Inching along: educational survival in South Africa
Part 2

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Introduction

The picture that emerges from a statistical survey of access to schooling in South Africa is one in which most learners enter and complete primary school, but numbers begin to drop quite dramatically in secondary school. Achievement levels are low suggesting that learners are moving through the grades but without necessarily attaining the learning outcomes prescribed by curriculum. The routine of school seems established but with learners increasingly being left behind academically and more and more vulnerable to repetition and dropping-out.

This paper identifies the socio-economic factors in communities and schools that add stress on these vulnerable learners, eventually (and inevitably) leading to their exclusion from school. The information for this chapter is gathered through a review of recent research and is organized around three main themes, beginning with the broader economic questions related to the cost of education. The second theme addresses social issues outside of the school which impact on family decisions to enroll or withdraw young people from schools, including issues related to family structure, gender and HIV/Aids. The third theme narrows down to the school and to supply side factors as well as whether the ethos of schools encourages or deters access. There is a possible fourth area explaining learner drop-out and those are reasons associated with learners themselves – their cognitive, physical and emotional capacity. This paper, however, does not review the literature on this theme, though learner's motivation to learn and remain in school is a potentially important area for further study. These categories, of course, overlap and it is usually a result of a combination of factors, rather than a single cause, that learners are absent or eventually drop-out of school.

The economy of schooling

The impact of school fees as a barrier to schooling and in increasing inequitable access has perhaps received most public attention. Money can buy access to better quality schools. Poor learners are excluded from high fee-paying schools mainly as a result of their geographic location (if exemption policies are functioning) but even the low levels of fees charged by the poorest schools can act as hurdle.

A number of cases collected by the Nelson Mandela Foundation's research in rural schools (NMF, 2005:p53) tell of learners dropping-out or missing portions of the year when they were unable to pay fees. Often this was a result of the criticism or humiliation

[1] This project is funded by DFID. Thanks are also due to Nazir Carrim and Keith Lewin for helpful comments on an earlier draft of this paper.

brought to bear on learners by teachers and principals. Wearing incorrect uniform, for example, marked learners out as 'poor'. In its *Review of the financing, resourcing and costs of education in public schools* (2003), the Department of Education acknowledged that non-payment of fees did sometimes result in schools acting contrary to human rights obligations: "Poor learners whose parents could not pay school fees have been turned away from school, placed in separate rooms, away from other learners, forced to sit on the floor, named and shamed in school assembly, and so on" (DoE, 2003:54). Exemption policies are not advertised to parents. Even learners officially exempted from payment may experience intimidation in comments made by the principal or educators (DoE, 2003:90).

Given that school fees tend to be quite low, especially in the poorer quintiles, the overall cost of education, including transport, uniform, books etc. may more substantively explain the economic barriers to access (Fleisch and Woolman, 2004). A study conducted over two years (1998-1999) of the needs and circumstances of 69 out-of-school and 60 out-of-age children in the Kathorus township cluster east of Johannesburg, found that protracted poverty was the most important explanation for why learners were out-of-school (though less acute for out-of-age). The depth of poverty, in terms of its material deprivation, social isolation and psychological consequences, distinguished the children who were not in school with their peers from the same poor community. Transport costs may be the single expense keeping learners - who live beyond a safe walking distance - out-of-school. Uniform costs were the largest initial – and sometimes insurmountable – expense. Although school fees were low (R50/annum) and were less of a practical barrier they represented the "last straw" when combined with other costs (Porteus *et al*, 2000, p43). The out-of-school learners in the study also seemed to lack social support networks and approximately half (47%) had had no contact with intersectoral services of any kind over a period of a year (Porteus *et al*, 2000, p44). A final defining characteristic of the deep poverty experienced by out-of-school learners was their sense of powerlessness to negotiate the bureaucracy and procedures for school entry.

The hypothesis that direct and indirect costs contribute to lack of access or late entry into school is supported by a number of studies which gauge the impact of cash transfers to poor families as having a positive effect on enrolment.

