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Street children in Swaziland: Problems and programs

Introduction

In contrast to the situation in most African countries, Swaziland the second smallest African nation, has few street children. These children are just beginning to come to the attention of the public. Because of these peculiarities, studying street children in Swaziland has provided us an excellent opportunity to understand some of the hypotheses about the causes of street children. For example, one accepted line of thought about the origins of street children claims that street children come from the pressures caused by the cultural adaptations needed to cope with changes brought about by rapid rural to urban migration (Aptekar, 1988; 1994; Rosa, Borba, & Ebrahim, 1992; Visano, 1990).

This is not the case in Swaziland. In 1980, the grazing ratio at 1.6, (the numbers of cows and sheep grazing a hectare of land) was one of the highest in Africa (Amoah, et al., 1982). Nearly three fifths of the country is broken up into subsistence farm of less than 3 hectares in size. Thus, Swaziland is an extremely rapidly growing population living on a small amount of land, which is heavily used for subsistence needs. These facts give plausibility to the hypothesis of a large rural to urban migration being a major cause for the origins of street children. However, the picture of urban life bringing about a newly formed set of values, different than that found among the rural population is not appropriate for Swaziland.

Only about 15% and 17% of the Swazi population live in urban areas, and even this might be an inflated figure, because as many as a full half of urbanites really live in their rural homesteads, and are only temporarily working in the urban areas (de Vletter, 1983). Also, whites, and non-black Swazis are over-represented in urban areas. Swaziland is culturally 97% Swazi (UNICEF, 1994), and there are no non-Swazi street children (Maphalala, 1996). Thus, the overall pool of Swazis that might be defined as uprooted ruralites living in a considerably more modern urban culture, which is what would be needed to support the rural to urban migration hypotheses for the origins of street children, is quite small (Russell, de Vletter, & Kliest, 1984).

In Swaziland there is an easy and frequent movement from rural homestead, to temporary urban employment, and then back again to the homestead. Because of this and because the country is so small the effects of urbanization are felt throughout the population, not just in urban areas. In the cities, rural life is always close at hand, and in the country, urban influences are constantly present In Swaziland modernization, to the extent that it has occurred, has been shared comparably between urban centers and rural homesteads. How then to explain the origins of Swazi street children?

The demise of family life commonly associated with rural to urban migration is also not found in Swaziland. There is no more divorce or separation of spouses, or more illegitimacy in the urban areas than in the rural areas (Ferraro, 1980). There is also no difference between the educational level of the rural household and the urban household (Armstrong & Russell, 1985; Russell, 1983).

"This lack of clear-cut rural urban differences leads us to the inescapable conclusion that it is not the 'calling of the city' or the process of urbanization which is responsible of modernization (Ferraro, 1980, 65)", and thus these factors would not explain the origins of Swazi street children. The study of street children in Swaziland teaches us that it is not population density, and people living in close contact, both of which are the sine quo nom of urban life, that are the sufficient ingredients to explain the origins of street children.

Relevant history of Swaziland: Compromise to confrontation

The Swazi nation originated from the Bantu migration of the 15th and 16th centuries. By the time the Bantu reached the Zambesi River they divided into two groups, the Sotho and the Nguni. The Nguni settled near present day Maputo around 1550, and are the ancestors of the modern Swazis. (The remaining Nguni continued south and divided again near the Vaal river into the Xhosa and the Zulu.) By the middle of the 18th century there were Swazis living in what is now modern Swaziland (Bonner, 1983; Davies, O'Meara, & Dlamini, 1985; Kuper, 1963).

Swazi independence was actually encourage by the fear among the competing colonial powers because the Boers and English, and to a lesser extent the Portuguese and Zulu, wanted to keep each other from gaining hegemony. By 1881 Swaziland became the first South African indigenous entity to be recognised as a modern independent state, but this was not accomplished without considerable diplomatic concessions. King Mbandezini was forced to accept some of the demands made by each colonial power in order to become independent. He did this by conceding nearly the whole of current geophysical Swaziland to foreign mining and grazing rights. This was the first major illustration of the Swazi skill at compromise (Booth, 1983). In short, he gave up a great deal to get a great deal in return.

