

Developing effective, relevant and empowering primary educational pathways and support services for out-of-school overage children

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POLP

INTRODUCTION

The Primary Open Learning Pathway Trust (POLP) is a non-profit organisation, and its mission is *to develop through research and curriculum development more effective, relevant and empowering primary educational pathways and support services for out-of-school overage children from socio-economically disadvantaged communities.*

The problem is that the formal system which is geared to age-specific classrooms causes marginalisation (often intolerance) of those who are not age-appropriate (even if the reasons are poverty/ disruption of communities leading to late entry, disruption of school year and repetition - phenomena common to poor communities where compulsory education has not been the norm).

Current South African educational policies provide for *compulsory education*, which theoretically makes it possible for access to schools of all learners 7-15 years of age. It also incorporates the principle of *inclusive education*, which presupposes *differentiated teaching* across a far broader spectrum than was usually the case.

Compulsory education is on the statute books but no provision has been made for compliance. So the out-of-school/ late entry /disrupted schooling remains a problem.

Inclusion although seen as a progressive and new educational principle, has always been the norm in black/ poor schools - where no special education support was provided except for a few schools for the physically and mentally challenged. The problem of overage learners, due to a lack of compulsory education, compounded the problem. However, even by definition, *overage learners* have never been included as learners with special needs.

Curriculum 2005 promotes **differentiated teaching**, which is a pre-requisite for inclusion, but most teachers are not skilled enough to handle such classes, while learning support in the mainstream is a concept yet to be operationalised.

Although *compensatory funding formulae* are in place, there are still no strategies, which after the devastation of the apartheid years, make provision for **compensatory education** for the vast numbers of children and youth who are still unable to attend school (for whatever reason), or are in classrooms inappropriate for their ages and levels of literacy. This lack of formal strategies to address the problem militates, I believe, against the principle of education for all, and of equity as guaranteed by the Constitution.

Part of the problem is that trying to find **accurate statistics** on which to plan education interventions is extremely problematic.

Definition of overage (in our terms) is three or more years older than the norm per grade - but national statistics do not necessarily reflect this as overage.

- o 1995 Edusource statistics on age by grade are as follows: (see Appendix 1: overhead 1).
- * An estimated provincial breakdown, shows a range between 8% to 22%, of learners in primary schools being overage (Edusource statistics 1999, based on 1997- 1998 figures from Dept. of Education). But here overage is defined as one or more years older (see Appendix 2: overhead 2).

- * Luis Crouch and Thabo Magobane (in a CEPD Summary Report: Key Numerical Indicators, 1991-1996, based on a commissioned report by Monica Bot) point out that Grade 1 tends to be extensively over-enrolled and used as several-grades-in one, with learners repeating for whatever reason. This has also been found to be a chronic problem for at least a decade or more. Another serious problem appears to be one of controlling or optimising the flow of learners through the schooling system. There is at least 20% repetition at the *Grade 7 level - pointing* to poor preparation of learners for secondary schooling and suggesting a promotion of learners from grade to grade, without a sound foundation of 'learning to learn'. It is estimated that it takes the system 18 learner/year of 'effort' to 'produce' a Grade 12 enrollee - this indicates a wastage of at least 25 %, due mainly to repetition. Why learners repeat is therefore crucial to understand and in this context POLP work could assist in this understanding.
- * One other significant statistic from the above report, is that the number of out-of-school youth in the compulsory age range is only about half of the number estimated in 1996 i.e. not much more than 400 000 and not all these would like to return to school (according to the 1995 October Household survey: (see Appendix 3: overhead 3). However, the literacy levels of these, plus those in schools (especially the overage) bear investigation.
- * Edusource Data News, March 1998 (article by Luis Crouch, 1998 Education Data and the 1996 Census) indicates that the differences between Census data and all previous sources of information is so significant that they damage the credibility of both sources of data.
- o The data on the age group 7-15 is particularly problematic, as is the mismatch found between enrolment and age-appropriate population in the early grades. What is clear, though, is the gross over-enrolment relative to appropriate population in Grade 1 - nation-wide the average is 60% but in some provinces is as high as 135%. Grades 2 and 3 are similarly oversubscribed. This bloating appears to be due to repetition.

INTERVENTION POSSIBILITIES

At the beginning of the new political dispensation in South Africa, there appeared to be three scenarios in education within the policy framework, in which POLP could locate its work:

(a) SCENARIO 1:

We could accept that **slow, incremental systemic change**, related to available funding after negotiated consensus amongst stakeholders in education (including resistance to redistribution and equity from better resourced areas), would eventually cause the problem of overage learners amongst the poorest schools in the system to disappear over time. Such an option excludes affirmative action or compensatory measures, and in essence maintains the status quo. There is, for example, still a strong lobby for 'areas of excellence' to be maintained and for policies to direct the promotion of excellence, rather than direct resource and curriculum intervention.

