally qualified educators be placed in charge of these children; and

- that the Head of the Junior Primary Department at the school supervise the work of the bridging module readiness class teachers and pupils.

The bridging period provides the child with the opportunity to effect the necessary adjustment between home and school, informal and formal learning, play and work at his or her own pace. During the bridging period the teacher has the opportunity of detecting any deficits and weaknesses in specific areas. An early detection, intervention and remediation means that it is possible to eradicate the problem once and for all. For the child, the bridging readiness class prepares the pupil to proceed from the known to the unknown, from the concrete to the abstract and from play to work. This facility provides for greater flexibility, there is a resultant lack of stress and strain and it leads the child towards formal schooling (Fabian, 1985:56; De Lange, 1990:76;).

### 5.2.2 Peer group teaching and learning

#### (a) Rationale

The school, as a societal agency, is duty bound to socialise learners. Getting pupils to work in peer groups and giving out assignments which require pupils to work for a variety of audiences are better suited to help the school in its important task of socialising learners. Peer group relations have an important bearing on a child's development and self-realisation. The peer group forms a safe basis for identification and conformity. Group learning provides the place and opportunity for practising independence.

#### (b) Recommendations regarding peer group teaching

The recommendations regarding peer group teaching are:

- that the topic of the task be written on the chalkboard so that

every child has the time and pace to read and understand what is expected of him or her;

- that the class or subject teacher assists in placing pupils into groups, namely about four or five pupils in a group;
- that the pupils be encouraged to work in groups, accepting and accommodating each other's views and criticisms;
- that the teacher supports and guides the pupils with their preparation of the task on hand; and
- that the teacher ensures that all members in their groups are active and that domineering members should be prevented from monopolising discussions.

The advantage of group work is that it allows for pupil collaboration. Pupils help each other in planning, putting together pieces and acting out the educational situation. Pupils also exploit the advantages of group work in order to sharpen their own ideas. The peer group technique promotes the learning of many social values: pupils learn patience and tolerance, especially when it comes to responding to each other's points of view. They learn how to make joint decisions and to be accountable. They feel important and develop self-confidence which leads to the development of a positive self-image. Pupils are able to co-exist without having to impose their will or others, hence developing a sense of responsibility. At the same time the individuality of all members shine through, they develop critical attitudes in the sense that they have to assess and evaluate each other's opinions. The fruition of peer group work comes through when the teacher evaluates his or her pupils. They are able to detect if the child had developed relevant skills and abilities, for example: can the child communicate, argue, debate, justify and convince others adequately within his or her group and during general class discussions ?

### 5.2.3 Pupil-centred lessons and active pupil participation

#### (a) Rationale

Active learner involvement and engagement with the learning task leads to effective learning. However it is the teacher's responsibility to ensure maximum pupil participation in a didactic situation while the principle of individualisation is based on the idea that every child must be helped to develop according to his or her own ability. In our present system of mixed-ability classes, the best that can be done is to ensure that the pupils stimulate, and be stimulated by, other children.

#### (b) Recommendations regarding pupil participation

The on-going struggle to make lessons more pupil-centred should be vigorously pursued. One way in which pupil participation can be enhanced, for example, is by applying the following procedure in an English lesson:

*The recommendations regarding pupil-centred lessons are:*

- The teacher provides the pupils with an issue such as "Should abortion be legalised ?"

- The pupils are allowed to decide which type of technique they would like to use to tackle the issue, e.g. through group-work, class discussion, debate, etc.

- After discussion the pupils engage in written work and suitable physical activities such as simulation, singing, drawing, etc. to *consolidate the insights they have gained.*

During pupil-centred lessons, pupils learn to take the initiative and to act

responsibly. They become aware of their own potential and capability. The pupils learn to take an active and meaningful role in their learning because they are held responsible and accountable for their particular accomplishments. In this way the old paradigm of teacher-centred lessons can increasingly be replaced by pupil-centred lessons.

