

**An investigation into whether a leadership and management
development project changed the perceptions of the
educators in a black, disadvantaged school**

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By

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Abstract

This study investigates whether a leadership and management development programme changed the management perceptions of the teachers of one of the schools that participated in the programme. The programme seeks to change the organisational culture of schools and develop effective management. The development philosophy of the programme is informed by literature on school effectiveness, organisation development, whole school development and systemic change.

My research is conducted in the interpretive paradigm. Interpretive researchers view reality a construct of the human mind, and therefore the way people perceive the world is not necessarily the same since there can be different understandings of what is real. I employ convenience sampling to select the school and purposive sampling to identify my research participants.

Whilst overall impression that the data conveys is that much of the programme does not seem to have had a lasting effect on the culture of the school, it nonetheless made an impression on the teachers' perceptions of management. There clearly seems to be a greater appreciation of participative management processes. The reintroduction of proper prior planning played a decisive role in re-establishing sound work ethics at the school and contributes to a more structured approach to events at the school. Some sort of organisational learning has also been introduced at the school. The realisation on the part of the staff that they now have their destiny in their own hands is an especially critical development. And whilst the vision is not a compelling force in the organisation, it has nevertheless produced some strategic focus at the school. The insights and skills they acquired concerning resource management will also stand them in good stead.

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Chapter One: Introduction

Over the many years that I have been teaching I have increasingly become aware of the impact that educational leadership and management has on teaching and learning in our schools. I observed how effective leadership and management at schools from the same poor communities result in those schools outperforming others in their neighbourhood. At the same time I have become painfully aware of the complete absence of any leadership and management development programmes being provided by the Department of Education to develop the leadership and management capacity in our schools.

The coursework for my M.Ed. degree also played a decisive role in the eventual selection of my focus area for my research. The sections on organisation development and learning organisations particularly made an indelible impression on me. Noting that these two concepts feature strongly in the specific leadership and management development programme that I had been looking at fuelled my interest in it. The report of the Task Team on Education Management Development, commissioned by the Department of Education (1996:34), also endorsed the importance of “the development of programmes and materials which are related to performance enhancement in the school context”. The Department of Education (1996) regards the development of sound, school-based democratic management practices as central to the new policy and legislative initiatives, but it asserts that schools will need assistance and continuing support to attain effective self-management.

The Centres of Learning (COL) project of the Delta Foundation in association with the Institute for Development, Planning and Research (IDPR) of the University of Port Elizabeth offers a leadership and management development programme (the one which caught my eye) which seeks to assist schools to develop effective leadership and management practices. The programme provided me with an ideal opportunity to do research.

I will now briefly elaborate on the historical background and some key features in the literature which helped to shape my focus area.

Context of my research

The neglect of black education was a deliberate policy of the previous National Party Government and was meant to prepare black children for positions of servitude (Molteno, 1984:66). Because education reflects the conflicts and anomalies of society at large it was to be expected that schools would become sites of struggle in a country like South Africa (Hofmeyr & Buckland, 1992:30-31). It was perhaps inevitable that under such conditions teaching and learning had to collapse at some stage.

The advent of the new South Africa in 1994 ushered in a new era with a new constitution in which the rights of all the people of the land are enshrined, espousing the values of human dignity, equality and freedom, and providing for the right of everyone to basic and further education (Mothata, 2000: 2). A flurry of policy initiatives in the field of education in the aftermath of the 1994 democratic elections culminated amongst others in the promulgation of the South African Schools' Act (SASA) and the National Qualification Framework Act, both in 1996. One of the crucial objectives of the SASA of 1996 is the provision of quality education for all learners in the country (Mothata, 2000: 11). These policies are directed at establishing a healthy culture of teaching and learning in all our schools.

According to Bush and Foreman (1998) international research on school effectiveness and school improvement clearly shows that a major factor determining a school's performance is the quality of its leadership and management. The Department of Education (1996: 27) contends that:

The task of management, at all levels in the education system, is ultimately the creation and support of conditions under which teachers and their students are able to achieve learning. Management should not be seen as being the task of the few; it should be seen as an activity in which all members of educational organisations engage. The extent to which effective learning is achieved therefore becomes the criterion against which the quality of management is to be judged.

The Department of Education (1996: 28) furthermore states that the SASA provides the framework whereby schools will increasingly become self-managing centres and thereby profoundly alter the culture and practice of schools. Significantly, the Department contends that in spite of their very different conditions and levels of resourcing, all schools have to accept responsibility for developing the capacity to manage themselves.

Various initiatives aimed at developing and supporting management in education to achieve the delivery of quality learning were embarked upon across South Africa post 1994. According to Ngcongco and Chetty (2000:72) policies relating to management and governance of schools such as the SASA and the National Qualification Framework Act of 1996 are informed by the central principles of empowerment and capacity building.

In Port Elizabeth the Delta Foundation in alliance with the IDPR, to its credit, at an early stage of the post-apartheid era acknowledged the need for and the importance of assisting disadvantaged black schools to become effective “centres of learning” by launching a leadership and management development project in 1996. The Centres of Learning (COL) programme seeks to change the organisational culture of schools and develop effective management. The initial aims of the project included the promotion of effective leadership and management and enabling “schools to become effective self-managing entities [my emphasis] which are characterised by self-reliance, professionalism, efficiency and internal vision” (Vinjevold & Roberts, 1999). Their development philosophy is informed by literature on school effectiveness, organisation development, whole school development and systemic change

According to a Joint Education Trust evaluation report (Vinjevold & Roberts, 1999: 54) the initial enthusiasm that was created by the leadership and management course was not translated into action at the majority of the COL schools. However, most of the schools reported that more participative management practices were introduced as a result of the course. The project is now in its second phase and will be concluding its operations by the end of June 2001.

Given the enormous challenges that historically disadvantaged schools face to become effective centres of learning, I believe it is of utmost importance to do interpretive research on projects like the COL of the Delta Foundation and IDPR so as to deepen our understanding of how projects such as these can play a role in educational leadership and management development.

Research goal

My research question is to ascertain whether the COL Project has changed the educators' perceptions of management at one of the schools that participated in the programme.

Methodology

My research is conducted in the interpretive paradigm. For the interpretive researcher reality is not an objective phenomenon outside people, but is viewed as a construct of the human mind. The way people perceive the world is often similar, but not necessarily the same as there can be different understandings of what is real (Bassey, 1995: 13).

Bassey (1995: 14) makes the following point about the significance of interpretive research:

To the interpretive researcher the purpose of research is to describe and interpret the phenomena of the world in attempts to get shared meanings with others. Interpretation is a search for deep perspectives on particular events and for theoretical insights. It may offer possibilities, but no certainties as to the outcome of future events.

For interpretive researchers theory must always be viewed from the context it emanates from. As a set of meanings it enables you to have insight into and understanding of people's behaviour. Theories in the interpretive paradigm are thus as diverse as the different human experiences and contextual meanings one can get (Cohen and Manion, 1989: 37).

According to Arksey and Knight (1999: 22) approaching research questions from different angles and engaging a range of different views has the potential of throwing up new and alternative explanations which can help to give a clearer and more complete picture of the social complexity that is being investigated. Unfortunately, because of time constraints, my research data is restricted to transcripts of interviews.

To be able to unearth some of the meanings of the complex human experiences of the Delta Foundation project at the school I adopted a case study approach. In light of the limited scope of this study, and the limited time available, I applied convenience sampling (Cohen & Manion, 1989) to select one of the nearby participating schools as the site for my research. I interviewed five teachers from the school. The respondents included members who were involved in the various structures of the COL programme at the school. The interviews focused on how the COL project has affected management styles and practices at the institution. I probed areas such as the cooperation and participation of the different stakeholders, staff development, problem solving, decision-making and conflict management. I tape-recorded all the interviews (with the permission of the interviewees) and transcribed them all in full. With regards to the analysis of the data, I first immersed myself in the data. I coded data items and began to develop categories. These categories were then interrogated in terms of how they addressed my research goal and arranged into themes.

Structure of my thesis

In chapter two I present an overview of the literature on self-managing schools. Chapter three focuses in more detail on the methodology I have adopted in my research. In chapter four I analyse the data from the interviews, and in chapter five I discuss the data in the light of the literature. The last chapter is a summary of my main findings as well as a reflection on the potential value of my research (both in terms of practice and possible further research), and the limitations of my research.

I will now have a closer look at what the literature has to say about self-managing schools.

Chapter Two: Literature review

Introduction

The focus of this chapter will be to try to uncover what self-managing schools are all about.

According to Caldwell & Spinks (1992: 4) a self-managing school is a school that operates in a broader education system where administrative authority has been decentralised to the school level to make decisions on the allocation of resources. Resources are broadly defined to include matters related to curriculum, personnel, finance and facilities. The local decisions have to be made within the context of a broader framework of local or national policies. The school remains accountable to a central authority for how it manages its resources.

Self-management is also referred to as site-based or school-based management, local management of schools, restructuring or decentralisation of schools in the various literature.

Why self-managing schools?

The move towards institutional autonomy is an international trend. This trend is based on the assumption that decisions should be made by individual schools who best understand the local needs and conditions of schools (Department of Education, 1996: 29; Bush & Foreman, 1998: 1; 2). Dalin (1998: 14) concurs that one of the strong motivations for school-based decision-making is that parents, teachers and school leaders understand the context and cultures of their schools best.

Caldwell & Spinks (1992: 14-15) contend that during the previous century or more schools had to perform relatively uniform tasks that remained stable over time. However, in the modern age, the wide range of individual learning needs and approaches to teaching and learning with

frequent changes in the specification of these needs and approaches calls for a much more responsive system than centralised, bureaucratic ones. They believe it is more efficient and effective today to restructure education systems in such a way that central authorities are relatively small and schools are empowered to manage their own affairs within the context of a central framework of direction and support.

But self-management is not just about the need to be responsive to local needs. It is also about the priorities for resource allocation in times of economic restraint. Governments across the world have found it increasingly difficult to resource public institutions. The response around the world was to cut back more on spending at the central level than at the school level (Caldwell & Spinks, 1992: 15).

The question of **resources** seems to be a very sensitive political issue. According to Wylie (1994, cited in Dalin, 1998: 20) schools in poor communities have greater financing problems than others, and they also lose pupils to other schools more easily. This is very worrying, especially in view of Whittaker's' (1993: 5) assertion that the survival of self-managing schools is linked to their ability to recruit pupils. Hopkins *et al.* (1994: 16) are adamant that the aspirations of self-managing schools can only be achieved if financial plans are in harmony with educational plans, and if resources are allocated to support the priorities of the school.

A number of critics of school-based management claim that the gap between schools is widening (Nuthal, 1993 cited in Dalin, 1998: 19). Evidence in the USA has shown that this system is less capable of providing equal educational opportunities for all than the centralised system it replaced (Dalin, 1998: 19). Dalin (1998: 19) furthermore states:

In a market system there will, by definition be losers, or schools that are unable to attract their fair share of pupils. The consequences are reduced income, fewer teachers... Increasingly, critics are starting to feel that the entire reform is an attempt to cut the federal budget [of the USA], and that the various initiatives have little to do with the pupils or good teaching.

And whilst self-managing schools are responsible for planning, commissioning and evaluating their own income and expenditure, the extra financial responsibility is generally not accompanied by increased power in relation to resources (Law & Glover, 2000: 208).

Where does school improvement or the concern for quality in education fit into the picture of self-managing schools? This question is especially relevant in view of Hopkins *et al.*'s (1994: 16) assertion that many of the policies with regard to decentralisation across the world seem either to be politically or ideologically inspired or to be an ad hoc response to an immediate problem situation. Simply changing bureaucratic procedures or increasing people's accountability does not by itself improve the quality of education for the pupils.

However, Midgley & Wood (1993: 256) believe school-based management should not be viewed as a goal in itself, but rather as a significant process towards the achievement of substantive school improvement. According to Hargreaves & Hopkins (1991; 13) truly self-managing schools are not only able to manage change and finances, but also know the art of school improvement which leads to more effective teaching and learning.

The growing concern about quality in education is causing countries to adopt strong national guidelines and policies to address the issue of quality education in self-managing schools. The concern for quality in education has been accentuated by the dictates of a global economy. Many nations fear that they may fall behind unless their citizens are equipped with the required knowledge, skills and attitudes to compete in the new global reality (Caldwell & Spinks, 1992: 9).

However, in contrast to the strong emphasis on a national framework for quality education, Bush & Foreman (1998) argue that the phenomenon of self-managing schools creates a competitive environment in which schools' responsibilities to preserve and enhance their reputation is strengthened. Brocato (1990) adds that self-managing schools enable teachers to be proactive and in so doing advance teaching and learning:

The up side of site-based management if properly implemented is that it has the possibility of greatly improving teacher morale. After almost a decade of being blamed for the failure of public schools [in the USA], site-based management provides teachers an unlimited opportunity to be proactive in educational reform. As teachers accept more responsibility for education decisions, (sic) opposed to compliance with regulations, both the education delivery system and student academic gains will be observed.

But then again Dalin (1998: 23) draws our attention to the fact that decentralisation is permeated with modern management philosophy. And that this has, among other things, led to school principals having to work far more on administrative tasks than before, resulting in less time for educational leadership. Nevertheless, international studies have indicated that schools' effectiveness can be greatly improved by the move towards increasing school autonomy (Department of Education, 1996: 29; Bush & Forman, 1998).

Brocato, (1990) however regards the process and implementation strategy of bringing about self-management as crucial to its success or failure. And Dalin (1998: 24) believes that school improvement in such a system depends on how the system works.

For Brocato (1990) site-based management is a management strategy that cannot be implemented in a short space of time. Because of the magnitude of the change involved, it could take 5 - 10 years to implement and to determine its effectiveness. Establishing self-managing schools is ongoing and a time-consuming process encompassing the total school culture, including its purpose, mission, the parameters for decisions and the redefining of roles. Dalin (1998: 5) is in agreement that achieving increased autonomy for schools is a "lengthy learning process". Dalin (1998: 15) views the overall development of school culture and organisation as a prerequisite for the success of decentralisation. Dalin (1998: 24) argues as follows:

What is certain is that decentralization will never be an effective force unless the individual school culture is changed. Elements such as the annual development plan, internal evaluation and similar exercises can easily become just that: vain exercises, and not strategic tasks for a school in development. If decentralization is to be experienced and its potential

exploited, this must take place in terms of the unique way in which each school functions.

