TESTIMONIES ON CHILD FRIENDLY SCHOOLS FROM THE FIELD
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This is a summary of reflections of service providers working in 65 schools in the Eastern Cape Province. Participants were asked to share their experiences on what has changed positively since the start of the implementation of the Child Friendly School Programme in their schools. This was shared with UNICEF and the Eastern Cape Department of Education during a mid-year review workshop held in July 2008. The input below is unedited and the identity of the schools has been protected.

“In my school there is a decrease in the number of pregnancies. Our high school got a sponsor for computers from Telkom.”

“We have gone into partnership with the municipality which has promised to build us a computer lab. The learners from our school (disabled learners) built a computer desk themselves. A company called Teba promised to build six classrooms. We have a trust fund from Transkei Quarry Company for those learners who passed matric exams with exemption. Teenage pregnancies and drug abuse cases have decreased since the start of the programme. We have a safer school community.”

“Our secondary school has received computers from Midlands College in Graaff-Reinet. The Department of Water Affairs has given one combined school sponsorship for their food garden and flowers around the school. These flowers and gardens will be taken care of by the parents of the learners and the community. We have Chambers of Council that are visiting the school to give motivational talks. They have also started a programme called “a school intervention programme” and they are also visiting orphans and vulnerable children. The school’s health advisory committee is also inviting other departments like Social Development, and local nurses, to come and give talks to the learners. We are working with the local farm societies who are helping to pay other educators that are assisting in the school.”

“Stakeholders that attended the workshop I organised for the learners include South African Police Services, Health Department and the Department of Social Development. The Ward Committee really appreciated the programme and they committed themselves to support it.”
“At our high school the lack of co-operation from the educators, parents and the principal was initially quite bad. But now all that has changed. Everyone is working as a team, including some of the learners. The school has now managed to repair the ceilings, lights, and toilets, and there are learners who attend the Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University. The school also has a soup kitchen that was started with the help of our neighbouring school, Greenville Primary. A sick bay and first aid kit are available as well as a parent who has been trained in first aid.”

“At our primary school children received jerseys from the mayoral office. A counselling room with a full time counsellor is available for children with problems. Toilets were repaired and are in good and healthy condition for children. Community organisations sponsor the school with cleaning materials and clothes for the children.”

“Learners that were involved in gang wars and disrupting the school learning are now working and positively changing the school. Educators are more committed. Schools are linking better with the community and community structures. There are infrastructural developments. The school is having campaigns and awareness programmes with the six pillars of CFS.

“The school had some of the most violent learners and had no support from the parents and community members. Now the learners are disciplined and are disciplining each other. Parents and community members are very supportive at the school.”

“We have support from Soul City in looking after orphans and giving them clothes, school uniforms and tracksuits, and food. Learners and educators are disciplined. Support from the community has increased. Teenage pregnancy has decreased.”

“The school used to have a high number of educators absent from school, especially on Mondays. Today, teachers respect their duties and are dedicated. We used to have rebellious learners and high drop out rates. Now most learners know how to behave at school and are eager to learn. There was alcohol abuse among educators and learners. Today no learners or educators come to school drunk.”

“The school had a zero pass rate last year for Grade 12. The school currently has sufficient educators to teach, and also has Saturday classes and winter classes. Currently no learners have been caught using any drugs.”

“In my school there is a group of learners who have gone for counselling and are emotionally healed. Performance of learners
has improved and so has the pass rate. Learners are involved in a programme known as ‘Adopt a Police’ programme, which involves learners being young detectives.”

“Positive attitudes in students and educators. Getting sponsors from community stakeholders for the school. Helping orphans in the school is now important. Partnerships were formed with community councillors.”

“The approach from the stakeholders has changed dramatically since the CFS was started. Awareness of HIV/AIDS has increased and we now have a lower rate of teenage pregnancy.”

“The school has been renovated. The learners are being more vocal about issues that affect them in the school, and they are being listened to. Cleanliness around the school premises and classes has improved. Security has been beefed up in the school.”

“Security has been beefed up and the community has raised funds to erect a secure fence around the school. Learner morale has improved slightly (they are wearing uniform satisfactorily and are more committed to learn, and they are also changing their behaviour).”

“The principal and teacher have been friendly and are committed. Environment is changing drastically. Sport is active and the Department of Sports has sent a coach to assist with sport (soccer, rugby, and netball). Development of a small computer lab has been organised. Three computers have been sent to a technician for upgrading. A nutrition programme has started and the Catholic Church is helping with food every day.”

“The educators and learners are now very exhilarated about the programme. Violence, pregnancy and drugs are now very low thanks to the CFS programme.”
THE CASE STUDY OF MAJOLA PRIMARY SCHOOL

Historical Overview

The approach to Majola Primary School, a combined school in the Vyrheid District in Northern KwaZulu Natal, is along a rugged and potholed dirt track. The school has been there since 1953 and historically had 900 learners. It is a farm school that draws its learners from the surrounding community.

The acting principal, Mrs Myaka, and the School Governing Body (SGB) Chair are waiting to greet us. The SGB are always apprised of visitors coming to the school, as they are integral to the running of the school.

The situation, challenges and level of functioning before implementation of CFS

Less than 200 metres up the dirt track is another primary combined school, Siphalaza Primary. It caters to the same community, for learners in the same grades as those at Majola Primary. The principal and staff of Siphalaza Primary park their cars outside the Majola Primary gate and walk up the road.

This is a beacon to the relationship between the two schools and the struggle for larger learner numbers that would bring much needed resources. Majola Primary now has 348 learners and nine educators. The numbers have drastically dwindled since the opening of the new school and the move of many parents to town. The Department of Education is seen as having permitted this situation and is looked to in generating a solution that is not forthcoming.

The challenge for educators and learners is the multi-grade classrooms and the reality that many learners live alone or with caregivers who are unable (because of their own lack of education) or unwilling (because of heavy responsibilities or by being weighed down with care) to assist with homework. Homework therefore goes unchecked by caregivers.

The accounts by educators and learners leave one with the distinct impression that the physical environment was a lot less cared for than is ideal.

Sexual abuse of learners is reportedly a problem in the community – young children are left with grannies and uncles. However the local tradition of dealing with rape – paying with a cow – is in stark contrast to the Children’s Rights based perspective of educators and the Department of Education.

1 To respect the privacy of the school, the name of the school has been changed for this case study.
Changes since the implementation of the CFS model

The GEMers (Girls’ Education Movement) are active in the school and take responsibility for ensuring the school, classrooms and ablution facilities are clean, neat and tidy. This is no easy task in a school that struggles to get water – there are only two water tanks for collecting this precious resource and the children’s “wish list” is for water, mops and brooms (alongside the soccer kits). Soccer and netball seem to be the sports of choice for learners and educators alike. The grounds are clean and tidy in defiance of the limited resource. The sweeping is shared equally amongst boys and girls – a task historically allocated to girls only. The tension around children and work is acknowledged – a Department that does not wish learners to work at cleaning their school and because of dwindling learner numbers is not able to allocate additional resources to the school to assist with cleaning, and a school that wants learners to take pride in their surroundings and learn in a clean and conducive environment.

The GEMers are, however, not just responsible for cleanliness. They make sure that the six priorities of Child Friendly Schools are taken care of. They play an important role in assisting and teaching other learners, especially OVCs (Orphans & Vulnerable Children), by going into the community. They are the eyes and ears of the staff. GEMers identify problems and talk to those who are most vulnerable. They bring this to the attention of educators or school based carer (SBC). The school must act on and report incidents of sexual abuse and they do. In 2005 an incident of sexual abuse was reported by GEMers that ultimately resulted in a girl being removed from her caregiver. The care and horror around this is evident.

Alternative forms of discipline have been explored by educators – cleaning windows, picking up papers in the school grounds, cleaning classrooms, additional homework, a chance to read in the library, discussing discipline problems with the learner’s parents.

The SBC was introduced with the implementation of the CFS model. She is able to play a role here, with learners that consistently do not complete homework, and in investigating problems identified by educators and learners. Through this the school develops a deeper understanding of the constraints the child is under and the effect this has on teaching and learning. The School Management Team (SMT) report that when the UNICEF project started, the SBC was originally drawn from the local community. However, she was offered a permanent position with the Department of Health. This was an opportunity she could not overlook in a community with widespread unemployment and her subsequent departure was a blow to the school.

The concern for security is prevalent – thankful for the fence and gate but mindful of the fact that there is no security guard at the gate during the day. The gate remains locked during the day when educators and learners are inside. If a visitor comes to the school, hooting or shouting is the best option for gaining access. The high levels of anxiety persist despite no incidents of robbery during the day.
The mood is that “this will come” in time. At night a security guard is present. In a previous incident the lock was cut and the security guard attacked. This incident of vandalism has left its mark. The appliances and tools are kept in the strong room and learners and educators alike raise safety as an issue.

Break time brings a meal, play time, bullying and fighting. Educators report that there is less bullying and fighting since the UNICEF Child Friendly Schools project commenced but learners tell a different tale. Tales are told by the learners of fighting between children that seems to be unchecked (and unknown) by the staff.