Equality of access with a trickle-down effect is therefore the underlying assumption -with the poor (and black) having to either wait, or make the sacrifice of travelling to these areas of excellence, paying the increased fees at better resourced schools, and submitting their children to assimilation of an alien culture. In fact, this is the trend for parents whether they can afford it or not, with the unintended consequence of the existence of some township schools being threatened, as learner numbers dwindle and rationalisation of staff comes into effect. Poorer schools, with large drop-out rates therefore oversubscribe their numbers, leading to teacher frustration. Richer schools employ more teachers as the communities can be taxed.

This policy of slow incremental change, whether rationalised as a lack of either sufficient resources or of political will, is the implementation strategy currently being practised. It also panders to the idea of a 'deficit model' in black schools and former well-resourced schools are held up as the unchallenged model, which needs to be aspired to. The positive argument for this strategy is that school/ social stability is ensured (in middle class

areas where this exists). On the other hand, there is an increase in negative social phenomena amongst the poor - continued or increased school 'drop-out', repetition and children on the streets.

(b) SCENARIO 2:

Exclusive or parallel educational strategies could be implemented, alongside this slow incremental change option, such as second-chance education programmes for youth with RDP redress funding. This assumes that the out-of-school and overage problem is either not *a priority*, or not *a large enough problem* to merit action or that it is a *short-term problem* - a backlog which will disappear over time as the system improves. Charitable organisations would therefore develop parallel non-formal or *complementary programmes*, which might be partially state-subsidised (possibly accredited within the NQF framework), to which could be added vocational courses. The emphasis is one of ensuring that these out-of-school eventually become *self-reliant* as quickly as possible. This has its merits, and is being implemented to some extent - but with very little attention being paid to teenage learners with low levels of literacy.

The positive and negative implications are the same as for Option 1, but in addition parallel systems do not have the credibility or funding support of formal systems and they are forced to rely heavily on separate (usually foreign) funding which is subject to conditionalities and aid exigencies. This has already been demonstrated in South Africa, with threats of funds drying up for educare, reception classes and adult education. This is because, like Option 1, the problem is often viewed within a paradigm of 'welfare to the poor' - which again conflicts with Constitutional guarantees of equality.

(c) SCENARIO 3:

Inclusion and affirmative action/ innovation within mainstream education. This scenario assumes that the problem is serious and endemic to the formal system - not only in South Africa currently, but also in other developing countries. We know this to be a fact. Age has been labelled the R 15 billion crisis - and once again, the overage learners are portrayed in the media and are regarded by education authorities as not having the same entitlement to education, but that the

'Cost of older pupils cripples SA's schools, cheats (other?) kids of equipment and books' (Sunday Times, August 23 1998). My insertion

It is precisely here - **at the interface between compensatory schooling and mainstream education**- that POLP is attempting to locate its advocacy, research and curriculum development.

We believe that flexibility has to be introduced which allows for the carving out of *strategic innovative space* to promote more democratic educational practices, as levers or signposts for future trends that can be sustained within mainstream formal education. POLP sees the challenge as influencing key aspects of a wider education development process. By providing quality research and development within the parameters of what can only still be called a disorderly school system, we hope through a micro pilot, to gain insights, which can be applied elsewhere in the system. The insights from our work are relevant to any classroom where differentiated teaching with ill-equipped teachers is being implemented.

It also presupposes decentralisation of decision-making, so that *district responses* which are specific and contextually appropriate can be found, within the framework of enabling national policy. It also requires a commitment to building capacity (of parents and teachers) at institutional level so that bottom-up governance and acceptance of schooling innovation can be assured.

In terms of policy what is needed is an unambiguous definition of the target groups (not subsumed under generalised equity), coupled with context-specific strategies which require active state intervention and the organisation of contending forces against maintenance of privilege.

It requires in practice that schools will flexibly meet the needs of children -which means affirmative action, more organisational and possibly even extra resources where needed, in the short term.

This could be smaller classes and targeted in-service teacher training and - in the face of the large-scale daily disorder in schools - serious systemic intervention to get schools working at very basic levels - daily attendance of teachers, regular and quality teacher-learner time-on-task interaction, much less disruption of teaching and learning time.

A collaborative intervention by state and NGOs (and international forces which are seriously examining social equity issues in education) is obviously necessary, with clear development targets and time frames.

CURRENT POLP STRATEGY: PRIMARY OPEN LEARNING CLASSES

Open learning in this sense means

- open to learners who have never been to school and/or 'dropped out' and who are 'over-aged' (i.e. 3 or more years older than the norm) for a grade;
- self-paced (as far as possible) to allow for different learning histories and ages in one classroom and more flexible movement between phases;
- providing opportunities for overcoming and changing blocks/ barriers to learning; and
- flexible to enable ongoing reflexive adjustment of the teaching - learning; task - learner; and teacher - task - learner.