Cash, Hosegood and Lund (2005) assessing the impact of the Child Support Grant[2] in the Umkhanyakude district in KwaZulu-Natal find that the grant appears to "overcome the impact of poverty on school enrolment" (Case et. al, 2005:469). Using data collected from approximately 11000 African households through the Africa Centre for Health and Population Studies, the study found that children who received the grant (in 2002) were significantly more likely to be enrolled in school in the years following grant receipt than were equally poor children of the same age (Case et. al., 2005:468). Among 6 year olds,

[2] The Child Support Grant is a non-conditional mean-tested cash transfer given to parents or primary caregivers whose monthly income is less than R1100. Initially the grant was targeted at children under the age of 7 but was extended in 200? To those younger than 14 years. The grant has steadily increased from R110 per eligible child in 2002 to R190 in 2006.

receipt of the grant was associated with an 8.1 percentage point increase in school enrolment, and a 1.8 percentage point increase among 7 year olds. Their older siblings, on the other hand, who were of school going age before the Child Support Grant was implemented, were significantly less likely to be enrolled in school than other children of the same age.

Unexpected economic and social shocks to poor households intuitively seem to suggest a possible disruption to schooling. Hunter and May (2003), however, find that this is not the case. Based on interviews from the study "Transitions to Adulthood", they find that a substantial proportion (41%) of all households in the sample reported experiencing some type of shock over a 24 month period (prior to September/October 1999). But just three percent of those households that responded to a shock (49% of households in the sample) said that they had removed one or more of their children from school (Hunter and May, 2003:17). This suggests that once learners are in school, households choose to keep up attendance even when faced with unexpected pressures. The effect of poverty, therefore, may mainly be seen at the point of enrolment.

The review so far suggests that the cost of schooling adds stress on household income and in a minority of cases (the most marginalized) will result in drop-out, but its biggest impact is in delaying school entry. As the following studies will show, once in schools most children will complete the primary phase – but they do so at a ploddingly slow pace.

While poverty may delay entry into school, it also slows progress through the grades. One of the key findings of the "Transitions to Adulthood in the Context of Aids in South Africa" (Hallman and Grant 2004) is that most young people attained at least primary education by age 20, but those of lower socio-economic status are more likely to have had school delays[3]. Among 14 – 15 year olds, more than half of youth in the lowest socio-economic quintiles had had a delay in their schooling, compared to 21% in the highest wealth category. Pregnancy is the most common reason for slow progress among females, followed by own illness, inability to pay fees and child-care responsibilities. For males, inability to pay school fees is the most common reason for school delay, followed by own illness, and having to work.

Anderson (2000) using financial expenditures on schooling for African children reported in the 1995 OHS, finds that children who are behind for their grade have less money spent on their school fees, their transportation and other school expenses. Students who are behind six or more years for their grade have approximately half as much money spent on their schooling as children who are age appropriate. This result persists in multivariate analyses controlling for such factors as the student's age, gender, family structure, location, and household socioeconomic characteristics. The assumption is that fees are correlated with quality and learners in better schools are less likely to repeat grades.

[3] A delay is defined as a year of non-advancement either because of either not having enrolled at all during a particular year (but eventually returning to school), withdrawal during the year, or repeating a grade because of poor performance the previous year.

Reinforcing this, Anderson *et al* show that "African disadvantage in schooling is not primarily the result of students dropping out of school early, but rather driven by a lower rate of grade attainment that begins in early grades (2001, p3). Using the 1995 OHS data, Anderson *et al* find that while Africans complete about 0.80 grades per year for the ages 10 to 16, for whites the value is 0.94. The impact of high repetition rates is plain in a detailed study of Gugulethu High School, a township school in Cape Town where roughly 2/3 of the students had repeated at least one grade and more than 1/3 had repeated two grades (Anderson *et al,* 2001). The effect of repetition is understudied but as Anderson *et al* argue it is "potentially a self-reinforcing process" (2001, p3) with repeaters less likely to fare well in future grades. Indeed, in the Gugulethu High School study each additional year of age resulted in a decrease of between one-half to two percentage points in the matric exam, and with ages ranging between 17 and 30, scores for the older students lagged 10 percentage points behind their 18 year old colleagues.