Despite these difficulties, some assistance has been provided to learners, although the extent of assistance hoped for may not be realised by those in authority. Problems detected in school by educators have been reported and investigated by the SBC. Certainly where the school is concerned, the SMT and educators now have a much better understanding of their children. Examples of deepened understanding include insight into the reasons for the high absenteeism of a boy in Mr Ngwira’s class. This was because of the poverty he lived in – he could not come to school unwashed and with dirty clothes and had no soap at home. Thirty nine orphans and four vulnerable children have been identified in the school. Birth certificates and identity documents have been persistently extracted from the Department of Home Affairs. All of this has allowed the most vulnerable to access much needed government social grants.

These learners have also been referred to the Majola Centre for early morning meals, but others have to wait until ten o’clock as the walk to Majola is too far. Metal plates in hand, all learners queue for their meal provided through the School Nutrition Programme. The gratitude for the meals is evident in their writings on Majola Primary.

The vegetable gardens were started “before UNICEF got here” when a portion of school land was allocated to the community for tending. For some learners gardening is seen as a life-line, as this provides fresh vegetables to take home and a beautiful place to play. For others, gardening is a form of punishment. However, the request for seeds and gardening tools is on the learner’s ‘wish list’. The last six months have seen drought and the result is that previously easy access to water terminated. There has been no rain to fill the tanks. There is a discarded borehole and unfortunately no contracted potted water tanker winding its way over the dry gravel, because the contract with the Zululand Municipality has expired and the school is expected to pay for this precious resource. Of course, the school’s limited financial resources do not allow for this expense, thus an essential requirement for health is not readily available. The SMT looks to outsiders for a solution. The hardy trees donated by UNICEF and planted by learners, thrive despite the drought and heat, providing much needed shade during break times. The learners know that their duty is to water the trees and vegetables first thing in the morning before the school day begins, and they struggle to do this with the limited water supplies available.

A learner claims “our teachers help us when we are sick and take us to the hospital/clinic because they care about our well being”.
The hardy trees donated by UNICEF and planted by learners thrive despite the drought and heat, providing much needed shade during break times.

Lucky, a Grade 7 learner, has a wish list for the school:
- Please can you donate computers
- We need security guards
- Please can we have sports equipment
- Please can we have paint so that we can paint our school
- Please come back again
- Please can we have cleaning things (mops, brooms)
- Please can we have gardening tools (spades)
- Please can we have soccer jerseys.

His request is typical of a number of children in his grade and testimony to the resourcing needs and challenges of this rural farm school.

Nkosinathi, another Grade 7 learner, has the following comments about his school that are typical of many learners the interviewer met:

Things I like about my school:
- I get to learn
- We play
- I like my teachers
- My school is clean.

The CFS model has provided a framework for improvement. The school can use this to monitor their performance across the focus areas. Furthermore the synergy with various Department of Education initiatives has resulted in cross-pollination of the model.

**Challenges faced and solutions generated**

Last year a Grade 5 fifteen year old boy was reported for bullying the younger children. He is no longer at the school. A story was recounted about a group of older boys that waited in the field outside the school grounds for Grade R and Grade 1 learners to leave. The fenced and locked gate had meant access to learners was restricted during school hours. In this instance because they were older boys, walking in groups to and from school, which is often seen as a precautionary measure for learners, did not assist. It required the intervention of
two male teachers who accompanied the younger learners and this reportedly sorted things out. It is thus apparent that the school notes concerns about learner safety and takes care to address these. The question remains, what happens when the problem is perceived to have been addressed, resulting in the withdrawal of the support, and then a recurrence of the same issue occurs? How well will the learners then be protected?

The grounds are litter free today and the classrooms swept and dusted by learners. The learners like this about their school. However, this is in sharp contrast to the ablution facilities. The learners complain about the number of dirty toilets – only eight in total. Although these are equally divided and demarcated for boys and girls, they are used indiscriminately. The two tap points close together near the one tank serve as the only hand washing facilities for learners and educators. The school looks to outsiders to provide assistance here.

The murmur of voices punctuates the warming air. The learners report feeling cared for and supported by educators. Posters hang precariously on the marked walls of a classroom – brightly coloured pre-printed posters alongside themed handmade educator and learner posters. Desks are grouped together in each classroom – a vague attempt to embrace facilitated teaching and learning, and the requirements and methodologies of outcomes-based education, where group work, properly facilitated, is one method to be used.

The HoD reports that team teaching and inclusivity is alive and well. A story of a Grade 6 learner with a colostomy bag serves as an example. Teachers are aware of the learner’s health issues and support the learner. The quarterly meeting between educators and parents scheduled for the 20th March is viewed hopefully by educators – that caregivers are sufficiently concerned about their learners and their progress to come to this meeting.

The new SBC has found access to homes and private lives of learners and their caregivers difficult and frustrating. She complains that “most of the grandparents don’t care. They don’t clean them, or care if they eat or go to the clinic”.

The two tap points close together near the one tank serve as the only hand washing facilities for learners and educators. The school looks to outsiders to provide assistance here.
People are suspicious of her motives and therefore they do not speak to her openly or invite her into their homes.

**UNICEF**

UNICEF is seen as a ray of hope – for bringing much needed resources to the school. The school is grateful for this support and the SBC is seen as a valuable resource and is included in activities. The circles of support have grown. The Department of Social Welfare, South African Police Services and Home Affairs are seen as partners and aiders of care for children. These are definite positive results of the project.

**The future**

The school looks to the resolution of the leadership crisis through the appointment of a permanent principal. This should stabilise the school further. They are positive about the work they have done with respect to the CFS model and determined to continue.

There is thus some evidence that aspects of the Child Friendly Schools project have had a positive impact upon the school, which nevertheless remains challenged, largely by a severe lack of resources, competition with the neighbouring school, lack of district support, in-fighting within the project, and, very significantly, socio-economic constraints.

The close proximity of two other primary schools and the need for the District Office to resolve this issue presses heavily on the SMT and acting principal as the schools compete for learners drawn from the same community.

Much of the feedback from educators and learners focuses on resources, which leaves one wondering about the role of teaching and learning but also how easy it is to implement the Child Friendly School framework in a context of severe resource deprivation. The school (educators and learners alike) is proud of their library (despite its lack of shelving) and of the laboratory with only a few chemicals. These are seen as a beacon of hope – to up the dwindling enrolment numbers and improve the quality of teaching and learning.
THE CASE STUDY OF TREE TOP FARM SCHOOL

**Historical Overview**

Tree Top is a tiny school in a deep rural area in Northern KwaZulu Natal. The school is on a deeply rutted farm track, off the main road and is surrounded by the forests of Mondi and Sappi.

The name of the school, Tree Top, is taken from its previous location. When it originally was founded in 1998 it had two educators who taught the Grade 1 to 7 learners. However, since its founding it has increased in size and has moved sites to its current permanent location. It currently has an enrolment of 166 learners and six teachers.

The school is a Section 14 school, which means that the land it occupies does not belong to the Department of Education but to another party, namely the Catholic Church. The school therefore had to apply for ‘permission to occupy’, and once this was granted, the current classrooms were built.

Up until this year, there was no electricity, but this is now in the process of being installed. There were also no burglar bars and no fences but a collaborative effort between SAPS (South African Police Service), Vodacom and some NGOs means that fencing is also currently being put in. This fencing is being put in with the consent of the Catholic Church since it is a Section 14 school. Any work done on the school requires the consent of the ‘benefactor’. Now cattle (and strangers) will not be able to roam freely through the school grounds.

Teachers in the school have always tried hard to teach well, regardless of the resourcing issues. It seems as though the school is attractive to learners as a number travel a fair distance (by choice) to attend. There is a very low drop-out rate at the school and learners are happy.

Teachers say that the learners are eager to learn and are respectful of them. They want to progress and are disciplined and willing to work. By and large the parents are involved and interested as they attend meetings at the school even though it may be difficult for them.

**The situation, challenges and level of functioning before implementation of CFS**

Because of the poverty-stricken area in which the school is located, all learners are exempt from paying school fees. Resources therefore have to be supplied by the Department of Education.

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2 To respect the privacy of the school, the name of the school has been changed for this case study.
Furthermore because the school is in a deep rural area, access to running water is a challenge. They depend on the catchment tanks and “pray for rain” to fill these.

The six staff share the four classrooms and multigrade teaching is the norm in this farm school. The Grade R classroom, a roughly constructed wood and mud building alongside the kitchen and principal’s small office, acts as a feeder to Grade 1. It is here that learners are prepared for school.

**Changes since the implementation of the CFS model**

On the morning we arrived at Tree Top the learners and educators were sweeping the corridor and classrooms. This is a daily occurrence before teaching and learning commences. Despite the challenges around access to water, the vegetable and flower gardens are watered and tended. The gardens are a relatively new addition and came with the implementation of the CFS model - an attempt to create a beautiful environment that is conducive to teaching and learning. The grass is cut and the edges of the forest are clear. The school regularly approaches the farmers for assistance in cutting the grass and has received help in clearing the forest, from parents and local business. This means that learners can see if someone is coming and run away. Learners have also been advised to travel in groups through the forest for improved security.

Learners have been trained to look at car number plates if they are worried about their safety. They have a first aid kit and are able to assist learners when they are ill or have hurt themselves.

The donation of seeds and tools provided by UNICEF at the commencement of the Child Friendly Schools project in 2005 allowed the school to begin planting, which they did. The meticulous physical environment reflects a level of care that the children frequently commented on. The learners are proud of their “beautiful and clean school” although the school principal adds that “during the winter months we suffer”. Learners carry bottles of water to school during this period. There are plans afoot to approach the Rotary Club for help with a borehole for the school as a longer term solution. A farmer assists when water runs low. This is evidence of a cordial relationship (and school/community linkages) between the school and local community.