However, a major misunderstanding soon arose as to what the King's concessions actually meant. The white settlers were convinced they had acquired jurisdiction over the land, but the Swazis thought otherwise. In Bantu tradition, a person can control access to land, but the whole tribe including its ancestors "own" it (Mazuri & Wondi, 1993). The ownership of land, the next conflict in what was to become a series of problems facing the Swazi nation was resolved through dividing the country into Title Land which was privately owned by white settlers and foreign capitol, and Swazi National Land which was controlled by the Swazi King and the royal family. The Swazis came together to defeat their common enemy.

Before statehood and colonial intervention Swazi culture was not fixed in time immemorial. Rather it was in a constant state of flux, sometimes changing rapidly, other times more slowly, but it was rarely static. (There is also evidence for this in other historical studies in Malawi, Zambia, and Tanzania (Chanock, 1985). Thus, traditional Swazi culture should not be confused with conservatism, this being a desire to return to a former state of affairs. Instead Swazi traditionalism has served as a dynamic (and innovative) way to cope with the necessity of making social changes, including as we have seen when it came to the very existence of the Swazi nation (Armstrong, 1992; Macmilllan, 1986). It was precisely this dynamism that allowed the Swazi nation to come through the rapidly fluid and difficult time of the Mfecane and the following epoch of white conquest. The only way for the Swazi culture to survive these periods was to be open to change and to present a united front.

The capacity and importance of compromise can be observed in how marriages were consummated. Even though power in Swazi culture respected age and favoured men a balance of power between the genders and between children and parents, albeit unstable and open to abuse, prevailed (Rose, 1992). Traditional Swazi marriage resulted from prolonged negotiations between the concerned families. It involved many compromises. First, the lobola was promised only after serious arbitration between many family members. Then only part of it was paid. Inevitably the receiving party wanted it faster than it was coming, hence more arbitration was needed. In fact the conversation of compromise could continue for so long that the lobola was not paid before the death of one of the potential spouses, making the consummation of marriage post-mortem. At all costs damaging conflict was avoided. Men and women participated together to come to compromise (Nhalpo, 1992; Russell, 1989).

In spite of what might be assumed at first glance, the relationship between adult men and women were harmonious. In Swaziland, as in many traditional African Bantu cultures, it was believed that God made women the custodians of fire, water, and earth. Thus women became the carriers of firewood, the drawers of water, and the preservers of the earth's fertility, through the harvesting of plants and the bearing of children. Each of these tasks was balanced by men who cut the trees, dug the wells, and cultivated the land (Mazrui & Wondji, 1993; Rose, 1992). Families who shared in the vagaries of the elements, and were forced together for survival learned to negotiate.

When people must reach consensus, issues of abstract rights (such as gender or family rights) are not as important as conciliation. During the period when Swazi justice met European jurisprudence, particularly with respect to family law. Each legal system had its own way of looking at family life and law, and each dictated the forms of discipline the child could and could not receive, the kind of education the child would have to have, as well as such matters as to whom a children would belong to in case of the dissolution of the marriage, or the death of parents. Thus the parameters of acceptable childhood behaviors were based on a set of compromises allowing each side the opportunity to raise their children (Armstong & Nhalpo, 1985; Eekelaar & Pearl, 1989;).

This process of compromise was interrupted, and the origins of street children in Swaziland began. If a date can be fixed for this the best selection would be 1973, five years after Swaziland received its independence, when the ageing King, Sobhuza II who had ruled since 1921, abolished parliament, banned political parties, and developed a system of government (Tinkhundla) that has made all three branches of government under the control of the King. As a result Swaziland is the last absolute monarchy in Africa, and any interference with the monarchy is viewed as a direct assault on the King's prerogative. Compromise cannot be considered (Nhalpo, 1990)

The royalists and the democrats, contrary to the Swazi history of conciliation, have set their feet in stone. By 1995 a general strike had shut down all public services, and threatened the Royal family's absolute monarchy (power). The modus operandi of compromise changed to confrontation and authoritarianism. It is this relatively recent inability to reach compromise, more than the commonly accepted hypotheses for the origins of street children that explains this new and sad Swazi phenomena.