The reviewed data reflects access patterns from the mid-1990s and earlier. As the later policies on grade-to-age norms and assessment (1998) take effect, the toll of repetition may become less of a factor. Changing repetition patterns is therefore an area for further research.

Child labour

One likely consequence of poverty is an increased reliance on child labour[4] – either directly in income-generating activities or in domestic tasks to enable adults more time in employment (or looking for employment). An obvious concern with child labour is its potential disruption to schooling, but there is little evidence in the South African context that this is the case.

The Survey of the Activities of Young People in 1999 by Statistics South Africa suggests that child labour is widespread in the country, but that it does not seem to prevent children from attending school. This may be because opportunities for children to directly contribute income is very rare given the high unemployment rate, together with legislation prohibiting child labour. According to SAYP data, 93% of children doing economic activities for at least three hours per week were attending school (Statistics South Africa, 2000: table 7.7). It is only when participation rates of over 36 hours per week (i.e. approximately 5 hours per day) are reached that school attendance drops significantly (Statistics South Africa, 2001:61). Work, then, is often carried out after school hours but this may nonetheless impact on performance. Results from the survey showed that children engaged in child labour experienced difficulties with finding time to study and in catching up with classwork. In terms of educational achievement, a larger proportion of children who do economic work aged between 10-14 years are not literate (less than 5 years of education) as compared to their peers who do not work (StatsSA, 2001:65). However, this difference disappears once children reach 14 years, and in fact reverses amongst 17 year olds. For Bray: "the most plausible potential sources of harm

[4] Child labour is defined as work by children younger than 18, which is exploitative, hazardous or otherwise inappropriate for their age, detrimental to their schooling or social, physical, mental, spiritual or moral development.

to children who spend long hours doing household chores are levels of tiredness that affect school attendance and performance" (2003:18).

The StatsSA survey also received differing responses from working children as to why they were not attending school. Fewer than 1% of children engaged in economic activity and who miss school cited their involvement in work as their reason for being out-of-school (Statistics South Africa, 2000:table 7.10). The primary reasons for non-attendance appear to be inability to afford school, health-related (reported illness), family related (pregnancy and child-rearing amongst girls) and the poor quality of schooling (disinterest in schools) (Statistics South Africa, 2001:64).

Social Factors

The studies reviewed so far indicate that the direct and indirect costs of schooling contribute to haphazard access patterns, but the explanation on its own is insufficient given the large numbers of poor learners who continue in school. Indeed, there is a countervailing view which maintains that since schooling is an important route out of poverty for successful learners, poor families have a vested interest in keeping children enrolled.

There is a growing body of literature which looks at intra-household characteristics influencing enrolment and performance of learners. These are mainly concerned with understanding how family structures effect decisions made with regard to investments in children. Household characteristics which may determine enrolment and transition include its size – where time and resources have to be shared among children - and children's relationship with co-resident adults – the degree of relatedness between guardians and children.

One possible predictor of children's enrolment in school is whether they live with both, one or neither of their biological parents – the assumption being that their likelihood of being enrolled in school drops if they are in single-parent or fostered households. Since the level of fostering is relatively high in South Africa, determining the veracity of this assumption is important. According to the SA Demographic and Health Survey (1998), 24% of households have foster children (children under the age of 15 who have no biological parents in the household). In urban areas the proportion of households with foster children is 17%, while it is double in non-urban areas (34%) (DoH, 1998:10)

Anderson (Sept 2003) uses a sample of 16,338 children from the 1995 OHS to test whether the presence of biological parents in a household predict school enrolment and outcomes. He finds that black and coloured children living with neither parent are most disadvantaged in terms of probability of enrolment, the highest grade completed, the rate of grade attainment and expenditures on school fees. Living with just one parent does not seem to make a difference relative to living with both parents and Anderson explains this suggests "a protective effect of the presence of a parent" (2003, p9). Similar conclusions result when using a sample of 11,211 black South African children from 1995 October Household Survey and the 1995 Income and Expenditure Survey (Anderson, 2005).