Some attempts have been made to break down the stereotypical gender patterns of work and behaviour since the implementation of the CFS model. For example, ways to break down the pattern of boys sitting back and doing nothing and holding back on expressing feelings have been discussed. Learners are encouraged to “feel free” in discussing issues. Girls are being encouraged to take the initiative and think beyond normal jobs and careers and not to think only in terms of working for others. The girls have worked actively in the gardens and the boys have been encouraged to clean classrooms and toilets. These are tasks previously allocated to the opposite gender. Nevertheless, about 60% of the GEMers are still girls.

Learners, in conjunction with the community, continue to raise funds to buy seeds for planting. The vegetable garden, although unfenced so cattle can roam in, is tended by the school based carer (SBC) and parents. The garden is an invaluable
source of assistance to the identified OVCs (Orphans & Vulnerable Children) who are given food parcels and to the school Nutrition Scheme, supported by the Department of Education, which commenced in the late 1990s. The teachers are grateful for this feeding scheme, as learners get a simple meal at ten each school morning.

Through the implementation of Child Friendly Schools (CFS) project in 2005, some of the activities that have been implemented in order to make the school a safer and more caring environment include:

- Developing a policy on HIV/AIDS
- Drafting guidelines on how to deal with OVCs (counselling, how to recognise signs of emotional, physical and sexual abuse, how to cope with living with sick parents).

Through the implementation, the school has identified that most children have at least one parent or grandparent that cares for them and that there are approximately 10 children who require additional care and support. These children were assisted in 2005 with blankets and clothes and receive home visits from the SBC. They are also the recipients of food parcels from the school garden. However, some children still “think that no one cares for them.”

There is a sense of community spirit and involvement as when the school holds parent-teacher meetings, the community is invited and they do attend. When a Grade 1 learner passed away recently, knocked down on the main road in front of learners, the community took the time to comfort the school learners and teachers. Furthermore the SGB (School Governing Body) Chair and Catholic Church representative were there on the day the school was visited to oversee the short listing of a teacher assistant with the school principal. They would return to assist in the interviewing process.

The appointment of a SBC came with the implementation of the CFS model. The school has had a number of SBCs since 2005 when the UNICEF CFS initiative began. The SBC is appointed through another Non-Profit Organisation, MIET (Media in Education Trust), and as such their focus is on schools as centres of care and support and not the broader CFS framework that looks at schools as promoting gender sensitivity, health, teaching & learning, school/community linkages (partnerships), children’s rights and as places of safety and protection.

Since the implementation, and with the help of the SBC, the school has developed good partnerships with the Department of Health, the police and the Department of Social Development. According to the principal, every month the school is “attended by various departments” – to immunise learners, to address them on various issues, to assist with accessing social grants and to counsel.

The jungle gym and roughly constructed soccer posts serve as evidence of awareness amongst educators that a child needs dedicated time for age-appropriate play. The learners are proud of their sports fields.

The GEM (Girls’ Education Movement) Club started when the Child Friendly Schools project was implemented in 2005 and draws its members from the girls
and boys at Tree Top. The UNICEF CFS champion, Ms Biyela, notes that they purposely chose learners from the different villages in the surrounding community to ensure that the outcomes – a health promoting, gender sensitive, rights-based, safe, protected and secure school that provided quality education and had good school/community linkages – would be easily implemented.

From Grade 4, learners volunteer as members of the GEM club. Their enthusiasm and commitment is evident in the fund-raising activities they engage in and the action plan developed. The GEMers I met, liked the idea of “uplifting the school” and “working in a team with teachers” and assisting where required. The idea of ownership has taken hold. The previous year they raised R500 and were responsible for the purchase and installation of a school board on the main road. This year they want to improve the principal’s small but neat office.

The school has been successful in persuading parents to send their children to school at school going age. Learning aids are neatly placed on all the classroom walls – pre-printed and hand drawn – and reflect a focus on teaching and learning. The library houses books and reading is an important focus at the school. There are scheduled times in the timetable and homework reading is also given. The school is determined to ensure that the levels of literacy in the local community are improved.

No windows appear to be broken, and both learners and teachers are working hard in the classrooms. The school is very proud of their certificate of service excellence and recognition for cleanliness.

Signs requesting visitors to leave weapons outside and that no alcohol or drugs are permitted on school premises are prominently displayed. However, despite these signs learners report that some pupils carry “sharp objects” (weapons) and “carry and use drugs during school hours”. Furthermore, the bullying reported by a learner, is in sharp contrast to the the belief held by educators around this issue. However the extent of the problem is not known. As far as safety and security from outsiders is concerned, although an anxiety persists amongst all those the interviewer met, there has only been one incident of vandalism in three years.
The general feeling is that this act was not perpetrated by someone from the community.

The learners report that one of the things they like about their school is that corporal punishment “has come to an end”. In discussion with educators, they report talking to learners, allocating the cleaning of classrooms to a single learner or keeping them behind during break time so they cannot go to play. However the principal also acknowledges that this is “not satisfactory as learners come to school on an empty stomach”. What is required from educators is support in terms of alternative forms of disciplining that can be adopted.

The implementation of the Child Friendly Schools project took place in 2005. Teachers attended a workshop and came back to the school to share their learnings with others. The general feeling is that the workshops assisted the school as learners know their rights. They have been told by educators that they should “not just keep quiet”.

Although not clearly articulated by the educators or learners, the CFS model has provided a framework for school improvement, with clear focus areas that may have been lacking in the past.

**Challenges faced and solutions generated**

Only three clean and neat toilets service the school. The principal notes that there has been a marked improvement in the cleanliness of these toilets since the GEM Club was founded. As a result of the limited number of toilets, some learners who tire of standing in the long queues use the bushes around the school, which is neither safe nor hygienic.

One of the current difficulties is that the current SBC is not from the local area. This has made it difficult for her to cater for the needs of the people, and the community also tend to hide things from this ‘outsider’. It has therefore made the identification of those who needed assistance, such as accessing grants, a challenge.

Furthermore, her task is to ensure that those who do receive grants are well cared for. The difficulty is that history of the CFS model and implementation is unknown to her. She arrived after the breakdown in the relationship between UNICEF and MIET. Thus the memory of work done in the past is lost.
Attempts to invite the Department of Home Affairs to the school, have failed. A special meeting was arranged with the Department of Home Affairs in order to obtain birth certificates and identity documents. The attendees sat and waited until 1 pm. No one from Home Affairs arrived despite the school receiving confirmation from them. Only approximately 20% of the learners still need to get their birth certificates. This document is essential if caregivers wish to access social grants for children. Many have accessed these grants, however an educator reports that some “parents are negligent” in the use of the grants.

When two learners were raped by another learner, the matter was reported to the District office and further investigations and action has been taken since then. The school was shocked by this event and the response was one of caring. However, the educators also report that children find it difficult to disclose physical and sexual abuse, especially if it involves family members. In the face of further investigation by the school and/or SBC the “family closes ranks”.

Value of UNICEF support

The support received from UNICEF has been both practical and theoretical. The practical support, through the provision of seeds, tools and blankets, has assisted the school to create a beautiful environment that reflects the ethos of the school, which is one of care. The blankets for OVCs were received with gratitude and the picnic and trip to a hotel was seen as an act of “love” for these learners. The excitement this generated can still be felt in discussion with educators.

The theoretical support consisted of two workshops held at the beginning of the implementation, which laid the seeds for the CFS model. The educators, who attended these workshops, cascaded their learnings and insights to the broader school community and thus informed and inspired the educators and learners.

The school is eager to improve and ensure that the CFS model is implemented to the required standards.

The view of the future

The Child Friendly School implementation has provided the learners, educators, parents and other school partners with a framework for improvement. This anxiety to improve is evident in discussions with the principal. The school’s eagerness to do better gets under your skin. They have embraced the focus areas of CFS model, with the support of the Department of Education and the SBC. The resource constraints cannot be ignored, such as access to water, sufficient classrooms and ablution facilities, yet the principal and the broader school community have remained solution focused.

They have established partnerships with organisations, instilled a sense of care and pride by ensuring that the grounds, classrooms and learners are well kept and focused on teaching and learning. Despite their small size, they are determined to “provide equal opportunities to all our learners to be marketable citizens through hard work”.

3 This is the mission statement for the school.
THE CASE STUDY OF ZWARTSPRUIT COMBINED SCHOOL

Historical Overview

Zwartspruit Combined is a farm school in the Paulpietersburg Circuit in Northern KwaZulu Natal. The learners are drawn from the surrounding area. Although situated next to a factory, amidst Mondi & Sappi forests, access to the school is a challenge as the dirt road is rutted and potholed.

The current principal, Mr TW Tshabalala, was appointed in November 2005 after a protracted dispute and consequent hiatus after the previous principal had passed away in November 2002.

A burning topic of conversation is that Zwartspruit Combined is a Section 14 school. This means that the school is situated on private property and requires the consent of the land owner before any changes to the infrastructure are made. The required signatures for permission to occupy have not been received and as such the school is in limbo – dependent on the good will of the farmer whose land they occupy.

The Grade 12 pass rate has historically been poor, although recent years have seen a marked improvement in this area as educators and learners focus on teaching and learning.

