

THE 1989 BLACK MATRICULATION FAILURE RATE: WHAT WERE THE  
CLASSROOM PRACTICES?

MAOTO DANIEL ZIMBA

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University of the Witwatersrand, in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the Degree of Master of Education.

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Declaration

I Maoto Daniel Zimba, hereby declare that this research is my own unaided work. It is being submitted for the degree of Master of Education at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. It has not been submitted before for any degree or examination at any other University.



M.D. ZIMBA

31 October 1994

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To my mother Ellen Folaga Zimba and in memory of my late father, Johannes Zimba.

To my children Boitumelo and Rebotile, this dissertation is dedicated to you.

## ABSTRACT

This research is an attempt to reveal aspects of History teaching concealed in conventional or popular beliefs about the Black Matriculation pass/fail statistics.

The classroom practices of two History teachers are described. One comes from an "achieving" Soweto secondary school. The school is popularly contrived as an "achieving" school because it is known in the community for producing better than average DET Matriculation results. The classroom practices of another teacher, from an "underachieving" school, are also described. This school is known in the community for producing lower than average DET results over a number of years.

These classroom practices are illuminated against the backdrop of the high pass/low failure rate during the eighties, with particular reference to the year 1989. This is the year in which the DET matriculation pass/failure rate was the worst in the decade of the eighties.

In-depth interviews were conducted over a period of eighteen months and twenty interviews with each of the two teachers. Their accounts of classroom practices in 1989, as cultural scenes in their own terms, provide insights into the conditions which dominated their teaching and their classrooms practices in that year.

The interviews were taped, transcribed and described to provide insights into life in the History classes which might

assist with a reading of the 1989 Matriculation pass/fail statistics.

The data suggests that the paralysis in Black education in that year was both a pedagogical and a political phenomenon. The impact of violence, boycotts and stayaways on the classroom practices is measured in terms of the results. It also suggests that the "achieving" school was better able to overcome this impasse by building a positive ethos whilst the "underachieving" school was left completely paralysed and ineffective through the intransigence of the students, teachers and parents.

Finally, the paper suggests that a proper reading of the 1989 Black matriculation pass/failure rate statistics is one which takes into cognisance the prevailing conditions in the classrooms prior to the examinations.

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## INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this study is to illuminate what is typically concealed in the Black matriculation pass/fail statistics, with specific reference to History in 1989, against the backdrop of a decade of high failure and low pass rate amongst DET matriculants during the eighties.

Pass/failure rate statistics tend to reveal as much as they conceal. Matriculation students' pass/fail statistics in the eighties, especially in 1989, reveal a history of failure among Black students. But concealed in these statistics are the disruptions which prevailed in the classrooms of secondary schools in Soweto and how teachers were frustrated in their attempts to engage in conventional daily classroom practices. Also hidden in the statistics is how these disruptions and frustrations in turn exacerbated History classroom conditions and teaching throughout the eighties.

It is the high failure/low pass rate among DET Matriculation students over the eighties, especially in 1989, that aroused the interest of this researcher.

High failure/low pass in the Matriculation Examinations have led to the research problem of whether Black students in the Department of Education and Training (DET) are unable to cope with the Matriculation academic programme. It also raises the question of whether the Matriculation pass/fail statistics present an accurate and complete picture of Black students'

present an accurate and complete picture of Black students' inability to pass the Matriculation examinations.

This study describes the classroom practices of two History teachers, one from an achieving school and the other from an under-achieving school, with the aim of illuminating these classroom practices against the backdrop of high failure/low pass rate statistics in 1989. In-depth interviews (which were taped, transcribed and coded) were conducted with each of the two teachers.

The research questions which formed the main thrust of this study are:

- \* What is concealed in the Black Matriculation pass/fail statistics of the 1980's, especially in 1989?
- \* What conditions prevailed in Soweto secondary schools' History classrooms in 1989 which can inform a reading of the DET pass/failure rate statistics?

## CHAPTER 1

BLACK MATRIC PASS/FAIL STATISTICS:1980-1989

According to Franz Auerbach, the problems that schools experienced in 1989 were a legacy of the early and mid-eighties. He argued that some of the failures of 1989 were those students who had missed out on two or more years of education as a result of the unrests of the mid-eighties ("The Star" 11/1/90: 5).

Hartshorne makes the following striking comment about the 1989 Black matriculation results:

"These results are the worst for black candidates since 1962, showing an overall failure rate of nearly sixty percent" (Hartshorne 1992: 82).

According to Hartshorne, the 1989 Black Matriculation results were the worst in twenty-seven years and, the decade of the eighties, itself gloomy, reveals a number of other issues as evidenced by Table 1 below.

The trend in the first half of the decade indicates a steady decline in the numbers of passing DET students: 52.4% of the total number of black matriculation students passed their examinations in 1980, 50.4% in 1981, 48.4% in 1982, 48.3% in 1983, 48.7% in 1984 and 46.7% in 1985. This downward trend, Hartshorne argues, is a cause for concern. The second half of the decade indicates a steady rise in the number of students passing DET examinations. In 1986, 51.6% of the students passed, 56% passed in 1987 and 56.7% passed in 1988. The

results in 1989, instead of being better than those of the previous year, 1988, suddenly dropped. The number of students who passed the DET matriculation examinations was drastically reduced with the pass percentage in that year falling to 41.8.

TABLE 1: BLACK MATRICULATION RESULTS  
1980-1989.

YEAR	ENTRIES	UNIV. ENTRANCE	SCHOOL LEAVING	TOTAL PASSES	TOTAL FAILURES
1980	43 237	6 447 14.9%	16 203 37.5%	22 650 52.4%	20 587 47.6%
1981	57 529	6 803 11.8%	22 220 38.6%	29 023 50.4%	28 506 49.6%
1982	70 241	7 005 10.0%	26 954 38.4%	33 959 48.4%	36 282 51.6%
1983	82 449	8 128 9.9%	31 687 38.4%	39 815 48.3%	42 634 51.7%
1984	86 191	9 727 11.3%	32 219 37.4%	41 946 48.7%	44 425 51.3%
1985	82 815	9 958 12.0%	28 741 34.7%	38 699 46.7%	44 116 53.3%
1986	100 012	13 460 13.5%	38 150 38.1%	51 610 51.6%	48 402 48.4%
1987	150 119	24 597 16.4%	59 601 39.7%	84 198 56%	65 921 43.9%
1988	187 123	30 685 16.4%	75 500 40.3%	106 185 56.7%	80 938 43.3%
1989	209 319	21 357 10.2%	66 153 31.6%	87 510 41.8%	121 809 58.2%

(HARTSHORNE 1992: 81)

From the above table, the results in 1988 showed an upward trend, the best for the decade. In that year, 187,123 candidates sat for the matriculation examinations. Of these, 30,685, representing 16.4%, obtained the university entrance pass while 75,500, about 40.3%, obtained the school leaving

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pass. This brought the total number of passes to 106,185 a 56,7% pass rate. The failure rate in that year was 80,938, which in percentages stood at 43,3%. This upward trend was expected to improve the following year, however, the opposite occurred.

In 1989 there was an increase of 22,196 candidates on the number that had entered for the matriculation examinations in 1988. Whereas we would have expected the number of passes to have increased because more students wrote in 1989, we instead have a contradictory situation. In 1989 there were 18,675 less passes than in 1988 whilst there were 40,871 more failures in that year than in 1988. Out of a total of 209,319, only 21,357 (10,2%), obtained the University Entrance pass, 9,328 less than the previous year. There were 66,153 (about 31,6%) candidates who obtained the school leaving pass (9,347 less than in 1988). The total number of passes was 87,510, about 41,8% of the total number of candidates and 14,9% less than the pass percentage in the previous year.

The total number of failures in 1989 alone, about 121,809, was three times the total number of candidates who had entered for the examinations at the beginning of the decade in 1980 (43,237) and higher than the total number of candidates who had entered for the same examinations in 1986 (100,012). It was even higher than the total number of passes (106,185) in the previous year, 1988.

In summary, university entrance passes in the decade of the eighties indicate an inconsistent trend. They decreased from 14,9% in 1980 to 11,8% in 1981, 10% in 1982 and 9,9% in 1983. An upward trend commences in 1984 when 11,3% obtained the University Entrance pass, 12% in 1985, 13,5% in 1986, 16,4% in 1987 and in 1988. This trend was reversed in 1989 when only 10,2% of the total number of candidates (209 213) for the matriculation examinations obtained the university entrance passes.

Fewer standard 10 candidates who passed obtained the university entrance certificate in this period. In other words, more passes were in the school leaving category where the passing percentage was consistently above 35% except in 1985 when it went down to 34,7% and in 1989 when it was 31,6%. There is an upward trend between 1980 and 1981 when the percentages were 37,5 in 1980, 38,6% in 1981. It went down by 0,2 percent to 38,4% in 1982 and remained there in 1983 (38,4%). It went down again (37,4%) in 1984 and dropped further (34,7%) in 1985. Between 1986 and 1988 the trend was upward, 38,1% in 1986, 39,1% in 1987 and 40,3% in 1988. The lowest for the decade was in 1989 when it went down to 31,6%, falling by 8,7% on the performance of the previous year.

These statistics suggest that the trend in the pass/failure rate in DET matric in this period differ for University Entrance passes and standard 10 School Leaving passes. In the case of the University Entrance passes there was a downward

trend between 1980 and 1983 and an upward trend between 1984 and 1988, and a sudden drop in 1989. On the other hand, the School Leaving passes, which were always higher than the University Entrance passes, did not show any consistency. There was a rise between 1980 and 1981, a 0,2% drop in 1982, which remained the same in the following year, a downward trend between 1983 and 1985 and an upward trend between 1986 and 1988 and when an improvement was expected in 1989, there was instead a heavy drop in that year.

#### THE RESULTS AT REGIONAL LEVEL

Table 2 shows results in eight regions into which the DET is divided. Emphasis is on comparison based on the range of performance from the highest to the lowest achieving region. These include the Orange Free State, Cape, Natal, Northern Transvaal, Orange Vaal, Johannesburg, Highveld and Diamond Fields. The statistics here reveal that there is a difference in performance between rural and urban areas. In fact, they reveal that in 1989 rural areas performed better than urban areas. Most important, they reveal that the Johannesburg region performed worse than all the other regions under control of the DET.

The distinction of urban from rural areas is important to emphasize the observation that rural Black schools produce better pass/failure rates than urban areas. A comparison of the Matriculation pass/failure rates between urban and rural areas for 1989 is made in Table 2 below.

TABLE 2: COMPARATIVE STATISTICS. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION  
AND TRAINING BY REGIONS FOR 1989.

Region	Entries	Univ Entrance	School leaving	Total passes	Failures
OFS	3980	341 8,6%	1252 31,5%	1593 40,1%	2387 59,9%
CAPE	3361	417 7,7%	1479 27,5%	1896 35,2%	3485 64,8%
NATAL	3201	386 11,7%	810 24,6%	1196 36,3%	2095 63,7%
N. TVL	641	119 17,5%	2455 38%	3574 55,8%	2841 44,2%
ORANGE VAAL	4710	576 12,2%	1874 39,4%	2430 51,6%	2280 48,4%
JO'BURG	5382	334 6,2%	1139 21,2%	1473 27,4%	3909 72,6%
H'VELD	10782	857 8,0%	3017 28,0%	3874 36,0%	6908 64,0%
DIAMOND FIELDS	2627	275 10,5%	971 37,0%	1246 47,5%	1381 52,5%
TOTAL	42568	4305 10,1%	12977 30,5%	17282 40,6%	25286 59,4%

(Hartshorne 1992: 82)

From the above table, the failure rate in 1989 showed a range within the DET of from 44% in the Northern Transvaal to 72,6% in Johannesburg. In the latter region, largely comprising Soweto, only 6,2% gained University Entrance passes and almost three quarters failed (Hartshorne 1992: 82). It was in this region that the DET produced the highest failure rate and the lowest pass rate in the 1989 Matriculation examinations (Race Relations Survey 1989/90: 830).

