Principals as Professional Leaders: Implications for Management of Rural Secondary Schools during Transition.

Thamsanqa Thulani Bhengu

Thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the Degree

of Doctor of Education

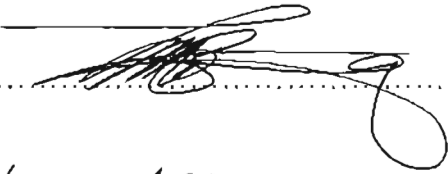in the School of Educational Studies

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DECLARATION

I declare that this thesis is my own work. It is being submitted for the degree of Doctor of Education in the University of KwaZulu-Natal. It has not been submitted before for any degree or examination in any university.

.....8th.. day of ..APRIL.., 2005

DEDICATION

This doctoral thesis is specially dedicated to my father Samuel Ka Thomas
Bhengu, and grandmother Jessica Mkhuzose Bhengu (both deceased) for their
inspiration from childhood to date. I also dedicate it to my mother S'phiwe
Bongekile Bhengu for her undying support since I was a child, and her continued
trust in my potential.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

ABSTRACT

This study is about documenting rural principals' stories, and voices regarding their experiences of education policy changes and how such changes are impacting on their day-to-day management lives. In capturing their experiences and voices, interpretive approach was used to allow the researcher to get behind their skins and faces and be one of them. Rapid changes sometimes overwhelm those people tasked with the responsibility of implementing changes.

The study involved 5 cases, purposefully chosen, in the rural district around Durban in the KwaZulu-Natal province, South Africa. Formal and informal conversations were held with principals, School Management Team members, and educators. These conversations were complemented by planned participatory observations, as well as, unannounced visits to the sampled schools. The data produced have shown similarities and differences in these rural communities. They are deeply poor, suffering from the lack of shelter, food, health, clean water, transport, electricity and services. HIV/AIDS is taking enormous tolls in every aspect of community. Unemployment is high and emigration of working-age adults disrupts families, which are left largely as comprised of grandmothers and children. Literacy levels are high, at the same time, the sense of community from the past, now and future is generally high.

The communities share similar histories as part of the Zulu nation, through colonialism and apartheid, political-cultural struggles, of the African National Congress/Inkatha Freedom Party conflict, the pressures of modernisation and globalisation. They live on Tribal Authority land, in a confusion of traditional leadership and democratic governance. They see themselves as marginalised, and they are. The socio-cultural, and political confusion is everywhere, at many different levels. Schools themselves are Western imports in their structure and

purposes with a history in the rural areas being kept from community life; the language of schooling is not the language of the community, and neither is the content of the curriculum the knowledge in the community.

There are commonalities and differences between schools. While similarities are clear; they share conception of 'school', all are situated in similar communities, with educators sharing similar backgrounds and education, there are also differences, for example, resources and facilities they have, matric results, the nature of School Governing Bodies and differences of priorities, the fundamental differences in management and leadership styles used, namely 'open-participatory', 'closed-participatory' and 'authoritative-participatory' styles. The data have indicated that these principals are highly intentional leaders, with their intentionality playing themselves out differently at school level, largely because of their different personalities and histories.

Rural principals are working under challenging environment, fending for themselves, and resort to doing things their own ways, irrespective of policy dictates. The Education Department plays an obstructionist role instead of supporting quality education provision. Principals use unconventional strategies to move forward. Recommendations to the department include the following: consult properly before policies can be implemented; consider diversity; provide thorough training for educators in order that Outcomes Based Education can be effectively implemented. Recommendations to secondary schools principals include the following: use available policies to get schools functional; involve educators meaningfully in governance and management; be creative and innovative, and try to understand demands of agency of transformation.

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LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

ANC	African National Congress
CEO	Chief Executive Officer
CEREP	Centre for Educational Research, Evaluation and Policy
COLTS	Culture Of Learning and Teaching Service
DAS	Developmental Appraisal System
DET	Department of Education and Training
HIV/AIDS	Human Immune Virus/Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome?
HOD	Head Of Department
IFP	Inkatha Freedom Party
LEA	Local Education Authority
LMS	Local Management of Schools
LO	Learning Organisations
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisations
OBE	Outcomes Based Education
PPN	Post-Provisioning Norms
PTSA	Parents Teacher Students Association
SRS	Self-Reliant Schools
SANDF	South African National Defence Force
SASA	South African Schools Act
SDP	Schools Development Plan
SEDL	Southwest Educational District Laboratory
SEM	Superintendent of Education Management
SBM	School Based Management
SGB	School Governing Body
SMART	Specific Measurable Achievable Realistic Time-bound
SMT	School Management Team
SWOT	Strengths Weakness Opportunities Threats
TBVC	Transkei, Bophuthatswana, Venda, Ciskei
WSD	Whole School Development
WSE	Whole School Evaluation

CHAPTER 1

ORIENTATION TO THE STUDY AND POLICY CONTEXT

1.1 Introduction

Change can be a very strange phenomenon; it can bring expectation and excitement on one hand and nervousness, apprehension and confusion on the other. South Africa, over the decade surrounding its becoming a democracy in 1994, has been a foment of change. In education, policies such as the South African Schools Act and Curriculum 2005 have brought dramatic changes to the ways in which schools are managed and governed, with schools and principals expected to play roles greatly different from those in the past. Different personalities and leadership styles amongst principals, as well as different histories and cultural contexts of local communities present difficult dynamics for the work of principals.

Secondary schools face particular demands, and receive a lot of attention from authorities and broader society when it comes to curriculum delivery. Problems in the school education system tend to manifest themselves more clearly at the secondary, rather than primary school level of education, because this is where the outputs of 12 years of schooling are displayed to the nation.

Rural schools experience challenges that are different from township and urban schools, because issues of infrastructure, poverty and marginalisation are closely linked to being rural. Gordon (1997:16), for example, reports that the largest numbers of learners are in the provinces of KwaZulu-Natal, Limpopo and Eastern Cape, and these provinces have the highest numbers of poverty-stricken communities. A huge section of South African society and the majority of learners in South Africa are largely ignored by the powers that be. Rural areas do not

receive tailored support, yet, serving so many of the nation's learners, they are expected to perform well in terms of matriculation results.

While changes in education have placed principals in the front seat of social transformation in all South African communities, principals in rural secondary schools are in particularly complex situations. Thus, I chose for my study principals and secondary schools in the rural district of Sea Lake, KwaZulu Natal. Sea Lake has advantages for my study of being 'typical' of many rural districts in KwaZulu Natal (and more widely), and accessible for me, in location and language. I wanted to establish whether or not principals in Sea Lake are performing the transformative roles expected of them. I wanted to investigate how processes of transformation have impacted or are impacting on their daily lives, duties and functions. I wanted to understand, from their perspectives, what they do as school managers and why. I believe such knowledge will be of value to policy makers and policy implementers (including principals) as well as researchers.

1.2 Decentralising schooling in South Africa

The advent of a democratic dispensation in South Africa in April 1994 brought new challenges for management in all spheres of South Africans' lives, including education. One of the changes in education was to decentralize power and responsibility for school management and curriculum design, from central authorities to individual institutions at local level, so that the latter could take charge of their destinies and respond to their communities (Potgieter, Visser, Van der Bank, Mothata and Squelch, 1997). Concepts of self-managing schools and school-based management are at the core of the South African Schools Act (SASA; Act 84 of 1996). According to policy, decentralisation takes place within constraints imposed by central guidelines – guidelines that range across curriculum and assessment, school governance, school management, human and physical resource planning, teacher appraisal, and school evaluation. School

principals have more power and responsibilities, but are surrounded by a plethora of guidelines and accountability requirements.

Principals have been catapulted to high positions, likened by some to 'Chief Executive Officers' (CEOs.), in a very short space of time (Godden, 1996). They are responsible for professional leadership and strategic direction for their schools, community participation and resource management (Knight, 1997). (However, school principals are not quite like CEOs, because, belonging to a national education system, their operations are circumscribed by national and provincial policies, bureaucratic demands, financial arrangements, and accountability measures that apply to all schools, regardless of location and community). For principals, the new expectations have been introduced with limited preparation, yet power, authority and responsibility go hand in hand with capacities to perform: the knowledge and skills of principals are of crucial importance if schools are to realise their goals and missions.

There is extensive literature from a number of countries concerning the difficulties for principals in coming to terms with decentralisation, and the time they need to develop the necessary knowledge and skills. For example, Giles's (1998a) study, conducted in the United Kingdom, showed that years after policies on school-based management were introduced, principals still had not grasped the strategic initiative to manage their schools as anticipated. Sackney and Dibski (1994) argued that many school principals do not possess the complex skills they need in order to cope and successfully run their schools. Studies of structural changes and their impact on the management of schools are reviewed in Chapter 2.

In South Africa, principals face what I call policy overload. For example, along with the SASA (and consistent with it) are new policies in curriculum (especially Curriculum 2005), new 'norms and standards of teacher education' (which apply to practising educators), requirements of Whole School Development and Whole

School Evaluation, teacher appraisal, and a raft of financial policies such as the post-provisioning norms. In addition, there are operational policies, such as codes of conduct for learners and educators, the banning of corporal punishment, and provision of education for pregnant girls. Major policies such as Curriculum 2005 and the SASA encapsulate the government's vision of participation and 'life-long learning' for everyone: educators; learners; parents; business; school governing bodies; communities etc (Principals Training Manual, 2001). School principals are crucial to educational and social transformation (Godden, 1996; Principals Training Manual, 2001).

While principals are trying to manage their schools, process the multitude of changes (in their minds and in practice) and adjust to the new demands, the Department of Education is exerting a lot of pressure and expectations, often through accountability measures linked to performance indicators at the district and regional levels. At the same time, principals are not only agents of the Education Department; they are directly responsible to their communities (where they are expected to express the community's wishes and expectations), and they are responsible to the educators and educational programmes as professional and administrative leaders of their schools. The policy overload has had tremendous impact on school principals (Lewis, Naidoo and Weber, 2000).

When people are not sure about what to do, and under pressure from many quarters, it is not uncommon for them to take different and convenient routes that they feel will take them 'somewhere'. One avenue, according to Lindquist and Mauriel (1989, cited in Anthony, 2001:2) is *"compliance without commitment":* presenting the trappings of change without seeking real change.

1.3 Following international trends?

Transformation in the management of education, of the kind currently underway in South Africa, has taken place in developed countries such as Australia, New Zealand, Canada, United States, and United Kingdom. The critical roles played

by principals in those reforms have been highlighted by scholars such as Caldwell (1994), Sackney and Dibski (1994) Caldwell and Spinks (1992), Giles (1998), Knight (1997), Cheng and Cheung (1997), Goldring and Rallis (1993), and Mthabela (1997). The conditions in the countries listed above – in terms of wealth and its distribution, infrastructure, social and systemic stability, skill levels and culture – are remarkably different from South Africa. In those settings, educational management researchers and policy makers initially believed that, by restructuring management systems, schools would improve their performances and improve learner performances. However, the efficacy of School-Based Management in terms of improving learners' performances has been questioned, on the grounds of lack of evidence of significant improvements, and difficulties anyway in attributing causes and effects (Sackney and Dibski, 1994; Caldwell, 1998; Mohrmans, Wohlstetter and Associates, 1994, Cheng and Cheung, 1997).

Reforms in developed countries were not undertaken against the backdrop of an entire country's social transformation, including democratisation of all social and educational institutions, as is the case in South Africa. While structural changes in South Africa are concerned to improve service delivery so that learners learn better, the agenda is bigger, going beyond service delivery to social change. For example, under Apartheid, different racial groups had different education systems, with different ways of working, and remarkably different resources. These differences re-enforced inequities in socio-economic levels, personal freedoms, culture, language and access to knowledge. Thus it was imperative that the democratic government provided a single, national education system, but at the same time respected (and enabled) differences between communities. Decentralisation according to a single set of national guidelines provided a mechanism for meeting these requirements of one system for all while allowing different communities to express their differences and guide their own schools. Thus, while the South African policies are partly about efficiency, they are also about equity, multiculturalism, redress, democracy and participation. In South Africa, it is necessary to look more widely than input-outcome models of

schooling, to the conditions of principals' work, what principals do and why, and the schools' roles in social transformation.

1.4 Why study rural school principals?

Detailed descriptions of South African rural communities are provided, for example, by Gordon (1997) and the Nelson Mandela Foundation (2004) study, referred to in this thesis as NMF. The communities and their schools suffer economic and socio-political isolation, lack of communication technologies and infrastructure, and general poverty and poor health. And they are almost exclusively Black African, typically with each community from a single language group. These three characteristics – rural, poor and African – separately and together made rural communities targets of discrimination under Apartheid. Administratively, their schools were classified as 'African schools' and belonged to the (then) Department of Education and Training (DET) and the (then) KwaZulu Department of Education and Culture. The legacies of poverty, marginalisation and isolation remain.

There is little knowledge thus far (for policy makers in the national Department of Education and researchers) of what principals in remote, rural communities have gone through, or are going through; of their everyday problems; of their feelings and experiences in these turbulent environments, as they negotiate opportunities and responsibilities created by Education Department policies and procedures, their local communities and the learners and educators in their schools. In situations such as these, negative impacts of all the policies and changes might be expected, but so might positive impacts and creative solutions. This study aimed to provide basic understanding of these issues. It sought to get behind principals' 'faces and skins' and try to understand, through their stories, how they lead and manage their schools the way that they do.

1.5 The significance of the study

The central significance of my study follows from the outline above: rural secondary schools serve a large proportion of the South African population, in communities quite different from urban and township schools, but little is known of what their principals do in practical terms, or the 'how?' and 'why?' of what they do. It is important to learn from them and about them, regardless of the policy frameworks in which they operate, but what they do is especially significant in relation to policies of decentralisation and transformation.

Principals of secondary schools in rural communities need to be heard; they need an environment that allows them to reflect on their management practices, to speak out about their experiences of transformation in their work places and the conceptions they have regarding their roles in transformation more broadly than curriculum delivery in their schools.

Rural school principals interact with policies and communities, and can contribute to policy formulation and critique. This study will inform policy makers, educational management researchers as well as principals about issues of democracy, devolution and socio-cultural complexities with which principals work in rural schools.

South Africans (professionals-academics-researchers-entire society) need to know and understand, not only 'how?' and 'why?' principals manage their schools the way they do, but also how they translate their thinking, visions and mission statements into concrete plans that might be implemented and are implemented.

1.6 Decentralisation and devolution

Writers such as Levačič (1995) and Conley (1991, cited in Sackney and Dibski, 1994), propagate the efficacy of decentralisation based on 'subsidiarity' and 'ownership' – if decisions are made closer to the 'clients', better decisions will be

made, and greater achievements will result. Over recent decades, it has become a widely accepted 'truth' that a single school in possession of its own decision-making powers will provide a better quality education than a school run by a distant, centralised bureaucracy. However, this truth needs to be questioned, in developed countries and perhaps more so in developing countries. It is far from clear from research in developed countries whether schools are improving in terms of 'quality' since decentralisation, and whether any changes in quality have occurred because of decentralisation. Writers such as Sackney and Dibski (1994) and Cheng and Cheung (1997) have stressed the importance of capacity building more than structural change and accountability demands.

Giles (1998a) in his paper entitled *"Role of Site-Based planning for schools' improvement: Control or empowerment"* emphasised that decentralisation in the United Kingdom was never intended to allow schools total freedom to use delegated resources. Hence he distinguishes between 'decentralisation' and 'devolution', arguing that the U.K. reforms were more about decentralisation than devolution. Caldwell (1994:78) shares these sentiments regarding the conceptual understanding of devolution and decentralisation. He argues that decentralisation occurs when a central government hands control to another government, on a lower level plane, whereas devolution occurs when decisions formerly made at a central level are made at a level in the organisation that is closer to the point of service (Caldwell, 1994: 78).

Perhaps the distinction between devolution and decentralisation hinges on lines of accountability, with accountability to the centre applying more and operating differently in devolution from decentralisation. In this study, I make no clear distinction between devolution and decentralisation, in part because in practical terms some decisions are decentralised, others devolved; in some domains accountability to the centre is low, in other domains it is high. As will be argued in later chapters, the extent and nature of devolution depend greatly on the details of the central 'guidelines' and related accountability arrangements. Further, when

the central authority pushes accountability mechanisms, people at various levels start questioning the motives for decentralising (or devolving) in the first place. For example Naidoo (2002) argues that decentralisation is a political strategy by the ruling elite to retain most of its power by relinquishing some of it. He cites some leaders in Asian and African regimes where decentralisation was used as a substitute for democracy, and a safe way to acquire some legitimacy and grass-root support, by bringing locals into decision-making processes (Naidoo, 2002:3). Giles (1998) has also expressed doubts about motives for decentralisation in the UK.

There are multiple reasons for devolution, often confused, appealing to different groups, and arising from difficulties in balancing central and local control, central and local accountability. Various authors and policy documents have argued for alternative justifications and claims, adding to the confusion. For example, is devolution about delivery of national curriculum, or participation of local communities in curriculum? Is it about democracy and social transformation, or 'shifting the blame'? Is it about devolution or decentralisation? Is it all a smoke screen, as Lewis et al (2000) suggest, accompanied by tighter central control?

If the policies and their justifications are confused, then principals can be expected to be confused, working to many masters, that is, the Department of Education, parents and communities. Part of this study will be to find out how the principals understand and manage the various rationales for and processes of decentralisation.

1.7 Strategic Management

Strategic management is a concept that was borrowed from the business sector (where it originated). In many ways, it is a technology, a recommended process, more than a concept. It was first applied in schools in some Western countries as recently as the 1980s, and has quickly become part of the language of educational management. It is central to the vision of decentralisation, providing

techniques whereby schools can shape their own futures, consistent with national goals and guidelines and resources available. Weindling (1997: 232) sees strategic management as a tool that principals can use to help their schools become better learning organisations. Bush and West-Burnham (1994: 82) regard it as a bridge between the perceived present situation and a desired future situation. The effectiveness of the process is logically contingent on three things: the quality of a situation analysis, the appropriateness of an envisaged future, and effectiveness in getting from one to the other. Each phase requires creativity, acumen and management skills; there are many ways of 'missing the point'. What are the characteristics of the current situation (which has local, national and global dimensions) that are important, and who decides? Which particular future should be selected from an infinite array of possibilities, and how? To what extent should existing resources (human and material), or perhaps opportunities for improved resources, drive the process? In all of these questions, conceptions of the school in relation to community, education in relation to development, and the principal in relation to the range of stakeholders are critical.

Techniques of strategic management can help a school understand itself and its environment, formulate its vision, and translate that vision into concrete achievements. Potentially, they can also contribute to the formulation of central policy in a *'feed-forward-feed-back'* fashion. This requires processes by which the Education Department can learn from schools, especially through the schools' formal representatives, their principals.

The complexity of strategic management should not be underestimated. Quite apart from complexities of blind spots and multiple perspectives, errors of judgement and limited resources, strategic management happens simultaneously in a number of domains and at a number of levels. In central offices and districts, schools and classrooms, different individuals and groups are asking "*Where are we, where do we want to go, and how do we get there?*" In each case

constrained or facilitated by what is happening at other levels. Such constraints are two-way. For example planning at school level may be constrained by what is happening at the district level and vice versa. Even within a school, there are significantly different but interacting levels, including classroom operations, the intended curriculum, school management and the School Governing Body.

A major challenge facing school principals is their capacity (including the school's, the community's and government's capacity) to fruitfully interact with education policies and various stakeholders, to concretise policy initiatives and at the same time to contribute to policy improvements.

1.8 Leadership and management

The thesis focuses on "principals as professional leaders" and gives particular emphasis to the implications of their leadership roles during this time of transformation. Koontz, O'Donnell and Weihrich (1986) regard leadership as:

> *The art or process of influencing people so that they will strive willingly and enthusiastically towards the achievement of group goals"*

Their definition centres on influencing people to act in particular ways. Leadership that has no influence on the people being led is not leadership. Granting that, McKenna, in Leask and Terrel (1997:95) approaches leadership from another angle – as capacity building. He emphasises change as the ultimate aim for all organisational endeavours. He says:

> *Leadership is a force that creates the capacity among a group of people to do something different or better. This could be reflected in more creative outcomes, or a higher level of performance. In essence, leadership is an agency of change, and could entail inspiring others to do more than they could otherwise have done or were doing*

Both definitions point to influence and inspiration, change and innovation. Both definitions are relevant for this study, with its focus on the agency of principals.

Transformation in rural communities and schools calls for creativity, pro-activity, agency, democracy and participation. While working within the system and being influenced by it, principals as leaders are simultaneously engaged in influencing the system to change. The structures within which principals are now working are such that the leadership skills McKenna refers to are crucial: if schools are to transform, they need transformational leaders.

While distinctions between leadership and management can be made (with management oriented more to the mechanics of achievement), the distinctions soon become blurred: on the one hand, both leadership and management are shared across the school, and on the other hand the principal is the key figure (as principal) in both functions. In this thesis, I use concepts of leadership and management interchangeably. The school community, like the Education Department, expects principals to provide leadership in process and substance, and management that ensures leadership and achievement. This puts heavy responsibilities on principals.

1.9 Why do school principals not use strategic management?

Despite the obvious advantages of strategic management in schools, researchers such as Brown (1990) contend that very few leaders use it. It is not clear why this is so. For example, do principals not use it because they do not like it, do not know how to use it, or are not aware of the benefits of it? Brown (1990) has generated seven reasons why business organisations might not have used the approach. I have paraphrased them here in terms of schools.

(1) There is a lack of awareness by principals and School Management Teams of their school's true situation.

(2) Members of the School Management Team are collectively deluding themselves about the position of the school. This can come about, paradoxically, if they are a tightly knit group and develop 'group think', a self-reinforcing view of

the staff and school, and relationships with the outside world. Members tend to re-interpret or ignore information that doesn't fit with the group's preferred way of looking at the world.

(3) Sometimes, there are powerful people in the school with vested interests in maintaining the *status quo*. Their positions and status depend on the continuation of the existing operation and they discourage the staff from asking challenging questions.

(4) Schools have to deal with externally imposed change and this tends to promote reactive, incremental responses rather than strategic approaches.

(5) The principal and School Management Team are too locked into every day problems and matters of urgency. This gives them no time to consider longer-term issues, nor does it prepare them to take a strategic perspective on the school.

(6) The past successes (and failures) of the school can make people "blind" to the current situation. Successes can also encourage management to stick to the tried-and-tested strategies that may no longer be appropriate.

(7) Related to the above is the tendency to cling to the past glories, which can make a principal reluctant to see the school move in a different direction. Moreover, a change of direction can be seen as an admission that what was done before was a mistake.

In managing their schools, principals have to balance the demands of maintenance (the smooth operation of the school's core business) and development, stability and change. The seven points above raise some possible explanations of how some principals find themselves not utilising strategic management in a proactive, focused and systematic manner. At the same time,

some of the explanations – such as prioritising the urgent or stability – can be seen as strategic choices. Thus the charge that principals do not use strategic planning is not a charge that they are not strategic, or don't plan, but that they don't use the analyses and big-picture approaches advocated as 'strategic management'.

1.10 Statement of the problem

Principals in rural secondary schools face complex demands from their communities and the Education Department whereby principals are regarded as agents of transformation – transforming the roles, operations and achievements of their schools, transforming local communities and transforming the nation. These demands have particular dimensions in rural areas, arising in part from the character of rural life, and in part from the history of Apartheid. Thus, on the one hand, transformation is particularly important in rural communities, and, on the other hand, rural communities need to have their voices heard as part of national transformation.

The government has made structural changes to the education system to give schools and communities more powers to make decisions on issues directly affecting them, according to central goals and guidelines, and to permit schools and communities to participate in policy development. The changes require sophisticated skills and high levels of commitment from rural school principals.

Little is known, in detail, of the conditions in which rural secondary school principals operate, the ways they operate, or why they make the choices they do. The current study was undertaken to address these questions.

1.11 Critical questions

For principals in rural secondary schools in KwaZulu Natal:

- How have changes in education policy impacted on their management practices?

- How do they manage their schools and why do they manage them the way they do?

- What management needs, ideas and strategies do they develop in the face of change and policy overload?

1.12 Conceptual frameworks

Given the background I have sketched above, the aims of the study and its critical questions, a number of conceptual frameworks are suitable. These include transformational leadership theories, democracy, participation, strategic leadership/management, principals as Chief Executive Officers, schools as learning organisations, and schools as open systems. A combination of these frameworks is relevant for public institutions operating at these times in South Africa. One way of bringing them together is through ideas of multiple roles and competing demands.

The ways in which principals view themselves and their roles are critically important to how they manage. For example, they might see themselves mainly as professional leaders, or administrators or CEOs. The ways they define their roles in particular contexts influence the ways they act in those contexts. A principal may take the role of entrepreneur in seeking school sponsorship, professional leader in a staff meeting, quiet achiever in a district meeting, pastoral carer in working with a student. Principals must play a number of roles. Their views of their own roles are influenced by their views of schools, and of the roles of schools in their communities. For example, they may see school entirely as a site for 'curriculum delivery', or as a community centre providing leadership and support in all things educational. At the same time, within their various settings, organisations and communities, how they view themselves depends in part on how others view them: principals' perceptions of their roles are socially mediated, if not socially constructed.

This study is centred on principals, with individual principals (not the schools or communities) as the unit of analysis. Principals are considered within the contexts of their schools, communities and the education system. They are in constant interaction with the internal environment (within the school) and the external environment (encompassing the community, the Department of Education, the business sector, churches, and, less directly, policy makers in provincial and national government). In rural South African communities, principals are important in processes of change and transformation of society, as well as in schools. Their interactions with locals and their reflections about their interactions are significant for the study.

In drawing from the theoretical ideas listed above, I will be asking how principals see themselves. Do they see themselves as change agents or transformational leaders? Do they regard their schools as learning organisations? Do they regard them as open systems? What do they mean by those terms? I will also look at the interrelationships among such concepts against the backdrop of a broader social transformation in rural settings, with their traditional African leadership, cultural and other dynamics that are in some ways peculiar to rural communities.

I am also interested in the interplay between local (principals and schools) and national (macro-policy formulation) ideas and groups, regarding policy formulation, development and implementation. A *'backward-mapping'* strategy of policy development, by which the situation on the ground (micro-level) serves as a source of policy formulation (bottom-up), is a cornerstone of democratic change. This implies that, ideally, as much as education policy is determined at national level of government, the local level plays active and meaningful roles in influencing policy formulation. From a framework of democracy, participation needs to be practised at each of national, provincial, district and school levels, as well as in the interactions between levels. 'Multilateral wisdom' is a proverb that

applies to collegiality, democracy, and conceptions of learning organisations as well.

1.13 Layout of the study

Chapter 1: The policy context

The current chapter summarises the orientation of the study, motivation for the study, its purposes and critical questions, and theoretical frameworks that guided the research design, analysis and interpretation.

Chapter 2: The personal context

Research is inevitably a personal journey for the researcher, as much as an 'external' objective process. This is especially so in the research framework I have chosen. Chapter 2 traces my professional and research journey, helping to locate me in the study, for example, why I chose the methodology I chose.

Chapter 3: Literature review

This chapter reviews literature on structural changes, transformational leadership theories, learning organisations, principals as change agents, and so on. The second part of the chapter deals with cases of studies done in the U.K. and Thailand. Such studies dealt with structural changes in educational management and administration.

Chapter 4: Research design and methodology

This provides a description of the research process, design, methodology and methods, as well as justifications for such methodological choices.

Chapter 5: The principals in their schools

This chapter presents research data and site-by-site analysis and findings. It seeks to locate principals in their schools, communities and the Education Department on a site-by-site basis, and locate the schools and communities in relation to the principals.

Chapter 6: Patterns in the data

This is a theoretical chapter, which attempts to theorise and make sense of what principals do when they manage schools. It does this by analysing across sites and also providing some linkages with other sources of data and literature and theoretical frameworks.

Chapter 7: Conclusions and recommendations

I present a summary and concluding remarks, as well as recommendations to relevant stakeholders, as they arise from the study.

CHAPTER 2

PERSONAL CONTEXT AND MOTIVATION FOR THE STUDY

2.1 Introduction

In an attempt to broaden understanding of the research and its interpretation I think it is prudent to place myself in the problem situation, explaining how I became interested and actually captivated by it. I strongly feel that research – especially doctoral research – involves an 'internal story', my personal journey, entwined with the 'external story' as told by the other participants. This is especially the case for the research framework I have chosen, centred on naturalistic, participative approaches to observations, conversations and interviews in the schools, where the direction and focus of data collection and interpretation depend heavily on the interactions of 'the researcher' with the other participants.

2.2 My personal journey

As I write, I work full time as a researcher for the Centre for Educational Research Evaluation and Policy (C.E.R.E.P.) at the University of KwaZulu-Natal (ex-University of Durban-Westville). I am also a part-time lecturer at Durban-Umlazi Campus of the University of Zululand, which is one of the previously disadvantaged black universities in South Africa. I teach an Educational Management module at B. Ed (Hons) level. This puts me in close and frequent contact with school principals; deputy-principals, heads of department and teachers. I also supervise mini-dissertation tasks that educators complete as part of course requirements. I am therefore in close touch with issues that affect rural principals and educators in different parts of the province.

I left the Department of Education in 1999. From 1990 to mid 1993, I served two schools as acting-principal under the (then) KwaZulu Department of Education

and *Culture*, until I was appointed as principal in 1993 by the (then) Department of Education and Training, on a permanent basis. This meant that I ran schools in two Apartheid departments of education, with different approaches to governance.

Many schools in the province in the 1980s and early 1990s went through traumas of political turmoil and instability. There were campaigns launched by underground struggle movements aimed at undermining Apartheid rule and management structures and personnel in a range of institutions; frictions between the African National Congress (ANC) and the Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP); disruption to schooling; burning of school buildings; depletion of the few resources available in African schools; demands by learners (and later by parents) for participation in decision-making through Student Representative Committees (SRCs) and Parent Teacher Student Associations (PTSAs), and a whole range of issues of social and political nature that put school principals in a precarious position. Principals (and others) were judged as either for the "struggle" or against it. Confusion prevailed, because right and wrong depended on which side one was looking from. The situation was too complex for any rational decision process; survival was everyone's preoccupation.