Although the school is unfenced and there is no security guard, something frequently commented on by educators and learners alike, the level of vandalism is low. This means that the school equipment, which includes computers and a TV, has been safe until the present. However there are comments that “people wander through the school”. Despite this, learners “feel safe” as no weapons or alcohol are permitted on school premises.

The situation, challenges and level of functioning before implementation of CFS

Access to the school is along a rutted dirt and gravel road. This road becomes impassable when there is rain, and the transport combis cannot traverse the road. This means that learners and educators cannot get to school in periods of heavy rain. Distance is regularly discussed as a challenge for the learners and educators (barring the four educators who still live on the school site).

Often, learners are tired when they come to school, ill-prepared for the day ahead – unfed, with insufficient sleep and their homework incomplete or not done at all.

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4 To respect the privacy of the school, the name of the school has been changed for this case study.
Mr TW Tshabalala openly discusses the problems that have arisen as a result of being a Section 14 school. These problems are partly as a result of his own candidly admitted naïveté. The current conflict between the school and the farm owner was precipitated when the principal went ahead with plans to paint the school without consulting the farmer or his agent. As a result, the school was nearly closed down, and the farmer ‘confiscated’ the school soccer field in response to this perceived misdemeanour. Despite this the school continues to have soccer, netball and athletics and learners are encouraged by educators to support their team when playing matches against other schools.

**Changes since the implementation of the CFS model**

The Code of Conduct or “rules” as learners refer to them, sets out what is not permitted – no smoking, no drinking of alcohol, no weapons, no carrying of sharp objects are allowed on school property. The consequences for infringing these rules is clear – suspension or expulsion depending on the outcome of the disciplinary hearing. Safety signs are prominently displayed that reinforce this practice. These signs were reportedly put up by the GEMers (Girls’ Education Movement Club that started with the implementation of the UNICEF Child Friendly Schools model). The GEMers assist with safety and security by checking that windows are closed and doors are locked at the end of a school day.

Yet, despite the Code of Conduct that stipulates that bullying and fighting is not permitted, students do get drawn in. The educators explain however, that the establishment of the GEM club has resulted in a decrease in the amount of bullying amongst learners as learners now intervene. However, perhaps a contributing factor to the infringement is that educators report that this Code of Conduct was not developed with learners. Thus learners do not own the “rules” of their school.

The School Based Carer (SBC), Ms Mbatha, assists the school in ensuring that the identified OVCs (Orphans & Vulnerable Children) receive a certain level of care. The SBC arrived with the implementation of the CFS model and their role was to support the school in the implementation. The result is that there are currently over 160 identified OVCs. She does this by organising visits to the school from the Department of Home Affairs and Department of Social Development. Numerous visits have been organised since the commencement of the CFS model in 2005. These visits are communicated to caregivers who are provided with the opportunity to apply for birth certificates and identity documents. This has seen an improvement in the number of children who have birth certificates. Previously, most of the learners did not have these documents, but now there are less than 40% of learners who still need to obtain them. Through obtaining birth certificates, qualifying children can access government social support grants.

The GEMers also encourage the development of a supportive rather than an abusive attitude towards OVCs from fellow learners.

The fruit and vegetable garden at the far end of the school acts as an important resource for the nutrition programme introduced by the Department of Education and also for identified OVCs. This garden commenced with the CFS model and its
focus on health promoting schools. On occasion identified OVCs are provided with food parcels from the school garden. The current challenge is to keep the goats out as there is no fence. A dispute between the farmer and the school has meant that none can be built at present.

An office acts as a kitchen and storeroom for the Departmental Nutrition scheme. Although not ideal, the school has still not received permission to occupy further premises from the farmer and they must therefore make do. At least once a day the younger learners receive a simple meal.

The principal reports that the drop-out rate has decreased since the implementation of the CFS model. The evidence is in the figures reported – from 160 learners to 49 learners last year. Much of this success has been ascribed to UNICEF. Perhaps it might be fairer to ascribe it to the school and the educators who have, as a result of input on CFS, focused their attention on retaining learners and following up on absenteeism. The level of care for learners is demonstrated in the home visits by educators and learners alike. The GEMers report visiting and taking homework to absent learners. Through this focus on learner retention, absent learners are retained within the school community and are less likely to fall by the way.

Ms Mbatha, the SBC, also visits children at home – to see where and how they live – investigates concerns and ensures that the appropriate departments are involved in follow up. The example provided was of a suspected rape. The SBC acted as a co-ordinator and liaison between the SAPS and Department of Social Development in ensuring that the matter was investigated and resolved. The school was grateful for this level of support for them and the learner.

A large number of learners communicated the “care” they feel from the educators and the respect for learner rights. However there is a conflict that arises in practice. The care that learners experience is evident in the stories they tell of home visits, trips to the clinic when sick, clothes and food received from educators and transport home late at night. The educators report that since the implementation of the Child Friendly Schools model they are more aware of the role that the school plays as a centre for care and support. The assistance they receive from the School Based Carer (SBC) reinforces this but also means that other areas of the CFS have been overlooked.
Learners repeatedly said that teachers are “dedicated to their work”, “passionate about what they do” and “help us when there are things we don’t understand” – especially the English, Physics, Mathematics and isiZulu teachers. For one learner this was summed up in a simple sentence, “they inspire me to be successful”. Testimony to the commitment to teaching and learning that is corroborated by the growing number of learners who attend Zwartspruit Combined and that parents choose for learners to travel such far distances to be educated. This is in stark contrast to the disrespect stated by others who reply that some teachers “use foul language”, “don’t respect us and shout at us. When we don’t understand something they call us names”. Thus teachers act as role-models – good and bad.

Challenges faced and solutions generated

The bell rings at 07h35 and by this time only one third of the 516 learners at Zwartspruit Combined have arrived for the commencement of the school day. Learners live far away and many are transported by van whilst others commute on foot or by bicycle. However, learners report having to traverse long distances on foot due to the transport problems – anything from three to sixteen kilometres in a single journey. These distances are “dangerous and the result is that some learners have been sexually abused” en route. Yet learners do not accompany one another.

By nine o’clock 90 – 95% of learners drift in. In order to deal with this, many educators use the first period for “remedial teaching”. However, this is not ideal. The very learners who may require assistance do not receive it, as the distances they travel (and work allocated to them at home) do not permit them to complete their school homework.

The responsibility and concern to “produce children that can find work and some skill to get work and improve” is openly discussed by educators. At the age of 16, a number of learners leave school to go to work. Most of the learners who start high school do not complete it. Educators report that parents believe that “if you can read and write you are educated” and it is therefore time for learners to contribute financially to the family coffers. Many learners go to “work at the factory next to the school” or “look after the cattle” or “go back to the forest” where the school education they received is purportedly unused. The educators report that “no single learner goes to a tertiary …” The carrot of further education, which could act as a motivator to Grade 12 learners, is unavailable (due to financial constraints and reported attitudes to further education on the part of parents). The educators believe that if learners had access to funding for tertiary education, more would stay in school.

The high rate of pregnancy is openly reported amongst educators and learners. The factory next door is identified as a contributor with workers “proposing” to female learners. For many young girls marriage is described as a “way out”. “If you can have a husband … if you get a boyfriend … go and stay with them without a bride price, without lobola”. These young girls do not finish school. In the previous year there were 26 pregnancies. Many of these learners come back to school. However some parents do not allow this – girls are expected to stay at
home and care for their children. GEMers talk to learners about this and encourage girls to remain in school.

Many learners are in the habit of disappearing to the country store nearby to play on the jukebox. The recently opened tavern at the store creates concern amongst the educators as this is where learners ‘disappear’ during the day. The principal wrote a letter of complaint but the tavern remains open during school hours.

The school also faced difficulties with accessing water when the farm owner decided to cut the pipe. The principal negotiated with the factory and finally got permission to use their borehole. Therefore the garden is watered and the school is neat and tidy. The comments from educators are that the UNICEF GEM club has meant that learners “own the school”. The learners take responsibility for ensuring that the school and toilets are clean. There is however a need to improve the toilets at the school but agreement has not yet been reached. The farmer has said “Don’t forget that you are only here because I care about the education of the learners.” The conflict between the school and farmer has resulted in the farmer giving the resident teachers notice. There are four teachers that are still accommodated in the school cottages as they cannot get accommodation in the town and their own homes are rather far away. It is difficult to get educators in rural areas – something that is widely acknowledged within the Department of Education. This is one of the motivators for the school to continue to abide by the wishes of the farmer.

The school has thought of Saturday classes as it is not possible to add an extra hour to the school day due to the transport and distance issues. This was seen as a solution to the 50% Grade 12 pass rate that was achieved the previous year. This result was in marked contrast to the previous year where there was a 76% Grade 12 pass rate. The school negotiated with the transporters, parents and learners. The principal was pleased with the turn-out as only one Grade 12 learner was absent. These classes are seen as an important part of the school’s improvement strategy in terms of teaching and learning and attendance is imperative if the targets set are to be achieved.