Anderson finds that relatedness had no effect on children currently being in school, but that children were behind in school for the child's age (2005:22). While the data suggests that children living with distant relatives may be at a disadvantage, an alternative explanation is that these children have had greater disruptions in their schooling history than children living with the biological parents (2005:24). Anderson's findings (2003 and 2005) on child fostering support the access patterns presented earlier: delays at point of entry, followed by slow progress through the system.

But Anderson's findings are slightly at odds with those of Zimmerman (2003) who finds "no Cinderella effect for children fostered to a close relative" so that South African households treat foster children who they are related to as they do their own children in terms of human capital investment (2003:279). This is true across ages, gender and rural households. Zimmerman (2003) hypotheses is "that foster children typically move from low-resource families without access to educational opportunities to families with more resources and better access to education" (2003:561). The data used in the study is quite old – collected in 1993 by the South African Labour and Development Research Unit (SALDRU), but it shows that "the institution of fostering allows parents to boost their child's chances of enrollment again by a 2-3 percentage-point increase" (2003:583).

While children may move in order to increase their chances of school entry, migration may also disrupt schooling. Evidence suggests that there is significant migration of people from largely rural areas and provinces to more urbanized areas. According to statistics South Africa, there is an increasing trend of young adults who move to more industrialized provinces in search of employment opportunities (Stats South Africa, 2005:23). The exact scale of such migration, as well as its implications for access to services is unclear, but recent data emerging from work of other researchers (for example Wilson, 2004 and Porteus et al, 2000) suggest that migration is a significant factor. Porteus et al (2000) found that out-of-school learners in the Kathorus township cluster (Johannesburg) were highly mobile, with 60% having moved homes at least once in the preceding five years. The study identified six "pathways linking high residential mobility to the lack of school attendance": refusal of mid-year entry to school; lack of documentation; general instability; new medium of instruction; no entry for illegal immigrants; short-term visit becoming long-term stay (Porteus *et al*, 2000, p76).

That young people remain in primary school despite high repetition rates suggests that there is a demand for schooling. Young people interviewed in the Transitions to Adulthood study noted that the persons they felt closest to within their family would want them to complete school (97%) and 94% said this person would want them to continue studying after high school. Similarly, the Nelson Mandela Foundation study into rural schools found that parents were committed to schooling their children, though their reasoning around the purposes of education differed for boys and girls. For girls education was more strongly linked to marriage and childcare – although a substantial minority of caregiver respondents in the survey (22%, 25% and 40% in Limpopo, KwaZulu-Natal and Eastern Cape respectively) felt it would be more difficult for educated women to marry (NMF, 2005:39).

While there is a demand for education, parents and guardians are not always able to provide the necessary epistemic support to their children – and this may at least provide one clue to why learners fail and repeat. The NMF study found that levels of education of adults were low. Amongst female respondents literacy levels were: 69% in Limpopo, 59% in KwaZulu-Natal and 70% in the Eastern Cape. Illiterate and semi-literate parents are unlikely to be able to provide much assistance to learners with their schoolwork. Of the learners interviewed for the NMF research, 65% reported that no one in their households was sufficiently educated to help with homework and a further 44% said they turned to an older sibling for assistance (NMF, 2005:29).

A strong correlation between the educational levels of (co-resident) mothers and that of their children is evident in data gleaned from the 1995 OHS. Anderson *et al* find that there is approximately two full grades differential between African children (at ages 13 and 17) whose mother has 12 years of schooling and those who mothers have less than 4 years (2001, p6). Anderson *et al* suggest that while one explanation linking schooling attainment of parents and children is that educated parents are more likely to provide support for learning, additionally, such parents are also more likely to send their children to better schools (Anderson *et al,* 2001).