### 5.2.4 Effective classroom management

#### (a) Rationale

Children must realise that without formal education, they will not be fully accepted into society. Thus parents also play an important role in guiding their children towards realising the importance of formal education. In the school situation, pupils should continually be encouraged to learn and their interest and enthusiasm should be aroused. Teacher's attitudes towards a task plays a significant role in shaping pupils' attitudes and dispositions. It is also important to note that teachers' attitudes are a contributory factor towards good or bad class management. If proper organisational skills are applied in classroom management then poor discipline leading to poor scholastic performance can be avoided. The fear of failure causes pupils to behave in an improper manner and it is this fear and disruptive behaviour which leads to further failure ( see Chapter 3; section 3.6).

#### (b) Recommendations regarding classroom management

The recommendations regarding detention and attitude development are:

- that the pupils who are disruptive and avoid completing a task should be detained after normal school hours and made to complete the day's tasks;

- that the teacher should not resort to corporal punishment which is supposed to act as a deterrent against repeated behaviour, but actually impresses upon the child what not to do, rather than what should be done;

- that the teacher attempts to make contact with the parents regarding the child's behaviour; and

- that the teacher ensures, that the subject matter is of relevance to the child's development.

At the same time the teacher wishing to develop a positive attitude among the pupils should take the lead in:

- displaying pupils' products in the class;

- making an effort to demonstrate good work (for example, in teaching composition writing - use pupils' own ideas, skills, etc. to show slow learners how to develop the skill of writing);

- avoiding embarrassing or negative comments about a child's work, neatness etc.;

- always trying to indicate both the strengths and weaknesses in the child's work; and

- ensuring that the child is not bogged down with abstract lesson content.

Besides displaying a cheerful and positive attitude towards a task, teachers can also enhance motivation by assigning tasks that are of interest to the child.

When it comes to projects in subjects like History, Science, Geography and English pupils should sometimes be allowed to choose their own topics or themes. If the teacher has to assign the topics or themes, let them be relevant in so far as they can relate to the current social, economic and political issues.

The relevance of subject matter is an important catalyst of motivation. Subject matter must appeal to the learners as it creates and sustains intrinsic motivation. The relevance of subject matter affords the child the ability to appreciate learning and to seek the pleasure it brings. The inner motivation that the child attains helps to bring about self-control and self-discipline.

### 5.2.5 Need for in-service education

#### (a) Rationale

The causes of learning difficulties and failure are often seen to centre upon weaknesses in the child rather than in the teacher. Teachers are seldom prepared to look objectively at the causes of scholastic failure and at their own role as a causative factor. This does not mean that the blame should now be shifted onto the teachers alone. One needs to investigate each individual case on its own merits and diagnose the possible causes in that particular case. There may be more than just one cause. For example: poor attitude, poor teaching styles, poor discipline, lack of motivation, misunderstandings etc. Although teaching is a complex, humane activity, it allows a teacher to grow steadily in proficiency over the years by means of disciplined curiosity, continuous training and skilful assistance. A teacher's education does not end with his or her departure from the university or college of education. As long as knowledge about education continues to evolve while new techniques and devices are discovered, there will always be something new for the teacher to learn regardless of his or her qualifications or years of experience.

(b) **Recommendations regarding in-service education**

The recommendations regarding In-service Education are:

- that the teacher maintains professional renewal and experimentation as part of his or her normal duties;
- that teachers be sensitized to focus on improving their communication skills and thus the efficiency of their teaching;
- that teachers constantly evaluate their own teaching practice by questioning the day's teaching and attainment of goals and objectives;
- that teachers become involved in educational dialogues with themselves as well as with colleagues; and
- that underqualified teachers upgrade their professional and academic qualifications through the relevant higher educational institutions that provide lessons on part-time and full-time bases.