Real transformation in school-based managed schools is also dependent upon the nature and quality of the school management, and self-management must be accompanied by a devolution of power within the school (Department of Education, 1996: 29).

The following are some of the guidelines for self-based management provided by Dalin (1998: 17) based on lessons from North America:

- a clearer vision and more explicit goals for the decision-making process;
- there should be a will to include parents and to take their concerns seriously;
- the work day should be reorganised to provide time for collaborative decision-making;
- high-quality professional development is a must if reforms are to make a difference;
- a collaborative school culture should focus on improvement;
- and there should be a concerted effort to address the real needs of students, and to provide a structured learning environment.

Many of Dalin's (1998) guidelines coincide with what transpires from the literature as key features of self-managing schools, namely having a shared vision that permeates all the activities of the school; the need for collaboration and participatory decision-making; becoming a learning organisation; and the need for external support (Caldwell & Spinks, 1992; Williams, 1995; Department of Education, 1996; Midgley & Woods, 1993; Brocato, 1990).

After a comprehensive literature review on School Effectiveness and School Improvement, De Jong (1998: 68 -70) identifies twelve key characteristics that are "likely to" constitute a successful school. Included among the characteristics are having a shared vision; a collegial and supportive culture which is characterised amongst other things by a collaborative and inclusive approach to planning and a sense of community; ongoing and regular staff development which is aimed at both individual and collective learning and development; a high sense of community

involvement in the well-being of the school; sufficient funding and basic resources and ongoing technical and professional support; and that these schools are learning organisations.

The central characteristics of self-managing schools which have been identified above clearly overlap significantly with some of the key features which transpire out of the literature on Effective Schools and School Improvement as discussed by De Jong (1998).

I will now focus more closely on the above-mentioned key characteristics of self-managing schools.

The importance of a shared vision

If there is no identified desirable future to work towards, it is very easy for a school community to lose a sense of the purpose of the school and education (Davidoff & Lazarus, 1997: 46). In the words of Murgatroyd & Morgan (1992: 84): “Without vision, the school will end up somewhere else.”

Very often schools develop negative self-images as a result of a lack of a clear vision and sense of purpose, and through lack of effective leadership. Circumstance and external factors usually demotivate such schools. Schools that cannot respond creatively to the circumstances with which it is faced, are bound to develop a negative identity, causing teachers to feel despondent. Having a clear and positive vision, and the human and material resources to facilitate the realization of this vision assist the school to generate a positive identity (Davidoff & Lazarus, 1997: 45).

Without a vision statement that pulls the school community behind it, competing energies in the school will divert attention from consistent focus on achieving specific objectives. Such a lack of a clear focus can dissipate the energies of the school and adversely affect the performance of the organisation (Murgatroyd & Morgan, 1992: 71).

Louis & Miles (1990: 219) contend that many schools don't have visions, but they "suspect" that few schools where significant improvement takes place lack them and that few "really excellent" schools are without vision. However, Murgatroyd & Morgan (1992: 71) assert that "high performing organizations - those that achieve steep-slope quality improvement - are those with a powerful, widely owned vision that is enacted daily."

But what does the vision of a school encompass? According to Davidoff and Lazarus (1997: 45) the vision of a school is the particular way in which it sees itself contributing in a meaningful way towards society. The vision is a conscious path the school chooses for itself and the sense of meaning it attaches to its activities.

Vision and mission are often used interchangeably in the literature (Louis & Miles, 1990: 218). According to De Jong (1999: 68) a mission statement might reflect a school's vision. Newton & Tarrant (1992: 219) contend that a vision may be communicated in terms of a specific mission statement. Davidoff & Lazarus (1997: 47) view the mission statement as the verbalisation of the vision, explaining the what, how and why of the vision. I will also refer to vision and mission interchangeably as encountered in the literature.

Caldwell & Spinks (1992), Murgatroyd & Morgan (1992), Davidoff & Lazarus (1997) and Bennis & Nanus (1985, cited in Preedy, 1993) refer to a vision as a mental picture or image. For Caldwell & Spinks (1992: 57) it is a picture of an ideal future; for Murgatroyd & Morgan (1992: 81) it is a vivid image of a challenging and desirable future that strongly responds to the needs of the pupils and is widely perceived as a significant improvement of the present situation; Davidoff & Lazarus (1997: 45, 26) see the vision as a picture of the ideal school towards which all the role-players can aspire and with which they can identify; and Bennis & Nanus (1985, cited in Preedy, 1993: 155) view it as a mental image "of a realistic, credible, attractive future for the organization, a condition that is better in some important ways than what now exists."

According to Collins & Porras (1991, cited in Murgatroyd & Morgan, 1992: 79) the vision statement should embody both a guiding philosophy and a tangible image.

For a vision statement to be effective, Murgatroyd & Morgan (1992: 81) contend that it must be challenging but not out of reach, not open to competing interpretations, easy to remember, empower the members, strongly tied to the values of the school, visually representable, command all members to respond, serve as a reference point against which all can evaluate their actions, and the ultimate test is linkage to the needs of the students.

According to Caldwell & Spinks (1992: 37) the mission of a school explains why it exists in a particular community, and it therefore usually includes significant beliefs about the particular kind of schooling that is being offered and the broad objectives which inform the school's programme. For Caldwell & Spinks (1992: 50) the educational outcomes for pupils are the most important of the different images contained in the vision.

The vision of the school must incorporate the hopes and dreams, the needs and interests and the values and beliefs of every stakeholder in the school (Sergiovanni, 2001: 149). Newton & Tarrant (1992: 221) contend that a good vision can include deeply embedded values. Sergiovanni (2001: 149) articulates the importance of values in the vision as follows:

It is not enough to have worked out what people stand for and what is to be accomplished. A binding and solemn agreement needs to emerge that represents a value system for living together and that provides the basis for decisions and actions.

According to Murgatroyd & Morgan (1992: 79) the vision of an organisation only becomes a reality once it is widely shared and begins to permeate all aspects of the organisation's activities. The vision of the school is also likely to command a high level of commitment among the school community if the various stakeholders have been involved in the formulation of the vision (Caldwell & Spinks, 1992: 52). Senge (1990: 206) points out that visions that are imposed upon an organisation from one person or a group, at best command compliance, not commitment. And that shared visions command true commitment because they coincide with the members' personal visions. Davidoff & Lazarus (1997: 46) also emphasize the importance of a shared

vision, arguing that working towards achieving someone else's ideal will not work. For them the essence of a meaningful vision is that it belongs to everyone so that everyone can collaborate wholeheartedly towards achieving it.

Caldwell & Spinks (1992: 51) assert that the "essence" of self-management is that the vision of the school has to be crafted jointly by the different components of the school. However, Murgatroyd & Morgan (1992: 69) warn that many long complex mission statements that are often the result of compromises among competing interests of staff members tend to be uninspiring. Such statements are rarely "owned" by anyone and even less often remembered.

Examples of industrial organisations show that powerful visions are simple. Toyota just wants to be the biggest car company in the world, Ford wants to build the best cars in the world and Sony seeks to "entertain everybody everywhere". The key to the vision's importance lies in the simplicity thereof. What is important is that the vision statement embodies the hopes and aspirations of all stakeholders of the organisation (Murgatroyd & Morgan, 1992: 80). Murgatroyd & Morgan (1992: 81) cite the example of a principal who was appointed at a school with the highest rates of juvenile delinquency, absenteeism, staff turnover and burnout, coupled with the lowest levels of academic and sport achievements. He revived the existing vision statement of the school which simply reads: We've got pride. Within months there were all sorts of representations of this idea painted on the walls. Within three years significant improvements occurred at the school. "Although all was not plain sailing ... the school was transformed because a vision was shared (We've got pride!) and acted upon by all [my emphasis] in the school."

Davidoff & Lazarus (1997: 46) point out that building a shared vision is a creative process that includes the sharing of values, hopes and dreams; the understanding of trends, constraints and opportunities of the environment; considering the available human resources in the school and integrating all of this into "a colourful tapestry which expresses who we are, what we can bring, and what we believe in." Louis & Miles (1990: 293) made the following finding about the

process involved to arrive at a shared vision: “Gaining real ownership of visions by school staff is critical, and requires serious time investment, patience and empowerment for success.”

A shared vision does not suppress individual dreams, thoughts and values. Rather it enables the establishment of common values which inform the practical classroom realities, extra-mural activities, staff development, etc. Far from being divisive, individual differences should be a source of richness for the school life where a shared vision exists (Davidoff & Lazarus, 1997: 46). Murgatroyd & Morgan (1992: 80, 84) argue that if there is a common understanding of where the school is heading, more independent actions will be performed to make the vision a reality. And teachers are prepared to take risks because they know what they want to achieve and how their individual achievements fit into the broader picture of the school’s vision. In the words of Louis & Miles (1990: 23): “A vision relates a school to its place in society and gives larger meaning to work that is being done by administrators, teachers and students...”

According to Senge (1990: 206) a shared vision is not an idea but rather a force of immense power in people’s hearts. “Few, if any, forces in human affairs are as powerful as shared vision.”

The impact on the members of an organisation that the literature attaches to a shared vision is awesome. According to Whiteley (1991, cited in Murgatroyd & Morgan, 1992: 83) effective visions energize people and can reinvigorate disgruntled and burned-out employees. It provides a true challenge and purpose which make every member feel that he or she can make a difference. Davidoff & Lazarus (1997: 46) contend that the vision “is the flame which lights the school”, which imbues the school with a sense of pride and direction, giving them a recognition and detailing of the unique contribution the school makes. Senge (1990: 208) pronounces:

Visions are exhilarating. They create the spark, the excitement that lifts an organisation out of the mundane... A shared vision is the first step in allowing people who mistrusted each other to begin to work together. It creates a common identity. In fact, an organization’s shared sense of purpose, vision, and operating values establish the most basic level of commonality... Shared visions compel courage so naturally that people don’t even realize the extent of their courage. Courage is simply doing whatever is needed in pursuit of the

vision.

When encouraging, enabling, empowering and developing staff members, the vision should always be at the forefront, and should be regarded “as the cornerstone for all actions” in the school. Every time a decision is made, one should ask oneself whether it advances the achievement of the vision (Murgatroyd & Morgan, 1992: 83). Murgatroyd & Morgan (1992: 71) state the following about the pervasiveness of a shared vision in an organization:

To achieve alignment and commitment to a shared vision, the statement that is produced needs to be something that is used daily by all staff to justify their actions to themselves and to each other. It is the statement by which all in the school wish to be judged. It is a statement that becomes so dominant in the thinking each person brings to their school that all activities and decisions become justified against it. The statement is not only remembered and used frequently each working day; it is also lived out in experience.

Block (1987, quoted in Louis & Miles, 1990: 219) notes that visions indicating our disappointment with the present situation supply a driving force for change. According to Louis & Miles (1990: 23) effective schools must be able to adapt to changes in the environment, but it must be future-oriented and not simply react to crises or pressures and therefore needs to be driven by a vision. Without a vision that provides a clear picture of an organisation’s strategic focus, people can become confused and poor adapters to change (Newton & Tarrant, 1992: 221). Murgatroyd and Morgan (1992: 84) argue that the vision statement enables all in the school to focus their efforts to achieve sustainable and significant quality improvements. Whether members will be working in teams or as individuals to achieve new objectives, all of their energies will be focused to more and more make the vision a reality. Newton & Tarrant (1992: 22) contend that it is important that there should be visible manifestations of the vision and regard it therefore important to achieve improvements and changes that indicate movement towards the ideals of the school.

Louis & Miles (1990: 219) point out that shared visions not only provide foci that mobilise and energise members for the difficult work of change, but also provide a sense of values and some security in the confusion that accompanies any change effort. Murgatroyd & Morgan (1992: 80) have this to say about the importance of shared values in relation to change:

When a school seeks to become powerfully effective in achieving objectives it does so by creating a climate or culture in which the range of shared values is high and commitment to these values translates into innovation and the effective use of scarce resources.

All of these functions call for the vision to be communicated constantly in all areas of the school (Murgatroyd & Morgan, 1992: 84). Caldwell & Spinks (1992: 53) argue that leaders in the school should take every opportunity to bring the vision to the attention of the school community. According to Davidoff & Lazarus (1997: 47) it helps to place the mission statement where it can be seen regularly, enabling it to become a public statement of the school's commitment to achieve certain value-laden objectives. Caldwell & Spinks (1992: 53) assert:

To the extent that the vision is a picture of the particular ways in which the mission of the school will be brought to realization over a period of time, this confirms the value of printing the school's mission statement in key documents which are widely distributed...

Visions may be reviewed as particular objectives are achieved or in view of new opportunities or threats (Caldwell & Spinks, 1992: 37). Davidoff & Lazarus (1997: 47) concur that the mission statement is not static but can be reviewed as the school ventures forward on a journey of development. It is therefore important that the school should from time to time ascertain whether its mission statement still embodies the aims and ideals of the school or not.

Lastly, Davidoff & Lazarus (1997: 47) remind us that the vision of the individual school should be located within the framework of broader national and regional policies, and not be in conflict with such policies.

Shared visions, however, are only possible in an organisation that is characterised by participation and collaboration.

Participation and collaboration

Kurt Lewin, the father of action research, as a result of a research project on how to reduce civilian consumption of rationed food during World War II, discovered a central principle of participative management, namely that people are likely to change their behaviour when they are participants in the analysis and solving of a problem and they are likely to implement decisions they were part of (Weisbord, 1987: 88-89).

According to Gilbert (1993: 97) school-based management offers the opportunity for greater participation in decision-making. However, Lunenburg & Ornstein (1991: 39) and Midgley & Wood (1993: 246) regard shared decision-making as central in self-managing schools. Lunenburg & Ornstein (1991: 37) contend that the authority to make decisions in self-managing schools is shared among the schools' major stakeholders, including teachers, parents, pupils and other community members.

Midgley and Wood (1993: 246) point out that school-based management takes on different forms: from involving all stakeholders to just moving away from pure top-down decision making and allowing some of the local people a say. But Sizer (1986, cited in Preedy, 1993: 152) argues that for schools to become better, teachers and students should be given the space to take full advantage of what each has to offer. And for this to happen substantial authority has to be devolved down to the school level.