The Northern Transvaal, a rural region, performed better than all the other regions, with a pass percentage of 55,8% out of a total number of 6,415 candidates. Of these, 1,119 (17,5%), obtained University Entrance passes and 2,455 (38%), obtained a School Leaving pass. About 2,841 (44,2%) failed.

On the other hand, the results in the Johannesburg region of the DET was a direct opposite of the picture in the Northern Transvaal. In this region, 72,6% (3,909) of the total number (5,382) of candidates who sat for the examinations failed. Only 1,473 candidates passed. Of those who passed, only 334 (6,2%) obtained a University Entrance pass, whilst 1,139 (21,2%) obtained a School Leaving pass. Both the University Entrance and School Leaving passes in this region were below the national average performance. The University Entrance and School Leaving pass rates at national level were respectively 10,2% and 31,6%, compared with 6,2% and 21,2% respectively for the Johannesburg region. This region obtained 11,3% less University Entrance passes and 16,8% less School Leaving

passes than the Northern Transvaal. From the above table, the Johannesburg region, which is completely urban, performed worst than the predominantly rural areas, such as Northern Natal, the Highveld, Orange Vaal, Orange Free State and the Diamond Fields. From a similar observation, Hartshorne concludes that as far as this region was concerned:

The results in 1989 came much nearer to the truth of the state of affairs in black secondary schooling. The 1989 results, unlike those of 1986-1988, were a truer reflection of the state of affairs in the schools (Hartshorne 1992: 84).

The Johannesburg region which had the highest number of disturbances in the form of boycotts and stayaways had the highest number of failures, the lowest overall pass percentage, the lowest percentage of University Entrance passes and the lowest percentage of school leaving passes. The region with the highest percentage of University Entrance passes was the Northern Transvaal, where there were fewer disturbances, if not none at all, followed by the Orange Vaal. Then came Natal, Diamond Fields, OFS, Highveld, the Cape and lastly, Johannesburg. The Orange Vaal region obtained the highest school leaving percentage, followed by the rest, with Johannesburg the last.

#### The Pass Failure Rate Statistics in Individual Subjects in the Johannesburg Region

The above discussion gives an overall picture of the pass/failure rate statistics in the whole of the DET. It also

shows a regional breakdown of these statistics. The next discussion focuses attention on the individual subjects in the Johannesburg region with a view to finding out which subject(s) produced the highest number of passes and which had the highest number of failures. Table 3 below provides the statistics.

TABLE 3: AVERAGE % PASS RATE FOR INDIVIDUAL SUBJECTS IN THE JOHANNESBURG REGION

SUBJECT	REGIONAL AVERAGE %
NORTH SOTHO HG	45,47
SOUTH SOTHO HG	50,22
TSONGA HG	45,37
TSWANA HG	38,43
XHOSA HG	40,36
ZULU HG	41,01
AFRIKAANS. 2nd Language HG	35,12
ENGLISH 2nd Language HG	44,67
MATHEMATICS HG	13,40
MATHEMATICS SG	10,30
PHYSICAL SCIENCE HG	27,74
PHYSICAL SCIENCE SG	24,82
BIOLOGY HG	18,36
BIOLOGY SG	25,81
GEOGRAPHY HG	27,62
GEOGRAPHY SG	35,86
BIBLICAL STUDIES HG	33,36
BIBLICAL STUDIES SG	28,41
HISTORY HG	17,11
HISTORY SG	26,81
WOODWORK SG	31,17
HOME ECONOMICS SG	39,73

From Table 2 above subjects with the highest failure/lowest pass rate in the Johannesburg region were History, Biology and Mathematics. History H.G. had a 17,11% overall pass rate whilst History S.G. had a pass rate of 26,81%. Biology H.G. had a pass rate of 18,36%, whilst Biology S.G. had a pass rate of 25,81%. For Mathematics H.G. the pass rate was 13,4% and for Mathematics S.G. it was 10,3%.

The Table further shows that the languages, i.e. English, Afrikaans and the Black languages had the highest pass/lowest failure rate. Of all the subjects in the Johannesburg region South Sotho had the highest pass/lowest failure rate.

As a History teacher, I found the low pass rate in the subject a compelling reason to focus the attention of this study on the classroom practices of History teachers in an attempt to understand the pass/failure rate in the subject.

In summary this chapter reveals from the statistics given in the above tables that in the decade of the eighties the Black Matriculation pass/failure rate was lowest in 1989 and that in that year, the Johannesburg region of the DET (comprising Soweto) produced the highest failure and the lowest pass rate in the whole country. The statistics also reveal that urban and rural areas performed differently, with urban areas performing worst, perhaps as a result of boycotts and stayaways. They further reveal that History was amongst the lowest passed subjects in the region.

It is as a result of the latter revelation that this study gives focus to the History classroom practices in Soweto in the year 1989 in an attempt to reveal conditions which prevailed in these classrooms as a backdrop against which the pass/failure rate statistics may be read.

## CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE ON HISTORY TEACHING

An analysis of statistics between 1980 and 1989 reveals an alarming pass/failure rate in Black schools at matric level, especially in subjects such as History. A review of the literature on the topic indicates several focuses of interest in this study.

This review of research into History teaching throws light on conditions in secondary schools. It suggests that conditions in the decade of the eighties, specifically in 1989 were unfavourable for the production of good pass/failure rate statistics. Major themes in the literature are:

- \* The Content and Teaching of the Subject History.
- \* Under-provisioning of Black Education.
- \* Violence.
- \* Examinations.

CONTENT AND TEACHING OF THE SUBJECT HISTORY

Protest, boycotts, stayaways and poor matriculation results are not new phenomena in the education of the black people of South Africa. Bantu education was vigorously opposed from its birth in 1953. Opposition came from the press, various public forums and by some white and many black opposition politicians. This opposition has often been entrenched in the form of boycotts and stayaways (Tom Lodge 1984: 266). There

is a strong argument that in the eighties these boycotts and stayaways were, among others, precipitated by the high failure rate in the African matriculation examinations as well as rejection of what the students referred to as gutter education because of its inferior and indoctrinatory content (Pam Christie 1985: 250). As explained by Lodge this kind of opposition culminated in the drive to replace externally administered and financed schools with own independent schools wherein certain subjects, for example History, came under intense investigation and attracted attempts to replace it with "alternative subjects" (Lodge 1984: 269).

Educationists and researchers who have studied the history curriculum agree in their arguments that there is naked politics, indoctrination and apartheid ideology in South African history. They concur that the intention of history was to maintain the political and economic status quo in which blacks are subordinate to whites. The history textbooks, written within the confines of Afrikaner historiography, teach propaganda and prejudice, whilst black teachers, who are controlled by the syllabus and work-programmes drawn by the DET reflect what they themselves have learned or failed to learn when they were at school, teacher training colleges and/or university (Boyce 1976: 9).

The biggest problem lies in the fact that South African history is written as if blacks have no history at all except where their subservient and disruptive nature either helped or

disorganised white progress, or as a people who went to war over stolen property and who had to suffer successive defeats from "punitive expeditions" aimed at "teaching the thieves a lesson". Generally, most of South African history is used to brainwash students by concentrating on the appraisal of white history at the expense of black history (Walker 1990: 303).

By presenting Afrikaner history as South African history, the Afrikaner is denying the very important and active contribution of the black man in the shaping of South African history. What is even more disappointing is that the heroism of black resistance to their conquest is hardly mentioned. This, amongst others, is what has led to the rejection of bantu education and the rise of student activism (Molteno 1985; Walker 1990). The ultimate consequence is that students almost lost trust and interest in the subject.

#### UNDERPROVISIONING OF BLACK EDUCATION

Black education in particular has been weakened by the lack of schools and facilities, poorly qualified teachers, shortage of textbooks and overcrowded classes. But as well as these long-standing grievances, the student complaints in the 1980's centred around the extremely low black matriculation passes.

The Race Relations survey (1989/90: 795) explains that per capita expenditure on African education was still the lowest in 1988/1989. In that financial year, the state spent R2,226-04 more on a White child than on an African child. It

spent on a Coloured and Indian child respectively, R565-54 and R1,410-89 more than on an African child. It should be noted that a ten year plan to equalise education funding, triumphantly announced by the government in 1986 had ground to a halt in 1989 because of economic stringency. In April 1989, F.W. De Klerk, who was then minister of National Education, declared that the plan was "on hold" (Walker 1990: 132).

According to a study published by the Institute for Future Research (IFR) at the University of Stellenbosch in 1989, this disparity in per capita expenditure is often politically exploited and is usually attributed to purely political factors and is blamed for the disparity in the matriculation examination results of the different racial groups in the country (Race Relations Survey 1989/90: 795).

Researchers have also focused on the disparity which exists in the teacher-pupil ratios, on the disparity in the provisioning and funding of the different racial groups in the country. There are some who have looked at the reproductive power of education and how education is manipulated to maintain the status quo (Christie 1985: 98).

#### VIOLENCE

Black children, noticing these disparities in the provisioning of education for the different racial groups in South Africa, as well as in the content of their subjects, resorted to violence, boycotts and stayaways as a way of expressing

rejection of Bantu Education and bias in subjects such as History (Molteno 1983: 24).

The students' rage was often shrouded in the concept of ungovernability which usually resulted in physical violence and disrespect of teachers and principals. School buildings and other assets were vandalised by students during the day and by thugs at night because they were regarded as state property. Regressive relations occurred with such frequency that students formed alternatives to the teachers' and principals' organisation of the classrooms and schools. Within the confines of these new organisations the students worked at becoming visible. The teachers' role as the administrator in charge of failure became dominant as school work got caught in this battle (The Star 11/1/90: 3).

Student-teacher relationships were consistently and completely overturned. Students seemed to have overcome their fear and respect of principals, teachers and parents, and simultaneously took matters into their own hands. Stander wrote that during 1989 there was no discipline, students lost respect for their teachers and came to school carrying guns and knives and refused to do any work. Threatened by this challenge to their authority, principals and teachers were forced into submission and were too scared to impose DET policies ("The Star" 11/1/1990: 3). The Education Policy Unit of the University of the Witwatersrand referred to the situation as a pervasive decay of authority of any kind, where

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Student-teacher relationships were consistently and completely overturned. Students seemed to have overcome their fear and respect of principals, teachers and parents, and simultaneously took matters into their own hands. Stander wrote that during 1989 there was no discipline, students lost respect for their teachers and came to school carrying guns and knives and refused to do any work. Threatened by this challenge to their authority, principals and teachers were forced into submission and were too scared to impose DET policies ("The Star" 11/1/1990: 3). The Education Policy Unit of the University of the Witwatersrand referred to the situation as a pervasive decay of authority of any kind, where

late-coming, bunking of classes and absenteeism seemed to be uncontrollable. Students established their own authority structures which were imposed on everybody within schools ("Drum magazine": February 1990).