Early appointments

When I started managing schools in 1990 in an acting capacity, I was barely five years into my teaching career. I was the youngest educator in the school, in terms of age and teaching experience, but the only educator who had a post-graduate degree. Presumably, this was an important factor in my appointment but the teaching staff also recommended that I be the person to guide them *through the deeply troubled situation that existed.*

The entire management team of the school had left the school within months of one another, and there was a *management vacuum. The exodus of the* managers occurred at the height of the 1989/1990 township violence in

Mpumalanga Township, in the province of KwaZulu-Natal. The conflict was between youth supporting the now defunct United Democratic Front (UDF)/African National Congress (ANC) and those supporting the Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP). The school served as a battleground, as it lay at the boundary between territories controlled by the warring factions. Blood was spilled within the school premises, during and after school hours.

The support I was offered by my fellow educators proved crucial, as we worked together to *'keep the ship afloat'*, because the entire functioning of the school was under serious threat. For example, it wasn't clear whether matriculation examinations would be written. Education Department officials were afraid to visit, because of the unpredictable and unstable security situation in and around the school. The Circuit Office officials had vacated their premises, taking refuge in the teacher training college within the township, where security was better.

Consequently, the outside world had no way of knowing what exactly was going on inside the school. I became the link between the school and outside world, but that link was weak. It was a traumatic experience for me. I decided that my main role as principal was ensuring that learners remained at school and were attending classes. A sizable number of classrooms (7 classrooms) had been destroyed in arson attacks against the school roughly 11 months before. The administration building, together with two staff rooms, had been destroyed as well. I had to ensure that rudimentary resources were available, e.g. pieces of chalk, shelter for educators so that they could sit down and prepare for lessons, or hold staff meetings etc.

During my first year as educator, I had not even been taught or briefed about the responsibilities that went with being a class teacher. Now I was the principal of the school as a whole, again with no orientation programmes. Nonetheless, I had always been interested in school management, at least at a theoretical level. *From my academic studies, I had some grounding, in terms of understanding*

how people communicate and interact in organisations, as part of my post-graduate studies. I was, to that extent intellectually prepared. I left the school before I could develop and refocus it and move from the 'reactive-crises-damage control' type of management that characterised my term of office, to a more proactive-strategic mode for the future of the school.

Permanent appointment

My permanent appointment as principal came in 1993 and took me to another school context, a secondary school belonging to a different department, the DET. Compared to my previous schools, this one was relatively well resourced, in terms of human and physical resources. Besides the principal, deputy-principals, the school had five heads of department (HODs) and five non-teaching staff members. For me, a major shift in focus in management and administration was required.

There was more paper work to be done by everybody, i.e. educators, heads of departments, deputy and the principal as well. The DET put more emphasis on ensuring that the filing system was in order.

Unlike the previous department I had worked for, the first people who had to be informed should something go wrong at school were departmental officials, not the chairman of the school committee, as had been the case in the other department.

Principals usually did not teach, and spent most of their time in their offices. When not in their offices, they could be attending the department's meetings, which were characterised by a conveyor-belt mentality of that time. Inspectors of schools, as they were called then, used to cascade the information from higher officials in the department's bureaucracy to schools, with no inputs from principals below. It was always top-down. There was even a programme called

'*Top Down*' through which principals were trained about the protocols of the department.

Many stakeholders were vocal in demanding representation in the decision-making processes in schools. This demand was ubiquitous in all schools in the area. Learners were putting more pressure on schools and the Education Department for recognition of their representative structures (the SRC's). Teacher unions were also demanding participation in schools. Parents felt that they were marginalized by school principals and wanted their voices to be heard too. Consequently, Parent-Teacher-Student Associations (PTSAs) gained momentum during this period.

Being new to the DET and having to face all these challenges was not easy. Ironically, having to attend to all these issues provided an opportunity for me to interact with various stakeholders, and in the process harness their expertise and inputs. I actually felt some kind of relief when problems arose at school, because there were many people with whom to share them, people who could co-own these problems. I felt some relief that I didn't have to carry the burden alone. The management approach I adopted was participatory and transparent. And it was helpful to me.

In the midst of all these demands and protests, never-ending meetings, (some with departmental officials, some convened by the local civic structure, some convened by principals in the circuit), work overload, and day to day issues, I found myself floundering about, not knowing what I had achieved each day, but I would notice that when I got home I was totally exhausted. I decided that I had to have some sense of direction and a sense of achievement at the end of each day, each week, each month. I designed the following plans of monthly, weekly and daily objectives. Each day, in order to see what I had done, I divided my diary into two columns, one for '*Proactive management*' and another for '*Reactive management*' Under 'Proactive management', I entered the tasks I

wanted to accomplish for the day. The 'Reactive management' column was reserved for notes on unscheduled interactions with parents, community members, or any other engagement that had not been planned. From the diary, I could see how much of my time was spent attending to unscheduled matters and how much was used to do what I had planned to do.

Overall management duties were divided among the seven of us that comprised the management team i.e. the principal, deputy and five heads of department. Each HOD was responsible for a key management area. The deputy principal was responsible for learners and school discipline. I was responsible for overall co-ordination including public relations and communication with the outside world, (including parents, industry and so on). A considerable amount of my time was taken up by meetings outside of the school. It was important that when I was away everything went smoothly in the school. To help, I designed a school stamp for the deputy principal because I kept the principal's stamp with me 24 hours a day (for many reasons, one of which was that, should I need to authenticate documents, the stamp should be available).

Despite the trials and tribulations of that time, on hindsight, I feel that my interactions with various stakeholders (although hostile at times) were helpful especially because I welcomed their participation. I liked transparency and openness. I had observed with the learners too that if they were well informed about everything pertaining to school matters, they were less destructive, compared to when they were left in the dark, when they felt that things were being hidden from them.

I used to consult as widely as possible about the latest developments regarding the school. I think, as a result, during difficult times the groups would combine and defend the school, for example, against thugs and criminal elements, disgruntled youth who had left school, and others who were disruptive of the school's progress.

Masters research project

As a teacher, I had been aware of tensions between school management and educators, particularly, when it came to supervision of the latter by the former. I had come to understand from the literature that supervision and professional development were not necessarily mutually exclusive, that supervision was not an end in itself, but rather, a means to an end, in terms of providing support to the teaching and learning situation. Hence, my study sought to:

- Access the principal's understanding of his/her role in staff development.
- Ascertain the extent to which principals' supervision strategies were enhancing their teaching staff's professional development.

The study showed that principals of schools in the sample desired to play a constructive role in the professional development of their teaching staff, but lacked the capacity to do so. They felt they were powerless to positively intervene in the educators' professional lives, given the militancy of teachers' unions. Their supervision strategies were not enhancing educators' professional development, and they saw no clear conceptual link between supervision and staff development.

2.3 Methodological Choice

I have recounted this journey in order to indicate my biases in my research interests and methodological choices. From my experiences of the complexity of African schools during the struggle, the confusions that have followed (for there are deep confusions in South African life, at all levels), and the hopes of social transformation, interpretivist and participative research approaches made more sense to me than positivist ones. During my Masters study, and then during my D.Ed studies, I increasingly realised the impact of experience and context on a researcher's interests and frameworks, including conceptualising the problem, the nature of research and knowledge, and the roles that researchers can play in knowledge production. I wanted to understand the complex world of lived-

experiences from the point of view of those who live it (Schwandtz, 2000; Kvale, 1983; Schumacher and McMillan, 1993).

The methodological choices are taken up in detail in Chapter 3 (literature review) and Chapter 4 (Methodology).

CHAPTER 3

LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

3.1 Introduction

Chapter three reviews literature on principals' transformational leadership and transformational schools; research about restructuring of school management; rural communities and leadership. I am looking at these issues especially with a view to transformation and backward mapping, as well as curriculum delivery. Principals are central figures in their interactions with all these issues.

3.2 Transformative schools and principals

It has been acknowledged by scholars such as Fullan (1999), Leithwood, Jantzi, and Steinbach (1998), as well as O'Sullivan (1999) that transformative institutions and transformative leaders go together. Before delving into the issue of principals' roles in transformation process, a more global and generic understanding of the concept of transformational leadership is needed. What is being transformed and what to? Who decides? What is transformational leadership? How can transformational leadership be understood? What does it entail? In what ways is this concept important in this research? These questions are key to understanding whether or not what principals do in rural schools constitute transformational leadership, and the extent to which their management actions are enabling transformation.

Burns, (1978) was one of the first writers to analyse the transformational leadership concept. He defined transformational leadership as, *"A process of influencing major changes in the attitudes of employees, so that the goals of the organisation and the vision of the leader are realised"*

He describes transformational leadership, not as a set of specific behaviours, but rather as a process in which the leader and followers raise one another to higher levels of morality and motivation. He states that transformational leaders are

individuals that appeal to higher ideals and moral values such as justice and equality, and can be found at various levels of an organisation (Burns, 1978: 20). What emerges strongly is the notion of *'stability and change'* or *'maintenance and development'*. The leader effects change in the attitudes of others while he, himself is changing. In other words, a transforming leader is bound by rules of the game whilst pushing the boundaries at the same time. A similar idea is advanced by other writers such as Bennis and Nanus, (1985); Leithwood and Steinbach, (1991); Sergiovanni, (1989 and 1990), who describe transformational leadership as:

> *Going beyond individual needs, focusing on common purpose, addressing intrinsic rewards and higher psychological needs such as self-actualization and developing commitment with the followers"* (South West Educational District Laboratory, 2001).

If the leader is transformational, he is perceived as *'challenging the process'* *'inspiring a shared vision'* *'enabling others to act'*, *'modeling the way'* and *'encouraging the heart'* (S.W.E.D.L., 2001).

Van Loggerenberg (2002: 39) avers that transformational leaders display dynamic actions by:

- Providing clarity of focus so that everyone involved understands the intended outcomes of curriculum reforms;
- Understanding group and *change* dynamics as natural phenomena;
- Initiating and sustaining productive group dynamics within the context of situational leadership and relevant change management models;
- Leading the development of clear outcomes, facilitating individual accountability and constantly monitoring progress;
- Ensuring the formation of effective networking to share ideas, best practices and nurture emotional support;
- Facilitating the creation of clear priorities and ensuring their systematic implementation and celebrating small successes.

From the points raised above, it is evident that this approach may be daunting for leaders, especially for school principals in rural communities, given the contexts in which they work and the resources available to them.

- From this definition, transformative principals must be open-minded about many issues in and around the school, imaginative, innovative and creative.

- They must be able to reflect on their leadership styles and behaviours, as well as, those of others within their schools. For the principals and others around them, their vision, policy implementation and all inter-personal dynamics are constantly being subjected to rigorous scrutiny. Even beliefs, customs and culture are questioned (Covey, 1990). The individual leader is viewed as central to change. It is the individual that must change, be amenable to change, and also be the driver of the change process as a 'change agent'. This theme is carried throughout the study. For example, Bhengu (1999); Kydd, Crawford and Riches, (1997), and O'Sullivan (1999) allude to the importance of the individual in organisations, namely that there can be no talk of organisations growing if individuals in them are not growing.

- The characteristics of transformational leadership are consistent with the expectations of the Education Department regarding principals' leadership (and) conduct as contained in the following set of criteria for assessing principals' readiness to deal with transformation.

- Although they do not seem to be intended to be the essence of transformation, these criteria do however, indicate collegiality that principals are expected to bring to their work with management teams in schools. Also, it would appear that the expectation is that a transformational leader will not have problems meeting such departmental criteria.

  ✓ To what extent does the School Management Team work as a team, with members offering support?
  ✓ Can the principal rely on the support of the School Management Team?

✓ Does the principal consult with the School Management Team on all-important issues related to the school?

✓ Does the School Management Team work closely with the School Governing Body?

✓ To what extent are all school policies and procedures aimed at ensuring that learners receive quality education?

✓ To what extent do school stakeholders respect one another?

✓ Does the School Management Team know and understand the policies and laws, which now provide the framework for the running of the school?

✓ Does the School Management Team welcome the idea of change or fear it? (Sacred Heart, 2001).

The characteristics of transformational leadership correspond with concepts of learning organisations, in that a transformational leader is expected not only to lead, but also to learn and provide an environment that is conducive to learning. The learning I am referring to here is not only that of learners, but for adults (educators); it is not only for individuals in the school but also for the school as an organisation. Everybody is a learner in the learning organisation and everybody is a learner in transformational leadership; transformation involves learning, learning involves transformation. The principal learns from the teaching staff, parents and learners; it is not that educators know everything and learners know nothing or the principal knows everything and the teaching staff knows nothing.

3.3 "Schools as Learning Organisations"

Leithwood and his colleagues (1995) define a learning organisation as:

> A *group of people pursuing common purpose (individual purposes as well)*
> *within a collective commitment to regularly weighing the value of those*
> *purposes, modifying them when that makes sense, and continuously*
> *developing more effective and efficient ways of accomplishing those*
> *purposes.*

Senge (quoted in O'Neal, 1995: 1) goes a step further by suggesting more than a collective commitment to service delivery and contends that a learning organisation is an organisation in which:

> *People at all levels are, collectively, continually enhancing their capacity to create things they really want to create.*

Senge in O'Neal (1995:1) further laments that:

> *Many staff development programmes have been, and still are, using traditional approaches whereby educators are helped to develop individual skills to do their work better, but are not actually focusing on enhancing the collective capacity of people to create and pursue overall visions.*

Similar sentiments are found in Argyris (1993) *"Single loop learning"*. Brandt (1998), like Senge (cited in O'Neal 1995), regards an ideal learning organisation as characterised by *'self-renewal'*. In that sense, not only are all members, as individuals, continually learning, but so is the organisation itself. Argyris and Schön (1978) argue that a learning organisation is best achieved by a flat and decentralised structure; where there are information systems that provide fast, public feedback on the performance of the organisation as a whole and of its various components; where there are measures of organisational performance, where there are systems of incentives aimed at promoting organisational learning; where ideologies associated with such measures are discussed and expressed, such as total quality, continuous learning, excellence, openness and boundary crossing.

The concept of a learning organisation invites questions about what is learned, and what learning is. Østergren (unpublished) considers a distinction between learning as adaptation and learning as enactment, arguing that they represent different epistemologies, positivist and interpretivist respectively. The idea of a school adapting to the environment around it suggests that the environment is knowable, and the knowledge objective. Learning is the reduction of uncertainty; understanding enables prediction and leads to action. This aspect belongs in the

positivist epistemology. The 'enactment' side of the concept belongs to interpretivist epistemology, and holds that the environment is socially constructed, and therefore knowledge is ambiguous, subject to various interpretations and trial and error applications. According to this view, learning is the creation of meaning and it leads to understanding (Spencer, 1996 in Østergren, unpublished: 2). Unlike its positivist counterpart, enactment does not presume that understanding will lead to action; rather, that it is the creation of meaning that will lead to understanding, which is the goal of learning. In the light of this, Senge's (1990: 3) statement that: *"the rate at which organisations learn may become the only sustainable source of competitive advantage"* raises some questions of *'adaptation'* in the *'enactment-adaptation'* dualism. According to Østergren (unpublished), such a statement puts Senge (1990a: 3) on the side of positivist epistemologies.

Purposes and processes of learning

Learning organisations can also be described in terms of different learning purposes, different conceptions of what can be questioned in the organisation and hence what can be learned. One of the most eminent protagonists of this approach is Argyris (1993), who distinguishes between *'single loop'* and *'double loop'* learning. On the first loop, learning is described as experience-based learning that does not question the dominant knowledge, procedures and goals of the organisation, and is not questioned by them. Learning results in improved efficiencies, but not any major change in the conception of the organisation. Although this type of learning is necessary, if managers want their institutions to survive in such a fast-changing environment, it is imperative according to Argyris (1993) that managers critically reflect on their behaviours and the way their organisation solves problems. This is the essence of *'double loop learning'*; it means that one *'stands outside of existing knowledge structures'*, and it demands a change in existing knowledge structures. That is the second loop. Argyris (1993) maintains that organisations need to have this characteristic to qualify as learning organisations.

Other writers use different phrases to describe similar dichotomies, for example Senge (1990) uses *'adaptive and generative learning'* while March (1991) uses *'explorative and exploitative learning'*. For schools to be regarded as learning organisations, these theorists would argue that they should be able to transcend *adaptive* to *generative* learning; *explorative* to *exploitative* learning, and so on.

There is much agreement among scholars that schools are not learning organisations, but merely organisations that are directed at learning, (Senge cited in O'Neal, 1995; Butler and Christie, 1999; Godden, 1996). Senge (cited in O'Neal, 1995: 1) for example, says that while schools can be regarded as institutions devoted to learning, but they are not learning organisations. Godden (1996) had this to say: *"It is ironic that although schools are organisations devoted to learning, they are generally not learning organisations"* (1996:31).

Descriptive and prescriptive approaches to learning organisations
According to Østergren (unpublished) learning organisations' literature can be divided into two categories, namely, prescriptive and descriptive:

(1) **Prescriptive literature:** This literature is prescriptive in the sense that it holds up a particular 'vision' as the 'best' (The learning organisation) and guides organisations on how to get to that particular vision. Learning is seen to have central significance for goal attainment in an increasingly changing and uncertain environment. That is, *"The rate at which learning organisations learn may be the only sustainable source of competitive advantage"* (Senge, 1990a: 3). Prescriptive literature urges organisations and management practitioners to (at least) embrace change in order to survive; at best to become learning organisations. There seems to be a link between prescriptive literature and positivistic epistemology.

(2) Descriptive literature: This explores *'learning in organisations'* or 'organisational learning'. It is primarily concerned with conceptual

understanding, describing the learning that does or does not occur in *'real'* organisations, trying to take into account the 'conditions on the ground.'

Senge in O'Neal (1995) has made a distinction between learning organisations and organisational learning, similar to Østergren's (unpublished) categorisation of learning organisations literature, namely, that there is prescriptive and descriptive literature of learning organisations. Senge (O'Neal, 1995), furthermore, maintains that the idea of learning organisations is unthinkable without organisational learning. For attaining that notion of learning organisations, one has to understand organisational and individual learning. It is only when individuals and groups in the organisation are continually learning that a learning organisation situation can be said to exist. I think this is significant since, according to Owens, (1995) it is individuals in organisations who learn and they also learn as a group, and without them learning, no institution can be said to be learning. Without people in organisations, there are no organisations since organisation as a concept, it must be remembered, exists in the mind only, and it cannot be touched, it only assumes practicality through human beings, (Owens, 1995).

The whole notion of learning organisations is a complicated one. The issue of whether the *'learning'* belongs to individuals or to the collective is not simple. This is the distinction, in constructivist learning theories, between personal constructivism advocated by Piaget and others and social constructivism advocated by Vygotzky, Dewey and others, (Schütz, 2002). Broadly put, there are three levels: individuals, individuals in interaction/exchange, and the collective. They are all important. On the one hand *'learning'* occurs within the individual, but on the other hand the *'learning'* occurs for the collective, to which individuals contribute and from which they draw. The collective learning of the school (for instance, its norms and expectations) greatly influence what individuals do, and vice versa. Related to this are epistemological issues – the extent to which knowledge can be likened to a substance that can *'reside'* somewhere and be passed around (albeit with modifications and distortions), or

whether it is only useful to talk about knowledge as discourse, as part of communication (whether with people or objects), action and process. In the *latter* definition, emotions, values, ideas, experiences, mores, unstated assumptions and tacit expectations are all part of knowledge. From this perspective, the ideas of organisational knowledge and organisational learning are clearly more than the sum of individual knowledge, just as the organisation is more than the sum of its people and their interactions.

The concept of learning organisations has shown itself to have other idealistic dimensions to it. For example (Senge, 2000) says that a learning organisation can be more usefully conceived as a vision, and may not be achievable. Looking at organisations in this light, there many be no learning organisation in the sense of a particular organisation that has arrived and that should be emulated, but at the same time every organisation is continually learning: sensing changes in its environment and adapting. Most organisations change and adapt to their environment. However, their adaptation can be what Argyris and Schøn (1993) refer to as *single loop* (in its attempts to be more efficient within existing conceptions of the organisation), but also have aspects of *double loop* in that it leads to dramatic changes in achievement within the organisation. This could be so for a school that, for example, is 'dysfunctional' and becomes highly functional. In other words, schools could be improving markedly in doing the same old stuff in new and more determined ways; it is 'more of the same' and yet it is not. Given the complexity involved in concepts of learning organisations and organisational learning, it is helpful to consider roles that principals can play in such organisations – especially because the principal is also an individual.

3.4 The Role of the Principal in learning organisations

The role of principals in establishing schools as learning organisations is crucial. Leshway, Leithwood, Lipton and Melamede (1998), for instance, recommend that principals see themselves as 'Learning leaders', responsible for helping schools

develop the capacity to carry out their mission. Senge goes a step further, to say that:

> *The principals I know who have had greatest impact tend to see their job as creating an environment where educators can continually learn* (Senge cited in O'Neal 1995).

Senge (1990), regards leaders in learning organisations as stewards, leaders that continually seek and oversee the broader purpose and direction of the organisation:

> *In a learning organisation, leaders may start by pursuing their own vision, but as they learn to listen carefully to others' visions they begin to see their own personal vision as part of something bigger. This does not diminish any leader's sense of responsibility for the vision- if anything; it deepens it* (Senge, 1990:352).

Leading a learning organisation is a challenging task, not clearly defined. It is possible that leaders may think that their organisations are on the path to becoming learning organisations, only to find that they are just treading on the beaten track, and what they are doing is more of the same, but in the name of a learning organisation.

3.5 Schools as Open systems

Sergiovanni (1997), Robertson (1995), Bryson, (1988), and others have emphasised that schools are, and should be, open systems with distinguishable yet not rigid boundaries that separate them from outside influences. The school is affected by what happens outside, because it is part of the social system. It provides labour to the industry for example, and also receives support from industry. A similar relationship obtains regarding the school and the government, whereby the state supports schools and schools provide the state with human resources. The school cannot remain un-touched by what is happening outside it. When one looks at schools as open systems, there seem to be two dimensions

to consider. Firstly the school can be regarded as an open system in the sense that it is open to outside influences, and it has to learn to adapt to outside demands and pressures. That aspect is alluded to by many writers on strategic planning models that acknowledge the significance of the environment outside the school. Secondly, schools can be regarded as open systems in the sense that they are transparent, nothing is hidden for outsiders (or insiders) to view and understand. The two conceptions of *'open'* are related, and while the ideals they express are clear, both conceptions are problematic. For example, it can be argued that some information in the school (such as personal information about children and educators) should not be openly available. Choices have to be made about which information and processes are open and which are not. So too, the relationships between the school and external groups are complex: some influences are more important than others, some more powerful, some coercive, and some cooperative. And some influences are contradictory to others. Again, schools have to make choices. The principal as the leader of the school is expected to play a particular role in managing the school's relationship with the outside environment, including the Department of Education, parents, industry and so on. But bureaucracy is also necessary: the school is part of a bureaucratic system.

3.6 Bureaucratic schools and principals

These types of organisations are characterised by their strong emphasis on rules and regulations, formalised structures that are hierarchical in nature. They require that personnel work under standardised conditions; expertise and direct supervision (Hoy and Miskel, 1987:110-112). Webster, (cited in Feronzo, 1998) defines bureaucracy as:

> *A system of carrying on the business of government by means of bureaus, each controlled by a chief; also government by bureaus heads and their superior administrative officers. Hence, the officialism in government's rigid and formal measures or routine procedure in administration.*

Weber, a German sociologist and one of the pioneers of this theory, proffers the following characteristics of bureaucratic organisations or institutions:

- A bureaucracy is a structure of offices each having specific responsibilities and duties.
- Authority rests with the office rather than the person. The division of authority and competence tends to be specified.
- Bureaucracy tends to encourage specialisation.
- The organisation is governed by rules and procedures, which tend to routinise and categorise activities.
- Functions and procedures tend to be formal and impersonal.
- Bureaucratic organisations are stratified and hierarchical.

Schools demonstrate some of the features of bureaucratic organisations. To illustrate this point, Feronzo (1998) makes an example of one county in the United States of America, where there is the Board at the head, followed by Superintendent; districts; schools, principals; educators, children and parents. In the South African case, different provincial Education Departments have different structural set-ups in terms of regional divisions, districts, circuits, wards, and schools. When it comes to schools themselves, a common pattern exists, whereby the principal occupies the most senior position followed by deputy-principals, then heads of departments for various learning areas or subjects, then educators, learners and parents.

The second dimension to bureaucratisation of schools is the notion that personnel in the upper levels in the hierarchy know better than those in the lower levels, so that responsibility for any level rests with 'bosses' in the next higher level. This principle sits alongside the principle of division of labour.

A third issue in the bureaucratisation of schools arises from their functions, such as their relative commitments to 'curriculum delivery' (from the centre) or

democratic expression. If the school, in its daily operations and its relationships with its communities, is expected to express and promote democratic principles and critical inquiry, it is not well served by highly bureaucratic approaches. This raises questions too, of whether a school can be essentially bureaucratic in its relationship with the Education Department, but democratic and participative in its internal workings.

Notwithstanding reservations some people have about bureaucratic schools and principals, bureaucracy has its positive aspects that schools could utilise. For example, Weber in (Hoy and Miskel, 1987: 112-113) states the following benefits of bureaucracy, each of which has its special function:

Bureaucratic characteristics	Functions
Division of labour and specialisation	Promotes expertise
Impersonal orientation	Promotes rationality
Hierarchy of authority	Disciplined compliance and coordination
Rules and regulations	Continuity and uniformity
Career orientation	Incentives

Table 1. Summary of bureaucratic characteristics and functions

3.7 Principals as Chief Executive Officers

This concept is borrowed from the private sector. It is linked with modernisation and neo-liberalism, in their advocacy of minimal involvement of governments in public enterprises and public institutions, and the value of competition and market-forces in promoting quality. (Lewis, Naidoo and Weber, 2000).

The concept of principals as Chief Executive Officers (C.E.O.) is fairly new in the South African context, but in countries such as the United States of America, it

has been in academic and political debate for some time now (Hoffman, 2003). In its extreme forms, the principal as CEO has responsibility for the total school budget and programmes, including the apportionment of the budget and the selection, hiring and firing of staff. The implications for such a move are enormous for principals, schools and unions, and the very concept of a *'school'*. It appears that Godden, (1996) was exaggerating to suggest that through the South African Schools Act (SASA) principals had become CEOs. It is not clear whether the concept of principals as *'CEOs'* is an ideal that the department of education is striving to achieve or just a metaphor being used lightly. Nevertheless, the popularisation of the concept of Self-Reliant Schools has contributed to uneasiness among principals who fear the apparent privatisation drive of public schools, and that some schools (as it happens in business) may collapse if they are not competitive enough or well managed.

The notions of principals as CEOs, principals as transformational leaders, and schools as learning organisations can be closely linked. The following section explores further the concept of learning organisations with special emphasis on schools as 'learning organisations'.

3.8 Strategic Management

Strategic management is one among many approaches that can be used as a framework for self-managing schools. Education in South Africa is going through a period of unprecedented change and maintaining a healthy balance between the *central* and the *local* is still a challenge. The rate of change has also meant that anticipating the future is difficult (O'Donohue and Dimmock, 1997). Strategic management has been proffered in the corporate world as a means for establishing and maintaining a sense of direction when the future has become difficult to predict. It can assist leaders and managers in dealing with the increasingly *'turbulent environment'* and the challenges that confront organisations. It is a continuous process by which the school can be kept on

course, including adjustments, as the internal and external contexts change, (Wendling, 1997, in Preedy, Glatter and Levačič, 1997: 219).

Strategic management requires a balance between maintenance and development, stability and change. School principals are continuously engaged in ensuring that the core function of the school, (namely educative teaching), takes place, while at the same time marketing the school to all stakeholders and shifting as required to be at the forefront. But the two functions are interlinked: the survival (maintenance) of the school is strongly connected to the school's adaptation to changing environments, as it uses that outside environment to pursue its core function.

One of the assumptions of this study is that strategic management is a *sine qua non* for schools improvement (Knight, 1997; Wong, Sharpe and McCormick, 1998; Cheng and Cheung, 1998). Kaufman, cited in Preedy, Glatter and Levačič (1997) succinctly summed it thus: *"Being strategic is knowing what to achieve, being able to justify the direction and then finding the best way to get there"*.

Some scholars have questioned the application of strategic management models in education and other non-profit sectors. Browns (1990) for instance, points out that there is a wide range of stakeholders in the school, and no *"bottom line"* like profit measure. This absence of *"bottom lines"*, Bowmans (1990) contends, means that the school managers cannot act with clarity and certainty in making decisions. Notwithstanding these doubts, people and organisations usually desire to improve their service and do things better than they have been doing before. Strategic management is not only about curriculum delivery or policy implementation, but also about anticipating the future in a more systematic way, perceiving with acumen a complex environment and negotiating a way through that environment.

Central to strategic management models is the view that the school cannot and should not be understood, and/or be removed from, the context within which it is located. Now more than ever before schools are open systems that interact, and are influenced by the context. The saying, *'ignore the context to your peril'* holds true for schools. Part of the rationale for devolution in education is the realisation that centralised planning cannot know or respond to local conditions in which a school operates: at least some strategic planning has to occur at the school level.

Bryson's Strategic Leadership Model

Bryson (1988) developed the model below with a view to demonstrating how planning could take into account factors outside of the organisation. It seeks to demonstrate how strategic planning can be, and has been, practical(ised) in *educational management.* There are many models like this one, but most if not all of them have similar characteristics. Schools are not isolated entities.

Bryson's model comprises of the following steps:

- ENVIRONMENTAL ANALYSIS:
  This process involves monitoring the present and future opportunities and threats both inside and outside the organisation that can influence the attainment of organisational goals. SWOT analyses (identifying strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats) can be done at this stage. Typically, opportunities and threats are sought in the external environment, while strengths and weaknesses are sought within the organisation itself.

- ESTABLISHING ORGANISATIONAL DIRECTION (Thrust of the organisation)
- There are two indicators of the direction of the organisation movement, namely, organisational mission and organisational objectives.

Organisational mission refers to the purpose for which the organisation exists and the reasons for its existence. Organisational objectives refer to targets that the organisation chooses for itself to achieve at given times. The mission and objectives grow out of the environmental analysis discussed above.

- STRATEGIC FORMULATION:

  This refers to the processes of designing and selecting strategies that will lead to the attainment of organisational goals and objectives.