Beckmann and Blom (2000: 3) remind us that in hierarchical organisations teachers feel less responsible and therefore less accountable for their actions due to the fact that they do not have the authority and power to affect others' behaviour. But utilizing collaborative decision-making structures have the potential to create an environment where teachers take greater control of their

work and accept responsibility and accountability for decisions that were previously regarded as the concern of the principal.

According to Gilbert (1993: 97) the staff of a school is its most important resource and their commitment to decisions is likely to be crucial in ensuring effective implementation of action plans. Greater participation in decision-making enhances the opportunity for shared plans for the school's development. Ownership of plans tends to give the school a clearer and more unified sense of purpose and direction and reduce the stress of education change. Schmuck and Runkel (1994: 8,9) point out that individuals and groups usually have abilities, information and skills beyond their responsibilities. Often the knowledge and skills needed to innovate and implement new programmes are already available in the organisation, ready to be utilized towards organisational change if recognised and affirmed. By making use of a participatory approach, these resources can be tapped to the benefit of the organisation.

French and Bell (1995: 94) have the following to say about the organisational benefits of participation:

... Research demonstrated that increased involvement and participation were desired by most people, had the ability to energize greater performance, produced better solutions to problems, and greatly enhanced acceptance of decisions. It was found such group dynamics work to overcome resistance to change, increased commitment to the organization, reduced stress levels and generally made people feel better about themselves and their worlds.

But shared decision-making in schools is not without its drawbacks. According to Law & Glover (2000: 125) participation is inhibited by "lack of time; the incompatibility of individuals; decision making without reference to the opinion offered; the opinion lacking clarity and relevance."

A critical drawback is the fact that participative decision-making is time-consuming. Brocato (1990) points out that the time of teachers consumed by their participation on school committees tend to compete with their teaching responsibilities and causes confusion and anxiety on the part of the teacher.

Another problem according to Midgley and Wood (1993: 246) is that the emphasis on local involvement in decision-making seems to suggest that the dominant values in each community should direct school improvement: “Whatever the community wants for its children is assumed to be in the best interest of students.” But they warn that such an approach could result in the danger that decision-making could ignore available scientific knowledge. Rather, involvement in decision-making by local school constituencies, whilst indispensable in school-based management, should not discard whatever body of knowledge is available to guide those decisions. Midgley and Wood (1993: 246) continue:

We need to know more, but we should not discount what we already know about the kind of learning environment that enhances student motivation, challenges all students, accelerates their learning, and maximizes their potential. Teachers and parents are in a position to decide how that knowledge needs to be an integral part of the decision-making process.

Schmuck and Runkel (1994: 10) also argue that the principle of consensual decisions does not imply that all decisions should be the result of consensus. According to them some matters in educational organisations are complex and need the input of people with expert knowledge.

Brocato (1990) makes it clear that devolving decision-making powers is not something that will necessarily be welcomed by those who wield power:

Transferring of decisions from an upper to a lower hierarchical level is a cultural change. Decisions have power and when there is a change in the decision-making process, there is real and perceived loss of powers. Central office personnel as well as principals will be reluctant to relinquish their roles as supervisors and final decision makers to accept new roles of service and facilitator.

The crucial role that participative decision-making and shared vision play in self-managing schools should make it clear why the Department of Education (1996: 29) envisages that self-managing schools should be developed to operate as learning organisations. I now turn to this important feature of management theory.

Being learning organisations

Lipton & Malamede (1997: 31) describe learning organisations as self-organising, collaborative, adaptive and reflexive and they make use of a process approach to develop these qualities. For Senge (1990: 13) a learning organisation is a place where people keep on discovering how they create or change their reality. Senge (1990: 3) defines learning organisations as:

...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.

Learning has lost its essential meaning in modern times and is being equated with assimilation of information. But real learning enables us to do something we were never capable of. Through learning we are enabled to get a new sense of the world and our relationship to it. Learning expands our capacity to be creative (Senge, 1990: 13, 14). Argyris (1991 cited in French, *et al.* 1994: 343) views learning, both at individual and organisation-level as the ability to solve problems, to reflect critically on one's own behaviour, to ascertain how one often unintentionally contributes to problems, and finally to be able to change the way one behaves.

An indispensable part of a learning organisation is the discipline that entails continual clarification and strengthening of one's personal vision, focusing one's energies, developing patience and being able to look at reality objectively. This is the "spiritual foundation" of the learning organisation as an organisation's commitment to and capacity for learning is determined by that of its individual members (Senge, 1990: 7). Dalin (1998: 24) contends that for the individual members involved in a school to feel that they are part of a stimulating learning organisation, everyone must commit himself or herself to enter into a personal and social learning process.

According to O'Neil (1995) education naturally possesses a large percentage of people who enter the profession with a high sense of purpose. But most of them become cynical within a few years. To rid teachers of this cynicism, a reflective environment with a relative degree of safety within which individuals can rediscover their initial sense of purpose and caring needs to be cultivated.

But for people to be able to develop or learn new ways, their deeply embedded assumptions or images that impact on their understanding of the world and the way they behave must be submitted to rigorous scrutiny. Often new insights cannot be put into practice because they are in conflict with influential mental images (Senge, 1990: 89). Meyer (2000: 256) agrees that a learning organisation is only possible if a major paradigm shift occurs in the thinking and behaviour of individuals and teams in the organisation. Lipton and Melamede (1997: 40, 41) underline the central importance of shared meanings in learning organisations:

For learning organisations, the use of language to explore and develop shared meaning, is crucial. This mutual engagement requires opportunities for mixed constituencies ... To join together to grapple with key issues, surface individual perceptions and assumptions, and create a shared reality.

One of the most important shared realities in a learning organisation is that of a shared vision. According to Leithwood *et al.* (1996: 170) a widely shared group vision could serve as a main resource for the group to direct what it needs to learn. Lipton and Melamede (1997: 37) are of the view that “the heart of the learning organisation beats to the rhythm of its shared vision”. As far as Senge (1990: 209) is concerned, a learning organisation is not possible without a shared vision. Unless there is a compelling force pulling toward some objective which people truly want to achieve, the forces sustaining the status quo can be overwhelming. He contends that the nobleness of the vision compels new ways of thinking and acting. The vision keeps the learning process on course in times of difficulty and pain. It enables members to get rid of deeply held views and be sensitive to personal and organisational shortcomings in the pursuit of what they dearly want to create.

However, O'Neil (1995: 22) argues that it is important to establish a continuing visioning process as opposed to a once-off vision statement writing exercise. O'Neil continues:

Actually having shared visions exist is so profoundly different from writing a vision statement that it's really night and day. It takes a long [original emphasis] time, and it's a process that involves a lot of reflection and a great deal of listening and mutual understanding. It always involves those two dimensions.

To treat visioning like an event, according to O'Neil (1995: 22), can even be counter-productive as people may react negatively to the fact that such a vision statement does not make a difference. He points out that if you are serious about visioning, you need to continually - never stopping - spend twenty to forty percent of your time reflecting and articulating together what it is that you sincerely want to create.

But dialogue in learning organisations goes beyond the articulation of shared visions to the heart of the learning process in modern organisations, namely team learning (Senge, 1990: 10). Meyer (2000: 260) endorses the indispensability of the learning team in the learning organisation:

Teams, and the individuals participating individually and collectively as members thereof, are the most important units of the learning organisation. Real learning takes place in teams when team members learn from each other, learn from their mistakes, and continuously learn how they can optimise their contribution to achieving the goals of the business at large.

Learning in learning organisations becomes a team process that requires new and creative ways of learning; an ongoing process of sharing, exchange and dissemination of information with organisational members and the environment (Meyer, 2000: 254). The discipline of team learning, Senge (1990: 10) points out, requires that members suspend personal assumptions and jointly seek to discover new insights that may not be attainable individually.

According to Senge (1990: 10) the intelligence of the team often surpasses the intelligence of the individual members and such teams can develop extraordinary capacity for coordinated action. But Senge (1990: 3) reminds us that "the team that became great didn't start off great - it learned

[original emphasis] how to produce extraordinary results.” However, learning teams not only produce unusually great results, they also enable the individual members to develop more swiftly than would otherwise have been possible (Senge, 1990: 10).

The fundamental challenges in education as in business involve fundamental cultural changes which call for collective learning. People at various levels of the organisation must together think about significant and lasting solutions and then join hands to realize those solutions. But for schools to become learning organisations all its different constituencies need to work together: from the few committed teachers with brilliant ideas, to the principal, the leader of the local educational office and the people in the community who form part of the school (O’Neil, 1995: 21).

However, the way in which educational institutions are designed and structured enhances the idea that a teacher’s job is basically individualistic in nature (O’Neil, 1995: 21). According to Lipton and Melamede (1997: 36) in most schools there are traditionally “a prevalence of isolation and fragmentation operating through fixed roles, rigid rules and limited resources, rendering these organisations ‘learning disabled’.”

According to Fullan (1993, cited in DuFour, 1997) the development of a learning school in which all staff members continually increase their knowledge and skills is indispensable to the achievement of ongoing school improvement. But DuFour (1997: 81, 82) reminds us that the structure and culture of the public school militate against the establishment of a learning organisation for the educators within it. The approach to professional growth is not only fragmented, but it is also characterised by a passive training approach. DuFour continues:

Long-term school wide commitments to an area of professional growth [are] the exception rather than the rule ... This traditional model of professional development is so entrenched in many school districts that educators have difficulty envisioning a school that operates as a learning organisation.

Meyer (2000: 260) draws our attention to the fact that learning organisations make use of more horizontal processes and there are greater levels of interdependence which allow people to learn together irrespective of positions. O'Neil (1995: 20) points out that a learning organisation enables people at all levels to collectively enhance their creative capacity on an ongoing basis. However, he reports that most of the teachers he encounters don't feel that their innovation capacity is allowed to thrive. On the contrary, they feel oppressed by all kinds of rules and objectives, many of which they don't identify with. Consequently, little collective learning is taking place in most schools (*Ibid.*).

Leithwood *et al.* (1999: 166) paint a more positive picture by pointing out that groups or committees within schools are more apt to represent the different interests in a school than an individual. They are also more likely to produce more creative solutions than an individual, and their constituency is more likely to understand and support decisions that are the product of participatory decision making. DuFour (1997: 85) expands:

The one common element of the activities [of a learning school] is that they require collaboration [own emphasis] on the part of the professional staff. A school functioning as a learning organisation would emphasize the importance of collaboration by providing staff members with the time to do it... the single characteristic difference [own emphasis] between traditional organisations and learning organisations is the way in which they view providing individuals with time for reflection and collaboration.

Central to learning organisations is the approach of systems thinking (Senge, 1990). Through systems thinking, all the different parts of a learning organisation are perceived as interconnected. Systems thinking, according to Senge (1990: 12), brings the different disciplines operative in the learning organisation together, fusing them into a coherent whole. He points out that systems thinking makes you aware of the interrelation of the different disciplines and of the fact that by strengthening each of one of them, the whole can exceed the sum of its parts.

Senge (1990: 73) argues that systems thinking enables one to look beyond the face value of events and details and see the underlying patterns connecting them, bringing the broader picture to the fore. Senge (1990: 128) articulates this point succinctly:

In effect, the art of systems thinking lies in seeing through [original emphasis] complexity to the underlying structures generating change. Systems thinking does not mean ignoring complexity. Rather, it means organizing complexity into a coherent story that illuminates the causes of problems and how they can be remedied in enduring ways.

Owen (1981: 252) agrees that events usually don't happen in isolation or from single causes. A systems approach underlines the importance of seeing events as manifestations of interconnected forces, problems, causes, and needs. Organisations are complex systems.

The ability to see the underlying causes of problems enables one to identify where actions and alterations in structures can result in meaningful and lasting improvements. This is unlike non-systemic approaches that focus on short-term alleviation of the pressure caused by symptoms. Ameliorating the stress caused by symptoms of a problem decreases the need to find more fundamental solutions to the underlying problem. The side effects of the symptomatic solution, in turn, make the accomplishment of a fundamental solution more difficult to attain (Senge, 1990: 114, 107). Owen (1981: 252) points out that due to the interrelation and interdependency of the subsystems, any substantial change in one subsystem results in compensatory or retaliatory changes in other subsystems.

O'Neil (1995: 21) is of the view that because innovations in schools usually centre on the individual teacher, the individual classroom or a new curriculum, the larger environment is normally neglected and few innovations last long. In schools that operate as dynamic systems capable of continual learning and growth, according to Lipton and Melamede (1997: 36), decision making is informed by the understanding of the interrelation of all aspects of a system. Such schools seek to increase the capacity of each member, realising the capacity of the system grows as a result. This enables it to constantly and creatively adapt the organisation to the changing needs and conditions of the environment. Meyer (2000: 262) argues that in situations where people are performing outstanding jobs in their separate corners, often oblivious of what others are doing, the collective intelligence of the members is largely eroded and such organisations are not able to perform at their optimum level.

In systems thinking, according to Senge (1990: 78), the assumption that an individual must be responsible is discarded, and everyone is allowed to share responsibility for problems that occur in the system. Senge (1990: 12,13) continues:

... systems thinking makes understandable the subtlest aspect of the learning organization - the new way individuals perceive themselves and their world. At the heart of a learning organization is a shift of mind - from seeing ourselves as separate from the world to connected to the world, from seeing problems as caused by someone or something 'out there' to seeing how our own actions create the problems we experience. A learning organization is a place where people are continually discovering how they create their reality. And how they can change it.

Senge (1990: 7) however, contends that few organisations encourage the growth of their people, resulting in immense untapped resources. O'Neil (1995: 21) furthermore alleges that many people in education appear to regard themselves as disempowered. He argues that where people at all levels of an organisation view themselves as powerless, such a situation is characteristic of an organisation that has a very low ability to learn. According to Meyer (2000: 261) in learning organisations, as an incentive for learning and performance, all the organisation members are empowered to make decisions and to learn from the successes and failures of their decisions. Senge (1990: 4) emphatically states that "the organizations that will truly excel in the future will be the organizations that discover how to tap people's commitment and capacity to learn at all [original emphasis] levels in an organization".