In practical terms, this meant to date

- **Advocacy at national and provincial education policy level** (at a time of vast political change and reshaping of institutions i.e. 1993-4) for recognition and definition of the problem area around overage learners.
- **Impacting on the emerging policy** which was being developed for a democratic education system, so that these learners would not fall between the policy cracks;
- **Designing a teacher education module**, which took cognisance of our experience in educational initiatives in informal settlements and the emerging National Qualifications Framework.
- **Persuading accrediting authorities at national level to recognise such a course; then**
- **Advocating its use at a College of Education**, through intensive negotiations, *to allow innovation* within an existing teacher education course. We were eventually allowed to impact on the in-service training of teachers at the Higher Education Diploma level (4 year of teacher education where we really wanted to start at the pre-service level). This POLP- initiated *HDE in Open Learning* was accredited at Cape Town College of Education, from which more than a hundred teachers graduated. A prerequisite of the training was that all the participants had overage learners in their junior primary classes.
- **Recruiting teachers from schools with overage learners** (this meant a survey, then school- to-school recruitment) and **finding bursaries** for the first pilot group. We were unable to impact on the changing state strategy, which was to stop all bursaries for teacher education (except for science and mathematics) - to include special education as an exception. POLP found bursaries for the first batch of 50 teachers, the second group were motivated enough to pay the fees themselves.
- **Developing and delivering the pilot module** - called **Junior Primary Open Learning Studies** - to the institutional requirements, and trying to work closely with the lecturers delivering the other three negotiated modules i.e. Environmental Education, Education Theory and Special Education, so that

all the modules would focus attention on the needs of the teachers and their overage learners. There was some impact but little effect on collective planning and co-ordination. Lecturers tend to work in isolation and there is almost no provision for research, curriculum development and innovation in Colleges.

- **Sustaining the course at Colleges.** This has failed. As soon as POLP staff withdrew, other lecturers rationalised that the course contents were subsumed under their normal courses. Where there was interest, the rationalisation of Colleges and lecturers has sidelined the issue.

We did impact on *national and provincial educational policy*, to the extent that cognisance was taken of the problem, and so that the issue was not completely marginalised. Policies for e.g. instruct Principals from turning away older learners, and mention is made (Gauteng Admissions Policy 1996) of older learners being referred to 'bridging classes' (which do not exist). Also, in 1998, POLP was consultant to a research process on 'out-of-school and out-of-age learners', initiated by the Gauteng Education Department (See Vuk'uyithathe Out-of-School Children and Out of Age Learners: Circumstances and Needs. Preliminary Report November 1998), so the possibility of innovation exists in that province at least, especially since UNICEF has indicated interest in Gauteng.

We also impacted to a lesser extent on other provincial policy and negotiated with the Western Cape Education Department,

to run a small pilot in open learning. The pilot (1998-2000) - called the Curriculum Innovation Pilot Project (CIPP)- aims to develop a sound educational pathway for *over-aged* learners through research-based interventions - such as an innovative curriculum (developed in process) with appropriate learning materials and teacher support - at the *Foundation Phase of schooling*.

The overall purpose is *redress by providing quality compensatory education* which allows learners to acquire a solid foundation and 'catch up' on some of the schooling years lost. The pilot involves nine schools (10 classes), in Khayelitshya, Langa, Guguletu and Crossroads, in Cape Town. The teachers all have the Open Learning HDE qualification. All the learners have Xhosa as their mother tongue (with one or two exceptions).

The learner profile in these classes is appended (Appendix 4: overhead 4):

In 1998, about 300 learners (aged 7-19 years) were in the classes (separate but within the school), following the normal Foundation Phase Curriculum 2005 Learning programme - with POLP providing support to teachers in lesson preparation, material resources and classroom management. Policy implementation parameters were negotiated for placement and progression - which the education department did little to enforce - so most of these have been ignored by schools under pressure to take as many children as possible (to ensure teacher posts).

A repeated measures design research instrument was adopted for the evaluation of cognitive learning progress, as the most suitable under the circumstances. Assessing pre-literate learners is a pressing problem in the case of older learners. The issue is how to access that which development enables but learning has no procured or stabilised.

The nature of the problem is complex, since POLP did not start from a 'clean slate'; there is an absence of reliable and/or appropriate baseline measures; and it is impossible to have perfect, experimental control over all possible variables that could influence learning outcomes. The learners were assessed on four different occasions (once per school term) on 3-5 different kinds of task. Accurate biographical data on learners in 1998 was scant. In some cases learners' birth dates had to be assessed. Schools were trying to use the class as general remedial classes for all age groups in the absence of special education support.

The tasks chosen were gauged to be appropriate given that individual assessments were not possible and most learners could not read or write responses to questions. However, the tasks capture important elements of basic, school learning; obtain some measure of problem-solving ability and provide insight into the learners' grasp of

school relevant tasks. The schedule sought to measure cognitive shifts and any movement (from the initial assessment) on school-related tasks. The tasks are not used as IQ tests.