- IMPLEMENT ORGANISATIONAL STRATEGY:

  The actual plan is drawn up. Performance indicators are specified. 'SMART' principles (in terms of their specificity) can be observed at this stage. 'SMART' stands for 'Specific; Measurable; Achievable; Realistic and Time-bound". It means that action plans should be specific about what exactly one will do; how one will assess achievement; and whether the indicators can reasonably be achieved given the capabilities, logistics and time at the disposal of the organisation. Organisational culture must be taken cognisance of, as well as, the amount of change that is to accompany the new strategy. This should be part of the analysis in Step 1, above.

- STRATEGIC CONTROL:

  This focuses on monitoring and evaluating the planning processes; implementation and achievement in order to improve and revise the plan (should it become necessary) and ensure that the strategy is functioning smoothly (Bryson, 1988).

It is clear from the above account that strategic management assumes and advocates a highly systematic and rational approach to planning and management. This remains so even when the step-wise outline above is softened, acknowledging that the different steps are strongly interactive, and need not occur specifically in this order. It also assumes that the organisation is

already *'functional'* and reasonably managed: if there is no respect for the plan, no matter how it was developed, it will amount to nothing. Further, the quality of outcomes depends on the quality of each step above – whether the analysis saw the *'important'* things, whether the mission and objectives are appropriate, the plan is creative and workable, and so on. In these ways, success depends on the resources available, and the capacities and willingness of the staff.

3.9 Structure research-Devolution and Accountability

Structural reforms in schools are called different things in different countries. For example, in England and Wales it is 'Local Management of Schools', in Scotland it is 'Devolved School Management', in North America, School-Based Management or Site-Based Management. In Australia and New Zealand, it is School-Based Management or sometimes Self-Managing schools. South Africa refers to Self-Reliant Schools. The various approaches are similar, in their wish to devolve responsibilities for school governance, school management, curriculum and assessment to schools, according to central guidelines and accountability mechanisms. A primary motivation, as noted by Sackney and Dibski (1994); and O'Donohue and Dimmock, (1997) that: *'The closer to the people concerned the decision-making powers are, the better the quality of decisions made will be'.*

The models in different countries find different balance points between devolution and central control, and involve different means of support, control and accountability. The United States literature defines School-Based Management as autonomy plus Participation (David, 1990; Levačič 1995; Sackney and Dibski, 1994: 105). This is quite different, for example, from Caldwell's (1990) definition of School-Based Management, which emphasises decentralising resource allocation within centrally defined parameters rather than participatory decision-making.

The motives for devolution have also been questioned. For example, Hargreaves (1994) quoted in Giles, (1998a) avers that in England and Wales, the impact of Local Management of Schools has been that, instead of improving the capacities of educators and schools to engage willingly in planning and improvement, reforms have increasingly manipulated educators to fulfil the government's agendas. Similar sentiments have been strongly expressed in South Africa where some principals and educators are sceptical about government's decentralisation motives: they feel tricked and betrayed by the department of education into buying into (and taking responsibility for) the government's failures (Sayed, 1997).

Research in the U.K. and elsewhere, has shown that the mere decentralisation of authority and responsibility from the central government offices to schools is no guarantee that schools will be more efficient, and that the quality of learner outcomes will improve (Caldwell and Spinks, 1998; Levačič, 1995; Cheng and Cheung, 1997 Sackney and Dibski, 1994). Wohlstetter and Odden (1992) complain that school systems and researchers rarely monitor School Based Management to see if desired changes to organisations and student learning do indeed occur. Instead, school systems merely use data obtained through accountability mechanisms to reward success or correct failure. Structural changes, in themselves, neither encourage innovation and quality nor stifle them. They can create opportunities or remove obstructions, but what happens depends on the people (Brown, 1990). That means that perhaps more needs to be done – in research and in monitoring performance - to find out what people do, and to give people freedom to express themselves, their feelings and aspirations. Giles (1998a), for example, has done this kind of research in the UK. He found that the principals he studied were not grasping the strategic initiatives that new structures presented to them. He points out that structural change has to be linked to capacity building, and that the linkage cannot be taken for granted. The more responsibility people are given, the more they need to be empowered to fruitfully engage with the task.

By changing management structures, fundamental changes do not occur unless people within those structures change. Principals, once again, are identified as being key to the operation and transformation of schools and the people that are part of schools. To achieve this, principals have to understand the desired changes and the nature of change, and be amenable to change themselves (Tate, 2001; Fullan, 1991).

In this, principals are torn between different stakeholders and accountabilities. How do they manage their accountabilities to the Department, staff, students, parents, and sponsors? Fullan (1991) in Bell and Harrison (1998: 156) cautions against excessive zeal to impose changes that educational policy makers have suggested. In his views, imposed changes have:

Serious limitations on the concept of the principals as lead implementers of official policies and programmes...that educational research is itself in danger of unintentionally reinforcing dependency. Government and communities expect principals to lead changes that will bring about visible and lasting improvement, yet, government and communities have also asserted a right to intervene on educational processes, to ensure that principals toe the line of central policies

3.10 International perspectives

Over the last decade, many studies have been carried out to assess the progress and effects of structural reforms. Many belong to 'School Improvement and School Effectiveness Research' and include, for example, Harper (1992); Giles (1995a; 1995b), Cheng (1996); Robertson (1995) Levačič (1992) Harris (1998) Davies and Ellison (1995); and Cheng and Cheung 1997). One of the problems confronting researchers and educational authorities is that there is no agreement about education 'quality'. We can add to this problem the complexity of schools, the number of policy changes involved in the reforms, and the linkage required

between structural change and capacity. Cheng and Cheung (1997) highlight two positions that emerge from the literature, regarding the benefits of School-Based Management. One position, supporting SBM, points to increased satisfaction levels of educators, parents and learners, and increases in educators' professionalism (David, 1989 and Brown 1990). The other position is rather negative, pointing to increases in anxiety and workloads and the absence of empirical evidence that School Based Management improves learners' educational outcomes. In South Africa, Lewis, Naidoo and Weber, (2000) report - feelings of principals and educators somewhat similar to position two.

3.11 Multi-Model and Multi level Perspectives Solution

After reviewing current literature on School Based Management and concluding that mere decentralisation of decision-making powers was not enough to ensure education quality, Cheng and Cheung, (1997) attempted to close the conceptual gap. They proposed a Multi-model and Multi-level perspective of school management that includes School level; Group-level and Individual-level. They offer seven models of education quality in schools and three of Self-Management in schools. I outline first the seven models of education quality:

Achievement of School Goals and Conformity to Given Specifications

The goal-and–specification model assumes that there are clear, enduring, normative and well-accepted goals and specifications as indicators and standards for schools to pursue or conform to. This model is more useful when school goals and specifications are clear, consensual, time-bound, and measurable. It is also suitable for schools where resources are sufficient to achieve the goals and they conform to the required specifications.

Natural result of Achievement of Quality Resources and Inputs for Schools

This model (Resource-input model) assumes that scarce and quality resources are necessary for schools to achieve diverse school objectives and provide quality services in a short time. And therefore, that quality education is assumed

as the natural result of the achievement of scarce resource and input for a school. This model is useful when there is a clear relationship between school inputs and outputs.

Smooth and Healthy Internal school Process and Fruitful Learning experiences

According to this model, the school process is a transformational process, which converts school inputs into school performance and output. According to Cheng and Cheung (1997) this model assumes that the nature and quality of school process often determine the quality of output and the degree to which school goals can be achieved. It is useful when there is a clear relationship between the school process and educational outcomes.

Satisfaction of School Strategic Consequences

This model assumes that the satisfaction of strategic constituencies of a school is critical to its survival, and therefore that the quality of school education should be determined by the extent to which the performance of a school can satisfy the needs and expectations of its powerful constituencies such as educators, management boards members, (Parents, students, alumni, and officers at the Education Department). This model is useful when the demands of the constituencies are compatible and cannot be ignored.

Achievement of a school's Legitimate Position or Reputation

Cheng and Cheung (1997) highlight the fact that the current educational environment is very challenging and competitive, and therefore that the legitimate model assumes that a school needs to be accepted and supported by the community in order to survive and achieve its mission. This model is useful when the survival or demise of the school must be assessed.

Absence of Problems

The absence of problems model assumes that if there is an absence of problems, trouble or defects, and difficulties, the school therefore is of high quality. This is useful when there are no consensual criteria of quality but strategies for school improvement are needed.

Continuous development and Improvement

In this model, it is acknowledged that the changing environment has a great impact on almost every aspect of the school's functioning, and therefore that dealing with the environmental impact and internal process problems is the key issue in assessing whether a school can provide education quality continuously. This is useful when schools are new or changing, when the environmental change cannot be ignored.

As well as their dimensions of quality, Cheung and Cheung (1997) considered management, and *"Multi-levels of Self-Management"*. They identify three levels, namely, Self-management at school level; Self-management at group level, and Self-management at individual level. They argue that any development that does not cater for all these levels is unworkable. School level change cannot take place if groups within the school are not given the opportunity to self-manage as a group. The same can be said of individuals within the school. If individuals are not taken care of, there can be no talk of any development towards self-management. All three levels, school, group and individual, are crucial for any comprehensive development and self-management to occur.

Cheung and Cheung's (1997) approach – in its efforts to define quality, and its consideration of three levels of self-management seeks to address the linkage between inputs (changed management structures) and output (education quality or learner performance/outcomes). In practice, many of the seven models of quality and the three levels of self-management will operate at once.

3.12 Case studies: Thailand and United Kingdom.

Granting the complexities of management and leadership indicated in the previous sections, the next section deals with case studies that have been done in the areas of structural changes, leadership and management behaviours.

I have chosen two examples from England, as examples from a developed country, and another from Thailand, as an example from a developing country outside Africa.

3.12.1 Four rural Schools of Thailand

Harper (1992) conducted in study in Thailand as part of a bigger study that included England and Botswana. The Thailand component is relevant here because it is about the role of principals and because the principals' image in rural communities in Thailand in many ways resembles the image that principals in rural schools in South Africa enjoy.

Objectives of the study

- ✓ To ascertain which factors influenced the quality of rural schools in Thailand.
- ✓ To study the actual roles and functions of rural schools.
- ✓ Compare them with the expected roles and functions as specified by law and as stated by educators.
- ✓ To describe the actual teacher-learning process.

Contextual background

- ✓ Principals were viewed by the Education Department, as well as the community in general, as key players in the education of children, but they spent most of their time away from school, attending meetings organised by the Education Department, or attending the community functions as part of their commitment to the community. Their absence from schools undermined schools' functionality.

✓ The teacher appraisal system was fraught with nepotism and favouritism, for example, fake reports on work loads of educators, as well as teaching achievement for promotion purposes.

✓ Devotion to teaching causes envy among other educators and resentment by principals.

Findings:

✓ Principals were always away from school attending meetings or community functions, where they felt obliged to honour invitations from the community, considering that they were held in high esteem by the community.

✓ Economic and political conditions made it difficult to remove the above problems. Educators needed salary increases, and if principals did not recommend them through untruthful reports on their achievements, there could be serious repercussions for them.

✓ By not honouring invitations from the community, principals could be viewed in a negative light by the community, whereas their attendance reinforced their place as key figures in the community.

This study is relevant to rural South African schools where principals are also held in high esteem, and they play certain roles that are peculiar to rural communities. There are also some misgivings among many educators in South Africa regarding the proposed teacher appraisal system. Some educators fear that principals might employ favouritism and nepotism. Such fears are rooted in educators' past experiences regarding assessment, and educators' past experiences have remarkable similarities with what is happening in the Thailand cases. The current situation in South African schools, particularly rural schools where transport is another important issue, requires principals to spend considerable amounts of time away from schools attending meetings organised by the district office or circuit office, or attending workshops. This study

conducted by Harper speaks quite directly to conditions in schools that participated in my study.

3.12.2 Giles' study "Are U.K. principals grasping the strategic initiative"

Giles' (1998a) study, conducted in the United Kingdom, to establish whether or not principals there had grasped the strategic initiative proffered for instance, by School Based Management showed that after more than ten (10) years of reforms, they still had not grasped the strategic initiative to self-manage, as was initially anticipated.

Background to the study:

Since 1988, United Kingdom schools had operated in a radically changed/different context. Strategic planning responsibilities had been transferred to local schools from the Local Schools Authorities (LEA). In other words, there had been structural changes, as a result of legislation, but whether principals had grasped the strategic initiative proffered by changed management structures, was still a subject of debate.

Main aims of the study:

The study aimed to establish whether or not principals in the United Kingdom schools, as they were operating under a changed management climate, were grasping the strategic initiative that was offered by School-Based Management (A new administrative/management structural framework).

Findings:
- ✓ Sampled schools showed that capacities to self-manage were slower to develop (in practice) than was earlier anticipated.
- ✓ Principals had not changed to be able to reap the benefits offered by changed management climate.
- ✓ There was no coherent planning process in schools.
- ✓ Swift and complete withdrawal by the LEA was questionable.

✓ A laissez-faire attitude by many principals towards School-Based Management prevailed.

Giles' study contradicted the notion that changes in the structure from a bureaucratic-centralised decision-making body, to a more participatory-decentralised mode (in the form of School-Based Management) *ipso facto*, improves the organisational behaviours in schools.

Another related study conducted by Giles (1995b), based upon a convenience survey of 106 educators from primary and secondary schools in North England and North Wales explored the question of school development planning within a changed structure of control. The research focused upon the site-based planning processes as evidence of the extent to which educators understood the role of planning in managing change and improvement in a devolved school system. Some of the themes that research generated are the following:

✓ Planning was *ad hoc* and incremental, with little whole school improvement taking place.

✓ Schools were reacting rather than assuming the strategic responsibilities for planning future whole-school improvement and development.

✓ There appeared to be little conscious management activity to link the strategic aims and objectives of the school with the resources needed to implement the priorities identified in the School Development Plans.

✓ The School Development Plans were dominated by a list of curriculum content-dominated, 'jobs-to-do', rather than a list of agreed priorities for improvement and development relating to a strategic view of the future, among others.

Perhaps, it must be noted that subsequent research conducted by MacGilchrist (1995) based upon the data gathered in 9 primary schools, supported the views of the previous research. One of the major findings was that the majority of the

difficulties experienced with school development planning concerned internal school matters, and not difficulties in coping with externally imposed change.

3.13 South African Research- General and Rural

A number of studies undertaken in South Africa in the recent past have focused on school improvement through improved management structures or improved school leadership (Christie and Potterton (1997), Sayed (1997) and Naidoo, (2001)). These studies deal with literature and conceptual issues surrounding decentralisation. None has tried to assess the impact of decentralisation on the ground.

Another study jointly conducted by Lewis, Naidoo and Weber (2000), entitled, *"The Problematic Notion of Participation in educational Decentralisation: the Case of South Africa"* is mainly a documentary analysis, and attempts to conceptualize decentralisation as emanating from modernisation and neo-liberalism. Lewis et. al. (2000) have pointed to a number of assumptions on which the government seems to have based its notion of participation and devolution of powers to local schools:

- Communities are homogeneous. Communities were *'born again'* with the lifting of apartheid and are relatively independent from the post-colonial state and global capitalism. Whatever historical legacies they may have, Lewis et. al. (2000) feels that the government did not consider them greatly relevant. That assumption, they contend, is rooted in modernisation theory, both from sociological and economic perspectives.

- Participation is divorced from politics. It is assumed that communities are to be united as well as homogenous, and therefore participation is an all-inclusive process, and not an elitist one. Decision-making regarding school governance is consensual, and not contentious. Lewis et. al. (2000) feel that such a position denies communities their political lives, and such behaviours are in line with a modernisation framework. If local

politics exist, they are assumed to be benevolent, and under this assumption, democracy is equated with acceptance, and not debate.

- Participation is a positive intervention that will improve schools. Such an assumption is held worldwide; that greater local participation will improve the relevance, quality and accountability of schools.

- Schools, parents and other community members are receptive to taking on new responsibilities. Everyone is committed to the national modernisation project. Schools' personnel will welcome greater autonomy and new decision-making roles, likewise, parents and other community members want to be involved in the schooling of their children and will be open to any way in which their involvement can be expanded. All three assumptions are still subject to confirmation.

- Participation is a rational and morally correct act. The argument here is that given the expected benefits of increased local participation, it makes sense for local participants to participate actively. To do otherwise would have been irresponsible and irrational.

- Financial deficiency can be resolved by community participation. Communities are assumed to be able to mobilise their own resources. Equity can be achieved by devolving financial responsibility for basic education to the local level. All these assumptions come from a neo-liberal framework (Lewis et. al. 2000).

- All levels of government are committed and capable of implementing participatory initiatives.

It would be interesting if the above assumptions could actually be tested in practice, particularly in rural communities. The study conducted by Gordon (1997) on rural schools seems to challenges many of them. According to Gordon (1997), rural areas generally, have been overlooked by people who do not live in them. Some, who used to live in rural areas, shun them in favour of better-developed urban areas. Gordon (1997) in her study, *Multiple inequalities, Challenges facing South African Rural schools'* comes up with findings that

expose the folly of ignoring rural communities. Two thirds of South Africa's poor live in three provinces, namely Eastern Cape 24 percent, Limpopo 18 percent and KwaZulu-Natal 21percent. 75 percent of South Africa's poor live in rural former homelands and TBVC states (the former, nominally independent states of Transkei; Bophuthatswana; Venda and Ciskei). All the homelands as well as the TBVC states were rural and all three provinces of KZN, Limpopo and Eastern Cape belonged in either TBVC states or homelands. Furthermore, the largest number of learners is found in these same three provinces that have a highest number of poverty-stricken communities.

The South African Schools Act has devolved responsibility for school development and management to school level. School Governing Bodies have the powers to promote school development by acquiring and managing funds and implementing projects. Gordon (1997) cautions against over-optimism regarding these policies, in that many households in rural areas do not have the capacity to cover direct costs of schooling, and therefore School Governing Bodies may not be successful in eliciting funds, which in turn hampers school development.

These studies point to the needs for research in rural communities: the less known about them, the less the likelihood that their needs can be met. My research tries to give voice to a small section of the rural population, secondary school principals in one district in KwaZulu-Natal. However, findings and recommendations have a nation-wide significance, particularly because what happens in Sea Lake district, in many ways, points to what is happening in other rural communities in South Africa.

3.14 Conclusion
A number of issues are laid bare in the literature review above. Firstly, the concepts of self-managing schools, transformative leadership and learning organisations are in many ways ideals – especially given the difficulties in

balancing control and devolution and hence in creating suitable systems of accountability, and issues of capacity and resources. In rural South Africa, schools face particular issues of poverty and capacity, and particular norms (historically defined) for how schools and principals operate and how they relate to the community. The significant differences between rural and urban communities support an argument for devolution, but they also require policies and support systems suited to rural schools. Gordon's (1997) reports of the impact of poverty on rural communities point out that the voices of the majority of South African poor communities need to be heard; the fit between education policies and rural communities, with their particular histories, cultures and conditions, needs to be explored.

This chapter has sketched the theoretical background surrounding structural changes that have occurred in many education systems across the Western world. It has tried to locate South Africa in this thinking, examining ideas of devolution, self-managing schools and transformative leadership from various angles, including ideals of democratic participation and social-economic transformation. I have also tried to indicate that, unlike the Western world, changes that are still unfolding in South Africa have as much to do with societal transformation from the racial segregation of the past centuries as with curriculum delivery *per se*. This alone means that researchers and policy makers have to be cautious in borrowing or adapting from developed countries such as New Zealand, Australia, Canada, Unites States and United Kingdom.

CHAPTER 4

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

4.1 Introduction

The purpose of this study was to understand principals' perceptions of their work, from their frames of reference. In chapters 2 and 3, I have drawn on my own experiences and the literature to show how complex their frames of reference might be, and how such frames are likely to be different for different principals. For these reasons, I have opted for naturalistic enquiry and interpretive research, which is more relevant for such a study (Mile and Huberman, 1994; Wolcott, 1992). This chapter sets out to explain the methods, as well as the methodology underpinning the methods used.

I am following authors such as Harding (1987) in distinguishing between methods and methodology. By methods I mean techniques or tools that I used to gather information that helped to answer critical questions for the study. Following Harding (1987) quoted in Gough (2000:3) I define methodology as:

> *A theory of producing knowledge through research and provides a rationale for the way a researcher proceeds. Methodology refers to more than particular techniques, such as 'doing a survey' or 'interviewing students'. Rather, it provides the reasons for using such techniques in relation to the kind of knowledge or understanding that the researcher is seeking.*

Given the aims of the study, it was crucial that the methodology provided an environment that allowed principals to express themselves freely. I wanted to research the reality of the 'researched' from their perspective (Schmidt, 1981 cited in Krefting, 1990:214; Miles and Huberman, 1994). This required that I *(as an outsider researcher)* try to enter into their lives, and in some ways become an

insider in their *'lived world'*. This depends largely on trust and rapport. (Guba and Lincoln, 1985 cited in Oka and Shaw, 2000: 4). Furthermore, Guba and Lincoln (1985 quoted by Oka and Shaw, 2000: 4) point out that:

> *The building of trust is a developmental task; trust is not something that suddenly appears after certain matters have been accomplished ('a specifiable set of procedural operations'), but something to be worked on day to day. Moreover, trust is not established once and for all; it is fragile, and even trust that has been a long time building can be destroyed overnight in the face of an ill-advised action.*

The challenge I faced, as Guba and Lincoln (1985) point out, was not only to earn trust, but to sustain it throughout the project, even through the reporting phase.

4.2 Methodological choices

A research design may be called many things, such as *"a pattern, order,* or *arrangement of all the activities in the research journey* (Gough, 2000:4) or *'plan', 'structure'* of the investigation that is used to obtain evidence to answer research questions (Schumacher and McMillan, 1993:31). The research design describes the procedures that are to be followed in conducting the study and responds to such questions as *'when?' 'To whom?'* and *'under what conditions?'* the data would be obtained. In this section I explain the procedures that I followed in obtaining evidence that would provide answers to the following critical research questions:

- How have changes in education policy impacted on the principal's management practices?
- How and why do principals in rural secondary schools manage them the way they do?

Paradigms used to look at the issues under investigation are explicated, so are the methodology and methods explained. Paradigms are crucial for understanding and choosing methodologies. For this study, interpretative paradigms are central to the methodology used. Different experiences and

personalities of principals lead to different personal interpretations of what is happening around them, even when they reside in the same community. In order to understand how principals relate to and make meaning of the reality in which they live, I saw it as important to gather data without disturbing the normal course of events for the participants in their natural settings. Since there is no one single objective reality that the inquirer seeks to find, and also there is no one correct way of accessing that reality, the researcher and the researched work together in the co-production of reality. To be able to do that, using participants' language becomes important (Kirk and Miller, 1986).

Different authors use different categories to classify major research paradigms For example, Terre Blanche and Durrheim (1999) postulate three paradigms, namely, positivist, interpretive, and constructionist, while Connole (1993, cited in Gough, 2000) mentions four: empiricist, interpretive, critical and deconstructive/post structural. Guba and Lincoln (1986: 109) provide a set similar to Connole's (1993), with Empiricism/Positivism, Constructivism and Critical theories.

Table 2. Terre Blanche and Durrheim's research paradigms

Terre Blanche and Durrheim's (1999) research paradigm		
Positivist	Interpretive	Constructionist

Table 3. Connole's research paradigms

Connole's (1993) research approaches			
Empiricist	Interpretive	Critical	Deconstructive/Poststructural

Tables 2 and 3 above indicate the extent to which Terre Blanche and Durrheim (1999) and Connole (1993) view various approaches to research. These tables also show the differences between the two authors. Terre Blanche has collapsed

what Connole (1993) has kept separate and he has called it, critical and deconstructive/post structural research, into one category, and he calls it, 'constructionist' (Gough, 2000: 9).

The choice of paradigms is guided by what the research seeks to achieve. Positivists and empiricists aim to predict, control and explain, while interpretivists/constructivists aim to understand, and reconstruct. Methodologies too are influenced by the aims of researchers. In this study for instance, interpretivist and critical methodologies were more suitable than positivist ones because of the purposes and aims.

For an interpretivist design such as this one, the researcher is a vital instrument (Marshall and Rossman, 1994: 59). The researcher is fully involved as an instrument of data production. The '*I was there*' element in the portrayal of the picture of the phenomenon being studied is part of the design. On this issue, Marshall and Rossman state that:

> *Her presence in the lives of the participants invited to be part of the study is fundamental to the paradigm. Whether that presence is sustained and intensive as in ethnographies, or whether relatively brief but personal, as in in-depth interviews studies, the researcher enters into the lives of the participants* (1994: 59).

Human bias can never be underestimated, nor can the notion of objectivity. Wolcott (1995: 165) cautions researchers to guard against bias rather than deny it, because as he sees it, the researcher's values and theories stimulate the inquiry, and sustain it. That is why he advocates what Erickson, (1984: 61; quoted in Wolcott, 1995: 165), calls *"disciplined subjectivity"*. Duell-Klein (1983 cited in Cotterill & Letherby, 1994: 109) refers to the same process of guarding bias as *"conscious subjectivity"*, while Coe, (1994: 21) calls it *"consensus"* or *"intersubjective agreement"*. While these concepts are different, they are related, together exploring the researcher's role in interpretive research.

People's behaviours and lives are seldom simple, linear and organised in any rational way. Rather, they are complex, unpredictable and messy, and therefore "the researcher has to look at different places and at different things in order to understand a phenomenon" (Henning, Van Rensburg and Smit, 2004: 20). To be able to do this requires a research design that allows open-ended approaches, with opportunities for deep analyses and reflection. Also, as part of the development of a democratic South Africa, the study aimed at giving the 'voice' to rural principals to 'speak' and to express their own reflections about their experiences of transformation, and how transformation was impacting on the way they were managing their schools. The most appropriate method to use was informal conversation and participant observations because their flexibility allows issues outside the pre-planned agenda to emerge and to be discussed, (Singh, 2000).

The suitability of a conversational approach is not without risks though. Shallow or deeper probing depends on individual skill. Added to that, is a danger of allowing the respondents to set the pace and the depth of discussion. Research paradigms and philosophical beliefs are theoretical frameworks, not rules on which the research process runs. The researcher always has choices to make about what is best for the study in the complex interaction of himself, the conversational partner, their purposes, and the research questions. The demands on the researcher are that he must have the flexibility and skills to work in different ways with different people and settings.

4.3 Participants

The main actors in this research are principals, in the scenes set by their schools and histories. Their perceptions of me (the researcher), the research itself and its implications for them, were part of the conversation. These perceptions influence the realities they choose to project. Part of that reality is the setting of the school and community, and various participants involved. Principals operate within the

context of the school, the education system and the community. The principal and the context are, for the purpose of this study, bound together. I needed to know and understand what crises and direction the school is facing and how the school is managing, but more especially how the principal is managing. On the one hand, my central concern was the principal, and his/her perceptions. On the other hand, I needed to know the extent to which the principal's perceptions were shared by and understood by others in the setting. For this reason, I complemented the interviews with principals with observations in the school and interviews with members of the school management team and educators. I restricted myself to professional educators within the school because I expected they might have perspectives and knowledge somewhat similar to the principal's. My focus was not the life of the school, but the principal's responses to policies and structural changes.

4.4 Sampling

The selection of principals was done through purposive sampling, which means that they were targeted because of particular features. The criteria used for the purposive sampling is as follows:

- Principals of secondary schools in Sea Lake district
- Schools were under traditional leadership authority
- School belonged to one of the five villages in Sea Lake district
- Principals and schools had good reputation in their communities and had implemented Curriculum 2005
- Principals were willing to participate in the study

After having identified the five principals from the five secondary schools, in the district, I coded them as: P-A; P-B; P-C; P-D and P-E. I then used these codes throughout this dissertation.

P-A: refers to the principal from school-A
P-B: refers to the principal from school-B

P-C: refers to the principal from school-C

P-D: refers to the principal from school-D

P-E: refers to the principal from school-E

After initial conversations with principals, I then requested access to one member of the SMT per school and one educator respectively. Their codes were as follows:

SMT-A: refers to a member of the SMT for school-A

SMT-B: refers to a member of the SMT for school-B

SMT-C: refers to a member of the SMT for school-C

SMT-D: refers to a member of the SMT for school-D

SMT-E: refers to a member of the SMT for school-E

The codes for educators were as follows:

Edu-A: refers to an educator for school-A

Edu-B: refers to an educator for school-B

Edu-C: refers to an educator for school-C

Edu-D: refers to an educator for school-D

Edu-E: refers to an educator for school-E

Purposive sampling was preferred over other sampling strategies because its aims are not the establishment of representative truths or general laws, but insights into particular lives in particular contexts (Blaxter et. al. 1996; Creswell, 1994; Kvale 1983; Powney and Watts, 1987). Thus the generalisability and theories I sought were not intended to be representative in the statistical sense, but more like the generalisability that arises from 'stories-meaning-human experience' and so on, where insights and meanings offered in one situation are generalised by the researcher or reader according to judgments about their value, regardless of how many people offered those judgments.

As noted earlier, besides interviewing principals, I also talked to educators and SMT members within each school. In some schools, SMT members and educators were recommended by principals, while in others, they were chosen by serendipity. A total of 15 interview transcripts were generated comprising five principals, 5 members of the SMT and 5 educators. On subsequent visits, I spoke to the same SMT members and same educators, regardless of the selection method used to allocate them to the sample. The purposes of these interviews (that is educators and SMT members) were to enrich my understanding of the school and principal, and to provide a check on the principal's perceptions of the school and his/her own work in it.

I visited each school 5 to 6 times over a 5-month period. Each visit lasted for a whole day, talking to participants and doing informal observations, being part of the school. I checked the principal's diary, logbook, schedule of matric results for previous years, moved around the school, talked to different people in the school, including gate guards. The return visits proved to be fruitful; they provided more time to gather and interpret data, and built trust as part of the research process. They also provided me with opportunities for other conversations, which I regarded as part of my 'non-participant observations'. I recorded information gathered through informal conversations in my research journal.

To bring more light about the understanding of rural principals and communities in which they work, I used data produced from another research project I was involved in. I used stories told by parents that showed the extent to which poverty was impacting on schooling of their children. It was funded by the Nelson Mandela Foundation (NMF) and is referred to in chapter 5 as 'NMF'. It covered three rural districts of Nongoma, Eshowe and Empangeni in the Zululand part of the KZN province. That study focused on rural communities' understanding of the interplay between rurality-poverty-education, development, and agency for development. Since its scope went beyond school boundaries into the lives of parents, learners (both in-school and out of school), it was going to complement

and augment the data that was produced in Sea Lake district, as the latter was located inside the school boundaries.