As far as the Department of Education (1996: 31) is concerned, learning organisations cultivate the capacity to learn, to reflect and to innovate so as to mobilise and use resources efficiently. It also employs these competencies to manage the changing environment that confronts the school with the objective to improve the quality of teaching and learning. And Lipton and Melamede (1997: 33) are of the view that healthy systems must embrace learning as indispensable for survival, and learning as a creative and ongoing process should be the basis of the education system.

A number of researchers regard the creation of learning organisations as the best strategy for enhancing quality of instruction (Dalin, 1998: 6). But in traditional schools time to come together to reflect, to prepare, and to plan is perceived as unproductive. In contrast, schools that function as learning organisations value collaborative efforts that might improve teaching and learning. They regard such activities as enhancing the productivity of contact time with learners (DuFour, 1997: 85). DuFour (1997:81) argues strongly that:

Those who have a genuine interest in learning school improvement initiatives must recognize that schools will not produce students as continuous learners and effective collaborators without the teachers who have these characteristics.

Commitment and leadership from senior management are indispensable in a learning organisation. They not only become learners themselves, but also inspire others to learn (Meyer, 2000: 261). O'Neil (1995: 21) contends that principals who always seek to create an environment where teachers can continually learn have the greatest impact when it comes to advancing the cause of learning organisations. Lipton and Melamede (1997: 36) have the following to say about the role of leadership in learning organisations:

Schools that have the capacity to self-organize are hinged on shared leadership. Thinking, planning and decision-making are integrated into all levels of the system. The members of the organization are simultaneously leaders and supporters, sharing roles and responsibilities in a flexible and appropriate manner. Decisions are shared, and so is the responsibility for those decisions as individual members' involvement in the organization shifts from compliance to commitment.

Finally, creating a learning organisation is not an overnight enterprise. People must first go through a learning process which will eventually cause their beliefs, worldview and ultimately their skills and capabilities to change (O'Neil, 1995: 23). O'Neil (1995: 23) goes on to pronounce that:

Most things that really matter in life take discipline and years of practice. But the concept of discipline has really drifted out of our culture. We've come to believe that anything we need that's important, we can go out and buy...

But DuFour (1997: 87) argues that the personnel of a school as a learning organisation is not oblivious of the difficulty of organisational change. They steadfastly believe it is achievable. Unsuccessful initiatives are not discarded as failures, but are appreciated as important lessons for the next attempt. They will not stop until their schools have been transformed into “true” learning organisations.

However, performing all the tasks that are involved in the different aspects of self-managing schools that have been discussed above will require a lot of assistance to teachers to enable them to acquire all the necessary skills. I address this notion in the next section.

The need for outside support

Beckman and Blom (2000: 2) assert that the advent of democratic management will thrust teachers into performing unfamiliar tasks. Brocato (1990) agrees that because most schools are hierarchical, bureaucratic organisations, many teachers and principals in public schools don’t have training for, nor have they been exposed to the type of decision making required in self-managing schools. Brocato further pronounces:

To suddenly reverse the trend from accepting mandates for direction to determining direction of the school is a total reversal of roles. This produces a change in the status quo that can produce a great deal of confusion, anxiety and mistrust.

Hopkins *et al.* (1994: 15) point out that the shifting of responsibilities to the school level has to be accompanied by capacity building by central authorities of teachers and parents at school level to meet their new responsibilities. Dalin (1998: 15) concurs that intensive training of staff members for their new roles is very important in schools where substantial decision-making power has been decentralised to the schools.

Brocato (1990) is also in agreement about the need for training for school-based managed situations. But he suggests that before decision-making powers are devolved adequate training will be necessary to assist both central office personnel and the local staff to adapt to their new

roles. Training in participatory decision-making and interpersonal relations will expedite the devolution process of decision-making powers. However, Brocato is adamant that in a change process of this magnitude, a once-off training will doom the process to failure. The situation calls for ongoing training, and it is to be accompanied by conflict resolution procedures to deal with conflicts that will arise from time to time. Hopkins *et al.* (1994: 15) are also of the opinion that external support for schools needs to meet specific local needs.

Taylor & Levine (1991: 396) also assert that the provision of appropriate training and related technical assistance for teachers and principals is a prerequisite for the successful involvement of teachers in decision-making in relation to effective schools projects. However, such training and technical assistance may accomplish little unless sufficient time is allocated for participation in the schools.

Let us now have a look at the phenomenon of self-managing schools in South Africa.

Self-managing schools in South Africa

I will now give a brief exposition of the policy framework and material conditions under which schools will have to operate as self-managing entities in South Africa.

According to Department of Education (1996: 29) at the heart of the South African Schools Act (SASA) of 1996 is a process of devolving decision making about the allocation of resources to school level, and the democratisation of school management and governance. De Jong (1999: 79) regards the representative governance as embodied in the democratically elected governing bodies as central to the SASA. Beckmann & Blom (2000), however point out that the principal of the school is entrusted by SASA with the responsibility of the management of the school.

The governing body of a school (SGB) in terms of SASA consists of parents, educators, non-teaching staff members, learners, the principal and co-opted members from the community (Beckman & Blom 2000). The powers of these governing bodies include (within the parameters

of national and provincial frameworks): admission policy, control of the school's assets, fund-raising, determining the curriculum, and a code of conduct for learners (De Jong, 1999:79). Thus, according to Ngcango & Chetty (2000: 72):

Successful outcomes of organisational goals... are no longer the sole responsibility of the school managers per se, but become the joint responsibility (as implied in current transformation policy directives) of every individual who has an interest in the educational objectives, processes and outcomes of the school.

Apart from the establishment of a governing body, the other essential challenge of the SASA is to uphold democratic principles and values by developing a culture of democratic practice. This is to ensure that the processes of electing the governing body in itself is meaningful, informed and credible so that the governing body has the necessary legitimacy and don't become a lackey of the principal and management. Furthermore, the way the SGB governs also needs to reflect the democratic principles of the various policy documents (De Jong, 1999: 79).

However, Beckmann & Blom (2000) argue that authority remains hierarchically structured in this governance model with decision-making taking place within the context of formal lines of authority and where final authority over management decisions largely resides in the principal. Potgieter (1997) and Visser (1997) both cited in Beckmann furthermore note that far from **devolving** comprehensive powers and authority to governing bodies, the SASA actually only **allocates** functions to them. Citing the examples of language and admission policies, Beckmann concludes that the powers of governing bodies are curtailed by many restrictions that are mainly aimed at protecting the fundamental right to basic education for all that is enshrined in the Bill of Rights in the Constitution of South Africa.

The Department of Education (1996: 28) contends that schools will need assistance and continuing support to achieve effective self-management. However, Davidoff & Lazarus (1997: 4) declare:

In terms of support for those teachers currently in service, there has been a clear lack of an enabling policy environment. What teachers and schools do to further their professional

development has been their own choice entirely [original emphasis]. From time to time departments of education have run in-service courses for teachers, and the subject advisory services have provided support for teachers in specific subjects or areas.

Nevertheless, the Department of Education (1996: 31) is of the view that the responsibility for developing the capacity for self-management primarily rests with the schools themselves, especially the principals and governing bodies. The provincial, regional and district education departments will, however, have a major role in assisting schools to adopt the new decentralised approach to management by providing support and mobilising other sources of support. It is also crucial that local departments develop sufficiently resourced support teams, as a matter of urgency, to offer relevant management information system for schools. They also have to ensure access to reliable management information system for schools.

But Davidoff & Lazarus (1997: 4) point out that departments of education will need time to build trust and rid themselves of the lack of legitimacy of the past. Notwithstanding this, these departments together with teachers are called upon to establish a 'new set' of understanding, skills and practices with the objective of ensuring policy that supports ongoing organisational and professional growth at schools and with all teachers.

Schools should, however, not only depend on support from education departments. Other potential sources of support like tertiary institutions, non-governmental organisations involved with education management development, private sector organisations and professional associations should also be targeted by schools to establish partnerships with. There is "a weight of evidence which demonstrates that such partnerships can be valuable and effective" (Department of Education, 1996: 32). De Jong (1999: 79) also argues that, given the dwindling human resources in the formal education sector, schools are faced with the challenge of cultivating the capacity to maintain democratic governance by establishing partnerships with a relevant education development agency or schools with successful governance experience. De Jong continues:

Perhaps the greatest challenge of all in establishing and developing democratic governance

is for schools to embrace the idea that capacity building is an ongoing, developmental process and not a once-off event.

The Department of Education (1996: 32) draws our attention to the fact that schools are currently focusing on short-term tasks, expecting that strategic decisions should be taken outside the school. Most of the schools have presently only a limited awareness of what planning could take place at the school level and they generally have no understanding of the necessary skills.

Self-managing schools in South Africa are clearly faced with a lot of uncharted waters that need to be covered. However I have a nagging feeling we have embarked on a journey for which we are ill prepared. For self-management to be implemented successfully the literature compellingly suggests that schools need to have quite an advanced level of skills at its disposal. But most of our historically disadvantaged schools' resources, both human and otherwise, leave much to be desired. To expect of schools with such inadequate levels of overall capacity to take responsibility for their own development is, to say the least, questionable. Support systems, especially from the education departments, that are supposed to assist with continual organisational and professional growth are hardly visible, particularly in the Eastern Cape.

I will now elaborate on the research methodology I adopted to investigate whether a leadership and management development programme, within the context of self-management, changed my research participants' perceptions about management.

Chapter Three: Research methodology

Introduction

There are differences in perception of the nature of reality and of knowledge (paradigms) and these differences in perception determine how research is approached. Guba & Lincoln (1994: 107) assert that research paradigms delineate what falls within and outside the limits of legitimate inquiry. The basic beliefs that define inquiry paradigms relate to the nature of reality, the nature of the relationship between the knower and what can be known, and how the researcher goes about finding out whatever he or she believes can be known. Terre Blanche & Durrheim (1999: 6) concur that:

Paradigms are all-encompassing systems or inter-related practice and thinking that define for researchers the nature of their enquiring along three dimensions: ontology, epistemology and methodology.

My research will be conducted within the interpretive qualitative paradigm.

Interpretive research

Interpretive researchers regard human beings as more than just part of a physical world because of their unique quality of consciousness. Through their consciousness they not only rise above their natural surroundings, but also are also active subjects in the construction of reality (Wamahiu & Karugu, 1995: 116)

Unlike positivists who believe there is a reality “out there” which exists irrespective of people, the interpretive researcher regards reality as a construct of the mind: the way different people perceive and understand the world is not necessarily the same. The result is that there can be different understandings of what is “real”. For the interpretive researcher the rationality of different observers may not coincide so that when they converse with one another their

observations of the world may not make sense to one another. Even language does not convey monolithic meanings for the interpretive researcher. Due to differences in perception, in interpretation and in language, interpretive researchers are not surprised that people view reality differently (Bassey, 1995: 13). Vulliamy *et al.* (1990: 8, 9) contend that in interpretive research human actions and institutions are viewed as the 'social constructions' of people rather than products of external forces with predictable outcomes. Bassey (1995: 13) furthermore asserts that for interpretive researchers, perceptions of human actions are based on social meanings and that these meanings change through social inter-action.

Jackson (1995: 9) points out that:

Rather than confining itself to behaviour alone, the interpretive approach examines how people make sense of their lives, how they define their situation and how their sense of self develops in inter-action with others. Humans are always in a process of becoming [emphasis in original]: they are influenced by how they see themselves, by how others see them, and by what they want to become.

Wamahiu & Karugu (1995: 16) also contend that the role of the qualitative researcher is seen to discover meaning that underlies the construction of social reality in order to understand and explain social behaviour.

In qualitative research the answers to questions are looked for by scrutinising social settings together with the human inhabitants thereof. Qualitative researchers are concerned with how humans arrange themselves and their settings and how they make sense of their milieu through symbols, rituals, social structures and social roles (Berg, 1998: 7). In qualitative research therefore, the researched are not viewed as objects with given properties like norms and attitudes which can be measured, but as actors whose actions can only be adequately interpreted and explained if there is a thorough understanding of their frame of reference and contexts (Allan, 1991: 178). Eisner (1998: 35, 36) declares that qualitative research is concerned with matters as they pertain to different contexts. Qualitative researchers are interested to know what motivates people and in the quality of experience for those in the situation that is being studied. They want

to uncover the meanings of events for those who experience them. The way in which meanings are expressed is to a large extent dependent on frames of reference that are used to interpret situations. Consequently an anthropologist and a historian studying a village will emerge with differing interpretations as they look at it from different angles and with different spectacles. Wamahiu & Karugu (1995: 128) assert that interpretive research is best suited for obtaining data on attitudes, perceptions, meanings and the description of social reality. Bassey (1995: 14) contends that:

To the interpretive researcher the purpose of research is to describe and interpret the phenomena of the world in attempts to get shared meanings with others. Interpretation is a search for deep perspectives on particular events and for theoretical insights. It may offer possibilities but no certainties as to the outcome of future events.

For interpretive researchers theory must always be viewed from the context it originates from. As a set of meanings, it enables you to have insight into and understanding of people's behaviour. Theories in the interpretive paradigm are thus as diverse as the different human experiences and contextual meanings one can get (Cohen & Manion, 1989: 37). Vulliamy *et al.* (1990: 11) assert that qualitative researchers do not impose hypotheses on data but instead, to avoid imposing frameworks on the subjects of the study, they generate theories from the emerging data.

For interpretive researchers there are different realities, which require multiple methods to uncover the meanings thereof (Connole, 1993: 22). Interpretive researchers observe, interview, describe, interpret and assess settings as they occur naturally. In education, interpretive researchers thus go out to schools, visit classrooms and observe teachers, pupils, etc. They also scrutinise inanimate objects like class registers, minutes of meetings, textbooks, etc. that have an influence on education (Eisner, 1998: 32-33). Wamahiu & Karugu (1995: 116) declare that:

Educational researchers adopting [the qualitative] paradigm attempt to produce data that is holistic, contextual, descriptive – in-depth data that is rich in detail. They are concerned with discovering the inner meanings of social actions rather than just their outward form. They are also interested in describing processes instead of simply the outcome or end results. In order to do this, qualitative researchers collect data from the natural setting, using

themselves as key research instruments.