The tasks and analysis in 1998 are appended (Appendix 5: OHP 5):

In a nutshell, the significant outcomes of the research indicate that learners' progress generally is *unstable*, when it occurs at all, and not indicative of dramatic increases in knowledge and skills.

More importantly, the gains from direct instruction (1,2,3 and 5) lag behind their increased cognitive abilities (4).

Put differently, the learners definitely benefit from being in school and they **demonstrate increasing readiness to learn - to a far greater degree than is taken up by teaching.** They are therefore being under-taught, despite having caring and dedicated teachers. What is problematic is that the knowledge, skills and performances learners come into the classrooms with - are not sufficiently extended or elaborated through deliberate, explicit instruction. They benefit from being in school - rather than on the street- but this is far from good enough.

In some cases there was actually unlearning (negative movement) in the 'following of instructions' task. Since this is crucial to schooling, negative movement here is undesirable. Teachers' effectiveness can therefore be measured to the degree which they can facilitate and develop this ability in learners. Our classroom observations indicate excessive amounts of spoon-feeding / under-teaching / infantilising of the curriculum, with very little extension of learners/activities. In addition, very little is achieved in terms of age-appropriate, school-related tasks, such as directed instruction in learning to read, and to produce original writing - rather than merely copying.

As far as overall adaptation to school learning goes, the data points towards more directed teaching and specific emphasis on consolidation or stabilising the gains made through teaching and learning.

The data shows at least three discernible groups as far as level of preparedness for schooling goes - and a small number of learners with *special needs* (who require clinical assessment and remedial education). The raw data requires more in-depth research and we are encouraging post-graduate students from the three local universities to assist us in this valuable exercise.

DEVELOPMENT OF AN OPEN LEARNING, FOUNDATION PHASE CURRICULUM FOR 1999

The question was 'how was POLP to think about or theorise learning, and learning to know and to solve problems?' On the one hand, there are those who see development as intrinsically or biologically driven. On the other hand, there are those who place emphasis for learning on culture and communication.

These theories both place particular burdens on our task with over-aged learners whom, by definition, have missed out on early forms of schooling and related opportunities for learning. On the one hand we are dealing with individuals who are mature in some ways and skilled in others, but unprepared for schooling and the demands of formal learning situations.

We decided that the problem would be tackled as follows:

A. Research-based:

On the basis of the first year's (1998) research findings and classroom observations, areas were identified which are salient to learners for succeeding in a formal school situation (and which ability was found to be extremely poor in our learners) and as a basis for fast-tracking. These areas are

- * **'Learning to learn' skills**, such as task readiness; gathering information for task execution; specifying the means and goals towards task completion; making the problem explicit; attention to detail; visual transport of information from one space to another space or surface; understanding invariant aspects of tasks; dealing with different sources of information; noting causal relationships; co-ordinating and integrating actions, information- and all task- relevant performances.

Deliberate attention to these areas in the open learning curriculum, is intended to compensate for the lack of mediated experiences. We believe that it is essential for learners to acquire these skills of learning to learn, which should have occurred from more capable peers/adults prior to school entry, and which appears not to have taken place (for whatever reason).

- * **Anonymity of learners and poor self esteem**: It appeared that the disorder experienced by learners- socially and educationally had left learners with little sense of themselves as individuals or learners with responsibility for their own learning. This was compounded by the lack of attention given to learner names and dates of birth by caregivers and teachers alike. How are learners to meet the demands of formal schooling which insists on order, structure and a positive sense of self identity - when their experience is one of (constant) disorder?

The curriculum input (especially through Life skills) therefore includes a deliberate programme of building of learner identity and self-esteem as well as the mastering of basic competencies to provide learners with a sense of success (on which to hopefully, fast-track learning, which is more age- and developmentally-appropriate). Peer acceptance is surely one of the major challenges for the age at which these youngsters are, and the sooner these learners can demonstrate more age-appropriate abilities, the better.

B. Theoretical base:

This touches on the difficult theoretical problem, which in the words of Craig ('Time and Learning', paper in progress) "...just about divides theories about cognition (the study of the development of thinking, learning/coming to know) into two."

She argues that, on the one hand, metaphorically speaking, Piaget's theory of cognitive development (as well as neo-Piagetian theories) could be characterized as outlining the changing size (capacity) of the cognitive 'engine', the motor of individual problem-solving and intelligent behaviour. According to this view of *mind*, the best teaching can do is to equip the learner with the wherewithal to utilise the engine it has at any stage. How to do this is of course not that easy to answer.