4.5 Ethical issues and access

A Superintendent of Education Management (SEM) in the district had recommended a number of schools in Sea Lake district and gave permission for the research to be conducted. With the presence of the SEM anonymity and confidentiality were compromised to some extent since the SEM was likely to know the schools and principals much more than the researcher. This concerned a possible risk or harm, with options of voluntary withdrawal (from particular questions as much as from the research overall). Ethical issues are areas often deemed to be resolved by procedures such as voluntary participation, informed consent, absence of risk or harm, confidentiality, and anonymity. In this research it was clear that the consequences of the research or 'absence of risk or harm' for the principals and schools could not be predicted. Anonymity codes could readily be broken by people who know the district and its schools, (Trochim, 2002). A distortion of the descriptions could separate people from contexts, contrary to the central assumption of the research. However, this was minimised by taking only five schools out of ten schools recommended by the SEM. Furthermore, I decided to exclude copies of interview transcripts from the thesis as appendices because their inclusion would expose my participants, thus undermining anonymity.

In accessing participants, I made promises about ethics and unfettered access to transcripts in order for them to check for compromising information. Also, it was important that the participation of educators and SMT was not taken for granted because the principal may have already agreed to participate. It is common knowledge that gatekeepers in higher authorities do not replace the rights and needs of research participants on the ground, (Marshall and Rossman, 1995; Miles and Huberman, 1994; Kvale, 1983). Because the design of the study located all participants within school premises, there was no need therefore to

consult and seek permission from Amakhosi (chiefs) or Izinduna (headmen) as the normal protocol demands in tribal lands. Permission from the Department of Education was sufficient.

4.6 Data elicitation procedures

Data were elicited by requiring principals to tell about education policies and their schools. This procedure should not be understood as the story-telling research approach. It refers to open-ended, free conversations with principals. It was preferred over formal interviews because it offered principals an opportunity to open up and talk freely without feeling pressured through a formal interview setting. Stories narrated in an informal atmosphere allowed principals to tell more of their schools' stories without having to be confined to the researcher's interview schedule.

Research questions driving this study suggest an open-ended approach to policy areas, without specifying which ones are being scrutinised. Methodology suggests active participation of the researched and the need to avoid imposing researcher's value judgments regarding policies each school regarded as important, (Kvale 1983, Wolcott, 1992). An interview guide lists a number of topics to be covered during the conversation (Lofland and Lofland, 1984). In my case, topics appeared in sheets of paper, and topics covered different policy areas. Each sheet of paper contained one topic area, for example curriculum; another contained 'buildings and resources; human resource management (HRM), and so on. Under HRM for instance, a topic would be on Post Provisioning Norms (PPN), and they would add other policies such as SGB, admissions, and so on. And in that way participants retained personal choices of issues to discuss, and thereafter, they would prioritise them according to how they experienced the extent to which they impacted on the day-to-day running of their schools. The structure of the interview was loose enough to allow free flow of the conversation.

Pilot study experiences had revealed certain shortcomings about not writing any policy on the sheet of paper, and therefore prompting the conversation had been compromised. As a result, I gave my conversational partners (as I prefer to call my respondents) a list showing policies that regulated their management of schools in order to prompt the discussion and minimise their chances of forgetting, but not compromising their freedom of choice. I then asked them to arrange them according to their importance.

In prioritizing, my conversational partners would give number1 for the policy that affected them the most, and give number 2 for the one that impacts on them less, numbers 3, 4, 5, as the case may be, with the one affecting them the least getting the highest number on the list. It was on the basis of each one's prioritised list that they would tell me the manner in which any particular policy was affecting them. That system was not unproblematic, for example, I still do not know about the significance of the differences of policies ranked: in fact rank 5 might be about equal to rank 1, or it may not. Others chose to go as high up as 7-8 in their list, while others went only as far high as 4-5. Although these tendencies showed a lack of consistency, they were statistically insignificant, because I was not trying to use quantitative methods, but I wanted conversational partners to retain power of choice so that they could say what they thought were the most important policies for them then without me imposing what I thought they should include as important.

4.7 Problematising methodology

Data production: theory and practical levels

The techniques of interviewing demands a variety of skills, for example, ability to open up the discussion and keep the interviewee interested in giving out more information, (Terre Blanche and Durrheim, 1999; Bogdan and Biklen, 1994). In concluding my conversation with one principal, I forgot to ask that critical question that would allow her to talk even about issues that were not covered by the interview. My later interview with an educator revealed a number of things

about the school, for example, no windowpanes had been broken since its inception five years before, general views about the Department of Education, and so on. When I asked the principal about some good things about the school she had not told me about, she retorted, *"But you didn't ask me! I told you everything you asked!"* I learnt and was reminded about the emphasis research literature put on the need to keep the conversation open, just as one closes it, otherwise, one might fail to see what is before one's eyes as this episode showed.

The use of tape recorders during interviews has advantages and disadvantages. For Patton (1990) for instance, the tape recorder is "indispensable", (Patton, 1990 cited in Hoepfl, 1997). One advantage is the keeping of accurate and true records of interviews, (Powney and Watts, 1987), while one of its disadvantage is that some participants either withhold some of the information or play for the tape, (Terre Blanche and Durrheim, 1999). One of the common mistakes neophyte researchers make, is failure to ensure that all mechanical aspects are taken care of to avoid any distraction that may result, and also the shift of focus from the interview to paying attention to the recorder and its functionality. However, I realised in one interview that no sooner had it started, my partner was looking at the tape most of the time, and I did the same too, checking if it was still running or not, and the technical glitches occurred, the tape stopped in the middle of the interview. I had to make a quick decision that would allow the flow of the conversation; I panicked. Thereafter, I took down notes and we continued the discussion, with less distraction. After we finished, I rushed back to the office and reconstructed the interview. I learnt few practical lessons that will make literature materials alive, and will stay with me for life.

Theorising the data presented its challenges as well. Much of the literature I have reviewed to frame the study is Western whereas the research is done in rural South African schools. Theories of learning organisations espoused by Argyris (1993), Senge (1990, 1995), Lashway (1995) and others, did not seem helpful for

the purpose of theorising the data. Strategic management theories also tended to assume that the environment within which schools operate is orderly and organised, and that schools basic infrastructure was in place in terms of basic functionality. Rural communities' uniqueness, complexities, histories, meant that what these theories espouse means a different thing for rural communities. For example the concept 'transformation' and 'learning organisation' meant a different things for them than what the tenets of each theory entail.

Each researcher chooses the strategy that is deemed fruitful. Before I chose the most appropriate technique, some questions I asked myself were: *Who is the possessor of knowledge? And how best could I access that knowledge?"* to introduce Gough's (1999) *'Ignorance reduction'* theme into this picture, this question could be posed this way: "Whose ignorance is being reduced here? And how best can the said ignorance be reduced?" In short, do I access the principal's feelings and experiences through him, the possessor of those feelings, or do I do it without his active participation? Surely, it is very difficult to think of the separation of the experience from the person who experiences them, (Wolcott, 1992). Implied here, is the whole notion of ontological-epistemological positions that deny the existence of knowledge/reality independent of the knower. The technique used preserves the person's dignity as a subject, and does not use him as an object, (Powney and Watts, 1987).

Interpretative traditions acknowledge researchers' biases, for example, Coe (1994: 21); Erickson, (1984 cited in Wolcott, 1995:165). Researchers make choices about sites, designs, methodologies, participants, and so on, privileging certain techniques may not be unproblematic. For example, privileging a multi-method approach to view reality may be problematic, as it tends to exclude other approaches that are not inclusive. Co-production of knowledge and exchanging of roles has been advanced by some researchers, such as Johnson (2002), Malcolm (2001), where the researcher's role is as much as to *'search'* as to *'research'*. Johnson (2002, quoted in Henning et. al. 2004: 106) advances the

notion of interviewers as 'educators' and interviewees as 'students'. The question of 'insiders' and 'outsiders', is everywhere, there are insiders and outsiders within schools too. Educators can be 'outside' the management; the principal could even be 'outside' the school (hiding in his office for instance, or spending all the time attending meetings, and so on).

4.8 Measures to ensure trustworthiness

It is important for any research that its process and findings are credible (Maxwell, 1996; Hammersley, 1997). One of the strategies to do that is triangulation, (Henning, Van Rensburg and Smit, 2004). Such a process involves using different methods to collect data, using different·techniques or tools to view reality.

Because of the study's focus, using other sources of information within schools such as educators and SMT members could help enhance the quality of the picture painted about the principal's view of himself and description of how he operates. Had the focus been on the organisation rather than the person, a more ethnographic approach involving attending school and SGB meetings, scrutinising their minutes, and so on, could have been more appropriate.

Participants were observed in their natural setting, that is, principals were observed whilst at work. One of the reasons was to establish the extent to which principals' stories could be corroborated by subordinates' stories. It is interesting to note how similar and dissimilar pictures emerge through talking to different stakeholders within schools. Such an exercise was different from Bryman's (1988: 59) suggestions where he advocates the integration of quantitative and qualitative methods, whereby, findings from one type of study can be checked against the findings deriving from the other type. That kind of triangulation was not suited to this study because of design used.

Furthermore, design was flexible enough to allow experiences to illuminate understanding of rural principals' situations. Other trustworthiness strategies used included credibility, confirmability, transferability and dependability, as formulated and popularised by Guba and Lincoln (1985). Credibility or believability, as Gallagher (1995: 32) calls it, is about accounting for one's honesty and integrity of methods. The researcher has to ensure that data produced is an accurate representation of the real situation, as the researcher understands it. One of such techniques is *'prolonged engagement'* and *'member-checking'*, (Wolcott, 1995; Gallagher, 1995: 26). 'Data do not speak for themselves', as Coe (1994); Wolcott (1992), and other researchers from qualitative traditions point out, but need human intervention in order to give them meaning. However, that process is not value-free or free of bias, there is always a danger of data contamination and distortion. That is why confirmation of data is crucial. As part of my promise to the participants, during participant observation periods, I brought with me interview transcripts for them to read and check for inaccuracies or misrepresentation of their stories. Human social life is too complex to be reduced to reliability testing formulae (Rubin and Rubin, 1995), and that is why researchers in the naturalistic enquiry search for contextually situated understandings (Oka and Shaw, 2000). It makes more sense for instance if educators feel that devolution has ensured participation than would be the case had they not been consulted as they are also beneficiaries of devolution.

4.9 Analysis and interpretation

I borrowed Freeman's (1996: 371-372) concepts of *'stance'*, *'approaches'* and *'processes'* and *'categories'* to frame my analysis. He advocates participatory, collaborative and declarative stances. Because of this study's epistemological base a *'declarative'* stance, as well as, iterative processes were used. At no stage did I employ software tools for analysis, nor did I seek assistance of another person to analyse data for me. Freeman (1996) mentions four

approaches located in a continuum, as **fig.1** below illustrate. My analytic tools included the following concepts:

- Schools as learning organisations
- Schools as open systems
- Transformational leadership
- Strategic management
- Principals as change agents

EMIC   ETIC

Outsider as Insider   Outsider as Outsider

◄──►

Hypothesis generating   Hypothesis testing

Grounded analysis	Negotiated Analysis	Guided Analysis	A priori Analysis
Categories and analysis emerge from the data with minimal a priori expectations	Categories and analysis developed by the researcher with the input of the participants	Categories developed a priori: subsequent analysis guided and categories modified through interaction with the data	Categories determined by advance of the data collection: analysis according to those categories

(See Strauss: 1987)   *(See Miles & Huberman: 1994)*

Figure 1: Data Analysis and Interpretation (Freeman: 1996: 372) Adapted

The study's aims and focus meant that *'etic'* and *'emic'* extremes could not work. My 'declarative' stance was more suited to *'guided'* categories where a researcher comes to the field with suggestive experience, but does not impose them on the data. Other categories emerge from the data as the researcher and participants interact. In line with the interpretivist paradigm, data analysis in this research started while the data gathering process was still in progress. Such a notion is referred to by some researchers as *"the principle of interaction between collection and analysis"* (Oka and Shaw, 2000:9; Erlandson, Harris, Skipper and

Allen, 1993: 114, cited in Oka and Shaw, 2000: 10). Thorton (quoted in Flinders and Mills, 1993); Eisner, (1991); and Spindler, (1982), advocate "*reflexivity of theory-practice*", a '*priori-grounded*' kind of analytic frame that ensures that a researcher can '*see*' what one would otherwise '*miss*'.

4.10 Limitations of the study

One of the limitations of this study is that it made it difficult for me to report its findings in a deeply detailed manner without unveiling the cover of participants, thus compromising ethical obligations. A flexible open-ended design that allows information from other data sources from other rural context was its strength. Another limitation is that rural communities are not easily accessible, and that impacted on the design. Hence few schools were chosen to participate in the study, but would be visited more often to understand them better.

Another limitation relates to the fact principals and schools were recommended by the Superintendent in the same district, and anonymity would be compromised. Nevertheless, problems of anonymity and confidentiality were reduced by the fact that he only recommended, and I selected 5 schools out of 10 schools he had recommended.

4.11 Conclusion

Before concluding this chapter I want to reiterate one point raised in chapter 2 regarding methodology used in the study, as well as, about my capabilities and excitements with what I know how to do. To illustrate this point, I borrow from Gombrich quoted in Dhunpath, (2003) who said: "*An artist does not paint what he sees, but he sees what he knows to paint*".

This quotation supports the view that perceptions are selective and motives for selection are influenced by the tools one has or knows how to use. We human beings have a tendency to seek what we know how to find.

CHAPTER 5

PRINCIPALS TELLING STORIES OF THEIR SCHOOLS

5.1 Introduction

The thinking of most principals in my study can be captured in one phrase: *'Practicality works and not the law!'* They make choices from their own perspective about what they can use from policy documents and what they will not use, depending on the capacity in their schools, the needs of the school and their own judgements about priorities and solutions.

In this chapter I present five stories meant to present characteristics of each school. Voices coming from other rural communities have been added. Rural schools in the Sea Lake district, like many rural communities, are not homogeneous; each one has its own uniqueness, and peculiar contexts. I have used different captions to portray each school's character, and also to indicate the role that each principal has played in creating such an atmosphere. The five case reports are told in ways that:

- Show how each school in its unique character interacts with stakeholders within and without. The stakeholders within the schools are HODs, educators, learners and parents; stakeholders without include the community, traditional leadership and the Education Department. This importance of context is central to my thesis.

- Draw attention to leadership styles, talents and personal judgements unique to the principals, and the way(s) in which individual characteristics are influential in the transformation process of a school.

5.2 Site by site stories

5.2.1"Productivity under strict conditions!"

This school is fenced, and it prides itself for its ever-clean schoolyard, and that there are no learners loitering around in the yard or making noise when lessons are in progress. It also prides itself for good matric results, for example, in the past five years; the lowest pass percentage was 63percent and the highest was 92percent and 93percent in 2002 and 2003 respectively. The principal is proud that in her school everybody is committed and works hard, it's *"Work-work-work!"* she says. School governance is effective, with SGB members fully supporting the school, and resolving serious problems that the school faces from time to time. Teaching and learning, with which the school prides itself, remain paramount in the minds of all stakeholders, namely, parents; educators; management and learners.

The principal from time to time helps the department of education at district level, running workshops for principals because of her insight on many areas of school management and leadership. Her reputation with the department and other principals in the area is good; every principal I met in the community talks of her as an astute person who is highly committed to her schoolwork and school's progress. While she is known among colleagues as a no-nonsense person, some staff members to complained about *'dictatorship'* and lack of consultation on important issues. For example, district principals might be meeting in the school hall without the educators' knowledge, so educators could not warn learners in advance not to play and make noise close to where the principals were meeting. There are many cases, some educators contend, where she would make announcements in the assembly that actually required the staff to know about them before they were made public.

> *Although the school does not at this stage, have a written school policy, or SDP it does have it in a fragmented form and it is, consistent with our*

conception of School Development, that school development should be a process, and as such, should unfold gradually **[P-A]**

No rush should be entertained when it comes to such important issues such as Development Plan and school policy documents, the principal maintained. The principal is opposed to the tendency of a *'rush-rush'* approach by the Education Department that she claims has been demonstrated by the Superintendents of Education's habit of giving principals School Development Plan forms to fill-in and demand that principals should submit completed forms to the circuit office within a very short space of time. She feels that no time is provided for proper consultations among relevant stakeholders.

The school is renowned for its strict discipline, the principal leads by example, she always honours her class duties, and she prides herself that she teaches, and not only deals with school management. One of her strengths is that she stays in the community, in that way, she is able to start at school before she goes to principals' meeting, and she also ensures that on her way home from meetings, she visits the school even if the school has closed for the day. In that way, she always keeps an eye on the school and assesses what is going on at school.

As a local person, the principal believes the community has complete confidence in her, because they feel she has the interests of the community at heart. The fact that the majority of educators, if not all of them, are commuters while she is local plays well in her favour also in her interaction with staff: she feels she can easily pressure them into doing things her way. However, as noted earlier, that kind of behaviour worries some staff members, who feel that she dictates and seldom consults. She is feared by the teaching staff as strict, and nobody would like to antagonise her. On the other hand, her personality and robust management style have earned her respect among fellow principals in the

district. It is that personality that has gained the school a good reputation and produced good matric results.

The pattern of her choices in the policies she feels are problematic in the school **Table 4**. is consistent with her personal style and concerns she raised in the interview. The similarity of her response to those from the SMT and educators suggests that there is shared understanding in the school, and differences that exists can be attributed to the different individuals' concerns. The principal, SMT and the educator all listed SGB, pregnant girls policy, OBE and corporal punishment as problematic policies for them. They felt that rural conditions were not conducive to the implementation of these policies.

PRINCIPAL [F]	S.M.T. [M]	EDUCATOR [F]
1. SGB	1. SGB	1. OBE
2. OBE	2. Corporal punishment	2. Pregnant girls
3. Admissions	3. Pregnant girls	3. Corporal punishment
4. Pregnant girls	4. OBE	4. Teacher Appr. (DAS)
5. Corporal punishment	5. WSD/WSE	5. SGB
6. WSD/WSE		

Table 4: School-A, list of policies as prioritised by principal, SMT member and educator

5.2.2 "The school is home to the homeless"

Despite beautiful surroundings, fertile soil, good climate, misty evenings, no shortage of rains, the school is swimming in the stream of poverty. The community is not only suffering from unemployment and lack of basic necessities like clinics, roads, electricity and water, but also the *'disappearance'* of parents, leaving behind children to fend for themselves. Some parents have gone to big cities like Johannesburg seeking jobs, and return only once in many months; others have gone away for years, while others have died as a result of the ever-present yet invisible scourge of HIV/AIDS. Among the destitute learners are

some who have never seen their fathers, and some whose families have been wiped out by HIV/AIDS. Some of these learners have taken charge of their parentless households.

In this situation there is some hope though. Some of the learners have developed confidence in the principal and even more in the deputy principal, who has acted as a father figure, feeding them, organising sponsors to further their studies after matric, *et cetera*. It is not clear what happens to girls who are also affected by this problem of parentless homes because usually, it is the boys that have been forthcoming with their family problems and usually the male SMT members and educators that have been flooded with pleas for help. At school during one of my observation visits, I saw a group of boys surrounding a male educator during break time, and I learnt later that they were talking about their problems at home. I was told that the same scenario continues after school, perhaps with different learners, perhaps with the same ones.

House breaking and theft of school property are cited as endemic problems. The principal's attempts at integrating the local community have been more counterproductive than productive. Nevertheless, many youth in the community look up to the school as a vehicle to a better life in future.

These are not the only problems the school has to contend with; religion in the form of a traditional Zulu Nazareth group (Shembe) is another one that has impacted on the school's management. Many parents are adherents of this faith. The school is concerned that educational matters take a back seat when the church holds its annual gathering in January-February, where many learners attend these gatherings instead of coming to school for registration. As a result when the department officials take their '10-day statistics', the school reflects low enrolment , and educator allocation is negatively affected. By the time theenrolment situation stabilises later, in February/March, the educator allocation has already been made. Here is an example of competing

requirements of the community and the Department, with the school caught in the middle.

The School Governing Body in this school, does not work as the Act intended, that is, it does not support the principal in school governance, but follows separate, private agendas. Instead of being a forum for stakeholders to participate in school governance, it is an arena for parents only. The executive has occupied its position for decades, in spite of name changes from school committee to School Governing Body. The same office bearers continue, and they have kept their positions largely because of their party political affiliation, and fears in the community for retaliation and victimisation if they complain. The school's needs are low in the SGB's priorities. All this frustrates the school principal, but she or he feels she or he cannot do anything lest he antagonise some powerful people in this community.

Another issue is that most educators commute between Durban to the school. This is an issue not only of the school management and time at school, but of lack of trust between these educators and the community. These urban educators are perceived by many in the local community to be aligned with the African National Congress (ANC), a party regarded as an urban, 'progressive' political party, opposed to the Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP) which has strong local support. Given that national Education Department policies have been developed by the ANC in government, the educators are considered as agents of the ANC. Traditional leadership is conservative and, according to one principal, pre-occupied with urban-rural and IFP/ANC divides, so that outsiders are viewed with suspicion. The principal expressed his concerns this way, being careful not to name political parties:

> One of the major challenges is that of Rural-Urban divide. Educators are sometimes seen as outsiders coming from the cities to teach their children in the countryside. They are going to teach their children their own value

and beliefs. There is this thing, party politics. There is this view that in the cities a certain political organisation is dominant there and, in the rural areas there is another one ruling there. So, these educators, by implication, belong to a certain political party, and they come to teach their children about this political party. This means, urban area =urban political party = urban educators. On the other hand there is, rural area =rural political party and rural children. By mixing with urban educators trouble could be brewing

In this climate of insider-outsider suspicions and political divisions, the school feels isolated from the community. It is also isolated geographically. It is situated at the extreme end of the district, with impassable roads in wet weather, so few departmental officials visit. When there are heavy rains during November examinations, the school is cut off completely, and depends on the South African National Defence Force (SANDF) to bring examination question papers.

Despite challenges the school and community are facing, and an SGB that does not cooperate, the principal's leadership style has created a relaxed climate within the school, where educators and learners mix and discuss their personal issues and try to find their way forward. All members of staff are free to openly share their views and initiate whatever they wants without suspicion.

PRINCIPAL [M]	S.M.T. [F]	EDUCATOR [F]
1. SGB powers	1. OBE	1. Pregnant girls policy
2. OBE.	2. SGB powers	2. Corporal punishment
3. Admissions.	3. Pregnant girls	3. Teacher Appr. (DAS).
4. Corporal punishment.	4. WSD/WSE	4. OBE
5. SDP.	5. Teacher Appr. (DAS)	5. Admissions/PPN
6. Pregnant girls policy	6. Admissions	
	7. Corporal punishment	

Table 5: School-B list of policies as prioritised by principal, SMT member and educator

As shown in **Table 5,** the policies seen as most problematic in this school are OBE, admissions, corporal punishment and pregnant girls policies, with SGB being of concern to the principal and the SMT member only. The pattern is somewhat similar to school-A **(Table 4)**

5.2.3 "Courageous woman that works alone!"

This is a new school, founded in the mid 1990's. In 7 years since its founding, the school has grown from being a building-less school to having 2 blocks of 5 and 3 classrooms respectively and an administration block with a principal's office, staff room, and reception. The school has also been fenced. These achievements have been realised through sponsorships mobilised by the principal, with little support from parents or the School Governing Body. However, the notion of the principal working alone is deceptive, considering that a consultation culture among staff is well entrenched, and an atmosphere that is open and free, with the principal sharing her decision-making with the teaching staff.

There is no electricity or water at the school, so tasks such as the production of tests and examinations are major demands, as the principal has to organise the typing and printing of question papers at other centres.

Matric results have fluctuated since 2000 when the school started to have an external class. For example in 2000, it got 46 percent; 2001 it got 5.5 percent; 2002 it got 80 percent and in 2003, it got 66 percent. These are wild fluctuations indeed. In 2002, five out of six educators produced 100 percent passes in their respective subjects. The principal has a class she is teaching in the school, and until recently an external class (which she has asked to be excused from). She fears that she cannot do justice to the learners given that she has to spend time outside the school and contend with school management. For the same reasons, she feels that she cannot compete with educators in her school in terms of pass

rates. Transport to and from the school is a problem, and, as a result, educators have rented rooms in the community, positioning themselves to offer better support to learners.

The school has championed the fight against HIV/AIDS among educators and learners. An NGO has been helping with providing training for educators and learners since 2002. Notwithstanding the fact that the school prides itself for these endeavours, ironically, the school is also facing an increase in pregnancy rates among learners.

Illiteracy and poverty among the majority of parents present difficulties for the school management, teaching and learning. Parents do not pay school fees. When just 10 parents pay R60 school fees, out of 275 enrolled learners, it is a miracle that the school manages to function, even writing June examinations. That amount of R60 had been lowered from R100 in 2002, but payment has not improved. Parents pride themselves that the school has its buildings, and wonder why it charges fees at all. The principal expressed it this way:

> *The community thinks that, because buildings have sprung up from nothing, then, there is no need for them to pay school fees. It's like they were paying because the money was going to build the school. They have even forgotten that they could not even raise the deposit of R10000 to build the first classrooms. I had to approach my mother, who had just retired, and she could afford to loan me that R10000 deposit for the building, with the hope that the community would pay me back* **[P-C]**

Being a small and growing secondary school competing with another school in the area for learners puts this school in an awkward position where it has to balance sticking to its vision about what it wants to be, but not scaring potential and current learners away to its rival school. Should enrolments go down, the school will lose an educator, but should enrolments go up, it does not necessarily

get an additional educator; it takes some time (years) with consistent enrolment levels for schools to get even one additional teaching post.

The principal sometimes feels betrayed by parents, for whom she feels she has done so much, but they do not cooperate in terms of paying fees, and the School Governing Body does not encourage parents to support the school through paying fees or providing labour. They only pay at the end of the year when reports are withheld (a practice that is contrary to government policy).

The school is proud of the fact that since the first block was built in 1997, not a single windowpane had been broken, it seems that learners and the community take good care of school.

> *It is like they understand their financial situation: where could they get the money to fix the windows if they broke them?* **[P-C]**

The principal – and her staff – feel that she has done too many things alone There are so many things that she has to attend to - – governance, management, departmental pressures, school-community relationships, making sure that the school grows, enrolment keeps going up, the school keeps functioning normally, - that sometimes the principal feels like giving it all up and leaving the teaching profession. Like other principals in the district, she had not developed any systematic planning document or school policy. Nevertheless, it is clear to me that her vision and leadership style have resulted in major achievements for this community.

PRINCIPAL [F]	S.M.T. [F]	EDUCATOR [M]
1. SGB	1.Post Provisioning Norms [PPN]	1.Corporal punishment
2. Curriculum	2.Corporal punishment	2. AIDS policy
3. Funding norms	3.Funding norms	3.Pregnant girls
4. SDP	4.SGB	4.WSE
5. Code of conduct	5.Pregnant girls	
6. Teacher Appr. (DAS)		
7. Continuous Ass.		
8. OBE		
9. C.O.L.T.S.		

Table 6: School-C list of policies as prioritised by principal, SMT member and educator

In **Table 6,** the choices of problematic policies are confusing. For example, the principal puts curriculum high on her list, but OBE low; SGB is mentioned by the principal and SMT, while corporal punishment is mentioned by SMT and educator but not the principal. The principal approaches discipline from the code of conduct, but is unsure of the direction to take:

> *Learners come late for school because they know nothing will happen to them. Making them clean the yard after lessons and or making the garden as alternative forms of punishment have not worked, instead they enjoy such kinds of punishment* **[P-C]**.

It is interesting too that the educator takes pride in the learners' awareness of HIV/Aids epidemic, while the SMT lamented the fact that learners did not practice safe sex. On the question of learners failing to practice safe sex, SMT complained that:

> *There is HIV/AIDS out there, so now if they are pregnant, surely, they do not practice safe sex...personally, I see a direct link between pregnancy and HIV/AIDS, i.e. the more unsafe sex, the more HIV spread... I feel for these kids, they are playing with fire* **[SMT-C]**

PPN and funding norms were seen to both hinder the school's progress and sustain it:

Policy about Norms and Standards is both helpful and not helpful. In our case we are surviving because of it, otherwise the school would not be functioning, but on the other hand, PPN is so rigid that the enrolment determines the amount of money due to the school and it does not matter what curriculum needs may be, you just get what the enrolment determines **[P-C]**

5.2.4 "Entrepreneurship, and School-Community Synergy"

This school is located in a very hot typical lowveld climate where at some point during the day, air seems to be motionless. In this remote place, I had not expected to find the resources that the school has acquired, largely through the principal's leadership and charisma. The school has many facilities that are not usually available in rural communities such as, clean piped water, grid electricity; solar electricity; computers; Internet connection; weather station, and so on. The school is orderly, fenced, with a security guard at the gate. Sponsorship comes from provincial, national and overseas donors.

One of the unusual features of the school is a new crèche within the school premises. The rationale for the crèche is part of a long term vision the principal has of a modern high tech institution as a foundation for Mathematics and Science minded learners that would be in a better position to understand Science and Mathematics that is taught at high school. The school has been transformed to a condition that everybody within and outside is proud of.

Integration of the community and the school has been achieved through various projects of community development, such as vegetable gardens located within the school premises. One is operated by educators, and the other by members of

the community. Destitute learners from within the school, youth from outside the school, and learners that study Agriculture all work together on the gardens.

The sense of ownership and pride in the school is so ubiquitous that learners, who cause disturbances at school, can be called to order by other learners. The community too, is proud of the school, and looks after it. There is no burglary. A security guard narrated a story in which he just blew a whistle when suspects were trying to steal from the school one evening, and members of the surrounding houses converged on the premises and caught the culprit. This is one characteristic that separates this school from the rest: it has managed to bring the community inside the school.

