

RHODES UNIVERSITY

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

**An investigation into perceptions of learner participation in
the governance of secondary schools**

Submitted by

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ABSTRACT

The question of learner participation or involvement in school governance has been a thorny issue in South Africa for decades. This study investigated secondary learners' participation in the governance of their schools through representation by the Representative Council of Learners (RCLs), formerly known as school representative councils (SRCs). The study attempted to find out how learners participation is perceived by both the RCLs and the School Management Teams (SMTs).

The study was conducted in five secondary schools in the Eastern Cape townships of Grahamstown. The research participants were members of School Management Teams and Representative Councils of Learners from these schools. The study was oriented in an interpretive paradigm following a qualitative approach. Questionnaires and in-depth semi-structured interviews were used to explore the perceptions of the two groups involved. The Department of Education documents that sanction RCL participation were referred to throughout and especially when analysing the respondents' views.

The main finding of the study is that learner involvement in school governance is still problematic, though it is presently provided for by policies that govern schools, including the South African Schools Act and the *Guides for Representative Councils of Learners* of 1999, in which their roles are outlined. The findings of the study reveal an indecisive and autocratic mindset among educators regarding the issue of learner involvement in governance and management. Furthermore, the Department of Education documents in place betray a narrow conception of RCL participation in school governance and still display an element of mistrust towards the learners concerning their roles in governance. As a result of these forces, the democratic potential of learner participation is undermined, and RCLs compromised as legitimate stakeholders.

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UNITY IS STRENGTH MADODA, KEEP GOING!

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DEDICATION

This study is dedicated to my very first role model and early life mentor, my late grandfather, Ndoda “Njineli” Nongubo.

Ugxogxo'lud'olumadolo
Unyaw' lutwashu lunebatha
Ozandla zithambe ngqwabalala
Kub'isiko lakh'ulazi nomthingo

Tshotsho nam ndifike kul'umagad'ahlabay'usaphila!

To him I say this is for you Mfene, Hlati, Lisa, Jambase, Msutu, Canzi, Sanzanza, Zaba, Chophetyeni, Phalangezandla

Many thanks for showing me the way before you passed on the baton to those who follow you.

ACRONYMS

ANC	-African National Congress
AZAPO	- Azanian People's Organisation
AZASM	- Azanian Students Movement
COSAS	- Congress of South African Students
DoE	-Department of Education
HOD	- Head of Department [School level]
HSRC	- Human Sciences Research Council
MEC	- Member of Executive Council [of a provincial government]
NECC	- National Education Coordinating Committee
NEPI	- National Education Policy Investigation
NGOs	- Non-governmental organisations
PAC	- Pan Africanist Congress
PASO	- Pan Africanist Students Organisation
PTA	- Parent Teacher Association
PTSA	- Parent Teacher Student Association
RCL	- Representative Council of Learners
SASA	-South African Schools Act
SASO	-South African Student Organisation
SGB	- School Governing Body
SMT	- School Management Team
SRC	- School Representative Council
UNESCO Organization	- United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 THE CONTEXT OF THE STUDY

Learner involvement in education is arguably one of the most emotional issues in the context of South Africa's development as a country, from the past to the present. The country has a long history of struggle for equality for all before the law, and the struggle of learners has been a particularly explosive one, initiated in the first place against an oppressive apartheid government. The fact that the struggle has persisted into the new democratic South Africa suggests levels of complexity that are clearly more profound than were imagined in the 1970s.

It is also true that the phenomenon of learners' struggle for improvement of the education system does not concern all learners but chiefly black learners. As I happen to have been one of those black learners who have first hand experience of the struggle, remaining academically disinterested and 'objective' has been a real challenge for me. Perhaps some who read this work will feel that I have failed, and that I privilege the voices of the learner body over those of educators in authority. The field is characterised by emotive and emotional discourse, and it has perhaps not been easy to ignore some of the strident voices of researchers and academics who bring an agenda of change to the research arena. While I hope that I have not contributed to the existing rhetoric, I am equally hopeful of having been true to my conscience: research is ultimately about oneself.

The issue of the role of the learners in the governance of educational institutions in South Africa has been problematic over decades since the years I was a secondary school learner (1986-1990), through my tertiary education to the present where I am a high school teacher. As students in our high school in one of the rural areas of the former Ciskei homeland we were responsible for the removal of two principals. Each time this happened I would be left asking questions as to whether all available avenues had been explored before coming to a decision like this. The speed with

which events developed from identifying problems to reaching deadlocks and chasing a principal away suggests that the answer was almost certainly ‘no’.

In my matric year there were many calls, persuasions and nominations for me to serve in the school’s student representative council (SRC), but I continuously turned them down citing academic and other personal commitments. My only true reason for not getting involved was running away from joining a corrupt (as far I was concerned) group of fame-seeking self-centred learners who also became the principal’s ‘tools’ for making some of the other teachers’ and learners’ lives miserable. At tertiary institutions it was almost a norm that every year we would lose as much as three months of normal tuition through campus unrests, some of which led to the jailing of the student leaders. As recently as 2000 I was on the receiving end of student wrath, as the teachers in our school were kept hostage by toy-toying and stone-wielding students and were rescued by police.

The question arises: Why is it that there are still problems and acts of violence in secondary schools when the new and democratic South Africa allows learners, through representation, to participate in the governance of their schools? This participation and hence recognition as stakeholders was made possible by the South African Schools Act (SASA) of 1996 (DoE, 1996a), which calls for the establishment of RCLs (formerly SRCs) and representation in School Governing Bodies (SGBs) in Secondary schools. This formal recognition of the role of learners marks the apparent end of a long journey embarked on during the early years of apartheid, yet it seems that this issue has not been resolved.

In my current position as teacher in a secondary school I began exploring the issue through informal talks with some of the learner representatives and one of the deputy principals in our school. What I found presented a convincing case for pursuing a study of this nature, chiefly because of the mixed views pertaining to this issue held by the two groups. For example, I asked if RCLs were represented in panels that sit for interviewing and recommending teacher candidates: from the RCL the answer was ‘yes’ whilst from the SMT the answer was ‘no’. Thus Terre Blanche and Durrheim’s (1999:25) advice that “... you can also gather background information by talking to people” helped to motivate me to do this study.

Throughout the years learners from mainly black townships have on many occasions shown ruthlessness, negligence, and little care for property in the process of raising and trying to have their issues addressed. In the 1970s and 1980s the sight of teargas on campuses was common for reasons that are well-known and understandable; but if in the 21st century - after all that has been said and done concerning democracy - you still see learners being chased by police and teargas filling the air you feel that something very wrong is going on within the secondary schools. As recently as May 2002, some 26 years since the Soweto uprisings, learners rampaged through the City of Johannesburg in a march organised by the Congress of South African Learners (COSAS) (Soweto 2002:2). In the same month the University of the North's (Turfloop) striking learners set fire to one of the institution's security residences (Makgotho 2002:3). The issues that underlie these events raise questions and are the focus of this research.

1.2 HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The issue of the role of learners in the governance of the educational institutions, especially those from the black communities in South Africa, has been problematic over decades. It is common knowledge that education in this country was used as one of the main tools to foster the apartheid system. Many authors, including Kallaway (1984), Ashley (1989), Cross (1992) and Hartshorne (1992, 1999) acknowledge this.

Tensions between learners and the authorities, coupled with the continuous implementation of unpopular policies, led to boycotts and contributed to the Soweto 1976 learner uprisings, spreading to many parts of the country (Kallaway 1984). In trying to have control at every level of governance, the authorities introduced the prefect system in schools. In the black communities this system was seen as further contributing to the 'divide' and 'rule' approach of the then government and as such an enemy to the unity in the fight against oppression. It was the 'for' and 'against' (apartheid) stance that fuelled tensions between the oppressive government and learners.

It was then becoming clear that educational reform was inevitable. Through the mid 1970s and 1980s the learners managed to organise themselves into such structures as the South African Student Movement (SASM), the South African Student Organisation (SASO) the Congress of South Africa Students (COSAS), Pan African Students Organisation (PASO) and the Azanian Students Movement (AZASM). In the mid 1980s the students had successfully fought for Students Representatives Councils (SRCs) and had them recognised by the authorities. These “were organs of student government and power” (Sithole 1995:95), which were by their very nature meant to be neutral/apolitical structures established in secondary schools. The roles played by the SRCs, coupled with the bigger issues facing the oppressed masses were never isolated, but formed part of the bigger picture facing the youth (and in the process disturbing their schooling) and all concerned with joining the struggle for liberation. It was not surprising therefore that the country as a whole, including schools, was characterised by ugly scenes resulting from the oppressed masses who were trying to fight the apartheid system and the authorities who were prepared to do whatever it took to defend it. Ultimately pressures from concerned national and international communities and independent organisations made it difficult for the state to ignore the situation. To that effect an HSRC Commission, chaired by J.P. De Lange, was set up to investigate education in the republic of South Africa in 1981 (Cross 1992). The HSRC investigation has to be seen as government response to the events in black education from 16 June 1976 to 1980. According to Kallaway (1984:371), however, “the report of the HSRC served to maintain the status quo and it successfully evaded critical comment”.

During all this time the learners had continued to involve themselves in struggling not only for equity in the education system, but for the recognition, both on paper and in practice of their representative organs. In trying to maintain control at every level of governance, the authorities introduced the prefect system in schools around the country. In the black communities this system was seen as further contributing to the ‘divide and rule’ approach of the government and as such an enemy to the unity of the fight against oppression. The mid 1980s therefore saw the abolition of this system in favour of the School Representative Council (SRCs) mainly in the black communities. The argument against the prefect system was that it did not have the mandate and/or voice of the learners in many ways. During this period Parent-Teacher Associations

(PTAs), and Parent-Teacher-Student Associations (PTSAs) were established, but these did not satisfy students' needs (Ndzimande in Kallaway *et al.* 1993).

The mid 1980s and early 1990s brought about the formation of many organisations and committees aimed at addressing the inequities in South African Education. As a result of these, three historical documents that provided the framework for the educational policies in the government of National Unity voted for in 1994 were produced. These documents were the *National Education Policy Investigation* (NEPI), reports produced through collaboration between the National Education Coordinating Committee (NECC) and some progressive academics in the early 1990s, the ANC's *A Policy Framework for Education and Training* document of 1994; and the *Implementation plan for Education and Training* document of early 1994 (Ndzimande, cited in Kallaway 1997). These documents paved the way for learner integration into the democratic system of governing educational institutions. According to Hutchinson (1996:203), "there is a push of the past involved in our decisions; however there is also the pull of what we anticipate about the future", hence the need to look at such issues in our education. This study looks at what is in place presently, concerning democratic governance in schools.

1.3 RESEARCH GOALS

Against this background this research seeks:

- To investigate different role players' perceptions of the role of learner participation in the governance of secondary schools.
- To examine the reasons why learner participation as provided for by policy is still problematic.

1.4 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The challenge of moving from violence-condoning intolerant cultures to more tolerant and peaceful cultures is a fundamental one... (UNESCO 1995, in Hutchinson 1996:3)

The present management and governance of educational institutions should by law be democratic in nature, as provided for in the national constitution, the South African Schools Act (SASA) of 1996 and other official documents that endorse RCL participation in governance. Democratic governance is characterised by, among others, transparency, inclusiveness, accountability and tolerance (Christie 2001), and schools as organisations are expected to welcome participation of all stakeholders viz; SMTs, teachers, parents and learners, to speak with ‘equal’ voices, so as to own decisions taken in the process of running the institutions. The contents of the SASA imply that learners in secondary schools are regarded as stakeholders and therefore need to be treated as such. The Task Team Report of 1996 (DoE 1996b: 28) drew attention to the ‘clashing’ of the old system with the new one when it stated that:

Recent changes to the system of education governance have resulted in school heads being unprepared for their new roles as chief executives. In large numbers of schools information systems have broken down, including basic communication between students, teachers and communities, record keeping systems and financial management systems...

This report acknowledges the fact that it is not to be expected by any means that the new ways of doing things would easily fit in without any of the existing problems posing challenges.

To construct a framework that would lead to workable solutions to common problems and matters of mutual interests in schools would, according to the contents of the Task Team Report, require that there be cooperation from all stakeholders. The cooperation and collaboration these documents call for would be enhanced by tolerance, which according to Vogt (1997:1) “is based on [acknowledging] difference or diversity”. Given the historical background of the learner activities and their schooling, it was always going to be a challenge to bring the schools’ stakeholders to successfully collaborate in governance. As the Task Team Report emphasises some of the many aspects the stakeholders concerned would need to work on are communication and tolerance, and according to Vogt (1997: xxv) “tolerance stands on the border between positive and negative relations among people”. Because the “operation of RCLs is uneven throughout the country” (Sithole 1995:95), there is a

need, possibly from all concerned, to unlearn old behaviours that would contrast with existing and or expected conditions of operation.

Unlearning behaviours would be particularly important for the successful management of learner participation, given its long and stormy history. Indeed, learner participation seems to be a phenomenon everybody wants but no one seems to know how to manage. There is little agreement on what it is, and markedly different understandings of how it could be implemented. In times like these Kemp & Nathan (1995:10) suggest that:

Whether your task is to make a long term plan or to deal with an immediate crisis, you must have a clear vision of what you are trying to do and clarity of thought when it comes to analysing how you are going to do it.

I would argue that there is a distinct lack of ‘clarity’ on the matter of learner participation.

The study aims to investigate whether the democratic framework recently created around school governance, which promotes “the pursuit of interests through dialogue, management and control of situations that are clearly or implicitly competitive or adversarial” (Mampuru & Spoelstra 1994:26), is used for the benefit of schools as organisations.

The democratic culture envisaged by the authorities when planning and implementing the new ways of doing things expects that there be continuous interaction between stakeholders in organisations, who in the process come to realise that flexibility needs to be exercised at all levels for the betterment of organisations. Whether such interaction and flexibility actually exist is one of the many issues this study seeks to investigate.

1.5 THE RESEARCH APPROACH

The approach used to conduct this study falls within the interpretive paradigm. With this approach objectivity (in the positivistic sense) is almost impossible to attain and

so both the researcher and the research participants shape the findings of a research. Attitudes, experiences, and the lived world of participants are the focal point of this study. Contesting the view that objectivity can be compromised, Guba & Lincoln (1989:175) argue “objections that humans are subjective, biased, or unreliable are irrelevant, for there is no other option”. When it comes to reality, researchers such as Wellington (2000:16) argue,

The interpretive researcher accepts that the observer makes a difference to the observed and that reality is a human construct. The researcher’s aim is to explore perspectives and shared meanings and to develop insights into situations, e.g. schools, classrooms.

Based on the views expressed by Wellington, and to do justice to my topic, I chose more than one school as research sites.

There are three research tools used in the study, i.e. questionnaires, open-ended interviews which served as the main data gathering techniques, and, to a limited extent, discourse analysis of a policy document.

The steps taken to facilitate the research process have been carefully considered, as a way of keeping track of the ethical considerations employed throughout the study. The use of pseudonyms such as Mr X instead of full names or surnames is one such example.

1.6 OUTLINE OF THE STUDY

In chapter two I present an overview of the literature that is relevant to the topic at hand. According to Hart (1998:1)

... a review of the literature is important because without it you will not acquire an understanding of your topic, of what has already been done on it, how it has been researched and what the key issues are.

Thus my research can be compared to what other researchers have been able to produce.

In chapter three I outline the research paradigm, approach and research techniques used in the collection of data. It is in this chapter that the justifications and limitations of the research paradigm and approach are explored. Because “a popular approach to understanding the human mind has been and is information processing” (Hoy & Miskel 1996:92), the latter part of this chapter deals with data analysis, leading to the findings of this research. The use of the said methods may be seen to have had a bearing on the outcomes of this research because of the limitations that have been detected.

In chapter four I present, analyse and discuss data, in light of relevant literature, to put the argument and discovered themes into perspective. It is the analysis and discussion of the themes that ultimately produce the research findings. This is the chapter that indicates to the researcher whether the choice of methods addresses such key aspects as validity and reliability.

The main findings of the research are summarised in chapter five, and this is done mainly through the themes highlighted in chapter four. It is also in chapter five that recommendations for both practice and research are made, and the limitations of the study are spelt out.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 POINT OF DEPARTURE

The literature on change is complex and interconnected... (James and Connolly 2000:1)

This chapter presents an overview of learner participation in school management and governance in pre-democratic South Africa to the present. Despite the fact that learner participation has a long and troubled history in South Africa, and that law has only recently provided for it, research on this crucial aspect of education institutions is scarce. This is especially the case when it comes to secondary schools, which is the focus of this research. One of the reasons for this state of affairs could be lack of interest among academics. As Boyd & Jardine (in Hargreaves & Fullan 1998: 18) claim, “student voices have been lost voices”, and this appears to be true in more ways than one. Learners have also often been seen as ‘trouble makers’, as this review will show. Knowing how best to accommodate troublemakers into historically authoritarian systems is difficult enough: researching this challenge is perhaps even more difficult. Nevertheless, the phenomenon of learner participation in education governance is a reality in South Africa, and this research attempts to throw light on the complexity of the challenges that accompany this phenomenon.

2.2 LEARNER PARTICIPATION IN PRE-DEMOCRATIC SOUTH AFRICA

Building on what has been said in chapter one, it is not difficult for one to conclude that school principals were almost a law unto themselves during the apartheid years. According to Mda and Mothata (2000:65):

The system of school management therefore took a top-down form, which gave rise to rigid control mechanisms that, more often than not, alienated the pupils, staff and community from the formal authority figure, namely the principal of the school. ...Teachers and students on the other hand, had no formal powers in school governance.

This idea is widely supported (see for example Kallaway 1986, Hartshorne 1992, McKay & Romm 1992, Kallaway 1997, Hartshorne 1999, and the Natal Education Policy Unit 1998).

The arguments made by these writers bring a strong message home that schools were used as some kind of extension of the political institutions used to further foster the apartheid system. Notably such strategies were employed to produce learners who were not to question but to obey authority, thereby leading to a subservient black workforce ready to serve their masters (Kallaway 1984). But because conflict becomes an inescapable by-product of everyday life (Bolman and Deal 1988:12), this type of school management and governance did not go unchallenged by those concerned. The communities and learners fought for many years against the imposition of the unpopular apartheid policies and employment of its 'agents' in township schools.

Government response was to introduce Parent Teacher Associations (PTAs) so as to be seen to be inclusive. Parents had little say over substantive educational issues and their involvement in education was limited to that of "an advisory body" by way of Parent-Teacher Associations (Mda & Mothata 2000:65). Learners, on the other hand, were always putting pressure on the authorities to have some form of representation through which their voices could be heard. Their call was to be allowed to form School Representative Councils (SRCs) that would be recognised by all concerned, including the authorities. For anyone looking to have a voice in any organisation it is not enough to be there just to 'advise', hence the fight by learners to have recognised SRCs in place in the mid 1970s intensified. Sithole (1995:94) puts it as follows:

Through the SRCs the students not only challenged the education departments and withstood the repressive apparatuses and strategies of the former apartheid state, but they also questioned the prerogatives of principals and parents to take decisions without consulting them and challenged their traditional views on schooling.

The Soweto riots of 1976 marked the beginning of a startling new development in school governance: for the first time it became clear that learners would have to be considered as active participants in the way schools were run (Hartshorne 1999: 68).

That learners fought for recognition as early as they possibly could showed that they had become a force to be reckoned with, not only to the government, but to all who played a role in their schooling process.

The authorities' response was to put in place a commission to investigate the happenings in education as they were under pressure to do something drastic about what was happening. The pressure came not only from local but also international communities concerned about human rights violations, hence the De Lange Commission of 1981 (Kallaway 1984) was put in place. In Hartshorne's (1999:55) words

...In response to a number of pressures on Education in the late seventies, the government commissioned the Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC) to set up an investigation into education in South Africa...this investigation was conducted in 1980 and 1981 by the De Lange Committee.

The commission was never free from interference or tampering in its work and not all the contents of its findings were made public by the government.

Hartshorne (1999:63) explains:

The government's initial reaction to the De Lange Report ...was disappointing, in some ways extremely negative and timid, clinging to the status quo and lacking in vision and perception. It was as if the issues that led to the appointment of the De Lange Committee had been forgotten.

The learners therefore continued to fight for their own structures' recognition and to have a say in the running of their educational institutions. The government then introduced the concept of Parent-Teacher-Student Associations (PTSAs) to replace the largely defunct prefect system (which interestingly still functions in historically white schools). The prefect system had "a measure of prestige attached to them" (Thompson 2002:1), but perhaps little in the way of true representation. The PTSAs, by contrast, were designed to give both parents and learners the opportunity to be involved in school governance, through representation. Ironically the PTSAs in black schools were allowed a very minimal role and almost none in some very critical

decision making processes. In Sithole's (1994:40) view the PTSAs were not a solution to political problems experienced by people in townships:

The rationale behind the establishment of PTSAs was a desire to shift the balance of power away from the much-despised school committees to parents, workers, teachers, students and their organisations. PTSAs were seen as the organisational machinery through which people's education could be implemented, albeit in a limited form.

The quotation above depicts not only the scenes but also the political tone of the time, by the mere fact that *workers* were mentioned as possible candidates to be included in school governance. This also tells us that those workers were among the oppressed majority, which had to do everything possible to rid itself of the shackles of apartheid. On the other hand it could be argued that the workers were viewed to be more effective in their fight against apartheid.

In what has been discussed so far, it is becoming clear that the management or governance structures in operation in schools did not have representation or participation of the whole schools' communities i.e. teachers, parents, learners and other interested bodies. The structures in place did not allow participation by other stakeholders, hence there was no will on their part to collaborate and cooperate, as they would be seen as 'agents' of the authorities. This was especially the case because according to Evans (2000:280):

Principals were free to lead, without worrying about being viewed as autocratic...they could worry less about whether they are using the right style and less about other process-based concerns...contrary to the laws of human relations, which remind us always to involve people...

2.3 PEOPLE'S EDUCATION?

Along with the learners' demands, many calls were made from different corners concerning inclusiveness in the management and governance of secondary schools. Among the calls was one that yearned for **people's education**. The very concept of people's education was associated with 'terrorism' by the authorities as they were of

the view that the ‘people’ would want to take everything away from the ‘dominant culture’.

Put into perspective, and in McKay & Romm’s (1992:1) views:

...People’s education envisages a connection between education and the political struggle for ‘liberation’ in society...a central feature of People’s Education is that it is a *process*.

It is common knowledge that many people called for People’s Education to be put in place, but they could not all come forward with a clear definition of what it was. In discussing people’s education Soobrayan (1990:30) argues that:

There is no model for People’s Education and there are no blueprints or seminal texts that can be subjected to analysis, evaluation or critique. It is a process that is currently unfolding in South Africa...aimed at transforming the shortcomings...by a mass movement of teachers, students, parents, workers and academics.

By its very nature and stance the government of the time did not deem it necessary to compromise its top-down approach, particularly since the learners (viewed as ‘trouble makers’) were the ones who had the loudest of voices in calling for it. Because of the pressures applied to the authorities the late 1980s brought about significant changes where SRCs were recognised and room was being created for them to play a role in governance.

The 1990s saw the emergence of three historical documents that laid the foundation for the educational policies of the government of national unity voted for in 1994. These documents were the National Education Policy Investigation (NEPI) reports produced through collaboration between the National Educational Co-ordinating Committee (NECC) and some progressive academics in the early 1990s, the ANC’s *A policy Framework for Education and Training* document of 1994, and the *Implementation Plan for Education and Training* document of early 1994 (Ndzimande as cited in Kallaway *et al.* 1987).

These documents represented the groundswell in moving towards basic democratic principles and thus laid the foundation for democratic school management and governance to take centre stage.

2.4 DEMOCRATIC SCHOOL MANAGEMENT AND GOVERNANCE

In a South African context the 1994 democratic elections brought about sweeping changes that saw the notion of learner participation in school governance both welcomed and formalised. To that effect the South African Schools Act (SASA) of 1996 states that:

A representative council of learners (RCL, formerly SRC) must be established at every public school enrolling learners in the eighth grade and higher. A Member of Executive Council (MEC) may by notice in the Provincial Gazette, determine guidelines for the establishment, election and functions of RCLs (Department of Education 1996a:10).