The point of this set of theories as far as the POLP task goes is that if mental development is intrinsically driven, primarily the product of (biological) maturation, we should expect normal learners to adapt to schooling and the demands of formal learning fairly rigidly. Overage learners should learn speedily because, if we assume the invariance of cognitive stages, they are mature enough, cognitively 'ready' as it were, to acquire age-appropriate skills and perform, with minimal teaching input, like other normal learners of their age. If they do *not* do so, one has a few explanatory exits:

- (i) Either the particular individuals are not normal (the data shows otherwise for the majority of learners), or
- (ii) The teaching input was inappropriate (a lot of it obviously was) or

- (iii) The testing of learner abilities did not hit the target, repeatedly and consistently (which we think it does); or
- (iv) Another view on cognitive development (which is discussed below).

The other extreme view of cognitive development sees intelligent behaviour in terms of the acquisition of task-specific skills and knowledge (as well as know-how) which are domain and/ or context specific. For these theorists, our developing grasp of reality, or abilities to operate in the world- successfully and autonomously - are acquired under the influence of external factors such as stimuli emitted by the environment, the kind of instructional processes which obtain between child and caregivers, and our cultural milieu, in general.

Theorists aspiring to this view are either inspired by what Vygotsky (1978) called a stimulus-response (S-R) framework or by the socio-cultural approach to cognition in which the mediating function of sign and tool use is primary (of which Vygotsky is an advocate).

In terms of S-R framework, one would expect that learners from poor environments disordered lives/ home and school circumstances would re-orientate slowly to the process of learning. The social nature of learning also tells us that each learner grows into the intellectual life around him/her; and what we do today with assistance, we do tomorrow on our own. **This is a most distressing view in the case of learners in the pilot, where the intellectual life around them is poor. Their only hope lies in obtaining the assistance 'today' to equip them for the tasks they will face tomorrow.**

POLP draws heavily on Vygotsky's work - in which he considered the S-R framework unsuitable for the study of higher psychological processes and in which he warned against simplistic views on context or stimuli emitted by the environment. He was also critical of Piaget's view of cognitive development as far as ' the mere unfolding of the child's organically predetermined system of activity' goes, and the view that there is ' a single organically predetermined internal system of activity that exists for each psychological function'.

As an advocate of the importance of sign and tool use, however, Vygotsky stressed that tools and signs transform context and activity:

'...Just as the first use of tools refutes the notion that development represents the mere unfolding of the child's organically predetermined system of activity, so the first use of signs demonstrates that there cannot be a single organically predetermined internal system of activity that exists for each psychological function. The use of artificial means, the transition to mediated activity, fundamentally, changes all psychological operations just as the use of tools limitlessly broadens the range of activities within which the new psychological functions may operate. In this context, we can use the term higher psychological function, or higher behaviour as referring to the combination of tool and sign in psychological activity.' (1978: 55).

Vygotsky advocated an 'experimental-developmental' method - which artificially provokes or creates a process of psychological development' i.e. tasks must be set that will elicit change or provoke cognitive adaptation. This view, we believe, is crucial for understanding how (biologically) normal children, living in (socially) abnormal situations fail to attain competencies, skills and knowledge typical for their age.

POLP accepts the Piagetian concept that older learners have a particular developmentally-appropriate capability -hence the need for age- and developmentally appropriate materials. We have, therefore, based our curriculum development on

Vygotsky's model for change - the Zone of Proximal development (M) - i which tasks are set to *provoke cognitive adaptation*; as well as

Feuerstein's work which shows that the ZPD is a fine model for *guiding reediting efforts in cases where cognitive development has been retarded.*

Children (according to Feuerstein) must learn to learn and will do so when receiving sufficient 'mediated learning experiences' from a capable other. This selection and transformation of stimuli by the mediating agent, is therefore an elaboration of the ZPD, since the mediator 'selects stimuli that are most appropriate and then frames, filters, and schedules them; he determines the appearance or disappearance of certain stimuli and ignores others'.

Based on the above, the POLP initiative believes that learning and the kind of learning opportunities which are available or are *deliberately created* for learners, matter a great deal - because the thinking, problem-solving and intelligence of learners depend on these.

This places a major responsibility on the *teacher as mediator and as selector as to what content and form of things should be mediated to learners*. In the case of over-aged learners - who in some cases have often already experienced 4 years of (ineffective) schooling, having to re-mediate or rectify that which did not happen during development, is an even more complex task. The teacher requires all the help s/he can get.

Teacher-learner materials developed by POLP, to support teachers, are therefore based on the principle of '*task-teaches-task*'. These aim to move learners through a specific process of modelling, setting tasks, engaging, observing and assessing, and re-engagement; providing practice and consolidation in this process and enabling the learners to move towards personal initiation of and greater independence in learning. At the same time, teachers who mediate the programme are gaining insights into why the materials are used the way they are, can see for themselves how and why these work and can tell which skills/ experiences require consolidation before moving onto more complex skills/experiences.

Teacher workshops to mediate the materials have shown the extent to which teachers themselves have little understanding of how to scaffold learning. This points to gaps in teacher education and the need for preparing teachers for learners whom come from environments in which mediated learning has not occurred.