There is collegiality too among the teaching staff. The principal shares his vision with educators and other stakeholders about the future of the school and community and the roles the school and community in working together. Channels of communication have been set up between the SMT and learners. From time to time, the principal conducts what he calls, *"Imbizo"* (special gathering) where he moves from one class to another soliciting learners' views and grievances about anything at school. If trouble is brewing, the principal has a way of handling the issue:

> *Here at school we have more boys than girls, and sometimes, we get information about something brewing, that is going to disrupt the school. Boys know that in the community as a tradition, when there are issues to be discussed, or that must be thrashed out, men must meet under a tree and discuss men issues ("Es'hlahleni"). As part of that tradition, we do have our own tree here at school, "Es'hlahleni sezinsizwa". When I call them there, I call them as "izinsizwa" and not as schoolboys or learners. No girl is allowed to attend that meeting. There is no shouting in that meeting. I put the issue on the 'table', sometimes I put the issue for discussion and tell them why I think what they are doing is wrong, and why it is not acceptable in the school* **[P-D]**

Over and above structures that ensure learner participation in the management and governance of the school, there is a suggestion box for learners. This box hangs on the window of the principal's office, and is easily accessible to learners. If they have any suggestion or complaint, they can write on a piece of paper, confidentially, and drop it in the suggestion box. Only the principal has access to this box. He utilises suggestions raised by learners, and sometimes, he gets tips about brewing problems.

Human and physical resource development have been well synchronised, with human resources given first priority so that it would become easier for the staff to maintain physical resources when they become available. It is remarkable that a school is able to maintain and service all the physical resources it has acquired, given the small amounts of money paid by parents per annum as school fees (R125): public schools in towns and cities with similar equipment charge fees more like R6000 per annum.

Academic performance has not been commensurate with physical resources, nor of the attention to human resources development whereby new subject packages have been introduced and educators re-skilled as part of curriculum diversification to cater for changing needs of the community. Maybe so much time has been devoted to school development in comparison with the basic programme, and tuition suffered. Hence the principal commented early this year (2004) when 2003 matric results were announced, that the school needed to give special attention to learner performances, in terms of matric results.

This principal explains his drive and vision as follows:

In the 1980s I was a revolutionary, I was in the frontline pressurizing the government to deliver to the people. After 1994, there were projects like 'Masakhane and Reconstruction and Development Project', which encouraged people to do things by themselves and for themselves. My

policy has changed since then. I believe in 'Self change', hence, we have developed all these plans, and we have done all these things, and we continue to develop. We are now part of the system, and we must use that to influence the system to 'change'. This drives me in whatever I do. As I said it before, I believe that people themselves must change, have their own plans for the future, and then go for it, if you wait for outsiders to do things for you, then, it is not your plans and desires anymore, but outsiders' plans and ideas **[P-D].**

What one can see in the school started as a vision of one person, who shared his dream with staff and started this long journey of development. The vision is supported by a strong belief that to make things happen, individuals must do something for themselves. This principal offers an instance of the importance of the leader's vision, and the leader leading; the importance of the principal's vision and how that vision can be sold to other members of the school (Senge, 1990; O'Neil, 1995).

PRINCIPAL [M]	S.M.T. [F]	EDUCATOR [M]
1. Admissions	1. Admissions	1.WSD
2. Funding norms	2. Corporal punishment	2. C.O.L.T.S.
3. SGB	3. Pregnant girls	3. OBE
4. SDP	4. SGB	4. Corporal punishment
5. Code of conduct	5. Teacher Appr. (DAS)	5.Code's of conduct
6. Continuous Assessment	6. WSD/WSE	(Learners)
7. Teacher Appr. (DAS)		6.Pregnant girls
8. WSD		7. Admissions

Table 7: School-D, list of policies as prioritised by principal, SMT member and educator

In this school, as in School-C, policies that occupy the principal's mind differ from those that worry the SMT member and the educator, Corporal punishment and

pregnant girls' policies did not figure in the principal's list, but were high in the SMT and Educator lists. The principal spoke especially of WSD policies and Admissions policies: he saw them as very important for the school in positioning itself for the future. As it is the case with all the secondary schools studied, School-D saw the Admissions policies as an illustration of the department's failure to accommodate rural diversities.

5.2.5 "Rigidity and fluidity for effectiveness"

Like all the schools I worked with, this school is fenced, and has a security guard at the gate. This one is endowed with electricity and running, clean, piped water. There is pride within the school that gender equity resulted in female educators having opportunities to manage secondary schools, which in the past, were reserved for male. The gender balance in the School Management Team is skewed in favour of females. Both the principal and her deputy are females, with only one male out of four HODs.

The principal is perceived by some staff members to be too rigid, following what the department wants at the expense of educators' needs. For example, one of the male educators said:

> *Women are demanding opportunities, and they are given. However that comes with its own challenges, because women principals do not lead schools in the same way as male principals. Sometimes you will find that the presence of males in the staff is presenting its own challenges for the female principal. The management style will change. She will feel threatened by males, and that affects her management style. Views become grievances or something else they are not. At the moment, we are not free to air our views because they are immediately misinterpreted as challenging the authority of the principal because all the time she feels threatened by us* **[Edu-E]**

When the principal is not present, other members of the Management Team do not have access to school documents like the log book, minute book, matric results schedule, etc. At one point when I needed to visit the school while the principal was on leave, she encouraged me to go and meet any of the School Management Team, who would be able to assist me with books or documents. But that was not to be. I could not get any of the documents I wanted. Although she assured me that SMT members would give me whatever help I needed, each one of them would refer to another. In the end, one SMT member would say, *"It is the principal that knows ..."*

To get around problems such as these, the staff takes their own initiatives. For example, they use a separate minutes book, reserved for cases when the principal is absent and they do not have access to school documents. They have designed a separate information book to invite staff members to staff meetings they convene from time to time in the absence of the principal. Late in 2003, the principal was on sick leave, and the staff confidently took charge of operations. Plans for admissions for 2004 were carefully prepared, including who would do what on which day. Everything went according to plan. Similarly, duty loads were completed before schools closed in December, so that educators could go to class on the very first day learners come to school for their new academic year. All these issues were discussed and implemented by the staff as a group, in the absence of the principal.

Despite unity among educators, parents are hardly involved. Few attend parents' meetings. They do not get involved in the school, or the many issues pertaining to school governance, school policy formulation, and learner discipline. Parents' roles in school governance seem to be issues more for academics and policy makers than for these parents.

Like other schools in the Sea Lake district, principal's personalities appear to play a crucial role in influencing the mood in the school.

PRINCIPAL [F]	S.M.T. [F]	EDUCATOR [F]
1. Corporal punishment 2. SGB 3. Teacher Appr. (DAS) 4. OBE 5. Admissions 6. Pregnant girls. [They overlap for example, SDP/safety and security/code of conduct for learners]	1. OBE 2. WSE 3Teacher Appr. (DAS) 4Corporal punishment	1. OBE 2. Corporal punishment 3. Preg.girls policy 4. Teacher Appr. (DAS) 5. WSE 6. Gender Equity 7. SGB

Table 8: School-E, list of policies as prioritised by principal, SMT member and educator

From **Table 8,** we see once again some differences in priorities, some similarities. Once again, it is difficult to distinguish between differences in priority as a result of different places in the school structure, and differences that arise from shortcomings in 'whole school' processes. Policies that were common among all stakeholders were OBE, corporal punishment and Development Appraisal. Policy on pregnancy and the SGB were only mentioned by the principal and educator.

5.3 Different priorities

Table 9 below illustrates how principals of different schools prioritised different policy issues.

Principal-A	Principal-B	Principal-C	Principal-D	Principal-E
1. SGB powers 2. OBE. 3. Admissions . 4. Pregnant girls policy. 5. Corporal policy	1. SGB powers 2. OBE. 3. Admissions . 4. Corporal punishment . 5. SDP. 6. Pregnant girls policy	1. SGB powers 2. Curriculum 3. School funding norms. 4. SDP. 5. Code of conduct for learners. 6. Teacher development Appraisal (DAS) 7. Continuous assessment. 8. OBE 9. C.O.L.T.S.	1. Admissions . 2. School funding norms. 3. SGB. 4. SDP. 5. Code of conduct for learners 6. Continuous Assessment. 7. Teacher development Appraisal (DAS) 8. WSD	1. Corporal punishment. 2. SGB. 3. Teacher Development ment Appraisal (DAS) 4. OBE 5. Admissions 6. Pregnant girls policy

Table 9: Sea Lake principals' prioritised list of policies across five schools.

Principals' priorities revolved around four policies, namely, SGB, OBE, corporal punishment and admissions policies. Some of the confusing positions taken by principals include support for the banning of corporal punishment whilst rejecting the alternative forms as not suitable for rural contexts, [P-E].

Principals of School-C and School-D did not mention the pregnant girls policy at all, nor did they talk about HIV/AIDS during our conversation. That is surprising, especially because educators and SMT members often pointed to deaths emanating from pregnant girls giving birth alone at home, and not receiving medical attention in time. And many of them talked extensively about HIV/AIDS

It is interesting that almost all principals prioritised policies such as pregnant girls, corporal punishment and School Governing Bodies, which are largely concerned with maintenance (that is, the basic functionality of the school), and not so much with school development. This focus on maintenance competes with the transformation agenda at school level.

5.4 Issues principals raised

Many principals interviewed in Sea Lake district were not happy about Outcomes Based Education, some blame department planning, for example P-B felt that workshops that were organised to help educators were:

> *Disrupting the schools, especially because they are disjointed...they are tackling those issues they regard as problematic at the time, and when they discover that they have a problem at another area, then they will think of another workshop at another time. They do not think of in-service training and do a thorough job that would cover the entire syllabus so that all educators will have a common understanding of what is required of them.*

Another principal complained about learners' progression, which, in his or her view, meant that undeserving learners are let through to the next class. To keep a learner back involves communication between parents and educators to discuss learners' progress and find ways forward before a learner is retained. According to **[P-E]** *"Ignorance on the part of parents and poor communication systems,"* that are characteristic of rural communities frustrate principals' consultation attempts. Because of the rough rural terrain, submitting learners'

portfolios to the district offices for assessment was also a logistical nightmare. As in other policies, we see a focus here on the logistics of OBE more than its potential for transformation. However one of the five principals was very enthusiastic about Outcomes Based Education, including its policy of continuous assessment. He said:

> *This is the only policy where the department has done its homework. I commend them for that, they are monitoring it, they are training educators, and they are implementing it. Last year, for instance, there were year marks coming from common tests.* **[P -E]**

The principal further said,

> *One of the problems is that of justification as to why the learner must be held back and so on. Educators need to carry learners' portfolios to the district offices for evaluations and discussions with district officials. Who can carry all these portfolios and exercise books? There is also another requirement that if a learner is not doing well, you need to attend to the reason why s/he has not done well, and there is no time to do all that. So what we do is simple; let them pass, to avoid all these departmental hassles.* **[P-E]**

This comment invites similar questions about the viability of the proposed performance based appraisal system for educators, to be implemented in 2004. Many educators raised fears about prevailing nepotism and favouritism in the school. These fears challenge principals' integrity and professionalism. There is no doubt that if educators in a school do not trust their principal, then that principal's leadership is questionable.

Time was mentioned on many occasions as playing a big role in policy implementation. Accessibility, logistical issues, the conditions of rural communities and capacity problems, etc, have proved decisive as inhibitors for implementation of various policy initiatives.

There are a number of issues that secondary schools principals raised. Such issues that emerged from our conversations are discussed below:

"School Governing Bodies are Parents!"

Whenever the phrase *'SGB'* was raised, principals, including educators, thought only of parents who served in that body, and excluded themselves from responsibility. The idea of the SGB as a forum where all relevant stakeholders could meet did not exist. For example, when I asked one principal about how the governing body affected the way in which he was running the school, he said:

> *A worrying trend by the department has been the devolution of governance powers to the SGBs. They [the SGBs, but read 'parents'] do not understand the implications of those powers. They do not understand legislation.* **[P-D]**

"School Governing Bodies are not helpful in school governance"

One of the major concerns from principals is that, SGBs are not helpful in terms of providing governance support, and help the principal in performing his management functions, as it is contemplated in the act, but the only thing they are capable of doing, is to give moral support to what the school may be doing. For example this principal said:

> *They are not doing anything for the school, only the chairman knows something, otherwise, they know nothing at all.... They only give moral support in that they do not oppose what we say that is in the interest of the school. So, in the end, everything rests on the principal's shoulders, unlike in the other race groups where you find that the S.G.B. does everything that should be done by them. Yet, the only thing that they know is that, they are in charge of the school, the government has given them all the powers to govern the school. They do not forget that they are our employers, but other than that, there is nothing that they do or know because of their levels of education.*

"Outcomes Based Education is not working in rural areas!"

Complaints about the failure of Outcomes Based Education generally externalised the problems, pointing to such issues as educators' lack of sufficient training:

> *We were trained for a week only. As educators, we received 3-4 years of training, how can we be expected to understand OBE after only one week's training? So, it's training that is a problem* **[Edu-A]**

> *The only problem I see for now regards training of educators. We are not sure about it; we just do not understand it* **[SMT-A]**

Some principals put the blame on the Education Department's lack of proper planning. This is how one principal put it:

> *There was lack of planning on the side of the department, and O.B.E. has not progressed to grade 10 learners this year. What a chaos that has created here! These learners now have to go back to the old ways of learning from O.B.E. These learners are now lost, they know nothing. They are used to O.B.E. but here in grade 10, is the old syllabus they are using now, it is a new thing for them, and it is confusing for educators as well, having to go forward and backwards concerning O.B.E. and suddenly no O.B.E.* **[P-B]**

Because of the confusion that reigns in rural communities, many schools resort to maintaining the *status quo*, by pretending to have adopted the new ways of teaching whilst in reality, they continue teaching the old way. One educator told me that: *"We use OBE flag to teach the old way we know"* **[Edu-B]**

"Parents educational levels undermine effective schooling"

Data from all five cases, like data from other communities in the province, indicate that schools regard parents as out of tune with what should be happening in schools. Principals and educators alike felt that parents' lacked understanding of educational issues, and attributed this lack to the levels of illiteracy among rural parents. For example, one of the principals put it this way:

One of the challenges we face is illiteracy problem among parent; they do not understand the importance of educational rules and regulations, they do not understand why they should register children the preceding year. For example, before schools close at the end of the year, I give them dates on which certain grades will be registering in the following year, before schools re-open. They don't turn up on those days until late, when schools have already re-opened. By that time, we have already admitted other learners from other areas, because we could not wait for people we do not even know they will be coming back or going to other schools. ...At the same time, we want to start teaching on the same day schools re-open.

Parents do not know why we register early, that is, before schools open. They just do not understand the implications of registering late, that is, when schools open. They do not know that educators need to be in their classes, teaching when schools open. It doesn't mean anything to them, but it creates problems for us. **[P-D]**

As in other issues, the school's focus tends to be on logistics: their concern about parents' lack of understanding proves to be lack of understanding of how schools operate, rather than, for example, curriculum issues and the place of the school in the community.

"Rural contexts were not considered when formulating policies"

In rural contexts, it is impossible to implement some of the department's policies. One example is the use of alternative forms of discipline to corporal punishment. Using detention for instance, is suitable for urban schools, which have facilities to administer it. Furthermore, parents in the urban context (parents who stay with their children, parents who can make arrangements for their children to be picked up after school) are more easily contactable. One of the principals, on the inappropriateness of this policy on rural setting said:

> *Many parents stay far away from their homes, they stay in their employer's residences in towns and cities. Now if you detain a learner after school, you have to make arrangements with the parents so that they will come and fetch that learner who had to stay behind. They are just not there to perform these duties and responsibilities. So if you detain him, who will fetch him at the end of detention time? That is the problem. Other forms of punishment also are not favourable for our conditions here in the rural areas. 'I think they were made for other communities, maybe whites', but not for black schools and certainly not for us in the rural areas* [P-E]

'Practicality works, not the law'

Related to the above differences between urban and rural schools, is the problem of educators being barred from holding meetings during school hours. All schools covered in this study ignored this regulation. In certain schools such as School-E, School-B and School-C, buses are timed according to school times and learners' travel. When schools closed for the day, at 14:30/14:45, the buses came, and by 15:00, there were no buses to take educators to town. So, in order to hold staff meetings, schools make adjustments to the school time tables, for instance, they do that by reducing periods times so that teaching stops by 13:30, but all subjects had been taught for that particular day. Schools would, furthermore, ensure that the meetings do not go beyond 15:00. Some schools

(for example, School-E) use Thursday to hold staff meetings between 13:45 and 15:00 because it is the school's sport's day, should there be an urgent matter.

Similar issues arise concerning admissions policies and procedures for registration. One principal said:

> *Government people theorise most the time, and they do not care about what happens on the ground. We do not follow admission policy as stipulated by the department, they mention a lot of things that might cause friction in the community…the policy as it stands is strict, and you will find that the neighbouring schools do not follow them, and parents will choose that school and leave yours because you are strict by sticking to government regulations.* **[P-B]**

Given the unworkability of some policies, from the schools' positions, principals have to make choices. As one principal said:

> *Powers or no powers, practicality works, not the law, for example, corporal punishment was banned, but we have to find our own ways of doing things* **[P-A]**

Another principal on the same issue of considering what works in practice rather than worrying about the regulations said:

> *Right now, only 10 parents have paid school fees of R60 out of 275 learners. This is a serious problem; we have resorted to illegal means like withholding learners' reports at the end of the year. When reports are withheld at the end of the year, they [parents] start paying* **[P-C]**

There are many examples of this kind. Principals are saying that rural schools do what they believe is going to work in practice, and that they must improvise to ensure that the school operates, that staff meet, that enrolments are maintained, and discipline is evident.

'Principals are overloaded with different demands, and some feel they cannot cope'

> *We, as principals, are overwhelmed by a lot of reading (policy documents). We are overloaded with many things including reading these policies, for example. I once jokingly commented to one of the subject advisors in the district who brought in my office a pack of envelopes, and I said to her that, I had not even read the previous load delivered, but now she was bringing another. She did not take that kindly, but at the same time, she did not show dislike of my comment. I noticed that in the next principals' meeting, when she commented back, by saying that some principals are complaining about these letters and big envelopes I bring to their schools. The truth is, there is too much reading materials, (policies and regulations). We, as principals, also have our own lives to lead as well. These materials mean that you must read them all and understand them. You cannot meet the educators and discuss these documents without having read and understood them* **[P-E]**

This is just one of many cases where the rate and magnitude of change in education has frustrated principals in rural school to the extent that they cannot cope with all the demands placed on them. Principals have to make choices from a range of demands from maintenance, development, parents, educators, learners, the Education Department, changes in structural arrangements and procedures. An example of conflicting requirements of the school, parents and the Education Department, is the strategy of schools withholding learners' reports at the end of the year. That practice has proved to be very effective in forcing parents to pay school fees. The Education Department is flatly against such practices. Added to the non-payment of fees problem, are confusing utterances by the Minister of Education who appeared on national television and explained that, in terms of the law, parents may not pay schools fees, not because they cannot afford to, but because, they do not want to. Such statements can easily provide justification for affording parents to withhold payments, and schools may

"Norms and Standards" allocation of funds to schools, the school cannot operate at all.

The fact is that multiple pressures and unrealistic deadlines put heavy demands on principals.

> *At the moment, there are too many documents coming from the department, some are very thick indeed, like the Labour Relations Act (L.R.A.) I cannot read it. I am stressed out. I have just focused on the code of conduct for educators, finance, S.G.B. but I am stressed, because I cannot read and I get worried for the lack of understanding emanating from me not having read these documents, or thinking about the meetings and workshops I have to attend, and I do not have time to focus on good results for grade 12, and I am expected to teach grade 12, but because of all these things I have mentioned, meetings; teaching; reading all these policy documents and legislations, it's just too much. Sometimes I feel like, I just have to quit the post of principal and do something else* **[P-C]**

'HIV/Aids as the loudest and vocal silence'

In one school I visited in November, I heard many stories narrated by the deputy-principal about families that had been wiped out by HIV/Aids related illnesses, leaving behind orphans to fend for themselves. The school chose to raise funds to assist them, and sponsors for those learners that had potential for tertiary education. In another school I visited in the same period, two grade 12 learners had died, one girl in the process of giving birth, while another allegedly of HIV/Aids related illness. While some of these rural schools were doing well in terms of taking care of orphans and poverty stricken learners, nothing much was being done to address the issue of the spread of the virus. No campaign of any kind had been planned or undertaken by schools. It raises issues of the roles of schools in rural communities, especially in the face of HIV/AIDS and poverty.

When talking to principals of schools in another rural area, I learnt through principals that talking about HIV/AIDS was considered a taboo in that community generally. The high school principal said that schools were not welcome to talk about it. Yet an NGO that operates in the community talks about it and acts on it, and that is welcomed. So too, as university researchers in that community we were requested to talk about it – even to have the children talk about it to the community, via posters that they made and a play they presented. Thus the issue seems to be not so much 'talking about it', but who can talk and who can't.

School principals in the Sea Lake district feel that they have to walk this tight rope whereby, they have to respond to the community's desires to stay silent, but talk openly as part of curriculum delivery, as required by the Department of Education. It has become clear that HIV/AIDS is one of those silences that reverberate loudly in my ears (as one of the outsiders), that insiders do not want to talk about and do something about it. My conversational partners mentioned HIV/AIDS and poverty only in passing but when it came to real indications of the presence of HIV/AIDS and poverty, such issues 'disappeared' from their minds. Policies on corporal punishment, pregnant girls and SGBs were somehow more immediate.

Accessing policy document by the teaching staff

There are two ways in which educators gain access to policies from the Education Department. Firstly schools shorten periods and teach until 13:30 and utilise break time to listen to either the principal or the teacher union representative reading out the circular from the district office. The latter method was deemed to be quicker. For example one educator said:

> When union representative comes back from a union meeting, he briefs the staff during break time, and if they do not finish their discussion, they then ask for more time to discuss the document at the time set aside between 13:30 and 14:30 **[Edu-A]**

'Teacher Appraisal and WSE cannot be implemented, yet'

Unlike the School development Plans where principals did have some plans, when it came to Teacher Appraisal, or DAS, and also when it came to Whole School Development and Whole School Evaluation, none of the schools had started these development initiatives. Some of the reasons for the lack of progress were:

> *This policy cannot be implemented, there is too much work that needs to be done, there is too much that needs to be discussed, and there is not enough time to deal with this during school hours. Implications are that we meet after school to do it, to talk about it, or we do not go to classes if we want to do it during teaching time* **[P-E]**

Despite the lack of progress on the implementation of WSD/WSE, principals had similar ideas about how such development initiatives should fit-in in the scheme of things. There was complete agreement among principals that schools need to have Schools Development Plans before there can be any talk of Whole School Evaluation. Further, they saw Whole School Evaluation as an action by outsiders (Education Department officials) who would assess them about their functionality. They maintained that that school should conduct their own internal Whole School Evaluations, linked to Whole School Development. They say that there are 7 key areas for assessment that department officials use to conduct their WSE, and schools need to use the same 7 key areas to conduct their own internal Whole School Evaluation exercises.

Their concept about the role of the whole school evaluation, vision and mission of the school and school development plan is represented in **Fig 2** below:
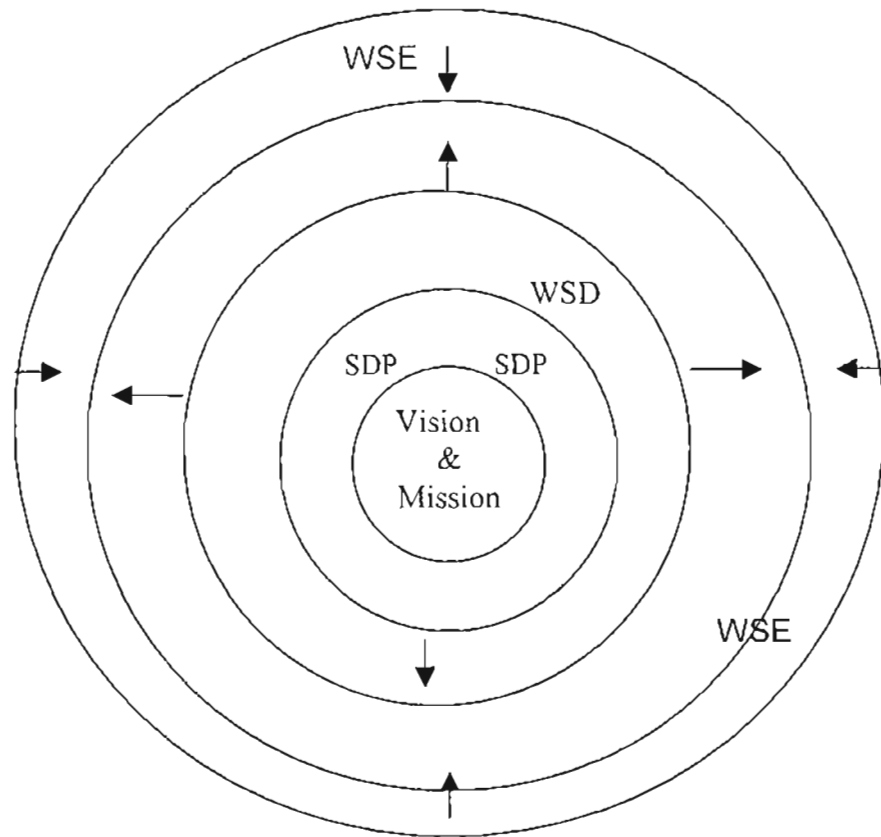
Fig. 2: Principals' conception of the connections between Whole School Evaluation and School Development Plan

The sketch tries to show that, for the school to develop, it needs to have vision and mission first. From that vision and mission, it needs to design a school development plan (SDP), (The second ring in the sketch). From the SDP, the school needs to have WSD, which involves more stakeholders, including parents and SGB, (Third ring). Before the Education Department officials can come to school to do their Whole School Evaluation (WSE), the school needs to conduct its own internal WSE using the same framework that the department has

provided schools with, (Fourth ring). The last ring indicates the department officials coming in from the outside to conduct their own *Whole School Evaluation.* Their concept relegates the Education Department to a position of final, summative assessment, rather than a partner in the formative development of the school.

"Education Department is an obstacle to school development"

There are a number of cases where the Education Department has been perceived to be playing an obstructionist role instead of supporting schools' development. One of the cases has been where it has frustrated classroom construction by sponsors, while another instance has been the application of policies such as PPN, which has not seem to be favourable to secondary schools compared to primary schools.

> *I have already told you that firstly the policy on P.P.N. norms does not accommodate our needs in secondary schools; it only considers enrolment and does not take into account the fact that we have many streams in secondary schools. Now the principal has got to make a special request to the department and explain that other subjects are not being taught because of that P.P.N. requirement. Then the department may authorise the employment of someone above P.P.N.* **[SMT-C]**

Norms and standards of school funding, and the red tape that goes with the process of acquisitions, particularly with regard to "Section-20 schools", has proved to be a problem that stifles efficiency in service delivery. Principal of school-C explains:

> *We saw the need to introduce science and commercial streams. We started with commercial stream and last year, we wrote our first Accounting and Economics in grade 12. This year, science is in grade 11 and next year is our first science matric class. But then again, the department is not helping us in facilitating the acquisition of teaching/learning aids. We now have Home Economics, we do have the*

funds that they are controlling, but we cannot buy the equipment that we need. How then do we ensure that our curriculum is developing? How do we ensure that learners are benefiting from the subject package we offer them here at school? **[P-C]**

'Principals' dubious policy regarding School Development Plans'

The majority of principals of schools covered in this study had a double-barrel approach to School Development Plans. There was one School Development Plan for the department of education and another for the school. The latter one was the genuine plan for the school development, whereas, the one for the department, was just paperwork prepared for the Superintendents of Education (Management) to submit to the department because, according to deadlines which in principals' opinions, were not feasible to meet, especially if they intended to do a thorough job. For example principal of School-B (expressing what other principals had told me) said:

We do not have S.D.P. on paper yet, but it is something I am now focusing on. But you know, it is only last year that the department in our district put more emphasis on S.D.P. and they emphasised the point that they are not events, but long processes focusing on 3-5 years in advance. To my surprise, the following month, the S.E.M. was asking when we would submit our S.D.P. It is then that I realised that they did not mean what they said about S.D.P. I realised that they only wanted to be seen as having done their work, because they had a list of schools that had submitted these plans and those schools that had not submitted. If you are interested in the paper, you can get it, it is easy that way, but if you want substance, then it is another story. We do have development plans and we are still working on it. What is still missing is to commit our development plans into paper, that is all! **[P-B]**

While on the question of the availability of School Development Plans in schools, Principal of School-A said:

> *It is available, but what is available is the 'hush – hush' of the department, schools were expected to draw and submit at a certain date which was quite soon. So I had to divide staff into groups and discuss the plan and submit it, but that is not the SDP I want, the SDP I want is the one that is born out of a vision and it is incremental and not rushed, it must be done after consultation.* **[P-A]**

'Too many changes frustrate more than enhance schools' transformation

This theme is more visible in the conversation with the principals, and it did not emerge at all with educators and School Management Teams interviews. For example one of the principals said:

> *The school policy document has not been completed yet, especially because new things keep on coming about the running of schools...You must remember that at this point in time, there are many things that are happening with the department, too many activities that we are involved in, it is just too busy and there is no time to prepare this school policy document because of these activities* **[P-A]**

What is intriguing is that the Education Department has been, and still is, doing something about building capacity of principals. The extract below indicates clearly the role of the department in assisting principals, and also that different people learn at different paces.

> *The department has helped principals in many ways to enable them to cope with many complex issues surrounding changes in the management of schools, but making sense of the reading materials is an individual matter of people involved, that is, how you read and understand what has been given*

to you. There are many workshops and a lot of reading materials, there is no time to read them and there is a lot to attend to **[P-A]**

This principal mentions the question of time constraints, and that the department of education has made attempts to build capacity among principals. However, another principal does not seem to appreciate what the department has done, but focuses on overload only. She expresses her frustration thus:

> *The problem with the department is that, it does not give us time to digest and discuss some of the issues that I regard as important as this one. This involves planning ahead the future of the school, and I believe, this should involve as many stakeholders as possible, but what happened is a different story altogether. Last year in August, I attended a workshop on S.D.P. and I was supposed to meet with other principals and discuss our training and cascade information I had received in that workshop. It did not happen. There was no time to discuss this with principals because of other pressing meetings and workshops that principals were engaged in, and before long, November exams started. Final exams are a big issue in our area, and you can actually start the session at the time it becomes feasible to do so because of geographical obstacles for example, when it rains, it is difficult to reach the school.* **[P-A]**

5. 5 "Rural schools are marginalised'

Rural schools are marginalised, not only by the central government department in Pretoria, but also by their own local district offices. The levels of marginalisation differ. Some far-flung areas do not receive visits from departmental officials, particularly, special support staff such as psychological services, and other support services. There are cases where schools have pleaded for such visits from the department officials to assess certain cases involving learners who, the teaching staff felt, needed specialised assistance,

and it would be easier to approach parents with some credible, and objective assessment about what they think the learner's needs are. Those officials would either ignore appeals, or complain of poor road conditions.