In qualitative research, researchers are expected to be perceptive and sensible, and to make sense of the situation that is being studied. This requires an ability to discern what is significant within the context of a particular framework. The researcher's own unique personal history has a bearing on how he perceives and interprets a situation. This is not viewed as a liability. However, personal insight does not provide a licence for freedom. At all times evidence and reasons should be provided (Eisner, 1998: 34). Eisner (1998: 39) furthermore asserts that:

In qualitative inquiry, judgement is alive and well, and hence the arena for debate and difference is always open. In qualitative research the facts never speak for themselves [my emphasis].

Interpretive researchers also concede that through their enquiry, either by interviews or observation, changes may occur in the situation they are studying. They see themselves as potential variables in the enquiry and may, when writing up the research, use personal pronouns (Bassey, 1995: 13).

Winegardner (nd) contends that whilst case study methods can be utilised within the various research paradigms, the epistemological orientation of most case study researchers is interpretive because interpretive researchers believe that reality is accessed through social constructions such as language, consciousness and shared meanings. My research is also aimed at unearthing some of the shared meanings of the complex human experiences that relates to the COL programme at the school.

Let us now have a closer look at case studies within the context of qualitative research.

Case studies

Case studies are exploratory in nature and normally focus on current events - be it a particular situation, programme or phenomenon - and attempt to answer questions of how and why

(Winegardner, nd). Stake (1995) also asserts that case studies in education focus on people and programmes, on both their uniqueness and commonality. The aim is to understand them. My research also focuses on a particular programme.

Case studies deepen the understanding of the phenomenon or programme, enabling the discovery of new meaning, the broadening of experience or confirming what is already known (Winegardner, nd). Stake (1995: 4) stresses that:

Case study research is not sampling research. We do not study a case primarily to understand other cases. Our first obligation is to understand this one case.

However, Cohen & Manion (1994) regard the purpose of case studies as a way to come up with generalisations about the wider population to which the unit of the case study belongs. But for Stake (1995) the essence of case studies is particularisation not generalisation. The aim is extensive knowledge of a particular case and not to discover how it differs from others.

When selecting cases one needs to consider a few criteria. Firstly one must choose one's case in such a manner that one maximises learning. However, case studies seldom lead to entirely new understanding. It rather results in refinement of understanding. When selecting a case one also needs to be mindful of time and accessibility constraints. If possible, a case should be easy to get to and hospitable to your research (Stake, 1995). My case meets these considerations (I will elaborate later).

The researcher plays a pivotal role in case studies. Stake (1995: 12) points out that:

Ultimately, the interpretations of the researcher is likely to be emphasised more than the interpretations of those people studied, but the qualitative case researcher tries to preserve the multiple realities, the different and even contradictory [my emphasis] views of what is happening.

Data collection in case studies typically involves different methods: from interviewing and observing to the analysing of documents (Winegardner, nd). But Cohen & Manion (1994) argue

that observation lies at the heart of every case study. The world, in which the educational researcher is interested, is composed of people, and as such it is subjectively structured, containing particular meanings for the people involved. Given this scenario, participant observation techniques are very helpful to the researcher to accomplish his task. The participant observation approach enables the researcher to discern ongoing behaviour as it occurs, and to compile notes about its salient characteristics. I was unfortunately not in a position to adopt the participant observation approach due to time constraints and the limited scope of this half-thesis.

Stake (1995) suggests that case studies can be classified into three different types, namely intrinsic, instrumental and collective case studies. Intrinsic case studies endeavour to provide insight into some issue or to refine some theoretical explanation. Collective case studies focus on several cases to improve understanding or theoretical construction about a more comprehensive group of cases. My study can be classified as an instrumental case study as I set out to gain insight into a research question by studying a particular case.

My initial plan was to embark on a collective case study that would have focussed on both schools that have traditionally performed well and others with a not so attractive track record. Unfortunately I had to abandon the idea because of the perennial problem of limited time.

Next I will set out my actual research process.

The research process

Selection of sample

I utilised purposive sampling. Proximity and hospitality to the research were the main considerations in choosing my sample.

After having received the go ahead I decided to make use of a questionnaire (see Appendix A) that had to be completed by all the staff members. My objectives were to get a broader

perspective of the staff members' perception of the COL programme and to identify educators for the individual interviews according to the richness of their responses to the questionnaire. However, the school had been exposed to numerous questionnaires by then and suffered from research fatigue. I had to abolish the route of the questionnaire. I subsequently approached one of the teachers, whom I happen to know is very articulate about the project, as well as a senior management member to assist me to identify five teachers who would be able to provide me with rich data about the project. I ended up with five willing respondents. They included three females and two males, ranging from ordinary teachers to members from the senior management of the school. The respondents included members who were involved in the various structures of the COL programme at the school. The interviewees have all been at the school since the inception of the programme.

Data-gathering

I used only interviews as a data-gathering tool. The interviews were tape-recorded with the consent of the interviewees and transcribed in full. The interviews comprised both structured and unstructured questions (see Appendix B for the structured questions). I used the unstructured questions to deepen my understanding of various issues as they arose.

I provided the respondents with copies of the transcriptions to check them for accuracy and also to ascertain whether they still held their original views. No alterations were suggested by any of the respondents.

Analysis of the data

The transcription of the interviews presented me with a huge amount of data. I first immersed myself in the data. I both read through the transcripts and listened to the actual interviews as often as possible. I made notes as I proceeded. I initially experienced a sense of bewilderment as I grappled to make sense of all the data.

Eventually a pattern of themes started to emerge. Ely *et al.* (1991: 150) provide the following definition of a theme:

A theme can be defined as a statement of meaning that (1) runs through all or most of the pertinent data, or (2) one in the minority that carries heavy emotional or factual impact.

I was quite surprised at the extent to which these themes overlapped with the key points discussed in Chapter Two. The only theme that does not appear to correspond as significantly is the one on Resources. There were other themes, but I discarded them because they did not address my research question.

I made my Analysis and Discussion of the data chapters (as well as the Literature Review chapter for those who were interested in it) available to all five of the respondents. I requested them to give me any feedback that they may have. My objective was to check my interpretation of the data against theirs so as to refine or even review it in the light of any convincing feedback. This exercise obviously provided them with an opportunity to once more reflect seriously on how, if at all, the COL project had affected their thinking about management. Making the respondents part of the research process in this way has the potential to impact on the participants' perceptions of their own reality by virtue of the fact that they are afforded an opportunity to look at their reality from a possible different angle, and that they may find themselves having a closer look at it than their normal daily routine may allow.

Some ethical issues

Punch (1994, cited in Berg, 1998) contends that concerns about research ethics largely revolve around various issues of harm, consent, privacy and confidentiality of data. Social scientists according to Berg (1998: 31) have an ethical obligation to their research participants and society at large because they probe into social realms of other human beings. This lead to excursions into private social lives, policies, practices, etc. Researchers should therefore ensure that the rights, privacy and welfare of the people who constitute the focus of their studies are protected.

Before I embarked on my research, I first approached the Delta Foundation who conducted the Centres of Learning (COL) project, to get permission from them to conduct my research. No problems were experienced in getting the full co-operation of the Delta Foundation. And after having identified the school, I approached the school itself for permission to conduct the research. I requested that the staff as a whole be consulted in this regard. I also made contact with each of the possible five research participants individually for their permission to conduct the interviews with them.

To conceal the identity of the interviewees, I obtained permission from them to make use of pseudonyms when referring to them in the data. I also deliberately obscured the identity of the school as an additional means of concealing their identity.

Some of the research participants (as well as one of the presenters of the COL programme) are well known to me. This meant that I had to work harder at keeping my own pre-conceptions at bay, and approach the subject with an open mind.

I decided to adopt a collaborative approach to involve the research participants as much as possible in the research process. As mentioned above, I gave them copies of the transcripts of the interviews to check the accuracy thereof, and to establish whether they still held their original viewpoints. Later, I also issued them with copies of the Analysis and Discussion of the Data chapters, which provided them with the opportunity to voice any concerns they may have about the research.

I believe that this process allowed me to deal with whatever sensitive issues there may have been in as honest and open way possible.

Limitations in my methodology

As mentioned already, I was forced to rely on the views of a few staff members to select my research participants rather than identifying them through one of my own research instruments.

I came across a number of contradictory views but unfortunately had no other data to consider when dealing with those views. It would have been very helpful if I had been in a position (I was hampered by time constraints) to scrutinise inanimate objects like minutes of meetings, year plans, newsletters etc. It would also have provided me with additional insight if I had the time to undertake participant observation during the research process. According to Arksey and Knight (1999: 22) approaching research questions from different angles and engaging a range of different views has the potential of throwing up new and alternative explanations, which can help to give a clearer and more complete picture of the social complexity that is being investigated. Nonetheless, I am confident that my research was executed with enough rigour to provide me with valid findings.

I now present an analysis of the data which I gathered for my research.

Chapter Four: Analysis of the data

Introduction

In this chapter I will try to make sense of the data I gathered from the interviews with the five teachers. As has already been explained in Chapter Three (the Methodology chapter), there are three female and two male interviewees. Three of them are in management and two are post level one teachers. The interviews provided me with a huge amount of data. With my research question in mind, I finally arranged the data in the following themes: In search of a vision; participation and collaboration; planning; towards organisational learning and the issue of resources. I discarded other themes which also emanated from the data, but which did not address my research question.

In search of a vision

The idea of having an organisational vision was first introduced to the school by COL:

Well, I'd say that the vision and mission statement that we have drawn up comes directly from what we were doing as part of our training with the project. Everything that is contained in it comes as a result of our direct involvement with the Centres of Learning (Dalene).

The Centres of Learning empowered the different role players to formulate the school's vision, bringing the different individual perceptions about the school together in a common set of goals:

When we started with that week's workshop, many people did not have an idea as to how to go about formulating the vision and mission statement – putting it into as few words as possible. That's always very difficult, to say a lot in a few words (Dalene).

Andrea:

For the first time our school has a mission statement. We've got a vision, which we never

had in the past. We all saw the school as a different place for each one of us, but now we have drawn up a common set of objectives (although it is just on paper), that we at least agreed to. This is where we are going to position ourselves in 10 - 15 years' time.

However, according to Martin the vision and mission had always been part of the school but was just not written down. "Even before the vision and mission statement, people were probably driven by it. In a sense, we just had to put pen to paper" (Martin).

And:

We knew where we wanted to take the school, but we have not yet put it into words, and I think that was very important ... The fact that you have put things down on paper makes it much more real to live up to and to aspire to (Dalene).

Drawing up the vision and mission statement was a collaborative exercise, involving all the different role players:

We had a workshop where we worked through the vision and mission. Everyone could make an input. Although it had to be short and to the point, the future of the school (as we see it) has to be encapsulated in the vision and mission. Teachers, parents and learners were involved (Carl).

Synthesising the different views was, however, not an easy exercise but according to Martin, the vision crafting in itself created a lot of enthusiasm amongst the teachers. There was an over eagerness amongst them.

Involving the different role players in formulating the vision and mission statements is regarded as very important for various reasons:

It is vitally important to have everybody involved in the drawing up of the vision and mission statements ... At the end of the day I would say all stakeholders had a say in the formulation of it. They were very clear as to what they wanted. There was a compromise between the different groups as to what they wanted. But once you got what you wanted in the vision and mission statement, you could see there was this enthusiasm to carry it out - to achieve it (Martin).

This collaborative approach leads to a greater sense of ownership and a more holistic outcome:

People generally, I think, have ownership of something when they are part and parcel of it. When it is a one-sided thing then it tends to become a question of: It's your idea and you run with it, but the more ownership you have, the more effective you are going to be at the end of the day. Because we come from different walks of life, each component covered a different aspect when we drew up our vision and mission statement. And each one's contribution made for a more holistic approach to what the school's vision and mission statement should be (Lucille).

However, when formulating the school's vision and mission statement, one has to be conscious of the bigger organisational framework within which the school operates:

At the end of the day, when formulating the school's vision statement, we must also be guided as to what our function is as far as the Education Department is concerned. We can't overstep certain rules and regulations as far as that is concerned. So the School's Act and those types of things also impact on how we formulate the vision and mission statement (Lucille).

The vision and mission statement of the school is the result of the bringing together of different experiences and perceptions:

To a large extent my teaching experiences informed my view of my ideal school. The Centres of Learning also played a role in emphasising certain points. I did a lot of reading of course. Reading about education ... and to an extent looking at a lot of schools around you. I visited a number of top model C schools ... How they operate is not necessarily the best way. There are certainly some things that they do that I would advise them to do differently ... But it is about seeing what positives you can actually take from them (Martin).

Also:

... That is something that I would like to see in an ideal school situation: where everybody is aware of his or her role. Everything is aimed at getting the school working together as a well-run, well-oiled school, bringing out the best in everybody to the best of their ability. Where you enable the child to find his place in the world. I think it would be an ideal school when all of us feel that we can send our children to that school ... Where they are raised as well-balanced children and we are giving them the best with regards to extra-mural activities

and with regards to their academic programmes. Where in fact your child can develop and become the best he or she can possibly be (Dalene).

Says Carl:

When a learner finishes school I expect him to be a well adjusted, disciplined, committed citizen of the community, province and the land and not maladjusted and inclined to wrong doings. If that happens then our learners who leave the school will be an asset to the community and the society at large.

Dalene says her views are informed by:

... the schools at which I taught and the schools I have attended. And I would especially say the primary school that I have attended.

Some existing practices at the school also inspired aspects of the vision and mission statement:

Prior to the COL intervention you will find that this school ran literacy classes. This is why I say many of these things were there, people had that calling already. Maybe the vision and mission statements were to put it down on paper and display it somewhere. But it was there. Those literacy classes are an excellent example of it. They looked at the needs of the community and tried to do something about it ... There's always been a positive relationship with the community within which the school finds itself. We've got a community fund. We initiate community projects. One year, for example, they entertained the old people of the area - the children's grandparents (Martin).

Members of the school attach a lot of importance to the vision and mission statement. It is seen as providing direction and security:

I think it's extremely important. Without that the school is going about in circles or everybody is doing his or her own thing. I think you must have a common understanding where you are heading with your institution. To make people feel secure. To get people goal-orientated. To get them committed. All those things help if you know you're together in this. We strive for the same things. We don't work against each other, and it also lessens conflict (Andrea).