The document *Understanding the South African Schools Act* (1997) states that “an RCL has the duty to elect the learners who must serve on the School Governing Body” (SGB), (DoE, 1997b:42). This officially gives learners in secondary schools stakeholder status.

Christie (2001:56) further endorses this:

...In secondary schools, students are to be represented. This is in line with the democratic principles of the new constitution and with the international trend of increasing certain powers at school level.

The concept of learner participation in governance through their RCL is in keeping with democratic management principles i.e. participation, transparency, recognition of stakeholders and, as Bush (1987:50) puts it “the essence of democracy is **participation** in decision making”.

It now becomes appropriate to discuss the present state of affairs in accordance with present policy requirements, and the theoretical framework on which policy is based.

2.5 WHAT SCHOOL MANAGEMENT AND GOVERNANCE MEANS IN A DEMOCRATIC SOUTH AFRICA

By now the reader might have noticed that I have not distinguished between the terms ‘management’ and ‘governance’ in my argument. I am not implying that they mean the same thing. It is now important to differentiate between the two in order for participation at different levels to emerge and show its true character. In describing the concept ‘management’ Hoyle (1981 in Bush 1995:40) claims that:

Management is a continuous process through which members of an organisation seek to coordinate their activities and utilise their resources in order to fulfil the various tasks of the organisation as efficiently as possible.

Governance, according to Stoker (1999: vii) “...refers to self-organising, interorganisational networks”.

The distinction between these concepts will become clearer as this chapter unfolds.

2.5.1 SCHOOL MANAGEMENT

As opposed to what used to be a case of one ‘best’ individual running a school in the form of a principal, the concept of a School Management Team (SMT) was adopted and introduced in secondary schools after 1994. The SMT is made up of the school principal, deputy/ies, and heads of departments (HODS) and in some cases co-opted members who are experienced and understand the school’s culture, norms and ethos. The SMT’s duty is to see to the school’s day-to-day running/activities/programmes.

By making schools as inclusive as possible the authorities are trying to harmonise schools as organisations, in a way making individuals feel part of the organisation. The present policies in operation encourage transparency, cooperation, participation and collaboration (SASA 1996). These policies are informed mainly by broader political theories presently in place underpinned by the concept of democracy. By its very nature democracy takes into account such important attributes as values and attitudes that give recognition to individuals and groups. Therefore a school as an

organisation should be managed by a group-SMT, which should value each individual's contribution.

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2.5.1.1 VALUES

According to Olson and Zanna in French & Bell (2000:211) values are:

General standards or principles that are considered intrinsically desirable ends, such as loyalty, helpfulness, fairness, predictability, reliability, honesty, responsibility, integrity, competence, consistence and openness.

Values play a vital role in helping individuals and groups in organisations attach meaning to whatever they are doing, more so if their contribution is given recognition not only by their peers but their superiors. Self-fulfilment and intrinsic as well as extrinsic motivations are just some of the attributes adding value to tasks performed. The attributes associated with values help trigger team spirit, thus leading to people in organisations maximising their potential and skills. The organisation therefore stands to benefit a great deal if there is unreserved commitment to the cause of the organisation by those involved. It is important therefore to realise that the notion of having SMTs managing schools was part of adding value to schools as organisations and also putting theory (democratic management) into practice, the essence of which is democratisation. Dias cited in Higgs *et al.* (2000:280) says of democratisation:

It would mean the process aiming to achieve theoretically and practically, through a radical process of transformation of all social aspects, the goals and principles of democracy. It implies, among other things, a fundamental new thinking regarding effective participation of all...

Also crucial to the attributes of having democratic principles employed in schools as organisations and more importantly in management is the quality of tolerance.

2.5.1.2 TOLERANCE

The Macmillan English Dictionary (2002:1513) describes *tolerance* as “the attitude of someone who is willing to accept other people’s beliefs, way of life etc. without criticizing them even if they disagree with them”. According to Vogt (1997: xxiv) many researchers conclude that:

It is enough to say that tolerance often involves support for the rights and liberties of others, others whom one dislikes, disapproves of, disagrees with, finds threatening, or toward whom one has some or other negative attitude.

The writer goes on to claim “the opposite of tolerance is *discrimination*, that is taking action against people one dislikes or with whom one disagrees” (*ibid.*). Such clarity on the term tolerance explains why supportive working and learning environments need to be created in schools, while lack of tolerance threatens the future of the learners. My bringing on board tolerance as a point of discussion is an attempt to explore not only the theory behind managing schools through SMTs, but also the notion of making the exercise work. We cannot, no matter how much we would like to, overlook tolerance when we talk of democracy or trying to entrench it in South Africa especially because it is a country that is almost ‘multi-’ everything. The crux of the matter here is for the country’s inhabitants to work on their attitudes and try to see good in everyone and shake off the constraints of the past. All this could be made possible by always trying to tolerate each other, not only individually but also in organisations.

As South Africans we cannot argue against the fact that we are still a country in transition. If this struggle for change and cooperation is to be successful we all have to be mindful of the fact that something good on paper is not always something good in practice. Dealing with different individuals from different backgrounds, let alone different cultures, is by no means an easy feat; hence tolerance should be the order of the day. This is especially the case when it comes to the new challenge that principals are facing – power sharing. It is therefore required of those involved to realise that “change is a process not a decision, sometimes a very long one” and also that

“legitimate power is not tied to you as a person; it is tied to the position you occupy” (Kayser 1994: xv).

Kayser’s comment is of great importance because the country has seen enough resistance to change to realise that once there is talk of change not everyone feels comfortable. I am therefore trying to bring to the fore the view that I see the introduction of SMTs as part of a process aimed at encouraging the development of human potential in a collective.

2.5.1.3 SHOULD TOLERANCE BE TAUGHT?

Vogt (1997: xxv) acknowledges that the issue of tolerance “... is explicitly a values question” and adds: “yes, we should teach tolerance”. I agree with this stance, more so because of South Africa’s history of lack of tolerance. Qualifying his stance Vogt (*ibid*) points out that:

Diversity and equality cannot coexist without some tolerance...if an individual is to be readied to cope with a pluralistic and egalitarian society, she or he will need, from time to time, some fairly well honed interpersonal skills, including skills of tolerance ...Tolerance stands on the border between positive and negative relations between people.

With the authorities’ mammoth task of trying to build a country so diverse, it would be wise to encourage the teaching of tolerance, especially if, as Vogt puts it, it is aimed at benefiting and fostering correlations in structures and organisations including schools.

I am not implying that tolerance is the most important aspect of democracy and therefore if taught no problems will be encountered. In agreeing that tolerance is necessary and should be taught Vogt (1997:44) argues that tolerance “...is a lesson so crucial to democratic society that an education system in a democratic society should try to teach it”. Such views lay a challenge to the authorities and educationists to devise ways and means of making tolerance a cornerstone of education. So far the challenge of making tolerance accessible seems to be a skill that should first be achieved by the authorities themselves. It goes without saying therefore that because

of the new approach with which almost everything should be dealt, *new skills* need to be acquired by school managers.

2.5.1.4 NEW SKILLS

One cannot just assume that because SMTs are in place all problems concerning school management will automatically be solved. It is obvious that SMT members would need to acquire new skills concerning their roles. Of immediate concern here could be the role of the principal in making sure that by voice or deed the SMT is a functional structure worthy of handling any burning issues successfully. The immediate focus falls on the principal because of the need for him or her “...to unlearn old behaviours and learn new helping, negotiation, and conflict resolution skills” and that “the key is to have people who believe that they are valued and empowered” (Zawacki and Norman 2000:231).

The sentiments shared by the above authors is especially true of (but not exclusive to) those principals who were there before the SMT as a structure was put in place, those who were used to exercising ‘absolute power’ as opposed to power sharing in the school. Kayser argues that “power sharing through delegation means giving up what you most naturally would like to hold on to – the control via formal authority; and holding on to what you most naturally like to give up, the responsibility” (Kayser 1994:50). I agree with this because adapting to change can never be just accepted without it being questioned, hence new skills for adapting to new working environments are required. I want to believe that when they were formulating and enacting the policies that gave birth to SMTs the authorities had in mind a *vision*, which the above authors are trying to put across. By implication, for any organisation to realise their set dreams there should be a vision according to which systems in place should operate. Hence South Africa’s vision concerning the education system, which has among its set objectives secondary school learner participation in governance, needs to be looked at.

2.5.1.5 VISION

The previous South African minister of education, Professor K. Asmal, in outlining his Call to Action in 1999, put a plan in place known as *Tirisano*, which was operationalised in January in 2000. *Tirisano* is a Sotho word meaning ‘working together’. It

Calls for a massive social mobilisation of parents, parents, learners, educators, community leaders, NGOs, the private sector and the international community, motivated by a shared vision (DoE, 2001:6).

A call of this nature is simply the voice behind what is an envisaged plan of action – *vision*.

Jones and George (as cited by French and Bell 2000: 371) argue “a vision has attractive power if it challenges and inspires, with the prospect of adding value, and releases obstacles that keep people from being creative”. These writers make it clear that it is well and good to have guides on paper by which people map out their routes towards realising their goals but are quick to warn that “visions do not guarantee success” (*ibid.*).

The minister’s voice is loud and clear in its message that it is trying to cultivate a culture of participation, not only in schools but also among all South Africans. The minister’s call could be likened to any prominent figure claiming to be employing an ‘open door policy’; however one could be concerned about how attainable a culture of participation may be, especially for learners. Schmuck and Runkel (1994:6) contend: “...work is more likely to get done if the people who will do it have a voice in planning it”. Perhaps these are some of the sentiments shared by the authorities in letting learners participate in governance, but the information at hand does not clearly show that they were involved in the planning processes concerning their participation.

Ngcongco and Chetty’s (2000) views of the current management and governance approach are that with the inception of the SASA of 1996, the traditional definition of the concept of management has been deconstructed, and it is no longer limited only to principals and their control over the schools. “It is a dynamic and inclusive concept

that incorporates a participative approach and regards practitioners at all levels of the school organisation as ‘managers’ in their own right” (Ngcongo & Chetty 2000:67-68). To that effect Belbin (1981:ix) claims that:

Each team member may carry the designation ‘manager’ but the word has largely lost its original meaning: it no longer implies an authority figure and may refer merely to someone holding a position of responsibility.

I would argue that it is convenient in this instance to refer to it as a position of responsibility and not of power. Though we cannot completely run away from addressing such characteristics as power in any hierarchical structure, the SMTs included, we can only assume that personal interests concerning power are brought under control.

It is not only the SMTs that have legitimate power in the running of schools. The ultimate structure that wields more power is the School Governing Body (SGB), which is representative of all the groupings that make up the community of a school. These groupings are parents, teachers, learners, non-teaching staff and co-opted members. That such groupings are perceived to be able to make up structures that are not only representative of all stakeholders, but also can reach decisions by consensus does make the prospect of governing in numbers look reachable. It is obvious that with all these groupings involved, no major decisions can be reached without thorough negotiation having taken place.

2.5.1.6 THE SIGNIFICANCE OF NEGOTIATION

One of the main tools employed by managers in organisations when going about their functions is negotiation. Negotiation is of late proving to be a powerful exercise through which differences are ironed out not only between organisations, but also countries when trying to reach amicable solutions. According to Fisher and Ury (in Mampuru and Spoelstra 1994:27):

Negotiation is a basic means of getting what you want from others. It is a back-and-forth communication designed to reach an agreement

when you and the other side have some interests that are shared and others that are opposed.

The one main characteristic of negotiation as a strategy used to foster better working relations at any level on matters of common interest is that it is a process.

Negotiation is fast proving to be not only a fashionable but also a necessary process through which opposing sides can solve problems. Niewmeijet and Cloete (1991:2) and Hartshorne (1999:31) acknowledge this view. It has over the past decade been at the core of South Africa's quest to be counted among the countries to have managed to avoid armed conflict and found resolution around negotiation tables. To that effect Mampuru and Spoelstra (1994:1) argue that:

The formal change of political power in early 1994 was in some ways the end but in other ways it was the beginning of changes brought about mainly by negotiation. It is perhaps true to say that negotiation has become a way of life in South Africa.

The arguments expressed by the two writers bring forth a clear message that negotiation was the starting point towards achieving a just society that should maintain that everyone is equal before the law. The two writers go on to qualify the recognition and significance of negotiation by referring to former United States of American president Bill Clinton who stated publicly that "what happened in South Africa is an example to the rest of the world and in many ways 'a miracle'"(ibid: 27)

It is against that background that I argue that negotiation should and must always be at the back of the minds of people in schools and other organisations if they want to succeed in achieving and maintaining good working relations. As shown by this argument on negotiation, the most important aspect of negotiation is communication. In simpler terms we can argue that negotiation without communication is impossible. In schools therefore negotiation is the gateway to better working, learning and governing conditions. Communication helps people know why others disagree with them and also why they may behave in a certain way.

2.5.1.7 THE ROLE OF COMMUNICATION IN MANAGEMENT AND GOVERNANCE

Hoy and Miskel (1991:345) agree that there are many definitions of the term ‘communication’ but finally settle for: “Communication means sharing messages, ideas, or attitudes that produce a degree of understanding between a sender and receiver”. They further agree that Simon put it best when he wrote that communication is “any process whereby decisional premises are transmitted from one member of an organisation to another” (*ibid.*).

The definitions of communication show that it is a crucial piece without which an organisational puzzle cannot be complete. Testimony to that is the Task Team Report’s (DoE, 1996:32) view that:

Resistance to change flourishes where there is poor communication, little or no active participation and involvement in decisions and where tensions are allowed to simmer unchecked. To overcome such resistance, it is necessary that there be open lines of communication...

It is obvious that tensions could ‘simmer unchecked’ if it is not possible for managers and governors of schools to always be in communication with learners so that ‘fires’ are curbed as early as possible. Decisions affecting the whole group should preferably be made by consensus, and communication should be full and free, regardless of rank and power. Communication does emerge as a tested and trusted form of reaching critical decisions by people in organisations. The non-existence of clear channels of communication between the learners and the authorities, I believe, contributed immensely to South Africa’s regrettable 1976 happenings. Bringing forth the view that communication in organisations is as significant as the existence of the very organisations and or schools, Gibson, Ivansenvich and Donnely (in Hoy and Miskel 1991:346) argue that:

Because communication plays such central roles in schools, the key issue is not whether administrators and teachers engage in communication or not, but whether they communicate effectively or poorly. Communication is unavoidable to organisations’ functioning; only effective communication is avoidable.

This tells schools that individuals within them do not have much of a choice but to exchange information so as to come closer to developing shared meanings. Therefore the role of communication in enhancing sound democratic management and governance is undoubtedly one of the strongest of the ‘pillars’ that entrench and sustain democracy in any organisation.

As this chapter has attempted to show so far, from pre-democratic to the present South Africa, communication has proved to be vital to the system of governance, not only when it comes to educational matters, but the whole issue of governing the country itself.

Through communication learners were brought on board school governance structures and as proved before, a lack of communication between learners and the authorities has been one of the factors resulting in disastrous consequences. The bringing on board of learners as participants in such a powerful body does augur well, I think, for all involved as it could make it possible for learner power to be positively channelled. The authorities seized this opportunity and through the concept of ‘governance’ the learners were then given an official voice.

2.6 SCHOOL GOVERNANCE

Unlike management which, according to Hoyle (1981 in Bush 1995:40), concerns itself with coordinating activities and utilising resources within organisations, governance refers to the role of stakeholders which lie beyond the organisation, such as parents, the community and government. In Rhodes’ view (cited in Stoker 1999: vii) among the characteristics of governance are “continuing interactions between network members, caused by the need to exchange resources and shared purposes”. In my view any organisation including schools, should be characterised by the need ‘to exchange resources and shared purposes’.

Other writers who contributed to discussing the features of *governance* include Osborne and Gaebler cited by Leach and Percy-Smith (2001:2) who further claim, “This process is perceived as inclusive rather than confined to office holders”. Claims

such as this one give the sense that governance is a relatively new concept in the country and as such employing it cannot be without its own problems. Among those problems could be a debate concerning power relations within organisations; hence stressing responsibility rather than power may be the way to go about it.

2.6.1 RESPONSIBILITY VERSUS POWER

By virtue of the positions they hold in hierarchical structures, there is danger that people in management tend to quickly think of themselves as being powerful and not so much as being responsible and therefore tend to behave as such. What is key, I think, in assuming that those in positions of management and or governance have acquired the necessary ‘new skills’ of being members of organisations and do away with the notion of ‘running’ them, is the assessment of their performances by those above them. This in a way could help schools not to have ‘directors’ but participants with different roles at different levels because “democracy meant originally the ‘rule’ or ‘power’ of the people” (Parry and Moyser in Beetham 1994:44). The emphasis here could be put on the fact that it is the people who have power; therefore everyone involved is responsible for their roles and so accountable to those around him or her and most importantly to the organisation.

In 1995, the Minister of Education in South Africa’s democratic government established a committee to Review the Organisation, Governance and funding of Schools. This committee commissioned Sithole to write a discussion paper on the participation of learners in democratic school governance (Education Policy Unit (EPU), Natal 1995:93) The National Education Policy Act of 1996 outlawed or replaced many pre-democratic practices that enhanced inequalities and non-participation in formerly black schools. Part of transforming the education system is to make it democratic by way of allowing all stakeholders to have a say in the running of schools because:

The democratisation of education includes the idea that stakeholders like parents, educators, learners, and members of the community should be able to participate in the activities of schools (DoE, 1997b: 5-6).

It is with this in mind that I am about to elaborate on participation, which has so far proved to be the core of the very concept of governance. In secondary schools participation is made possible by the School Governing Body (SGB).

2.6.2 WHAT IS A SCHOOL GOVERNING BODY?

According to the Department of Education's School Governance Starter Pack of 1997

A governing body is a group of people who govern a school. They are either elected or appointed...the main job of the governing body is to help the school principal to organise and manage the school's activities in an effective and efficient way (DoE 1997b: 7).

The document further clarifies that this group of people referred to comprises the school principal, parents elected by other parents, educators elected by others, learners elected by the RCL, non-teaching staff elected by the non teaching staff, co-opted members chosen for their experience and skill. The document demonstrates the ways by which members are elected into the SGB so as to legitimise it.

Of course it would be naïve to assume that legitimate representation guarantees equal participation. The policy is, in my opinion, vague on the role of the principal in the SGB. Perhaps my concern is there because "Democratic theories tend to overlook the possibility of conflict between internal participative processes and external accountability" (Bush 1987:59). This warning by Bush needs to be heeded if people are to be critical of policies that are being put in place and the aim is for those policies to sustain the objectives for which they were put in place.

My view is that the policies need to be scrutinised and not implemented as ends in themselves, but employed in such a way as to take into account local or existing conditions. This warning may sound political, but I believe it does apply to schools as organisations, more so because they have democratic structures in place. It can never be assumed that a body of this nature could always operate smoothly without experiencing differences of opinion on issues of common interest.

The politics of difference are acknowledged by almost everyone in any group incorporating different personalities, let alone if there is a notable age gap between the participants. This brings me to a point where I find it necessary to scrutinise the very participation by secondary school learners in governance. Although meant to complement and normalise school climate, the participation raises questions concerning the extent and honesty on the part of the authorities and also the manner in which they still deal with learner grievances.

A simple question for example would be: Do learners and authorities have the same definition of participation concerning their roles? Can we from the 'outside' assume we know what it means? According to Morrow (1994:104):

Participation by persons in the making of decisions, which affect them to take up 'participant attitudes' towards someone, is necessarily to recognise his right, and give him the opportunity to participate in decisions, which affect him.

The arguments by Morrow take into consideration the fact that:

Democratic models include all those theories which emphasize that power and decision-making are shared among some or all members of the organization (Bush 1987: 48)

An ideal situation where learners adopt participant attitudes is of course one where there is shared responsibility. Bearing in mind that the other stakeholders in the SGB are adults who could look down upon learners and perhaps not take them seriously I want to delve more deeply into their exact roles.

2.6.3 THE GUIDES FOR RCLs

According to the Department of Education's (DoE 1999d: 12) *Guides for Representative Councils of Learners*, the main functions of an RCL are the following:

- a) An RCL acts as an important instrument for liaison and communication.

- b) An RCL meets at fairly regular intervals, as determined by its constitution, to consider ideas, suggestions, comments and even complaints from its constituencies.
- c) After every meeting an RCL gives feedback to the learners.
 - If an idea is turned down, an RCL must try to explain why approval was not granted.
 - If an idea is approved, it must be conveyed to the professional management and the SGB, where applicable.
 - If they also approve the idea, it becomes part of the school policy, if applicable; if they do not approve the idea, the principal must explain the reasons for this decision to the council, who in turn must inform its constituency.

2.6.3.1 THE GUIDES EXPLORED

At face value the *Guides* appear to be helpful and descriptive of how members of RCLs may/should participate in school governance. However, a critical reading of the *Guides* exposes entrenched assumptions and preconceptions which tell a different story. The aim of this part of the chapter is to analyse the discourse of the *Guides* to establish how learners are positioned concerning their expected roles in school governance. Here I draw on Janks (1997:329) who explains the rationale for discourse analysis as follows:

All social practices are tied to specific historical contexts and are means by which existing social relations are reproduced or contested and different interests are served. It is the questions pertaining to interests that relate discourse to relations of power:

- How is the text positioned or positioning?
- Whose interests are served by this positioning?
- Whose interests are negated?
- What are the consequences of this positioning?

It is in line with this view that I now briefly explore the very document that gives learners the official status of being co-governors in schools.

2.6.3.1.1 A CRITICAL READING OF THE *GUIDES*

The *Guides* provide a brief historical perspective on secondary school learners and their respective representative structures. The forms of representation are the prefect system and the SRCs [now known as the RCLs]. Not much is said about comparing the two because, after all, the *Guides* are about the RCLs.

The document pays tribute to the role learners have played in democratising education governance in South Africa: "...many schools have a tradition of Student Representative Councils (SRCs) which played a major role in the birth of the new South Africa" (DoE 1999d: 11). From the point of view of creating room for learners to have a say in school governance in secondary schools the document seems to be a positive step in the right direction. This sounds complimentary and encouraging, particularly in light of the inspiring cover of the document. The outer cover of the *Guides* document bears a picture showing an equal number of participants sitting around a table, labeled as SMTs, RCLs and SGBs (Appendix E). The implication is clear: there are three groups governing the school, and the RCL seems an equal partner.

The document gives learners and their representation full recognition, which was not there before. Among the basic recognition accolades is that they have the right to have their own democratically elected structures, including the RCL itself. The *Guides* state, "An RCL should become the most prestigious official representative structure of learners in the entire school" (DoE 1999d: 11). This statement clearly shows that the authorities allow for and support the existence of learner structures in schools, in agreement with the ANC's (1990:53) discussion paper on Education Policy that "Education policies will have to be developed which have the confidence of society, in which the young can participate..." The Task Team Report's (DoE 1996c: 41) also expresses the view that school managers must be familiar with and be able to understand what it means to manage under democratic "fully participative conditions". The *Guides* further maintain that the RCL is to provide learners with an opportunity to participate in school governance and to participate in appropriate decision making. This sounds positive and appropriate, especially if there is proper

and constant consultation between them and other stakeholders within the school governing structures.

Reading from the point of view of the learner, these messages are likely to make learners feel that their long-sought objectives of having true representation in the education system are slowly being realised.

However, it is possible to argue that the picture is misleading because inside, where the crux of the participation is discussed, there are many loopholes, and the encouraging appreciative tone is not maintained.

Among the requirements set out in the *Guides* is that “the principal cannot morally or legally hand over the management of the school to anyone; he or she cannot give his or her powers to the learners” (DoE 1999d: 12). Granted that this ‘warning’ is framed within a context of on-going conflict between learners and school authorities, the statement nevertheless sounds defensive and positions learners as potential trouble-makers, ready to exploit every opportunity to seize power from the SMTs or principals. The *Guides* further caution that

An RCL must remember that the relationship between educators and their employers (the provincial Department of Education) is governed by Labour Law and that they have no direct influence on labour processes and matters.