Since 1973 when the King reached for absolute hegemony the delicate balance between the genders and between parents and children have suffered. From 1973 to the present the increase in modern schooling, the rise of wage labour, and higher access to technological sophistication have added additional pressure on the ability to compromise. A rapidly increasing number of young men are now able to earn their own wages and are becoming less dependent upon their fathers. They are able to gather the money to pay lobolo without assistance from them. Increasingly, women are being taught in schools to distrust polygany. These changes have been perceived as an assault on the monarchy. The King as the father of the culture/nation, and his royal patronage and patrimony derived from polygany, have been challenged. There is too much at stake for the Royalty to give up, and the opportunity too ripe for the democrats to back off. As a result the possibility of coming to a communal consensus is greatly reduced. This has upset family cohesion, and has resulted in children leaving their homes, and being neglected by the community.

Street children in Swaziland come from the failure of reaching consensus on family matters. There is a great deal of mistrust between men and women. They mistrust each others sexual motives, men see it as their right to have more than one female partner, while females view men as untrustworthy. Females believe males want sex and want them to be submissive to their demands, while the males believe females want gifts and faithful monogamy (McClean, 1991; Nhalpo, 1987). There is little trust between them. In fact, single parents families are often preferred by modern Swazi women (Armstrong & Russell, 1985; Armstrong & Nhalpo, 1985), and 80% of unmarried mothers do not later legally marry (Mbatha, 1983).

Women no longer want to be involved in a marriage whose purpose is to strengthen the clan and produce children. They are looking for personal fulfilment in marriage. The former type of marriage represent the Royal tradition, the latter the democratic spirit. In former times Royal Swazis were able to compromise but now they are unable to give way on the family law and

custom. As the solidity of the family becomes fragile, the Royal family also becomes less sacrosanct. The battle is larger than arguments in private homes, it is over the very nature of the state.

Swazi street children: General Information

As in other African countries there is no clear definition of street children in Swaziland. UNICEF has two categories; children <u>of</u> the streets who live without adult supervision and work to maintain themselves, and children <u>on</u> the streets who also work, but who return home at the end of the working day (UNICEF, 1986). Many Swazis assume that all the unkempt and dirty children on the streets are street children. However, in a study of 28 street children in Mbabane and 26 in Manzini (Maphalala, 1996) only 15% were sleeping without parental supervision. (In other African countries as many as 90% of working children return to their homes at night (Aptekar, et al., 1996; Aptekar & Stocklin, 1997; Donald & Swart-Kruger, 1994).

Child abandonment, abuse, and neglect are much less likely to account for the origins of Swazi street children than popular opinion assumes. In Swaziland. Maphalala (1996) has shown that less than a third of Swazi street children were on the streets because of emotional family problems. (In most studies of African street children less than a tenth of the children have been abandoned by their families (Connolly, 1990; Dallape, 1987; Richter, 1989; 1991; Veale, 1993). Rather than being totally estranged from their families, most Swazi street children return home periodically, and contribute what little they can to their families. In fact this shows how the children are capable of compromise. There is however an important gender difference, male street children are able to find some reconciliation with their mothers, but they remain angry at their fathers (Maphalala, 1996).

Across African cultures, including Swaziland, as many as nine out of ten street children are male (Aptekar, 1994; Boydon, 1991; Ennew, 1994; Swart, 1990). Almost all of these street children come from homes where their mothers are in charge, their fathers not being present or available (Suda, 1993; Kanduza & Magongo, 1993). This makes it important to differentiate between boys and girls rather than to rely on the "genderless" moniker street child (Aptekar, 1996; Maphalala, 1996). Most male Swazi street children are on the streets because of economic necessity. Indeed they are socialized to leave home and work at a much earlier age than is found in higher socio-economic communities and where two parent families are considerably more common (Aptekar, et al., 1996; Clark, 1984; Kabeberi, 1990; McLean, 1991). Conversely, street girls are socialized to stay at home and help their mothers with child rearing and housework. They are not expected to leave home until much later than female children in the higher socio-economic communities (Aptekar, 1992, 1996).

This gender difference might help to explain why several empirical studies indicate that male

street children have developed adequate coping strategies, that allow the majority of them to function at least as well as their poor counterparts who stay at home. Some of these coping techniques include securing a niche in the economic market which provides the children with some income, finding and taking advantage of programmes that serve them, being sufficiently informed about their physical health to stay reasonably healthy, forming close friendships with peers, and maintaining a connection to their families of origin (Aptekar, 1994, 1996; Ennew, 1994). Female street children, because their normal socialization has more likely been negatively altered have more mental health problems than the male street children (Aptekar, et al., 1996).