It articulates what the school stands for:

The most important challenge, I think, is that every school should have a vision and mission. What does the school represent and where is the school going? What type of centre must the school eventually be ... The vision and mission is absolutely essential. Because if the school does not have it, it will struggle to find its feet (Carl).

And:

If a company exists without a vision or mission statement, what would its core function be at the end of the day. I think we, as a school, need to know what our core function is ... It really refocuses your attention: What are my plans, my purpose? (Lucille)

The vision gives meaning to the school's existence:

To me your vision and mission statement is really giving purpose to your existence. If you don't have a vision and mission you merely exist. You 're not working towards a goal. So to me, your vision and mission statement really keeps you on track, taking you eventually to where you want to be (Lucille).

Lucille believes a clear vision and mission statement that has been communicated effectively and is visible at all times should serve as a guide for decision-making at all times. For Dalene the vision and mission statement is there to:

... guide your planning. It is there to guide your conduct. It is there to remind you of the ethos of the school, the principles which guide us. So it plays a very important role. In fact, I have a placard in my class and I look at it regularly.

The vision and mission statement is also empowering:

[It] empowers everybody ... I think people feel much more empowered. They do things with much more self-confidence. They run projects on their own. They don't wait to initiate projects (Martin).

It spurs people on into action:

Your mission statement was to develop facilities to a standard where you would be able to

become a school of excellence ... To enable you to compete with the best ... And projects started because of that. That's when the computer centre started (Martin).

Respondents also highlighted the importance of the visibility of the vision and mission statement:

... We were supposed to have a big board somewhere in the foyer or staff room to put up our vision & mission statement. It was important for that to happen. Everybody who steps inside the school can see: Oh this is [the school] where I am; this is the type of environment that exists here; this is the people's understanding of things and so on. We never did that. This is a small thing perhaps - not putting up those statements. But I think that also shows that ... That people after a while tend to forget what you learn, what you're supposed to strive towards (Andrea)

Martin believes that the visibility of the vision serves as a constant motivator:

... putting it down on paper and continually reminding yourself is a continuous motivator. When you read it again, it does tend to motivate you. I read it every second week. It's a motivator again. I don't exactly know whether the teachers read it or not. We try to put it in wherever we can. So if we would have something which is distributed to the teachers and there is some space on the page we put in the vision and mission statement just so that you can read it again. But personally, yes personally, I find it a motivator. I come here on a Monday morning and look at it ... And it gives me some sort of direction ... Which reminds me of where I am going.

Senior management is seen as having an important role to keep the vision visible:

I think senior management plays a big role [in keeping the vision and mission statement alive and in the forefront of the people's minds] ... Wherever we would get a space we would put up the vision and mission statement. Just as a reminder (Martin).

Says Dalene:

I'd say we should be looking at it more often. I'd say there are some individuals who look at it a lot. There are others who don't look at it often enough. But we do our strategic planning and we certainly do look at where it ties in ... with our vision.

The vision and mission statement provides the school with a strategic view of where it wants to be in the future:

This is where we are going to position ourselves within 10 to 15 year's time. These are our objectives. These are our goals, our aims [the vision and mission]. Those are practical things in a sense but is also long-term (Andrea).

And being future-orientated, the vision and mission serves as a compass when changes are brought about:

I would say that it most certainly guided us when we had to change the curriculum of the school. We had to adapt the curriculum of the school in order to suit our changing circumstances. And we were reminded about our vision and mission. We certainly stressed our being a part of the larger community that we serve. And when you look at the changed subject choices ... The new curriculum was in fact designed to serve the needs of the community instead of stressing academic subjects too much - we do have a technical section now. We have, for example, Home Economics and Needlework, a combination of the two. Because we realise that not all our children are going to find jobs in ... white-collar jobs. If you look at our present economic circumstances in the country, then self-employment is going to become much more important. So that is certainly one example that stands out in my mind where the vision and mission statement played a very important part (Dalene).

However there is a belief that the vision and mission statement has become a sterile document:

... We worked out all these documents, what our objectives and our mission were. That was not supposed to be a piece of paper that is filed away somewhere. And I think that is perhaps what happened. It was filed away neatly somewhere and a few people can vaguely remember what it is. It wasn't ... refreshing people's minds through ... what was happening at school. For example, if you had an objective that within 5 to 10 years time that [our school] is going to be a school of excellence ... People want to see how you're going to arrive at that. What are you implementing ... But there is nothing happening (Andrea).

The vital role that the leadership plays with regards to the vision of the organisation has also been succinctly articulated:

... the leadership must have ... must have a vision, clear goals. If you don't have it, you are going nowhere. You must believe in that. And once you have a vision, then you can get others to believe in it ... If everybody is part of that, then it's easy. And then you play a

supportive role ... But if management doesn't have a vision, then you are going nowhere (Martin).

And as discussed above, senior management is also seen as playing a crucial role with regards to the visibility of the vision and mission statement.

Organisational vision needs a climate of participation and collaboration to do justice to it. We will now examine to what extent a climate of participation and collaboration exists in the school to support its establishment of a vision.

Participation and collaboration

When it comes to decision-making, the school has a tradition of participatory decision-making. Most of the times issues are discussed vigorously before decisions are taken, and decisions are usually based on consensus rather than voting:

It was always ... things were resolved by discussions, it was discussed and thereafter a decision was usually taken by consensus ... Instead of resorting to voting, everyone gets a chance to make an input and then a decision is taken (Carl).

And:

... Decision making at [our school] has always been done (if possible) on consensus. We rarely have issues where we voted on ... Although from time to time we did give in to a majority vote ruling. But we've always tried to bring people on board to differ or to accommodate differences. And that is also, I think, the message that we got from (not specific), but I would say from COL ... that it's not necessary always to vote on issues or rule by majority, but try to convince people of issues and ... We're fairly successful at [our school] on that (Andrea).

But whereas decision-making in the past used to be effective and productive, there is a belief among some that it is no longer the case:

We knew how to conduct ourselves, how to implement decisions, how to report back, how to keep minutes, notes and things. We've done all that. We had a tradition of doing that at

school. It was part of what was right at [our school]. And all those things have slowly been eroded. ... And those are things that were also mentioned at the [COL] training. We went through all those things and we thought ... great ... well [our school] has been doing that but now we see we've got problems 4 to 5 years down the line. We don't do those things ... those basics anymore (Andrea).

And that creates tension:

... people don't know what they have decided in the meetings, they contradict each other, they don't know who's responsible for implementation of certain projects or tasks and who's accountable ... and you cannot operate in our environment like that. It's bound to create tension and conflict, and it normally does affect staff. So it's not a pleasure for most people to attend staff meetings ... (Andrea).

Such a situation is also not conducive to problem solving:

... Meetings, staff meetings and other meetings haven't been productive at all [the last year or two]. Some ... say it's a waste of time these days. I would not put it that strongly, but I've also said they're very unproductive, generally. And that leads to a lot of conflict and problems with colleagues, because people don't want to attend meetings, they don't contribute effectively and solutions are not found ... Issues are postponed and agendas are not completed ... that type of thing (Andrea).

And the seeming unproductive meetings in the final analysis impact on the teaching and learning in the school:

... most of the decisions are not implemented. It's just mentioned, noted perhaps and then that's gone and that's past. And people tend to make light of it these days. They joke about it, but it's serious because it impacts on ... the quality of teaching and learning (Andrea).

Nevertheless, COL also emphasised the importance of an inclusive approach in all the endeavours of the school:

I think one of the things we have learned from the COL project - one basic lesson - is that in order to achieve certain things you need to have structures, and you need to have the support of your role players ... up to this stage it is still an important practice at the school. Whenever we attempt to do something, we would always try to involve people, the staff - as far as possible, the learners and the parents and also put structures in place. Although sometimes it's not effective (Andrea).

Martin concurs, noting that a collective approach facilitates goal-achievement:

... one of the most [significant lessons of COL] that you can mention is that ... whatever we do we must be all-inclusive. People must buy into that. They must feel they belong ... Achieving your goal becomes so much easier, whether it's a simple, basic task or whether it's a complex task, whether it's a crisis also ... the redeployment, that was an out and out crisis situation ... in many senses we are reasonably mature about it. It didn't change the problems, it didn't change the resentment ... but, people will still realise we have to do things as a team.

And:

... I've always believed in being inclusive. If you have everybody on board when decisions are taken it's so much easier to implement that particular plan. So, I've always believed that it makes it so much easier. I'm not somebody that wants to fight with you. So I'd rather convince you the idea is right or listen to some of yours (Martin).

According to Carl COL helped to improve the co-operation between teachers:

I would say that [COL] had improved the co-operation between teachers ... there is a greater sense of unity and as a result there is more co-operation. Teachers are prepared to do more ... obviously there are exceptions about whom very little can be done (Carl).

However, Dalene says their school has always been characterised by a culture of collaboration:

I think that [teachers at our school] have always had the interest of the school at heart and they are always willing to assist, always ... if you can, take for example, the matric farewell ... or the Mr and Miss [of our school] show. And the awards evening, the family day. In fact most of the events at the school are being organised by the teachers. With the principal playing an important part – but not being the person solely in charge (Dalene).

To illustrate how the teachers at the school collaborate with one another, Martin explains how the allocation of teaching takes place:

... If we do an allocation of teaching at the beginning of the year, I would head the class groupings ... we've got teams doing the different class groupings. And once that is done, it goes to every head of department for every grade. And. Let's take mathematics as an example. They will now say: "look, this is the math's for the school." These are the math's teachers. They then meet. They must meet – that's almost an instruction. They decide how that math's will be allocated in that particular department. So, at the end of the day, they make the decision. Of course I've got the right to veto ... and I never had to use it. But people do listen to you if you come and say: "Look, I don't think that one is quite ready yet for matric" ... But that's about as far as I had to go and it works wonderfully ...

And:

... we've actually designed a form that the head of department must submit at the end, so that I can study whether the work is evenly distributed ... So the head of department does not take all the small classes and you get all the big classes. Quite often, you will whisper and say: 'Look here, I don't think you distributed this fairly.' And so we get going with the school year. Everybody is happy or at least, if you're not happy, you have an understanding why it had to be that particular way. And that brings about a better acceptance (Martin).

The co-operative approach to teaching that takes place at the school, as can be seen from the quotations above, serves to promote good working relationships between teachers. It makes people to wanting to support the various activities of the school. Goal achievement is thus enhanced. People attain a clearer understanding of even sensitive or divisive issues. And as such it helps to minimize the possibility of conflict.

The pupils are also encouraged to participate in the running of the school: "... a good part of the school assemblies is actually run by the learners" (Martin). The learners are called upon to come up with sketches when the devotions are linked to social themes like Aids Awareness, sexual diseases, etc. They also run a Miss X school show:

We run a Miss [X] show ... It's not my cup of tea. But if you look at the show itself, it's a high quality show they are running ... Therefore, you are teaching the child a skill. This is OBE [outcomes based education]. This is what OBE is all about. It's not talking about the show ... the children are taught skills in organizing, in choreography ... but you teaching the child a number of skills. It's one of the most popular shows here, and actually, I've got a new appreciation for it (Martin).

The learners thus not only become partners in the running of the school, but also learn valuable skills through their participation. The learners are also entrusted with more serious decision making, giving them a sense of accountability and responsibility towards what is happening at school:

Even our prefect system has changed. Initially the staff nominated the prefects and then the learners only voted for the prefects from amongst the nominees. Now it is being done in a much more democratic way. The learners – the grade eleven's – come with their nominations and table it to the staff. Then, because we know the learners better, we would veto some nominations. Then the process is being finalised (Carl).

By allowing the learners to participate in the running of certain activities at the school, they are obviously being empowered.

Parental involvement, however, does not appear to be satisfactory:

... I would love a closer parental involvement at the school. We regularly have parent evenings, etc. at the school. But then it is usually the parents whose children are not causing problems at school who attend these meetings. The parents you would like to see do not attend (Carl).

Dalene believes the lack of parental involvement is characteristic of parents coming from disadvantaged areas:

... To get our parents involved is extremely difficult. I think, no matter which school you go to in the disadvantaged areas, you'll find that it's going to be a small group of parents who really become involved. Even if you look at your Governing Body – you look at the calibre, ... you'll find that parents, who should become involved, don't want to become involved (Dalene).

Andrea, however, draws the attention to the fact that parents never used to be involved with what is happening at school. "We've always done everything on behalf of the parents and the pupils" (Andrea) The establishment of School Governing Councils (SGC) at public schools seems to be changing this apparent lack of participation of parents in the affairs of the school:

A big project, driven by the Governing Council, was the establishment of the computer centre. It was mainly driven by the parents on the Governing Council. So much so, that they succeeded in getting the Governor of the Reserve Bank, Tito Mboweni - just before he was appointed - to be a guest speaker at a banquet which was organised by us. We sold tickets, at R100.00 a table, to companies to generate funds to start the computer centre (Andrea).

According to Martin, COL played a big role in empowering the previous Governing Council to play its rightful role. Maybe SGC's will in time ensure greater participation by parents in the affairs of the school.

The following theme is actually an elaboration of the theme of participation and collaboration, but I discuss it separately because it was presented as a separate subject matter by the COL project.

Planning

COL has put a lot of emphasis on planning. They introduced the following slogan to the school: Proper, prior planning prevents poor performance. This resonates strongly with Lucille:

I believe in planning things timeously so that it can run effectively ... I don't believe in labour-intensive things ... and at the end of the day if you don't get any reward out of it because you haven't done your homework properly ... I believe the work lies in the planning. When the actual event takes place ... to me the event is over already, because you've done your homework properly. You know you've put everything in place.

So as far as Lucille is concerned COL's 6 p's (proper, prior planning prevents poor performance) is not something unfamiliar, but a re-emphasis of principles she is already practicing. However, COL was instrumental in getting "strategic planning" going again at the school according to Lucille (apparently it used to be part of the school).

Lucille says that their "strategic planning" covers the running of the complete school:

... You know, like exam dates ... maybe there's a prize giving – those types of things. We have a set calendar of when those things would take place. We don't come at the beginning

of the quarter and then decide...