This point is also open to ‘oppositional’ reading. The document falls back on the force of the law of the land, leaving little room for negotiation. Again the effect can be argued to be one of setting learners up as potential threats to order, this in the absence of clear legislation on learners’ participation. This cautionary tone is sustained by points such as “The amount of authority or responsibility to be assumed by an RCL must be understood clearly...” and “An RCL should not interfere unlawfully with the administration of a school.” The degree of anxiety (on the part of the DoE) is tangible, and does little to encourage a spirit of cooperation, joint decision-making and working together; indeed, it can be said to do the opposite. One also senses the uncertainty of the DoE in warnings such as “the RCLs must normally act in accordance with the school authorities” (DoE 1999d: 12). When can/should/must the RCLs **not** act in accordance with “school authorities”, one might ask? The DoE sense that it is on slippery ground here, and tries to hedge its bets. In

light of previous claims, and the powerful image on the cover, these statements appear contradictory. The document sends out mixed messages.

It seems, therefore, that the *Guides* were perhaps carelessly written, and perhaps not handed over to a broader readership (such as academics) as part of a process of deliberate scrutiny.

One could then argue that, under these circumstances, learner participation in governance will of course be minimal and conditional. It is even possible to argue that a way to 'monopolise' power is somehow being perpetuated, probably in contrast with the ideals upon which learner participation was conceived. The voices of the learners in the *Guides* are given little room, a move one could see as one where the authorities think of themselves as being generous to the learners by allowing them to participate in governance. Therefore the fact that learners do have a say in matters concerning their education could be for somebody else's convenience rather than the learners themselves.

The tone of the *Guides* thus positions learners as potential opponents who are not to be trusted. The educative and democratic potential of the *Guides* is thus threatened by an apparent lack of trust, and without trust there can be no partners, which is what learners are in the new dispensation in South Africa.

What the *Guides* highlights is that the challenge of democratising the education system in its entirety is by no means an easy one to tackle. It is perhaps too much to expect school administrators to suddenly see themselves governing schools in partnership with learners, more so if there are loopholes in the very *Guides* that give learners stakeholder status. It can also not be taken for granted that the learners, who by law are considered minors, could easily assume the role of being responsible partners with the adult school governors and managers, which it is probably why their participation is 'restricted'. Also, the schools are statutory organisations, thereby implying legal implications in some instances when certain duties are performed, which could well be why they are seemingly 'protected' from assuming fully participant roles on paper, more especially because they are not permanent groups who would occupy positions for longer periods.

In summary, the *Guides* as a package do not seem to be addressing the learners' quest for unquestionable stakeholder status, especially if the very first function (according to the *Guides*) of the RCL is to act as an instrument for liaison and communication. Its functions are to communicate to learners the messages of school administrators. It seems like there is not much flexibility on the part of the professional management and the SGB as this quotation from the *Guides* shows: "...the principal must explain reasons for decisions taken, to the RCL, who in turn must inform its constituency" (DoE 1999d: 14). This suggests that once a decision is made it is going to be implemented, even without the consent of the RCL. It is difficult to see how learners can own deeds committed by their members as a result of claiming stakeholder status if the *Guides* are not to their satisfaction.

If the *Guides* are meant to promote orderliness, a sense of community and to establish conditions conducive to teaching, learning, managing and governing environments then they need to be reviewed. Participatory democracy is likely to be undermined if learner involvement in school governance is limited in this way. The *Guides* are generally shallow in their recognition of learner rights and are not a true reflection of what it means to educate learners through participation.

As a general comment therefore, the *Guides* could be edited to reflect a more positive and inclusive attitude, not only for the betterment of policies on paper, but also as a measure of trying to curb the consistent disruptions in schools caused by learners who want their voices heard by the authorities.

What the *Guides* do manage to convey is a calming sense of 'normality', which is perhaps misleading. I return to this point in the last chapter.

2.7 LEARNER PARTICIPATION EXPLORED

2.7.1 IMPLICATIONS OF THE PARTICIPATION

What in essence does learner participation in school governance imply?

As per the recommendations of such significant documents as the Task Team Report of 1996 and the ANC's *A Policy Framework for Education and Training* of 1994 the prevailing conditions were planned in advance.

In order for South Africa to develop systemic capacity to manage schools better, education departments, the proposed national institute and provincial centres should take concrete steps to promote understanding and support of the new vision of schooling. This is the baseline for change, and "leaders at all levels of the system must assist others to understand the intention of recent policy and legislation". Also, this understanding "must start with school governing bodies, school management teams and district officials" (DoE 1996c: 34).

Coupled with that was the notion that:

Governance at all levels of the integrated national system of education and training will maximise democratic participation of stakeholders, including the broader community, and will be orientated towards equity, effectiveness, efficiency, accountability and the sharing of responsibility (ANC 1994:22).

Looking at happenings in education over the years Hartshorne (1999: 89) contends, "The education system is not a machine that can be overhauled, but a living organism which grows out of its earlier incarnations". There could be ways and means of always keeping in check the strengths and weaknesses and working on of each 'reborn organism' (the education system). The recommendations by the Task Team and planning by the ANC illustrate a view that with favourable conditions prevailing and good planning, schools as organisations could be successfully governed through involving more people. That learners should be included in this involvement is now beyond question.

However, different people could explore the implications of learner participation from different angles, as it could mean different things to different people. The Task Team report of 1996 seems to imply that other superiors or SMTs should teach the RCLs their duties and functions within governance. One needs to be conscious, though, of

the tendency of individuals in organisations to always guard against individuals ‘trampling on protected territory’. In his review paper, Sithole (1995:93) claims that:

Although it is the stated policy of the national ministry of education that students at secondary level, for the purpose of school governance, constitute one of the main stakeholders, how students are going to participate in school governance and over which issues is yet unresolved.

Coming across such sentiments one is again a bit surprised by the manner in which things are taken for granted by those who put policies and working conditions on paper. The concerns are raised since “because of their very nature and function, schools and the education system in general are open to divisions, dissent and protest in society” (Hartshorne 1999:8). Although democratic policies are now in place and transparency should be prevailing in organisations including schools, Hartshorne’s (1999:10) warning is still very relevant:

It is naïve to expect that politics can be kept out of education: this is true both for the politician who put it there in the first place and who sees politics in education only when it is not his or her own politics, and for the educationist who tries to act as though education exists in some kind of vacuum, untouched by the realities of the world...

A practical situation is therefore presented before everyone to see that politics are part of almost every move that involves more than one individual. A tricky task thus faces the authorities in terms of putting vision to action and in the process avoiding politicising (as in alienating others) almost everything. Of concern again would be addressing inherent behaviour of authorities i.e. to try and win over the learners at the expense of working along acceptable democratic guidelines. Again it seems like there is no easy way of divorcing politics from education as the arguments so far illustrate.

2.8 POLITICS IN EDUCATION

As has already been shown, it seems virtually impossible to keep politics out of the education system. The most important question therefore concerning this issue is: do the authorities know how to deal with those politics in education in terms of their approach to managing and governing education? Bush’s (1995:73) depiction of

political management is helpful: “Political models assume that in organizations policy and decisions emerge through a process of negotiation and bargaining. Interest groups develop and form alliances in pursuit of particular policy objectives”. The scenario depicted by Bush creates concerns over what it really means to have politics playing a role in education. Clearly, for some measures to be employed, certain groupings need to be in agreement on policy issues even if some in the organisation disagree. If policies put in place privilege some at the expense of others, some issues in education will remain open for debate, even controversial for a very long time to come.

Does more participation mean more democracy in the context of secondary school learners? For now as the roles of learners are apparently not yet clearly spelt out in the present documents in operation, the implications are that a win-win situation is being created.

2.8.1 A WIN-WIN SITUATION?

All too often after the 1994 democratic elections, there seems to be a tendency by the authorities to overlook some of the critical areas when addressing certain issues. I mean this in the wider sense of adhering to such attributes of democracy as transparency, in letting parties concerned know of their exact roles and what at the end of the day is expected of them. It could be argued that by seeming to involve learners the authorities are trying to placate them. The general perception created is that learners are not always ready to reason but to fight whoever seems to be standing between them and their aspired gains, no matter whose ‘feet’ they could be trampling on.

A win-win situation would then be created where learners feel part of the governing machine, whilst the authorities on the other hand feel that they have the measure of the learners. The learners’ contribution to the struggle, we may argue, not only for an acceptable education system for all but the greater struggle for liberation, probably earned them this participation. The theory informing learner participation in governance in South Africa so far seemingly fails to convince me that it was not

meant to 'neutralise' a force "...whose potential opposition had to be diverted" (Bush 1987:82).

2.8.2 SO WHO NEEDS A MIRROR?

Why would any of the groups involved (the authorities and the learners) need to look in the mirror concerning learner participation? The literature I have been able to peer into so far paints a picture which shows that somehow the authorities have not impartially accepted learners and their roles in governance. It is therefore yet to be proved that the participation was more than a matter of convenience for the relevant participants in school administration.

For the learners as well, it remains unclear whether they could on any day claim that their present participative status is really what they had bargained for, but at the same time it cannot be taken for granted that there is no need for them to be educated for democratic participation.

2.9 EDUCATION FOR DEMOCRATIC PARTICIPATION

For now we cannot help but assume that "youth in general and school children in particular have been the main actors in initiating either the process of resistance or the search for alternatives in education" (Cross 1992:77).

If this is the case then there is a need for democratic education. Many decades have seen generations of youth being 'taught' how to fight for the country and very little or not at all about how to reason and help build the country.

Hartshorne (1999:65)) saw this coming and remarked:

As teachers we should ask ourselves, not just what our pupils should know and be able to do, but more importantly what kind of people they need to be and become what kind of people South Africa needs now and in the future.

It goes without saying therefore that the youth of this country need to be taught to do away with always thinking about confrontation, using force and even destroying property in the process of voicing their concerns. This can never be thought of as an easy task; hence a great challenge faces not only those in power, but also every positive thinking adult. Schools should and must be used to empower them with the necessary 'armour' in order to contribute positively to the cause of democratising the country. To that effect the ANC's discussion paper on Education policy contends that democratic education "must advance the ideas of democracy, the participation of society in making decisions about the way in which resources are used and the way in which that society is governed" (ANC 1994:11). Therefore an education system embedded within a democratic framework and which strives to produce democrats could go a long way in building a credible nation.

If "education is seen as a powerful weapon that has the potential to impact on its socio-economic and political context" (Soobrayan 1990:33) then I feel vindicated in agreeing with those who stress education for democratic participation. Entrenching democracy through education would be building a responsible nation for generations to come. Soul (in Hargreaves and Fullan 1998:15) claims that the primary purpose of education is "to show individuals how they can function together in a society". *Togetherness* in South Africa can never be overemphasised because for too long the country has been operating in fragments.

One's support of such views is however not blind to the real complexities of bringing together a nation as diverse as South Africa is. Education for democratic participation therefore calls for the learner force to be encouraged to be accustomed to the notion of participatory democracy as early as possible. Education for democratic participation also aims "to develop a broader sense of community and indeed in the world at large", says Soul (in Hargreaves and Fullan 1998:42). With the country now part of the global village it can perhaps not afford to deny its future citizens the only acceptable language to the international communities – democracy.

Taking into consideration what happened during the apartheid era and what needs to happen in future, Mda and Mothata (2000: VI) argue that:

The proliferation of education policies, laws, acts and discussion documents in South Africa since 1994 mirrors the state of hope, desire and urgency to move away from a painful, divisive, destructive and self-defeating education system.

The arguments by the two writers bring forth a strong reminder that whatever the authorities are doing they should and must guard against reintroducing 'inherent contradictions' in the education system. All in all if the concept of learner participation in school governance could be developed it would contribute greatly to educating the youth on how to contribute positively to democracy now and in the future.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research is not a technical set of specialist skills but implicit in social action and close to the ways in which we act in everyday life (Shratz and Walker 1995:2).

The claim by the two writers above is in my view meant to portray research in such a way that it be seen as something that is accessible to anyone who takes the initiative. My research investigates the perceptions of the SMTs and the RCLs on the roles of the RCLs in the governance of secondary schools. My research participants involve SMTs and RCLs from five secondary schools in the Grahamstown townships of Extension Seven, Joza, and Newtown extension, otherwise known as Fingo village. This research was conducted using the interpretive approach.

3.1 RATIONALE FOR THE INTERPRETIVE APPROACH

The research is conducted within the interpretive paradigm (Cohen *et al.* 2000:22), using a qualitative approach, which according to Lincoln and Guba (in Creswell 1994:4) “is termed the constructivist approach...” Through this approach, the world of participants is left to themselves to describe without the researcher imposing any of his or her views. Such a researcher is aware of Mwiria and Wamahiu’s (1995:116) views that

People possess a unique quality, *consciousness* that is not possessed by natural objects including other animals. Consciousness enables humans not only to *transcend* their natural surroundings, but also to actively *construct* social reality.

There is more than one definition of what a research paradigm is, as shown by Birley and Moreland (1998:30), who claim that; “A paradigm is a theoretical model within which the research is being conducted, and organizes the researcher’s view of reality (though they may not be aware of it)”. This is in line with Bassey’s (1999:38) claim that

A research paradigm is a network of coherent ideas about the nature of the world and of the functions of researchers, which, adhered to by a

group of researchers, conditions the patterns of their thinking and underpins their research actions.

Therefore, going through this research, I took cognisance of the fact that those involved (research participants) are in the best position to describe their own situation(s). With reference to this approach Bassey (1999:43) goes on to argue that:

Data collected by interpretive researchers are usually richer, in a language sense, than positivist data and because of this quality, the methodology of the interpretive researchers is described as 'qualitative'.

In joining this band of like-minded thinkers, I agree with Bassey (*ibid*) that:

The interpretive researcher cannot accept the idea of there being a reality 'out there' which exists irrespective of people, for reality is seen as a construct of the human mind. People perceive and so construe the world in ways, which are often similar, but not necessarily the same. So there can be different understandings of what is real.

'Getting inside' the two groups, the SMTs and the RCLs, helped me to get a better picture of what was really happening inside schools as organisations. This is by no means meant to imply that the researcher compromised the stance of letting them do the talking, in terms of describing their own surroundings, and then working with whatever data comes his way. This is informed by Stake's (1995:44) contention that, "For all their intrusion into habitats and personal affairs, qualitative researchers are non-interventionist. They try to see what would have happened had they not been there". Based on the deliberations of the different qualitative commentators and practitioners, this chapter characterises the entire research process, the methodology and the range of approaches used to gather data for analysis and interpretation. This is done in order to understand and explain the dynamics of the governance of township secondary schools, with particular focus on the perceptions of the roles of the RCLs in school governance.

Many writers, among them Lincoln and Guba (1985), Cohen and Manion (1994), Cohen *et al.* (1995), Bassey (1999), Berg (1998), Wilkinson (2000), have in my view

accurately highlighted the appropriateness of adopting an interpretive framework in research practices that reflect on descriptions and explanations of people's problems and situations. The reasoning behind employing this paradigm and approach is further propelled by the historical events that preceded the present scenario of democratic practices expected of school governance. In line with Mouton's (2001:114) definition, that a research design is the "...design and methodology followed in your study in order to investigate the problem as formulated..." the background outlined in the previous chapters prepares the ground for an approach of this nature.

This research journey is taken with much care and heeding of Walker's (1985:78) suggestion that "negotiation' is important at most stages of the research process". Obviously whenever one is permitted to join a certain group or groups as an 'outsider' (researcher), it is vitally important to avoid taking anything for granted. For me this has been the case because of many reasons, among which is the age gap and levels of operation among my research participants. The unfolding of the research problem in chapter one has convinced me that democracy is an unfinished revolution and as such an investigation of this nature is necessary in order to discover whether there are people who are committed to embedding it (democracy) in all social practices in order to care for the freedoms, safety, humanity, dignity and so on of others.

By its very conception, my study seeks to understand as opposed to generalising about or proving anything. I therefore argue that it fits well within this paradigm, which by its very nature sets out to describe, interpret and explain the manner in which participants make sense of situations and the way meanings are reflected in their actions. To this end, in trying to project the successes as against the failures of this paradigm, Schostak (2002:5) maintains, "...no matter how intensively one observes from a distance or close up, to understand the lives of the people who dwell in the houses and walk streets, contact has to be made". Therefore as a way of getting settled and working with the hope that getting a little 'under the surface' in order to uncover the world of participants, I chose the interpretive research paradigm. The fieldwork was done in five schools with SMTs and RCLs where the perceptions of the roles of the RCLs in governance were investigated. According to Mouton (2001:98)

The term “fieldwork” is also sometimes used to refer to the “doing” stage of research, presumably to signify that you have left your study or the library and entered the field, whether it is a laboratory, a natural setting, an archive or whatever is dictated by the research design.

With both historical and natural human conduct characterising my research participants I am bound to agree with Birley and Moreland (1998:41) when they say, “Any method must produce data that is relevant to the research question(s) and be able to provide answers or illumination on the topic”. Also on the use of the term fieldwork, which ordinarily would refer to things other than those that have something to do with research, Schwandt (1997:54) says the term

... refers to all those activities that one engages in while in the field; including watching, listening, conversing, recording, interpreting, dealing with logistics, facing ethical and political dilemmas and so on.

I think it is appropriate that Schwandt goes as far as mentioning ‘facing ethical and political dilemmas’, because on many occasions I had to face some of these challenges. These are discussed later in this chapter.

3.2 GATHERING DATA

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, more than one method was used to collect data. With research, says Creswell (1994:4-6)

Multiple realities exist in any given situation: the researcher, those individuals being investigated, and the reader/audience interpreting the study...the qualitative researcher needs to report faithfully these realities and to rely on the voices and interpretations of informants.

Creswell’s views help bring forth the realities involved in the research process, i.e. that it is never a one-dimensional, but a multipronged exercise meant to reveal whatever is concealed as far as the researcher is concerned. I used questionnaires and open-ended interviews as data collection tools, and in so doing I was basically trying to answer Guba’s (in Halpin & Troyna 1994:77) third fundamental research question; the other two have been addressed:

- * What is there that can be known – what is knowable? (*Ontological question*)
- * What is knowledge and what is the relationship of the knower to the known? (*Epistemological question*)
- * How do we find things out? (*Methodological question*)

The brief discourse analysis in the previous chapter serves as a third source of data to illuminate my findings.

3.3 THE RESEARCH TECHNIQUES

3.3.1 QUESTIONNAIRES

According to Walker (1985:91):

Questionnaires may be considered as a formalized and stylized interview or interview by proxy. The form is the same as it would be in a face-to-face interview, but in order to remove the interviewer the subject is presented with what essentially is a structured transcript with the responses missing.

The SMT questionnaires' (Appendix A) first section sought their biographical details, concerning teaching experience, period of their serving in the SMTs and so on. The middle section looked at their involving the RCLs in governance, working relations with the RCLs and their schools' code of conduct; the last section looked at the RCL accountability and how they as SMTs dealt with crisis situations involving learners and or RCLs.

The number of schools and more significantly the number of participants in my research required that I include questionnaires among the techniques, and also, because "change is viewed differently...and therefore calls up a range of responses" (Morrison cited in James and Connolly 2000:19). The questionnaires helped me decide on whom to choose for the interviews, both from the RCLs and SMTs. There were no a strict criteria for selection except to say that with the SMTs, I was looking to have (out of five) a principal, a deputy principal, and HODs. With RCLs I needed

to interview (out of five) a president, a deputy, secretary, treasurer and an additional member. The questionnaires also served as another stage of data collection.

A total of thirty questionnaires were administered to five secondary school SMTs in the Grahamstown townships, otherwise known as Rini. From the very onset I could sense that not all of the questionnaires would be completed and returned, mostly because the very gatekeepers (principals) with whom they were left, took, on average, three to four days to distribute them to the relevant people, the rest of the SMT members. There were two schools in particular which took about a whole week and a half to distribute them, and it was never an easy task to always enquire after them. In the first school, the principal always had a politely convincing answer pertaining to the reasons for not handing the questionnaires to his colleagues. Fortunately one of the deputy principals in the school came to my rescue and took it upon himself to distribute them, after hearing about my predicament, but I then had to make a whole new set of copies available.

The second principal told me that only he and one HOD were readily available to fill in the questionnaires (out of five SMT members in their school), as the others were not interested. Acting on advice by the consenting HOD I took it upon myself to personally hand (after much convincing) the questionnaires to the members concerned. This was not without its own problems because I did not know how the principal would respond: interestingly he was later among those who never returned their completed questionnaires. One HOD also was adamant that she was 'too busy' with schoolwork, and so would not manage to make time to complete it. Ultimately I managed to collect nineteen completed questionnaires from the five schools, ten HODs, six deputy principals, and three principals managed to complete them.

With the RCL questionnaires (Appendix B) there were no major problems concerning distribution, because I made use of teacher liaison officers (TLOs), in schools that have them, who liaise between the RCLs, SMTs and other staff members. I had to check the dates and times on which they would be made available to fill them in, as I had to be present. Twenty questionnaires were distributed to five RCL executive committees from different secondary schools, and fourteen completed ones were

returned. The RCL executive members i.e. the presidents, deputies, secretaries and treasurers filled in the questionnaires.

The questions asked were divided into: period in their schools, how RCLs are put in place, how they work, codes of conducts, their stakeholder status with reference to participation in general school governance and in decision making processes, their roles, working relations, RCL/SMT meetings, suggestions concerning the manner in which the authorities deal with learners or RCL issues. As with any questionnaires administered with the hope of, firstly, getting them back on time and possibly the whole total number given out, I patiently followed the necessary measures of always enquiring about when I could come and complete the process, and in the end it paid off. This is where I learned to understand the realities of research and to take into account Mouton's (2001:65) suggestion that as a researcher "be flexible at all times and make changes to the project timetable if required. Don't become a victim of your own plan. Remember that a plan is just a tool to help you reach your goal".

The questionnaires for both sets of respondents are attached as appendices at the back of this thesis.

3.3.3 OPEN-ENDED INTERVIEWS

According to Patton cited in Arksey and Knight (1999:32)

The purpose of interviewing is to find out what is in and on a person's mind...to access the perspective of the person being interviewed ...to find out from them things that we cannot directly observe.

Kvale (1996) cited in Cohen *et al* (2000:267) says that, "an interview is an interchange of views between two or more people on a topic of mutual interest".

Because of the nature of the interviewees open-ended interview questions were employed. Also because, as Hurst (in Powney & Watts 1987:16) claims, "interviewing is somewhat like catching rain in a bucket for later display. What you end up with is water, which is only a little like rain", I had to resort to a structure that would allow for flexibility. For purposes of comfort and a relaxed environment I

always made sure that with the RCLs there was a second person with every interviewee, be it a fellow member or a close friend. This is because Cohen *et al.* (2000:270) argue that “for personalised information about how individuals view the world ... one veers towards qualitative, open-ended unstructured interviewing.”

I interviewed five SMT members, one principal, one deputy principal, and three HODs in their respective schools. Eight RCL members were interviewed: two presidents, with the third one accompanying his secretary, two secretaries, two treasurers and one additional member. Only one could fully express herself in English and was therefore interviewed in that language; all the others spoke Xhosa. It was agreed beforehand with all the interviewees that the interviews would be tape-recorded and transcribed later, and that was the case with all of them.

The interview schedules are attached as Appendices C and D respectively

3.3.4 INTERVIEWS WITH THE SMTs

The use of open-ended interview questions with SMTs produced both expected and unexpected views. I am saying this because as a teacher myself, working in a school where there is a SMT which is also part of my research, I was awakened to the reality that even something that is sometimes regarded as common sense by others from a distance, may seem significant for those involved.

In the process of trying to delve more deeply into the social setting of the SMTs as a way of gaining access to both the ontological and epistemological aspects of their views I came to agree with many writers concerning their views on common sense. These writers include researchers such as Neuman (2000:73) who claims that the interactive approach says that common sense is a vital source of information for understanding people. Neuman's views remind me that initially I took it as common sense that it could not be very difficult for them to talk about SMT/RCL activities and/or problems. During the interviewing process, however, I discovered that the SMT members sometimes found it difficult to explain working relations when responding to specific questions, and one member even stated, “I do not know whether they want to be kids or that guidance teachers need to be brought in”. Their

body language was contrary to what I had expected in terms of the seriousness with which they perceived RCL roles. It is therefore these types of interviews which revealed their real concerns and views on the involvement of learners in school governance.

3.3.5 INTERVIEWING THE RCLs

From the onset I must admit that interviewing this group posed some unique challenges, mainly because the majority of them were adolescents, and according to Keats (2000:101) “Adolescence is a stage of development rather than a specific age range.” Hence I am not about to say anything about their ages in trying to make my point. On many occasions when interviewing this group I was almost always caught in the middle in terms of whether to treat them as ‘minors’ or stakeholders because of the manner in which some conducted themselves. Here I am referring to, firstly, the language I had to use or avoid using as a way of making sure that each interview progressed at an acceptable pace, that of the interviewee. This was the case because the interviewer must pace the questioning to suit the pace of the respondent (Keats 2000:63).