### EXAMINATIONS

The examinations themselves put a lot of pressure on the teacher and the teaching of history. As Walker argues:

The externally set examinations imposed further constraints on innovative approaches to history. These exams encourage rote learning and the ability to write down information quickly and accurately. If examinations inform practice and provide feedback for teachers, then the present form of the examinations provides no incentive to teachers to change existing practice. If changes in the form and content of the syllabus do not incorporate change in the form of assessment, most especially in the public matriculation exam, then these changes are unlikely to have any significant impact. Given that history is seen by the ruling Nationalist party as next to the mother tongue, the best channel for cultivating love of one's own, then changing this examination is both a pedagogical and a political issue.  
(Walker 1990: 305).

The above quotation shows that the syllabus and examinations are strictly adhered to and reflect the desires of Afrikaner pedagogicians who will not accept innovations which may challenge Afrikaner historiography and apartheid policies.

The History examinations have also been perceived as a mechanism of social control and there is also a belief that there exists a manipulation of the Matriculation examination results with the aim of ensuring the generally inferior

quality of black education. These examinations have also been looked upon as an extension of the ideology in the History syllabus and textbooks while several publications expound on the socio-economic and/or socio-political problems which have an undeniably strong impact on education and the examinations (Christies 1985: 149).

### Rejection of DET controlled Half-Yearly Examinations

In May 1989 a controversy arose over the writing of common papers in the half-yearly examinations which were organized by the Johannesburg region and its subject advisory services. Teachers and pupils in many schools complained that conditions had not been conducive to cover the required syllabus. In some schools, there were allegations that the papers had not arrived on time or had failed to arrive, that there had been cribbing and other forms of irregularities. Though not used to determine the end of year results, these exams yielded a 25% pass rate, a bad premonition for the final results (Race Relations Survey 1989/90: 832).

### Marking Irregularities

During the marking of the History and other Matriculation examinations scripts, some irregularities were reported in "The Weekly Mail". A reporter of this newspaper was able to walk into the examinations centre in Pretoria, handled scripts and was successful in having himself photographed posing as a marker. He reported that markers were overworked, sometimes marking for up to twelve hours a day. He reported that some

of them were taking out scripts to mark them and getting through them fast in their dormitories. It was also reported that white university students were employed as markers even in subjects they were not themselves studying. It was also reported that pupils who had written their matriculation examinations at the end of that year were being used to add up marks. Those who were involved in these irregularities were dismissed. However, the damage had been done (Race Relations Survey 1989/90: 832).

In summary it emerges from the literature review that daily practices which dominated History classrooms and schooling in general, especially secondary schooling in Soweto during the decade of the eighties, especially in 1989, contributed to the low pass/high failure rate. The rejection of Bantu Education, which manifested itself in violence, protests, boycotts, stayaways and rejection of subjects such as History obviously meant that students found it hard to exert themselves. They could not reconcile their rejection of the content of History they had to learn with the need to pass the History examinations.

Time and attention was focused on violence, instead of learning and teaching as the students sought to register their protest. Teachers were caught in the crossfire as agents of an unwanted system of education. As they lost respect for their teachers, the students could hardly enter into a meaningful student-teacher relationship.

Perceived as deliberately designed to fail students, the externally set Matriculation examinations could not have come at the right time as the academic year had been shortened by violence, boycotts and stayaways. The students were hardly prepared for the examinations which came as an imperfect end to a year whose classroom practices which were not conducive to teaching and learning.

## CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Qualitative methods were used to gather data with a view to describing the classroom practices of two History teachers during the course of 1989. In-depth interviews were used. This method was preferred to all other methods because it is truly an attempt to have detailed descriptions of conditions hidden in pass/fail statistics. Secondly, this data could not be prespecified within techniques typically set in survey. Besides, structured techniques were not considered ideal to collect data for this study because the conditions that prevailed in Soweto secondary schools in 1989 may not reflect what the teachers actually did in their classrooms. The kind of data needed for purposes of this study was confined to the informants' personal reconstructions of their daily classroom practices in 1989.

## THE IN-DEPTH INTERVIEW

Erickson argues that in-depth interviews are important especially for researching daily occurrences and events usually not documented in structured interviews. He further argues that this is because of the invisibility of everyday with its familiarity and contradictions some of which may have passed unnoticed and may only be unravelled by incessant interviewing which is typical of the in-depth interview. What is happening, daily concrete details of practices in a school, for instance, can become visible and be documented systematically and a comparative understanding of different

social settings (e.g. schools) can also be achieved from the same documentation (Erickson 1986: 121-122).

Following James P. Spradley (1979), in-depth interviews are like a series of friendly conversations in which questions asked of informants give the "insider's view", here of what actually happened in their classrooms in 1989 concealed in pass/fail statistics. The interviews were informal and elicited response to questions about classroom practices through which was sought to uncover that which was hidden in the statistics of the 1989 black matriculation examinations results. To uncover these, various types of questions were used (such as grand-tour, structural and contrast questions) as suggested by Spradley, over a period of about eighteen months and about twenty interviews each with two informants, wherein they were asked to detail issues about their daily classroom practices in that year. The questions were intended to uncover those classroom practices and relations which dominated these Soweto History classrooms in 1989. This, in brief, is how interview data was collected in this study.

This method of collecting data is called "retrospective interview" by Fetterman who further explains that in this method:

The interviewer uses retrospective interviews to reconstruct the past, asking informants to recall personal historical information. In some cases, retrospective interviews are the only way to gather information about the past (Fetterman 1991: 50).

This was carried out to build up details about classroom practices. The teachers gave detailed insights into their own pedagogical experiences inside the classrooms during 1989.

Retrospective In-depth interview data made it possible to reconstruct the past, allowing the informants to recall personal historical information, thereby revealing hidden classroom practices and daily occurrences which usually go unnoticed or are taken for granted. In these interviews, various questions and types of questions were used to uncover patterned daily practices (Fetterman 1991: 50).

Questions were asked repeatedly in a series of interviews. Sometimes the same question was asked in different ways to find contrast or to establish consistency in the informants' descriptions, to ensure free, uninterrupted and constant flow of data. To increase the precision of the interviews, all the information was tape-recorded and transcribed (Spradley 1979: 78).

In-depth interviewing is invaluable for revealing the insider perspective in History teaching in the classroom with a view to describing each as a cultural scene aimed at understanding the "other" way of life as described by the informants (Erickson 1986: 122).

Twenty interviews were conducted with each informant which required the researcher to maintain and develop a relationship

with informants to ensure the free, uninterrupted and constant flow of data.

Adherence to this methodology enabled the research to draw on the review of literature and the data to describe their contents and move the research process forward and to assess the significance of what he was hearing and continually to refine the study (Wilcox 1982: 294).

### Kinds of Questions used in the Interviews

The researcher used in-depth interviews to elicit, classify and organise the informants' perception of reality. All researchers, according to Fetterman (1991: 50) and Spradley (1979: 56), share a range of questions. Some questions found useful in this study, as stated earlier were: grand-tour, structural and contrast questions.

#### Grand-Tour Questions

These are called "survey" questions by Fetterman (1991: 51), or "grand-tour" questions by Spradley (1979: 86) and are designed to elicit a broad picture of the informant's world. They are intended to inform the researcher about a setting in which the informant carries out routine activities. An example of a grand-tour question asked is: Could you describe a typical day at your school in 1989? The response expected from the informants was that they should give detailed accounts of the common features of each school day from morning until school out in 1989. It required of them to

detail the setting in which they carried out routine activities.

### Structural Questions

These questions "enable the researcher to discover information about domains, the basic units in an informants knowledge. They allow the interviewer to find out how informants have organised their knowledge" (Spradley 1979: 120). An example of a structural question asked is: What are all the different kinds of problems you experienced in the history classroom? Structural questions may be repeated in different forms, for example: Can you think of any other problems that you experienced in your teaching in that year? or, Are these all the problems you experienced in your teaching in that year? The aim in using these different questions is to check on categories already elicited and to establish that the full range have been uncovered.

### Contrast Questions

These questions are used to find out what an informant means by various terms used in his language. They also assist in discovering the dimensions of meaning which informants employed to distinguish the objects and events in their world (Spradley 1979: 56). An example of a contrast question asked to distinguish domains is: What is the difference between a good, cooperative student and a troublesome student?

## CRITERIA USED FOR SELECTING SCHOOLS AND INFORMANTS

There are sixty-five secondary schools in Soweto. Two of these were selected for this research. First it was important to establish the pass/failure rate percentage of the matriculation results for all sixty-five secondary schools in the Johannesburg region, comprising Soweto, for the year 1989. Secondly, the first five schools with the best above average pass/failure rate were grouped together on the one hand and five schools with the highest failure rate and the lowest pass rate were also grouped together on the other. One school was selected from each extreme to study what actually happened within two school contexts where results strongly contrasted with each other. The intention was to be able to uncover both conditions prevailing in high pass/low fail contexts as well as in high fail/low pass school contexts.

### Criteria Used for Selecting Schools: Thebe and Ithuteng Secondary Schools.

Reasons for selecting the first school, the achieving school, was that it produced results that were better than average DET results, making it one of the top five in the region for the year 1989. In addition the History teacher was willing and able to talk freely about his classroom practices unlike the other four schools where the teachers did not wish to be involved in research projects especially where it involved their own personal daily practices.

This school, Thebe Secondary School (a pseudonym), is a

private secondary school situated in Soweto. The salaries of the staff in this school are not paid by the DET, but by the private sector. The state does, however, give the school a subsidy which, in 1989, amounted to R50,000. Though private, the school does however, have its matriculants sit for the DET matriculation examinations. In 1989 it registered 12 candidates for the history examinations. Of these, 6 entered for the higher grade and 6 entered for the standard grade examinations.

The subject obtained a one hundred percent pass rate in that year (see appendix A). Two candidates in the higher grade obtained the symbol C, two obtained D and 2 obtained E. In the standard grade history examination 2 candidates obtained distinctions (A symbols), one obtained a B, and three obtained a D symbol. There was no failure in both the history higher and standard grade examinations. The school achieved an overall pass percentage of 72% with history being one of the subjects with the best results along with the Black languages, Biology, Accounting, Economics, Business Economics, English (which is done as a first language higher grade subject) and Afrikaans. The subjects with the lowest pass rate were Mathematics and Physical Science.

The second, Ithuteng Secondary School (a pseudonym) is a state secondary school. It was selected because it had a pass/failure rate placing in the lowest five schools in Soweto and had a history teacher who was willing to converse about

her teaching of history in 1989. In this school, almost everything, such as teachers' salaries, textbooks and stationery, school buildings and maintenance is provided for by the state. The DET prescribes the syllabuses, work-programmes and textbooks to which the teachers must adhere in accordance with the requirements of the examinations.

In 1989 one hundred candidates entered for the history examinations in this school. Of these, fifty-six entered for the higher grade exam while forty-four entered for the standard grade. Of those who entered for the higher grade exam only one passed, obtaining a "D" symbol. The rest failed. Candidates who entered for the standard grade exam performed better. Altogether 19 students passed, one obtaining an "A" symbol and two getting "C" symbols. 37 failed.