A challenge to providing quality education is in persuading parents to allow learners to commence school at the appropriate school going age. The underlying issue is that these learners have to walk long distances to get to school – a test for little legs across potentially unsafe terrain. Therefore many remain at home until they are eight or nine years old. This is not ideal as learners of this age are at a different developmental phase as compared to their Grade 1 class mates of six and seven years. Furthermore the multi-grade classrooms means educators must give learners work that is relevant and at “their level of capability”. This is no easy task when there are over seventy learners between the age of six and nine in a single multi-grade classroom. The Junior Primary HOD indicates that they “network with other schools and within the school with other educators to solve problems” that arise through multi-grade teaching (amongst other things). This level of support can only improve the quality of teaching and learning as educators are open to acknowledging problems and developing solutions to them. This is supported by
the principal, who acknowledges mistakes he has made regarding his dealings with the farmer. Such reflection and accountability is heartening.

The role of the SGB in monitoring school performance and developing solutions to problems needs to be addressed if the school is to engage in further meaningful improvement. By developing these partnerships with parents, the solutions generated are owned by all parties. It seems as though Zwartspruit Combined is a school that is doing some things well, but that there are areas of inconsistency and difficulty.

**UNICEF**

The distances and challenges of being a rural Section 14 school have not prevented Zwartspruit Combined from embracing the Child Friendly Schools model. The school sees the School Based Carer that was appointed at the commencement of the CFS model as a UNICEF representative. Their focus on schools as a centre of care and support, health promotion and safety areas dominate and are areas of success. The educators and learners have embraced the value of “care”. The tangible support the school received from the SBC has been an important factor here. Imagine what else could be done with this level of support to ensure that all aspects of the CFS model are implemented – rights based, school/community linkages and gender sensitive.

**The future**

The issues with the farmer need to be resolved urgently as the temperature of the school/farmer relationship dictates events at the school. A more cohesive and systematic emphasis on all aspects of the CFS framework needs to be applied as there is considerable progress in some aspects, such as the peer based and SBC support. Yet health issues and nutrition issues, such as a regular, uninterrupted supply of water and adequate nutrition, remain a concern. Safety also needs to be addressed – this would be an outcome of the resolution of issues with the farmer, thus enabling the desired and required fence to be erected. Broader societal issues, such as parental attitudes towards learning, and the high pregnancy rate for girls, are rather more complex.
THE CASE STUDY OF H MANTSHINGA COMBINED SCHOOL

Historical Overview

H Mantshinga is located in Dumbe, a township of Paulpietersburg in Northern KwaZulu Natal. The school has grown since its early days in 1999 as a primary school with only 230 learners. Today it is a combined school from Grade 1 to Grade 12 and boasts approximately 1400 learners.

It has “squatted” in various locations and finally the school convinced local Dumbe Councillors to provide them with a permanent home. Despite the prefabricated buildings that house many of the learners – hot in summer and cold in winter – the commitment and motivation of staff and learners remains. The construction of permanent classrooms and two workshops has been received with gratitude. These were the result of a generous donation by British Telecommunications, introduced to the school by UNICEF.

The situation, challenges and level of functioning before implementation of CFS

The UNICEF champions, led by the school principal, Mr Zulu and deputy principal, Mrs Mbatha, are not dismissive of the contextual realities at H. Mantshinga. The challenges are real – poverty, HIV/AIDS and child-headed households, unemployment, increasing alcohol and drug related problems – but H. Mantshinga Combined remains learner and solution focused and action orientated.

There is a belief that regardless of what position you occupy in the school you can make a difference! H. Mantshinga Combined acts as a testimony of what can be achieved despite adverse socio-economic circumstances, a poor community and an under resourced school with little access to sustainable additional sources of income, when the leadership at the school (which includes educators and learners who are adopting a leadership role and modeling positive behaviour) reaches out to the community in a respectful way to establish partnerships that are mutually beneficial.

Changes since the implementation of the CFS model

The implementation of the Child Friendly School project is viewed as complementary to what the school and Department of Education are trying to achieve and has been effective in managing learners according to the SMT (School Management Team). The SMT and school are quick to praise their own efforts and also to acknowledge areas for improvement. Partnerships are seen as a key to success – with parents, learners, educators, the District office, other government departments, UNICEF and the community. The workshops offered by the service provider at the beginning of the CFS project attended by educators and learners have been taken to heart.
H. Mantshinga did not wait or stand on ceremony when the CFS model was introduced to them. They identified the issues that needed to be worked on and developed action plans and solutions, despite the difficult context. This year the Action Plan drawn up by GEMers focuses on OVCs, late coming and drugs and the partners that can assist here, namely GEMers, educators, Social Development, SAPS, rehabilitated drug users etc. It is clear that the CFS model is being implemented and is owned by the school.

Another example of learner involvement and empowerment is that the learner code of conduct that sets and governs standards of behaviour, was developed by learners. The RCL President, a girl and an ardent GEMer member and supporter, indicated that learners owned the process of developing the Code of Conduct and it was ratified by the SMT and SGB once complete. In this way learners know the boundaries within which they operate – and they set them! The SMT displays confidence in the student leadership and provides opportunity for the RCL to address learners without educators. The result of such involvement, properly organised, is improved behaviour and a co-operative, more disciplined environment.

The school is fenced off from the surrounding houses and dirt road. Care is taken to ensure that the classrooms and the gate are locked at the end of the school day. The community owns the school and watches over it – no incidents of vandalism or theft occur over the holidays and anything untoward is reported to the principal. The learners and educators feel safe, although a lone learner voice speaks of the need for policies on violence to help with “students that take drugs in our school”. Perhaps this is more of a problem than is reported and explains why the school and the GEMers are focusing on the issue this year.

The cherry on the top for many is that this year no one has been required to pay school fees. Pride in the school is evident regardless of whom you speak to at H. Mantshinga. Together with this self-evident pride, a dominant aspect of the school’s culture is what learners call “respect”. Also palpable to the researcher was the observation of a problem-solving approach to school issues and challenges that goes beyond the curriculum. The 100% Grade 12 pass rate is testimony to a strong focus on teaching and learning despite the prefabricated classrooms and the educators’ strike of the previous year. When asked about this performance, the principal explains that educators, parents and learners are motivated – by the time the strike arrived, the Grade 12 syllabus was complete and learners were left with revision. The day of the school visit was a chance to celebrate the 100% Grade 12 pass rate achievement and the large number of distinctions attained by the matriculation candidates. The planned celebration was a party that was scheduled for 12h30 to acknowledge all stakeholders who contributed to this achievement. This included community members and is testament to partnerships forged between the school and the local community.

The school day unfolds in an orderly and focused manner despite the anticipated party. On walking around the school, it is obvious that learners and teachers are
focused on the task at hand, which is teaching and learning. Many learners equate their school with a university because of the quality of teaching and learning that they feel they receive. According to learners, the “teachers teach”, “explain until all learners understand” and learners are not permitted to wander around the school during lessons. The ethos of pastoral care and professionalism evinced by educators was noted time and again in the written feedback provided by learners and in the way in which the SMT talks about learners. Learners appear to be able to raise all manner of issues with educators, especially with Mrs Mbatha, the deputy principal and UNICEF CFS champion. The focus is consistently on the learner and what can be done for him or her.

Mr Zulu indicated that when he first came to H. Mantshinga the staff gathered to discuss the expectations of learners, parents and the community of the school and of educators. This type of discussion and agreement set the foundation for a focus on teaching and learning. It clearly communicated to the learning community what educators were responsible for. In turn the community responded by taking responsibility as parents and learners. The meetings between parents/caregivers and educators are considered successful – with a remarkable record of nearly 100% attendance. This is especially true for Grade 12 learners where the school communicates what is required and expected from all parties – no stakeholder is left off the list! The idea of partnerships is cemented through these types of activities where everyone takes responsibility and is accountable for their actions. Again, there is evidence that the leadership of the school understands the significance and mutual benefits of a reciprocal relationship between the school and its community. Whereas this is one of the underpinning premises of South African educational legislation, it is not always achieved.

The school does not practise corporal punishment. This decision was taken in 2001 in conjunction with the community. Rather, alternative discipline options are explored – like gardening. Furthermore there seem to be few complaints of discipline problems – those that were mentioned were late comers, truancy, fighting, stealing and vandalism – and the sense is that these would be dealt with in a fair and just manner through consultation with the RCL (Representative Council of Learners), parents and if necessary, the SGB. This problem solving approach is evident in the management of the school. A task team was put together to advise and develop solutions to the increasing late coming problem. The team was scheduled to report back on the following Monday. Secondly, the SAPS (South African Police Service) addressed learners on issues of alcohol and drug abuse and more is planned for the remainder of the school year. Although everyone hastens to add that this is not currently a problem at H. Mantshinga but is reportedly a significant problem at another local school. The GEMers are developing songs, poems and plays around the issue for the school. The motto seems to be “prevention is better than cure”.

The principal, Mr Zulu, is described as “the best of the best” although contextually “harsh” in dealing with late-coming, enforcing the wearing of school uniform and in dealing with unacceptable behaviour. One learner explained that if learners are late due to their public transport being late – an issue considered to be beyond
their control – Mr Zulu would understand this and would subsequently take action with the transport provider. However, if local learners were late he would be less understanding. Thus, it is evident that the type of leadership demonstrated by Mr Zulu takes into account the different realities and complexities of managing the challenges that arise so that a blanket response is tempered by the context. It appears that Mr Zulu understands and applies the concepts of situational leadership successfully in his school.