My interviewing skills were tested to the limit during these interviews, because with some of them some responses were a simple “Yes” or “No” or even a simple shaking or nodding of a head. Keats (2000:105) argues, “...adolescents do not want to be treated as children”, but she goes on to say that

It will appear that in some situations they may behave as children or as if they would like the security of childhood. This behaviour may manifest itself in the course of the interview if the questions become threatening.

It is at this stage that the researcher in me got a little worried about the validity of data such an interview was likely to produce. Keats (2000:107) however goes on to suggest “A change of questioning style will then be needed to restore their sense of self-worth and acceptance”, which I did with some success.

Though I cannot claim to be an exceptional interviewer my personality, character and ability to adjust to different situations were stretched and hence I managed to obtain rich data from them. Overall it was an experience that will stay with me for a long time, through which I will remember my ‘infant stages’ in the field of research.

3.4 DATA ANALYSIS

According to Taylor & Bogdan (1998:141)

Data analysis is a dynamic and creative process. Throughout analysis, researchers attempt to gain a deeper understanding of what they have studied and to continually refine their interpretations. Researchers also draw on their first hand experience with settings, informants or documents to interpret data.

It is at this stage that I realised the truth in Arksey and Knights’ (1999:49) words that “data analysis is difficult and can take the novice and the more experienced researcher as well longer than expected.” This was the case when I had to decide whether to firstly present the data in one chapter and then analyse and discuss it later or do all of it in one chapter. In fact I did start presenting it but could not resist the temptation of discussing and analysing it, hence I later, in consultation with my supervisor, decided to opt for the latter of the two ways. With reference to analysis, Robson (1993:305-6) claims:

Analysis is necessary because generally speaking, data in their raw form do not speak for themselves. The messages stay hidden and need careful teasing out. The process and products of analysis provide the basis for interpretation.

Taking into account the nature and goals of my research study, as well as the methods used in the collection of data, the data were also analysed and discussed in a triangulated form. Justifying the use of triangulation, Robson (1993:383) argues:

Triangulation is an indispensable tool in real world enquiry. It is particularly valuable in the analysis of qualitative data where the trustworthiness of the data is always a worry. It provides a means of testing one source of information against other sources...if two sources

give the same messages then, to some extent, they cross-validate each other.

Throughout the process of presentation, discussion and analysis the different sets of data were made to 'talk' to each other. This was the case because qualitative research "implies a direct concern with experience as it is 'lived' or 'felt' or undergone" (Sherman and Webb cited in Merriam 2001:06). These writers depict the practical situation I was faced with in terms of asking the SMT and RCL members to describe their day-to-day activities, how they felt about these and the processes they undergo in the governance of schools. The responses by both groups to the questionnaires and the interviews, coupled with the contents of relevant documents, necessitated that analysis be done bearing in mind that "qualitative research can reveal how all the parts work together to form a whole" (Merriam 2001:6). The 'parts' in this case are the research techniques and the 'whole' refers to the findings. In justifying my use of triangulation both in data collection and analysis I present the following example:

Responding to the questionnaires, the majority of the RCL respondents claimed to have their own codes of conduct, but during the interviews, it emerged that only one out of the five RCLs actually has one. On the other hand the RCL *Guides* of 1999 (DoE 1999d: 11) state that "an RCL participates in developing a code of conduct for learners". Stressing the fact that there was no code of conduct of theirs in operation in their school, one respondent during the interviews recalled that, having finished filling in her questionnaire, and failing to understand what a code was, she went to ask her class teacher what it was.

My contention therefore is that this is a typical example of a case where "each approach is regarded as providing its own perspective on the issue" (Keats 2000:63). The competing perspectives are then brought to the fore during analysis, more so if it is done against the background of having used more than one technique during data collection.

3.5 THE INTERPRETIVE PARADIGM CRITIQUED

I may have opted for the interpretive paradigm for various reasons; some of which have already been brought to the fore and discussed at length, but that does not mean that I blindly follow whatever is interpretive and/or qualitative. Adopting and working within the interpretive paradigm does not in any way suggest that I am not aware of the criticisms levelled at it. Among those criticising it is Walker (1985:88) who argues that; “Qualitative methods, it is said, are subjective, unreliable, unsystematic, lack adequate checks on their validity and are generally speaking, unscientific”.

This may be a bit strong, but in a way it does bring to the fore the view that there is no one best method for conducting research. Relevance, applicability to research sites and other aspects were taken into consideration before it was decided that this research be embedded in this paradigm.

In the following sections I attempt to address the criticisms usually levelled at qualitative research.

3.6 METHODOLOGICAL TRIANGULATION

Within the mentioned paradigm the “methodological triangulation” (Mason 1996:25) in Silverman (2000: 98) was used to collect data. Arksey and Knight (1999:21) say “the basic idea of triangulation is that data are obtained from a single wide range of different and multiple sources, using a variety of methods, investigators, or theories”. It is also Cohen *et al.*’s (2000:115) view that “multiple methods are suitable where a controversial aspect of education needs to be evaluated fully”, that more than one method was used in this research. I viewed the issue at hand as controversial for obvious reasons, many of which are dealt with heavily in the first two chapters, and more importantly in the analysis and discussion of data.

With more than one method used to collect data, I was awakened to the realities of secondary school governance. Discussing triangulation in data collection Arksey and Knight (1999:21) respectively quoting Denzin (1970) and Jick (1983) claim that:

“triangulation is not an end in itself...In effect, triangulation serves two main purposes; *confirmation* and *completeness*”. In trying to avoid taking anything for granted and to let those employing it in their research projects exercise flexibility and open mindedness, Arksey and Knight (*ibid.*) go on to clarify that:

When the approach is used for confirmation purposes the individual strengths, weaknesses and biases of the various methods must, first, be known and, secondly applied in such a way that they counterbalance each other.

I would like to think that when deciding to use triangulation from the very beginning, it was my aim to try and make the sets of data gathered ‘talk’ to each other. Looking back I have been able to do that through different methods. This was done following Arksey and Knight’s (1999:22) claim that:

Approaching research questions from different angles and bringing together a range of views has the potential to generate new and alternative explanations, ones that better capture the social complexity that the fieldwork explores.

Citing the two writers’ views on my part is taking into account the fact that my research participants are SMTs and RCLs, naturally meaning that these groups are from different levels in terms of their operations and constituents. However, true to the nature of research processes, triangulation is not without its own difficulties, as Schostak (2002:79) observes:

Triangulation is not a magic solution to the problems of assuring validity, truth, generalization, and objectivity. However, it does provide a means of exploring what is at stake for individuals when they try to coordinate actions in relation to a material and symbolic world of others.

The research techniques used in this study are questionnaires and interviews, and (to a small extent) discourse analysis. In settling for the three mentioned techniques, I was following Berg’s (1998:7) contention that:

Qualitative research properly seeks answers to questions by examining various social settings and the individuals who inhabit these settings. Qualitative researchers, then, are most interested in how humans arrange themselves and their settings and inhabitants of these settings make sense of their surroundings through symbols, rituals, social structures, social roles and so forth.

With what has been said by Berg concerning data collection, I was convinced that doing research through these three methods was doing justice not only to the research participants but also to the ‘richness’ of the data. By richness I mean the likelihood of methods “yielding the most appropriate information” (Birley and Moreland 1998:43). These two writers enhance this argument by pointing out that:

The central point of triangulation is to examine the research topic or focus from a number of different vantage points, though this should not blind the researcher to differences between sets of data that such vantage points provide.

3.7 SOME KEY ISSUES IN INTERPRETIVE RESEARCH

Any form of research carries with it some issues that are considered to be as significant as the paradigm itself. The issues concerned include objectivity, ethical issues, reliability and validity. With my kind of research participants these were bound to play a significant role.

3.7.1 OBJECTIVITY

Scott (2000:16) argues that objectivity “may be used to indicate that a description of the world about which a claim of validity is made is accurate...the word itself has become a synonym for ‘truth’”. As a matter of principle it is important that, in the process of conducting research, one enters any situation with an open mind as opposed to going in with preconceived ideas of what exactly is happening inside. As with other issues, there is no guarantee that trying to be objective about certain things in research is without its challenges. Sadler (in Eisner & Peshkin 1990:33) argues that:

Qualitative researchers are likely to be unduly influenced by positive instances, and not so sensitive to the significance of negative instances, they are likely to be unduly influenced or “anchored” by experiences undergone early in research and so on.

For any researcher to continuously purge such ‘hogs’ in his or her research journey would require of them to always try to ‘balance’ the scales in terms of what the research at hand reveals. Eisner & Peshkin (*ibid*) go on to suggest that:

To achieve objectivity within a paradigm, then, the researcher has to ensure that his/her work is free from these problems (mentioned by Sadler), and again the presence of a critical tradition is the best safeguard.

This research does not claim to follow a ‘critical tradition’, but I have tried to be as open and critical of the findings as possible.

3.7.2 ETHICS IN QUALITATIVE RESEARCH

Shwandt (1997:4) explains, “The ethics of qualitative inquiry...are concerned with the ethical principles and obligations governing conduct in the field and writing up accounts of fieldwork”. As with any other researcher, I was confronted with having to take almost everything into consideration when conducting this research, more so because I was faced with different groups of minors (RCLs) and adults (SMTs). Scott and Usher (1996:69) argue that:

Gathering information bestows certain obligations on the gatherer and yet they are motivated by conflicting impulses. Their account needs to be credible: that is, it must reflect, refer to, or in some sense illustrate what is happening or has happened, and yet fieldwork is a social activity, which demands a level of trust between the researcher and the researched.

As one would come to expect, at times these impulses conflict as the argument has shown this far. Stressing the significance of these issues in research, Schostak (2002:8) argues that:

In carrying out a project – interviewing, observing, writing up analysis, views, argument – there is inevitably some intervention in the life of another and with it both an ethics and a politics is projected having implications for how subjects and objects are valued, opportunities framed and resources allocated.

Barbia (in Berg 1998:31) interestingly points out “all of us consider ourselves ethical, not perfect perhaps, but more ethical than most of humanity”.

Concerning the ethics of research therefore and the sensitivity with which this topic comes, as illustrated in chapter one, I would claim that I did have the ‘consent contract’ with my research participants. Though they did not sign any forms, we agreed in principle that I would always try to be sensitive in my approach at all levels, in terms of anonymity and confidentiality, and that the research was only for academic purposes and nothing else.

3.7.3 RELIABILITY

Hammersley (in Silverman 2000:175) claims that, “Reliability refers to the degree of consistency with which instances are assigned to the same category by different observers or the same observer on different occasions”. Also Wilkinson (2000:38) claims that it “refers to matters such as the consistency of a measure – for example, the likelihood of the same results being obtained if the procedures were repeated”, and Birley and Moreland (1998:43) “The extent to which a test would give consistent results if applied more than once to the same people under standard conditions”.

As a measure of trying to achieve reliability in my research, I piloted both the questionnaires and the interviews. The exercise of piloting also helped contribute to my belief that I surely was on the right track in terms of the questions asked. The ‘right track’ in this instance is the resultant ‘near’ consistency with which the respondents responded to the questions posed to them. Lincoln and Guba (1985:298) argue, “The key concepts undergirding the conventional definition of reliability are those of stability, consistency and predictability”. Therefore in trying to avoid following ‘attractive’ trends/views that would lead to me falling into the trap of

developing another research project within my study, I stuck to always checking the responses against the research questions and goals.

3.7.4 VALIDITY

According to Shwandt (1997:168) validity refers to phenomena that are “sound, cogent, well grounded, justifiable or logically correct.” Birley and Moreland (1998:42) argue that

Ensuring validity can be achieved in a number of ways, one of which is to carry out an initial investigation (a pilot study) using any intended data collecting instrument to check the authenticity and relevance of data produced.

What the two writers are saying is in line with what I did with my questionnaires and interviews concerning piloting. Making their views clearer the two writers go on to say that “alternatively a panel of experts can be used to assess that the planned instrument really does measure what it is supposed to be measuring”. In Wilkinson’s (2000:38) words; “validity relates broadly to the extent to which the measure achieves its aim, i.e. the extent to which an instrument measures what it claims to measure, or tests what it is intended to test”. The very conception of involving more than one school in my research, with a total of fifty questionnaires respectively administered to SMTs and RCLs, and thirty-three having been completed and returned and also conducting interviews with more than twelve respondents was on its own a kind of cross validation, because mainly, their responses were always compared with the contents of the existing departmental policies. Therefore this was on its own a measure of trying to ‘validate’ whatever came out as data from the participants.

Having opted for the interpretive paradigm and research methods, I agree with Schwandt’s (*Ibid.*) views on the use of triangulation as another means to put validity to the test by using two terms, ‘true’ and ‘certain’. He says that “true” means that the findings accurately represent the phenomena to which they refer, and “certain” means that the findings are backed by evidence or warranted, and there are no good grounds for doubting the findings or the evidence, for the findings in question are stronger than the evidence for alternative findings.

Perhaps the most significant understanding of validity comes from Cantrell (1993) and Guba & Lincoln (1985), who view validity as the extent to which findings emerge from the data, and nowhere else – not whether other researchers would produce the same findings, but whether a reader would agree that one's findings accurately reflect the data, which I want to believe is the case with my data.

In chapter four I analyse and discuss the data collected.

CHAPTER FOUR

DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

In this chapter I present the data and discuss my findings. The data are arranged in themes, which emerged as issues as my familiarity with the data developed through repeated readings. The data are drawn chiefly from the interviews. Data from the questionnaires are included where appropriate. References to relevant documentation and literature complete my attempt at triangulating findings.

4.1 LEARNERS: CHILDREN OR PARTNERS?

4.1.1 LEARNER RECOGNITION

A change in understanding, which is of basic importance, does not of itself, however, mean a change in the concrete (Freire 1999:26).

One of the key concerns emerging from the data is the problem of learners' recognition by the SMTs when it comes to their roles in school governance. Some of the responses depict an ambivalent attitude to the kind of recognition given to the RCLs as the following quote from an SMT member shows:

H1: ...it is difficult to handle working with children, especially because we could not discuss things on the same level.

RCL members are referred to as 'children' and as not operating 'on the same level'. The respondent clearly regards the idea of involving learners in management matters as problematic. Yet by law they should be recognised contributors to the democratisation of schools (SASA 1996), and in the process stereotypical views or attitudes should be done away with. It is clearly difficult for adult educators to regard young adult learners as management partners. Hemmati's (2002:11) contention that "trust-building and overcoming stereotypical perceptions are among the first important steps" thus becomes a particular challenge. When talking democracy, people just cannot afford to ignore the roles schools could and should be allowed to play, as Goodlad *et al* (1997:22) cautions; "if schools are the neglected forges of our future, they are also the abandoned workshops of our democracy."

Having gone through the background on learner activities and struggles to have their representative organs recognised, it is not difficult to see that they have been able to 'legitimately' acquire power for themselves. After the 1994 democratic elections in the country, the majority of South Africans including the government generally welcomed the notion of learner participation in the governance of educational institutions. This was acknowledged in the form of the South African Schools Act (SASA) of 1996.

The RCL members interviewed are also concerned about RCL recognition in school governance:

SEC.1...The learners' problems should be addressed in a welcomed manner, with student structures given enough recognition.

The concerns raised by this RCL secretary raise questions as to whether the SMT members tell or discuss issues with RCLs. The following responses depict the picture I am trying to paint, that of them attaining stakeholder status and being doubted by the people who daily work with them, the SMTs. The respondents were responding to questions pertaining to RCL roles in school governance:

H. 2. ... The only thing I know is that they are represented in the SGB (School Governing Body), by two or three students that are expected to go back and report to the whole students' forum. Secondly, what I know is that even if they are involved I have never seen them involved in the employment of teachers. In those meetings there are financial statements, so they know about anything that is being discussed because they are part and parcel of the SGB.

One deputy principal reiterates:

D.1. ...They are seen by the law as minors, for instance even if we have got some committees and we want to put up a tender they can't come into that subcommittee, because if there are legal implications there could be problems, and in the appointment of teachers they are not there but when we report to the SGB they are there.

And one principal responds:

P.1. Like... one other thing ...er... even today I think it is the responsibility of every school to workshop students about their roles.

These responses show that the SMTs do not hold the same views pertaining to RCL roles in school governance, and that may well mean that RCL recognition may be a mythical issue, especially if one takes into account the fact that these were views from people who come from different schools. It is also very interesting to notice that others chose not to answer the question directly, as the principal's response shows. Of the five SMT members interviewed only one seemed to know that the learners are considered minors by the laws of the country, leading to one questioning whether the documents in operation make it any easier for the learners to claim their 'rightful' place in governance.

The SASA of 1996 does not say much about the extent to which the RCLs must be involved, which in my view is where some of the vagueness starts. The Education White Paper-2 (DoE 1996e: 13) is a little clearer:

It would not be appropriate for learner representatives to participate in discussions concerning the contracts or performance of currently employed staff members, but they should be encouraged to participate in discussions on policy matters affecting the teaching staff and learners respectively, and relations between staff and the body of learners.

The participation by learners in the governance of secondary schools has many unanswered questions pertaining to their roles and the extent thereof. It is doubtful that such participation is what Mortgetson (in Morrow 1989:104) views as:

Participation by persons in the making of decisions which affect them and the idea that to take up 'fully participant attitudes' towards someone is necessarily to recognise his right and give him the opportunity to participate in decisions which affect him.

This quotation probably refers to management generally, but in a way it does set the framework for learner participation, because along the way some decisions would undoubtedly affect them directly.

The RCL members themselves show that they doubt whether they are recognised in the manner that they would like to be, as the following responses demonstrate. They

are responding to a question relating to their involvement in very important decision making processes or meetings:

Pres.1 Sometimes we are involved...

Pres.2 Yes they tell us...

Taking into account the fact that the respondents quoted are presidents in their respective RCLs, it is becoming clear that RCL roles in governance are not clearly understood. With the RCLs having acquired stakeholder status, it begs questions as to why it should be deemed less important always to involve them bilaterally with SMTs. The fact they are only 'sometimes' involved indicates limited participation.

It is also ironic that the RCLs are sometimes 'caught in the middle' because they are sometimes seen as leaving the learners they are leading in the lurch. The following views show this:

Pres.2 It happens that if a learner does something wrong, like jumping over the gate when it is locked, gets suspended without them being referred to us (the RCL), and that is where our problem lies.

This is a clear indication of one who does not know exactly where he fits into the whole process of having a say in how things should be done in the school. Also the problem of being seen as 'sell-outs' by some learners among the group they lead bothers them:

P.3 ... sometimes we are caught in the middle, for example the issue of learners smoking at school. They know that it is not allowed, and we address them on that, and all of a sudden they see us as being on the side of the teachers.

One HOD observes:

H.3 Other learners would have a feeling that the educators are moulding the learners so that they can 'toe their own line'

One of the RCL presidents claims that in his school:

P.2 Even the students do not come to lodge their complaints with us.

So far the manner in which the RCLs were included in school governance and as such in decision making, lacks depth and proves Conway (1984, in Murphy & Louis 1999:7) correct when he claims that: “The faith put in such approaches (participative decision making) was not supported by research, yet [we should be] calling for better research rather than their rejection”. It is therefore not difficult to see why there will almost always be ‘problems’ with involving learners in governance. Having said that, Hemmati’s (2002:40) suggestion to ‘problems’ like these is that “all stakeholders as partners together define the problems, design possible solutions, collaborate to implement them and monitor and evaluate the outcome”.

If the RCLs experience such problems as seeing that their very constituents are not very sure of how to go about dealing with their representatives, it now becomes appropriate to look at the reasons for learners to get involved with the RCL.

4.1.2 WHY JOIN THE RCL?

Do those in the RCLs know why they are there? This question is asked in terms of their duties and functions, their observations and possible knowledge of how RCLs function. The reasons for joining the RCL vary from one individual to the other, but the most prominent of all seems to be the performance and reviewing of previous RCLs, as the following quotes from respondents demonstrate:

The first president:

P.1 The RCL from last year...they had a few people they were sure were going to be chosen for this year...I think what happened is that I stood up for what I believed in, I was kind of talking a lot. If somebody I didn’t believe in was appointed, I made it a point that that person was brought down again. By doing that some students were kind of looking at me, seeing that I could stand for the role of the president of the school, without me knowing it. Since we students know each other better than the teachers, we knew that some of them wouldn’t make it and I told myself that if this was to be my last year in

the school, I was not going to be led by people who do not know what they are doing.

The other president claims:

P.2 So that I can make some changes in how things are done in the school, those that need to be changed...the previous RCL was not talking enough to the students

And one of the treasurers concurs:

T.1 I noticed that things were not going right for the learners, and being the talkative person that I am, I felt the need for me to help the learners by representing them, and I feel good about it.

One treasurer though, had an interesting addition to her reasons:

T.3 When we got nominated I got more votes than the grade 11 student I was competing against, also I wanted to play a role in helping other students address their problems.

It is interesting that the fact that she got more votes than her competitor seems to count as her first reason to get involved.

A secretary observes:

S.2 It's because in the last few years I've been a learner here, the past RCLs were less competent in my view, not that very bad, but I felt that I can and I wanted to serve.

That they mainly find some 'little faults' with their predecessors is an indication that they are observant enough to see how they can plan for their coming term of office. Again, the fact that their general contribution in meetings 'wins' them votes shows that their peers believe that they can be entrusted with the responsibilities of representing them. Having said that it cannot be claimed that those who vote them in are always satisfied with their performances. It is difficult to judge from a distance, but some claims by their electorate show that not all of them have confidence in their representatives.

A publication from one secondary school (Gcina 2002) had some interviews with learners concerning their views on the roles of the RCL. The writer and interviewer feel that “although the decision of who is in this leadership is taken by the learners, some of them are not pleased by the productivity of the leaders”. She goes on to say that the interviewees feel that those elected “do not know what to do and not to do”. This may sound a bit confusing, when the very electorate would claim that their representatives are only there [by implication] for themselves. But having said that the learner masses are the most relevant to judge whether the RCLs are effective or not. As to whether they know the exact roles of the RCLs within the governance as opposed to their expectations [and possible comparison to the SRC era] is open for debate. Also, this may have an impact on the interaction and flow of information between the representatives and the electorate.

However positively geared the RCLs are for the duties ahead, there is still no denying that they may be coming in to join school governance with that inner learner ‘fighting spirit’, as the following quotes demonstrate:

P.1 The three of us in the SGB normally meet to have a briefing on what we are going to be talking about, like ways of defending ourselves.

It is interesting that the respondent sees the learners’ role as one of “defending” themselves, rather than negotiating or discussing. Sithole (1995:95), discussing learner participation, claims that:

Those who are elected to serve in those SRCs (now RCLs) are not elected on the basis of their leadership credentials, but on whether they are brave enough to face the onslaught of parents, principals and teachers.

It is difficult to argue against this view because on many occasions the confrontational nature of learners has prompted many to think this way. In trying to come closer to reality let us now look at the views of SMT members concerning learner involvement and participation in governance.

D. 1 ... I think they welcomed it (participation in governance) ...they were welcoming it but they were also coming in with that culture of opposition and as they were welcoming it they saw it as that terrain where they have to fight for themselves, so the coming on board for them was still to get what they want. As I've said we have had these forums in the past even before the legalisation but students do change and so does the leadership and so for those who took over I think they were happy and they welcomed it. They used it to gain more ground!, for instance we had something which took us three days discussing it with them, they wanted a trip to PE and we had long stopped to sleep over because of problems, so they wanted to sleep over, they wanted to leave here on Friday and come back on Sunday, we were not agreeing, but then it was only the leadership which wanted this, the student body didn't want to sleep over.

Taking into consideration the reasons behind the use both by literature and the research participants of words such as *defending*, *onslaught*, *culture of opposition*, it seems that conflict is among those aspects that characterise schools as organisations. This does not surprise me because of the manner in which schools used to operate in the past, and in the process created cultures that would prove difficult to undo. Giving their own views on school culture Senge *et al.* (2000:325) argue that:

A school's culture is its most enduring aspect...culture is rooted deeply in people. It is embodied in their attitudes, values and skill, which in turn stem from their personal backgrounds, from their life experiences...