Says Carl:

Every year in the recent past we have been planning the following years work in the fourth quarter. And it entails all the activities of the school: administrative, academic and whatever. In this manner, we start every year with a school plan in place...

Most respondents regard their year plans, which covers the various activities of the school, from administrative to academic activities, as strategic planning. According to Dalene their planning is accompanied by a needs analysis.

Whereas planning used to be top-down, it is now inclusive. Martin says to allow everyone to make an input as far as the plans are concerned, they break up into teams focusing on all the various aspects from administrative tasks, to sport and culture, etc. This collaboration “gives people a sense of ownership” according to Dalene. Carl claims this collective approach ensures that the plans are executed because:

... we put the plan together. It is not something that has been forced upon us from the top by management. We were all part of that planning and it entails all the activities of the school.

And

... With the strategic plan in place, everybody knows what is expected of him (Carl).

Initially plans “were too grandiose” says Dalene. This could partly explain why, according to Lucille, these plans are not always fully utilised, resulting in the school going from “crisis to crisis”.

Lucille regards planning as one of the most important aspects of COL which, she sadly believes, has disappeared:

I think it stands out in all our minds and it stopped, and I think maybe more so, because maybe we are not implementing it. We keep asking: ‘Where is proper, prior planning for the

school's performance now?' (Lucille).

To illustrate her point, Lucille refers to the family fun day that was planned but which did not materialise. Firstly, it was hampered because of the moderation of the continuous assessment marks, of which the Education Department informed them very late. In the following quarter, it had been jeopardised in that a number of teachers had to go and mark the matriculants' final examination papers. Lucille therefore asks:

So where was your proper prior planning ... if there was an action plan, place and time frames in place [the plans could still have materialised] So the question again comes up: 'Where's the proper planning for performance?' (Lucille).

Andrea suggests that the banquet with the then Labour Minister, Tito Mboweni, could have raised more money if it was planned properly:

But we made some silly, obvious mistakes because we didn't plan the thing properly. We didn't actually realize what it entails. So, that fundraiser which could have gathered us a couple of ... I think just under a million rand ... that really flopped. People felt really despondent afterwards. And various things were blamed ... but I think all of us must take responsibility for that.

But Martin is of the view that they adhere to their plans, notwithstanding all kinds of pressures to depart from it:

... You have a parent meeting the second week of the second quarter. And now the Education Department comes up with CASS [continuous assessment], and the easy thing to do is, just meet the parents later. We did not inform them yet [of the meeting]. They don't know about that ... [but] that is our calendar. That is our plan. You adhere to it with all the pressures [involved]. You meet the deadline...

As far as Dalene is concerned, nobody gets to implement 100% of what they have planned anyway. And if:

... By the end of the year you can say ... you managed to tick off 70% of the things that you had on the list, then I think you have been extremely successful (Dalene)

The emphasis on thorough planning that was brought back to the school by COL has had a number of positive spin-offs for the school. According to Carl this emphasis on planning to a large extent eliminated unplanned activities at the school:

... Because in the past things were very much done on an ad-hoc basis. Then something would suddenly crop up to which you need to pay attention. But with the strategic plan of which everyone has a copy, dates have already been set for the new year. The result is that, on day one of the school's year we can immediately get going...

Martin concurs that things are now done in a more structured way:

... And anything you now do or plan ... you have an idea of how to go about it and it's not a haphazard type of thing. It's structured. People are consciously aware of the fact that you ... planning must be in a structured way

Dalene believes that the workshops on planning helped the school to re-establish proper work ethics:

... People realise ... we cannot just let things slide. Because it would be very easy to let things slide. You know, to say: nobody [from the Education Department] is going to come around anymore, nobody is coming to check on us. I think it has helped to maintain and to reinforce the work ethics that has always been at the school (Dalene).

Martin believes that the insistence by COL that they should stick to the timeframes of their year plans instilled a new sense of discipline:

Teachers become more disciplined ... you have to meet those deadlines... you take a simple thing that's not happening at many schools, and in our school we are moving to that ... handing in your question paper on time, with your memo ... or handing in your record book on time. You know, it's those basic things. We're talking about very basic things. But we've lost it. Teachers come the day before they write to hand in their question paper ... but deadlines say we're quite serious about it. If we give you a date to hand in your paper, we insist that you abide by it ... So it brings about greater discipline ... a lot of those things we actually had prior to 1994. It was in place. But these things we seem to lose and everybody seem to just do as they please. So, we're moving back ... to put it back into place ... we're moving back to basics (Martin).

And

We had to meet timeframes; you had to meet deadlines. And sometimes you did not feel like it and you thought it's not ... it's too much. But people met those deadlines. Afterwards it

becomes a part of you. This is how things work. If we say that must be done by that time then ... if that takes pressure, then that is what is required. I think that certainly comes from the COL intervention (Martin).

However, even though the COL intervention referred to long term planning as well, there is no such long term planning at the school according to Lucille. Lucille believes a lot of long term planning is needed to promote the school and to ensure that the number of pupils attending the school is not dwindling away. Lucille argues:

... It remains a major thing ... the school should always have long term planning. They should be able to see that you are pro-active, that you're going towards a goal. What do you aim to do ... and not just ... day-to-day running.

According to Lucille, the lack of long-term planning has resulted in crisis management:

There hasn't been any strategic planning concerning a long-term project. I think basically at this school we have come to a state where we crisis manage ... crisis management you know. Something arises; we'll workshop to assist. I'm more and more realising the difference between doing urgent things and doing important things. And if you are doing important things then you are on the right track, then you are going somewhere. But when you are doing urgent things, to me, then you are crisis managing. When there's a call for an urgent staff meeting or an urgent fund-raising [event] or an urgent something. Then it tells me there's crisis management. There's no long-term planning ... and we find that thing is now happening more because there's always something urgent.

Lucille's statements seem to negate earlier claims about some of the positive effects of the year plans.

Given the extent of participation and collaboration that exists in the school, I will now examine whether it is supportive of any learning taking place in the organisation.

Towards organisational learning

Even though the school cannot be described as a learning organisation, there are definite signs of some learning taking place.

It is clear from the data that there are ongoing attempts at improving the school:

.... [our school] has always been seen as one of the most organised and progressive schools in [their area]. With a staff that's dedicated and who likes to improve things ...Who was always trying to improve things in different ways to improve the school ... (Andrea).

And:

... The biggest challenge is to continue trying. And to use what you have learned. To use what you have gained from the project [i.e. COL]. Putting that into practice and improving your service at the school ... (Dalene).

Lucille believes that COL made members of their staff come to realise that ongoing training is needed to keep abreast with developments in the education field:

... my interpretation of the project is that when you are exposed to something of this nature, then you ... have to sit back and think to yourself: 'Man, if I don't keep up with the latest trends, then I'm going to be left behind.' And I think that same message then should have hit home to me, hit home to someone else ... also that we need to keep people on their toes. And the only way we can do that is by continuous training. And I think, the more you are exposed, the more you'd want to know. Whereas people who are just not informed or ill informed will just accept the position they are in and think that what they are doing is right ... and maybe discover but ... we were very wrong. We are outdated in our approach ... Whereas continuous training brings you up to scratch with what is current and what is relevant (Lucille).

Martin says that teaching needs to emulate the importance that is attached to continual training, which is prevalent in the corporate world:

Let's face it ... you take big business. I take an insurance company ... take Metropolitan. Twice a year they take their top salesmen and they retrain them ... this is what is lacking in teaching. It doesn't matter whether I am a good teacher, I must be refreshed ... it gives you a new drive, a new enthusiasm. That's how businesses are operating. That's what is missing in teaching. Teachers are not being retrained and given new enthusiasm. Now that's what the Centres of Learning did for us ... (Martin).

And continual training fuels progress:

... the Centres of Learning may have speeded up the development [of the school] ... and that's what makes successful businesses. They don't wait for a thing to happen. They speed up the process. That's why I'm saying, we must be trained all the time (Martin).

Lucille also believes that learning is an ongoing process:

... I don't think we can ever ... stop learning ... Death comes when there's no more room to grow or to develop ... (Lucille).

The Centres of Learning introduced the concept of continual staff development at the school. But attempts to embark on learning ventures have not always been successful:

One of the things that came out of the COL training was that we must ... establish some forum or structure [through which] we can develop our staff ... Everybody was happy to do just that. Everybody realised the need to develop the staff consistently. And we just put up a structure ... We had one or two sessions where we identified certain key areas in which the staff was lacking or where we needed to intervene. And we even had one programme. But then things just died. One of the reasons ... people felt there was no time to do it ... But I think it's a question of managing the process ... We talk about it a lot at school. We still feel there's a need for that ... (Andrea).

Nevertheless, some staff development activities do take place:

We do attempt to have staff development. Although it has not always been successful. Because of all the factors involved. You know, quite often you find that our year is disrupted. But, for example, at the beginning of this year we had a stress management workshop because some teachers have been having problems coping with stress in their lives.

Martin suggests that the school has always been mindful of changes in education and in the community, and as a result has changed a number of things at the school. However COL has "probably made [their] approach to changes more structured" (Martin). They have for example, established a curriculum committee at the school to change the curriculum in view of the changing realities:

How are we going to restructure our curriculum within the light of the changing situation in

education and also the loss of experienced teachers that we have suffered; the type of pupils that we get these days are changing; the community out there, industry and all those things (Andrea).

The prefect system at the school has also been changed with a view to improving it:

... We always had a system where prefects were partly elected by the learners and partly by the educators ... since last year the new prefects actually take over in the third quarter. And they go through a training programme. And at the end of this [the training programme], we will elect the new head boy and head girl for the new year. They go out on leadership courses and training camps. They go through various training sessions at school. Various facets of working together, dealing with other people and dealing with difficult learners. All of those things. So that certainly is a whole new way of looking at our prefect system. Not, at the end of the year, you name the head boy; you name the head girl ... We actually see that there is a training programme to arrive at the prefects (Martin).

This new approach to the prefects was informed by:

... the knowledge that we really just elect them and we leave them there. Almost like you throw them to the dogs. I, for one, always said that we need to treat them better. We need to train them at the end of the day. There must be something positive that comes out for them also. [As a result of COL] we sort of brought about an intervention by teaching them what planning is, in teaching leadership skills, empowerment and administration ... the same aspects [of COL] ... (Martin).

And:

[The new approach to the prefects is about] new ideas all the time. Won't this work better ... won't that work better (Martin).

Changes thus take place as part of a learning process. Another example is the date for the matric farewell:

... You would find that we've changed dates. ... we moved it to about this week ... the last week of the third quarter [from the end of the year]. And we saw the results are rock bottom. Then with a lot of resistance from teachers and parents ... we moved it to the first week or second week of the third quarter ... and [it] is now far away from the exams. And now everybody accepts it as part of the school's programme (Martin).

When it comes to problem solving, Martin believes that probably “the biggest impact [of COL] ... could very much be how you deal with problems”:

... if you take problems with learners ... we went through our code of conduct. We went through the establishment of the RCL [Representative Council for Learners]. We went through the working relationship with the RCL. And all of that is about how you deal with problems ... because when you finally come to the problem, you’ve established a structure, which enables you to deal with the problem. It’s not when the problem crops up for the first time, and now I want to suddenly get people around to solve it ... we’ve built a structure that everybody understands ... So developing all of those ... structures and your code of conduct, your Dress Code and your Code of Conduct for the teachers are part of enabling yourself or empowering yourself to deal with the problem. You take a problem like pregnancies ... we developed a policy and we’ve all agreed on that. [And if there’s a problem with regard to implementing the policy] I can now say, but everyone has approved it ... And it makes dealing with problems very easy when there is a structure (Martin).

To deal with the social problems that the pupils are experiencing, the school has employed a student councillor /social worker:

... And children’s problems are now being dealt with by a professional. And the problems are much bigger than you and I will ever ... thought it was ... And you are totally unaware of it. You expect the child must progress ... he must focus or concentrate. So in dealing with the children’s problems we’ve taken a major step forward (Martin).

Carl believes the employment of the social worker has eased the task of the teachers and the management.

But, when it comes to managing conflict, Andrea is of the view that the school is not doing well:

... We are still going to have problems addressing it successfully, because we perhaps didn’t take the lessons learned from the project [COL] ... through to it’s logical conclusion. We left it there at the workshop, and we are getting caught up in things. Every other day another conflict. And we still can’t resolve it satisfactorily, and that leads to more stress between colleagues, parents, learners, etc. (Andrea).

And:

... There's not proactive processes ... we are living from one crisis, one conflict to another without really getting down to managing the conflict and ... problems are increasing at such a rate ... Sometimes I feel we are drowning in the series of conflicts and problems. We don't have a recipe on how to manage it (Andrea).

However, notwithstanding the problems that may exist at the school, there is a willingness among staff members (inspired in part by COL) to take responsibility for what is happening at the school, and to prevent the school from losing its appeal that it still has in the community:

... whatever is going to happen to the school – where the school is going to be in 10 years, 15 years, 20 years time – is going to be our responsibility. Not the Department's [of Education], not any other outside bodies, but primarily the community's; the school community, i.e. the parents, the learners and the teachers. And I think that was a rude awakening for us, because we've always been used to somebody else helping us, supporting the school. A big brother up there, having the responsibility and we're just coming to school doing our jobs and leaving ... There's still people amongst the staff that believe that we are not responsible, it's not our school. We just work there. But I think the majority of the staff, through this COL project, has come to realise if we don't do something about it, nobody else will. And most of us will end our days at the school ... any changes that we want to see happening, we have to do it. We have to initiate it, we have to take the process forward, and we have to see it to the end. Otherwise we are going to become irrelevant, and I think most of us do not want that. We want our school to be competitive, to be relevant, to be up there with the best – and we've shown that we can do that ... that is to me the important lesson [of COL]. That we must take charge of the school. We've got the ultimate responsibility for the school (Andrea).

COL also brought about a realisation amongst some staff members that they should not operate in isolation of one another, but harmonise their efforts:

Whereas before, I would only be involved in my own department, I think COL has shown me that each one of us has a bigger role to play than merely being a teacher or involved in a particular field of learning. And that meant that we had to get ... involved in decision-making at various levels, interacting with parents so that we all could actually affect the common goal that we had worked out ... for the school (Andrea).