The positive ambience of the school is reinforced by statements such as, “all learners are seen as equal – no one is seen as superior to the other.” Regardless of gender, all are apparently responsible for cleanliness. The classrooms are swept – a task assigned to both boys and girls – and the toilets are “always clean”. However that Friday, no boys could be seen cleaning or picking up litter. This is one example where it was not possible to verify alignment between assertions and observed fact.

The GEM Club is responsible for ensuring that the environment is clean. Perhaps this is partly why other learners refer to them as “cleaners” and “GERMS” – a derogatory term in opposition to the culture of respect the school is trying to inculcate in learners. In contrast to this view, other learners see GEMers as a source of inspiration and optimism. They “really guide us because ... easier to talk to someone who is your own age ... you open your heart and don’t feel shame ... they help you to get rid of your problem”. However, the challenge for the school is for this culture of respect to infiltrate the entire school so that respect for each other and the environment is not left only to the approximately 100 GEMers and their educators.

The CFS model has dovetailed with the school’s quest for improvement and provided them with a framework in which to work that requires them to go beyond the curriculum. The very real challenge of poor infrastructure – prefab classrooms – has been addressed through the introduction of an external partner, British Telecommunications.

The CFS model has also provided all school stakeholders with the opportunity to focus their efforts. No one spoken to, had anything negative to say about the model and implementation of it, at H. Mantshinga.
The challenge expressed by educators is that many learners come to school ill-prepared for the school day – they are hungry.

Challenges faced and solutions generated

The distinct impression one is left with, when walking away from an interview or encounter, is that teaching is an act of service. The focus on teaching and learning can be heard through the ebb and flow of voices before the ten o’clock break, that filters through to the Administration Block of roughly plastered, unpainted walls, roofed over, but with no ceilings to act as a buffer from the extremes of heat and cold. Although the overall atmosphere in the school is healthy and happy, the school environs could do with some attention and smartening up. For example, there are very few posters (hand drawn or otherwise) on the classroom walls. This is clearly an area for improvement in terms of teaching and learning in the future, as appropriate visual material that relates to the curriculum can stimulate ideas, reinforce concepts and remind learners and teachers of work covered.

In sharp contrast to the emphasis on teaching and learning, the focus on play, a component of a health promoting school, appears to be limited – be it soccer or netball to “exercise our bodies”. For some learners, the strong focus on academics has not provided them with an opportunity to display their talents, whilst others travel every day to come to H. Mantshinga for that very purpose. An attempt to bring more balance into the school’s activities by considering the importance of co-curricular activities can only enhance and improve an already solid foundation, as extending activities to include more emphasis on sports and culture need not necessarily diminish the focus on academic achievement, but complement it.

After the lunch break, papers and plastic lie strewn over the school grounds. The GEMers (Girls’ Education Movement Club that started as a direct consequence of the implementation of CFS in schools) are responsible for picking up the litter left by fellow learners.

The challenge expressed by educators is that many learners come to school ill-prepared for the school day – they are hungry. This school does not have a nutrition and feeding scheme facilitated through the Department of Education. The educators report this in frustrated tones. The Departmental qualifying criteria for feeding scheme schools seem incomprehensible and inadequate! At one point educators were collecting money to provide soup and bread but the question they kept asking themselves is, “Can we sustain this?” They could not, however the expectations of the community and the children are felt. The school is lobbying
the Department of Education to introduce the feeding scheme at H. Mantshinga. The motivation is that the surrounding community is poor, with high levels of unemployment.

The vegetable garden, created and maintained by GEMers does assist here, although the space is small. The children who are “orphans and some who are neglected by their families” are reportedly helped by the GEMers’ vegetable garden. However, the vegetable garden is not the only work that GEMers do. They “give them clothes to wear” and conduct dramas “to show that life is full of challenges … you must face them whatever it takes”. The sense one has in talking to GEMers is that they have personal experience of many of the challenges faced by H. Mantshinga learners.

Once the new buildings are complete, the intention is to relocate the vegetable garden and make it larger in order for identified learners to receive tangible assistance. The garden is also a place of discipline – one of the ways that learners deal with the consequences of inappropriate actions.

The OVCs (orphans and vulnerable children) are identified in each grade with the help of educators and GEMers. The lists are kept by the deputy principal and the names forwarded to the SBC (School Based Carer) and Department of Social Development. However, as a GEMer reported, “some kids don’t like to show themselves”. Furthermore the frustration around the collection of OVC names mounts each year. The completion of required forms for learners to access grants is obstructed by a Department of Home Affairs that does not provide the necessary birth certificates and identity documents. The twice yearly visits organised through the school for the registration of learners is an important part of the process and enables identified learners to access grants. The follow up and collection of additional evidence is time consuming and frustrating. The result is that some learners fall through the cracks. The grant does not always reach the identified and neediest of children. Problems that arise include family in-fighting about who should collect the grant; or the grant being used for funding a more extravagant lifestyle instead of attending to basic and sustainable needs of the child. Alternatively, the grant is insufficient for the many it is required to support – the unemployed caregiver and their family.

The workshops attended through the service provider and the assistance received have been embraced by H. Mantshinga. The introduction of an overseas funder by UNICEF, British Telecommunications, and the assistance that the school is consequently receiving, has buoyed already high spirits. This assistance is received with gratitude for work achieved to date (and work to be done in the future).

The future

Everyone you speak to sees the school as “going places” and as a “shining star”. The SMT and educators are aware of the challenges they face and see the building of permanent classrooms as a positive step. All are committed to ensuring that the 100% pass rate and large number of distinctions achieved the previous year are improved upon.
THE CASE STUDY OF MOSHE HIGH SCHOOL

Historical Overview

The approximately 1800 learners of Moshe\(^5\) High, a peri-urban school in Newtown A, Inanda, Durban, drift along the dirt road to the school, which is approximately one kilometre from the police station.

The school day starts with assembly at 07h45. The new school hall – a roofed structure with no walls and a hard-packed sand floor – is lined with learners jostling for position whilst some educators congregate on one side. Others remain in the staff room, awaiting the hum of voices that signals the start of classes. A handful of latecomers congregate outside the school gate to be dealt with after assembly. The wind carries the voice of the deputy principal away. The gist of his words is that more of the recently repaired windows have been broken. The funds allocated for other things will be used to fix these and the culprits will be found. Learners laugh nervously at a story of a learner who broke windows the previous year and moved to another local school. The people in authority are aware and the consequences of his action will be felt even though he has not returned to Moshe High. Perhaps he is scared to return?

One teacher jokingly reports that when she came to the school in the 1990s she was told, “In that school you have to run … Do you have takkies?” The history of the school is marked by vandalism, hooliganism, poor academic performance and learners’ active participation in the political struggle prior to the 1994 democratic elections epitomised in the slogan, “Freedom Now. Education Later.” Unfortunately it has not proved to be a simple task to shift learners (and staff) from an activist stance to the more structured task of settling down to teaching and learning. This is a real pity for learners who are now doubly disadvantaging themselves. Whereas learners and teachers previously involved in the struggle could look forward to an ultimate gain for their efforts, now the learners, who are only attending school in a desultory and uncommitted fashion, are simply excluding themselves from the possibility of self-improvement and economic and social progress through education. However, it is evident that in this school, the shift has begun.

The situation, challenges and level of functioning before implementation of CFS

That safety is often spoken of is not surprising and reflects the broader context of physical and sexual violence that educators and learners experience. Reports of rape, sexual harassment, violence and theft on the way to and from school and “hooligans” and tsotsis who loiter outside the school gate so they could take their pick of potential victims, was repeatedly mentioned.

\(^5\) To respect the privacy of the school, the name of the school has been changed for this case study.
Furthermore, teenage pregnancy and HIV/AIDS are an ongoing challenge for the school.

The culture of teaching and learning, an underlying premise of South African educational legislation, has been a battle to inculcate and this battle continues. According to educators, this new teaching and learning culture and a safer school – fenced, guarded and with security cameras – has happened since the current school principal took over the role. The pass rate has increased since 1997. The Grade 12 pass rate of 42% in 1997 has improved to over 70% latterly. The introduction of HODs (and their inclusion in the School Management Team) and focus on developing School Governing Bodies (SGBs) is seen as assisting here with a wider leadership working towards a common goal, namely teaching and learning. However, educators report that the role of the SGB in teaching and learning is an area for improvement through the development of work and training plans for staff, a better understanding of the problems through analysis of readily available data and a more solution-focused approach to the challenges that arise.

**Changes since the implementation of the CFS model**

Despite the school’s proximity to the police station, a concern for safety is prevalent amongst educators and learners alike. The school gate is locked all day and staffed by a security guard day and night, who is elected by, and appointed from, the local community. The school believes that a sense of community ownership of the school will result from this.

The installation of cameras after the theft of the computers has meant educators and learners feel more secure on the school premises and that theft is no longer such an issue. The staff report that they leave handbags and valuables in the staff room. All learners now “know the way to behave”, and that to “steal is a crime and the consequences of that”. So some improvement in resourcing and therefore, monitoring, has assisted in creating a safer ambience.

The sentiment is optimistic as building a real school/community partnership takes time and sustained effort. Considering that safety and security are often raised, it makes sense that this was the focus, alongside gender, in the implementation at Moshe High.