In-service education or training helps to counteract obsolete or defective teaching. It also implies the continuation of professional development. Engaging in in-service education and training would help teachers to self-evaluate their performances, to assess growth needs and to plan their own learning programmes based upon these needs. In-service education can be seen as a vehicle by means of which teachers can influence and guide their own professional training and also as a means of extending their knowledge and keeping abreast of new developments in education.

### 5.2.6 Parental involvement in academic activities

#### (a) Rationale

It is an acknowledged fact that schools play an important role in the lives of children. After the family, the school is the most important institution which shares with parents the tasks of socialisation, education and acculturation of the children in its care. However it must be remembered that the home environment is the first contributory factor towards the child's educational growth. For the parent to be in a position to help the child improve his or her academic performance, it is absolutely necessary that parents become actively involved in their child's education. Even parents with low academic qualifications ought to be reminded of their **vital role in the child's education.** Thus the institution of educational programmes for parents will contribute immensely towards educational development and the reduction of repeated failure and the dropping-out of pupils.

#### (b) Recommendations regarding parental involvement in academic activities

The recommendations regarding parental involvement are:

- that parents become actively involved in the activities of the school which their child attends;

- that parents with low academic qualifications are encouraged to register with an adult education centre, if possible, in order to upgrade themselves educationally;

- that parents impress on their children the importance of education;

- that parents provide ample time for children to study in the evenings and that these studies should be supervised by the parents;

- that parents provide suitable study places and furniture at home for children to study; and

- that where the floor space is small, parents arrange to have the family dinner at an earlier or later time, so that studying can be done before or after dinner.

The implementation of educational programmes will help parents from a deprived community to become more actively involved in their child's education. Parents who take an active interest in their child's education, will help their children in the completion of homework, projects, assignments, communication skills and even interpersonal behaviour. Parental involvement would motivate the child to strive for better results and to produce work of a high standard. Being involved in their children's education will help parents to guide, support and supervise the study by means of a personal study time-table. A child should never be made to feel that he or she has to walk the path of self- development all alone. Hence it is imperative that parents be fully involved in the intellectual growth of their child and accompany their child to self-realisation.

MODEL LESSON FOLLOWS:

## 5.3 MODEL LESSON TO ILLUSTRATE THE EFFECTIVE APPLICATION OF DIDACTIC PRINCIPLES

| | |
|---|---|
| CLASS: | STD 5 |
| NUMBER OF PUPILS: | 35 |
| SUBJECT: | English |
| TYPE OF LESSON: | Composition |
| TOPIC: | The influence of television on our lives |
| TEACHING MEDIA: | Newspaper articles; chalkboard and source book |
| SOURCE BOOK: | *A Guided Course in composition writing* by J.Blaithwaite |
| ENTRY SITUATION: | Pupils are of a mixed ability. There are 18 boys and 17 girls. Approximately 20 percent of the children have working class parents while the other 80 percent come from lower middle class homes. |
| PREVIOUS KNOWLEDGE: | All the pupils have television in their homes. An oral discussion on television in general was done during a previous English oral communication lesson. |
| AIM: | To instill a love for writing. |
| OBJECTIVE: | To write a logical, original and stimulating argumentative composition of approximately one and a half pages on the topic: "The influence of television on our lives". |

The composition lesson is taught over a three-week period.

WEEK 1:

FIRST LESSON PHASE: Oral discussion to arouse interest and direct the pupils towards the lesson topic.

(a) Ask pupils to name their favourite programmes on television (eg. K.TV.; Mini TV.; Kideo; A few sitcoms etc). They could be further asked to name some of their favourite actors and actresses.

(b) Clarify abstract concepts such as: neglect; degradation; influence; television addicts; couch potatoes; conditions of viewing, etc.

SECOND LESSON PHASE: Instruction of new content

(c) Hand out newspaper cuttings (articles on how certain TV programmes had influenced some teenage boys in America to carry out the same type of violence on family members). Pupils are requested to form friendship groups which are partly teacher-directed to ensure that the slow learners are integrated with bright and average learners. The groups consist of between four and five pupils. They read the articles individually and jot down their own views. The groups discuss the views jotted down.