This is not to say that the male Swazi street children are without problems, indeed both male and female street children have many difficulties. In addition to being impoverished they are the products of irreconcilable differences between their parents. Their parents were unable to reach consensus on a variety of family issues, including how to raise their chidlren, how to manage their economic affairs, and how to get along with one another (Dlamini, 1996; Magagula, 1996; Makhanya, 1996).

What has not yet happened in Swaziland, but what we fear is likely to happen, is that the tension within families, between mothers and fathers, and between children and their parents, will lead to hostility toward the children by the general society. In part we predict this because it seems to occur in other African societies where there are street children (Swart, 1990, Aptekar, 1996), and in part we suggest this will occur because it mirrors the trouble between general Swazi society and the Royal family.

There are, we think many reasons for the public's exaggerated hostility toward street children. First, the press relies on publicizing information about Swazi street children which emphasizes worse case scenarios, such as the youngest child on the streets, the children who are the most intoxicated, or those who are the most delinquent. For example Aptekar and Maphalala (1995) discussed their teacher training program in a public forum at the American Cultural Center (The Swazi Observer, 1996). Although they made a point of articulating the children's positive capacities, their coping skills, their good intellectual development, and their ability to compromise the children were still described in the press as "scavenging to sustain themselves".

This has its parallels in Kenya where the press reported that children in the center of Nairobi were carrying syringes filled with contaminated HIV positive blood and were threatening anyone who refused to give them money with lethal injection. Not one case of this alleged behaviour was actually ever authenticated, yet the press reported this as common fact, which of course exacerbated the public's fear. (The information was even relayed to us in Swaziland when we were talking to an ex-patriot Kenyan who repeated the story as if it were true.)

The Swazi public is also alarmed by the two major hypotheses that have been publicised as the explanation for the origin's of street children (Baizerman, 1988; Boydon, 1991). One hypothesis relates to urban poverty, which allegedly leads to a breakdown of families and moral

values. The second hypothesis suggests that street children are the result of aberrant families who abandon, abuse, or neglect their children. In both cases the children's families are judged pejoratively.

Our experience, is that most parents (certainly mothers who give most of the parenting the children receive) of Swazi street children are as loving toward their children as you or I. It is not the breakdown of affection or moral values is the major cause of street children. It is far easier to raise the level of anger and hostility against parents who abuse or neglect, or who are otherwise irresponsible toward their children, than it is to do something to help poor loving parents, or for that matter to address the larger social concerns which have brought about such strife in the country.

Secondly, Swazi street children are treated in the aggregate. That is the street and working children are lumped together, which makes the problems seem larger than it is. Aptekar (1996) worked with two street children both of whom were about 13 years of age. Little John, as we have come to call him, was the oldest of six children. He came from a home where the only potential bread winner was mother, who is illiterate and ill. At the age of six Little John learned to cope with poverty by helping an older boy sell newspapers. What he earned he brought home. By ten he was parking cars for change. At twelve he left home to live in a shelter for street children, where he received money for studying, and where he was allowed to find additional sources of income, which he did by selling rags, paper, cigarettes, and his services to people doing research on street children. Although he doesn't live at home, he contributes to the support of his family, and remains on good terms with them. As far as he is concerned he has had a normal childhood, and is optimistic about his future.

Clarence is also thirteen years of age but unlike little John his father worked for several years as a gardener, while his mother did odd jobs to earn extra income. They were able to keep Clarence and his five siblings in food and clothes, and even provided the boys with school fees. Clarence's life started to change about two years ago when the owners of the house where his father worked moved to another city, and his father lost his job. Then, one day when his father was looking for work, he was run over by an oncoming car. He was in the hospital for several months, and when he returned home he was unable to walk. His mother's income was just not sufficient to feed the family. After relying on relatives for some time the extended family simply ran out of money. Clarence was eventually sent to a distant home to work as a live-in gardener. His employer forced him to work from sunup to sundown, underfed him, and whenever Clarence questioned this, he was beaten badly. After six months he ran away and began to live on the streets. Clarence sees his life as filled with disappointment and tragedy, and he has given up hoping for a better future.