The safety nets provided by extended families and community networks may prove crucial in the context of HIV/Aids. The HIV/Aids pandemic is having enormous impact on demographic patterns in South Africa and is possibly the most important factor impacting on access questions in the near future: affecting both supply and demand for education.

The media commonly makes links between HIV/Aids and related morbidity and school drop-outs. This intuitive assumption is based on the idea that young people themselves are ill or take on the additional responsibilities of caring for ill parents or siblings. In addition, Aids related deaths of productive household members is likely to deprive households of cash incomes, therefore leaving less money to pay for education-related expenses. Lack of motivation and trauma as a result of illness and death are also likely to increase absenteeism among affected children. Emerging data suggest that many children who are orphaned as a result of HIV/Aids are "forced to abandon education to care for ill parents or to work in order to supplement family income" (CASE, 2003: 11).

The length of time children are absent from school as a result of care-taking responsibilities and whether they are able to reintegrate into schools at a later stage is as yet unclear. A longitudinal study in the Free State found a statistically significant difference between non-attendance in school for older children in households affected by HIV as opposed to their peers in non-affected households. Proportionately fewer children between 7 and 13 years of age are out-of-school compared to adolescents (14 to 18 years) suggesting that older siblings are more likely to carry take on caring roles or domestic tasks in HIV affected households (Booysen and Arntz, 2002). Bray (2003) notes a lack of substantial research investigating the links between HIV/Aids and children's work responsibilities though her own research in one community in the Western Cape found that caring responsibilities tended to fall on neighbours or kin rather

than on children.

Girls may be more likely to be pulled out of school as a result of HIV/Aids. A survey of households affected by the pandemic in four provinces found that within a total sample of 330 children who were maternal orphans, twice as many girls than boys dropped out of school (Steinberg *et al*, 2002:ii). But their survey also showed that boys under the age of 18 were just as likely to be primary care-givers as girls of the same age (Steinberg *et al*, 2002:iv).

It does appear, however, that withdrawal from school is a measure of last resort. Schools may offer a sense of continuity or routine for families experiencing the devastating effects of HIV/Aids. A survey conducted in Limpopo Province reported that HIV-affected households spent 8.5% of total household expenditure on education (about R259 per month), compared to unaffected households which spent a proportionately higher amount – 15.6% (a mean of R640) (Oni *et al,* 2002:53). Yet, the difference in expenditures on housing between affected and unaffected households is greater, suggesting that spending on other basic needs is trimmed before children are pulled out of school (Bray, 2003:21).

A contributing factor to desultory learner performance, repetition and drop-out is poor nutritional status. Kallmann (2005) explains that malnutrition, hunger, parasitic infections and a lack of nutrients in diet (particularly iron and iodine) diminishes children's cognitive development either through physiological changes or by reducing their ability to participate in learning experiences, or both. She points out that children with diminished cognitive abilities and sensory impairments are more likely to repeat grades, drop out of school and enroll at a later age than healthy children. The problem is serious if one considers the Health Systems Trust's (1997) estimation that at least 20% of primary school children were stunted and suffered from chronic malnutrition.

Gustafsson's analysis of the 2000 SACMEQ data reveals that 65% of learners in historically disadvantaged schools receive lunch on all days, with 8% going without lunch every day. Gustafsson estimates that "if all learners were to eat three meals a day, we might expect a performance improvement of around 2%" (2005, p22).

Schools

This section moves from looking at the issues affecting access outside the school gate to a review of literature on in-school dynamics that encourage and discourage access. The focus here is on prevailing attitudes within schools, or the institutional ethos, that act either to welcome or discourage learners – especially those who are disadvantaged or have been out-of-school for any length of time.