> *We do not get support from the department...we have failed to make subject advisor to come to our school, citing inaccessibility of the school, yet these people have government cars to visit schools with, and we do not, but they talk volumes when we have problems reaching their offices coming from the same school they have problems visiting.*

Certainly, the above statement cannot be said to be the reason for department officials failing to offer support to schools that need help. The only official, schools claim, they see coming to schools is the SEM who is responsible for management of schools and he visits schools in order to see to it that schools are running properly. Usually, schools have to fend for themselves feeling that nobody cares about them. However, when it comes to enforcing compliance with one or another department policy that has become a priority, they then show up in schools, perhaps to monitor learner attendance, or check if there is order in schools, and no loitering. This tendency by department officials raises questions about whether their actions are driven by a genuine desire to support schools, or just to fulfill the department's "Big Brother" agenda and performance objectives.

To illustrate this point further, I draw on my personal experience, as part of another project. A researcher and I were part of a team of researchers, conducting a study on rural schools somewhere in northern KwaZulu-Natal a year ago. We had randomly picked a school from a pool of rural schools kept on our database. We wanted to understand rural schooling within the context of rural underdevelopment and rural poverty. The SEM responsible for that particular district discouraged us from doing research in that school, saying that the school was alone and isolated, and the roads leading to the school were terribly bad, we would need a 4x4 bakkie. She insisted that we find an alternative school to that one. But, that kind of attitude intensified our resolve even further, and we were

more motivated than before to see for ourselves how schools such as that one we had not even seen before, were coping with the whole range of environmental factors outside and inside the school that were impacting on its life. That SEM promised to see us that same day because we were still going to be introduced to the community before we could embark on our study. She never showed up. For the entire four months we spent working in that community, not once did she come despite numerous invitations, including the one she received for our closing function, where the whole community participated, the local councillor and traditional leadership structures participated, she never did.

5. 6 Rural School Governing Bodies are dysfunctional

When one talks about the functioning of SGBs of rural school, it needs to be understood that rural schools operate under unfavourable conditions where tangible support from the School Governing Body seldom happens. Data from all sites show that parents (who form the majority of this body according to the act) are in most cases, illiterate. Communication of meeting dates, agendas, minutes, plans, ideas cannot be achieved in written language. In addition, transport and phone communications are difficult. One of the findings of this study is that the School Governing Bodies are not functioning as well as contemplated in the act (SASA), in terms of their duties, responsibilities and functions. Such functions include issues such as supporting the school and the principal in managing the school, helping in the raising of funds for the school, and advising on curriculum. **(P-D)** argued that, *"Parents do not even understand the implications of the powers given to them by the legislation, unlike for instance, their counterparts in the ex-Model C schools".* **(P-C)** maintained that, *"Their (parents') levels of education (at best) confine them to just appreciating what the school could be proposing or initiating without them leading the process, despite the fact that, it could be their function (area of their jurisdiction)."*

In fact most of the activities in terms of section 20 and 21 of SASA, core responsibilities and functions of School Governing Bodies are carried out by

principals. Many challenges facing these structures, particularly in the rural areas have influenced some people into believing that School Governing Bodies exist in name only, hence Vandeyar's (2002) conclusion that: *"SGB's are dysfunctional"* (Vandeyar, 2001 cited in Calitz, Fuglestad and Lillejørd, 2002: 104), and it is principals who lead the school, both in governance and management. Soliciting funds is just one function that remains the sole responsibility of the principal, as **P-C** put it:

> *I started building the school, I am alone, I approach different companies alone, the SGB only gives moral support though, because they do not oppose what I do.*

Rubber-stamping is the best that some Governing Bodies, ones that do not obstruct progress in the school, can do to assist schools **(SMT-C)**

Educators who are appointed to serve in School Governing Bodies were not fruitfully utilised. For example one educator said that educators were only involved in governing body meetings at short notice, and, that the principal may forget to invite them to meetings, especially because SGB meetings usually took place on weekends:

> *It is working very well I guess. It is just that they involved us very late in decision-making process. I was a member representing educators before new elections, but I only attended three meetings last year, and the chairman was very happy to see us attend. It's just that our principal overlooked us, and she used to forget that we were members too, and that we needed to be there in their meetings* **[Edu-A]**

The comment echoes those gathered from rural schools as part of another project in which I was involved. I refer to it as NMF project:

> *The SGB must be functional, because currently, it does not function well. For example, educator component is marginalised. Educators are never involved in all activities of this body, except when voting; yet they are full*

members of this body. For example up to now no results of the elections have been released, more than a month since elections were held. Is not that surprising? **[NMF]**

Literature reporting on educators' participation in school governance shows that the roles are fraught with ambivalence and contradictions. For example Chapman (1990) and White (1992) indicated positive educator attitudes towards participation in school governance, while Harrison's (1993) study conducted in the Unites States of America, showed that educators were negative towards participation.

5.7 'Eyes wide shut: Poverty as a present absence'

Poverty is present everywhere in rural communities, including Sea Lake district, yet principals do not seem to see it. Somehow the fact is acknowledged, but its meaning is lost. To make an example, principals and educators alike at the Sea Lake district, regarded parents' inability to pay school fees as an unwillingness to pay schools fees. One of principals said:

> *Its not that they are so poor that they cannot afford R100 per child per year in this community"... "Maybe that is why they do not want to pay school fees because they say they are poor, it is just not it, and there is no evidence of poverty in this area.* **[SMT-C]**

They do not consider levels of poverty, yet they are the ones to highlight the high levels of unemployment and poverty levels as characteristics of these areas. It is a confusing situation. Consider what this one says with regard to girls that *'purposely'* fall pregnant:

> *They are poor, they come from poor backgrounds, and because of this, we suspect they seek child support grant to use for their own personal needs instead of education, they want to afford personal needs they would afford later in life...even the clinic is free..."* **[Edu-B]**

Add to this a comment from one of the parents, and she was expressing a desperate poverty situation. Although this parent does not belong to Sea Lake district, her situation has already been alluded to by principals in the Sea Lake district, and it point to the seriousness of poverty on many rural district in the province:

> *With my elder children I had a financial problem and could no longer afford to send them to school. I could not buy them uniform, so they stayed at home. There are those who do not go to school amongst the ones after them. The problem is money still. The only two that I am still sending to school have no uniform themselves. Paying school fees is a big issue. I have to go to the forest and collect wood. Sell it and pay school fees. If nobody buys my wood, the school fees remain unpaid...If nobody buys wood, they can still go because sometimes I also sell live chickens, which sometimes also do not sell well* **[NMF]**

To cite another example:

> *My schooling experience was not pleasant at all. I went to school. I got sick and I quit. When I tried sending my own children to school since there was no one else to pay for their education, I failed somewhere along the line and handed them over to somebody else to take over. I have since assumed responsibility to take the younger one to school. Her mother is in Tongaat. However, I cannot afford it because I do not get pension. I do not know what to do now and it has been three years since the school fees were paid* **[NMF]**

It is not my intention to trivialise difficulties that principals have in rural areas, it is just that the poverty issue seems to disappear from the scene when school fees issue arises, but shows up when they talk about socio-economic conditions in these communities. Principals and School Management Teams told me moving stories about learners who come to school without having eaten a meal of any

kind, and how staff organised lunch food from their own pockets to help out. Yet, the same people complain about low fees payment. When parents pay at the last moment, (that is, when reports have been withheld) schools do not accept that they paid so late because, maybe, they were so pressed at the corner so much so that they had no space to move anymore.

Right now, only 10 learners/parents have paid this R60 out of 275 learners. This is a serious problem. We have even resorted to unlawful measures like, withholding learners' reports at the end of the year. It is not easy to do that in June because learners do not give much significance to June reports [P-C]

5.8 Conceptions of rurality in rural Zulu communities

Zulus use three terms to describe a rural place, and the meanings are not the same, though they all link to poverty, underdevelopment and neglect. Slight shifts, in terms of intensity of meaning assigned to each of the terms, exist among different communities in the KZN province, depending on location.

Emaphandleni: this term is almost equivalent to *'off the beaten track'*, but symbolising a location far away from resources, opportunities and human dignity. People that stay in such areas take offence when this term is used by a person that does not live in rural areas.

Kwanjayiphume: This term refers to places where there are a lot of domestic dogs, which are underfed. Since these dogs are underfed, they become a nuisance inside houses, and they need to be constantly chased away. This term may be used in a nostalgic way by people who were born and bred in such areas, and they are now living in cities; when they are going home, they use it as a way of showing they are missing home, and they are finally returning where they came from.

Emaqwaqwasini: This refers to a place where it is difficult, because of topography, to provide better infrastructure such as electricity and clean water. It is characterised by desolation and backwardness in terms of infrastructure.

All three terms convey a sense of poverty, hopelessness and feeling *'left out in the cold'* by the powers that be. In conversation (in isiZulu) with people that live or work in rural areas, these terms come up. The marginalisation that principals in this study raise has to be seen in this cultural context. They are attaching to it a deeper meaning, arising form the practical experience of being marginalised. And in some way, they are saying that they are not surprised they receive the treatment they are receiving from officials of various governmental departments.

Principals are serious when they say:

> *The development the department of education is taking about has to start with us in the rural areas, and not with the township schools, because they have always been ahead of us.* **[P-B]**

When they say they do not receive the support they feel they deserve, they are talking of the images attached to the indigenous (Zulu) meaning of the term *'rural'*, and, in a sense, anticipating no real change; the marginalisation they live with has become a *'normal'* way of life.

5.9 SUMMARY

Principals are in difficult positions. They are under pressure from different expectations, from schools, from the Education Department, from educators, as well as their expected roles as part of transformation, initiating transformational moves and thinking.

It is also not clear who the principal works for, whether the principal is the 'Chief Executive Officer' of the school; whether he is 'with the Department' and in that sense against his educators, or vice versa, whether the school serves the

community in which it is located or the department. These tensions are not resolved, but work themselves out in different ways, according to the details of the situation. In that situation, the principal takes action according to his personality, perceptions, leadership styles and philosophy. The combination makes the principal's job lonely, high-stress and high-risk. In this situation, the policies and the department lose their legitimacy or credibility: some principals use *'devolution'* to claim power for themselves. The question is always high in the minds of many about whether devolution is for empowerment or abrogation from responsibility and accountability.

5.10 Conclusion

Chapter five has presented data as well as analysis. This analysis involved site-by-site and across sites analysis. Chapter 6 is about abstractions from the data, seeking to provide some explanations as to why principals in rural communities do what they do.

CHAPTER 6

EMERGING PATTERNS FROM THE DATA

6.1 Introduction

In this chapter I focus on principals, and why they do what they do in the situations in which they work. At the centre of my argument are the interactions between the *individualism of principals (including the ways in which they express their individualism)*, the particularities of local contexts, and the policies as laid out by the Education Department.

6 .2 Similarities and differences in rural communities

I have described at some length in earlier chapters the general characteristics of the schools and communities in this study. The communities are deeply poor, and suffering from lack of shelter, food, health, clean water, electricity, transport and services. HIV/AIDS is taking enormous tolls in every aspect of community life, for children and adults. Unemployment is high, and emigration of working-age adults disrupts families and communities, which are left largely comprised of grandmothers and children. Education and literacy levels are low. At the same time, the sense of 'community' – from the past, now and for the future – is generally high.

The communities share similar histories, as part of the Zulu nation, through their experiences of colonialism and apartheid, political-cultural struggles of the ANC/IFP conflict, the pressures of modernisation and globalisation. They live on Tribal Authority lands, in a confusion of Traditional Leadership and democratic governance. They see themselves as marginalised, and they are.

The socio-cultural and political confusions are everywhere, at many different levels. Schools themselves are Western imports in their structure and purposes,

with a history in rural areas of being kept separate from community life. The language of schooling is not the language of the community, and neither is the content of the curriculum the knowledge in the community. Traditional leaders (Amakhosi) are expected to pay allegiances to IFP, and some community members see educators (who often live away from the district) as belonging to the ANC:

> *Powerful members of these communities view the government policies as impositions of the ANC ideology on them and we as educators are collaborating with it* **[Edu-B]**

Some education policies such as the banning of corporal punishment, allowing pregnant teenage girls to stay at school until they give birth, involving parents in curriculum issues and school governance are considered foreign and belong in Western, urban domains. Certainly in Sea Lake district the perceived binary of a rural (IFP) and an urban (ANC) is a serious issue. Tensions and suspicions are real. At the same time, empirical studies show that parents in rural communities greatly value schooling and hold educators in high esteem (Harper, 1992).

School/educator and parent/community tensions are not peculiar to Sea Lake district, or rural areas or African countries. Gorton (1991: 519) cites two major factors that contribute to these tensions, namely, educators' professional challenges to community norms and community challenges to educators' professional norms. This study has revealed many cases of such conflicts.

At the same time, there are important differences between communities: some people are poorer than others, some more directly affected by HIV than others; some communities have better resources and infrastructure than others. So too tensions between community and school and between IFP and ANC play themselves out in different ways. For example, in some communities, though educators are outsiders, they feel welcomed by their communities and therefore part of the communities, while in others they do not feel part of the communities.

In some communities, attempts by the school to bring down the fence between them is welcomed by both parties, while in others the community is not amenable to such endeavours. Parents and communities are not the only culprit in resisting such bridge building attempts, schools resist as well. Tensions between IFP and ANC are severe in some communities while in others, party political tolerance exists.

6.3 Similarities and differences between schools

A detailed description of the schools and life inside them is provided in Chapter 5. The similarities are clear. All share the same conception of 'school', as a building with educators and learners, particular management structures, curriculum and assessment, timetables and texts. All have a fenced enclosure, and most have paid security guards. They are situated in similar communities. Their teaching staffs have similar backgrounds, which are mostly urban, and they have similar educational background. As well, they all work to the same government policies, as part of the same administrative system, with similar tensions between the demands of the Education Department, the local community, educators and learners.

Within that similarity, however, are wide differences. Some of the schools have more resources (human and physical) than others. Enrolment levels differ, and so do enrolment trends, with dire repercussions for staffing and programmes if enrolments fall. Matric pass rates differ as well, some are consistent, while others fluctuate from year to year. Some schools have transformed and diversified curriculum to cater for local needs and are responding to the tourism potential of the area, while others have not progressed that much. Schools also differ in their priorities of policies that affect them, as chapter 5 indicates, tables 4, 5 and 6, show that in these three schools SGB and OBE policies enjoy top priority, whereas table D indicates that admissions and funding norms have priority and in table E, corporal punishment comes first followed by SGB related issues.

On the issue of School Governing Bodies and their functionality, most principals in the study felt that the SGBs were not supporting their schools as they should; they are not performing their duties and functions as provided for in sections (20) and (21) of the South African Schools Act. While many principals felt their SGBs lacked the skills and general understanding of what they should be doing in schools, for example, **(P-D)** one of the principals described his SGB as actively obstructing progress in the school. Some SGBs gave their whole-hearted blessings to what principals were doing to enhance the quality of education in schools. In some, a core group of parents collaborated with the principal, pushing ideas through when the meeting of the whole body took place. Some SGBs wanted to learn the ropes while others preferred a back seat; some were barely functional, most were coping and improving.

Just as principals and their educators combined on some issues, principals and parents in the SGBs combined on others. In these cases, educators often had difficulties challenging the principal because of 'outsider' stigmas that they carry in the community, and the fact that educators' unions are so far away.

6.4 Similarities and differences between principals

The principals in this study were all reasonably successful, chosen because they were known to operate highly functional schools, and work hard on school development and responses to policies. They were all greatly overworked, in a complex of competing demands and policy overload. As well, they were all in schools that were seldom visited by the Education Department officials and services. They were similar too in their preparedness to go against regulations and procedures, offer trappings of policy implementation rather than deep expression, and 'take charge' of the vision and leadership of their schools.

In Chapter 5, I referred to their adage that *"Practicality works and not the law!."* A related idea was "Be *everything to everybody*" Principals used this metaphor not in the sense of standing for different things at different times or with different people, but in the sense of choosing a style of interaction and language that suited the people and situation at hand. For an example, one principal stressed that to earn respect of teenage boys, one has to prove one's prowess in the *'battle field'* and *'hold your own'*, showing that one is 'really a man':

Sometimes there is a need to confront that particular boy as 'insizwa' so that you can understand each other's physical strengths. You do not have to become a teacher or principal or something like that, but you have to behave just like him. If you are stronger than him, he must feel that on the battle ground, knock him down if need be, if he knocks you down, he is stronger, but you do not have to take it personally, you must understand that, that was just a men's game…. Be very polite if need be. Do not follow the law as in the code of conduct. If you do that, it means you must do one and the same thing to everybody because, if you have the rule book, you need to follow it, you need to do things according to the book, but if you take the situation as it comes, then you are free to act in that particular way that you think will solve the problem.

The phrase *'be everything to everyone'* does not mean *'change yourself'*, so much as *'talk to them in the language they understand'*, that is, talk to the rough boys one way, the soft boys another, the Department of Education one way, and the parents another way. This concept of identity is in line with Reddy's (2003) idea of multiple identities, and the fluidity of identity formation. There are a number of instances where principals in this community shifted their identities and positions depending on the goals they wanted to achieve at any given time. When the Education Department for instance, makes a policy that principals and parents do not like, such as banning corporal punishment, principals side with parents/communities against the department, but the opposite is true when the Education Department policies suit the principals.

6.5 Personal styles and choices

The main thrust of my thesis is that rural principal' personal styles and priorities drive the schools. Personal style includes their values and talents. Principals tend to do what they do well (or are practiced at doing), rather than re-learning new ways, or delegating. For example, principals who value *'multilateral wisdom'* have effected an inclusive type of management. These choices have ramifications for staff and SGB interactions. For example, one principal has worked to empower parents in the School Governing Body others have not. In schools where staff interactions and management environments are open and free, educators were more happy and enthusiastic about participation in the management of their school and more optimistic about the school's and the community's future. This is line with Smylie's 1992, (cited in Sackney and Dibski, 1994) findings that the willingness of educators to participate was contingent upon their perceptions of the environment, whether it was open and collaborative/supportive or closed/exclusionist and controlling, and this fed back into the principal's behaviour, in positive ways.

The management styles exhibited by Sea Lake principals can be divided into three broad categories, which I have termed *'Open-Participatory'*, *'Closed-Participatory'* and *'Authoritative-Participatory'*. These emerged from the data produced through sustained interaction with many data sources such as formal and informal conversations with principals, educators, SMT members; my observations; and reflections and discussions with other researchers.

Participatory leadership is required and in vogue in South Africa these days, and for a principal to be characterised otherwise would be contrary to the spirit and the content of the constitution of the country. No school principal can be dictatorial as they might have been in the 1970s and early 1980s. Hence

'participatory' is a common factor in the characterisation of rural schools leadership and management approaches.

The enactment of the South African Schools Act may not have increased the powers of principals, as many people (such as proponents of principals as CEOs) believe. Some principals claim the opposite now obtains:

> Powers have now been limited rather than increased. Now, you are forced as principals, to consult with many stakeholders, particularly the S.M.T. and S.G.B

Such structures attempted to do away with dictatorship/authoritative leaders in schools, urging 'participatory' approaches.

Further, at a practical level in schools, there is no distinction between management and leadership. Neither is that distinction clear at a conceptual level (Calitz, Fuglestad and Lillejørd, 2002). Such lack of distinction applies also to the functions of School Governing Bodies and School Management Teams, and the involvement of learners (in secondary schools) in school governance. In this study I use the terms management and leadership interchangeably, to acknowledge their unity (or confusion).

Given that all of the principals in this study were providing more or less successful leadership in their schools, I cannot conclude that a particular leadership approach is more workable in rural schools: the settings and interactions within the schools are too complex for that. The following table below indicates the essence of each approach.

Open-Participatory	Closed-Participatory	Authoritative-Participatory
• Normal 'Received' participatory concept • Consultation of stakeholders • Climate free and relaxed. • Various structures established with autonomy to make decisions within school's vision and mission. • School's vision and mission is known and understood by every member of staff. • Creativity and collective pride from everybody.	• Structures exist to participate in decision. • Decisions made by principal before meetings. • Climate tense and no free expressions of ideas. • More 'satisficing' and 'saficing' by the principal. • Agenda is manipulated to stifle debate.	• Normal authoritative concept with participation. • Principals views known to everybody [No under surface agendas] • Close supervision and vocal criticism of staff. • Strict discipline on learners and educators. • Views of SGB and community demands take precedence.

Table 10: Schools principals' management styles

6.5.1 'Open- Participatory' Management Approach

'Open-participatory' management is the 'received' approach to management. It is characterised by inclusion of all relevant stakeholders. Structures for participation are established and educators receive staff development training from outside experts. Their participation in school management affairs is open, free and without hidden personal agendas by the principal. No attempts are made to sabotage or infringe on ideas and inputs from the teaching staff. As part of staff development, different expertise and talents among educators are solicited, identified and utilised for the benefit of the school. This is clearly displayed especially when various committees are established in the school to cater for various needs within the school, and in response to community needs. In this

leadership approach, no single *individual in the school holds an undisputed* voice. 'multilateral wisdom' forms part and parcel of decision-making. Educators share the school's vision and mission with the principal, and there is ownership of such vision and mission. They have been part and parcel of generation and adoption of the vision, and those educators who joined the staff later, are (assimilated) incorporated into the school's vision through the process of orientation.

Various committees enjoy autonomy from the principal. They keep their own files and programmes. They only update the principal about their progress from time to time. They design their own work plans and submit them to the co-ordinating committee that designs the year planner for the school. Because everybody knows the vision and mission of the school and communication is open, the danger of different committees moving contrary to the school's agenda is minimised.

Educators working in open participatory climate view decentralisation/ devolution as providing them with personal and institutional space to pursue creativity and innovations in the ways they do business.

6.5.2 'Closed- Participatory' Management Approach

This type of management is different from the 'open-participatory' approach in many ways, and closer to the 'authoritative participatory' approach. The similarity with the open participatory approach is the establishment of structures such as the School Management Teams and Governing Bodies, but educators who participate in these structures, particularly the Governing Bodies, do not like operating in them. For example one educator complained about educators' roles in the SGB saying:

> *The SGB must be functional, because currently, it does not function well.*
> *For example, educator component is marginalised. Educators are never*

involved in all activities of this body, except when voting; yet they are full members of this body.

With regard to participation in the SMT, educators feel obliged to tolerate the situation because membership of that structure is through appointment by the Education Department as Heads Of Department (HOD), and not through electoral processes. When it comes to extra-curricular committees, there is no joy in those committees either. Life at school is uncomfortable:

At the moment, we are not free to air our views because they are immediately misinterpreted as challenging the authority of the principal because all the time she feels threatened by us. Even when we have grievances, she will just take them as concerns and they are never attended to

When staff meetings are called to discuss issues affecting the school, educators complain that no space is provided for 'general' slot in the agenda, because that could open a window of a debate. The agenda is designed in such a way that it is very tight and no opportunity can be created to express grievances. This is seen as agenda manipulation. When there is a meeting that involves all components of the Governing Body such as parents, learners and educators, non-parent roles are reduced to *'rubber stamping'* decisions that have been made by the principal and close parent-members of the Governing Body. Educators feel they are referred to a circular containing department's regulations only if circulars suit the leader, for example when the leader shares similar views and sentiments with educators and disagrees with the department. Suspicion and hidden agendas arise in this leadership approach.

The principal seldom makes his position clear and known to the staff. He pretends to be appreciative of staff inputs; he pretends to be embracing participatory processes in decision-making process, whereas he does not. That is the essence of 'satisficing' (Sackney and Dibski, 1994). Changes and

behaviours by management (principals) are often cosmetic, intended to deceive outsiders into thinking that changes have occurred whereas, under the surface, things continue as usual. This kind of deception is meant not only for outsiders, but also for the people inside.

6.5.3 'Authoritative-Participatory' Management approach

Like the 'closed participatory' approach, structures for educators and learners' participation in the management and school governance are established. The principal's position regarding any issue at school is made known to everybody concerned. Repercussions for the staff choosing any particular route as an alternative option to the principal's views are disclosed and made clear to everybody by the leader. The principal seldom use under-hand means or hidden agendas to achieve his/her personal goals. There is no deception; it is just that the principal does not pull the punches. Nevertheless, the participation of educators and learners in the Governing Body is restricted, partly through the visible authority and wishes of the principal, and partly through a technique of having meetings with different stakeholders separately, or holding SGB meetings on weekends, particularly on Sundays, and not making invitations to learners and educators. Old beliefs that 'Governing Body are parents' (see chapter five) may play a role in the principal forgetting to invite educators and learners for Governing Body meetings. Marginalisation of educators seems to persist though:

> The SGB is working very well... It is just that they involved us very late in decision-making process...It is just that our principal overlooked us, and she used to forget that we were members too, and that we needed to be there in their meetings. And meetings are held on Sundays, and maybe that is why we normally missed them, they forgot us.

The principal places high value on the inputs and powers of parents in the Governing Body because:

> *They have more at stake in the school, whereas educators come and go but the community remains.*

However, educators can help the parents in articulating their vision because they are learned, and they know how to put vision into paper. As another principal explained:

> *I have found that educators come up with more inputs from the side of educators as staff and not those educators participating in the SGB. Parents did have a tremendous inputs regarding improvement of the curriculum, but parents had a vision only and they relied heavily on educators to help in the drafting of the new school curriculum.*

Close supervision of educators' work prevails in the 'authoritative participatory' approach. The principal is strict on learners and educators. The principal is vocal about what she/he feels is wrong at school. Although all principals lament the banning of corporal punishment in schools, and are against the policy on pregnant girls, the 'authoritative-participatory' principals are vociferous in their beliefs about these two policies and they continue to impose them. Their opposition to the policy on pregnant girls is motivated, not by any environmental or logistical factor, but on what they call *'moral'* grounds. Such conservative thinking is not part of the government's transformation agenda, and such principals cannot be regarded as agents of transformation as the government expects them to be. Authoritative-participatory principals do not pretend to embrace changes in the education policy: where they do not agree with new policies, they voice that within the school.

These principals are efficient, all structures are set, and everybody is doing his/ her share of work. This approach is reminiscent of 'input-process-output' models of Tyler and Weber, in their 'classical/ scientific' approaches to organisations. Educators subjected to this management/ leadership approach, like its 'closed' participatory counterpart, complain that there has been no change as far as their working conditions as professionals are concerned. They view decentralisation moves by the government as having done little to increase the power of educators:

> *Schools still receive instructions from the department. If the department is not issuing out instructions, then there is the SGB with more instructions, and oppression continues.*

Even so, devolution empowers authoritative-participatory schools to counteract what the schools see as the department's obstructionist tendencies. One principal, who had acquired more equipment, transformed curriculum without assistance from the department:

> *I do not depend on the department to maintain these equipments...I also tried to establish connections within the department so that they do not frustrate my work, not that I need favours from them in terms of support for me. But, I am trying to make sure that they do not stifle the development that we are making as a school and community.*

6.6 Principals doing things their own way

The ways in which principals go about their daily activities, according to the different participatory approaches, are shown in the grid in **Table 11**. The grid describes how they do things in their own way and what determines their own way:

What they do	How it's 'their own way'	What determines their 'way'
What they choose	They fill out forms and go to meetings, but these are only trappings. They set up tricks within their schools to achieve local acceptance of the policies they want: for example, Corporal punishment, hold staff meetings within school times, etc.	They feel marginalised: they get few visits from Department, and little 'help' in their own situations; The department does not understand their lives. The Big Brother visits tend to be on operational things such as attendance registers, loitering *et cetera*.
Prove their (fighting) prowess, in order to maintain respect	It's against the rules, and contrary to the authority of the 'code of conduct'	It is a cultural expectation: leadership capacity has to be earned as a 'man' (even for a woman)
Work around the SGB	It is not in the spirit of participatory management and democracy. Again the trappings are there, but not the ideals of the policy.	They feel the SGB does not have the capacity to do what is set out in the policy, it does not understand schools well enough, and does not wish to be involved directly in curriculum and the shape of the school.
Work with what they have	The ways they work with their SGBs depend on the principal, with a view to how the SGB can be useful to the principal	Their judgment about how the SGB can be useful.
Express their personal management styles- whether open, closed or authoritative	In different ways they pretend to be 'participatory' but only the open participatory is genuinely sharing power with other stakeholders, for example, educators and learners.	The choice of management style seems to be *personal*, not organisational, or policy/knowledge based.

Table 11. Principals doing things their own way

6.7 Personality, history and role definitions

Schools in rural communities such as Sea Lake district have a legacy of operating under tight controls from the Education Department officials; they had no real powers to make decisions. Patriarchy and monarchic tendencies among the community's traditional leaders also prevailed, and in many communities, still do. Principals can choose to work in these traditional ways, or change them, or use them in some contexts (such as interactions with educators).

In Sea Lake district, principals have different personalities, and, to large extent, they define their roles accordingly. For example, one principal is happy just to keep the school going, with few attempts to effect major changes, while another, through his personality-vision-innovations and creativity, decides to go all out for resources, transform the school curriculum and empower the teaching staff, through re-skilling campaigns. Some principals go even further to mobilise the community, bring it into the school vision and integrate the community into the school. Some are authoritarian and monarchical; some are highly participatory. Their individual personalities and priorities influence the ways in which they interact with others, and the direction in which they drive their schools.