#### Criteria Used for Selecting Informants:

For purposes of this study two informants were selected to get in-depth data of conditions prevailing in their History classes in 1989. Both clearly were History teachers and were willing to articulate their experiences giving details of their classroom practices. Only they, as teachers, could give details of classroom practices. Both informants were selected because they showed willingness to talk, and according to their colleagues, had a wealth of information and were able to talk about their teaching in a non-analytic manner. They were also willing to participate in the interviews for an

unspecified duration of time (it took eighteen months to complete the interviews). Both accepted events as they were and were hardly conscious that people might see things differently. For instance, the teacher from Ithuteng, Mapule, (a pseudonym) insisted many times that her school was in no way different from the rest of the schools in Soweto, that the behaviour of the students at her school was a general trend in the township. Both informants were certain that there would be no problems in being interviewed at their respective schools if the need arose to allow for verification of some information.

#### Informant 1-Meneer : Thebe Secondary

The first informant, Meneer(a pseudonym), in his mid-fifties, has been a teacher for the past twenty-five years. He started his teaching career in Pretoria and moved to Johannesburg in 1970. He has taught in state schools for most of his career and joined the private school where he now teaches in 1981.

He possesses immense experience in the teaching of History as displayed in his ability to speak the subject at any given time. Throughout his teaching career he has taught both History and Afrikaans with distinction and has records to prove his achievements and to corroborate his verbal arguments. In his many files he keeps statistics of results of his pupils ever since he started teaching (and these are kept both in his office at school and in his study at home). Included too, are official documents about the syllabus, work-

programmes and curriculum, memorandums of examination papers of both subjects over the past ten years. He has records of all in-service training courses he has attended.

He has gained a number of merits as a teacher both in state and private schools. To an extent his record keeping is somewhat exaggerated, as some of these documents are carried with him all the time, in his pockets and attache-bag.

Informant 2-Mapule : Ithuteng Secondary

At forty-one, Mapule (a pseudonym) is one of the few long serving teachers at her school. When she started teaching fifteen years ago her highest academic qualification was a junior secondary certificate (JC) which was complimented by a primary teachers' certificate. A self-made teacher, she improved her qualifications by first studying for a matriculation certificate on a part-time basis and now holds a bachelor of education degree from the Rand Afrikaans University. For her Bachelor of Arts degree she studied History as a major subject at Vista University.

Mapule has been teaching history in the matriculation class since 1989 after graduating from Vista the previous year. Unfortunately for her, the results in 1989 were very poor at her school, as in almost all the other schools in Soweto. Performance in the subject History was one of the poorest in the whole region.

Outspoken, she made an ideal informant for one who spoke for a school with one of the poorest performances in the region. On the other hand, she regarded interest in her classroom practices in 1989 as therapeutic. It was as if she always waited to be interviewed. She fitted the description of the respondent described as "that respondent who is provided with a platform for expressing his or her opinions, attitudes and explanations. People who are in need of someone attentive and eager to listen without interruption to all that he or she has to say" (Rummel 1964: 104).

The use of a small number of informants is supported by Spradley and McCurdy;

In order to even scratch the surface of one person's cultural knowledge, it takes a great deal of time. Because your time will be limited, it is not possible to work with many informants (in fact we suggest that you limit the number of informants you interview to two).

However, there are ways of increasing the reliability of what a single informant tells you. First, if you have developed good rapport with your informants, it will decrease the possibility of lying. Second, rather than inquiring about his/her personal opinions, it is useful to ask what he/she thinks others in his/her group believe. Third, by asking the same question during successive interviews you can see whether your informant is being inconsistent. You can directly ask him/her to check what you have learned and see if you got it right.

(Spradley and McCurdy 1972: 46).

They, Spradley and McCurdy, argued that in-depth interviews is best used with a small number of informants to gather data about one's culture. One informant can for instance, be

interviewed repeatedly over the same issues or aspects of an issue to check data, to determine consistency and reliability or even to find out if what the informant had said in a previous interview is a fact or an opinion.

In summary, the in-depth interview is invaluable in collecting natural and unstructured data (Cohen and Manion 1994: 108). However, caution needs to be taken during the collection of data to develop relationships with the informants in which they are able to speak about their experiences and "cultural knowledge" in the most natural form as is possible. The interviewer needs to set aside his/her own stereotypes and preconceptions about what went on in the schools and allow informants to describe their own experiences in their own language and terms (Spradley 1979: 6) thereby naturally and freely giving them room to reveal their classroom practices in teaching History in 1989.

## CHAPTER 4

THEBE SECONDARY : BEACON OF HOPE

The informant's accounts present hope for teaching History in 1989 in Black secondary schools. They reveal that teaching and learning of the highest standard can take place if a school is well provided for by both the state and the private sector. They reveal that if teachers' salaries are subsidised by the private sector, teachers get motivated and as a result, are prepared to work beyond the call of duty by availing themselves even during weekends and vacations.

Thebe secondary is a normal functioning school. It suggests what one would normally expect to find in a school: normal classes, discipline, order, a good library, an equipped science laboratory, committed teachers and students, involved and concerned parents and beautiful premises. In 1989, for instance, the teachers taught and the students learned. This is obviously what one would expect to find in a school. Students were not allowed to come to school carrying guns, knives and other weapons and thus, there was no violence. The violence, boycotts and stayaways of the eighties did not have an impact on the History classroom practices at the school.

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mostly American companies. Besides, the school also receives a subsidy from the state and also has the financial support of the parents who pay fees in cases where funding by the sponsors falls short. Besides the payment of fees, parents buy their children's school uniform and textbooks.

In this school, there is very little that is hidden in the pass/fail statistics of the matriculation examinations as the classroom practices are what we would otherwise expect of a secondary school. The school is, in other words, what one would describe as an achieving school in which what teachers and students do actually depict a functioning school. The description "achieving", it will be recollected, means simply that this school produced results that were above the average for DET schools in general.

An achieving school is one in which there is every effort by teachers to promote effective teaching and learning. Achieving schools are usually coherent, have good communication within their communities, they also have a wide range of student incentives and a clear student discipline policy. We may also identify the following characteristics of achieving schools: teachers' high expectations for student performance, a task orientation among teachers, the ability to keep students on task, the expenditure of little time on behaviour management, the principal's instructional leadership, the participation of parents and a pleasant, orderly and quite environment conducive to learning.

The matriculation results of the school in 1989 were excellent: 46 students entered for the examinations, 43 passed: 32 obtained the University Entrance pass and 11 obtained the school leaving pass: only 3 failed. Of interest for this research was to reveal what it was like in this school in 1989 in contrast to an underachieving school.

Meneer gave accounts of day to day classroom practices and experiences he went through in the year 1989. The descriptions that are given in this part of the study were led by him and given as far as possible, in his own terms.

Several factors are involved in the attainment of above DET average results in History and these give an indication of several dimensions we find in pass/failure rate statistics of the matriculation examinations. The following, in order of priority, are what the informant considered to be the most important in respect of his school.

#### PROVISIONING

Thebe Secondary is a private school situated in the heart of Soweto. The salaries of the staff are paid by the private sector. Clearly, the school is well funded as it epitomises a first world situation in a third world environment in which it is situated. Its physical structures do not resemble the match-box houses surrounding it on the southern, western and northern sides, and the open field on the eastern side which almost serves as a buffer between the school and the hostel in

the distance. It compares well with and might even be more beautiful than many schools in the affluent northern suburbs of Johannesburg. With pentagon shaped classrooms, instead of the conventional four-walled shape, it immediately exudes a situation conducive to standards far above all schools around it. The school draws its students from all over Soweto with a few coming from the immediate surroundings.

Private-sector funding put aside, the school in 1989 received a state subsidy of R200,000 in its annual budget of R1,4 million. This budget covered the annual expenditure of the school from teacher salaries to maintenance. Within the school's premises there are certain outstanding features which are exclusive to the school (when compared with other secondary schools in Soweto). The library is well maintained and packed with books and the latest magazines and is run by a qualified librarian. There is a room that is used exclusively for showing films and videos. Audio-visual aids for commercial, science and the general subjects are available in abundance.

The school has a big hall opposite which is a tuck-shop where students buy and enjoy their meals and drinks at lunch-time, instead of going home or buying food outside the premises as is normal practice in other schools in Soweto.

The garden and grounds are a sign of an excellent horticultural design and enhance the beauty and serious

cultural foundation of excellence in education that are typical of an affluent community far removed from the third world situation immediately around it. Further, the gardens are well kept and enhance the good atmosphere and spirit of serious business that is typical of the school, further contrasting the school from its immediate surroundings. The informant was quick to point out the physical assets of the school have created a sense of belonging in the minds of its stakeholders.

Although the informant did not want to give details in this regard he did, however, confirm that teacher motivation is also enhanced by higher income and overall better working conditions as compared to DET schools, a fact which points to proper funding. Parent involvement in the payment of school fees and in the provision and purchase of textbooks for their children also helped to sustain the performance of the school. There was no shortage and destruction of textbooks and Meneer confirmed this perception in several interviews, one of which is quoted below:

Parents bought the textbooks, and paid school fees and I believe that the students were also motivated by the desire not to disappoint their parents or waste their money, and this made the parents to seriously have control over their children and their education, unlike those in DET schools who do not pay school fees and do not buy their children's textbooks.  
[Meneer IV1 15/10/91: 5].

From the above data it is argued that a conclusion may be drawn that because the school is private-sector funded, that its parent body is also expected to pay school fees, thereby

getting all the more involved in the affairs of the school, it is without most of the problems inherent in Black State secondary schools. In this way, the level of teaching and learning in the school may be what would be expected of a school.

#### EXAMINATIONS

If the daily classroom practices of a teacher determine the level of performance of his or her students in an examination, or put in another way, if the level of performance of the students in an examination are a reflection of the daily classroom practices, then There is a relevant institution where a study intended to establish that link may be undertaken. Needless to say, the generous funding of the school has greatly contributed to the building of a positive ethos, morale and motivation as Meneer explained how he as individual contributed in this regard and how he and his students were motivated, above all else, by the desire to succeed and assist in keeping the good sponsors of the school, with emphasis on the fact that the sponsors measure the productivity of the school, generally, by looking at the performance of the students in the matriculation examinations. Meneer, as a result, considered the examinations paramount and understood that his performance in producing above average results is shown by his daily practices as shown repeatedly in interviews like the one below. In the end, Meneer's classroom practices seemed to be pointed towards good acquittal of students in the examinations.

The type of questions one sets for the students during the course of the year, in their classwork and tests may either prepare them for the examinations or destroy their chances of passing. I made answering questions part of the lesson. I am a senior marker of the matric history exam and one has learned a lot from this involvement. When I go to class from day one in the new year I know what is expected of the students in the examinations, I know how to set papers that are up to standard and I have also learned the correct way of marking. It has also helped me in knowing how to prepare my students so that what I do with them in class is what is expected of them in the exam. In fact, my experience as a marker has improved the quality of my teaching and questioning in class, tests and internal exams. It is in keeping with the expected standards of the DET.

In the middle of a lesson I usually pause to say to the students: when answering a question on this topic these are the facts, then I would usually write them on the board and even make them aware that if an essay question is divided into sections they must respond according to mark allocation and I teach them how to summarise and discuss. In testing I juggle things to test whether they understood the principles I taught. I think it helped them, got into their system so that even when they were studying on their own they must have been able to prepare their own questions and answers using the same principles. I taught them what sort of questions to expect on all the topics we did.

[Meneer IV12 19/02/92: 4].

A motivated and experienced teacher, good teaching and motivated students were undeniably the cornerstones of good results in 1989. The students were further motivated, prepared and trained through lots of written work and publication of the results of their monthly tests on the school's bulletin board. They were also taught how to interpret their results in relation to the class average and, more importantly, to see the benefits of working above average and cooperating instead of competing.