A consistent observation of the South African education system is that there is differential access to schools. Learning outcomes can often be predicted on the previous racial department the school fell under and its geographic location. Such differentials are evident in statistics collected for the Education Labour Relations Council (ELRC) which

show 60% of rural educators reported teaching classes with more than 46 learners. An analysis of the responses of the 20 488 educators, show that 58% of African educators are responsible for classes of about 46 learners, while over 60% of white educators teach in classes smaller than 35 (Phurutse, 2005:5-6).

Overcrowded classes, absentee teachers and continuing use of corporal punishment feature in many of the descriptions young people provided of their schools in the study based in KwaZulu Natal "Transitions to Adulthood in the Context of Aids in South Africa" (Rutenberg *et al*, 2001 discussed above). Seventy percent of respondents reported that their classrooms are noisy, 45% said they are crowed and 39% said their classes were dirty. One-quarter of those interviewed stated that their teachers were often absent and almost half (48%) said they do not have all required textbooks (Rutenberg *et al*, 2001, p26).

Yet despite these often chaotic conditions, young people also had a sense of social connection in their schools, with three-quarters of the 2415 respondents saying they had many friends at school and 93% thinking that the teachers care about the learners. The majority (86%) felt safe at school, though 27% also reported violence among learners. One-third of all respondents said they would be happier if they attended a different school, with rural and African learners more likely to express this sentiment. (Rutenberg *et al*, 2001, p27).

The quality of learning in schools has been of concern for some time. The most recent Grade 6 Systemic Evaluation Report (December 2005) highlights just how serious the problem of education quality is. Learners obtained a national mean score of 38% in Language (LOLT), 27% in Mathematics and 41% in Natural Sciences. Most worrying is that open-ended questions were particularly poorly answered, which may explain why learners did slightly better in the Natural Sciences where 72% of the questions were multiple choice. The worst performing learners came from township, rural and farm schools. Learners whose home language was the same as the Language of Learning and Teaching scored significantly higher than those who learnt in a language other than their mother-tongue, though LOLT may be a proxy for other socio-economic factors. One of the recommendations from the report is that, "particular attention should be paid to ensuring that schools have proper strategies for dealing with punctuality and absenteeism of learners and educators for the maximisation of available learning and teaching time" (DoE, 2005b:118).

Large class sizes, new assessment practices and lack of resources are among the reasons educators give for increased workload. A study of 3909 educators (Chisholm *et al,* 2005) reveals that while educators spend slightly less than the required 43 hours per week on their various activities (41 hours per week), on average only 16 hours per week (3.2 hours per day) was spent on teaching. Policy expects educators to teach between 22.5 and 27.5 hours per week, but the study finds administrative tasks crowding out class contact time. Rural educators and those with classes of over 50 learners spend fewer hours on their different activities than those in urban areas and with smaller classes. In addition, "Educators spend progressively less time on teaching and other school related activities

as the week progresses, with very little teaching recorded on Fridays in many schools" (Chisholm *et al*, 2005).

Analysing the 2000 SACMEQ data set, Gustaffsson (2005, p22) identifies that 85% of school principals in the sample regarded latecoming amongst educators as a problem. Removing the latecoming problem would increase scores by around 15% for the system as a whole.

Unsurprisingly, poor quality of schooling impacts on educational outcomes. The adverse effect of high teacher-learner ratios on enrolment and achievement is captured by Case and Deaton (1999) who combine the 1993 SALSS with data from the Education Atlas of South Africa, which measures average quality of school in a district. They find that even when household background variables are controlled for, high pupil:teacher ratios reduce maths scores. Furthermore Case and Deaton find that school quality has a significant positive effect on the years of completed education. Using data from the 1996 census, Case and Yogo (1999) find that reducing the learner:educator ratio by 10 learners would, all else equal, increase completed schooling by 0.6 years.

A safe environment to learn

The level of bullying and violence in schools and its impact on drop-out and absenteeism is somewhat under-researched. There have been several initiatives aimed at making South African schools safe places and importantly corporal punishment was abolished. However, based on the Educator School Survey (Shisana *et al*, 2005) the three major forms of violence experienced by educators in schools over a 12 month period were: learners or educators carrying weapons to school (22%), assault (18%) and fights involving weapons (14%).