The expressions by the quoted authors does capture the mood in schools and the possible reasons for the use of such strong words, which would otherwise mean that each group has a marked territory that must be defended at all costs. Much has been said to conclude that it is doubtful that organisations can manage to go about their business without having to face conflicts at any stage, and the main issue then would be the manner in which they positively deal with those conflicts as opposed to always pointing accusing fingers at other stakeholders within the schools. Looking at the views expressed and the use of the words of 'conflict' quoted above, it is not difficult to see why it would be possible for some stakeholders to resist some of the measures put forward by the demands of the schools. According to Morrow (1996:57) "the central strategy of resistance is to put forward demands, backed up not by reasons but by threats and the power of refusal..." This unfortunately is characteristic of learner

behaviour. Whether they are pushed to do so is a matter for debate. Through joining the governing structures of schools “they come to have feelings of solidarity and loyalty to one another, they value their membership in the group and want to protect it” (Schmuck & Runkel 1994:58), hence the eruption of conflicts because the SMTs are there to defend what is considered valuable both by them and the education authorities. By way of facing the challenges posed by the differences of opinion, Schmuck and Runkel (1994:118) suggest that the two groups be brought together “to explore goals, uncover differences and agree on terms”.

And the principal from one school observes:

P.1... Learners need to be workshopped thoroughly not only for their specific roles in governance, but also be readied to be made leaders, like chairing meetings, standing in powerful portfolios even if not in the SGB but in other structures, they must be made to know exactly what to do. This to avoid having them in structures just to listen and be passive people as if they are watchdogs to see if we are going to ‘chow’ their money. They must be full participants in structures and that can only happen when they are empowered and be bold enough to stand even in community-based structures.

In a way there seems to be a notion that the SMTs feel that the RCLs are coming in more to fight than to help build. For example some SMT members interviewed were vague when asked about the roles of the RCLs in governance, but were however sure of those things which excluded them, as the following HOD notes:

H. 2 ... What I know is that even if they are involved I’ve never seen them involved in the employment of the teachers.

In chapter two parts of the *Guides* for RCLs (1999d) pertaining to their roles were quoted directly to stress the vagueness with which the authorities justify RCL participation in school governance. The contents of the *Guides* show that the RCLs have a role to play nowadays in school governance, albeit constrained to what the authorities think. It is known to many that their official inclusion in governance is a relatively new exercise, hence it is hoped (interestingly among others by the very same SMT members) that they could bring in that needed stability. This is true among learners as well, as the following views by SMT members demonstrate. More

than one SMT interviewee hinted at hoping that their inclusion does have a positive side to it:

P.1 I think it has actually helped us a lot in institutions, because things have improved in terms of governance and also the levels of protests by them has slowed down. We are able to have a whole year passing by without having disturbances or protests, as there is transparency at all levels.

And one HOD reiterates:

H.2 I think yes, because at least the lines of communication are open; two, whether schools like it or not they are entitled to certain things, and in some cases they themselves are able to diffuse potential conflicts.

And another HOD claims:

H.3 ... due to the involvement of learners nowadays I'm beginning to learn that learners themselves can also have ideas that can help in developing the institution, so I would still say involving learners is a good thing even though there is still a lot to be done.

Two clear reasons have emerged as to why learners are not really involved: unwillingness of SMTs and the vagueness of policy. The unwillingness on the part of the SMTs manifests itself not only from what the policy is saying, but their having problems recognising 'children'. On the other hand it cannot be taken for granted that those involved in RCLs are always good leaders ready to cooperate with other stakeholders. RCL involvement seems to have been put in place as an exercise meant to contribute to organisation development (OD) where the school would serve as a terrain that, through cooperation between all stakeholders, helps all involved realise their goals.

4.1.3 REBELS WITHIN THE RCLS?

As has been highlighted by Sithole's (1999:95) claim, there could be rebels within the RCLs in the eyes of the SMTs. The question one would ask then would be what impact such thoughts would have on the working relations between the two groups. Some responses indicate that such suspicions could lead to some harsh realities in terms of the operations of the RCLs, as the two HODs below highlight:

H. 2. ... But this year we had a little problem whereby the chairperson (president) had some disciplinary problems and so was removed, and for about four months there was no chairperson.

H.1. I think they did not follow any channels except for influencing students in other classes and then students followed, and I could sense by the song they were singing, “sibanik’umzuzu baphume baphele” (*we give them a minute to leave the school*) that we were seriously being chased away. We then left for the area office.

It can be generally accepted that because of historical instances and or confrontations associated with learner representatives, it was never going to be easy for the SMTs and the RCLs to collaborate from the beginning in terms of working together as stakeholders. Through looking at it from different angles therefore, one can detect a state of confusion and difficulty in trusting each other. In times like these, Begley (1999:17) claims:

Confusion sometimes attends efforts to differentiate between principles and ideals, an *ideal* represents a desired state, one that need exist for no purpose other than its own realization, principles guide action aimed at realizing ideals.

Not much can be said about the song they were singing except to say that it is one of those learners’ ‘war songs’ which made them highly motivated and could then be very dangerous.

The views expressed by the two HODs indicate that some SMT members feel that there are rebellious members within RCLs that could sometimes have a negative impact on the contribution of the RCLs to the smooth running of the schools. Two RCL members I interviewed in one school commented that their school’s SMT could not afford to ignore them in any way because they were so ‘afraid’ of their (RCL) president.

Sec. 2 We are the ones representing the learners, so they have to start with us...normally they do, because they are afraid of the president.

It is interesting that it matters to them that their president is someone ‘feared’ by the SMT, and perhaps it is an indication that they themselves consider him to be a rebel. These are signs therefore, that openness and entrusting each other with sensitive issues would prove difficult, as the groups involved display signs of being suspicious

of each other, and in the process generally make working together difficult. Having said that, Murphy and Louis (1999:15) argue that:

In a professional field like educational administration relevance is also a matter of preparing future administrators with knowledge and skills that will enable them to become successful practitioners.

The talk of educational administration in the present era does not exclude the RCLs, and that calls for acceptable measures to be put in place to counter the rebelliousness of learners, instead of those used in the olden days where they were viewed as nonentities. Before going too far with the 'game' of pointing fingers between the two groups, let me look at some of the basic aspects of organisational life, starting with communication.

4.2 COMMUNICATION

Communication should be full and free, regardless of rank and power (Lindbom 1996:59).

If there is to be free flow of information in any working environment pertaining to general and specific duties and assignments to be performed by different individuals and groups in organisations, communication is one aspect organisations cannot afford to do without. As organisations schools are no exception to the view that they should and must keep information flowing if they are to come anywhere near attaining their goals, among which is governance with as few problems as possible. This is especially true in the present scenario where school governance includes not only staff members but the RCLs as well.

According to Sizer (1992:89 in Fullan 1993:45):

The real world demands collaboration, the collective solving of problems... Learning to get along, to function effectively in groups, is essential. Evidence and experience also strongly suggest that an individual's personal learning is enhanced by collective effort. The act of sharing ideas, of having to put one's own views clearly to others, of finding defensible compromises and conclusions, is in itself educative.

The argument by the two writers states clearly that for any organisation, including schools, there needs to be open, clear lines of communication. Through this, the exchange of ideas would help minimise misunderstandings between all involved, and that through these kinds of interactions those involved would learn a lot both from each other and otherwise, individually and in groups. Before looking at communication between the RCLs and the SMTs, it would be appropriate to first examine communication within the RCL and then between the RCLs and their constituents.

4.2.1 COMMUNICATION AMONG THE RCL MEMBERS

One would assume that the RCLs, especially the executive committees, because they should be working as a unit, are constantly exchanging and working on information in accordance with their programmes. As it turns out that is not always the case. This is shown by the following responses on learner representatives in the SGB concerning the RCLs' preparations for, attending and reporting back after attending SGB meetings.

One of the presidents laments:

Pres.2 They (RCL members in the SGB) do not even report back to us... They just keep quiet...

Not reporting back to other members is contrary to the goals and objectives of having RCLs, as the *Guides* to learner participation state that having RCLs “aims to keep learners abreast of events at school and in the community” (DoE, 1999d: 12). Keeping them abreast of events is of paramount importance because some of the issues discussed in SGB meetings affect them in more ways than one, for example the manner in which schools should fight drugs inside and outside of their yards.

There will undoubtedly be problems if there is not enough information gathered by the RCLs as a result of their not always sharing information among themselves, more so if it is information from the SGB meetings, as SGBs are the most powerful structures in schools. They are therefore meant to discuss very important issues affecting everyone in the school community. Sharing, discussing and making

decisions based on direct first hand information by the RCLs are of great value. If such opportunities of reporting back to other members after SGB meetings are not used, it could easily lead to unnecessary misunderstandings. The emphasis here is for them not to miss out on some critical decision making processes or stages of implementation, hence putting their own participation in jeopardy. In saying this, one is however aware of Koslowsky and Sagie's (2000:ix) claim that:

Participation in decision making and many other terms are tossed around very casually; yet what one means by these terms differs from person to person, from organisation to organisation and from country to country.

The SMTs do have their own way of looking at whether the RCLs are sharing and exchanging information by way of holding meetings, hence the following observation by one of the deputy principals in one of the schools:

D.1 For a short period we have a well functioning RCL and then they forget themselves, you do not see them holding meetings, knocking on our doors to ask for advice, and they only honour the scheduled meetings, so I think we have got to do more and assist them. Helping them is a life-building thing; maybe it is time guidance teachers helped them with advice.

An observation like this one is necessary on the part of the SMTs so that they know the kind of people they are dealing with and as such make it easier for them by offering advice freely. By the 'kind of people' I am specifically referring to the responses from both the questionnaires and the interviews, that many of the RCLs do not have their own codes of conduct, as only one out of the five RCLs claimed to have one in place. Also, I want to believe that not having a code of conduct is a contributing factor to some RCL members not adhering to making reports one of their priorities, because by not doing so accountability is compromised. Having the codes of conduct for RCLs seems to make a difference in how things are done by those involved, as it does with knowing or not knowing their roles in governance. The participants show this, one of which is this RCL president from one of the schools:

Pres.1 We made a code of conduct at the beginning of the year; we had a workshop with the principal to discuss the basics on how we are

going to help him, and how we are going to work positively towards building the school... It is the RCL's code of conduct, based on some of the school's codes of conduct.

This statement by the RCL member seems to be making it a little easier for them to go about their duties and meeting with other stakeholders in the process of participating in governance. There are also advantages to having these codes in schools as this president elaborates further on the main item(s) of the code:

Pres.1 Firstly, you be the president or the treasurer, it doesn't mean that you are stuck with that job, everybody has to put in hundred percent and again it doesn't mean that you have power over the school. You also have to work with the teachers and do what they say. We also try to motivate other pupils to do things on their own; we also formed "youth for work" a group here at school. We also have our own security since we have no fences, we do try to meet our own problems.

As we can see, if there are such documents in place, the roles and functions of the RCL are made a little easier and it would also make it a lot easier for SMTs when communicating with them to refer RCLs to the contents of the codes of conduct.

4.2.2 COMMUNICATION BETWEEN THE RCLS AND THEIR CONSTITUENTS

As a matter of principle, effective communication was and still remains essential in terms of keeping in touch with current developments in schools. The respondents' views show that maintained communication among the learners goes a long way in allaying whatever fears those represented might have regarding various issues. Therefore, cordial working relations in schools between SMTs, RCLs, teaching staff and the learner populations at large could be nurtured. The following president's views show that there is lack of continuous interaction between the RCLs and the very learners they represent:

Pres. 2...The RCL 'desks' are just there and not doing anything. Even the students don't come to lodge their complaints with us, so these make me say we are not used as much as we would like to...maybe they are shy to come to us with their problems.

This president sounds like someone who is complaining about not being used enough by their own constituents, the learners that they represent, and it seems like he is not sure as to where to direct his concerns. There may be more than one reason leading to this state of affairs, but an obvious question one may ask would relate to the channels of communication between the RCL and the learners who may not be at all aware of those ‘desks’ and why they are there. It is also very interesting to hear his concerns about them not bringing their complaints to the RCL. It is natural for almost everyone to try and blame mishaps in an organisation and/or structure on somebody else as the RCL president does without first making it clear that something was done to make sure that the whole learner body knew how the RCL structure functions, not only the executive council, but also the whole elected council.

It could be suspected that this goes back to the observations of one of the respondents, a deputy principal, who feels that there is a fairly big difference between the SRCs of yesteryear and the present RCLs. He sees a lack of a desired spirit, which was there in the SRC era, and it may happen that the very learners who do not bring their concerns to the RCLs have made that observation of the RCLs being ‘toothless’ and therefore think twice before bringing them in, as he says:

D. 1 We have not had the RCL in the forefront as it was in the SRC era. The RCL is not always in the forefront giving directions but mainly caught in the middle. That “oomph!” which was there in the SRCs is not there in the RCL... I am not sure that the RCLs are serious in looking at themselves in terms of their roles. I see them as taking a back seat and not coming in front and playing their role. The spirit of the RCL is not similar to that of the SRC.

There is more than one SMT member who feels that the RCLs are not operating in the same manner in which the SRCs were doing. The following HOD just mentions this difference in passing, without delving much into the differences between the two:

H. 1 I would say it is better now because we are having RCLs instead of SRCs, so it’s good that they are there when the parents are discussing.

My own observations and conclusions concerning the ‘SRCs versus the RCLs’ view are that the SRCs were not a recognised stakeholder, except that they forced their way

into being recognised learner representatives. This means their activities were not scheduled in a coordinated manner, known to other stakeholders in the schools. Their programmes were mostly kept under wraps and would most probably catch other stakeholders off guard. As a result of that they were mostly regarded as radicals who wanted to operate as they wished, hence the view that “uncompromising attitudes on the part of the learners and misguided militancy were often interpreted as party political” (Sithole 1994:43) in the apartheid era. On the other hand the RCLs are given room to exercise their acquired stakeholder status, (the restrictions on their participation are secondary) and as such it is easy for their programmes to be known by other stakeholders, possibly in advance.

Some of the SMT members’ responses show that if there is not good enough communication between the RCLs and their constituents there could be problems faced by the RCLs. As this SMT respondent shows, even with the smallest of interactions between the SMTs and the RCLs, if the other learners are not aware of what is going on they could easily be mistaken for sell-outs:

H. 3 Though the training is informal, it does help a great deal to the learners; however the very same training also rouses suspicions because it is not formal... Other learners would have a feeling that the educators are moulding the learners [in the RCL] so that they can ‘toe their own [SMT or teachers’] line’.

The fact that other learners may want to believe that those in the RCL are being ‘infiltrated’ by the SMT members is a sign that somewhere along the way there is a breakdown in communication between the whole teaching staff and the learner body. One would think that the learners in general are supposed to know all about the functions and duties of the RCLs, including the fact that they have to be trained once they are in the RCL, so as to be readied for their job in the governance of the schools. My contention therefore is that the RCLs may either be lacking in information, not aware of certain things, or that the lines of communication between themselves and those they represent are not always used to the satisfaction of all involved.

Another RCL secretary, from another school, who is supposed to be the very first to know about learners’ activities both in and outside of the RCL, complains that other

learner formations within her school tend to ignore the ‘right’ channels when they want to go about their activities:

Sec. 2 There is this Active Youth group inside the school, which decides on things without consulting with us, we just see them organising activities.

It may happen that the group members concerned are not aware of the said need to consult, mainly because this was never made clear to them. One may see a need to ask some questions concerning the exchange of information between the RCL and those they represent, especially if they come across the concerns of the said RCL secretary, who goes on to say:

Sec. 2 I would say we are the chosen ones, the learners should respect us.

It is doubtful that there would be any need for her to remind them of whom their representatives were if there was enough flow of information among all the learners concerning the roles of the RCLs. It is however of concern to many to note that the RCLs do sometimes fail to inform the other learners, or even worse, misinform the learner population about important things within schools. To that effect the SMT members notice that the RCLs are on the other hand ‘good’ at ‘influencing’ other learners into going astray and or even disturbing school programmes. According to Harris *et al* (1997:25) “influence is defined as the attempt to modify others’ behaviour through either the mobilisation of or reference to power recourses”, and if this is what influence means, then learners can and are easily influenced because by nature they are readily available to use their energies. On the other hand this observation by SMT members may be unfair because “assuming people are uncooperative, when in fact they *may have different goals*” (*ibid*), can sometimes be an oversight on the part of the SMTs. The SMT members blame those in the RCL of instigating some unsavoury incidents in schools. This may be unfair but it is how the SMTs look at it, as these members indicate:

H.1 One of their representatives in the SGB had shown them a financial statement and then according to them they would not be having money for the farewell, and started to be violent.

Any learner who represents others in the SGB is a member of the RCL as has been shown by the views of other respondents before and also the contents of the SASA, hence the view that (according to this SMT member) the very learner representative in the SGB had some 'ulterior' motives in revealing half the information to the others. According to the same SMT respondent, another meeting, which was rescheduled for another day, was not attended by the RCL:

H.1 A meeting was scheduled for an earlier date, but due to unforeseen circumstances we had a meeting later, they didn't come to the meeting and ask for clarity after receiving a financial statement.

A deputy principal from another school puts it in a way that clearly demonstrates that the learner leaders can sometimes manipulate situations to their advantage, even without the full backing of the whole learner body.

D. 1 They used it (involvement in governance) to gain more ground, for instance we had something that took us three days discussing it with them. They wanted a trip to PE and we had long stopped to sleep over because of problems, so they wanted to sleep over, they wanted to leave here on Friday and come back on Sunday, we were not agreeing but then it was only the leadership which wanted this, the student body didn't want to sleep over. And so we pushed for it to go to the student body, so we discovered that the student body didn't want to sleep over, then the matter was solved and yet we were struggling with them. They were threatening us that they were going to do this and that, so they welcomed it with that fighting spirit to gain more in terms of control and winning more rights.

The pictures painted by the respondents from both sides demonstrate that some kind of 'influencing' could be taking place between the RCLs and the whole learner body. On the other hand, it would be interesting to know what the SMTs do to address that situation. According to the SMTs there is not much they do except to try every possible means to stop them, even if by unacceptable means, in a democratic sense, like a 'divide and rule' strategy, as one principal claims to have used to stop angry grade twelve learners who were demanding more money for their farewell function, which according to him is contrary to the policy of the school:

P. 1 I managed to identify two instigators who I mentioned by names in that meeting to say they must not destabilise our programmes in the

school, as they are about to write their trial exams and shortly thereafter the final exams. I told them they could toyi-toyi till they break their legs, so I think I was using that 'divide and rule' strategy, and it worked.

Using the 'divide and rule' approach may have worked (according to him) for that particular moment, but he may not have succeeded in convincing the learners to always use the available channels of communication to keep each other in touch with developments in the school. This sets the stage for looking at communication between the SMTs and the RCLs.

4.2.3 CONSULTATION BETWEEN THE RCLS AND THE SMTS

Opening the lines of communication between the RCLs and the SMTs is as basic as establishing and having the learners' structures recognised. In my view it is in the interests of everyone involved in the school as an organisation to have lines of communication open to all the stakeholders. It is an open secret that one of the causes of the 1976 tragedies in South African education was the non-availability of channels of communication pertaining to learner grievances, hence it is vital for the two groups to keep communicating at all times. My argument for open lines of communication between the two groups stems from the notion of avoiding tensions and making it possible for both to identify areas where there are differences of opinions as early as possible.

The data at hand paint an unsatisfactory picture pertaining to the RCLs receiving full information in connection with their roles as stakeholders in schools. The department of education has somehow eased the burden on schools concerning ways and means of operating in the new dispensation by availing documents on roles for every stakeholder. The stakeholders affected in this case are SMTs, SGBs and the RCLs. Because they are given out to schools and not individual structures, the RCLs are by implication at the mercy of others, most probably the SMTs, when it comes to them getting all the relevant information about their roles in governance.

Among the documents for operation is the *Guides for Representative Councils of Learners* of 1999, (South Africa, 1999d), (discussed in chapter two) wherein the roles

of RCLs in school governance are contained. Through this document and others the Department of Education has come forth with promoting communication between the two groups in more ways than one, this by making provision for schools to avail a teacher liaison officer (TLO), who acts as the ‘middle man’ between the SMT and the RCL. In stressing the significance of this kind of communication the *Guides (DoE, 1999d: 16)* state that the TLO:

Must create a sincere and trusting relationship with the RCL, the principal as well as the school management.

He or she must promote communication between himself or herself, the principal, staff and the RCL (underlining my emphasis).

By making room for the TLO to help ‘build bridges’ between the said groups, it could be made a little easier to avoid unnecessary clashes within the schools. It is also encouraging to find out that the liaison duties are being observed by the secondary schools, albeit in a manner that still shows ‘teething problems’ as the following quotes show:

One RCL president claims:

P.1 We have our own teacher (Teacher Liaison Officer, TLO), Mr X, whatever we have to do we have to go through him first; if it is above him then we meet the principal.

An HOD from another school reasons:

H.3. ... But here at school, we have what we call the liaison committee; it’s a link between the staff, parents and the learners. The members of the liaison committee, of which I am one, are usually asking the RCL for areas in which they would love to get some explanation.

And one deputy principal from another school qualifies the presence of a TLO:

D.1 Yes the principal remains that link although there is a teacher responsible for liaising between the RCL and the SMT.

At least a positive sign emerges from the views expressed by the quoted respondents that the documents in place are being given recognition. As I see it, the notion of making room for having someone playing the role of mediating between the two groups is very noble and is meant to ease the ‘pressure’ on RCLs of always having to face the SMTs all the time. Questions are raised though, about the SMTs’ knowledge and use of written Department of Education documents to schools. This is more the case because according to their questionnaire responses some schools, including mine (because I happen to be a TLO in my school, and was never shown any written information on my duties as there was not even the *Guides* document) they do not necessarily know the written duties of the TLO contained in the *Guides* of 1999. It is not clear how they came to know anything at all about the TLO. Some of the schools do not even have that kind of a teacher doing the mediating duty between the SMTs and the RCLs.

4.2.4 INFORMATION FOR RCLs ON THEIR ROLES/POLICY ISSUES

Schmuck and Runkel (1994:23) argue that:

Roles are norms about how a person in a particular organizational position should perform – or more exactly, how two or more persons should interact on the job.

According to these two writers:

Norms are shared expectations, usually implicit, that guide the thoughts and behaviours of group members. The tenacity of organizational culture lies in the power of its norms, that is, how well they are adhered to and how resistant they are to change (*ibid.*).

Seemingly norms have a very significant role to play in organisations, hence schools are expected to make it a point that the ‘groundwork’, in terms of letting everyone know of their responsibilities, is done to the satisfaction of the requirements of the school as an organisation. It is almost unbelievable to find out that many, if not most of the SMT members know very little or nothing about the *Guides for RCLs* (1999) the very document meant to sanction learner participation in school governance. The

following respondents demonstrated this as they were responding to a question asking about their knowledge of the said document.

The first HOD responds: **H.1:** No. The second HOD remarks:

H.2 Well I know that there is... there are documents like Education law and Policy but personally I have never had to deal with RCLs, I never go through those not unless there is a real need.

One deputy principal responds: **D. 1** If they are new then you will need to date them...

And one principal:

P. 1 The guides?...Ja, I think also within the documents sent to us that underpin this whole participation of stakeholders, the department is not silent about learner participation. Like for example, they cannot be involved with hiring of educators and that they must know about the whole question of how school funds are managed because that promotes transparency.

It is clear from all the quoted respondents' responses that most of the SMTs are not aware of the *Guides* in question. It raises questions therefore as to how they do the 'groundwork' (allow for RCL participation in governance) if they show lack of knowledge of the very document that sanctions learner participation in school governance. Since the RCL involvement in governance is relatively new in schools, there is obviously a need to alert the learners to what is expected of them as per the official documents in place, including the very one on their roles. The SMTs are seemingly just 'a little too comfortable' with letting the RCLs represent the learners in governance 'on paper' and as far as they are concerned, that is where it should end.

To that effect one of the HODs interviewed says:

H.1... but the only thing I know is that they are represented in the SGB by two or three students that are expected to go back and report to the whole students' forum. In those meetings there are financial statements, so they know about anything that is being discussed because they are part and parcel of the SGB.