Both of these boys were engaged in petty delinquent behaviour. They did so for vastly different reasons. They did not proffer from the same treatment, and their future prospects are quite different. Yet, they are both street children. By merging the most and the least promising cases, the children with the best prognosis are no longer in the public eye. Instead all the street children

are seen as being without hope.

Third, ethnocentric judgements increase the hostility the children receive. Aptekar (1996) visited a mother of four boys and two girls who lived with four of her six children in one room no bigger than a small bedroom in a middle class home. The room was divided by two blankets hung up by clothes pins. Behind one blanket was the mother's loft, behind the other, three levels of shelves, each of which was used for a bed. In one corner was a small one burner propane stove surrounded by two pots and a stool. The only source of light in the house was from the front door. Open sewage ran through it, and then down to where it met the drainage from other homes.

This woman was nearly able to support herself and her children by selling illegal beer. She never attended school, had no job skills, and was illiterate. Her two oldest boys, half-brothers well into their teens, both lived and made a living on the streets. They came home periodically, usually with some gift, and were very welcome. Their mother had taught them that the time they could stay at home without making a contribution ended shortly before puberty. The boys accepted this. They preferred the streets to their home, particularly because they could come home when they needed to.

One cultural interpretation of this mother's situation would describe her as irresponsible and immoral. However, she can also be seen as coping quite adequately. She taught her two oldest boys to make their own way. She found a means to feed the other four children at home, and fulfilled her hopes of educating as many of her children as possible by using the sale of illegal brew to pay the children's school fees.

The most important way in which ethnocentrism affects the hostile reactions to children is the pejorative public attitude toward the children's parents. In spite of the fact that poverty has been shown to be the major cause of street children, and not aberrant parents, the view that parents are to blame for street children has come to be accepted as fact. (Aptekar, 1994; 1996; Connolly, 1990; Lusk, 1992). To pejoratively label these families, in large part because the mothers develop their own cultural criteria for supervision and protection of their children which is different from those espoused by the Royal tradition, is to compound rather than solve the problem. Not only do the pejorative attitudes condemn the hard efforts of the mothers, they dismiss the fact that unmarried mothers can raise their children without a husband, and discount the judgement of street children who have left unhealthy homes, such as girls who have been physically or sexually abused, or boys who have made an early choice to strike out on the their own.

The teacher training project:

In spite of the fact that numerous studies have pointed out that the difficulties endured by street

children come less from the hard conditions of the street, than from societal reactions (de Carrrizosa & Poertner, 1992; Lusk, 1989; Pereira, 1985; Swart, 1990), all but a handful of the tens of thousands of people devoted to helping street children work directly with the children to change their behaviour, leaving the important work of changing society's attitudes toward the children almost completely neglected.

We planned for a public education program in Swaziland. The program would include information about the possibility of different family structures. It would teach about the diversity among street children. Each street child has his or her own history, circumstances, desires and goals. Emphasis would be placed on the positive characteristics of street children, such as their above average intelligence, their loyalty to peers, their responsibility to families of origin, their high degree of autonomy, their sense of empowerment, and their desire to live life to its fullest.

In addition to the direct education of the public we envisioned training for particular groups of people, such as teachers, the clergy, police, and other community leaders. We began this at University of Swaziland (UNISWA) by helping students who were preparing to teach Swazi street children to assume a broad professional role, one that encompassed public education and the roles of the above mentioned professionals (see the work of Dlamini, 1996; Magagula, 1996, and Makhanya, 1996).

After reviewing the practice of teacher training in Swaziland we concluded that teachers were being prepared to teach in an educational system adapted from the English model, that is, they were being prepared to work in schools that had adopted a pre-set standardized curriculum, where students of the same age were expected to receive and learn information in organised classroom situations, where the teacher would hold an authoritative presence relating to the students as a distant role model rather than as a familiar adult, and where discipline was maintained through a series of rules and regulations.

These preparations would not work with the Swazi street children. Teachers of street children would have to work with students who are not passive in class, and who are difficult to discipline. They would also have to develop a curriculum built on the children's needs rather than accepting one that is centrally approved.

We began our program in two venues. At the first site the classroom had a chalkboard, desks, chairs and an assortment of visual aids constructed by the teacher adorning the walls. The children started school at 8:00 A..M and broke off at 1:00 P.M. There was a morning assembly which consisted of singing and prayer led by the teacher. There was a half hour mid-morning break. Around this timetable there were slots for the various subjects. The curriculum followed a traditional path, conforming to the requirements of the Swaziland Primary Certificate.