(d) Hand out photocopies of a composition written by another pupil (Advantages and Disadvantages of television) from the source book. Pupils, still in groups, read this article individually. Using the brainstorming method they write down the group's opinions and explore the issue of how television influences our lives.

(e) The teacher, in the meantime, walks around guiding and supporting the pupils. He or she supervises and ensures that all members are actively

involved. The teacher must also make sure that a particular group member does not dominate and monopolise a group discussion.

THIRD LESSON PHASE: Functionalisation: pupil activity.

(f) Still in their groups, pupils begin to prepare their first drafts under the guidance of the teacher; each pupil writes his or her own draft. They categorise their ideas by listing a number of sentences. Then they put similar ideas together under relevant topic sentences. In this way paragraphs are formed and a logical sequence develops.

(g) Once the outline has been planned, pupils complete the composition in its entirety for homework. This first draft must be submitted in the second lesson (week 2).

WEEK 2:
FOLLOW UP

In this lesson pupils get into pairs and read through each other's drafts. They edit the drafts, deleting irrelevant material and adding in new ideas. They discuss the new material added in and try to correct other errors like spelling, grammar and syntax. The teacher moves from one pair to the next guiding and supervising the editing and corrections and giving assistance to those pupils who require more guidance. Once this has been done, pupils are asked to enter the edited version into their class-work books. This can be carried over as homework but must be handed in for evaluation the next day.

WEEK 3:
CORRECTIONS AND REMEDIAL WORK

The marked compositions are given back to the pupils. Corrections are

discussed and completed in class. This is then followed by a remedial exercise on high frequency errors.

### 5.3.1 Discussion of model lesson

One of the most important features of this lesson is a strong sense of **socialisation** and yet at the same time it brings out the individuality of the child. Pupils come together, they collaborate and help each other in every phase of the composition writing. The slow learners gain from the group work situation because they mix with medium and fast learners. They latch onto the ideas of brighter pupils and this helps to sharpen and build the slow learners' abilities in composition writing. The group work promotes various social values. Pupils learn to accommodate each other; they respect each other's views and also learn to be patient and tolerant. Pupils learn to criticise and to accept criticisms from fellow pupils.

As far as **individualisation** is concerned, pupils build up self-confidence because they participate actively in the learning and in this way their self-esteem is developed. They realise the responsibilities they have towards getting together and completing a joint project which equips them for future emancipation. They develop critical attitudes and learn to assess the authenticity of each other's opinions thereby sharpening their capacity to make personal judgements. The skills and abilities of communicating, arguing, debating and convincing people is clearly defined during this lesson and therefore pupils are able to act as unique individuals.

In so far as understanding instruction — **perception** — and developing a love for writing is concerned, these aspects are also enhanced during the group-work. Pupils who do not understand the teacher's instructions are in a position to learn what is required through their fellow pupils. The brighter pupils who are quick in understanding and grasping instructions support and encourage the slow

learners by demonstrating ways in which the task can be conducted. Those pupils who are too shy to ask the teacher for clarification when they are puzzled find it easier to talk to their group members with the result that all pupils become involved and learning takes place effectively. By asking pupils to write compositions within the context of their environment helps to improve their perception of composition writing significantly.

Although the pupils are in groups and are actively involved, the teacher remains as a vital back up. He or she supervises and intervenes during the various stages. His or her role is to keep interest alive by making positive comments on pupil's work.

Subject matter relevance is a crucial factor in enhancing **motivation**. The subject matter in this lesson appeals to learners and facilitate intrinsic motivation. They learn to appreciate learning and move away from dependence on incentives. Not only does the relevant subject matter promote intrinsic *motivation, but it also develops self-control and self- discipline within the pupil.*

In the process of editing and correcting, pupils learn to **evaluate** each others' work. The teacher, while evaluating the pupils' work, makes a self-evaluation of the teaching. He or she is able to gauge the successes and weaknesses of the lesson, thereby obtaining clarity on which aspects need to be retaught. This also helps in future planning and preparation.