As does another HOD who interestingly feels that:

H.3 ... It is not a good thing to see a learner contributing in a meeting situation, to one who has been trained to be an authority and now one

would feel that he is losing his authority, the learners now take everything up.

Some may argue that this is a bit confusing, coming from someone who is not only a member of the SMT, but also of the liaison committee in his school (as he earlier indicated), which deals directly with learner affairs.

And one deputy principal comments:

D.1 I am happy, I think it's a proper thing (having RCLs in governance) although at first I thought it was a liberation tool, I was not comfortable to have it in the statutory Act and be part of the whole education setup, but with time I have learnt to accept that it's proper to have them there. They are aware of decisions, code of conduct, its adoption and the way it was formulated, mission statement and so many other things that we do, they will be part of those. They can therefore be able to preach and propagate that kind of mission and promote responsibility among other learners, so I have learnt to accept them, I think it would be wrong not to have them now.

At least there seems to be a positive sign from the views expressed by the quoted respondents that the documents made available are used by the schools, but the manner in which the SMT members show concern for the participation cannot be ignored. All too often they have shown this 'awareness' that the RCLs have by law obtained participatory powers, however there is always a '*but...*' in how they view this participation. This leads to one feeling a little anxious and wanting to know more about the participation of learners in governance, that is, whether it is partial or token participation. Perhaps this concern is raised in terms of Bush's (1995:75) view of political models and hence their implications for practice in organisations. He argues:

Political models stress the prevalence of *conflict* in organizations. Interest groups pursue their independent objectives, which may contrast sharply with the aims of other subunits within the institution and lead to conflict between them.

According to Bush, organisations are generally characterised by politics, irrespective of their nature and size, hence the suspicion that politics may play a role in the manner in which the two groups communicate.

In further stressing communication as one of the major contributors to organisation development and maintenance of clear channels of communication in schools, the *Guides* of 1999 (DoE 1999: 16) go on to state that:

- (a) The principal's general advice, communication, inspiration and assistance are indispensable.
- (b) Communication and liaison between the RCL and the principal are imperative for the well being of the school.

By putting it this way, the *Guides* bring out another dimension to this argument, that it is also the principals' duty to see to it that communication is not only established but also maintained and sustained over a long period of time, all in the name of change. James and Connolly (2000:16) say of change:

Change is an interesting notion. It is all around us, within us, and it is difficult if not impossible to escape from it. ...We might like to think we have at some time a period of stability, but change carries on none the less.

It can be argued that if there is any proposed or envisaged kind of change, the schools are bound to feel it first hand, because according to James and Connolly (2000:17):

There is a case for arguing that schools are organisations built for the management of change. ...To learn is to change, hence the role of schools in managing change. ...Since change, learning and emotions are inextricably linked, schools are places where the management of emotions is important.

Likewise there is a case for arguing that communication should be at the centre of all school activities, including informing RCLs of their duties. The case of SMTs informing RCLs of their duties, through whichever means of communication at their disposal remains a debate so far. This is seen by looking at the responses of the respondents when asked about the roles of RCLs in the governance of their respective schools.

One HOD responds: **H.2:** I don't really know...

And another:

H.1 Well, first of all they are the voice of the learners, whatever the learners' grievances and problems are, two, they have to take to the learners what has been communicated by the Department through the School. They play that two-way role and also I think that they start to gain because in times of conflict once they get to know these they inform the other learners

And another HOD:

H.3 Well, they play [roles] like any other member in a particular structure, for example we have the SGB, in which they are represented as do parents and educators and their status is equal to that of the other parties.

A deputy principal:

D.1 I think they are minimal [the roles]... I think their role will be more evident when we look at the student body itself, their component in terms of their control there, organising. In the sports forum for instance, we have got them there with teachers and the whole forum reports to the management and other societies but not really big roles within the SGB as it is where you see those prominent roles besides being members.

And a principal:

P.1 Like... one other thing ... even today I think it is the responsibility of every school to workshop students about their roles. We have workshopped them, and as such, they know their roles... They are of help a lot, for example in the school gates for student lateness, uniforms, school fees and so on, involving them makes things much easier for us as the SMT.

The SMT respondents from different schools interpret the RCL roles differently. On the other hand the RCLs show the same signs of having different views concerning their roles in governance. Quoted respondents demonstrate this:

P.1 We try to keep the peace because some students are being violated, and we try to make teaching fair for the teachers and us. We also have to raise money for the school, if maybe something has to be

fixed. We also raise funds through entering competitions, projects, and sometimes win prizes for the school... My job (as the president) is not that difficult because I am bridging the gap between the learners and the teachers, whatever they have to complain about I just take it to the teachers and whatever the teachers are trying to voice out towards us and they are experiencing some difficulties, they tell me to talk to the pupils. This is so because we are at the same level and we know each other better, so I always bridge the gap between the two groups.

P.2 Raising funds for the school and other things...

Sec.1 to represent the learners, as it sometimes happen that a teacher is wrong and you, as the learner must refrain. So ours is to stand for their needs and look at the whole school's other needs, like the school gate [the closing thereof to latecomers].

T. 1 Student grievances start with the RCL before going forward, and if we feel it is something above us we take it to the SMT... And some of the things the learners want, like school tours.

Sec. 2 Checking if students are wearing school uniforms, especially males who are always problematic when it comes to that, check late coming, help with locking the gates at eight o' clock, help with checking class registers, bunking of classes.

As demonstrated already, with RCLs as well, there is no consistency and or uniformity in the manner in which they seem to be performing their duties in their respective schools. Contrary to claims by some SMT members, that they always make a point of informing the RCLs of their roles in their schools, and this, as early as possible, RCL respondents' views show it to be the other way round. A response from two RCL members of a school where the principal claimed they have workshopped the RCL on their roles goes:

Sec. 2 Nobody tells us, we see for ourselves when there is need for us to act, and other learners suggest things to us, to talk to staff members on their behalf... There is more we feel we can do, but the staff members don't always allow us to.

Contradiction and irony seems to be the order of the day with everyday dealings between the SMTs and the RCLs. There can be more than one explanation of that scenario, among which could easily be attributed to lack of communication, hence the

dangers of facing student resistance. One other view that kept on coming up, particularly with the SMT respondents, was that the RCLs either do not know or do not care much about what is expected of them in terms of their duties or roles, as the following claims demonstrate:

H.2 Just to comment on their role in management; there is a whole lot of potential in them that needs to be developed, but the system does not allow for that and somehow you find that they are not aware of what their exact roles are...Yes but [stresses] *not sufficiently*, its not like they undergo a kind of training, they get it bit by bit and only when it becomes necessary...

Another HOD from another school adds:

H.1 ... They do not contribute positively and in fact I do not know whether they do understand their roles.

What she says next raises some questions because she uses the word 'sometimes'...

...Sometimes the principal informs them about their roles in the school governance and their roles as members elected by the learners.

Another HOD:

H.3 ... One would say students need to be trained or be given the tools so that they could do the job effectively. Like em...if the learners are to be brought into these particular structures and yet they do not have the know-how, then it means they are not going to be effective in those very structures.

One principal, in trying to explain the reasons that normally lead to RCL/SMT confrontations says:

P.1 I think it is not because the management is controversial or intransigent, sometimes it is the lack of insight or knowledge on the part of the learners, they do not know how to go about voicing their grievances, so they do not differentiate between rights and privileges. Also management sometimes fails to understand and differentiate between the two. Student arrogance sometimes comes from lack of knowledge and it is for us to clear up their minds and give them lectures.

At least it is positive that self-criticism is sometimes displayed, as this could pave the way for constructive interaction, as some of them acknowledge that the professional managers sometimes fail in their duties of disseminating information to the learners. But the SMTs are generally very reluctant to take it upon themselves that they may be responsible for some of the mishaps inside the schools, but consistently point fingers to the RCLs:

D.1 I am not sure that the RCLs are serious in looking at themselves in terms of their roles, I see them as taking a back seat and not coming in front and playing their role.

The RCLs' conduct concerning their roles and duties within the governance of schools takes many forms and approaches, with many 'deserving' some negative labels from the SMTs. To this end one may never be sure whether they alone deserve to be blamed for their lacklustre performances in carrying out their duties. Some of them admit to not performing their duties to the satisfaction of many, including among others, the non-attendance of SGB meetings:

P.2 ... mainly they don't even attend those (SGB) meetings.

Tres. 1 ...but it's sometimes us who don't attend such important meetings

It can be argued that communication is one aspect, which can be said to be the 'life blood' of organisations, and this directly affects schools. From different quarters, many have argued that for stronger, healthier bonds and relations in organisations, communication should always be kept simple, effective and powerful. If there is continued communication between the two groups it is the school as a whole that stands to benefit.

In a school situation therefore, involving RCLs through communication is on the other hand promoting organisation development (OD) values, which help bring about the spirit of togetherness and ownership of decisions and programmes. French and Bell (1999:62) say of OD values:

OD values tend to be humanistic, optimistic and democratic. Humanistic values proclaim the importance of the individual: respect the whole person, treat people with respect and dignity, assume that everyone has intrinsic worth, view all people as having the potential for growth and development.

As the quoted writers argue, matters of mutual interest in organisations need to be openly discussed, analysed and documented. Being optimistic and democratic, as the authors put it, is of value to the school situation because then the learners, through the RCLs, stand to develop self-worth and as such think twice before resorting to unsavoury means in addressing their issues. The respondents interviewed from both sides do acknowledge that continuous communication goes a long way in making schools better working environments. To that effect two of the HODs argue that:

H.1: I think in any relationship of any kind, communication is the best, because what leads to conflict is lack of proper communication and understanding.

And another HOD reasons:

H.3: ...Here at school the rugby team wanted to go for training to a school in town, but the school didn't have funds to finance that and seemingly there was a problem regarding communicating that to the rugby players, so they felt that the principal didn't want to cooperate and as a result they toy-toyed, they ruffled the principal but that was stopped and educators and parents and RLC were involved in trying to look into the issue and come to a conclusion, as a result of that the whole thing was sorted out.

And one RCL president comments:

P.1 We are very much satisfied because we do not just get to see something happening, affecting you, you have a say on how and why it is going to happen.

The expressed views on communication further depict the argument that though “organizations are made up of multiple individuals, with varying roles and perspectives...” (Cooper and Rousseau 1994: 99), when they have well functioning operational lines of communication, schools are destined to gain more than they might

lose. Over and above just involving the RCLs in governance, part of the package involves their being able to attain skills that would help produce future leaders. To that effect Schmuck and Runkel (1994:118) advise the authorities to:

Train students in communication skills, establishing objectives, uncovering and working on conflicts, conducting meetings, solving problems in groups and collecting data.

With their having acquired such expertise it is without doubt a direct opposite of what used to happen with the apartheid system where there was no need to empower them in any way. Those lines of communication in schools must be opened and used to the benefit of the school in terms of transparency, as the following respondents show:

H.3 The major reason, I would say is lack of transparency, which usually breeds suspicion because most learners react like that [negatively] because they are not sure as to whether the decision that was taken was really fair or not and then when they get the facts later on then they realise the fairness of the decision. If they are involved from the beginning I don't think they would react the same way they do when they are not.

It is also encouraging to notice that those in schools do aspire to have transparency in their respective schools:

H. 2 I think in any relationship of any kind, communication is the best, because what leads to conflict is lack of proper communication and understanding.

H.3: I feel students need to be involved in all the governing structures, so that they can be aware of each and everything that is taking place within the school situation. If they are involved rather they are definitely going to be abreast of the things...all the developments within the institution and therefore they would be happy like all the other parties.

4.2.6 COMMUNICATION AS NEGOTIATION

Negotiation depends on communication (Mampuru and Spoelstra 1994: 28).

Other respondents' views revealed aspirations to employ communication as negotiating their way through a mass of issues that need attention. It is quite encouraging to notice that even before the 1996 SASA some of the schools were trying their best to avoid confrontational situations by way of giving learners a voice in some capacity in the name of negotiation. By way of negotiation, schools show a positive sign that the stakeholders concerned can come together to discuss issues that concern them as an organisation, hence these views by the respondents, the first one being an HOD from one of the schools:

H. 1 I do not remember what the structure was called, but it consisted of management, educators and learners, so all parties were involved.

According to the HOD concerned, this happened in the midst of learners wanting a say in school governance, hence they 'opened this window' to the learners, and this was happening before the SASA of 1996 was made a reality.

Another deputy principal from another school relates the situation in his school, before the new policies were put in place, how they negotiated their way through, among others, the many political ideologies that learners believed in and wanted to follow, even inside the schoolyard. With reference to the length of the following quote, I honestly could not leave out any part of what the interviewee said, because the contents of the quote seem to have laid the foundation in his school for, as he says, 'coping' under the pressures and influences of the issues that sometimes led to the ugly scenes in schools. Within this quote as well emerges the fact that political formations do play a role in how learners approach and address their issues. Through employing communication in negotiation it seems possible that differences could be ironed out without there being unsavoury scenes. Because "participation creates ownership" (Hemmati 2002:45), when learners are involved in decision making processes they could easily take it upon themselves to make it their responsibility to own up to their actions and in the process help diffuse possible tensions amongst themselves. Therefore the views expressed below show how the disadvantages of having many 'politicians' within one school were transformed into advantages.

D.1 ... For our own way of coping and out of our own experiences in our school, we kind of exposed them, opened a window, for we were consulting them in many issues. Yes we had a PTA which was running well, but when it came to some issues ... We had a students' forum besides the SRC, and in that forum we had, that is where the political formations met because you will find that the SRC will this year be AZASM, (student movement, affiliated to AZAPO) COSAS (affiliated to the ANC) that year, you know. To balance that we had a students' forum where say for instance a June 16 will be discussed, Steve Biko day will be discussed and many other historical events. Mind you these were not public holidays at the time, so we would have them there whilst these were made activist days, we would make that an educational day and we would get speakers from relevant political organisations and so in that way we were able to contain the politics inside the school. For an example when AZASM called for white teachers to leave township schools, as much as we would be discussing that in the PTA and surely taking a position that that is not going to happen, we would take it further to the students' forum. There Azasm is going to interact with COSAS, PASO, SRC as well, we were also trying to work so as not to have the SRC being accused that "you are pro administration" because at the time the administration as well was very quick to be seen as being "for government" so sometimes when you attacked the government the principal and his HODs would be seen as that buffer that disturbs the will of liberation. But then we opened all these forums to discuss issues, so in that way we did bring them on board but they were not aware that they were part of the controlling voice and remember at the time there was the whole cry of the 'three legged pot', students, parents and teachers, so that was used as a weapon to gain full control of the school, so to have that under control we had them on these forums and so we managed... When this came up and was legalised and put on statutory we had already embarked on that exercise as this school so it did not bring so much shock but now at least we were going to sit with them and parents.

The views expressed by this respondent demonstrate that in order for schools to avoid finding themselves in situations where the learning premises would be made political fields they had to devise means by which to cope under those trying times. This further stresses the importance of continuous negotiation in schools. Some of the things that warrant negotiation in school are more serious than many would like to think, as shown by this respondent:

D.1 The group [of students] that we have is not having a common purpose in terms of 'who we are and how we can conduct ourselves'. The big problems of catching a boy with dagga for instance or negotiating to take a weapon from a boy are things of people who really do not have a common purpose.

On the other hand the learners show that they are not always this group of impossible, power hungry non-thinkers who would not listen to anyone but themselves, but through negotiation can be so positive about many things, especially if they were to negotiate their differences with the SMTs in good time. Following are the words of an RCL president who describes her job as involving negotiating important issues between the RCL and the SMT in her school, thereby averting possible ugly confrontations.

Pres. 1 ... I am bridging the gap between the learners and the teachers, whatever they have to complain about I just take it to the teachers and whatever the teachers are trying to voice out towards us and they are experiencing some difficulties, they tell me to talk to the pupils. This is so because we are at the same level and we know each other better, so I always bridge the gap between the two groups.

True to the character of a leader or one with responsibility, she mentions ‘bridging the gap’ which is positive by any standard, if good relations are to always prevail.

Another RCL member, a treasurer from another school reasons that negotiation leads to smooth running of schools:

Tres: 1 I would say it is very important for all schools to have RCLs for representation so that everything runs smoothly, and the RCLs as well should know what they are doing

The views expressed demonstrate that there is an added advantage to having RCLs always ready to sit down and negotiate issues with the SMTs, especially if they know their duties within the school.

4.2.6.1 LACK OF NEGOTIATION: DANGER(S) TO THE SCHOOLS

With substantiated claims, I have argued at length concerning the advantages of having healthy communication in schools. In consequence there are more gains than losses to having these kinds of situations. There are many unforeseen and unpredictable circumstances that could crop up if such channels are not open and maintained. The following HOD relates something unpleasant which happened to

their principal, just because there were no prior negotiations with the learners concerned.

H.3 ...they felt that the principal did not want to cooperate and as a result they toyi-toyied, they ruffled the principal but that was stopped and educators and parents and the RLC were involved in trying to look into the issue and come to a conclusion, as a result of that the whole thing was sorted out.

That the learners did not continue attacking the principal after the intervention shows that had the issue at hand been negotiated with them from the beginning they would never have done the things they did.

Without the use of negotiation, the language and tone of communication could hardly be understood, and glaring ‘mistakes’ could be committed along the way if there is no negotiation going on between the two groups in schools. Among the other ‘burning’ issues in schools that sometimes lead to conflicts between the RCLs and the SMTs is the issue of the matric farewell functions, of which almost all interviewed, especially the SMT members, cite as among the very common reasons for learners to get unruly and become reckless when ‘demanding’ monies for them.

The matric farewell functions in schools are meant to be planned, organised and carried out in very good spirits, however, this does not always tend to be the case as many of the respondents’ comments on the matter demonstrate.

H.2 ...There were incidents where there was dissatisfaction with matric farewell. At some point the learners jumped over the fence, and there were some incidents. One year, though I cannot remember well it was alleged that one of the learners in grade 12 had a gun, but I don’t think anyone [among the staff members] actually saw it. ...So I think whatever unruly behaviour experienced was because of the farewell.

On many occasions, as the research participants show, when wanting a farewell function, especially if there are any slight indications that it may not take place or may be delayed, the matriculants have shown that they are prepared to go as far as they can to make sure it is done on their terms. These terms could include [mainly] the amounts of money involved, which has proven to be the bone of contention on many

occasions between the matriculants and schools. Obviously there are worse things that could happen to anyone in the schoolyard if there could even be talk of some learners bringing guns to school. This really shows that learners are more than serious and are prepared to do whatever it takes to get things done, hence the importance of not letting things get out of hand from the very beginning.

Another HOD adds:

H.1 Students were violent; they were demanding a farewell [the matriculants]. ...According to them they would not be having money for the farewell, and started to be violent....

There are more questions than answers pertaining to the reasons contributing to sometimes making these functions controversial. The very first question to ask would be “do the learners view these functions as rights or privileges”? It does not seem clear whether the schools make it clear from the very beginning whether it is a privilege or a right. The grade twelve learners do not seem to make it any easier for schools to avoid the controversies that mainly characterise these functions. Through negotiating with them in advance and adhering to policy, no one would be left behind in terms of understanding the reasons behind making the farewell functions an issue to fight over. According to the following respondents there are cases however, where they are made aware of a prevailing status quo, but none the less continue fighting the SMTs. This principal relates his school’s story:

P.1...It is a widespread phenomenon that they demand money for their farewell functions, we also have been victims of that, but what has helped us is that we have managed to put together all involved and formulated a policy concerning the funding of a farewell... it is a product of students, teachers and parents.

There is a good sign that emerges here, which shows that there is something good on paper, by which everyone should abide, in connection with the farewell function in his school. This sounds positive, but the same principal has had some bad experiences with regard to these functions although there is a policy on paper, as he continues:

P.1... If I may quote a recent example... It happened to us about two weeks ago, we were attacked by students, who were demanding three thousand rand for their farewell. I was attending a workshop in town and was phoned by one of my colleagues about that crisis. I promised to call the police if they were vandalising property, but if they were listening, I advised teachers to try to address them in accordance with our policy.

Unfortunately the learners were impossible according to the respondent, as they did not want to listen to the teachers, but instead...

P.1 The police came and chased them away locked the gates and were told to come to school on the following day. I had to address the whole thing (the following day) which took me about twenty minutes. Firstly I talked to the farewell committee and the grade twelve learners, and told them that they were not going to get that amount, because lower grades' parents' money was never going to subsidise them, they have to fundraise throughout the year, through a committee involving the teachers as well... I gave them options, to cooperate with the committee, if not, the gates are open [for them to leave the school], or all go back to class. I managed to identify two instigators who I mentioned by names in that meeting to say they must not destabilise our programmes in the school, as they are about to write their trial examinations and shortly thereafter the final examinations.

The views expressed by this principal are not only unique to his school, but are almost a norm to many schools, that the learners disregard what has been agreed upon between them and the SMTs and do things their own way, as this deputy principal relates to this state of affairs:

D. 1... We have had few incidents after 1994, which turned violent, and even now we think that they were due to misunderstanding, the first one was around matric farewell. As a school we insist that the matriculants have got to be the first ones to pay school fees and then we have our own fundraising so we know that the farewell is guaranteed. But in this particular year they did not pay their school fees and we insisted that they were not going to get a farewell if they did not pay, but I think we had a different brand of students in matric in that year... They were influential, arrogant and so the leadership of the matric class was more in control of the school than the RCL, that leadership hijacked the whole school just because of the matric farewell. I remember that we were kept hostage and they wanted a 'yes' to the matric farewell and we said 'no' the whole teacher body was hostaged and they were singing their songs until the riot squad released us and so we reported at the area office. They did come to school and used fire extinguishers to flush the floors of the administration block, but together with parents we stood our ground that there will be no

farewell. And so we had to reregister everybody, which was the agreement of the SGB so they had to reapply and it then quietened down and we started afresh and we worked our way through.

This respondent makes some very interesting comments, to the effect that the grade twelve classes can manage to hijack the whole school. As to why it is possible for them to do this is open for discussion, but generally the respondents' responses show that there really is a great influence that the grade twelve classes wield in their respective schools. Talking of 'influence', another controversial aspect of organisational behaviour, *power*, has attracted my attention concerning how it influences school governance.

4.3 POWER

Of all the different aspects of organisational life, power is possibly the most problematic (James & Connolly 2000: 12).

According to Bush (1995:79) "power may be regarded as the ability to determine the behaviour of others or to decide the outcome of conflict".

Power is unquestionably a significant dimension of learner participation in school governance (see page 64). The data contain several other examples of language that indicates opposition, disagreement, even 'warfare', such as *ruffled* (man-handled), *weapon*, *fight*, *gain more ground*, *seriously being chased away*, "*sibanik'umzuzu baphume baphele*", *caught in the middle*, *struggling*, *fighting spirit*, *keep the peace*, and *violated*. According to Talbot (2003:337), management theory is characterised by elements of warfare, and he concludes that "the military legacy for organisational structure and management prior to the Industrial Age arose because previously the largest organisations known to society were armies". It comes as no surprise therefore that schools as organisations are not short of individuals and groups who are oppositional in their attitudes, and that they use language which reflects this.

Covey (1992:102) discusses principle-centred power, which he claims has three types of power, among which is *utility power*, which is characterised by an exchange of benefits. Covey maintains, "Much of what happens in the normal operation of

organizations is fuelled by utility power”. This is the kind of power that is most likely to be showing its character in schools. Qualifying this, Covey (1992:103) claims: “You only have power over people as long as you don’t take everything away from them”. The spirit of opposition can thus be diverted into some kind of a melting pot of collective bargaining. This is briefly discussed on page 89 where the respondent concerned was outlining ways and means by which their school tried, with measured success, to deal with the many political ideologies.

Seemingly there is no one best way of referring to how power is acquired, which may mean that in more ways than one, it depends on the individuals concerned. To that effect Schmuck and Runkel (1994:58) claim that:

When people identify themselves with others as members of a group, they come to have feelings of solidarity and loyalty to one another. They value their membership in the group and want to protect it.

This is characteristic of students, through their RCLs, and that is how they obtain power, whilst with SMTs it has everything to do with their positions and responsibilities. By their very nature, organisations, because of among others, power, are characterised by conflicts and negotiations. According to the NEPI (1992:15):

Conflict and negotiation between individuals and or organizations is a critical variable in the process of change in state education systems. These relationships involve power balances and a struggle for control of the system.