We told our student teachers that when they arrived at this school they would be acutely aware of how hard it would be to teach the children using this traditional framework. In each classroom the students varied from 8 to 18 years of age. They were also at different levels of

mastery of content, some never went to school, others dropped out of the traditional system at different grade levels.

The student teachers tried grouping children according to their abilities, but this proved difficult because the teachers were not used to teaching more than one lesson at one time. They had to learn to prepare for different ability levels within the same class. This meant that the maths teacher would have to teach addition to one group of children, while at the same time teach others multiplication. They learned to "tune out" certain children, even though they were uncomfortable with this strategy. Only after time did they begin to realise that it catered adequately for the needs of the children.

Another source of difficulty was learning how to teach with children whose interest in the subjects varied considerably. Many children ignored the student teachers and pursued their own interests rather than what was being discussed. Eventually, the teachers learned that the best way to keep the children engaged was to allow them to work on the same subject, even if it was at different levels.

It was not only the curriculum that posed challenges for the student teachers. While at the first venue they met a pre-set traditional curriculum, at the second site they discovered there was no educational programme set up to teach. Indeed the venue was an abandoned garage with an open parking space in front of it, two chairs, one small table, no chalkboard, no arrival and departure times, just our two student teachers and the children. The student teachers learned to determine what was to be taught and how. They secured a donation of readers, and some paper and pencils for the children. They prepared teaching aids using coloured chart paper and felt pens, and attached them to the walls of the garage so that the children would have a "blackboard". After a while one student teacher boasted "...in spite of the shortage of materials we have built a classroom." They found that although building an appropriate curriculum was difficult at first, when they did met with some success they became more motivated, and felt empowered to innovate more.

The student teachers built a curriculum based on the children's interests, needs and abilities. They began each day with stories in SiSwati. They asked the children questions about the reading, which encouraged them to compare their own lives to those of the children in the narratives. After a while the children suggested that the one who answered the most questions correctly be given a present. The question and answer sessions grew in time and intensity. The student teachers set up a reward system tat incorporated academic skills. Hence story telling increased motivation for other academic subjects. With the passage of time the children began to tell their own accounts of where they grew up, how they got to the city, etc. This helped the student teachers incorporate Social Studies information such as the rivers of Swaziland, regional climatic conditions, and urban and rural information. Mathematics was introduced by using the children's needs of dealing with money and making change. When the children were not feeling well, we told the student teachers to promote the idea of hygiene and health hence the introduction of Science into the curriculum.

Reading stories in SiSwati and English served to teach different skills for different groups as well as maintain the interest of all of the children. The student teacher would read a tale in SiSwati to all the children. At the end of it, questions based on the exercise would be posed to the group. Because they were using their mother tongue, the questions challenged all the children and all could respond. However, because the children's writing abilities varied significantly, the teachers would assign different tasks according to level of ability. For example, some children were asked to spell words used in the story, others might be required to write a summary, or answer specific questions, or define specific words.

The student teachers learned to structure the timetable according to the 'mood' of the children. As the children began to experience success in academic subjects, their interest increased and they demanded more work and greater individual attention. Before long the children were calling their teachers "auntie", talking more about themselves, and asking them to come and see where they lived. Nevertheless, the student teachers had to understand that not all the children would be keen to learn. We did not want our student teachers to lose enthusiasm when children came late, avoided certain tasks, and disengaged from the stories to play soccer, or monopoly.

There were several student behaviours that would have resulted in censure or expulsion in traditional schools, but the teachers learned how to turn these behaviors into learning opportunities. Behind the absenteeism of students were unanticipated explanations. Because the majority of the children slept in the 'open', the weather played a major factor on the number of children attending on a particular day. Mondays could be especially trying, because the children might come to school very tired, and Fridays there were often many absences because the children would be eager to take advantage of the week-end which gave them more opportunities to earn money. Rather than fight these facts, they began to incorporate them into the curriculum. This resulted in teaching the children to prepare for the weekend by making plans, developing schedules, and setting goals.