Another way in which students were motivated was by giving them a broader understanding of what it means to be a student and what was required of them and the following was said with a lot of pride:

I talked about the good students I taught before things were turned upside-down in 1985. I talked about how those students conducted themselves inside and outside the classroom and how successful most of them are to-day. (pensively) I talked about Benjamin, Patrick, Catherine and many others. I talked about how those students on their own learned what it meant to do group work and just how motivated they were, how they stayed after school to do work after the playful lot had left the premises. Those students worked on their own. It motivated the 1989 group and I saw them work and pass.

[Meneer IV12 19/02/92: 7].

From the confidence shown by the informant, it appears that after having trained the students in how to study and to use the textbook, as well as to approach and answer exam questions, a lot of faith was placed on them to the extent that he believed they would do only the correct things required once they entered the examinations room. It also shows confidence in that he was the force behind their interest and success.

#### INDOCTRINATION

Indoctrination was obviously also a problem in History lessons as the school teaches the State History curriculum and syllabus which, according to Meneer is loaded with politics, indoctrination and apartheid ideology. But because the school had comparatively less disruptions, boycotts and stayaways and because of the availability of audio-visual aids and a good

library as well as a motivated teacher, well motivated students, concerned and involved parents, indoctrination in Meneer's History classroom appears to have been less onerous to deal with than at state secondary schools.

Asked to explain how he dealt with indoctrination in the History syllabus he responded as follows:

I told them, especially when it came to South African History: for examination purposes, swallow this poison. (he stressed the statement). but this is what the truth is, which, according to the syllabus you are not supposed to know. I would deviate to substantiate a point. I always went out of my way to tell the students that this and that is intended to brainwash blacks, to make us feel inferior. I always think about the frontier wars and the untruth told about cattle theft and, how it is told in our history textbooks that it was we blacks who always thieved. This is a distortion. I always told them the truth. I taught them how to learn history objectively by looking at all sides to a story. My students in 1989 (and always) ended up being critical thinkers. I taught them not to just accept any fact of history given to them without testing its validity. I taught them to be critical, to ask questions, to read more, you see! to be objective.

Did this not take too much of your time, did you not worry about finishing the syllabus?

I first of all concentrated on the requirements of the syllabus. Pushed it, built up the lessons nicely, say I had a double period, I got into the subject matter and used the time properly, giving summaries where necessary, taught them how to use their textbooks and how to write assignments. I taught them how to ask and answer questions. They became interested, independent and this was shown by the level of participation and partaking in class

[Meneer IV5 31/10/91: 11].

Data accumulated on indoctrination suggests that here was a

teacher who had built a good repertoire of History teaching for himself and always went out of his way to build good lessons based on thorough preparation. Only a teacher of high calibre would have enough time to show his students all sides of an argument on a topic in History and ultimately prune the information to explain what the students had to learn for the exams whilst successfully making students aware that there are other arguments which have been omitted from the syllabus or included by commission. From the many newspaper cuttings he showed me, he obviously made a lot of research in his preparations and lessons were made interesting, all aimed at producing good results. To achieve this he read different books, newspapers, magazines and other documents. This made it possible and easy to combine different, sometimes differing ideas, in building rich conclusions which were imparted to the students.

In his study at home Menez keeps written evidence which includes past question papers and memoranda, newspaper cuttings, maps, correspondence with the DET examination and subject advisory sections.

#### VIOLENCE

The secondary school was not disrupted by violence, boycotts and stayaways that was typical of DET schools, but the ripple effects of disruptions were felt here like in many other schools. Even then, the school was affected only in as far as the headmaster and staff permitted.

In the series of interviews conducted with the informant, the issue of violence, boycotts, stayaways and student activism surfaced from time to time. Here is an extract from one interview:

Did this, I mean student activism, violence and other disciplinary problems not affect your daily routine?

No!no!no! the policy of the school has always been that students can have their toi-toi, political rallies and social activities after teaching time. Student leaders, even those outside our school respected this. We allowed even those from outside to use the school hall. But it was always after school. Disruptions were not allowed.

You had no disciplinary problems?

Not in my class. If any child wanted to cause problems I drove him out of the class to the principal's office. Whatever he did or said to them always changed their behaviour. I do not know what he did or said to them, but they changed. Some students did want to identify with their friends in other schools by preaching boycotts and stayaways or ill-discipline. But he controlled it no sooner than it started.

Then you were not affected by boycotts?

Of course we couldn't always control the situation. Our children were sometimes intimidated by outsiders, then they stayed away. Sometimes we would agree in a staff meeting that they should not attend on certain days with the proviso that we would make up for the time lost. We thought about their safety (thoughtfully) and ours, afterall our school is right in the middle of Soweto.

They wouldn't come to school and boycott classes?

Nee Jong! once in the school they knew t h a t there was work to be done  
[Meneer IV6 12/11/91: 6].

These interviews with Meneer revealed that there is an absence

of thuggery and violence at the school. Besides, Thebe secondary seems to have been fortunate in bringing together a team of cooperative teachers who have vowed to shelve their individuality for the survival of the school. For instance, there is team-work and inter-dependence in teaching and keeping discipline as well as a preparedness to work beyond the call of duty. Timetables are drawn for after school, weekend and vacation teaching under the supervision of the principal and parents. The following is an extract from an interview:

Would you then say that your school survived because of strong principalship?

Ja! but not that alone. We helped the m a n . He is good. He consults with the staff. Hy kan nie alleen werk nie. That he knows quite well. We also always had the unqualified support of the parents. Teacher-parent relations were very excellent, there was full cooperation. Parents were involved in everything we did.

How did you help?

Different ways, depending on situations. We did our best in the classroom, keeping every child engaged in their work, sometimes we patrolled the premises and searched students for weapons and cigarettes or dagga  
[Meneer IV12 19/02/92: 7].

This is indicative of team-work among the teachers and is further substantiated by the school's policy and rules. For instance, no child was allowed to report late for school. All students who arrived late were locked outside for some time and allowed to join their classes only after lunch. During lunch students were not allowed to leave the premises. Registers were marked immediately after lunch (ten minutes were allocated for this) after which teaching resumed.

The principal, as usual, took rounds to see that everybody was in class and that there was teaching and learning. Teachers who were free for certain periods were expected to be in the seminar rooms where they would be engaged in other types of school work, such as marking and preparations, or in meetings with the HoD's where their work and progress with the syllabus was monitored and supervised.

Meneer was involved in all these. As head of department for Official languages he chaired the meetings and supervised work and checked pace as he was the pacesetter. He also attended meetings in the History department where his work was checked and monitored by the relevant HoD. In these meetings, the teachers jointly and mainly checked progress and planned for the future. They prepared and planned the quarterly tests for March, June and September as well as for the exam at the end of the year. The principal sometimes attended these meetings. However, he always received the agenda and minutes of all meetings, even those he did not attend.

The classroom practices of the History teacher is ready to be understood provided one understands the theory of symbolic interactionism. This theory explains human behaviour in terms of meanings. Spradley for instance, identifies three premises on which this theory rests. The first is that human beings act towards things on the basis of the meanings that things have for them. The second is that the meanings of such things is derived from, or arises out of, the social interaction that

one has with ones' fellows. The third premise is that meanings are handled in, and modified through an interpretive process used by the person dealing with the things he or she encounters (Spradley 1979: 4).

### CONCLUSION

Data in respect of Thebe Secondary as a response to the research question about conditions that prevailed in the school's History classrooms reveals that this was a normally functioning school in 1989 and represents what would be expected of any school. The History pass/fail statistics can be understood to imply that the day to day practices in the History classroom were normal and in harmony with the matriculation examination results. The pass/failure rate statistics at this school, in other words, should be read and accepted as they are because they do not hide disruptive conditions that might have disturbed normal classroom practices. The history teacher is happy and satisfied with his working conditions and with the results at the end of the matriculation examinations.

It was revealed that the daily circumstances experienced by teachers and students within the History classes at this school in 1989 were what we would have expected in a secondary school with matriculation classes. In fact, the pass/fail statistics at this school reveal order in which conditions that were conducive for learning and teaching prevailed. Among these are sufficient funding by the government and non-

governmental organizations, as well as supportive and cooperative parent involvement. The school was so normal that unruly elements such as thugs and political intimidators felt out of place with the cultural situation at the school and either left on their own or were driven out with ease.

The school has a tradition of producing good results which have shown an improvement from year to year. It also has a well remunerated and satisfied staff which was motivated to teach beyond teaching time and making up for lost time. The students were generally well behaved and cooperative whilst their parents, because of their financial obligations to the school and their children, were supportive and assisted in creating a situation conducive to learning.

The principal is strong, fair, firm, sympathetic and has the ability to work with all the stakeholders. He is a disciplinarian who manages to run the school without intimidating both teachers and students. He came to the school in 1988 on the request of the parents who had faith in his abilities as headmaster to save the school from collapse after the resignation of the former principal after the initial sponsors of the school withdrew their support. This was after the students at the school had shown a tendency to align themselves with those in the rest of Soweto, breaking down discipline and reacting against their US donors.

It is remarkable that in three years the principal "has not

only re-built the image and confidence of the school, but has radically altered the whole institution. He re-established the discipline and made the school function when few schools were doing so. He used his contacts to get replacement funding from three American companies along with many South African sources" ("The Star" 26/10/91: 14)

Clearly, this school and its History classrooms are organised. The students learn and the teachers teach. For this reason, the results depict a functioning school as shown in the newspapers in which the results were publicised and reports were given about the school. There is entrenched in its policy a culture of seriousness, a businesslike attitude and approach to education and schooling which is the result of the headmaster's strong leadership as described in the following words.

TIGHT SHIP SAILS ON IN SEA OF SUNKEN VESSELS

..the school was moved from breakdown to success under the guidance of the new principal. Elsewhere in Soweto, classes may never start at all. But here they start at eight o'clock sharp; indeed pupils run to the sound of the bell. In three years, he has not only rebuilt the image and confidence of the school, but has radically changed the whole institution

("The Star" 26/10/1991: 14)

The successes of the school are a direct opposite of what happened in other schools around it. This is typical of a private school as compared to conventional DET state secondary schools. It stands out as a beacon of hope to black education that all is not lost in getting things going and striving to

teach the black child as never before. It also stands out as a beacon of hope in getting rid of the perception created by the statistics that DET matriculation candidates cannot cope with academically charged programmes.

The pupils loved the order that prevailed at their school, the teachers encouraged it and the principal ensured that discipline and commitment were strictly adhered to.

Clearly the impression created by pass/failure statistics can be read with confidence in this case, that DET students are able and willing to study their work and to cope academically in an entirely disruptive environment. Their good results suggest little that is unconventional in their school as could be expected in the reading of the Matric results.

For this reason it is less interesting than Ithuteng, which represents the wider performance of Black children in education. Ithuteng represents the majority of Black schools which are riddled with disruptions, a breakdown in order and discipline which typically is concealed in pass/fail statistics. For this reason it is the more interesting of the two schools precisely because the pass/fail readership conceals conditions prevailing in DET schools. Hence it creates the impression that DET students lack academic ability.