The focus on Child Friendly Schools has brought about conversations between learners and educators around gender and safety that had not been prevalent previously. A number of learners and staff who were interviewed stated that “the programme worked for us”. As part of the CFS implementation, educators moved from class to class at break time talking to learners, requesting learners to come forward and discuss issues. A box was left in each classroom, so that learners could write down problems anonymously and these would be discussed and solutions provided to the class. Through this learners “came close” to educators. A successful intervention through partnering with the South African Police Service (SAPS) was repeatedly mentioned by educators and learners alike. Mrs Nsele, the UNICEF champion and “engineer”, went from class to class with the SAPS who advised learners on what to do when raped. (That this was the tenor of the
discussions, points to the endemic gender-based violence in the area – prevention measures are not the focus.) SAPS also addressed learners on their rights and responsibilities. As a result, learners came forward and confided in members of the GEM committee.

These discussions translated into action. This has assisted in ensuring the safety of learners – learners look out for one another as “brothers and sisters”; they walk in groups and “protect one another” so no one harasses them; they demonstrate “self control” in terms of pregnancy; they intervene. Current GEMers have been helped by other GEMers and have felt motivated to get involved as a result of this. Whereas previously learners would shy away from intervening, the GEMers do so before teacher intervention is required. This growth in confidence amongst GEMers in managing problems – rape, physical abuse by family/boyfriends, being an orphan, pregnancy – and developing solutions has meant that GEMers report to feeling control in and over their lives. Learners find it easier to talk to peers although there is no privacy – learners stand to one side to discuss issues but “people look … stare … gossip”. This is corroborated by educators. A local Youth Centre where older counsellors are available acts as an important resource. Here counsellors are “quiet and keep secrets”. The synergy between the various initiatives – those within the school, such as the GEM Club, and those outside the school, such as the Youth Centre – goes some way towards creating a more supportive, safer environment within a broadly dysfunctional community crippled by poor socio-economic conditions.

However, this involvement is not always easy for GEMers. They report that when they visit learners at home, some parents are very aggressive. GEMers stated that the response to their visits includes scolding and shouting out questions such as “Who do you think you are?” This points to the fact that people in the community possibly feel vulnerable and exposed, when what they consider to be family matters are ‘exposed’ in this manner. It may also evoke cultural norms where age is a determinant of authority, with parents struggling with having to account to a young person, no matter how tactfully they are approached. The GEMers say that

Learners find it easier to talk to peers although there is no privacy – learners stand to one side to discuss issues but “people look ... stare ... gossip”.

they try to remain calm as the aim is often to get learners with problems back into school. When things get really tough, Mrs Nsele, the UNICEF “engineer”, is there to step in and assist. However, the visiting of learners to follow-up on absenteeism or drop-outs is not common practice amongst educators. GEMers provide Mrs Nsele with the names of learners who need help. Her commitment and warmth is felt. However, one can’t help wondering what would happen if she left Moshe High. Mrs Nsele’s key role points to the need for a reliable and committed internal ‘project champion’ in projects of this kind, for the possibility of any hope of sustainability. Despite the beginnings of a process and structures to assist OVCs, the efforts are not yet supported by a systemic approach within the school. An example of this is although the names of OVCs are known, educators report that no school-based resource register is available in terms of referral, nor are there regular meetings with relevant stakeholders. Thus, potential school partners who could act as a resource are not tapped into.

Teenage pregnancy continues to be a problem. The number of pregnant learners remains constant despite discussion around the issue and HIV/AIDS, with approximately 30 learners falling pregnant a year. What has changed, however, is that prior to the implementation of CFS many of these learners would have been lost to the school system once they had delivered their babies. Now girls “continue coming to school. They deliver and they come back”.

The 30 GEMers (both girls and boys) used to meet every Thursday. This was an opportunity to discuss problems encountered and how to assist and resolve problems in an active way (in the form of dramas constructed around themes such as a pregnant girl, a party girl, an orphan, a child-headed household, or an abused child). These dramas were used to advertise how GEMers help others. The meetings served as a support and GEMers were also assisted here. The number of GEMers has dwindled since the start of the CFS project. Only 10 to 12 remain. All are aware of this but nothing has happened yet to swell the numbers.

The SMT and educators report that this growing focus on teaching and learning has resulted in learners now going to look for teachers who do not appear for classes and in “reporting this to the office”. Learners now attend school on a Saturday – science and commerce have been identified as problem areas – or when extra lessons or study periods are scheduled after school.

The educators report that they “like the team work” and “good human relations” at Moshe High, however are “not saying we don’t have problems”. This measured approach has assisted the school in setting and achieving realistic targets.

**Value added by CFS**

The increased awareness around the Bill of Rights and the values underpinning it of “human dignity, equality and freedom” is seen in the small things. Boys and girls get to sweep classrooms – a task previously allocated to girls only and still despised by boys despite the insistence by female educators that it should be shared by all. The school grounds and ablution facilities are swept. Each month a grade is responsible for cleaning but boys “don’t like it”. There is a conflict
between what the school wants and how parents treat boys and girls. The separate staff rooms – one for males, one for females, alongside each other – were however, only cleaned by girls on the days I was present at the school.

A further gain is found in the reports by educators that girls return to school after delivering their child in order to complete their schooling.

**Challenges faced and solutions generated**

However the large class sizes (between 60 and 70) and under-preparedness of learners to deal with the school day (not enough food, sleep and homework incomplete or not done) is a challenge for both educators and learners. Educators acknowledge that problems remain unidentified for longer periods of time due to the large class sizes. Yet numbers continue to grow at Moshe High and learners and their parents were being turned away on the day I visited – one week into the new school year. One educator advised that the only way to deal with the large class size is that learners “must produce the second teacher”. In a Mathematics class a learner stands in front of the chalk board whilst her teacher and classmates look on. In this way learners begin to take responsibility for their education alongside the teachers.

Furthermore, the co-operation, “team work” and “good human relations” between teachers are mentioned time and again. Another teacher explains using a recent example – she had to teach parts of speech and is “not good at this” so asked for help. The help was forthcoming and the beneficiaries, the learners, were better off for this. The ability to acknowledge areas of weakness amongst staff indicates that this is encouraged and acceptable in order to improve performance. Incidentally, this acknowledgement is an indication of a move towards reflection on teaching and learning – a practice that should be capitalised upon. Furthermore, despite two teacher’s unions being present in the school, the SMT and educators report co-operation where there could be discord.

The focus on teaching and learning amongst staff needs to continue. Although learners are not loitering around the school during lesson times, in marked contrast to other high schools visited, the classroom walls are clean but bare of teaching and learning aids.

The struggle to get parents/caregivers to commit to learning is noted by members of the SMT – “only a handful will come” to parents meetings to discuss learner progress. The meetings are scheduled for Sundays as parents/caregivers are off work on this day. However, educators report that these parent/teacher meetings are not regular. To add complexity to this, approximately 90% of learners at Moshe High are from “incomplete families” – either a child-headed household, or single parents, or they live with their grandmothers. The school persists in establishing lines of communication between themselves and parents. As one educator explains, “You need to teach parents … to participate … to sign” the learner progress reports.
During Life Skills there is an opportunity to play soccer, netball and “ushumpu” but there is no playground available. The cars in the parking area are moved aside for this.

Although the school has identified the importance of a vegetable garden to assist identified OVCs (orphans and vulnerable children), this was put on the back burner and has still not materialised. The school prioritised how money provided by UNICEF was spent, with the school hall being the first priority.

There is an underlying tension in talking about school discipline amongst educators and learners. They are vague about what options are available since corporal punishment is no longer permitted. The responses are thin about alternative forms of discipline. Rather, educators and learners describe the school as “strict” and one is left wondering what this translates into in the classroom.

The future

The educators and learners are positive about their school and “willing to participate”. There is a sense of pride and an acknowledgement of the role that partners play in ensuring the success of the school. The fruits of UNICEF’s presence are tangible. You can “see the hall. You can see the lab because of this project” and this is “for the community at large”. The school has embraced the notion of partnerships.

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6 Ushumpu is a game played by school learners with a tin and ball, a bowler and a runner, similar to rounders.
THE CASE STUDY OF GREENVILLE JUNIOR PRIMARY SCHOOL

Historical Overview

Greenville7 Junior Primary opened its doors in January 1979. It draws its 394 learners from the local informal settlement and KwaMashu Township north of Durban, previously Dolmen Farm.

Learners are able to attend Greenville Junior Primary (JP) from Grade R to Grade 4.

The situation, challenges and level of functioning before implementation of CFS

Educators report high incidences of physical and sexual violence in the surrounding community. Alongside this, high levels of unemployment and HIV/AIDS. The previous year approximately 60% of parents did not pay school fees and only R9,000 of the R80,000 required budget was received from parents. Yet the school buildings are neat and tidy, perhaps evidence of the persistent phone calls from Mrs Khubeka who claims these renovations commenced in 1997. Only the school roof needs painting now. The administration office seems a luxury – a converted classroom that holds the photocopiers and two PCs – but is also testimony to the fact that learner numbers have dropped since the early 1990s when there had been 1040 learners.

The SMT (School Management Team) explains this in terms of the move of many learners to ex Model C schools and the perceived quality of teaching and learning that takes place in these schools. Perhaps more firm partnerships with parents and the community and less of an ‘us and them’ positioning could assist in changing parents’ perceptions about this.