This is especially true of children who come from environments where parents/caregivers have been made to feel disempowered by an (apartheid and colonial) system, which denigrated their cultural backgrounds and achievements. Such caregivers often no longer mediate appropriate learning to learn - because they no longer believe that what they can mediate is valuable (a case in point is Xhosa-speaking parents who no longer allow their children to speak Xhosa, so as not to contaminate their learning of English). Which is precisely why the early childhood development advocates must be supported to the hilt - especially when motivating ECD programmes for the poor!

Foundation Phase could very well be the equivalent of the reception yea advocated by ECD specialists for 0-9 year olds - but for 9-15 year olds. Sue programmes should be regarded extremely seriously by education departments, if we are committed to redress the inequalities of the past. There should be policy decisions and implementation of compulsory programmes such as these, in all multiple risk areas.

Such programmes, I believe, start to give muscle to mere lip service to educational equality and redress. McLennan (in Fitzgerald, McLennan and Munslow 1995: 534) puts it succinctly - and the quote bears repetition:

Developing systems for redress will require a fundamental understanding of the notions of equality, justice and equity. It implies unequal allocations on the basis of past imbalances and exclusion. However, such redress cannot simply take place on a quantitative level, but must be qualitative in terms of the nature of education provided. (my emphasis).

POLP is therefore in the process of developing and implementing a somewhat different curriculum in 1999 (the second year) based on the above considerations. Changing the very basis of the curriculum, one year into the 3-year programme has created some problems. These are compounded by the fact that teachers do not keep learners for the intended two years in the class - although the principle of progression i.e. move them when they are ready to mainstream is the correct principle. However, the basis for moving learners (and the decision) remains with the school and is often not taken on sound educational grounds. Learners also move on into (still) overcrowded classes (sometimes 70 learners) and after a year of directed attention become one of the 'herd' - with probable loss once more of the individual identity which we tried to nurture in the open learning classes.

CIPP CURRICULUM

It consists of two stages or phases (see Appendix 6: overhead 6):

Phase 1: Back-track (1 year):

This phase is really a springboard for future learning, so 'back-tracking' is a bit of a misnomer. It will focus strongly on

Primary Open Learning Pathway Trust, April 1999

12

In a sense, the Learning to Learn programme for overaged learners in the

- *The building of learner identity*
- *'Learning to learn the basic competencies underlying (or generating) performance on school tasks and problem solving generally;*
- *Enabling cognitive adaptation to the demands of formal schooling; and developing basic competencies in reading, writing and handling numbers.*

With Feuerstein, we believe that **children who lack mediated learning experience are deficient in appropriate attitude and motivation for learning as well as working habits, rather than 'structural and elaborational capacities'**. Process learning should reverse these deficiencies. Process learning turns acquired principles, rules and strategies into habits through repetition (of the principle not the task) through a systematic intervention programme.

POLP's Learn to Learn module is skill rather than content focussed but is not content-less. The vehicle for the skills of scanning, focussing etc. are age-appropriate tasks which allow for a multi-variate combination of skills (e.g. The game Snap allows for 'vital reading processes' but at the same time teaches learning behaviours such as following rules, sequencing, etc. which Feuerstein himself indicates are problems for under-prepared learners.

Within this framework, and given that we face a heterogeneous group of learners, POLP has had to conceive of an intervention that does more than merely remediate for lost learning opportunities. We need to ensure that older learners are not embarrassed by the tasks but nonetheless develop very basic competencies, while also equipping younger learners with the same - yet at the same time preparing all of them for school tasks through providing both knowledge and skills. The task thus calls for a balance between content-less (but skill-based) and content learning.

POLP has interpreted this by developing curriculum materials to initiate, implement and consolidate activities such as the following:

Term 1: **'Learning to Learn' materials** include activities aimed at *deliberately developing the skills required for learning to learn i. e. re-mediating task readiness; attention to detail; following instructions; visual transfer of information; understanding invariant aspects of tasks; perspective and space orientation*. The materials were mediated with the teachers, and the activities introduced during the first term.

Our insistence on accurate biographical details of learners tries to force teachers and schools to engage with the learner as an individual identity, and to begin to allow learners to see themselves as individuals with individual learner identity - even if it means we have to allocate a birth-date when there is none!

Feedback from teachers, on the first term's activities, are that the learners are actively and excitedly engaged to the extent of being exhausted by the end of the school day. Improved discipline and better attendance is another consequence reported.

Heads of Departments at these schools are motivating for the use of the materials in their own classes as well as in other Foundation Phase classes - but some of the materials are not age-appropriate for 6 or 7 year olds, so teachers need to be selective. We are not making the materials generally available to the Foundation Phase during the pilot (although we are keen to test its relevancy more generally), as they require testing and evaluation - and possible refinement.

Term 2: This *intends to lay a sure foundation by developing the precursors/ basic competencies of letter, number and life skills*. It will involve activities which will position *each learner* in the classroom (i.e. managing and organising him/herself as a learner) and *managing and organising information* in the classroom.