## CHAPTER 5

ITHUTENG SECONDARY : INTELLECTUAL BREAKDOWN

Contrasted with Thebe secondary school is a state secondary school which is less successful in its matriculation examination results i.e., it obtains below DET average results. The problem is that an impression is created that the students in this school are not able to cope with the Matriculation academic programme. This is the most important dimension, for in this school occurred, almost with a certain degree of consistency in 1989, a systematic breakdown of discipline and order.

This may be more revealing of issues concealed in a reading of the pass/failure statistics of DET students in the more conventional state schools which are not sponsored by the private sector. Debates on pass/failure statistics in black education do not reveal the daily classroom practices and circumstances derived from the data on this school which is representative of many black state secondary schools in the urban areas of South Africa.

Teaching is no longer as exciting as it used to be nineteen years ago for Mapule. Then, as a new teacher at a primary school in 1976, she looked forward to every new day with excitement and expectations. This no longer happens. She no longer has excitement in teaching but is despondent and dismayed and has a feeling of tiredness every morning she wakes up to go to work at Ithuteng where she has been teaching

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now for the past fourteen years.

Like all Soweto secondary schools, Ithuteng is headed by a principal who was appointed to principalship out of trust by the DET that he would uphold the policies and aims of the state, and to promote sound educational relationships in the school. The school is run according to the rules and regulations of the DET as contained in the Education and Training Act of 1979 and amendments thereto. The school has one deputy principal and four heads of departments who assist the principal in the administration of the school. My informant heads the Social Sciences department. Office work is done by two ladies, one a typist and the other a filing clerk. There are thirty-seven assistant teachers whose qualifications range from secondary teacher's diplomas (STD) to degrees and post graduates.

In 1989 distribution and allocation of duty was done communally in two consecutive meetings at the beginning of the year in preparation for the education of the one-thousand four-hundred and fifty students registered at the school. It was in these meetings that Mapule was allocated History in the matriculation classes.

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Locating the school had not been difficult as I had an idea where it is situated. There was no gate though it was not difficult to find the entrance. The fence around the school had fallen in some parts while it was completely absent in others. On an afternoon, when most schools are deserted, I did not expect to find many people around as I walked freely into the premises. On the wall of the building facing what used to be the gate, black paint had been used to erase the school's real and original name, and next to it were painted the name of a prominent black politician, probably as the new name of the school. I had the feeling that this had been done by students.

It is apparent from the moment you walk into the school that a reading of the matriculation pass/fail statistics conceals a lot of debilitating and distressful conditions at Ithuteng. The buildings and classrooms looked dilapidated and disused, yet, according to Mapule, this is where she and her colleagues performed their duties daily during 1989. This is an old school with the conventional pattern of classrooms found throughout Soweto. Each classroom has five windows at the back and four at the front. None of them had window-panes. Also easy to notice was the absence of doors in the school. In most classrooms the furniture was overturned, broken chairs lay everywhere. The corners of the classrooms looked like they had been used as fire-places as they were black with soot from the floor up to the ceiling.

There was a strong smell of dagga as I entered and there, just next to the chalkboard in one classroom, was a group of boys standing in the form of a half-moon, one of them was in a bent position and making a noise that sounded like an exclamation. He was throwing dice and the others mumbled as he did. Above them hung a cloud of smoke. They were smoking dagga. As I peeped through one window, they took no notice except for one who tried to hide something he held between his fingers, a dagga stub. They were the only students remaining in the school that afternoon and I later learned that this was a daily practice as these gamblers and dagga-smokers enjoyed the safety of the school where the police were unlikely to patrol.

Just then I heard someone call my name from the opposite block of classes. I followed the voice to a classroom that appeared to be the only one in a block of seven that had a door. I knocked and opened the door and found Mapule busy marking. As I entered she removed a book from a pile on the desk in front of her, made some ticks and crosses, signed and threw it unto another pile next to her feet, beckoned to a chair and started packing her handbag as we greeted. We settled down to an interview.

On subsequent visits to the school, which were purposely arranged to coincide with teaching time I discovered that disorder reigned. In fact, one could not tell whether school was open or whether lessons were in progress. Students were always milling around the premises without supervision.

obviously enjoying the freedom outside the classrooms. There was always a lot of noise. Some boys noisily played soccer on a lawn that separated two blocks of classes. Groups congregated behind the toilets, some gambling while others lazily shared a cigarette or dagga. A group of small boys, I thought its members could be the youngest in the school, always played soccer inside a classrooms.

Groups of girls always congregated around others who jumped around playing some kind of game. They obviously enjoyed themselves as they laughed noisily and wailed at the top of their voices. Teachers congregated near the offices or next to an old, dilapidated staff-room, discussing soccer or other things, or watching the students as they played noisily. These are some of the things that were not revealed by matriculation pass/failure rate statistics.

After several interviews, a number of issues emerged as the important dimensions of their cultural scene, which typically are concealed to an indiscerning reader of statistics. A sorting technique was used to prioritise these dimensions which the informant mentioned as having impacted on History classrooms at the school in 1989. This resulted in issues being split into four key areas, namely: violence, provisioning of schools by the DET, bias in the History syllabus and textbooks and, examinations.

## VIOLENCE

According to Mapule the year 1989 saw a consistent and complete overturn of student-teacher relationships. Student-teacher relationships were often characterised by mutual distrust and, usually, student hatred and victimisation of teachers. Often this amounted in some teachers and principals being physically attacked by students who labelled them as state puppets. The result was a complete breakdown of discipline in the schools with teachers and principals forced into submission by belligerent students who came to school late, armed, and showed an eager keenness to replace conventional school authority structures with their own. As teachers and principals lost control, late-coming, absenteeism and bunking of classes became common. These kinds of issues were detailed by the informant which explain what it was like in the school, given the level of violence.

Violence in this school sometimes emerged in the form of rivalry between students of neighbouring schools, or between students and local gangsters and thugs. These levels of violence had the effect of destabilising schools.

Violence is revealing of issues hidden in debates about pass/fail at Matric level in Black education. Violence inflicted here is not the kind that could be expected in schools at all, let alone to be concealed in pass/fail statistics. Confirming this, Mapule explained that violence in the township led to a complete breakdown of order and discipline in the school.

This, she argued, had been a problem not only in her History classes, but throughout the school. History teaching time had been generally affected by the failure of the school to function normally, for instance, starting time had been gradually and spontaneously shifted from ten-to-eight to any time thereafter because everybody reported late for duty and school. Generally, the situation had drifted into an unmanageable laissez faire. She expressed the sentiment that as teachers, they distrusted and cared very little about one another and that this boded ill for the relationships in the school.

That violence had been a major problem at Ithuteng in 1989 is suggested as it emerged and recurred in interviews:

Violence curtailed the authority especially of the principal. He was no longer able to enforce the school and DET policies. Without them he appeared to be toothless. He was disrespected by both teachers and students. For his personal safety he chose to adopt a laissez-faire attitude, which led to further breakdown of authority.

Was this the only problem related to violence?

No!...there were other problems.

[Mapule IV1 23/9/91: 6].

Several interviews confirmed that there was a serious problem of violence which emerged in different levels in DET schools during this period. Some of these are considered below.

### Symbolic violence

Violence at Ithuteng, according to Mapule, emerged in

different forms, but what seemed to perturb her most was violence against the office of the principal. This was the dimension of violence which I call symbolic violence as its objective here is seen to be the erosion of the authority of principalship which was identified with the enforcement of the DET's directives. It is symbolic violence because it was not personal (though on one occasion it became physical) as it was directed against the office of principal which was often caught up in a web of manipulation and intimidation. Against this authority, the SRC (Student's Representative Council) had made demands, given instructions and called meetings during school hours.

In August 1986, at the height of the unrest, the principal had called an emergency parents' meeting to brief parents on violence and on the disruptive attitude of the SRC in the school. Because of the urgency of the matter, he had called the meeting at the earliest possible time, at night on a weekday. During the course of the meeting, the students, protected by the darkness of night, caused chaos by physically attacking the principal in front of parents who fled instead of assisting him. His car was also broken in the same incident, costing thousands of rands in damages and, only a few brave teachers came to his rescue by pacifying the "comrades" and whisking him away in a different car whilst his car was driven out by others. This may be seen as symbolic violence as it was directed against the office of the principal whose occupant is obviously one who applies DET

rules and regulations. The accusation was that he cared less for the interests of black people as he enforced the status quo at the expense of the hegemony of black liberation. In fear of further violence, the principal stopped calling meetings and this affected his outlook towards parent-teacher relationships.

Petrified, the parents remained silent. In what Maule saw as regrettable, the only visible reaction of parents after this incident was the removal mostly of the school's hardworking and cooperative students whose parents sought for them sanctuary in schools with academically desirable prospects and probabilities of getting a pass in the matriculation examinations.

For the next three years no parent-teacher meetings were called at Ithuteng. The school functioned without a governing council in that period. This was further compounded by a serious disagreement between the principal on the one hand, and teachers in the school who were members of the National Education Union of South Africa (NEUSA) who campaigned for the scrapping of the government's governing council and its replacement with the elected Parents Teachers Students Association (PTSA). In this venture the teachers were supported by many parents who themselves were under the spell of the concept of unionism and protest in industry.

### Students' Deaths

Student murders and deaths were numerous at these times at Ithuteng. All the deaths occurred outside school hours, usually over weekends, at a drinking party or in a robbery, but they impacted on the school. As if spontaneous, once a student's death was reported, many boys would come to school armed, spill out of classes into the township in search of the murderer. Sometimes students leaders called an impromptu assembly without permission and urged the students to avenge the death of a colleague. These searches were violent as they would result in attacks and counter-attacks between students and thugs, battles that usually lasted for periods of a week or more. Ceasefires were concluded after a revenge killing or a death of another student but the school took another week or two to settle down.

In conclusion, what the data suggests is that violence in 1989 promoted lawlessness and confusion, not only in the school, but in the History classes as well. Teaching could not go on whilst the battles were raging. Sometimes the police came to the school, walked right into the classroom in pursuit of students implicated in the battles.

### Student Activism

Generally, student activism, which manifested itself in various ways at the school, contributed, perhaps unintentionally, to spasmodic and sporadic disruption of classroom activities, general disorder in the school, lack of

interest in education and schooling, as well as aimless and harpharzard classroom activities. For instance, the Student Representative Council (SRC) misused its authority by consistently holding mass-meetings, and the staff would only be told later that the day was to be used by the student leaders to teach "people education". As Mapule expressed it, these meetings were only meant to politicise the less bellicose students as they would be heard screaming slogans and singing liberation songs whilst their teachers sat idle in the staffroom.

Frequently student leaders would insist on meeting the entire staff during teaching hours without prior notice. In these meetings, which were dominated by students, sometimes the dignity and authority of teachers was torn apart when the students openly challenged the integrity of the staff on its conduct and social behaviour of certain teachers. Teachers were, out of fear and intimidation, forced to sit in these meetings and listen to such challenges. Sometimes serious divisions occurred between teachers and students, causing further strain to already dubious student-teacher relations. Whilst such meetings were in progress, the rest of the students would be seen leaving the premises.

Student activism also contributed to the concept of "pass one pass all", which implied that no student was to repeat a class other than the matriculation class, irrespective of whether that student had failed or passed the internal examinations.

This reduced the legitimacy and relevance of internal examinations set by teachers. It was a further curtailment of the duties and authority of teachers who were no longer allowed to set standards by which students either passed or failed their examinations.