Hhomework, a regular feature in conventional schools was for the most part inappropriate for these children. Most of them were homeless, or slept in make shift shacks constructed of burlap or at best tin, in either case they were not conducive to study. Yet, these also offered an opportunity to build relationships with the children. The student teachers conduct home visits, and helped the children by seeking donations of dothes. These efforts not only helped the children stay warm which increased the children's probability of being able to study, but they also helped the children realise that they had teachers who cared about them.

At both venues the student teachers had to work with children who were, for the most part, not amenable to authority. The children would not arrive on time, would leave the classroom when they desired, would engage only in the activities they liked, and often played fiercely with each other. Much to their frustration corporal punishment, which teachers in conventional schools could always resort to, was not an option for them. It would mean the children would leave school and not return. The teachers had to learn to communicate and discipline children who

rarely accepted uninvited intervention, and who might be friendly and open one day, and not the next.

This was perhaps the most difficult aspect of the programme for our student teachers. Their own upbringing and schooling had taught them to respond authoritatively to discipline problems. Eventually the idea that they were, in the eyes of the children, more than just teachers, but also important adults, often filling a large whole in the children's psyche, caught hold. Once it did the dynamics between teachers and students helped the children move forward in their lives.

As time wore on the teachers began to compile case histories of the children. They also leared about the children's communities, and conducted home visits. This presented problems because what the student teachers found was not always the best of circumstances. We had to help them accept as tolerable, what had been in their eyes intolerable.

Some of the children were staying in residential programmes with house parents who were ex-street children. In one case many of the boys told our student teachers that the house parent was beating them and depriving them of food. Our student teachers were caught in a bind, on the one hand they believed the children, but on the other hand they did not have evidence to support the allegations, or alternatives for the children should the allegations prove to be accurate. This information also came in the middle of teaching practice, a time when the excitement of the first phase had ended, and the difficult reality of teaching the children and being part of their lives was setting in. It was thus easier for our student teachers to focus on the possible abuse the children were receiving at night than the difficulties of working with the children in school.

As the supervisors of the practice teachers we also had to determine if the allegations were true, and if so what we could do about them. Prior to placing our student teachers at these sites, the teaching practice committee required assurance that our students would undertake practical experience that would be comparable to their peers. In addition we encouraged our student teachers to write observations of the children on a daily basis, particularly what the children enjoyed, how they reacted to the lesson, and to focus on these notes when thinking and preparing for subsequent lessons. We were able to supervise the student teachers and assess them including assigning a numerical grade. We had the student teachers prepare a scheme of work and make daily preparations.

In short we were able to satisfy the desire of the faculty to construct a comparable practice teaching experience. But, when we received news of potential child abuse, or cases of drug abuse, or delinquency, we had to fulfil our obligation to the children's well being, to the student teachers safety, and to the standards of our profession and faculty. Rather than ignore or deal with these problems privately, we were able to draw parallels with the student teachers experiences and thus through discussions with them, make it a professional learning experience.

By the time the student teachers were finishing their teaching practice they were faced with other

emotional issues. The student teachers did not know how important they were to the street children. Nor did they know how much the teaching had meant to them. Not only did the children want their teachers to stay, the teachers were sad about leaving them. We decided in order to help both the children and the student teachers deal with the termination of the experience that it would be appropriate to end with a special event. We arranged for the children to go to a game park, view the animals, and have a braii. Although the children enjoyed it immensely it did not really resolve the issues.

Much like we found at the venue that tried to fit the street children into the traditional classroom we found that our system of teaching practice and didactic work made it very difficult to provide for a continuous presence with the street children. We use the months of May to July for teaching practice, and August to April for academic work, the latter is filled with many lectures and no time for outreach. Of course, the children's needs go on throughout the year, and in those places like at the second venue where there was no regular teacher or school programme, the children were experiencing a symbolic abandonment. Thus, as teacher educators we were and are forced to reconsider how we could, in our conventional system of teacher training, address the well being of non-traditional students, like the street children of Swaziland.

Finally, our student teachers learned that as representatives of the adult community they were, in the eyes of the street children, important people capable of filling a large gap in the children's psyche. By extension a public education program could convince all public care givers, or perhaps reconvince is more accurate because African communities have always cared for all of their children, that not just the clean and submissive children deserved attention, but that all children were in need of care, and that the whole community is responsible for the well being of all of its children.