Teachers are beginning to see the relevance of scaffolding activities which build on previous work - to the extent that they themselves have opted not to start the second term's activities until they had completed the first term's work - a major turnaround to the paradigm of completing a syllabus at all costs, irrespective of where the learners are.

The challenge for POLP is how to shorten the Learning to Learn time and provide extension activities/ materials as learners begin to move, as well as to find ways of dealing with a heterogeneous group who has been exposed to some reading and numeracy, yet lack basic learning to learn skills. This throws up possible curriculum implementation models - a current dilemma (see

We are still in the process of analysing the first repeated measures assessment of 1999 and testing materials, as well as trying to evaluate teacher and learner uptake of the curriculum - which should inform which model we select. A major dilemma is that teachers are teaching content for entry into Grade 4, even while implementing the curriculum being tested.

Terms 3 and 4 will develop and build on the basic competencies in Literacy (Xhosa) and Numeracy. The research assessment of learners will occur once during each of these terms.

The Project for Alternative Education in South Africa (PRAESA) has been approached to investigate the language usage in Open Learning classrooms - in order to recommend a language policy for the curriculum particularly timing around the introduction of English - which is a major concern schools. A questionnaire to analyse the language proficiency levels of learners and teachers is a first step, and advocacy aimed at governing bodies, schools and parents will be attempted so that everyone understands the educational need of competencies in the home language, as well as English. Another concern is how and in what order.

Primary Open Learning Pathway Trust, April 1999

14

Already, POLP is trying to have extension activities in language for faster learners developed in time for the third term, which could be accessible without teacher mediation. For mathematics this extension will pose a problem, as the teachers' main problem is mediating differentiated tasks to different groups of learners and we are not sure that the materials could stand on their own for learners to access.

Phase 2: **Fast-track (1 year)**

This phase will attempt to move learners into a self-paced, more age-appropriate curriculum in order to achieve, minimally, all the outcomes of the Foundation Phase. This, of course, would achieve only a saving of one year, if learners stayed with the programme for 2 years - we hope that repetition in the following years would also be cut down.

The major problem, of course, is trying to place a multi-age innovation into a system built on age-appropriate classrooms and a curriculum not geared to a grade by grade progression.

New **research goals for 1999:**

Given the above, our research goals for the rest of 1999 are focussed on

Undertaking on-going spot-checks of progress in terms of

- (i) Take-up of the POLP curriculum, teacher support and materials
 - (ii) Learning outcomes and
 - (iii) The process and products of schooling.
- Examining cases of resilient teachers and learners
 - Obtaining teachers' and learners' own understanding of education/ to educate with an emphasis on their grasp of age, gender and the role-rule configurations appropriate to schooling.
 - Examining instances of learning vs. unlearning in younger vs. older learners.
 - Tracking individuals' reading and writing through individual assessments.
 - Undertaking two matching/control studies: Assessing a group.
 - (i) Of 200 learners at the end of Grade 3 of similar backgrounds and in similar schools to the learners in open learning classes i.e. OL's (at the end of October 1999 when the third/final 1999 assessment of OL learners occurs); and
 - (ii) a group of 200 learners, matched to 200 OLE's on age and gender from similar schools and NOT in the Foundation Phase, (at the start of the school year 2000).

Primary Open Learning Pathway Trust, April 1999

In conclusion, if repetition is the major problem of learners in the Foundation Phase, then **'Mine, merely being at school, and submitting to whatever is on offer will eventually benefit all those who can afford to repeat grades, at least more so than merely being 'on the street' - or so we would all like to believe. However, if we cannot do better than time, if time is all we have on the side of those who are un-, under- and ill-educated, we will have to consider alternatives to formal schooling.'** (Craig: 1999 unpublished paper)

However, POLP believes in finding mainstream solutions. It is imperative, therefore, that all stakeholders in education - the Education Department officials and policymakers, para-educational services, schools, teachers, et al, acknowledge, support and take seriously the need for quasi-experimental sites (such as the open learning classes) where barriers to learning are being researched as a basis for development of curricula. This means ensuring that the classes - especially in the absence of special education support - are not turned into dumping grounds for all those learners who do not survive the schooling disorder and the all too often pointless teaching that characterise most of the classrooms of the poorest of the poor.

The fact remains that these learners cannot be wished away and their Constitutional right to education, as well as redress, must be honoured.

OVER-AGE ENROLMENT

South Africa's school system is characterised by a high level of over-agedness. In 1997, 13% of primary learners and 27% of secondary learners were over-aged (see table 5). Over-age enrolment in grade 1 (learners who are eight years or older) was 19% in 1997 compared with 23% in 1995. In grade 12, 56% of learners are were over age (19 years and older).