In conclusion, Violence and student activism had a ripple effect as teachers and students alike took advantage and were guilty of late coming, bunking, dodging, absenteeism and a lack of commitment. The students enjoyed the unrest, while many teachers saw an opportunity to use the time to either further their own studies or engage in other personal matters. On average, about three hours of teaching time were lost on a daily basis as a result. When at school some students just milled around the school premises without going into classes, disturbing classes that were in progress by making noise and moving about outside a busy class.

History teaching was minimal and very little progress was made regarding the syllabus and work-programme which prescribe the pace of teaching on a daily basis. Given the circumstances, it appears that there was very little that individual teachers could have done to arrange and facilitate the occurrence of learning. This situation is corroborated by Johnson and Johnson with a reminder that whilst it is the teacher who must facilitate the occurrence of learning, only the student can cause himself to learn by, amongst others, showing interest in their work (Johnson and Johnson 1975: 168).

## PROVISIONING FOR STATE SCHOOLS

Ithuteng is a typical Black State secondary school in Soweto. It is under provisioned as a result of which it is poorly maintained. Damages to buildings and the fence were not repaired in 1989 and for several years before. Students were not supplied with all their textbooks. The library did not function at all. The community perceives the school as a property of a state which discriminates against them, property which has to be vandalised in order to cripple the state. The data below reveals forms in which under-provisioning impacted on education and schooling at Ithuteng.

### Cleaning of Classrooms

The school was open to vandalism and destruction on a daily basis. Teachers and students spent precious time cleaning the classrooms which were vandalised and littered everyday. Daily, vandals and thieves left the classrooms in a mess; they stole furniture, broke window-panes and threw all sorts of litter (broken furniture, bottles, papers, urine and faeces) on the floors. They stole doors and removed floor-tiles, broke ceilings and roofs. The school buildings were used for education in the morning but were a haven for vandals in the afternoons and at night.

The school day was shortened by the daily practice of cleaning. The first two periods, between 8.00am and 9.00am were frequently wasted on the supervision of loyal students, those who always reported on time, in the cleaning and tidying

up of classrooms. This usually gave dodgers a chance to skip even more serious lessons if the cleaning overlapped into the third and sometimes the fourth period. Serious and normal teaching started in the third period, at 9.00am, if by some chance it had not overlapped beyond that. Teaching would then continue until 11.00am when school broke for lunch. The seventh period started at 12.00 noon and, theoretically school was to go on until the end of the tenth period at 2.00pm. But then typically only a quarter of the total number of the students returned for afternoon classes. Even these would be seen trickling out of the school no sooner than they had returned. The reality was that only four periods, for two hours, between 9.00am and 11.00am were used for teaching daily.

A vandalised school meant inconsistent teaching and learning. Teaching and learning depended on the weather. On cold days there was no school because students and teachers warmed themselves in the sun. On rainy days it was inconceivable to sit in a class with rain pouring in through broken roofs. On windy days the wind blew through the classes which had no window-panes, so there was no school. Standing at one corner of the school during a "normal day" it is still common to see students loitering outside the classes smoking and gambling whilst others are in class learning. More disturbing were the people in the vicinity of the school who, because of the broken fence, used the school as a thoroughfare. They noisily walked past the classrooms whilst lessons were going on. The

informant said that it made a mockery of schooling and discouraged the students and many of them gave this as one of the reasons why they preferred to loiter outside the classes. In fact, several concerned teachers spent most of their time assisting the deputy-principal in driving students into classes, but no sooner had the teacher gone past their class than they would spill out again. It was like a game of hide and seek.

### Over-crowded Classes

Over-crowding made it difficult for the teachers to control the classes, let alone to know all the students. It was common in some classes to teach different sets of students on different days as a result of absenteeism and bunking. They attended as they wished. "One day you teach a group of students, the next day half of them are not there, instead you find faces that were absent the previous day. The third day you find yet other new faces. The numbers fluctuated from day to day." [Mapule IV 3 11/02/91: 4].

Because of the big numbers it was not easy to teach normally and to motivate students. Mapule confided that she did not know all the students she taught in that year, they were too many and too inconsistent. When the teacher got to class students talked noisily until she had to quieten them. When given written work or assignments and there was a hundred percent response, the informant explained that it was difficult to mark the work of too many students, sometimes up

to sixty essays in one class, and 200 in four different classes. As a result, she avoided giving her students too much written work, especially essays. To compound her predicament, students did not all have textbooks and simply failed to do the work which was up to the standards prescribed by the syllabus and examinations.

### Textbooks

The supply and availability of textbooks was another stumbling block to normal progress in teaching. First, Mapule complained that the history textbooks were delivered only in March of 1989 and secondly, that the supply was not enough to cover all the students. Thirdly, the previous standard ten students had not all returned their textbooks. This led to slow teaching because the teacher had to write notes on the board, a tiresome practice. Teaching in this school appears to have been a very difficult thing to do given the conditions and because of the constant shortage the school did not devise a good system of retrieving textbooks from students.

In summary, there is a temptation to say It was not surprising that the matriculation results at Ithuteng were amongst the worst in the Johannesburg region in 1989. The standard ten classes were overcrowded. Many of these students were repeaters and the smallest of the four classes Mapule taught had forty-five students. Under the circumstances, not enough time was given to the lazy and slow learners in a situation where only the motivated and cooperative students did their

class and home-work timeously. The majority of the students, as a result came to school to practice thuggery and to while away time.

Too much of teaching time was expended on discipline problems, constant meetings, driving students into classrooms, checking late-coming, bunking, dodging, or leaving of school before school-out, and the onerous practice of cleaning the classrooms every morning.

Conditions responsible for this state of affairs were the dilapidated state of the school. Classes did not have all window panes. Some had no doors, ceilings had been pulled down, in some classes there were no chalk-boards, and to make matters worse there was no fence around the school and school property (doors, tiles, ceilings, windows, books, typewriters, tools, etc.) was stolen at will.

#### EXAMINATIONS

Preparing very big classes for examinations is very difficult as argued by Mapule and this is compounded by the fact that the present matriculation examinations encourage rote learning and the ability to write down information quickly and accurately (Walker 1990: 305). If this is the case, then preparing matriculant students at Ithuteng secondary school for the examinations is difficult considering the huge numbers in these classes.

### Lack of Practice

The effects of violence and the breakdown in the culture of teaching and learning made it difficult for Mapule to sustain classroom practices which prepared students for examinations. As she explained, her daily teaching was inconsistent and often lacked continuity because not the same set of students was present from day to day. Under normal circumstances, preparing students for examinations implies continually giving students work that is consistent with the requirements of the examinations. But as often occurred, not all of them did their class and homework. Initially she followed those who didn't, but after months of failure she gave up and was only happy to concentrate on teaching students who were cooperative and willing to learn. Many of these students attended Saturday schools where they received more teaching and advanced preparations for the examinations. But they were sometimes a nuisance as they would spend time comparing what she had taught them with what they were taught at Saturday schools.

### Language Problem

However, even for those who received extra tuition, there was a language barrier which proved to be serious and sometimes discouraging especially to the teacher. She found herself in 1989 having to teach both History and English. It was difficult, she argued, to ignore the language problem as the students were unable to grasp even the simplest of concepts and principles necessary for a sound basis in the study of

History. They could hardly write essays, which is an integral part of studying History and writing the History examinations.

It was pointless to teach the subject which requires mastery of language in a medium in which the students were not proficient. The teacher was not sure as she proceeded from one concept to the other that the students had followed what had been taught. In the written work that was given they often proved that they had understood very little.

From her arguments it appears that one single factor that stands out clearly as contributing to high failure rate in History is the language problem. The students went up to the extent of not understanding even the instructions in the examination and selecting questions for which they were not very well prepared, all because of language.

#### Semi-Literate Matriculants

Another issue of great concern was the group of students who had come into the final year class being semi-literate, students who had been "condoned" (allowed to proceed to the next class even if they failed). They are usually condoned into the next class on the grounds that they nearly passed, or to make room for those coming in from the lower classes. Some came into the Matriculation class as a result of the pass-one, pass-all call by students in the previous three years. These were very difficult to teach as time was spent on building their language development at the same time as they had to

master the concepts of the subject and this was done at the expense of more able students. None of these students passed.

### INDOCTRINATION

The decade of the eighties witnessed the rejection of History and attempts to replace it with "alternative subjects". It was also in this period that there was born the concept of "people's education" which implied that kind of education desired and perceived by the Black community to empower them to stand up to the demands of the period and the future (Christie 1985: 246-247).

#### Irrelevant Content

The informant argued that the History that is taught in the schools is long dead, uninteresting and irrelevant. This was proved by many activist students, who, though not arguing from a well informed perspective, questioned the content of History and pointed out that it is meant to negate blacks and their contribution in the history of South Africa as they are shown mostly as hurdles and objects of disruption in the development of the White society. This resulted in lack of interest in the subject which is regarded by many educationists and students as derogatory to the blacks.

#### The Place of History in the Classroom

She questioned the validity of the History and argued strongly that perhaps what the students need to learn is what they can read about in the newspapers and what they see on television.

She argued that the same importance that is attached to Mathematics and Science should be given to History instead of the present criterion where almost all the students who do not do the Sciences are channelled into History and Geography. Proficiency in the English language should become a prerequisite for studying History, then History teachers will produce good results. Perhaps, she argued, History should be removed from the curriculum until blacks are allowed to determine its content which would be made to present a better picture of the contribution of blacks in the development of the economy and politics of our country.

#### CONCLUSION

In response to the research question about what is concealed in pass/fail statistics, a reading of the matriculation pass/fail statistics of 1989 clearly conceal classroom conditions that prevailed in the Matriculation History classes. There are numerous such conditions but the following seemed to have prevailed: violence, thuggery, indoctrination, underprovisioning, student activism, boycotts, stayaways, absenteeism, late-coming, bunking of classes, leaving before school-out. The data suggests that there was a complete and systematic breakdown of order and discipline as the daily History classroom practices were dominated by these events which were not conducive for teaching and learning.

Data reveals that pass/fail statistics conceal the belligerence of student activists who replaced conventional

classroom practices with activities that were not expected to occur in a normal functioning school. Traditional school authority structures were replaced by student structures which threatened to result in the total collapse of the school, a reality which is concealed in an uninformed reading of the 1989 Black matriculation pass/fail statistics.

Statistics conceal that DET schools were underprovisioned in the eighties and in 1989 and that this resulted in overcrowding, shortage of textbooks, broken furniture and buildings, daily cleaning of classrooms by students during school hours as well as delays or failure to repair or replace broken furniture and buildings. All these conditions were not conducive for learning and teaching.

Data reveals that violence manifested itself in different forms such as the challenge and erosion of the teachers' and principal's authority, destruction of school property by students and outsiders, thuggery, students' deaths and funerals, loitering and late coming with impunity by both students and teachers as principals were intimidated and could neither reprimand nor punish. All of these problems resulted in the reduction of teaching and learning time, the school day and academic year. Teachers spent unnecessary time trying to promote a situation conducive to learning but received little support and cooperation from their students who saw the teachers' attempts as ways of trying to pacify them. Many of these students came into the matriculation class being semi-

literate. The pass/fail statistics at the end of the year prove that both students and teachers had been unable to prepare adequately for the matriculation examinations.