Concern has also been raised over sexual harassment of girls in schools and the impact this has on their participation in class. The Human Rights Watch's report titled, "Scared at School – Sexual Violence Against Girls in South African Schools," highlighted that girls regularly encounter violence in school, including rape, sexual abuse, sexual harassment and assault by male classmates and teachers. The HRW Report records girls speaking of daily sexual harassment – inappropriate touching and derogatory remarks – as well as the horror of rape by male peers and teachers and a general feeling of being unsafe. Many of the girls told of how their school performance dropped following assault. Others dropped out of school altogether. The culture of silence around sexual violence in schools has made gathering reliable statistics on the extent of the problem extremely difficult. The HRW Report argues that sexual harassment and violence has become normalised in schools, cases are often concealed, and victims who report abuse talk of further victimisation and stigmatization.

Inclusion and social justice

Given apartheid's legacy, the problem of racial integration in schools has received a great deal of media attention – although proportionately multi-racial schools are a minority. The flow of direction of learners has been from former black schools into former coloured, Indian and white schools. Research undertaken by Paterson and Kruss

concluded that "educational migration patterns are driven either by a lack of local access to educational opportunities, or by the motivation to gain access to educational opportunities that are perceived to be better" (1998, p150). This conclusion is confirmed by a Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC) survey of 79 schools in five provinces in 1999 (Sekete, Shilubane & Moila, 2001), which showed black learners moving to schools perceived to be better resourced or providing better opportunities for success, usually suburban or former Coloured and Indian schools.

While schools may no longer discriminate on the basis of race, a number of exclusionary devices regulate access to ex-Model C schools. The first is geographic area since these schools are located in previously white residential areas, most black learners have to be transported in, adding to the incurred expense. The second exclusionary mechanism is financial as fees at these schools are relatively high. Thirdly, these schools block out potential learners by presenting themselves as places of privilege where, for example, white cultural norms, traditions and language define the ethos of the school and learners coming in from outside those traditions need to fit into the dominant culture. Such a tendency towards assimilationism was found to be the overriding approach taken by schools in the Education Inclusion and Exclusion in India and South Africa Project (Inexsa), which investigated processes of integration in 14 schools in the provinces of KwaZulu-Natal, the Eastern Cape and Western Cape (Soudien, 2003). Soudien points to three forms of assimilation: aggressive assimilationism which is "brusque, characterized by high degrees of intolerance and often violence"; assimilationism by stealth in schools with political credentials, such as in former Indian and coloured schools, but where racial issues are left unaddressed and benign assimilationism, where the school (usually former white English-speaking) presents itself as multicultural but dominant relationships remain untouched (2004:104-105). In sum, these schools mark out learners who are different from the dominant culture – by race or class – and discourage their admission or include them as long as they fit in with predetermined norms. Using findings from the Inexsa Project, Soudien and Sayed (2004) show that the new exclusionary practices invoke discourses around 'standards', 'language' and school fees. Admission to former white, Indian and coloured schools is controlled at the entry gate as schools attempt to preserve their established ways of doing things and explain their access policies as upholding standards of excellence, or arguing that learners' inability to speak the language of learning and teaching disqualified them from admission.

Conclusion

While this paper is not a comprehensive portrait of all factors affecting access to schools it paints and overall picture of access patterns in South Africa and supports much of the findings revealed by the statistical analysis on access. Most learners enrol in and even complete primary education, but late entry and relatively high repetition rates slow progress through the system. Those who drop out of primary schools tend to be particularly marginalized, but poverty also accounts for the generally slow transition rate through the grades. There is demand for schooling, despite poor quality of outcomes and parents will foster their children out to improve their chances of accessing school. Withdrawing learners from basic education appears to be a measure of last resort – even

in the context of HIV/Aids.

Given the general culture of school going in South Africa, the poor quality of schools is a haunting worry – especially if demand for education drops – since it contributes both to drop-out and to high repetition rates.

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