The relations in schools between RCLs and SMTs do show that there may be struggles for control from both sides. With the different stakeholders having acquired power, there is bound to be conflict because according to Harris *et al.* (1997:26) “Whether the attempt to use power in order to influence behaviour succeeds depends upon the reactions of those over whom it is being exerted”. Because of that, I want to believe, some of the things that have happened in institutions would not have happened had it not been for the manner in which different groupings in schools pursued their goals.

4.3.1 “ENTITLEMENT SYNDROME”?

As demonstrated already, communication has a pivotal role to play in addressing matters of mutual interest in schools. When one looks at the manner in which many schools do things it is not surprising that the learners take it for granted that they are entitled to certain things in their respective schools. The respondents have different views on whether some of those things are privileges or not. Also there seems to be a set trend with the grade twelve classes from almost all the schools in terms of taking many things for granted:

H. 1 ... The problem with them is that usually they don't follow the correct procedures, I think that is the first problem with them. And then when they are doing grade twelve their behaviour changes. I think also with them they have this 'entitlement syndrome' especially when it comes to farewell issues they feel that they are entitled to the farewell.

H.2 So I think whatever unruly behaviour experienced was because of the farewell.

One may argue that people who feel entitled to privileges will find it difficult to develop their management and leadership skills. A startling revelation has been that of the grade twelve classes making sure that the very critical positions in the RCLs, especially the presidents, would be held by learners who are their classmates:

H. 2 ...They also take advantage of the fact that the RCL president is usually in grade twelve.

I also made this observation while in the process of conducting the interviews in all five schools, that all the presidents and the majority of the secretaries were from grade twelve, hence the very big possibility of their manipulating the RCLs.

4.3.2 THE POLITICS OF DIFFERENCE

It is widely acknowledged that differences will almost always be there in organisations, and that being the case, it means that schools may not be exceptional. Christiansen *et al.* (1997:62) claim that among others, “the emergence of power and status issues, the failure of one party to appreciate the other, and the reference to time, or rather lack of time, as the reason for failure”, would characterise the collaborations

in schools, in this case between the RCLs and the SMTs. If that is the case then, surely that is bound to have an impact on the smooth running of schools. Cyert (1975:28), in Bush (1995:76) argues that: “within any organisation conflicts tend to arise between the goals of subunits and the overall goals of the total organisation”. In schools therefore this sets the stage for some interesting scenes, because as Bush (*ibid*: 77) puts it, “organizational politics arise when people think differently and want to act differently”. To put Bush’s view into perspective in this regard, the respondents do come to the fore in terms of the ‘them and us’ stance.

P. 1 We try to understand why they say what they are saying and try to make them understand our point of view, but normally we can’t decide in one meeting. We meet again after having gone home to think the issue more.

And another president from another school:

Pres .2 We had a meeting with them (the SMT), telling us what we must be prepared to do in the school.

And a secretary from a different school:

Sec. 1 Sometimes they just do things their own way...

It is unfortunate in this time and age that there are still such glaring differences between the SMTs and the RCLs concerning their views on certain issues. I am saying this because it could prove detrimental to the well being of schools, especially because there is something positive on paper in terms of the ‘middle ground’ between them. Perhaps the issue here relates to the question of centralising or decentralising power, which concerns many in school governance, including the NEPI (1992:3), which states that:

One of the central debates of educational governance is that of centralisation and decentralisation. In reality... most systems are a mixture of both. The key issue is rather that power relations are critical in determining the character of the system. A critical theme is therefore the optimal distribution of powers and functions to the different levels of the system.

I am aware of the fact that the NEPI papers and suggestions were put forward before the SASA was passed in 1996. However the contents are relevant as many of these suggestions formed the core of the SASA and other important educational policies. Also I am aware of the fact that the scales may not balance when it comes to ‘power sharing’ between SMTs and RCLs, but that is not where it should end. The issue of school governance in the new dispensation has made inroads in the adoption and employment of democratic principles, but more still needs to be done. The challenges raised by the quoted writers, coupled with the comments of the interviewees, bring to the fore the fact that many a time attention has to be paid to detail when dealing with secondary schools. On organisational matters and potential conflicts Hoy and Miskel (1996:198) suggest the employing and adoption of a compromising style, which they refer to as:

...a balance between the needs of the organisation and those of the individual. The focus of this style is on negotiating, looking for the middle ground, trade offs, and searching for solutions that are satisfactory or acceptable to both parties.

The ‘middle ground’ mentioned by these two authors is crucial to the maintenance of continuous contact and positive relations between the SMTs and the RCLs. Again, concerning politics in organisations, Bush (1995:75) maintains that; “political models are concerned with *interests* and *interest groups*. Individuals are thought to have a variety of interests which they pursue within the organization”. It is these differing views on certain issues and lack of openness about them that sometimes bring about the element of mistrust among the SMTs and the RCLs in schools, hence looking deeper into the mistrust that has emerged would be helpful.

4.3.3 MISTRUST

It would be unfortunate for any organisation to experience mistrust among its members, more so in a school situation where there are different levels of operation. The element of mistrust seems to have characterised secondary schools for years, in some cases for obvious reasons, but how does it come about that after many ‘democratic’ policies have been in existence, there is mistrust? More than once

during this research I have come across sentiments that express mistrust in different forms and tones from the respondents. According to Sithole (1995:97)

There are both negative and positive experiences of the role of students in democratic school governance; therefore policies must be formulated on the basis of existing strengths and by addressing some of the glaring weaknesses.

If what Sithole is saying is anything to go by, then part of it would explain, though with less justification, why there is room for mistrust among the stakeholders in schools, as shown by this respondent's views:

H.1 I think the best way is to get somebody from outside to intervene because sometimes when there is a crisis students do not trust anyone, so it is better to call in a neutral somebody.

The speaker was responding to a question of how they as the SMT in their school handle crisis situations involving learners. There is an element of concern in the respondent's views, that calling for the intervention of outsiders would under normal circumstances be secondary, which does not seem to be the case with her.

Below is the response from an HOD from another school who relates an incident involving learners where because of dissatisfaction with a matric farewell function, an ugly confrontation ensued and then all stakeholders had to be called in to try and solve that.

H.2 The staff, SMT and SGB got involved... because as we felt we couldn't handle it by ourselves we let parents come and observe thereafter.

Another respondent, a deputy principal from a different school argues:

D.1... I have learnt to accept them, I think it would be wrong not to have them now.

There is an element of not trusting learner involvement in his words, though he consoles himself towards the end of his statement, and in the process makes it sound

as if the school would be held accountable by somebody else if they did not abide by the set rules of involving them.

An RCL member reasons that:

Pres.3 If someone is a student representative, they must be sure of themselves, not to be sell-outs, and know what to do.

One may sense that the ‘them’ and ‘us’ stance is still very much alive if the RCLs are careful not to be seen as being ‘sell-outs’ by their constituents. The unfolding picture gradually reveals the reasons for schools’ inability to attain and sustain successful SMT/RCL partnerships. In a case like this therefore, the culture of democracy is not easy to come by. Such ends easily defeat the means in a society that barely needs that, because for long enough “in planning, the emphasis was on the negative” (Christie and Warburton 2001:48) when it came to learner issues.

Among the questions to ask about learner involvement in governance is the issue of which parties benefit at the end of the day. In trying to answer this, Sithole (1995:99) claims that:

The role of students in deepening democracy and ensuring that the culture of democracy is nurtured and developed in school governance cannot suddenly be marginalised or put in the background.

The claim by Sithole goes deeper into looking at the rationale for including the RCLs in school governance and also the extent to which they must be involved. The data from both the interviews and the questionnaires, coupled with the Department of Education documents, reveal that the extent of their involvement could be convenient to somebody else other than the RCLs or learners themselves. Again, still on the issue of whether involving them was a good idea or not, Sithole (1995:98) further argues that some forces:

Suggest that decisions about education are a matter for elderly people and must be attended to by parents, principals and teachers, whilst students concentrate on their studies... On cultural and traditional grounds, elderly people do not discuss important matters in the presence of children, and to do so now would tarnish the respect which

children must accord their elders, and bring about decay and morass in the traditional value system.

These could be the beliefs held by adults when it comes to RCL recognition as stakeholders. Some may argue that the ‘cultural grounds’ that pull back democratic processes are no more acceptable in a society that is very much trying to shake off the unwanted stereotypical behaviours of the past. It would also surprise many to notice that there are still signs that show that some do cling to those olden days’ views when it comes to facing issues head on, as this HOD has observed:

H. 2 Unity needs to be instilled in them, but I worry about the girls, as they are not confident enough, I think for cultural reasons...

The ‘cultural reasons’ mentioned by this respondent address the ‘cultural and traditional grounds’ mentioned by Sithole, who in the process of acknowledging the difficulty the SMTs as adults have in accepting RCLs as young adults or ‘children’ suggests ways and means to overcome that. This, he claims, would be done in the interests of democracy.

Seemingly the notion of adopting democratic practises in the governance of schools was never going to easily erase the belief systems of the adult groups among the stakeholders.

D. 1 When this came up and was legalised [RCL participation] and put on statutory we had already embarked on that exercise as the school, so it did not bring so much shock but now at least we were going to sit with them and parents, and parents were the most conservative group which was struggling to accept the kids presence in a meeting [underlining my emphasis].

True to the character of parents it was always going to be a bit difficult for them to accept the ‘kids’ (RCLs) presence and or participation in governance, but the data reveals that it is not only the parents who show signs of not trusting the learners, but also the professional stakeholders as well. The following response from an HOD, on the general dealings between the RCLs and the SMTs draws attention to conflict resolution:

H.2 ...We see whether to involve the teacher union members and usually parents if it is a group of learners that is involved...

Why, one may ask, would there be any need to involve teacher union members in matters that are clearly meant for the stakeholders of schools if there is enough trust between the SMT and the RCL? The answer to this, though it may not end there, may lie in the political nature of the relations between the SMTs and the RCLs that has emerged so far in this chapter.

The political elements that emerge between the SMTs and the RCLs are characteristic of organisations. Whether this augurs well for a school situation or not is open for discussion. Having said that, I am however aware of the fact that facing such situations, schools cannot afford to be idle and not do something about it. Responses to this dilemma from different writers suggest that there will be bargaining and negotiation among the groups involved. Among these writers is Bush (1995:85), who argues that “political models assume *organizational structure* which emerges from the process of bargaining and negotiation, and may be subject to change....” What Bush is saying here is that for schools as organisations to adopt ideal organisational features when facing challenges, they need to employ bargaining and negotiation, and this should form part of ongoing processes. For bargaining and negotiation to form part of ongoing processes in schools would help avert what Weick (1996) calls ‘Fighting Fires in Educational administration’, and according to him, “effective fire fighting occurs when people know what they do not know and simultaneously trust and mistrust their past experience. Wise organizations know what they do not know.”

Among the issues that have characterised school governance and conflicts in secondary schools in this chapter are those that involve school finances. Hence looking at how the monies are raised, kept and used would be of interest.

4.3.3.1 FINANCIAL MATTERS

On many occasions anything that involves money in secondary schools, has proved to be ‘sensitive’, but why, one may ask, when there are clear rules and regulations governing the generation, keeping, and use of funds in schools. The respondents’ responses on money matters reveal that the RCLs are involved in fundraising activities, in fact, the RCLs take it to be one of their main duties within the schools; let us look at what they say concerning this:

P. 1 We also have to raise money for the school, if maybe something has to be fixed. We also raise funds through entering competitions, projects, and sometimes win prizes for the school.

P. 2 Raising funds for the school and other things...

Tres.1 I have to keep the money after fundraising functions, we all count it and then I keep it. Even with the school's money, I have to know what's going on with it...

From the very beginning it is interesting to notice that the learners are involved in the fundraising processes, and seemingly the proceeds do not go to the same coffers after the different fundraising projects have been completed. The first quoted RCL treasurer goes on to say:

...No I don't bank it, I take it to somebody who will keep it safe for me when I need it. As for this year, we did fundraise as the RCL and that's the money I'm keeping.

Tres. 1: After fundraising we count the money and keep it, also with school finances I am involved.

It is not very clear what happens with the monies raised by the RCLs and kept by their treasurers, and the answer I got from asking that question was not convincing, that they were using it for learner affairs and the after-farewell party.

Educational institutions, like all other organisations work best when there is good cooperation, which according to Halpin and Troyna (1994:49) "is an acknowledgement that lack of conflict is in the interest of both parties". As the research shows so far, if the parties involved do not work very hard to always reach compromises on issues of mutual interest and iron out their concerns in good time, there could be more unnecessary problems encountered. The two authors go on to say that "good relationships depend on trust". In agreement with this view, I also take note of their concern that..."trust is also complicit with power, for relations of trust contain obligations to justify their continuation". The sentiments expressed by these two authors and the development of the argument in this chapter warrants a deeper

look at the attitudes of the SMTs and the RCLs towards each other, in relation to school governance.

4.4 ATTITUDES

The choices we face are complex and involve challenges to deep-rooted behaviour and attitudes (Christie & Warburton 2001:136).

Having observed existing differences and future prospects of planned policies, Sithole (1995:97) argued that:

There are both negative and positive experiences of the role of students in democratic school governance; therefore policies must be formulated on the basis of existing strengths and by addressing some of the glaring weaknesses.

Sithole's stance on learner involvement in this argument seems to be one of cautioning policy formulators about being complacent and or taking some aspects for granted. The long held view that learners as 'minors' should sit back and let the 'guardians' or adults decide on their fates has always been cause for concern. Those with such attitudes are, according to Sithole said to have suggested that decisions about education are a matter for elders and they are the ones who should worry about it and not the learners. Whichever reasons may be brought forward as trying to counter learner involvement in school governance, they are now immaterial because what matters most is that learners are presently recognised stakeholders, as per the policies in operation. It cannot just be wished away that there might be remnants of those whose attitudes have barely changed concerning this. The implications thereof could be detrimental to the realisation of set objectives by schools, more so to the challenges of democratising school governance, the very reasons learners were roped in.

Kraak and Young (2001:6) argue that there should be "continuing dialogue between vision and theory on the other hand, and policy and practice on the other". The suggestion is very relevant to prevailing circumstances in South Africa, with almost every policy bound to experience 'teething' problems. Such views are a lot more significant when it comes to the present scenario of trying to cultivate democratic working relations in school governance. Many will agree that democratising school governance any day anywhere, is a challenge, but this should be more the case in

South Africa because of past experiences. The need to continuously interact with policies could be helpful to many stakeholders in a school situation because of the need for some to unlearn old behaviours and begin accommodating everyone. To that effect Bush (1986:52) argues that:

The introduction of democratic approaches in schools has been slower, less complete...The tradition of all powerful heads, with authority...has stifled several attempts to develop participative modes in primary and secondary schools.

The attitudes of school heads and or SMTs to RCLs' assuming stakeholder status seem to be questionable, as many respondents continue to demonstrate. Likewise, RCL/learner attitudes towards the SMTs are not predictable. The following incident, related by an RCL president occurred in one school, where I want to believe, had it not been for the display of a combination of negative attitudes towards each other from both sides, it would not have happened:

Pres. 3 One year the principal just got angry and he punched a learner, and he even had to face the police. That crisis continued for a whole week.

Asked who they think was wrong between the two, they respond:

Pres. 3... I think they were both wrong, because the learner was called to the principal's office, but would not come and the principal went to beat him in class.

And to top it all, the RCL did not hesitate to 'take sides';

Pres.3 They [the RCL] were on the learner's side.

To an 'outsider' this is a clear indication of a clash of attitudes, and could easily be associated with a number of aspects, among which have already been discussed in this chapter, i.e. mistrust, power, and so on.

Also, data from the SMT questionnaires concerning the department of education's attitude towards learner participation in governance seem to imply that it is encouraged and that is where it ends, as they only need it to avoid conflicts with

learners. Of the three principals (out of a possible five) who responded to the questionnaires, one goes further and claims that the departmental attitude “is very vague and confusing”. Though no immediate conclusions can be drawn from that statement, with the principals being the links between schools and the officials of the department, there is far too much one can read into it.

Both parties can interpret the body of knowledge at the disposal of both the SMTs and the RCLs differently leading to them not formulating the same attitudes towards each other. The different levels on which these groups operate could yield results that are contrary to Bush’s (1987:62) views that “democratic processes can be effective only if participation is maintained at an adequate level”. My contention therefore is that the ‘adequate level’ cannot be assumed to be suitable for everyone at the same time in the case of secondary schools. Some RCL questionnaire responses, on suggestions concerning the role played by RCLs in school governance call for ‘more powers’. It is interesting that they would call for ‘more powers’, in the sense that the authorities see nothing wrong with what they have offered them, hence I would argue that the roles of RCLs would need to be revisited, and this time include the very RCLs in the process of formulating them.

A question one would ask therefore, pertaining to attitudes towards each other, would relate to whether any of the stakeholders involved in school governance have changed. This question stems from the differing views expressed so far by the respondents. Any group of individuals involved in school governance feels that they should never be dominated by any other, and as such would most probably do anything to validate their stance. Clearly the respondents do not hold the same views when it comes to them analysing the bringing of the RCLs into governance. The following respondent captures it better when he says:

H.3 Well...in my view I will say things have gone for the better, even though as educators we might have different views in that respect...as an educator who has been schooled in a non-democratic environment and.... who has been trained in an environment which looked or which envisaged a situation where the learner would be the subordinate and the educator would be the authority.

Through trying to solve these on their own, schools would on the other hand be well on the road to adopting a ‘learning organisations’ stance.

4.5 SCHOOLS AS LEARNING ORGANISATIONS

The problem of change is bigger than the school...schools obviously cannot solve the problems alone but they must see themselves as part of the solution (Fullan 1993:42).

As pointed out already, schools are by nature meant to be there to help to help initiate and or facilitate change in a manner that is acceptable to the majority of a country. Like any other organisation, it can never be taken for granted that schools, in terms of power sharing, delegation, and stakeholder participation could easily assume that role of being learning organisations. According to Senge (1990:1) learning organisations are:

Organisations where people continually expand their capacity to create the results they truly desire, where new and expansive patterns of thinking are nurtured, where collective aspiration is set free, and where people are continually learning how to learn together.

About a learning organisation, Evans (1998:201) says: “A learning organisation is one that promotes learning among its employees, but more importantly, is an organisation that itself learns from that learning”. With schools the ‘employees’ could be referring to all the stakeholders that make the organisations that the schools are, always functional.

There is no doubt that because of the manner in which schools were managed in the apartheid era, where there was no significant sharing of management and governance duties, there is a definite need for those involved to learn in order to rid themselves of the stereotypes of the past. Through a variety of acceptable measures, among which is *readiness*, schools do need to be gradually made to be learning organisations, so that new acts and policies do not become ‘strange pieces of paper’. Put into perspective, through this kind of learning, schools would value every stakeholder, and by so doing, work positively towards the betterment of relations between the RCLs and other stakeholders. Many OD practitioners acknowledge that becoming learning organisations and hence accepting change is no easy feat. Schmuck and Runkel’s (1994: 57) argument in connection with this view is that there are two influences that can be said to help build an organisation i.e. *motivation* and *perception*.

Readiness is without doubt one of the most important pieces of the big puzzle in complementing the organisational structures' willingness to cooperate and collaborate in order to positively work towards realising shared goals. Endorsing my argument of not taking things for granted, Evans (*ibid*) claims that "many organisations (or parts of organisations) become learning organisations not because they identify it as a strategy for organisational development: they do so as a result of a set of circumstances". The responses from both sets of respondents interviewed do show the need for adopting that 'learning organisation' attitude, as this deputy principal argues:

D. 1 ... I think we have got to do more than that because that is more of an orientation into the job and it ends there. I think we have got maybe to have termly outings or team building things, so that we return maybe having drawn up aims for that particular term, not only to govern, but also on 'how to be myself', peer advice, peer counselling. We do not want them to be young police people but to attempt to talk to someone smoking dagga, to someone who is late, talk to me as an educator to get more empowered.

The principal from another school endorses this and throws more light on the need for schools, particularly learners to differentiate between rights and privileges so as to avoid having to face conflicts day after day, and he argues:

P.1 I think its not because the management is controversial or intransigent, sometimes it's the lack of insight or knowledge on the part of the learners, they don't know how to go about voicing their grievances, so they don't differentiate between rights and privileges. Also management sometimes fails to understand and differentiate between the two. Student arrogance sometimes comes from lack of knowledge and it's for us to clear up their minds and give them lectures... I think as I have already alluded to that, learners need to be workshopped thoroughly not only for their specific roles in governance, but also be readied to be made leaders, like chairing meetings, standing in powerful portfolios even if not in the SGB but in other structures, they be made to know exactly what to do. They must be full participants in structures and that can only happen when they are empowered and be bold enough to stand even in community-based structures.

What this principal says is relevant, not only to the benefit of the learners, but to those communities from which they come, and this is said by someone who is really concerned about the future of those in his organisation and who also is aware that a

school is not there for academic purposes only but for the whole development of young minds, which could grow up to be prominent leaders of our country.

And one of the presidents sees this as an opportunity to empower others for future purposes:

Pres. 1 It is only that in some areas we could try harder, maybe next year to empower more people and maybe some students will get interested.

Through this learning and continuous interaction, light can be thrown on the view that “It can often highlight problems at an early stage or point out issues of detail that ‘strategists’ may miss; it can reduce the time consuming errors” (Evans 1998:202). Along the route of governing schools may appear loopholes that would otherwise have been overlooked by the authorities (the “strategists”). Therefore in adopting a culture of learning organisations, schools may help ‘plug’ those loopholes missed by policy formulators. Without rehearsing in detail the deliberations in chapter two, the gist of my argument in this part of the chapter further confirms that adapting to the new ways in which schools must be governed was never going to be easy. I therefore agree with Senge *et al.* (2000:325), that, “It is clear that creating vibrant, collaborative cultures in schools and school systems is a vital strategy for individual and school development”, because after all, “change is a journey, not a blueprint” (Fullan1993: 24).

4.6 SUMMARY

This chapter has looked at RCL participation in secondary school governance from its very conception, through the themes that have emerged from the participants' responses to the questionnaires and the interviews, against the contents of the DoE documents that concern school governance. The research has found that the SMTs still have a problem accepting the newly acquired learners' status of being partners (through the RCLs) in governance. The documents concerned with RCL participation have been put under the spotlight in this chapter, and have proved to be among the main contributors to the SMTs' sceptical perceptions in considering learners as equal partners.

Many aspects that characterise schools as organisations have proved difficult to overcome and as such it is very difficult for the culture of democracy to exist. These aspects include *recognition of all stakeholders, communication, power, attitudes, trust* and the view that *schools need to be learning organisations* in order to accept democratic ways of doing things and to unlearn the old ways in which schools were governed. Of the mentioned organisational aspects, lack of communication has proved to be dominant within the RCLs, the RCLs and the larger learner communities and most significantly between the RCLs and the SMTs.

This has led to the groups involved being undecided about each other's conduct. As a result, the politics of difference, mistrust and rebellious RCL members have shown their character in the manner in which schools are governed, and in the process send a message to the authorities that the vision of learner participation in school governance is far from being realised.

CHAPTER FIVE

5.1 ISSUES OF CONCERN

In this chapter I summarise the main findings of the study emerging from the themes highlighted in chapter four.

The first theme addresses recognition and suggests that only partial recognition is given to the RCLs as young adults and their roles in school governance by the SMTs and the documents from the department of education. The study revealed that contrary to what people are made to believe, as per the laws that govern school governance (SASA 1996, *The Guides for RCL Participation in School Governance 1999*), RCL participation in governance is limited to statements that are vague when it comes to the extent of the participation, and only a little clearer in terms of forming part of SGBs and other insignificant structures. When it comes to critical decision making, RCLs are presented as minors, even by the departmental documents that sanction their very participation. This ambivalence has emerged as one of the main findings of this research.

The basis on which RCL involvement in school governance rests has, according to this research, proved to be practically lacking in terms of what one understands by democratic involvement. What has emerged instead, are indications, according to Schmuck & Runkel 1994:117) that:

The gap between the sporadic, generally ineffective ways in which students currently participate in educational decisions and the well organized procedures available to this end constitutes a major problem.