The fact that principals are overworked and struggling with competing demands and tight timelines, perhaps paradoxically, gives space for principals' individualism: without appropriate structures and time for delegation and consultation, they do things their own way. Preoccupation with *survival* (their own and the school's) limits what they can achieve in 'strategic thinking' and 'transformation'. Further, while the management contexts are so complex and resources so few, there is plenty of room for 'non-rational' decision-making – at every step of the day, principals have to make value judgments about what to do, who to do it with and how, and the 'data input' to those choices is only partly objective/ rational; most of it is subjective and intuitive. The five schools I have written about display marked differences: their staffs, their SGBs, their resources and their priorities are different. The question I have asked myself is, can the

differences be attributed to different environment? The answer is yes and no. Opportunities present themselves in one environment and not another, but the principal shapes that environment, as well as being shaped by it. This is shown in **Fig 3**. I will argue in the sections that follow that a principal's individual history, style, priorities and skills are the key determinants of what happens in the name of school development and transformation. Principals powerfully influence the character of the schools.
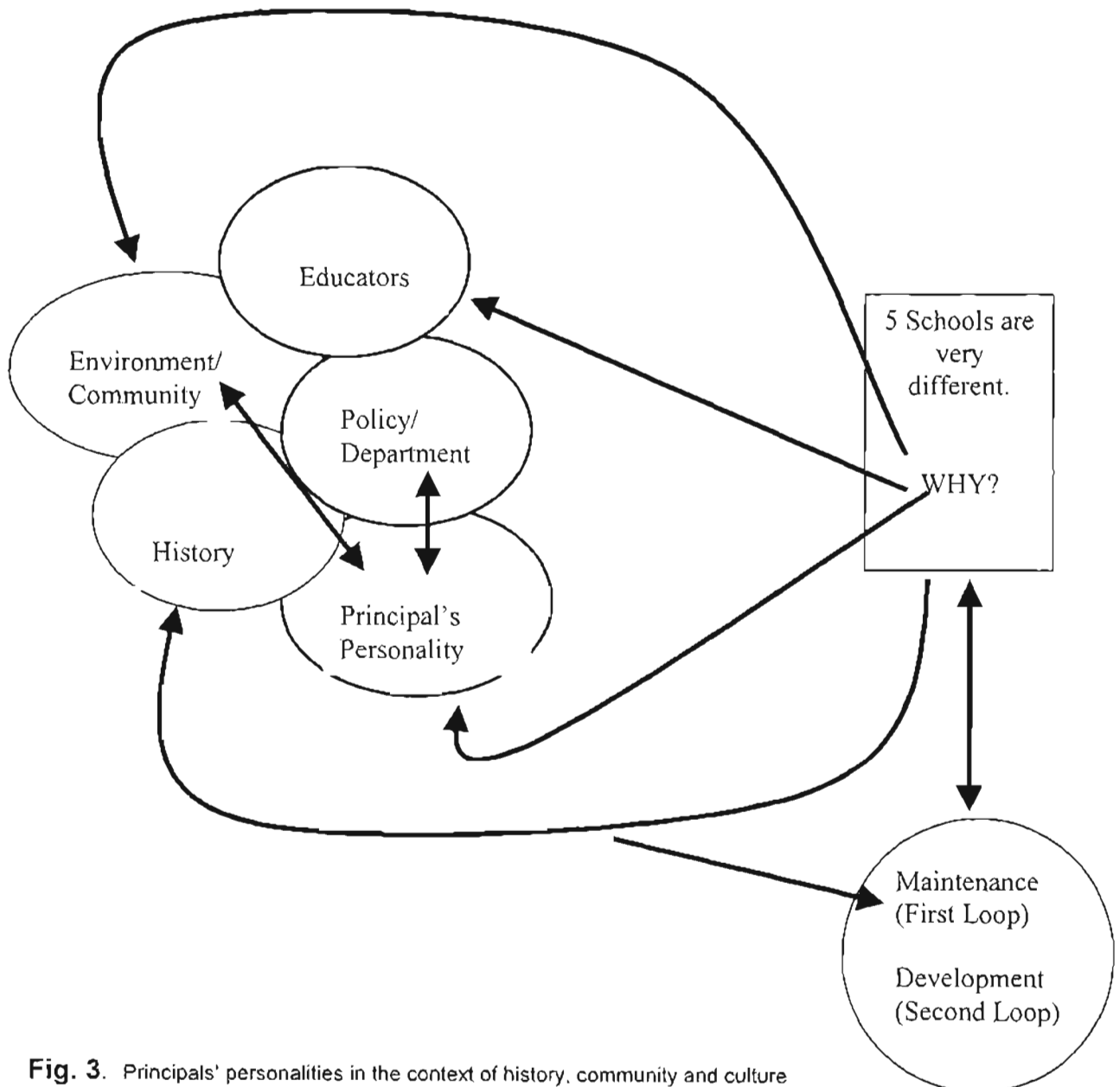

Fig. 3. Principals' personalities in the context of history, community and culture

6.8 Principals' individualism

Earlier sections have shown that some principals are open-participatory, some closed-participatory and others authoritative participatory. Their individualism goes beyond that. Within open-participatory style for instance, one principal's history is characterised by political activism, fighting for human rights and social justice. The Masakhane campaign and RDP programme have both fed into his vision of school development and transformation. Patriarchal tendencies in the community, and school-community synergy **(Section 5.2.4)** have provided space for safety and security (for equipment and everyone working in the school), and school and community development have occurred side by side. Some within the same leadership style have tackled HIV/AIDS incidence more than others, with one school becoming 'home to the homeless' HIV orphans, while another one is focusing on mobilising resources but battling to have parents/ community involved in school affairs.

Individualism shows itself also among authoritative principals, who tend to put emphasis on strict adherence to the group norms of traditional authority and ethos that shaped their growing up. Such values are now shaping school ethos that prioritises matric results at the expense of everything else **(Section 5.2.1)**. Education department's policies are vigorously enforced, though selectively, depending on the principal's choices and goals. School development and transformation for such a principal means producing 100 percent matric results, and promoting respect for authority and a sense of duty. Democracy and participation are undermined, as decentralisation becomes centralisation at school level (Welton and Shaw, 1998). Giles (1995b) findings are reinforced that bringing power and responsibility closer to schools through devolution does not always empower people or organisations concerned. As much as the context has shaped this principal (rural background) he is also shaping it, sustaining and reinforcing it.

The Department of Education has made no distinction between urban and rural when formulating policies **(Section 5.5).** The centralised nature of education policy is evident from principals' and educators' complaints about its failure to accommodate rural schools and different contexts. What has eluded principals and educators is that policy, by its nature, is not meant to be prescriptive only, but also to provide a framework for people and organisations to operate and make their own policies: they are more likely to see policies bureaucratically, to be implemented, fudged or circumvented. At the same time, individual principals have interpreted policies differently. For example, some regard devolution as liberating, enabling them to act like CEOs, while others regard it as oppressive because of accountability demands. Such scepticism is shared by Crook and Menor (1998, cited in Naidoo (2002: 3), when they caution that changed structures in the form of devolution have been used in some countries as:

> A political strategy by the ruling elite to retain most of the power by relinquishing some of it...leaders in some Asian and African regimes view decentralisation as a substitute for democracy, and a safe way to acquire legitimacy and grassroots support

Furthermore, people respond to change differently. For example, according to Merton (1983), people's responses to change will demonstrate one or more of the following stances: 'conformism', where one does as told or just agrees without questioning; 'retreatism', where one refuses to acknowledge changes or withdraws from the situation whilst actually remaining in the scene; 'ritualism' where one pretends to embrace change on the surface while deep down, the opposite view is being held. (Ritualism is similar to concepts of *sufficing* and *satisficing,* (Sakney and Dibski, 1994; Harrison, 1998). Closed-participatory principals are at home in ritualism.) 'Rebellion' is open rejection of change whereas *'innovation'* involves people who say: "We can do it the better way" (Merton, 1983). Innovators are more poised, proactive and more willing to be creative about change, prepared to confront a situation with their own initiatives without nullifying the original, contemplated change, (Merton, 1983). Innovation is

in line with the notion of transformational leadership. Within open-participatory principals are possibilities for transformation and innovation-minded leaders.

6.9 Conceptions of schools as learning organisations

Different principals' utterances regarding their understanding of the idea of schools as 'learning organisation' are broadly similar. For example one said: *"I regard the school as the centre for learning and development"* and another one explained: *"schools should ideally be multi-purpose resource centers for the community. Not that schools should cater for all the needs of the community in practice, but that they should provide information about everything, including careers"*. The depth and extent of the implications of the concept 'learning organisation' differ from one principal to the next. For example two principals who shared similar management style (open-participatory) had personal visions of a school that were connected with its community. One of them sold his vision to his colleagues; he together with the staff developed a strategic plan that would ensure that the school was responsive to the needs of the community, and that the curriculum was diverse to cater for diverse needs of individual learners. His success in creating a sense of 'school ownership' by the community is an envy of his colleagues, and his achievement could be attributed to marrying personal and others' visions as Senge (1990: 352) puts it:

> *In a learning organisation, leaders may start by pursuing their own vision, but as they learn to listen carefully to others' vision they begin to see their own personal vision as part of something bigger*

The concept of self-renewal (Brandt, 1998; Senge cited in O'Neal, 1995) is central to a learning organisation, and flourishes where the organisational set-up is flat, open, and characterised by boundary crossing, excellence, continuous learning; where information systems provide fast, public feedback on the performance of the organisation as a whole (Argyris and Schön, 1996). This state of affairs can be better facilitated where principals *"see their jobs as creating an*

environment where educators can continually learn" (Senge cited in O'Neal, 1995).

The other principal, who regarded a learning organisation as a *'multi-purpose resource centre for the community'*, has tried, with minimal success, to draw the community to the school; established a computer centre that will, when completed, help train youth in computer skills locally; and has made the school a 'Home to the homeless and HIV/AIDS affected children' within the school through various initiatives, to deal with issues of HIV/AIDS. Although he has not made any formal strategic plan for drawing the community towards the school, he has undoubtedly shifted the boundaries regarding the conception of and role of the school in these African communities. For example, schools traditionally, have been known to be places where formal lessons are delivered, children play during break time, and return home. Taking their welfare at heart, feeding those without parents, helping to search for parents where they have abandoned their children, etc, are emerging roles that the school has assumed.

Principals such as these two are trying hard to ensure that management styles they use are consistent with new realities and that their schools adapt and respond to challenges proffered by a changed environment. Learning should not, according to these principals, be restricted to classroom activities only, but should go beyond. The effect has been that the whole image and character of their schools have been transformed; what happens inside the schools is connected with and understood by the outside as well. When matric results go down, partly because of shift in focus from curriculum delivery, the school reflected on its performance and adjusted its plans and redirected focus. Such is an indication that this school is learning from its own practices and mistakes.

There are, however, other types of principals in the Sea Lake district whose leadership and management styles make opportunities for 'organisational learning' and change to be limited. Often these are principals who display

dictatorial tendencies, whereby views and inputs from the teaching staff are stifled, totally ignored or regarded as a threat to the position of a principal, and undermine the prospects of the school growing. Development for such principals is about the school becoming better at maintaining order at all times, educators and learners being punctual for lessons, and the school maintaining 100 percent pass rates in matric, with no time given to sports because sports waste teaching and learning time. Transparency (in terms of both outsiders and insiders being able to see the insides of the school) becomes crucial, and challenges principals to think deeply about learning atmosphere, and the extent to which school development can occur. There were instances whereby the principal maintained, "development should be a process, and should unfold gradually", but in applying such a stance, the principal mostly preserves and secures his own position against change; no consultations with stakeholders within and outside the school are done.

Closed and authoritative principals, contrary to their open-participatory counterparts, acknowledge that learning is not the individual school's domain alone, but that it should involve the society. That position is central to social learning theory (Wenger, 1998). Outcries about the parents' lack of supportive efforts in this regard are testimony to these principals' beliefs in the role parents could be playing. One of the reasons for parents' failing to give support on curriculum issues is their lack of capacity and lack of understanding of the implications of non-involvement in school affairs, especially curriculum issues. The irony here is that little attempts have been made by the same principals to educate parents about this. Immediate results have been that their school development planning is dislocated from their communities, and the dislocation undermines the whole notion of school ownership by community, just as it undermines partnerships between schools and community on one hand and schools and government on the other.

Principals' leadership and management styles, their insights about the government's transformation agenda and the philosophies behind various pieces of legislation, and their conceptions of their roles in the scheme of things entwined, and reflected on the extent to which the environment around the school was interpreted as hostile, benign or fertile. For example, one principal who is conservative regarded devolution as removing powers principals enjoyed before 1994, because power is now shared among different stakeholders, whereas, another one viewed devolution as empowering principals, inviting them to be creative, innovative in implementing government policies, and exploit local conditions in policy application. To use Argyris and Schön (1978) and Senge's (1990 and 1995) conceptions of *single loop-double loop learning* and 'transactional/transformational learning' for instance, authoritative-participatory and closed-participatory principals in the Sea Lake district seemed to be at the first levels of development where their focus was on maintenance, single-loop learning and transactional learning - improving curriculum delivery more than fundamental transformation. There is no doubt that theories of school development, transformation and strategic management, together with changed structures, devolution and strategic planning (for instance) provide a practical guide that can help schools cope with multiple change, and *"become better learning organisations"* (Preedy, Glatter and Levacic, 1997: 219).

6.10 Issues of transformation, agency and strategic management

In transforming education in South Africa, principals play a driving role (Godden, 1996). The efficacy of strategic management and agency for organisations undergoing change and transformation is well documented (Preedy, Glatter and Levacic, 1997; Bennis and Nanus, 1985 and Leithwood and Steinbach, 1991). However, transformation and change is not always welcomed by everybody in the organisation, especially where previously excluded persons are included, and previous routines and norms are changed. Tensions abound. Such tensions, resistance, ambivalence and scepticism may not be surprising if one considers

Crook and Menor's warning that changes in structures in the form of devolution have been used in some countries as:

> A political strategy of the ruling elite to retain most of the power by relinquishing some of it...leaders in some Asian and African regimes view decentralisation as a substitute for democracy, and a safe way to acquire legitimacy and grassroots support. (Crook and Menor, 1998, cited in Naidoo, 2002:3).

Ideas expressed above are held by some of the principals and educators in Sea Lake district, as in other rural communities; these principals doubt the motives for decentralisation and transformation in education. Welton and Shaw, (1998) maintain that decentralisation at one level can become centralisation at another, and that may be the reason why one of educators said:

> The way I look at it is that there is no change in schools in terms of powers given to them by the department; schools still receive instructions from the department. If the department is not issuing out instructions, then there is the SGB with more instructions, and oppression continues

Data has shown that principals in the Sea Lake district have, by and large, not engaged in serious, careful planning in the grand scale sense of the term. "Although the school does not at this stage have a written school policy, or school development plan, it does have it in a fragmented form", was a response from one principal when asked if the school had a development plan. Another said: "it is still in a draft form". Such statements were not isolated, but neither did they characterise all the principals. Others for instance, have elaborate long-term plans, which have been drawn up in a collaborative manner.

Furthermore, not having formal strategic plans does not mean the principals do not act strategically: on the contrary, all of the principals were quite creative and certainly strategic in many areas despite their apparent lack of capacity to 'digest'

and engage with transformational issues, as advocated by strategic management and complexity theories.

Strategic management for many is about organisational survival, without the clear rational and systematic orientation of strategic management in the received sense of the term. Rather, the principals' approach is underpinned by epistemologies, which regard knowledge mores as a discourse than residing 'somewhere'; knowledge as discourse is part of daily communication, action and processes, and hence abounds with emotions, values, mores and unstated assumptions and expectations as well as ideas. Fluidity, complexity and messiness of prevailing conditions in rural districts such as Sea Lake render inappropriate Owens' (1995) and Senges' (cited in O'Neal, 1995) conceptions of orderly and functional organisations, where planning has to follow certain processes. In short, rational planning whereby, step-by-step processes are to be followed in making decisions, are the founded on assumptions of rational, objective models that are based on positivist thinking. Similar kinds of thinking is held by scholars whose conceptions of learning organisations is informed by positivist philosophy that regards learning as 'adaptation' to the outside environment, where learning is essentially individually based, (Mintzberg, 1994). Secondary schools principals do not engage in such deterministic, predictive exercises in thinking, decision-making and or organising learning in their schools. For them, any conception of organisation that aggregates individuals and their knowledge as constituting learning in organisation, tells only part of the story, as organisations are more than the sum of its people and their interactions. Principals' view their schools and learning in it in a more global-holistic manner, and planning does not always follow well thought out rational steps, as strategic planning models suggest, but occur instantly, with emotions, context, culture and mores; all simultaneously playing their roles.

6.11 Individualism, contexts and policies

The pattern that has emerged from the Sea Lake district is that the interactions between individualism, local context (including remoteness from Education Department's offices) and centralisation of the Education Department policies determine how principals and schools in these rural communities operate. And while the principals might not exhibit 'strategic management' in the sense used in management theory and policies, there is no question that intentionality characterises Sea Lake principals. This intentionality plays itself out in a number of areas, one of which is management styles that were more personal than organisational, and often intuitive more than knowledge based. Intentions and individualism were closely related, and influenced the choice of areas to strategise about. For example, a principal chose a focus area such as getting school buildings and resources, or tricked the department into allowing curriculum reforms using available human resources, while others focused on re-establishing corporal punishment, and were strategic around that particular focus. Depending on management or leadership style, a principal would carefully choose appropriate allies in an attempt, for example, to exclude teaching staff in decision-making.

Principals classified as open-participatory, closed-participatory and authoritative-participatory viewed structural changes differently, mainly due to different personalities, and different attitudes towards the government's motives for change. For example, suspicions and scepticism about the efficacy of devolution connotes the extent to which ethos for genuine participation exists in the school.

Closed and authoritative principals and schools tended to 'hate' OBE and feel threatened by inclusivity paradigms, to such an extent that agency for transformation seemed to be a distant possibility. Educators worked harder when the principal was not at school, in order to 'prove that we can do a better job without the principal around'. The 'closed climate', which Chapman (1990) and White (1989) identify as inhibiting educators in schools from dedicating

themselves to their work, seemed to have invited creative individualism among them, and spurred them to go beyond principals' expectations that they only perform with close supervision. Notwithstanding such effects, drawbacks persisted. The SGB was separated from educators and communication barriers were common. These schools were run like bureaucracies, and bureaucracies are in tension with professionalism with regards to autonomy in decision-making and self-imposed standards of control (Hoy and Miskel, 1987: 150).

In the schools led by open-participatory principals, the pattern that emerged is one of amenability and acceptance of a new reality; educators were excited about their school; principal and staff cherished participation; OBE and other curriculum initiatives invited possibilities, imagination and creativity. These principals still regarded the Education Department as an obstacle to their schools' development initiatives, but their misgivings did not hold them back; they found ways of maneuvering for the sake of school and community development.

An interesting mix of local traditions and democratic participation in decision-making process that is gender biased emerging in the form of "Es'hlahleni sezinsizwa" gatherings. Such traditional Zulu ways of resolving problems exclude females, although decisions taken are binding to everybody within the school. Male learners, who often are the ones causing trouble in schools and also in communities out side schools, get special recognition by school management, and problems are resolved. Such practices play a crucial role in linking community values and practices with those of the school, thereby marrying the 'universal' and the local, the Western and the indigenous. Such leadership skills are linked with personalities, histories, styles chosen, and the exploitation of the local context.

It is clear that principals' individualism, context, leadership styles had different impacts on the teaching staff. Certain styles liberated educators while others did

not as indicated in the previous paragraphs. The following table summarises educators' responses to different styles of leadership.

Leadership Style	Educators' responses
Open-participatory Leadership:	The staff is very excited to work in the school.
	They regard the principal as open-minded and receptive to their inputs and ideas.
	Proud of their school's achievements, such as, physical resources are safe from vandalism, and community is perceived to be cooperative in fighting vandalism and criminality generally.
Closed-Participatory Leadership:	The staff feels that they live under strong fist working conditions where there is no room for genuine inputs from staff and flexibility-there are blockages in the communication system, for example, SGB meetings are held only to rubber stamp decisions already taken by the principal & close allies.
	Suspicions are ubiquitous: views become grievances whereas; grievances become concerns only and are not attended to.
Authoritative-Participatory Leadership:	Educators complain about management insensitivity towards their needs.
	The principal is strict but they are proud of the school's performance-some educators attribute good results to work ethics introduced by the principal, while others attribute it to staff commitment to their work in spite of the principal's presence or absence. For example educator said to me: *"While the principal was away, educators dedicated themselves to proper, even more serious teaching so that they could prove that they could do a better job without the principal. We got 94% matric pass without the principal around"*

Table 12. Educators' responses to principals' styles

6.12 Complexity and chaos

Complexity theory can be efficacious in helping principals make sense of their work and accept that the challenges they decry form a normal element of organisations; that their task is to enhance and harness their creative energies and innovation.

Conventional management and change theories are not greatly helpful in explaining the lives and experiences of the rural schools principals in this study, whose day-to-day management practices do not operate in a linear-ordered-predictable and controlled fashion. Human beings are conscious (Wilber, 1992), willful and intentional beings (Vanberg, 2004; Dennet and Haugeland, 1991; Pessa, Montesanto and Penna, 1996) in the actions they take in complex social, political and physical situations, and in the changes they initiate or experience. Hence organisational change cannot be fully understood from mechanistic, reductionist, predictive models, models largely derived from Newton's laws of motion. Complexity theory also has its roots in physical sciences, extended into biological systems and ecology (Geyer, 2003; Rosenhead, 1998). Like mechanistic models, it too has been extrapolated and applied in the social sciences, including fields of management and organisational change (Rosenhead, 1998), as the limitations of conventional theories of change, planning, strategic management and learning became increasingly apparent.

Standard theories of change rest on metaphors of change as motion (change in position of an object, or movement of cogs and levers in a clockwork) and Newton's laws, whereby any object in a system moves predictably (and smoothly) as a result of the forces on that object, and the system is the sum of its parts. In this metaphor, planning and management require organisation of the 'objects' and subsystems, interactions and forces (including the cooption of human will and ability) so that the whole system changes as desired. The more complicated the system, the harder it is to have adequate knowledge of all the parts and their interactions, but the basic model remains. Knowledge equals

order, and therefore, greater knowledge equals greater order; there are no hidden surprises because the whole is the sum of the parts (Rosenhead, 1998; Geyer, 2003). Government policies of Whole School Development, strategic management, evaluation and planning, and the workshops organised for principals are all broadly based on this metaphor, with assumptions of reductionism, determinism, order, and predictability. From this perspective, the failure in rural schools of policies of corporal punishment and pregnant girls, for example, is either a failure of 'situational analysis' - the policies did not take into proper account aspects of the system such as educator and learner travel (which prevent after-school detentions) or lack of medical services (for girls who are pregnant at school) – or 'implementation' (the system was not created and operated according to plan).

Complexity theories, on the other hand, were developed for systems involving more complex changes: changes in temperature (thermodynamics), fluid flow (hydrodynamics), climate and weather (meteorology), and changes within ecosystems. They distinguish between 'complicated' systems (which have many parts, but could be understood in principle from a mechanistic model) and 'complex' systems, where the whole is not the sum of parts, where small perturbations and 'forces', under certain conditions, can have major effects, where cause and effect are not easily separated, and where change can be 'violent' (not smooth) in its shifts between states that are 'far from equilibrium'. According to Rosenhead (1998):

> The systems of interest to complexity theory, under certain conditions, perform in regular, predictable ways; under other conditions, they exhibit behaviour in which regularity and predictability is lost; almost undetectable differences in initial conditions lead to gradually diverging system reactions.

From the government's perspective, this is expressed, for example, when policies of corporal punishment and pregnant girls are magnified at the school

level to the extent that they interfere with implementation of 'bigger' policies of School Governing Bodies, Curriculum 2005, Whole School Development and strategic planning. From the principals' perspective, with principals' considerable insight into the *complexity* of their schools, systematic approaches to participation, planning and general management give way to intuitive, piecemeal and individualistic approaches. In rural schools, compared to urban schools, complexity is increased by poverty, illiteracy, lack of resources and infrastructure, distance and the mixture of cultures that operate.

In line with Rosenhead's (1998) description of complexity, Fullan (1999) invites us to think of organisations as paradoxes, as they are:

> *Powerfully pulled towards stability by the force of integration, maintenance control, human desires for security and certainty, and adaptation to the environment on one hand. They are also powerfully pulled to the opposite extreme of unstable equilibrium by the forces of division and decentralisation, human desires for excitement and innovation, and isolation from the environment,* (Stacey, 1996a, cited in Fullan, 1999: 4).

Complexity theory challenges the cult of order, while at the same time challenging the cult of disorder (Geyer, 2003: 22). For rural secondary schools principals, order and disorder are not mutually exclusive; they can co-exist, and one can set the scene for the other. For example, disorder can be created, to serve as a useful indicator to parents, learners, and communities for the need to have order. Complexity theory itself is not a not a single theory, and neither are its proponents in management theories unified in their approach. For some, complexity is a strategy for going beyond linear paradigms, while retaining a modernist and progressive posture (Geyer, 2003). For others, such as Cilliers (cited in Geyer, 2003), complexity theory can be understood as a postmodernist position because of its sensitivity to the complexity of the phenomenon being dealt with and the multiple 'truths' that exist Both approaches can assist with understanding how principals work under conditions of rapid change, via their

claims that the links between cause and effect are difficult to trace, that change (planned or otherwise) unfolds in non-linear ways, that paradoxes and contradictions abound and that creative solutions arise out of interaction under uncertainty, diversity and instability (Fullan, 1999).

6.13 Conclusion

This chapter has focused on principals' individuality as a driving force behind their leadership styles and the interactions that arise between local contexts and policies. It also showed that individualism and communalism, similarities and differences, coexist. Principals' leadership approaches, underpinned by personal ideologies, histories and contexts, indicate the extent to which their view of schools, and the resulting school practices locate their schools in the community, and whether or not the school becomes an investment by the community and department (for example, a vehicle for community development in visible or non visible fashion, in both immediate and long term ways). Different leadership styles express differently and to different extents the tri-partite and symbiotic relations between school-policy-community.

Complexity and chaos theories were proposed as alternatives to mechanistic, reductionist theories, because complexity theories are more relevant for providing explanations of some of the difficulties principals in rural communities have, and some of the ways in which they make sense of their experiences and take action in the context of change and rapid social transformation.

CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

7.1 Introduction

This chapter summarises the findings, analyses and interpretations of the study and makes recommendations for the Education Department and principals. In summarising the study, I have used the critical questions that drive the study.

7.2 Critical questions restated:

7.2.1 How have changes in education policy impacted on rural school principals' management and leadership practices?

There is no doubt that changes in education policy have impacted on principals' management and leadership practices in the rural communities involved in this study. Even in schools that seek to hold on to old ways, the policies have changed what is done, how it is done, and how much is to be done. There is no doubt also that too many changes all happening at the same time have overwhelmed many principals to levels where some of them contemplate quitting the profession altogether. The data have pointed to a number of areas where policy changes have impacted on management practices of rural secondary schools principals. It has also revealed the extent to which principals are grappling with policy implementation in schools within the context of rurality. Tables 4-9 in chapter 5 have shown that crucial transformational policies such as C2005, Norms and Standards, Whole School Development and Whole School Evaluation, do not enjoy priority; instead corporal punishment, SGBs, admissions, and pregnant girls policies occupy principals' minds, seeming to set the ethos of the schools in significant ways.

As a result of the South African Schools Act, principals now have more work to do than before. For example, taking charge of their schools' destinies requires them to create their own visions, and to work collaboratively with interested parties who were not so involved before, such as learners, educators, parents and SGBs. Principals are more involved in raising funds, and in designing and reshaping the curriculum so that they fit the schools' envisioned futures. Principals interact with more people than before, and spend more time outside schools, partly because of never-ending departmental meetings, but also to maintain high profiles with the donors and NGOs. They also attend to social issues related to learners' needs, such as parentless children and HIV/AIDS. It is clear that principals are working more and differently compared to the past, and also that they are involved in different things, hence the outcry of 'overload'. Their interactions with so many different people and issues have proved to be frustrating to some principals whilst, they present interesting challenges to others.

The impact of policy changes on rural secondary schools differs from their urban and township counterparts. Such differences can be linked to factors such as poverty, demographics, distance, lack of human and physical resources (in the community as well as the school), and the mixtures of African and Western cultural dynamics that exist between these two groups.

Personalities and principals' individual leadership styles have played key roles in schools' interactions with issues described above, giving each school a character different from other schools. So, for example, one school focuses on the development of facilities, another one, on support for children orphaned by HIV/AIDS; one school operates in a closed-participatory style, another in open-participatory style. Because of collaborative imperatives imposed by national policy, some principals have resorted to *mimicry* or *sufficing* strategies in order to appear to be embracing new realities regarding management. Different principals have formed different meanings and understandings about the government's

motives in devolving power to schools, which affect the ways in which principals interpret and play the roles expected of them. Some view devolution as the perpetuation of oppression, while others view it as a boon that enables them to be creative and innovative. Policy changes, therefore, have brought to the fore principals' leadership qualities; they have *provided* some and *deprived* others of space to chart their schools' destinies (Godden, 1996).

Devolution of some decision-making powers, a common feature of the government's structural reforms, has imposed new roles and responsibilities on principals, such as, being 'CEOs' of their schools, and taking responsibility for fund raising. However, rural contexts put limits on what schools can or cannot do, for example, with regards to fundraising, despite the powers the legislation has given to schools. The data and literature reveal serious challenges to devolution, in terms of its purposes and processes, given poverty levels and lack of capacities in rural communities (Gordon, 1997; Calitz, Fuglestad and Lillejørd, 2002).

Policy changes have brought instabilities of many kinds, making many schools and principals feel vulnerable. For example, student choice and Post-Provisioning Norms (PPN) link the provision of educators with overall enrolments. The movement of learners and hence educators from school to school has unsettled many schools and educators, with anxieties and instability reigning. Principals in Sea Lake community are now competing for learners, and in that process, some find it difficult to define and maintain their schools' identities, for fear of losing learners to competitors. One principal said he had a difficult choice to make, between: *"Being ourselves and maintaining our identity, or being like them (competing schools)!"* Another prided his school in *"Being ourselves and maintaining our identity"* because that identity was a draw card for his school. Particularly relevant in this search for 'identity' is the tension between conservative and progressive approaches in relation to a school's reputation in its community: it is conceivable that the school most successful in expressing

government policies, for example on curriculum, corporal punishment, and attendance of pregnant girls, will be the first to lose its learners.

Principals' capacities to act on policy

Data have revealed that principals and schools in these rural communities lack the capacity to *'act on policy'*. Lack of capacity arises in a number of ways, including lack of knowledge, skills, support and resources (in the schools and their communities), the unevenness of capacity, the complexity of expectations and motivations, and the instability resulting from rapid change. One effect is a failure to interpret education policy in terms of its immediate and broader societal transformation agenda, a failure to see the 'big picture' and understand policy as a guide to action, not always to be followed to the letter, but calling for actions consistent with the framework. Principals, educators, learners, resources, stability, all need to work together to support teaching and learning, but this is difficult to achieve.