As stated in the literature review, by mid-year in 1989 the school, showing a bad premonition for the end of year results, joined others in rejecting the DET controlled mid-year examinations. It was an indication that very little had been taught and learned by then. There was very little learning and teaching at the school. Students lost respect for their teachers and the principal in particular. As they rendered the teachers and principal redundant they took matters into their own hands, replacing conventional school administration structures with their own alternative organizations ("The Star" 11/1/90: 3). Student leaders at the school demanded and called meetings with the staff, or they would call the entire student body to a meeting during teaching time. According to Mapule, whilst these meetings were in progress, the rest of the students, who were not involved or were annoyed by the situation, would be seen leaving the school premises simply because they were not being attended to by teachers.

From what the informant suggested, student failure seems to be the accepted norm at this school because very few people are perturbed by the high failure rate. Those students who pass the Matriculation examinations do not show the excitement one would expect to see in students who have acquitted themselves well. Most of them would thereafter proceed to universities

and colleges without remembering the school.

A culture of disorder dominated the scene, intimidating both parents and teachers into fear and submission. Students became more visible than teachers. The Education Policy Unit of the University of the Witwatersrand appropriately described the situation in many Soweto secondary schools in 1989 as a decay of authority of any kind ("Drum"; February 1990: 6).

Mapule saw the problems of 1989 at Ithuteng as a legacy of the early and mid-eighties. In clarifying this, she explained that the problems of the mid-eighties in black education actually built up until they exploded in 1989. The boycotts, stayaways, pass-one-pass-all and ungovernability, started in the mid eighties, only began to show repercussions in 1989.

Clearly, this school was not organised. Very little time was spent on the activities of teaching and learning. The school clearly had no direction as this is revealed in the data. What comes out clearly is that all these problems are not revealed in the matriculation pass/failure rate statistics of the school. The accounts given by Mapule depict a situation of disorder which may not be known by a reader who may otherwise be sympathetic to the conditions that prevailed at the school in his/her reading and/or analysis of the school's pass/fail statistics.

## CHAPTER 6

WHAT STATISTICS CONCEAL

This study has revealed conditions which prevailed in the Matric History classrooms in two Soweto secondary schools during the decade of the eighties, especially in 1989, as a backdrop against which the Matriculation pass/failure statistics have to be read. The aim in describing these conditions was to develop a perspective in which the statistics should be viewed in a way that will give the reader insight into the 1989 Black matriculation pass/failure rate statistics in relation to the prevailing History classroom practices in that year.

The 1989 Black matric pass/fail statistics which were released in the press at the beginning of 1990 informed readers nationally that 121,809 (about 58,2%) of DET matriculants failed the examinations. In the Johannesburg region alone there was a 27,4% pass rate. This dismal record disturbed many taxpayers, educationists, politicians, economists and parents (Hartshorne 1992: 82), who have the impression that DET students are unable to cope academically. That is, a sense is created by these statistics that DET students fail despite having access to schooling and that explanation of their failure is done without having access to the culture of the schools where the statistics and their background are used to explain that failure.

A reading of the statistics may easily mislead both the

informed and uninformed reader to the erroneous assumption that these results were obtained under normal conditions. This study problematizes that assumption to show the reader, through a description of prevailing conditions in DET schools, that the pass/failure rate statistics conceal conditions which made the attainment of normal results difficult, if not impossible. This may have the effect of at the very least turning their assumption into a question so that a sensitive reader needs to recognize the fact that whilst normalcy should prevail in schools, there were however, categories of secondary schools in Soweto. On the one hand, there were DET schools which were sponsored by the private sector and functioned normally where a reading of the statistics conceal little other than a normally functioning school where teaching and learning took place. However, the vast majority of schools, like Ithuteng, were dis-functional and dominated by conditions which a reader would not expect to find in schools. This reality is concealed in the pass/failure statistics which a reader must take into account when studying statistics of DET students' failure in the 1989 Matriculation examinations.

A reading of the statistics conceals the reality, that only a few secondary schools had sponsorship, like Thebe, and as a result, functioned normally. Here, History classroom practices that prevailed in 1989 were what we would expect of a normally functioning secondary school. It is well maintained, has little or no violence and by all standards has qualities of a functioning school. The students came to

school on time and left at the right time, there was no thuggery and there was sufficient funding by both government and non-governmental organizations as a result of which there was no shortage of textbooks, furniture and other facilities essential for the teaching and learning processes. Generally, the History teacher was enthusiastic and diligent and the students hard working. For this reason, Thebe is the less interesting of the two schools in this study because it represents what a reader would be expecting of a school on reading pass/fail statistics.

Ithuteng is more interesting because it challenges the reader's assumptions of normalcy and that DET students are unable to cope with academic study. The pass/fail statistics conceal conditions one would not usually expect in schools. Conditions at Ithuteng stand for situations in non-sponsored DET schools where conditions prevented the carrying out of normal teaching and learning. These schools were dominated by thuggery, vandalism, violence, intimidation, boycotts, stayaways, underprovisioning, bunking of classes, late-coming and leaving before school-out.

Pass/fail statistics typically concealed that a culture of teaching and learning could not be assumed and that the conditions mentioned in the above paragraph had become synonymous with schooling. Students went to school carrying knives and guns in their schoolbags instead of books. There was lawlessness as students took the law into their own hands

and were threatening to both their teachers and peers. Time was spent by students in reprisal raids hunting for the murderers of their peers and schools seemed to claim more student deaths than University Entrance passes.

The problems created by the level of vandalism which was carried out and virtually reduced the school to ruins is not revealed by the statistics. Classrooms were used as gambling dens during teaching time and as toilets by outsiders in the afternoons and at night. Every morning loyal students spent time in several classrooms to clean them and to remove dirt including faeces and urine. During winter furniture was used to make fires in the classrooms for warmth. In the process, floors and walls were damaged.

Statistics conceal the erosion of teacher authority in the school. These do not reveal that mindful of their own safety, teachers either ignored the lawlessness in school or treated the situation with caution. Violence in and around the school was so common that the teachers, especially the principal, was often suspected and accused by students and members of the community of collaborating with the police if students were arrested for their part in violence and/or intimidation. The school's telephone was destroyed because it was perceived as the principal's link with the police. Himself a victim of his own students, the principal often did not want to reprimand or punish students. Student leaders took control of the situation as they dictated what was to be done and what was

not to be done. The principal and teachers were often called to meetings which the students dominated and in which the conduct of teachers was often discussed. Student mass meetings were a daily feature in which the student leaders were purportedly teaching people's education. Always when meetings were called many students who felt that such meetings were a waste of time, left for their homes, annoyed and frustrated, while others obviously enjoyed the freedom.

Underprovisioning is another problem concealed in the pass/fail statistics. This was profoundly acute it resulted in students either having to share textbooks or to do without them altogether. In some classes none were supplied at all. The library did not function at Ithuteng and ultimately, because of shortage of rooms, became a staffroom.

Teaching consequently was difficult, teachers seldom could set classwork and homework with success. If work was given, students seldom complied with the requirements of the work set. Students bunked classes and bunking became a very serious problem and the culture of teaching and learning was eroded to the point where very little teaching and learning took place regularly. A reading of pass/fail statistics is blind to the disruption of teaching and learning as would be expected.

Another occurrence, typical of History teaching in 1989 and concealed in the statistics, was the phenomenon of late-coming

by both students and teachers which prevented the normal running of the school, the daily morning assembly was often held long after 8.00am, sometimes as late as 9.00am. Coupled with this was the frequent tendency of the students to leave school as early as 11.00am and to loiter when they were present at school. The principal and some concerned teachers spent most of the day driving students into the classrooms. It appears that every effort was being made, directly and indirectly, to shorten the school day. Ultimately, teaching time was reduced to two hours, between 9.00am and 11.00am.

Stayaways and boycotts were drafted into the students' activities and is another recurrent occurrence concealed in the statistics. Stayaways meant that students and teachers did not attend school. Boycott action was two dimensional; it sometimes meant that students boycotted classes by staying away from school; it also meant that students could attend school but boycott classes. These were the days on which quite often furniture and other school equipments were destroyed.

On days when there were boycotts and/or stayaways, students went to the nearby shopping centre to attack delivery vehicles. When pursued by the police they sought refuge in the school and were subjected to teargas which forced everybody out of school. Humiliated and annoyed, the teachers simply packed their bags and left for their homes to report the next day. When students got injured in this mayhem,

teachers faced the choice of either ignoring them and risk being labelled collaborators, or attending to injured students which, depending on the level of injury, sometimes implied taking them to Baragwanath Hospital, or to the local doctor and clinic. The teachers' assistance usually meant that they bare the costs, with the result that students often acted with impunity. Such disturbances were infrequent but were nevertheless part of teaching History at Ithuteng in 1989 and are concealed in the statistics.

Ithuteng represents non-sponsored DET Secondary schools where the conditions in the decade of the eighties, especially in 1989, prevents a reader assuming that order and normalcy prevailed in Black schooling in reading DET Matric results. Like other DET schools around it, schooling at Ithuteng was characterised by vandalism, violence, etc. and very little schooling. To assume that a culture of teaching and learning prevailed in 1989 in the History classroom is simply a mistake. History classroom practices were determined not by the teacher but by prevailing circumstances, and Mapule reiterated that conditions hindered even the very smallest opportunities for teachers to teach and students to learn.

The administration of the school fell into the hands of bellicose politicised students who lacked the wisdom to distinguish order from disorder. In the lower classes students passed themselves from one standard to the next, and resulted in semi-literate students entering the matriculation

classes. Interviews also revealed that certain students sometimes sat for the wrong grade for which they had not been registered. This is indicative of the confusion which prevailed at the school and that it would be unreasonable to expect the pass/failure rate to be otherwise. Clearly, the statistics did not reveal such details.

The pass/failure rate statistics of the school should be read and understood against the backdrop of the conditions prevailing in schools like Ithuteng and not read as if normalcy prevailed in DET throughout the eighties. An "educated" reading of the DET pass/failure statistics in the Matriculation examinations will then be less inclined to attribute deficit to students in an explanation of the high failure/low pass rate, but to look to the structural and ideological conditions prevalent in Black schools to explain the pass/fail statistics.

At the very least, a reading of the DET pass/fail rate statistics should not assume normalcy. Pass/fail statistics conceal as much as they reveal. Concealed are the conditions that prevented normal learning and teaching taking place at this school and those like it. In reading the pass/failure statistics, informed and sensitive readers need to take account of the prevailing conditions in the account they give of the appalling results.

The conditions prevailing at Ithuteng, it is believed, are

representative of many secondary schools in Soweto and should be a cause of concern rather than a cause to attribute deficit to students. Clearly, the pass/fail statistics conceal conditions which were disruptive to normal teaching and learning to which a reading of the statistics may be blind. They conceal the impact of violence, boycotts and stayaways, underprovisioning and the rejection of subjects such as History which exude elements of Bantu Education, on classroom practices. All these are conditions which, according to the argument of Hartshorne, resulted in an acute crisis situation in Black Education, a deteriorating learning environment, harphar zad and spasmodic school attendance, demotivated and "burnt-out" teachers, unsettled conditions in which violence and intimidation were common and all led to disastrous Matriculation examination results (Hartshorne 1992: 80).

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## APPENDIX A

THEBE SECONDARY SCHOOL : MATRIC HISTORY RESULTS, 1989

SYMS OL	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H
H.G			2	2	2			
S.G	2	1		3				

## APPENDIX B

ITHUTENG SECONDARY SCHOOL: MATRIC HISTORY RESULTS, 1989

SYMB OL	A	B	C	D	E	F	FF	G	H
H.G				1				6	37
S.G.	1		2	2	3	8	3	15	22





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