This type of composition lesson allows pupils to develop confidence in expressing their ideas. Especially during the editing phase, pupils learn to appreciate the importance of writing correctly and logically. They learn to focus on aspects like grammar, syntax and styles of writing. The important fact is that pupils learn to sift the pro's and con's of an argument and in this lesson they are able to differentiate between the advantages and disadvantages of television. I have recently taught this lesson in a real-life situation. At the end

of the lesson the pupils' awareness regarding the advantages and disadvantages of television has been deepened and, at the same time, they have experienced social contact and success. It was particularly rewarding to find that the slow learners in the class wrote compositions with less language errors and more creative ideas than they did when they were left to their own devices.

## 5.4 CONCLUSION

This dissertation investigated the following problems:

(a) What are the principal didactic causes of scholastic failure in primary schools; and

(b) How can these causes be addressed ?

The hypothesis was a suggested answer to the first problem. Looking at research evidence, the hypothesis was, on the whole, proved true. The principle which research evidence shows was most crucial to reduce failure rate was socialisation because language implications and incompetent teaching are strong didactic influences. Not as much evidence was found to show that motivation was a cause of scholastic failure. It was the principle which appears to be most neglected in empirical research and recent publications. The other three principles; individualisation, perception and evaluation had varying degrees of influence as a cause of scholastic failure.

The answers to the two research problems have been identified as:

(i) Inadequate language skills (and specifically speech deficiencies, defective handwriting, speech disabilities and reading and writing limitations)

(ii) Weak proficiency among teachers

(iii) Low self-esteem

(iv) Authoritarian parents

(v) Incompetent teaching - weak lesson presentation and lesson content

(vi) Defective concept formation and perception

(vii) Lack of concreteness

(viii) Low English proficiency.

In this chapter it was recommended that the following should receive more attention in primary schools in order to reduce the impact of didactic causes on scholastic failure:

(a) Bridging module readiness classes

(b) Peer group teaching and learning

(c) Pupil-centred lessons and active pupil participation

(d) Effective classroom management

(e) Need for in-service education

(f) Parental involvement in academic activities.

It would be superficial to place the blame of scholastic failure on the teacher alone. The living-world of the child is such that it invites exploration. If an unstable, threatening and hostile world exists, the child is not encouraged to explore. Looking at research evidence, the underlying belief is that a person who

believes in himself or his abilities will probably achieve more scholastically, while a person who has a negative self-image will not have the urge to accomplish much and is consequently most at risk of failing. On the other hand, if the child does not have the right IQ and attitude towards school-work, he cannot grasp the learning content quickly and easily. It is up to the teacher to create a positive self-concept in an individual, thus building on the child's self-confidence *which would help him to realise his self-actualisation.*

To a primary school child, the teacher is the key to knowledge. Teachers should not be idealised as they also experience personal problems and they do have some shortcomings. Aware of their own shortcomings, teachers must still strive to carry out their duties faithfully and to instil respect in their pupils, because scholastic failure is not caused by a single factor, but by a multiplicity of influences. Such teachers must not lose courage. Instead they must seek new ways of teaching and fulfil their task of awakening in the child an awareness of the child's potential.

*The wanting to-be-someone-oneself is a basic human desire. The slow learner* as a human being has such a desire, and this is evident in his or her appeal for help. Each time help is given it enables the child to be independent in a particular present or future situation. Slow learners are only human. The learning material that they absorb may be temporarily forgotten, but the values they learn are long lasting. The teachers' influence on slow learners has far- reaching effects. If what the teacher says or does helps these children, then it is accepted. On the other hand if underachievers do not get satisfaction from the help requested, they learn to doubt adults' directions. Thus the teacher must always bear in mind that the cumulative effect of education is to enable the growing person to be an independently existing adult.

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