Changes since the implementation of the CFS model

At ten o’clock the children wade through the long grass, unconcerned by the lack of jungle gyms or play equipment, to receive a meal or head for their separate ablution facilities – 18 for boys and 14 for girls (excluding separate facilities for male and female educators). The facilities are impeccably clean and tidy. The long grass seems at odds with the rest of the school. The tension is on how to use the limited funds at this Section 20 school – cut the grass, continue with building maintenance, purchase further teaching and learning aids. However, “It must be done!” says Mrs Khubeka and so at the end of the first school term the grass will be cut as it is every quarter.

The wide open unstructured playing spaces are secure – no one can enter as the entire area is fenced. Inside the children are safe – the gates are locked and there is a perimeter fence with a security guard.

7 To respect the privacy of the school, the name of the school has been changed for this case study.
Campaigns and Activity Days are run every year – evidence of partnerships with other government departments. In 2007, for the HIV/AIDS Day, learners walked through the community with placards. Local ministers and nurses were invited to address learners, educators and parents. Themed classroom activities meant that there was a link between the campaign day and the curriculum. This shows that educators understand that learning is not isolated and discrete. The circles of support are on the way to being established. These Activity Days have entrenched the relationship between the school and other departments – SAPS, Social Welfare, Health. The Road Safety Scholar Patrol, driven by the Safety & Security Committee, assists in ensuring learners are safe and that they are addressed on a regular basis. The number of road related deaths makes this an issue of concern.

The school has made some inroads into the six focus areas of Child Friendly Schools – rights-based; effective teaching and learning; gender sensitive; health promotion; partnerships and safe, protective and supportive. But one gets the sense that more could have been done through a stronger intervention and more support and guidance along the way. The seemingly once-off contact with the service provider was insufficient and the lack of follow-up meant this school was left to its own devices. The six focus areas of Child Friendly Schools were not systematically and equally tackled. Rather, the focus was on three areas (gender sensitive schools, health promoting schools and safe, protective and support schools) – with educators not really understanding and being able to clearly articulate the broader model of Child Friendly Schools within which these focus areas were located.

Success stories

A handful of educators gather before the start of the school day in the Grade 1 classroom – to pray and share information. Not all are present – some only arrive at 07h45 when assembly starts. However, the excitement at this small prayer meeting is palpable. There is a Provincial Department of Education competition. Mrs Dlomo, HOD since 2003, attended a last minute meeting on Saturday and collected ‘the song’ for this Provincial Competition. Greenville JP plan to win and have enough time to ensure this! The principal’s small office is lined with trophies – Inkondlo, Indlamu, Gospel – so the chances are good. Thus the development of children includes activities beyond the classroom – an important component of the CFS model.

The two teachers watch the learners line up at the internal school gate in preparation for assembly. Empty tins and bulging school bags jostle for space between learners as they stand in the shaded corridor area outside Grade 3 and 4 classrooms for assembly. Today there is a collection of tins – part of a fundraising and environmental campaign – and learners proudly hold up their collection from the weekend. The school has recognised that every small effort counts towards raising funds and are not daunted by the task.

Teaching begins promptly at 8h00 after the daily morning assembly. Children’s voices ring out as the school day commences, “100 ... 97 ... 94 ... 91 ... 88 ...” The counting backwards and forwards, greeting songs and revision continues
for half an hour this morning, as it does every Monday to Friday for Greenville JP Grade R to Grade 4 learners and the 14 educators in the rapidly heating classrooms. In one of the Grade 3 classrooms the educator hands out a worksheet for learners and in the classroom next door the learners are crowded round the blackboard for revision of the previous day’s work, the neatly stacked work books waiting. The cut-out rabbits on the Grade R windows announce that it is close to Easter time. The birthday chart in the Grade 1 classroom lets learners know that they matter. The classroom walls are filled with pre-printed and hand drawn posters – less so in the higher grades. The timetables are pasted to the principal’s office wall; opposite neatly labeled files are kept for each Grade. Teaching and learning, an important component of Child Friendly Schools is visibly demonstrated through these activities at Greenville JP. The educators and learners are attempting to make their school vision real: “To provide quality education for all learners in order to have a quality life”.

Learners provide testimonies to the important role of the school, educators and the passion for teaching and learning that they are inculcating, “I love my school because it gives us food. I love Mrs S.D. Ngidi. I love all teachers” and another “Ngiyaku thanda ukufanda”8 and “I like my school. I like my friends. I like my classroom.”

**Challenges faced and solutions generated**

Educators report that learners come to school ill-prepared for the day … “some have not eaten or slept well, others have not completed their homework”. The school feeding scheme that has been running since 1999 assists – but only at 10 o’clock when children rush with metal plates to get their meal. Yet these socio-economic circumstances do not stop the SMT and educators from improving, nor from keeping the school neat and tidy, nor from striving for excellence by implementing more effective methods of teaching and learning. They do not shrug their shoulders and give up! All teachers participate and head up committees that are responsible for different aspects of school life.

The storeroom next to the dark kitchen serves as a place for a sick child to lay his

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8 Roughly translated this means “I love to learn”
head on a lap. He seems content to have a gentle hand that strokes his forehead. The school has this facility on their ‘wish list’ – evidence of caring. They are aware of the gap and do not have the financial resources to meet this need at present.

During break time bullying is a problem. Teachers know what to do and how to report this, due to strong linkages with other government departments. There is no evidence that corporal punishment is administered – educators articulate the Department position. The learners drawings show smiling, teaching educators and learners in a tidy environment. However, when probed, the alternative options available for disciplining learners appear to be thin.

The small principal’s office is open to all – educators and parents move in freely – no standing on ceremony is required as a parent arrives for an impromptu meeting and is quickly escorted in. The walls are pasted and lined with timetables, photos, committees, action plans, files and trophies. Mrs Khubeka and the SMT, describes Greenville JP as a “moving” school and are proud of their achievements. However these pockets of excellence in terms of teaching and learning, health promotion and safety are hamstrung by resourcing difficulties and challenges in building partnerships with school parents. Perhaps Greenville JP could be described as a ‘strolling’ school – on the improvement path but not there just yet. The commitment to this vision is evident. They speak enthusiastically of the school and their time there. Many have been at the school for a long time. This provides an organisational memory and connections within a changing context that may require new attitudes and new approaches.

A tangle of vegetables, weeds and grass at the far end of the school grounds is tended by parents. The intention is to supply vegetables to the identified orphans and vulnerable children in the school. The OVCs are known yet largely unvisited by educators. The ‘circles of support’ that need to be created through partnerships with external organisations would assist with the integration of these children more firmly into the school and the community. The gap between the idea and implementation of Child Friendly Schools is found amongst the most vulnerable. The links with Social Development and the Department of Home Affairs require persistent follow-up. There are no school based carers to assist here. This is in marked contrast to what happened in the implementation of Child Friendly Schools in Northern KwaZulu Natal. However the Department of Home Affairs has visited the school to assist learners and their caregivers in obtaining birth certificates or identity documents. These are especially important for the 13 identified OVCs (orphans and vulnerable children) to access government social grants. The process is long and frustrating for the learner, their caregivers and the school.

The school urges parents to pay school fees – even if it is only R5, although many do not. There is a certain amount of disgruntlement on the part of educators around this – parents will contribute towards jumping castles, trampolines, biscuits and ice-cream on a fun day, but not pay school fees. So the school uses these activities to raise much needed funds. The School Management Team (SMT) feels the push of the Department of Education to manage their relationship with parents and the School Governing Body (SGB) better. The school open days are an
opportunity for parents to review their children’s performance. The SMT bemoan that it is the same 30 parents every quarter. Working parents are unavailable Monday to Saturdays. Sunday is the only free time they have – yet this is the day for catching up with family, housekeeping, church, relaxing.

The conflict is evident – the school knows they need to build relationships with parents to ensure effective teaching and learning. The educators lament that, barring a handful of parents, who communicate with the school, there are constraints – “some don’t attend meetings; some don’t pay school fees; some neglect their children; some send their children to school sick without any report”. Although the SGB meets, the number of parents who participate is limited. Getting together sufficient parents for the AGM has proved a challenge in the past with few stepping forward for nomination to the SGB. The SMT reports that only one or two parents arrive for SGB meetings. The Treasurer comes in to sign cheques on request. The principal must drive to the SGB Chairperson late at night or on a Sunday in order to get any paper work signed. There is a need for a deeper understanding of partnership between the school and parents in order to get the implementation of Child Friendly Schools to work. This is a need endorsed by a Department that focuses on building firm relationships between schools and their parents. The SMT feels the weight of responsibility - “What should be done by SGBs is done by school reps, the principal and the SMT!” and the SMT looks to the Department to help solve this problem.

The future

Greenville JP seems up for the challenge of further implementation of the CFS model and with sufficient guidance and support and addressing real resourcing needs, would be in a better position to respond to all the focus areas of a Child Friendly School. This is something from which these learners would benefit.

They have a “wish list for success” that includes:

- Food parcels for learners to carry home or drop-in centres around the school to alleviate poverty
- Computer class with trained computer educators to develop learners in computer literacy
- Improvement of school grounds, sports equipment and attire
- Grade R outdoor facilities
- Parking bays and paving
- Construction of administration block, school hall and renovation of the school
- Subsidised security guard.
- Quintile ranking according to community servicing needs and an increase in the norms and standards allocation of funds.

All are positive about the school’s future. Action plans are in place – the school SMT and educators know what work needs to be done. The challenge is in translating this into action – especially when it comes to the SGB and parents.