Lacking the capacity to *'act on policy'* essentially limits principals' fruitful interactions with various education policies. Literature on School-Based Management (SBM) has alluded to the difficulty that many school managers/ leaders have in quickly adjusting to changes in the outside environment (Giles, 1995b; Gorton, 1991; Wallace and McMahon, 1994).

The lack of capacity has complex and confusing dimensions. Firstly while lack of capacity and 'marginalisation' are often fashionable words in South Africa, the Education Departments' commitments and attempts to capacitate principals have drawn mixed and confusing responses. Some principals complain they have had too little *'time to digest ideas'* from training workshops, while others complain about *'wasting time by attending training workshops'* – time they feel would be better spent running their schools and monitoring progress. However responses to the workshops, like so many dimensions of principals' work, tend to be individualistic. For example, while the positions expressed above are about time

and its fruitful utilisation, one principal observed that: *"understanding what is taught in such workshops remains an individual matter"*. The individualisation results partly from the different contexts and needs of schools, and partly from the individual personalities and interests of the principals. It has consequences for the design and presentation of the workshops: the workshops need to better acknowledge principals' individual contexts, agendas and styles, in the kind of learner-centred education that government policies require in classrooms.

Different levels of capacity to interact with policy, and the tendency to see policy bureaucratically, have engendered a situation where some principals talk of *'outmanoeuvring'* the department where it is perceived to be obstructing schools in their development. Principals and schools set their own priorities according to local context, and their school's learning and development agenda. Principals operate strategically, but not in the systematic ways advocated in 'strategic management'. This is largely a matter of capacity: systematic approaches to whole school development and school-community interaction demand levels of stability, resources and commitment that are often not available and are, at least, uneven.

7.2.2 How do principals in rural secondary schools manage their schools and why do they manage them the way they do?

Many principals in the study seemed to be pre-occupied with basic functionality of their schools, rather than development and transforming their schools in the sense implied by fundamental policies such as C2005, Whole School Development, Norms and Standards, and the Developmental Appraisal System. These policies remain in the background, while the foreground is taken up by corporal punishment, policy on pregnant girls, and SGBs' functionality, alongside pressures for Matriculation results and enrolments.

Drastic changes continuously unfolding throughout the South African society have overwhelmed these secondary schools principals, in contexts where they face complex challenges. Trying to cope with such challenges has invoked particular management styles. Such styles **(see section 6.5.1-6.5.3)** reflect different personalities and different epistemologies and orientations. Open-participatory principals and schools, for instance, engage policy differently from those pursuing closed-authoritative approaches. Choices principals make are remarkably influenced by their personal management styles and orientations. Whether a principal views staff as a valuable resource or simply as subordinates, for instance, is linked with the above positions: some principals run their schools like regiments as used to be the case 10-20 years ago while others run them as participative communities.

Research has shown that SGBs in rural schools are not functioning as set out in sections 20 and 21 of SASA. For example, Vandeyar (2001) in Calitz, et. al. (2002) cites Mathonsi (2000: 9), as saying: *"In many cases instead of the SGBs being a voice of reason, they are seen to be part of the problem"*. Similar stories emerged from participating schools. Principals according to their respective leadership styles have handled this challenge in varied ways. Some have embarked on within-school training sessions for parents in SGBs, and regard it as part of their agency mandate. Others work alone, only reporting to SGBs the progress they have made. Yet others work with certain parents in the SGB to achieve their personal goals to the exclusion of other stakeholders such as educators and learners.

Similarly, the ways principals handle inherent tensions between parents and educators reflect different leadership styles and different personalities. The notion of *territoriality*, to which King (2001) refers to when explaining the *'us and them'* attitudes between educators and communities, seems to be prevalent among many principals in the Sea Lake district. Again *individualism* plays crucial

roles in how territoriality is handled. Easing territoriality, and ensuring good relations between all stakeholders remains the principals' burden.

At the same time, different styles of leadership are not as important on some issues as on others. For example, where principals feel that applying policy will be unworkable, principals, regardless of their style of leadership, have opted for *'going it alone'* for the school. When educators have to be *'bought over'*, when principals are making choices about modalities of observing this or that policy, all principals give more attention to collegiality and collaboration. Parents are critical to fewer domains of school operation than educators, but, like educators, they are consulted when their support is essential, for example on actions not consistent with the legal framework, such as learner expulsion, or re-establishing corporal punishment. Principals manage their schools strategically, with a strong sense of the political dimensions of management, as well as the technical aspects of goal achievement.

7.2.3 What management ideas and strategies can principals develop in order to overcome the problem of change and policy overload?

The Education Department has organised many training workshops for principals, SMTs, educators and SGBs covering areas including governance, management, labour relations and curriculum. There is much in the literature about how to deal with environments experiencing rapid changes (Tate, 2001; Kaufman and John 1993; Atwater and Atwater, 1994; Wallace and McMahon, 1994; Fullan, 1991, 1993, 1999). However, as noted earlier, the principals see department workshops as more concerned with explaining policies and procedures than working in problem-solving ways from the problems facing rural schools.

One of the suggestions on lessening the burden of making decisions alone, drawn from conversations with Sea Lake principals, is the idea of distributed

leadership and *multilateral wisdom*. Such notions are in line with theories of *'learning organisations'* and strategic management, which provide frameworks for systematically taking into account internal and external contexts. In spite of the complexity and capacity issues that these schools face, the frameworks of learning organisations and strategic management remain useful, as is testified by the schools who operate in open-participatory ways. But within these frameworks, as discussed in **Section 6.12**, principals have to be attuned to the complexity of their schools, working intuitively to the (sometimes turbulent) flow of politics, needs and priorities that characterise their situations.

The way rural principals do things their own ways raises questions about what transformation, strategic management and participation mean for them. Transformational leadership theories as espoused by scholars such as Burns (1978), Bennis and Nanus (1985), Leithwood and Steinbach (1991) assume that schools are running normally. In a non-functioning school for instance, getting learners into classrooms and taught could be transformation of greater magnitude and worth than plans for better school-community interaction. And the management strategies in a school where the fundamentals of educators teaching and learners learning are absent may be quite different from those employed to 'transform' a functional school, where the professionalism and commitment of staff, learners and SGB are reasonably high. In similar ways, effective approaches to discipline and order in the school might be precursors to community acceptance of the school as a place where learning can occur.

Notions of participation too have particular meaning for secondary schools principals in the Sea Lake district. For them, stakeholder participation in school management and governance is fraught with paradoxes. While the department devolves responsibilities to schools within broad policy-frameworks, they often apply pressure through bureaucratic demands and accountability measures; while principals demand inputs at the departmental level, they often minimise educator involvement at school level; while educators call for input at the school

level, they often minimise it for learners at the classroom level; while parents want to influence how the school operates, they see schooling as the responsibility of educators and the principal. This is part of the complexity of schools and the principal's work.

7.5 Recommendations

This section deals with recommendations emanating from the study, directed to the Department of Education and school principals.

7.5.1 Recommendations to the Department of Education

At the heart of complaints by these rural secondary school principals is the marginalisation of rural schools and communities. This marginalisation takes many forms; one of them involves being ignored by officials such as SEMs and auxiliary services such as health services, because of distances and unfavourable road conditions. Another is that policies show little insight into the conditions and needs of rural schools and communities. Principals say they are not consulted when policies are made, and rural realities are not brought to the fore. The principals refute the Education Department's claims (according to principals) that such representation occurs through teacher unions, because the interests and perspectives of educators are not the interests and perspectives of school managers.

Government policies, since the beginning of democracy in 1994, have sought to provide guidelines and frameworks that create space at the local level for schools to develop in ways that also fit with local needs and resources. Even so, the principals in Sea Lake district feel that those policies take little cognisance of rural schools and rural communities. Further, the department often translates the policies into processes and requirements that are insensitive to rural schools and communities. (For example, most educators travel long distances to and from school, and are dependent on group transport arrangements; parents and SGB

members often have neither telephones or cars and cannot easily find out about or attend a department workshop organised a few days hence). Rural schools such as in Sea Lake district comprise a large percentage of South African schools.

The situation needs to be addressed, and to do it the government needs to find better ways of consulting rural communities and schools as part of formulating policies and planning services. It needs to consult school principals as well as teacher unions. Teacher unions, first and foremost, fight for interests of educators. Principals, however, sit in a particular location between the department, educators and school communities, in one sense representatives of the department, in another representatives of educators, in a third representatives of communities. Unions are not likely to adequately represent principals' aspirations and interests in their engagements with the Education Department. In countries such as Denmark principals have their own associations through which the Education Department communicates with them, and through which principals are involved in policy development (Ministry of Education and Research, 1992). Such a framework in South Africa could facilitate the meaningful participation of principals in policy formulation.

The Department has to find a way of accommodating the diversity of communities in South Africa. To pretend that urban and rural communities are homogeneous enough that they can be treated the same way – even in broad terms – is a mistake. In school management and policy, as in curriculum, diversity has to be acknowledged, understood and celebrated as part of a unified, national education system. The Department has to find better ways of framing legislation that takes into account different realities in South Africa, with special reference to socio-cultural dynamics, economies and needs in rural as well as urban South Africa.

The policy on pregnant girls offers an example at the operational level. The Education Department needs to balance its concerns for human rights and transformation with sensitivity and caution in rural communities. A girl's rights to education have to be balanced with her rights to medical attention if necessary, and the responsibilities of schools have to be clearer. One solution is to provide schools and communities with the necessary infrastructure and expertise to ensure girls' safety during pregnancy. This might include training educators so that they can assist pregnant girls if complications arise, or making available ambulances and clinics. Notwithstanding the fact that many rural schools are very conservative when it comes to this issue, many of them took conciliatory stances and suggested practical and constructive solutions. Inaccessibility of health facilities for rural communities is a reality and poses a threat to learners who fall pregnant and hence to the liability of schools. It is crucial that visible support in this regard should come from the department before it blames educators for failing to provide health-related assistance when it is required.

The department needs to provide educators with deeper, intensive training in Outcomes Based Education, the sooner the better. Training programmes that have been offered, often on an *ad hoc* basis, are not working. That training should address not only issues of teaching style, but also fundamental ontological and epistemological issues that require thorough mental preparations on the part of educators. Such issues require deeper and more carefully considered training programmes for educators and principals. One principal captured this issue thus:

> *One or two or three days workshop, and hope to un-do entrenched attitudes that have been inculcated through a rigorous training spanning three to fours years, is just not on.*

Educators generally share their principals' position on OBE training. For example, when one educator was asked to elaborate on why she felt OBE was problematic for her and others in the community, she said:

We were trained for a week, yet we received 3-4 years of training as educators, how come we are expected to understand OBE after only one week's training?

Rural schools principals have, despite numerous challenges in running schools, building and equipping classrooms, expanding curriculum offerings and taking initiatives on HIV/AIDS, identified serious defects in the department's conception of development. The department, for example, categorises schools as either *developed* or *not developed*, based on buildings and equipment, then funds each school on a sliding scale in which developed schools receive less. Rural schools want a broader definition of development, one that enables them to develop in their own ways. They question also the dichotomous categorisation of *developed* and *not developed*, arguing that development, like learning, has no ending.

7.5.2 Recommendations to secondary schools' principals

Radical changes that have taken place in education have placed principals in the front seat of social transformation, and as such, they need to be aware of the different roles they are expected to play, and prepare accordingly. For example, to be agents of social and educational transformation requires commitment and personal reflections, often involving fundamental personal changes and looking at their duties and functions in new ways. Rural communities, with their particular social, historical, and cultural dynamics, and complexities unique to rural communities, present particular challenges for principals.

As professional leaders and agents of transformation, their leadership roles extend beyond the school fence and beyond the education bureaucracy. Bureaucratising schools to the extent that sources of knowledge are viewed, as the preserve of a few is not helpful if schools are committing themselves to renewal. Secondary schools principals in rural communities need to understand that to look at schools as open systems (Robertson, 1995) is not enough, they

have to understand the implications thereof, exploit the benefits of 'shared wisdom' that are found in systems with permeable boundaries, and allow inputs (both positive and negative) from the inside and outside environment in order to be able to move forward, envisioning both long-range and immediate goals. Educators, learners, parents and community members all can contribute to the school's development, but only if they are all perceived to be potentially helpful to the school's future. To be transformational leaders, principals generally are required to operate on two levels: the basic functionality of the school, and development by which the school is transformed. Such responsibilities call on principals to be in the forefront of fighting for equal rights, democracy and participation.

Principals in rural areas, however, face particular challenges and deprivations of many kinds, such as poverty, marginalisation, HIV/AIDS and other social ills. Transformation involves change of communities, not only change in schools. Practices that border on gross violation of learners' rights such as excessive beatings, and withholding learners' reports because of their parents' failure to pay school fees, should belong in the past. Some of the principals in this study have provided glimpses of how schools can work in socially and educationally transformative ways, bringing their political and managerial skills to bear.

Principals' positions on HIV/AIDS and how it can affect schools and communities need to be clearer. The data show that some schools and principals are taking innovative roles in this. HIV/AIDS remains a taboo subject in many rural communities, but principals and outsiders enjoy particular respect, to an extent that they can talk about it, and are even looked to by the community to talk about it. Agency, skills and curriculum responsibilities, coupled with the special position given to them by their school communities, present principals with favourable platforms to help educate parents about the pandemic, at least to the point where the silence can be eased, and action can begin. The best place to start this

education is with the learners, in education about HIV/AIDS, nutrition and health, and in programmes of care and support.

There is evidence in the data that education policies currently in place do not, *per se*, prevent anyone from envisioning a school's future and going for it. Those principals who are still reticent and sceptical should be encouraged also to learn from their colleagues who, while sharing similar backgrounds and working with similarly illiterate and poor parents, have been able to do many things, such as creating effective SGBs and mobilising teaching staff around teaching. They have made a difference to their schools and communities, and other principals can do the same. Schools need to take care of basic functionality, utilise local resources, and the government's, to move forward. Without taking care of the fundamentals, there can be little prospect of a school developing.

For an organisation to change, Tate (2001) emphasises the need to start from *individuals who begin to see things differently, who see new possibilities or old problems in new ways*, in order for people to create fundamental changes in organisations. According to Tate (2001), to create an environment within the school where everybody becomes a learner and the school a learning organisation, it is imperative that principals begin to view themselves as learners too: leaders who guide their own learning and the learning that occurs in and by the organisation. It is when people have learnt to create a long-range vision and design plans to move them from where they are to the envisioned future that they can be said to have taken charge of their futures. As strategic thinkers and planners, and as transformation agents, principals need to find creative ways of solving problems, including ways of allowing everyone within the school community to be creative. Through this study, it has become clear that transformation to many principals is about doing better what they can already do, rather than transcending the normal.

While the recommendations above are broadly consistent with established approaches to management and change (for example, situational analysis, envisioning the future, formulating goals, strategic planning, evaluation and feedback), the complexity of schools and communities must also be accommodated. All of the schools in this study are struggling with overload and limited capacity, in complexes of micro and macro politics, interacting cultures, isolation, hierarchy, poverty and competing agendas. In such systems, as complexity theories advise, change can sometimes be planned and predicted, sometimes not. Seemingly minor events can have major effects, and vice versa. The principals in this study, in their different ways, have shown that their intuitions are well tuned to the dynamics of their schools. Whether they work in open-participatory or closed-participatory styles, whether they embrace department policies or get around them, they work for their schools, and maintain sufficient stability that instabilities are manageable. While guiding principles and broad algorithms are important, principals have to make judgements in the context of the moment, and, in these, intuition and insight are critical. School principals need to understand their schools from the perspective of complexity, and work deliberately to develop their insights into their schools and communities as complex systems.

Principals' individualism, whose major elements include their personal histories and personal leadership styles, the interaction of local contexts and complexities, and government policies, are all interwoven and form part of the devolution and democratic participative framework for schools. The principals and schools in this study have redefined the government's conceptions and policy imperatives for devolution and stakeholder participation so as to capture local texture and meaning, and their strategies, more or less, are working for them. '*Isihlahla sezinsizwa*', which is an indigenous version of frank and open discussions among equals on any urgent and important issue, is a good example of a localized conception of democracy and participation.

School principals in rural secondary schools need to understand that the individualism they have and show, the particularities of local context and the imperative of centralised, national policies, are all necessary for educational and social reforms in the school and community. This tripod scenario sits within a framework of devolution of powers according to central guidelines, which in turn, should form the basis for stakeholder participation, not only within schools, but also in policy formulation at central level. The graphic below tries to portray such a tri-partite approach, within a framework of democracy, human rights and stakeholder participation.
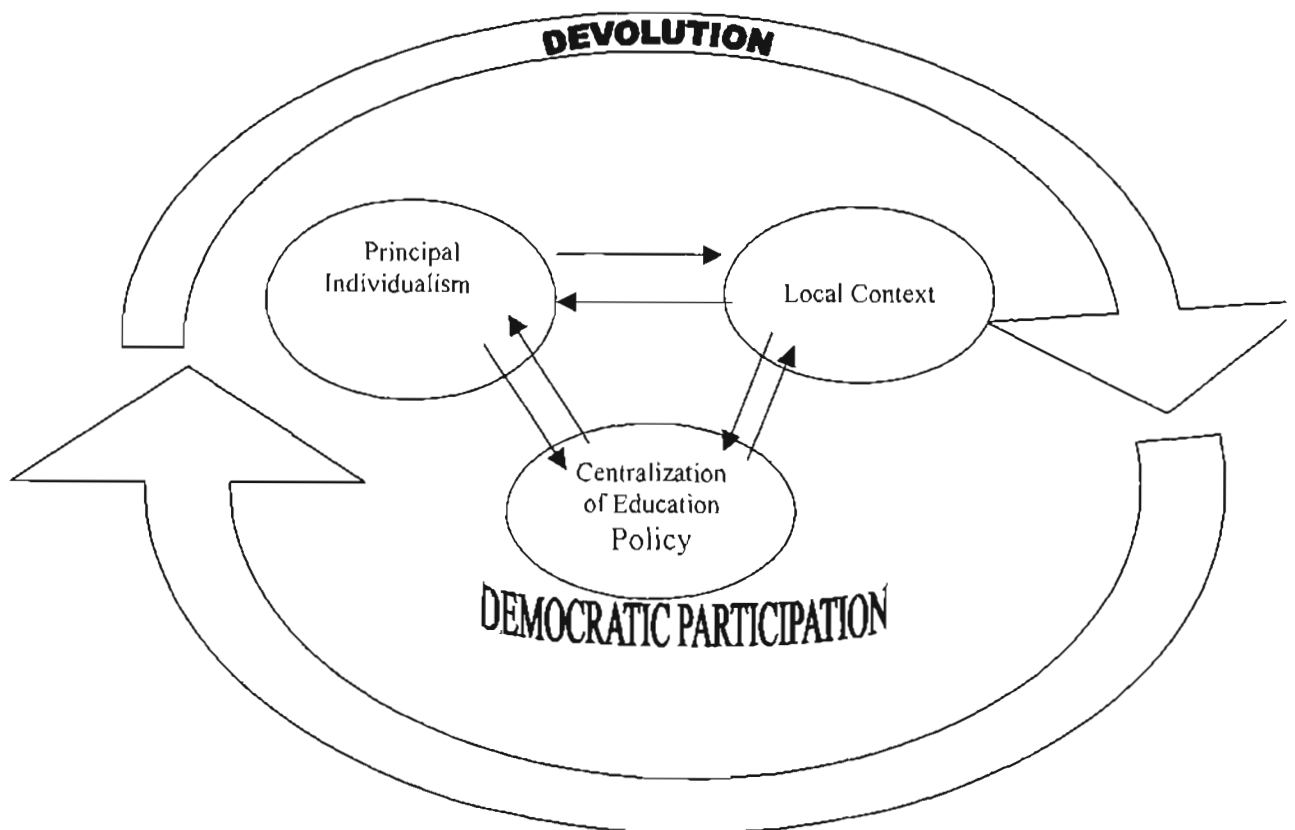

Fig. 4 Proposed framework for rural principals' management practices

7.6 Conclusion

This study has, in accessing rural principals' experiences and expressing their voices, confirmed some of the 'received notions' about change, such as the value of strategic management and planning, participation, and schools as learning

organisations. It has shown too that changes in policy and practice bring mixed feelings for people who are affected. It has shown that, in coping with unstable/ turbulent environments, principals benefit from and depend on their personal knowledge of the school and community and their intuitive judgements about appropriate action. Their judgements may or may not fit well with government policies and government-recommended management strategies. Given the influential roles of individuals in school management and leadership positions, individual leaders need to be highly amenable to changes and learning; they need to be proactive, visionary, with a sense of the whole and deep insights into their organisations (O'Sullivan, 1999); they need to ensure that they are being transformed themselves even as they are active in transforming their communities.

This study indicates that government policies and training workshops for principals are often trapped in assumptions that what they tell principals (which in most cases is nomothetic) will work as planned in rural secondary schools, yet it does not. The Education Department's truths might or might not become schools' truths, but they are not working out. Emanating from their personal knowledge and experiences, principals are better positioned to construct realities and truths about what works in their communities and what does not. It follows that any empowerment exercise by the Education Department needs to enable principals to say, 'given what you have presented to us, this seems to be able to work, while that does not'. Instead, as the principals see it, the department has through its policies pretended to be able to commend particular actions and predict the resulting changes. What has come out strongly in this study is that rural principals who exercise creativity, innovation, create school vision and stick to it, often feel frustrated by the department. For them, the department becomes an obstacle to change and development rather than providing support.

This study has shown also evidence that rural schools and communities are marginalised. They operate in conditions and value systems that are complex

and different in many ways from schools in cities and towns. It is inadequate to presume that policies of devolution, in themselves, provide the space to interpret the policies locally, especially while some policies are bureaucratised into set procedures and demands, and linked to funding. The policies themselves need to be better tuned to rural schools, and respectful of rural life. This requires the department to listen more carefully to rural school principals and others who have direct and relevant knowledge, and then to act on that knowledge.

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LIST OF APPENDICES

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APPENDIX 1

A LETTER TO DISTRICT MANAGER ASKING FOR PERMISSION TO DO RESEARCH

Ref. Prof. Cliff Malcolm: 031-260-7584　　　　P. O. Box 596
E-mail: malcolmc@ukzn.ac.za　　　　　　　　NAGINA
　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　3604
　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　11 April 03

The Chief Superintendent of Education Management
For ATTENTION: Mr. A.G.Mthembu
Ndwedwe District Office
Private Bag X 532
NDWEDWE
4342

Dear Sir

REQUEST PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH IN NDWEDWE DICTRICT

I am a D.Ed student at the University of Durban-Westville. I write to request permission to gather data from five High Schools in the Ndwedwe district. I would like to collect the data between May-July. The data collection would require 2 full days in the school, talking to the principal and educators. Confidentiality of the participants would be protected.

The project is concerned with the ways in which Principals are managing/running their schools at this time of changes. Education in South Africa has experienced rapid and fundamental changes. School principals are driving forces behind the transformation process.

My purposes are to investigate how this process has impacted or is impacting on their daily lives, their duties and functions. These need to be understood by, especially policy makers and policy implementers alike. The study is targeting rural high schools in the province. Five schools have been selected to participate voluntarily in the project. No disruption of teaching is anticipated as a result of

participating in the study. Both principals and educators will be interviewed at times convenient to them.

I believe the research will be useful in our understanding of principal's work. I also have designed the research process so that it has direct and immediate value to the principals involved. Findings, it is hoped, will be beneficial for both the education department on one hand, principals and myself on the other, in terms of broadening the understanding of how the rapid environmental changes affect the management of the schools, particularly, in rural parts of our country already known for deprivations of many kinds and magnitudes.

Participation by principals and educators, through their willingness and availability for interviews, will ensure the success of the study.

Thank you for your assistance in ensuring that this study is a success.

Yours truly,

Thamsanqa Thulani Bhengu (Researcher)

------------------------ (Cel.0837561148) Tel. 031-260-7028 (Work)

E-mail: bhengutt @ ukzn.ac.za

APPENDIX 2

REPLY FROM THE DISTRICT MANAGER

PROVINCE OF KWAZULU-NATAL ETHEKWENI REGION NDWEDWE CIRCUIT Department of Education and Culture	ISIFUNDAZWE SAKWAZULU-NATAL Umnyango wemfundo Namasiko	PROVINCE OF KWAZULU-NATAL ETHEKWENI REGION NDWEDWE CIRCUIT Department van Onderwys en Kultuur

Address: Ikheli: Adres:	Private bag: P/bag X 532 Isikhwamaseposi: Ndwedwe Privaatsak: 4342	Telephone: (032) 533 1015 Ucingo: (031) 533 4017 Telefoon:
Enquiries: Imibuzo: J.B.ZWANE Navrae:	Reference: Inkomba: Verwysing:	Date: Usuku: 2004-05-12 Datum:

MR T.T. BHENGU
P.O. BOX 596
NAGINA
3604

PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH IN NDWEDWE

This letter serves to endorse the verbal agreement co conduct research in Ndwedwe i.e. the agreement between you and the former "District Manager" of this office.

This agreement gave you permission to collect data from five secondary schools, talking to the Principals and educators.

This office wishes you good luck with your research.

CIRCUIT MANAGER: NDWEDWE

JBZ/pm

APPENDIX 3

PRINCIPALS' INTERVIEW GUIDE

SECTION A

1.

A5 card with the following policy areas listed on them:

- Code of conduct for learners
- Post-Provisioning Norms
- School development Plans
- Outcome Based Education

-
-
-
-

2. Each participant was given a card like this one, and asked to read and add to the list a number of policies that affected the running of the school.

3. He or she would prioritise those policies according to the seriousness in which they impacted the management practice in the school, for example, the most

problematic one will take position 1; the second problematic will occupy position 2, and so on.

4. They will then give more details about how they such policies were affecting the management of the school.

5. Probes and follow-up for clarification purposes will follow.

SECTION B

(Pre-planned questions to add on section A)

- What capacities has SASA brought to your school that you did not have before 1996?

- What management areas in your school have been greatly affected by the implementation of SASA?

- What role have you as principal played in the formulation and implementation of various education policies at school level?

- In what ways are school policies, regulations and procedures aimed at ensuring that the learners receive good quality education?

- Have all structures been established in your school to ensure that all relevant stakeholders participate in school governance and management? (Elaborate please!).

- On what issues do you consult with the SMT?

- What challenges have you come across in the process of implementing SDP into concrete action plans?

- Can you please take me through the steps you took in designing school mission statement and SDP?

- How would you characterize your relationships with the SGB, SMT, and the teaching staff respectively? (Please elaborate).

- What do you find helpful in new policies regarding the running of your school?

- What aspects of the new policies or legislations regarding management of schools, do you think, negatively affect the way in which you run your school?

- The Department of education has come up with "Self-Reliant Schools" concept, and "Schools as Learning Organizations"- what is your understanding of these concepts?

- What are some of the department's expectations regarding your role as principal in "Learning Organizations?"

APPENDIX 4

INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR SMT MEMBERS

SECTION A

1.

A5 card with the following policies areas listed on them:

- Code of conduct for learners
- Post-Provisioning Norms
- School development Plans
- Outcomes Based education
-
-
-
-

2. Each participant was given a card like this one, and asked to read and add to the list a number of policies that affected the running of the school.

3. He or she would prioritise those policies according to the seriousness in which they impacted the management practice in the school, for example, the most problematic one will take position 1; the second problematic will occupy position 2, and so on.

4. They will then give more details about how they such policies were affecting the management of the school.

5. Probes and follow-up for clarification purposes will follow.

SECTION B

(Pre-planned questions to add on section A)

- What role have you as an SMT member played in the formulation of the school's mission statement and code of conduct of learners?
- On what issues does the principal normally consult?

- Have all structures been established in your school for all relevant stakeholders to participate in school, governance?
- What new education policies or legislations do you think have helped your school to be run efficiently?
- What aspects of new policies regarding the management of your school do you think negatively affect the way in which the school is run?

APPENDIX 5

INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR EDUCATORS

SECTION A

1.

A5 card with the following policies areas listed on them:
• Code of conduct for learners
• Post-Provisioning Norms
• School development Plans
• Outcomes Based education
•
•
•
•

2. Each participant was given a card like this one, and asked to read and add to the list a number of policies that affected the running of the school.

3. He or she would prioritise those policies according to the seriousness in which they impacted the management practice in the school, for example, the most problematic one will take position 1; the second problematic will occupy position 2, and so on.

4. They will then give more details about how they such policies were affecting the management of the school.

5. Probes and follow-up for clarification purposes will follow.

SECTION B

(Pre-planned questions to add on section A)

- What role have you as an educator in the formulation of your school's mission statement and code of conduct for learners?

- Have all structures been established in your school for all relevant stakeholders to participate in school governance?

- On what issues does your principal involve you as educators?

- How would you characterize the relationship between the teaching staff and the principals?

- What aspects of the new education policies or legislation, do you think have enabled you to teach more efficiently? (Please elaborate!).

- What aspects of the new policies do you think, are negatively affecting your teaching?

APPENDIX 6

SCHOOLS' OBSERVATION SCHEDULE

Aims:
- To observe first hand what rural schools principals do in a typical day.
- Experience school life as an outsider.
- See if the school day commences on time.
- Numbers of learners and educators that come late for school.
- See what happens to those latecomers, etc.
- What do educators do when they are not in class?

Mood: [this refers to paying attention to questions that follow below]
- Interactions between the principal and educators and learners.
- What learners do before school starts; during break/lunch time, and when the school closes for the day?
- What do educators do during lunchtime?
- How is life generally in this school?

Records:

Logbook:
- How many entries have been made recently; past weeks-months?
- What is the nature of entries made, what issues did they raise?

Principals' diary:
- What is planned for the week ahead?
- What was done the previous week?
- And what kind of entries is made in the diary?

Communication book:
- When is the teaching staff called for staff meetings?
- What is planned for discussion in such meetings?
- Are minutes kept for such meetings?

- What is the level of educators' responses to such notices?; how many sign such notices?; what id the level of attendance? etc

Minutes book:

- What is discussed in the principal's meetings?
- Do HODs have their own minute books?
- What do they enter in those minute books?
- What is the level of cooperation between educators and HODs?