Many of the SMT respondents were not forthcoming or did not know what to say about the sincerity of RCL participation. This was more significant during the interviews, where only one out of the five respondents mentioned that by law they are considered minors and can therefore not be included in committees that would perform duties that have legal implications. The SMTs acknowledge that they (RCLs) are part of school governance, but are not too sure about how to involve them except to represent the RCLs in the SGBs. The learners on the other hand, accept and

acknowledge their stakeholder status and want to take it a step further, thus sometimes creating scenes that get out of hand. The study has found that the RCLs do not know very much about the restriction of their participation, whilst the SMTs accuse them of wanting to take over proceedings.

Such situations have hardly helped the cause of having calm and smoothly running schools, as was expected to be the case when the issue of learner involvement was conceived, hence doing less in terms of developing and enhancing good school climate. According to Hoy and Miskel (1996:141):

School climate is a relatively enduring quality of the school environment that is experienced by participants... (it) affects their behaviour, and is based on their collective perceptions of behaviour in schools...a personality of the school.

The school climate, as envisaged here has a significant bearing on the discussion of issues, implementation of decisions taken and monitoring of progress by all concerned. The unfortunate manner in which the SMTs and the RCLs respectively perceive the role of RCLs in school governance does not constitute what the two writers perceive to be an ideal situation in schools. There are no indications or plans of coordinated efforts on the part of either group to try to make sense of the middle ground or framework created by the laws that govern schools, particularly with RCL involvement. It seems that they have not yet made sense of what it means to share responsibilities in a collegial way, meant to benefit the school as a whole. Talking of togetherness, Lambert *et al.* (1995:81) argue that “schools or organisations change as participants make sense of their work and find challenging possibilities together”. The study has found that the groups involved in school governance, instead of facing challenges together, have the tendency of projecting their energies **at** each other.

Among the very important aspects that led to a state of confusion on the roles of RCLs in governance is that schools are characterised by inadequate communication. As a result of the manner in which schools handle communication, the RCLs themselves are unable to understand the significance of communication and are therefore not able to disseminate information pertaining to important issues in good time within the RCLs and to the learner masses they represent. So significant was the lack of communication between the RCLs and the SMTs that it proved to be among

the root causes of the sometimes explosive nature of the relations between the two groups in schools. Such situations have proved to lead to both groups jumping to conclusions about each other's conduct. A typical example is one where the SMTs blame the RCLs for not knowing their roles, or not taking their roles seriously and neglecting their duties, whilst the RCLs reveal a lack of documented information; information which the SMTs need to supply.

Kraak & Young's (2001:4) concerns are pertinent here:

Implementation of changes in a system with deep historical divisions and low levels of capacity is inevitably a slow process when compared to the relatively easy task of designing new policies. It is a process in which the experience of practice has to be drawn on to continuously interrogate the original vision, not to reject it.

Looking at how other countries address the issues of past indifferences, Kraak & Young (*ibid.*) go on to claim that:

International experience, not the least from the UK, suggests that learning lessons from the failure of past policies is not easy. Because such lessons are often uncomfortable (for radical reformers as well as for governments), they are easily forgotten.

It cannot be argued that South Africa as a country looks at and does things any differently from other countries, hence there is a need to heed the call by these two writers on learning lessons from the past.

5.2 POLICY ISSUES – IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE IN SCHOOLS

Policies that appear to 'deliver' in measurable ways will always be attractive to politicians and policy makers under pressure (Kraak & Young 2001:4).

The study has found that the documented laws that govern school management and governance basically made it possible for learners to participate in school governance through the RCLs. The positive consequences of this step have, to some extent, been 'measurable', in that schools generally appear to be more stable than were in previous decades when learners sidelined, because legitimate channels through which to

interact with other stakeholders and authorities have been opened. The acquired powers (participation) by the RCLs have, however, led to their wanting more room to exercise them. For example, one RCL president complained that learner offenders are not brought to them to deal with their cases; they are punished and later brought to the RCLs' attention as complaints. This scenario has created further confusion in schools, especially because many SMTs do not communicate effectively with the RCLs concerning written information pertaining to the extent of their participation. Much of what has been discussed so far seems to put an element of doubt on the policies in place, but having examined these policies, Kraak & Young (2001:4) are optimistic and argue that, "the problems of implementation are not necessarily an indication of the failures of South Africa's first democratic government or even that the original vision was wrong".

There is an element of unease on the part of the SMTs, as they feel that because the RCLs feel entitled to things, and because they are stakeholders, they want to take over the running of schools. This feeling is certainly coherent with the tone of the *Guides*, suggesting that it is an entrenched attitude people may not even be aware of. This suggests that the SMTs have not yet been able to shake off the mentality that "organizational control is a fixed, finite entity that emanates unilaterally from the top of the organizational hierarchy" (Abdel-Halim, in Kolowsky & Sagie 2000:21). This is where the politics of difference show their character i.e. that the two groups set goals differently and in the process of pursuing them their interests clash. The manner in which the two groups address these issues has contributed to many unsavoury scenes in schools, manifestations of what Ngcongco (1995:44) calls a "lack of a democratic culture and tolerance of the divergent views". As a measure of transparency, which is among the cornerstones of democratic governance, implementation of the policies in place have proved to be far behind in terms of reaching their intended aim of letting everyone in the school community feel part of a democratic community.

Mistrust, a lack of clarity over the management of school funds and a display of negative attitudes towards each other have contributed to tensions and ultimately energy wasted on fighting rather than positively contributing to making the schools teaching and learning environments. The schools have proved to be doing very little

when it comes to displaying or adopting learning organisation stances, though some of the SMT members concede that they have learnt some valuable lessons through interacting with the RCLs in school governance. Perhaps what is emerging here is what the NEPI (1992:13) cautions about:

However, it is important to note that institutions and structures which allow democratic participation are a necessary but not sufficient condition for a democratic system of education governance.

By implication then, there is much that needs to be done in order for the policies to cultivate cultures that embrace all the stakeholders and make them feel part of a 'living' community. According to Sergiovanni (2000:14):

Culture provides us with knowledge, beliefs, and norms systems from which we derive significance. Community lets us know that we are connected to others and are part of a social group that is valuable and thus we ourselves are valuable.

This may not be specifically referring to the school governance dealt with in this study, but there are obvious connections, and similarities, which make it relevant, and the same writer goes on to say, "Schools need special leadership because they are lifeworld-intensive" (*ibid.*, 166). It is in this 'lifeworld' intensity that issues such as communication become such crucial building blocks.

Of the challenges that schools face, pertaining to policy implementation and the general reactions (possible interruptions) by those for which it is meant, Weick (1996:571) looks at them in two ways, as he argues:

When the interruption is labelled a problem, then there is the expectation that people will hit it hard, that it can be solved, and once it is solved it will stay solved. However, when an interruption is labelled an issue, one expects that it will be managed rather than solved, that it will take different forms over time, and that endurance and persistence will be needed to keep it under control.

Therefore, it is expected that the SMTs, when addressing issues or crisis situations involving learners or RCLs, try to explore different avenues and not try to look for

quick fix solutions that would easily backfire on them and have a negative impact on the schools. Also the loopholes in the policies have difficulties for schools to operate, but the schools, seemingly, have not been able to detect these, so as to do something about them, even if only to bring them to the attention of the authorities. It is thus a question of managing issues, rather than solving problems.

5.3 A COMBINATION OF FACTORS

A combination of factors seems to be the cause of the revealed state of affairs in school governance.

As has been argued, one of the principal documents that sanctions RCL participation in governance, the *Guides for RCL Participation in School Governance of 1999* seems to be inadequate for the purpose it was produced. The document is vague and too general in its reference to RCL roles and as a result it is likely to contribute to the manner in which the schools handle (or fail to handle) RCL involvement in governance. Furthermore, as discussed in chapter two, the tone of the document positions learners as potentially hostile partners. Of course the fact that the majority of the SMTs seem to be unaware of this document robs it of the power it may have to bring about change, however small.

As mentioned before, the loopholes in the policies that sanction RCL participation in school governance have not been identified by the SMTs, because of lack of interaction with these documents. Policy literacy seems to be a deficient aspect on the part of the SMTs. Perhaps it is against this background that, when discussing educational reform, Fullan (1993:3) argues:

The answer does not lie in designing better reform strategies. No amount of sophistication in strategizing for particular innovations or policies will ever work. It is simply unrealistic to expect that introducing reforms in a situation, which is basically not organized to engage in change will do anything but give reform a bad name.

The SASA mentions only that the RCLs should form part of school governance in schools that enrol learners from the eighth grade. The White Paper 2 of 1992, which preceded the SASA, talks only about involving the RCLs in discussions on policy

matters affecting the teaching staff and the learners and the relations between the staff and the body of learners. This is a clear indication that the participation was vague from its very conception. Therefore there are no distinct specifics referred to by documents concerning learner involvement, except to lay the framework for participation. One may of course deduce that policy makers believe(d) that schools have the capacity to make these policies ‘work’ in their organisations, and left the details to school managers to work out.

Concerning one of the roles of the RCLs, it is stated, “an RCL must contribute to the smooth running of the school and support the governance of the school” (DoE 1999d: 12). There are many conclusions that can be drawn from this statement, some of which could conclude that learner participation is partial and is there to instil a sense of responsibility in them and in the process avoid confrontation. One of the highlights of the findings of this research study is the fact that the schools investigated are by and large not learning organisations concerning governance, as they generally would be expected, because they have repeated the same mistakes on many occasions. Senge (1990:5) explains that:

What fundamentally will distinguish learning organizations from traditional authoritarian ‘controlling organizations’ will be the mastery of certain basic disciplines. That is why the disciplines of the learning organization are vital.

My understanding and contextualising of Senge’s views go back to the failure of SMTs to know and understand the contents of relevant policies and in the process make this one of their basic disciplines.

In conclusion, RCL participation in school governance is conditional and vague, and learners are still generally seen as potentially hostile ‘partners’ set on ensuring that schools are run on their terms. The research has therefore found that as a result of these and other factors the schools seem to be sites of struggle – places where power struggles occur. Schools are characterised by *political climates* (or cultures) rather than *community cultures*, thus stakeholders regard each other with hostility and suspicion rather than a need to cooperate.

In making these claims I do not mean to oversimplify a complex issue. Extending democratic rights to learners may always be problematic. The SMTs see themselves as upholding the laws governing schools in the manner in which they involve them; on the other hand the RCLs want more say and powers over and above their traditional levels of participation, hence they will always experience their participation as restricted. The reasons may not be out of selfishness on the part of the authorities and schools, but simply an acknowledgement that learners are still young adults or ‘children’ in the eyes of the law and those of the adults with whom they share stakeholder status. It is these dilemmas that call for further research on how best to involve them in school governance in ways and means that would suit all involved.

The real scenario in schools, then, is seemingly about power *versus* each other. The stakeholders concerned struggle [to the point of ‘fighting’] to find the common ground to help them think about contributing to schools becoming powerful organisations through coordinated efforts and or working together. Perhaps schools need to be managed along the lines suggested by Weick (1996:570) who argues:

...administrative fire fighting in its simplest form would consist of removing one or more of the causal conditions. If for example, it were the case that anger (heat) plus docile associates (fuel) plus taunting (oxygen) were found to be common denominators among parents, teachers, supervisors, students and board members who consumed disproportionate amounts of attention, then administrators could develop routines that eliminate one or more of the three... Effective fire fighting occurs when people strive to manage issues rather than to solve problems.

Weick argues that the customary negative associations of a ‘fire-fighting’ approach to management may be misleading. He argues that schools are particularly vulnerable “to failure” (Weick 1996:1), and routinising measures that minimise or neutralise causes of conflict may be an effective ‘fire-fighting’ approach. Perhaps the *Guides* discussed earlier (Chapter Two) are an attempt to do exactly that, in other words to ‘normalise’ the role of RCLs in schools. This may have the effect of counteracting the ‘oppositional’ and encouraging the ‘cooperational’.

5.4 THE LIMITATIONS OF THIS STUDY

The size of this study is its most obvious limitation. The fact that only five secondary schools' SMTs and RCLs were involved is obviously a limitation, firstly in terms of seeking statistical generalisability, secondly in terms of presenting a picture that may be true for schools or areas of the province, or indeed country, other than the five schools in Grahamstown. Although generalising was never one of my intentions, it would be interesting to be able to compare the findings of a larger study with what I have found. Larger studies also have the potential to attract the attention of the authorities to the problems experienced in secondary schools in terms of the nature of RCL involvement in school governance.

A larger study would also have the potential to involve other stakeholders. Parents' roles would be particularly interesting to explore, since for many parents the phenomenon of learner 'power' would be foreign to their own experience. It would be interesting to investigate the potential role of parents (perhaps via the SGBs) in managing learner participation.

The chief potential limitation of this study is the threat that faces all interpretive research, namely the extent to which findings may be accepted as valid, trustworthy, and 'objective', as opposed to merely reflecting the pre-conceived perceptions of the researcher. I deliberately refer to this a 'potential' limitation, since it is my belief that, although I have taken a strong and critical position on the matter, I have remained true to the injunction that, in qualitative research, findings should be shown to emerge from the data and nowhere else. I certainly discovered the truth in Arksey & Knight's (cited in Van der Mescht 2002: 48) views that "clearly, analysing data obtained from multiple sources is a far more complex exercise than simply adding all the various sets of data together." The question of objectivity is, in any event, a debatable issue in qualitative research, and I resign myself to the fact what I have presented, by drawing on questionnaire, interview and document data, is a complete and believable picture, rather than an 'objective' one. I have come to realise that:

... gathering more and different sets of perceptions from more and different respondents will result in more and different representations; i.e. the picture will

become more complete, but not [therefore] more valid” (Van der Mescht 2002:48).

5.5 RECOMMENDATIONS

5.4.1 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PRACTICE

Foremost on the recommendation list concerning learner participation in school governance is an urgent revision of the documents that sanction the RCL participation. These documents’ presentation of RCL roles displays a lack of public or academic input. As they stand, they are too vague in terms of RCL roles, and narrow in their positioning of learners as opponents rather than partners. The input of a broader body of consultants (including parents and academics) may go a long way towards turning this potentially powerful tool into a living document.

I also recommend the following:

- Workshops for RCLs on their roles. The *Guides* could be a good starting point for workshops aimed at clarifying what exactly is meant by learner involvement in school governance. Facilitation will, of course, have to be tolerant and even encouraging of critical engagement.
- Workshops for RCLs conducted by the SMTs/Schools. This step would be crucial in the sense that generic sets of guidelines (such as are contained in policy documents) need to be customised to local conditions before they can be ‘owned’.
- Report backs to learners by RCLs on their roles through the class representatives and other means. Clearly RCLs need to strengthen their communication links with the people they represent. Schools need to find ways of facilitating on-going contact.
- Organisation development workshops, where whole school communities may be drawn together so that oppositional strategies may be gradually replaced by co-operational ones. There is no doubt that current policy strategies (such as the Whole School Evaluation programme) have a huge role to play in strengthening schooling in South Africa. The **way** in which these policies roll

out will be of crucial importance, as will be the fact that learners need to be included as stakeholders in any development initiative.

5.4.3 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Some related areas were exposed during this research that I believe need to be looked at:

- The grade twelves' understanding of the roles of the RCLs. This research has revealed that senior learners do not understand the roles of the RCLs or only report issues when they feel like doing it, and after all, they almost always make it a norm that the RCL president is one of them. The issue of leadership in the RCLs also arose in this study. This could be a fruitful area of study, since there seems to be evidence to suggest that learners look for qualities such as rebelliousness in leadership. How did this come about? Is this trend reversible? Is it even undesirable?
- The role of teacher unions in the governance of schools has emerged as an issue in this study. They are not regarded as stakeholders by policy, yet they do seem to play a role in governance. In some schools they are always involved when disputes crop up. How have they contributed to the politicisation of schooling? What role can they play?
- The 'use' of RCLs by teachers to further their own interests has emerged as a worrying issue. A certain principal in this very study was nearly not employed, apparently not wanted by teachers, who 'used' the RCL and the learner masses to realise their wishes. This has proved to be the teachers' 'secret weapon' for years, and has emerged as yet another symptom of political model management in the schools I investigated. Indeed, the entire question of the proliferation of political management (rather than collegial or cultural) needs scrutiny.
- The problematic nature of matric farewell functions, as a separate issue, needs urgent attention. Almost all the respondents mentioned these functions as

having contributed in one way or the other to school disruptions. I also have first hand experience of what this means as it has happened on more than one occasion in our school. Of course, the functions themselves are only symptoms of bigger issues, but they do seem to have become magnets, or focal points of disruption, disagreement and conflict.

- The handling of finances in secondary schools in the new era needs urgent attention. It is not very clear what the role of the RCL treasurer is and how his or her role stands to benefit the school and not impact negatively. School finances have proved to be among the sensitive issues and causes of disagreement between the SMTs and the RCLs. This study has revealed worrying levels of poor (or mis-) management of money.
- The influence of parents in the manner in which the SMTs perceive the roles of the RCLs has also emerged as an issue that needs attention. Parents are the major stakeholders in the SGBs and some SMT respondents mentioned on more than one occasion that parents are the most conservative group among the stakeholders involved in school governance. To what extent does the prevalent perception of learners as ‘children’ stem from traditional domestic factors?
- The role of learners in country-wide initiatives currently promoted by the DoE (such as Whole School Evaluation) also needs to be considered. It seems clear from this study that programmes aimed at school improvement (or normalisation in some cases) cannot afford to omit learners from their thinking and planning. The question is not whether they have a role to play, but what the nature and scope of that role should be.
- Perhaps the biggest challenge of all will be exploring ways in which adults and ‘young adults’ can work together towards a common goal. The study has shown that teachers find it difficult to accept learners as equal partners. While this is not surprising and perhaps understandable, learners also need to be seen

as more than ‘mere children’ if the vision of truly collaborative governance is to be realised.

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APPENDIX A

QUESTIONNAIRE FOR SCHOOL MANAGEMENT TEAMS (SMTs) IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS.

You are humbly thanked for taking your time to fill in this questionnaire.
This questionnaire is to be filled in by members of School Management Teams in secondary schools. Please take your time and give your honest opinion of what is asked.

Section **B** requires you to provide a **YES** or **NO** answer.
Section **C** requires you to choose among the given alternatives.

SECTION A

Name of your school.....

Teaching experience (in years).....

Your position within the SMT (eg HOD, Principal or deputy).....

How long has the SMT been in place in your school?

SECTION B

PLEASE TICK A **YES** OR **NO** IN EACH CASE

Does your school have an SMT? (yes/no)

Is the SMT involved in putting the Representative Council of learners (RCL) in place?
(yes/no)

Do you have a school code of conduct for learners? (yes/no)

Does the RCL participate in the governance of the school? (yes/no)

SECTION C

TICK YOUR PREFERRED ANSWER

What sources of information do you normally consult when dealing with learner affairs?

Department of education policies

Learner code of conduct

School code of conduct

Any other.....

Is there a linkperson between the SMT and the RCL? If yes, who?

RCL member

SMT member

Parents

SGB member

Any other.....

When does the SMT get to meet the RCL?

In times of conflict

As often as possible

When planning the school activities

Which document governs the participation of learners in the governance of high schools?

South African Schools Act

School code of conduct

Any other?

SECTION D

What role does the SMT play in the process of electing the RCL?

.....
.....
.....

Is the RCL made aware of their duties within the governance of the school? If yes, how?

.....
.....
.....

Are specific roles assigned to the RCL in the running of the school? Please elaborate.

.....
.....
.....

How would you describe the relations between the SMT and the RCL?

.....
.....
.....

How are relations between the school principal and the RCL?

.....
.....
.....

Do you consult any documents when dealing with learner issues? If yes which documents and why?

.....
.....
.....
Does the RCL get to meet the school governing body (SGB)? In what circumstances?
.....
.....
Who is the RCL accountable to?
.....
.....
How is their accountability assessed?
.....
.....
In which decision making processes in the school does the RCL participate?
.....
.....
How would you describe the Departmental attitude towards learner participation in high schools?
.....
.....
How do you as the SMT normally deal with crisis situations involving learners in the school?
.....
.....
.....
.....

APPENDIX B

QUESTIONNAIRE FOR RCL

I sincerely thank you for taking time to fill in this questionnaire. It is to be filled in by members of Representative Council of Learners in secondary schools. It would be very much appreciated if you could answer in English.

Your answers are confidential. DO NOT write your name on the questionnaire.

SECTION A

Name of your school.....

How long have you been in the school (in years)?

Your position within the RCL.....

How was the RCL put in place in your school?

.....
.....

How many members make up the RCL in your school?

What are their titles?

.....
.....
.....

How often does the RCL meet?

.....
.....

HOW THE RCL WORKS

Does the RCL meet the wider parents' community? If yes, how often does it happen?

.....
.....
.....

Do you always inform someone of your plan of action as the RCL? If yes, explain who and how

.....
.....
.....

Does the RCL have its own code of conduct? If yes, explain how it came about

.....
.....
.....

SECTION B

TICK YOUR PREFERRED ANSWER FROM THOSE GIVEN IN BRACKETS

Does your school have an SMT? (yes/no)

Does the SMT play any role in the election of RCL members? (yes/no)

Is the RCL represented in the school governing body (SGB)? (yes/no)

Should the RCL participate in the decision making processes in the school?
(yes/no)

SECTION C

Who is involved in the process of electing the RCL?

.....
.....
.....

Comment briefly on the role played by those involved

.....
.....
.....

Which structures of school governance have RCL members as stakeholders?

.....
.....
.....

Comment briefly on the roles assigned to the RCL in the school

.....
.....
.....

What is the most important item(s) in the RCL's code of conduct?

.....
.....
.....

How would you describe the relations between the school's SMT and the RCL?

.....
.....
.....

What are relations like between the RCL and the school principal?

.....
.....
.....

Do you have any suggestions concerning the role of learner participation in the governance of high schools?

.....
.....
.....

What are your suggestions concerning the manner in which the authorities deal with learner problems?

.....
.....
.....

SECTION D

TICK YOUR PREFERRED ANSWER:

What do individual candidates do in order to be elected into the RCL?
Campaign

Wait for fellow learners to nominate them
Any other.....(Explain)

Who decides on items to be discussed in SMT/RCL meetings?

RCL
SMT
All concerned
The principal

Who chairs RCL/SMT meetings?

SMT member
RCL member
Neutral person
A randomly chosen person

How do you view learner participation in school governance?

Important
Not important

APPENDIX C

SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR SMT MEMBERS IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS

Can you tell me a little bit about your teaching career, when did you start, how difficult or easy was it then?
Any significant memories over the years, just a few?
When were you first involved with school administration?
Did the learners at that time have a say in school governance, how, why not?
What are the RCL's roles in the governance of the school?
How do other SMT members generally feel about this arrangement?
How do you involve the RCL in the governance of the school?
Did the school experience any violent learner behaviour in the last few years? (How did you deal with that?)
What in your view are the common reasons for learners to resort to violence when raising their concerns?
Are the RCL members assigned specific roles in the school?
What in your view is the best way to address crisis situations involving learners?
Does the SMT always tell the RCL of its programmes in the school, why/why not?
Are there any contentious issues between the RCL and the SMT? (REASONS)
Are you aware of the guides for the RCLs that sanction participation in governance? (.....follow up)
Have things got better or worse since learners were allowed to form part of school governance, please elaborate
Personally are you happy with learner involvement, why/why not?

APPENDIX D

SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR RCLs IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS

Please tell me how long have you been a learner at the school?
Are you happy to be a learner at your school, why/why not?
Is it the first time for you to be in the school's RCL?
What made you get involved with the RCL? (Position, how often do you meet, how many members make up the RCL, your job within the RCL,)
Who do you normally inform of your plan of action as the RCL?
-even if you know they would not approve you do inform them?
What are the RCL's roles within the governance of the school?
-who informs you of your duties within the school?
-are you satisfied with the roles assigned to you as the RCL?, please elaborate
Does the RCL have its own code of conduct ?
-what does it mainly stress?
Do you feel that the RCL is involved in critical decision making processes in the school? Please elaborate?
Who normally chairs SMT/RCL meetings?
-Is everyone given a chance to talk?
-Who between the two groups normally dominates?

-Are decisions always reached with consensus?

Are there any sensitive issues that crop up between the RCL and the SMT during meetings? (Elaborate)

What does the RCL normally do when there is no agreement on certain issues between them and the SMT?

How does the SMT normally deal with crisis situations involving learners in the school?

APPENDIX E