Table 5

Percentage of Appropriately Aged Learners by, Province, 1995 & 1997*

	Primary (6 to 13 years)		Secondary (13 to 18 years)	
	1995	1997	1995	1997
Eastern Cape	85		70	66
Free State	82	82	63	66
Gauteng	93	87	80	79
KwaZulu-Natal	90	87	79	76
Mpumalanga	88	86	72	70
Northern Cape	88	87	84	84
Northern Province	91	89	67	68
North West	84	78	70	66
Western Cape	93	92	92	88
Total	88	87	74	73

Source. Calculated from information provided by the Directorate Information Systems. Department of Education Pretoria. October 1998

Over-agedness is worse in some provinces than in others. In 1997, the North West seemed to have a particularly high proportion of primary learners over the age of 13 (22%) followed by the Free State (18%). At secondary level, the proportion of over-aged learners is particularly high in the Eastern Cape, Free State, Northern Province and North West.

LEARNER PROFILE

Age: 9-15 years (but there were also 8 and 20 year olds). The important issue is the distinction between educational levels and their chronological age. Mainly pre-pubescents and adolescents.

Gender ratio: Approximately 183 boys: 100 girls. This is not typical for Africa where the ratio of overage girls to boys is higher.

Location: Come mainly from marginalised urban locations (informal settlements) but migration from rural areas and frequent relocation is part of their life histories - being out-of-school and disrupted schooling being part of the pattern.

Experience: Generally a lack of success, disempowerment and failure in school; exposure to limited resources, a poor learning environment, violence, disorder and relocation, and in some cases also emotional, physical and sexual abuse.

Family situation: Most have lacked regular educational, emotional and financial support. They often have support from extended family systems rather than direct nuclear family support.

Strengths: Most have a strong desire to learn, demonstrate high levels of determination and perseverance, with expectations of progressing academically which will provide access to better opportunities, economic improvement and status. They are creative in non-structured activities and have good 'navigation/survival' skills.

Weaknesses: Generally have a low self-esteem and a weak sense of their own identity and abilities, manifesting as aggressive behaviour (mainly in males) but also in their drawings which show individual identity under threat or emotional disturbance.

Most, if not all, have experienced disordered/ poor non-formal and formal mediation of education /life skills by capable peers 1 adults, so that the competencies needed for learning to learn are weak. They also demonstrate a strong need for order. security and boundaries. and to be busy and stimulated.

The tasks and analysis were as follows:

Task	Analysis
1. Copying letters and numerals	<i>Learners' progress tended to remain the same over else 4 assessments throughout the year.</i>
2. A task involving following instructions	<i>There was improvement and movement up and down and fluctuating</i>
3. Drawing a family in a park.	<i>Mainly remained the same, or fluctuated to a lesser extent</i>
4. Completing patterns	<i>Was positive and there was distinct movement</i>
5. Assessment on a combined measure of tasks 1-3	<i>Showed a fluctuation and stagnation.</i>

Diagram B: Open Learning Class Model under consideration

Stage 1:

- * Learning how to learn
- * Developing competencies
- * Basic literacy and numeracy

1 year duration

Stage 2:

Fast-tracking to Foundation
Phase outcome levels in
Literacy, Numeracy and Life
Skills

- Structured curriculum to cover core content
- Differentiated learning and teaching materials

1 year duration

Learners are assessed and are in a position to move into more appropriate age and academic/ vocational opportunities

Figure 3:

POLP Impact Model

Causal Factors	Problem	Interventions	Outcomes	Impact
<p>Social factors:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Legacy of apartheid: disordered communities /families • Poverty • Migration <p>Education:</p> <p>Disordered schools</p> <p>POLP addresses the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inappropriate curriculum • Educators ill-equipped to facilitate OL learning 	<p>Large numbers of OLs in the Foundation Phase at ex-DET schools in the Western Cape who lack Learn to Learn competencies and age appropriate knowledge and skills</p>	<p>Curriculum Innovation Pilot Project:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Advocacy with WCED (Curriculum Services Directorate) and OL schools 2. An OL curriculum and materials that compensate for lost learning opportunities (Backtrack) 3. An OL curriculum and materials that equip learners with more age appropriate knowledge and skills (Fast track) 4. OL educator support 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. WCED officials and OL schools (principal, management staff, educators) understand the OL concept and have a positive attitude about OL classes. OL classes set up according to POLP guidelines and POLP placement and promotion policies are in place. appropriate 2. The research driven OL curriculum grades must include materials that compensate for lost learning opportunities (Learn to Learn) place basic literacy and numeracy skills in place (2nd module of Backtrack) 3. The Fast Track materials must equip OL learners with appropriate knowledge and skills so that they can be successfully placed in Intermediate Phase. 4. OL educators must understand OL needs, grasp point of OL materials, set appropriate outcomes, match teaching to outcomes, give clear instructions, set time constraints, use specified OL teaching and learning modes, test in order to teach, extend and remediate learning, and modify teaching methods where necessary. 	<p>Learners achieve OL curriculum goals and are placed in more age-appropriate</p>