However, there appears to be a tendency at the school to focus efforts on short-term alleviating of the symptoms of problems:

One of the big problems at [our school] is the question of ... ill discipline of, especially the learners. But I think it's just a symptom of a larger problem that we don't recognise and we do not address at [our school]. For example, one of the fundamental things in any organisation is to feel safe and secure in your workplace ... We do not have that at school. There have been one or two incidents of robberies, there have been attacks [on] teachers and learners at school, during school hours ... Now those things are not addressed. With the result ... people (teachers and learners) become undisciplined. They don't turn up for classes. They come late ... they leave school without permission ... And we try to address the symptoms ... And we've learned at the training [of COL] that we must address the cause of the problem, not the symptom (Andrea).

Similarly, the school seemed to be sidetracked easily from staying focussed on broader development objectives:

... instead of addressing the broader issues ... we would be caught up in discussing, e.g. fundraising for the matric farewell. Teachers will debate those kinds of things ... instead of coming back to fundraising as a broader issue that we need to address with pupils or parents. But we still get bogged down ... and use all our energy, and at the end of the day, we will have presented a successful matric farewell, but the financial problems that we have are still there (Andrea).

And:

Most of us – including myself – were caught up in doing the day-to-day running of the school ... forgetting that we're working towards broader objectives (Andrea).

According to Andrea, the challenge for them, after COL, is to undergo a paradigm shift:

I think we've all learned a lot. There's no doubt about it. It is just a question of perhaps changing our mindset and that will take a long I think. I don't think that will happen overnight ... we come from different backgrounds, different philosophies, we maintain ... So we had to gel into a unit that had a common understanding, a common vision ...

The following comment from Andrea illustrates the point about a need for a change in mindset:

... Perhaps the vision or mission has changed, but we don't look at those things or realise those things when we go through our daily, routine work at school.

Next I will have a closer look at the vexed question of resources at the school within the context of self-managing schools.

The issue of resources

How much a school is endowed with various types of resources that make for quality overall education has come to manifest itself as a decisive dividing line between schools, post 1994:

And these days ... our schools have become very, very competitive. It's almost as if there's a market out there, and industry, the community, parents ... they want the best for their kids. And they are going to look at results and things like that and what can you bring to us if they come to you to enrol their child (Andrea).

The school no longer attracts the top learners that it used to in the past:

We used to draw learners from the top so-called coloured (if I may say so) homes. And that meant that we would get the ... not only the best learners, but also the best parents. And all those learners and parents ... well quite a lot of them went over to ex model C schools. And that meant that our matric results were also adversely affected ... teachers had to now start finding the resources within themselves to work with learners that are presenting far more problems, coming from a less favourable background. In fact, one of the things that came out of our strategic plans that we do as a result of our involvement in the Centres of Learning project, was the decision to appoint a social worker at school (Dalene).

These changes in the learner profile of the school pose serious challenges to the teachers of the school:

And it was very, very hard for the teachers to remain motivated and to be teaching a class of learners where you have all these children with major social problems, major learning problems (Dalene).

The teachers have to get to grips with the changed learner profile and equip themselves to deal with the situation:

... it's a whole paradigm shift for teachers now that we are dealing with a community that has many problems ... and unemployment, broken homes and divorces ... if we can start skilling ourselves to understand it ... some people are excellent educators, but they don't click with the children sometimes and they don't understand the child sometimes (Martin).

Teachers in South Africa emerge from an era where the Education Department was responsible for almost everything:

... People perhaps became too reliant on ... the Department [of Education] in the past to provide everything, to maintain and sustain things. And it's difficult to make that transition ... [to] how to sustain things yourself ... we're still struggling with that ... (Andrea).

COL has put a lot of emphasis on the question of becoming more self-reliant according to Martin. Teachers taking responsibility for the maintenance of their own classrooms formed part of the strategy to broaden ownership of the schools resources:

... one of the things I am trying to drive, and it certainly has worked with a number of the teachers ... [is] that we're responsible now for the maintenance [of the school]. There is no financial or other support from the Education Department. And teachers here, has taken their classrooms and they painted and repaired them. And I see that all as part of the drive from the [COL] project. They take responsibility for that class. Initially there was resistance. Teachers said it is not my job to clean my class. It's not my job to paint my class. But acceptance came [when teachers came to realise] that we are not supported by the Department [of Education] (Martin).

But it is not only teachers that need to change their mindset with regard to ownership of the school's resources. If the community as a whole can make this important shift, thousands of rands can be saved:

I think it is an educational task for the whole community - the whole of society. If I think about the thousands of rands the school has to spend on maintenance every year. For example, after the June holidays, there was not a single lock left on any of the doors. The copper pipes were broken off. There was no water. Thousands of rands had to be paid out on repairs and broken windows. Every month we spend hundreds of rands to replace broken windowpanes, etc. that is because of the notion that we are responsible for protecting the property [of the school]. Whilst people don't recognise that everything that is being broken have to be paid for in some way by the parents ... if that perception can take hold, then we will surely look better after our existing properties ... and the money can then be spent on

other more important things (Carl).

Taking ownership of the school's properties creates a situation where the community will protect it far more effectively, ensuring that valuable funds are channelled to areas of real need.

Making the most of the available resources is one of the more serious challenges the school faces. Drawing up budgets and adhering to it has become part of the overall plan to maximise limited resources:

... what is new is that we now, in terms of the limited funding from the Province [the Education Department], is that we now have to draw up budgets. We have to manage the funds ourselves ... some people are slower than others, some teachers still ... it is difficult to convince them that we now run the show and that money is not just freely available. They say repair that fence as is ... in the old days you just picked up the phone and get Public Works out here. We got a budget and if there's no provision in your budget for that, you can't just go and do that. So it is a learning curve for us ... (Martin).

Making the most of the available resources involves utilising whatever the parents can offer, whether it is maintenance, fundraising, etc., but parents at the school seem reluctant to come forward:

... [Parents] involved in the school is generally low ... If parents can play a more positive role, even just supporting the child in terms of checking that their homework is done, just motivate ... supporting them at sporting activities.

Having the parents there is a big thing. That would be a big plus. Then they could get involved in ... most probably one of the main areas for a parent to get involved in today, is fundraising. Because we are responsible for maintenance at the school which has become a major headache. And parents need to make a contribution. Not necessarily always in fundraising, but also in the actual maintenance of the school. They are just sitting out there with the skills. They're working at places where they use these skills. If they can come and spend some time at the school and maybe even develop the learner's skills [in the process] (Martin).

But there are parents who are prepared to make a difference:

... Parents took all our overhead projectors for example. We've got parents who are skilled

in this, who came and repaired it. And they raised funds and they bought additional projectors. And they're still responsible for it ... (Martin).

Being in a position to tap all the resources that parents can offer, could have a huge impact on the school:

With 3000 parents [of 1500 pupils], I think we can have quite a bit of resources available to us. At one stage we tried to draw up a little bank of resources – what job specifications were involved, things like that. But that's something that also stagnated along the way (Lucille).

Even the voluntary service of a teacher, retired from the school, is being employed to stretch the available resources:

... At our school we have a retired teacher who lends his support to the school [with regards to disciplinary problems among pupils]. He usually comes in the morning. He then tends to any disciplinary problems of the previous day, depending on the nature thereof. If it is of a serious nature, the parents have to come to the school before the pupil is allowed back in the classroom ... (Carl).

Forging partnerships between the school and sections within society is also viewed as a strategy to overcome the lack of resources:

We need to forge partnerships between the school, the Department [of Education] and the broader community, e.g. Industry and your parents. I think that is the key. If we're going to have a solid workable partnership then we can achieve a lot in any situation. Then we won't have problems like lack of resources. We won't have problems with teaching and learning taking place or attracting skilful people to our school, exploiting our resources to the maximum. Even motivating teachers and learners to perform to their best. If people can see that, yes, the community is behind us. They are interested in what is happening. Industry is looking at the school. Look, for example ... we're a technical school. We can provide skilful learners ... to Industry ... If we can do that, we can then attract sponsorship and other things from industry in return ... (Andrea).

But according to Andrea, the school is not fully utilising the resources at its disposal. She cites the fact that they are a comprehensive school with a technical section and that they have a computer centre as examples. She believes that much more can be achieved if these resources were exploited more fully.

... We have a computer centre that is up and running. But I think we're not using it to maximum effect. We only provide basic computer literacy classes for 70 – 80% of the scholars at the moment. After hours the centre is locked up and there is nobody ... and weekends and holidays nobody has access to the centre. I think it's a waste of resources. That's one example (Andrea).

However, according to Martin, it is not so easy to exploit, for example, the technical section of the school to the advantage of the whole school:

... and as much as the idea sounds very nice, the practical part of it has got some problems. I've had talks with different people, but it never materialised. It's got to do with problems such as, how do you ensure that theft and vandalism do not take place ... That if we are going to bring in fellows into the motor mechanic workshop ... the kids expect on Monday morning that everything be in place. It's part of your problem ... (Martin).

COL introduced the idea to the school of going big when it comes to fundraising, and imparted skills on how to draw up a business plan and to present it to prospective sponsors. It gave the school enough confidence to host a major banquet with Tito Mboweni [the then Labour Minister] as the guest speaker. In the process they raised additional funding from “a major national concern” (because it was so impressed with this initiative) to set up a computer centre.

Sustaining such fundraising is however, much more difficult:

... But what we have discovered is, to consistently do it, is a major headache. Our computer centre exists because of a major fundraising effort in which we had Tito Mboweni just before he became Governor [of the Reserve Bank] as our guest speaker. And Telkom was impressed enough with the function to make a major donation towards the start of that computer centre. So in terms of that, yes they [COL] did have an impact ... but the sustainability of it [fundraising] is ... and given the unemployment in the community that you serve, to sustain it over long periods is a major problem (Martin).

The availability of resources or the lack thereof has a direct influence on the teaching and learning in the school. Due to the decrease in teaching posts at the school, as a result of the

restructuring in the Education Department, the school was forced to make major changes to its curriculum to be able to survive with the fewer teachers. Class sizes increased significantly:

... I salute the OBE [outcomes based education] teachers, in grade 8 at our school, who sit with average classes of 56 learners ... Those teachers teach more than 300 learners within a cycle of 8 periods per day ... Then I asked myself: How can that teacher pay individual attention to those pupils who have to be evaluated within a specific framework? And how do you exercise control when they have to do group work? How do you monitor that? (Carl)

Teachers hardly have any time to attend to anything outside their own classes, however important the issue at hand may be. According to Lucille, pupils of individual teachers who are prepared to take the initiative with regards to strategic issues outside the classroom, suffer.

Being situated in an impoverished community, the non-provision of textbooks and stationery by the Education Department is a very serious problem:

Our grade 9 to 12 pupils are not provided with stationary, they must buy their own textbooks. And in our community, because of the unemployment and all such problems, it is a huge problem and one does not know how to effectively address it ... (Carl).

In addition, there is the lack of audio-visual equipment that also impacts negatively on the teaching at the school:

... Then there is of course the lack of other resources such as for example, audio-visual equipment and all such things. And the lack thereof can only be addressed through funding (Carl).

Even participation by pupils in extra-curricular activities is affected by the lack of resources:

I am in the lucky position in that I am also involved in a school governing body on the other side, of a former model C school. And from what I can see and deduce ... to a greater extent [the difference between the two schools] is based on funding. If we think about facilities, we have no [sports] playing fields at our school. The result is that every time we use transport, and that costs money. And as a result many children are denied the participation in sport. For example, if we have to play a cricket match against Grey or Newton Tech [quite a distance from the school] then our pupils just say that they have no taxi fare (Carl).

Addressing the issue of equal distribution of resources among all the schools is a complex problem with no easy answers or solutions. But no one can deny the far-reaching consequences involved:

I think it is possible [to realise my ideal school]. But the major challenge is to get rid of the backlogs that have, in many instances, been accumulating over many years. It will entail a monumental effort from government's side to say: Let us put all the basic things in place, that is facilities, the necessary resources of whatever nature. Be it teaching posts, smaller classes and all such things. If all that is in place, I believe the ideal school can become a reality (Carl).

Although I have presented the data in themes I am aware that the thematic divisions are not always as clear-cut as one would like them to be. Qualitative data is less easily ordered than statistics. Nevertheless, arranging the data in this way has the advantage of presenting what I hope is a meaningful picture of my data, in an attempt to address the research question. I have deliberately included generous quotation from respondents to convey a sense of the people involved.

In the next chapter I discuss the data in light of the literature reported on earlier in Chapter Two.

Chapter Five: Discussion of the data

Introduction

I made it clear in chapter three that my research is conducted within the interpretive framework. I therefore set out in this chapter to try to interpret the shared meanings that were presented in Chapter Four. In so doing my personal judgement plays a major role as the facts “never speak for themselves” in qualitative research, but are related through the eyes of the researcher. But, as mentioned before, personal insight does not provide a license for freedom. Evidence and reasons need to be provided for any assertions (Eisner, 1998: 39). In the end the reader will be the final judge of the academic rigour and the validity of the claims that are being made.

The purpose of this research is to find out whether the COL project of the Delta Foundation in had an impact on the perceptions of the teachers about management at one of the schools that have gone through their management training programme. This research is not about an evaluation of the COL project. I discuss the data under the following headings: in search of a vision, participation and collaboration, planning, towards learning organisation, and resources.

In search of a vision

Given that the school only drew up a vision and mission statement as a result of the Centres of Learning (COL) project, it is obvious that the members’ perceptions on visions are heavily influenced by COL. It is significant that a school such as this, with a very good reputation for its scholastic performance, only acquired a vision and mission statement after the intervention of the COL project. But there are claims that the vision was always part of the school, and that it was just never written down. It is obvious that this school must have had some vision of where it was going even though it may never have articulated. It is however very interesting to note that according to Louis & Miles (1990: 219) significant improvement can take place at schools without visions, although they “suspect” that few schools without visions can achieve

meaningful improvement and that few “really excellent” schools are without visions. Once more I can only assume that they refer to written visions, and that the schools they refer to knew where they are heading.

Having a mission and vision statement for the first time created a lot of excitement. And whereas they all used to see the school “as a different place for each one” of them, they have now “at least agreed” to where they want to position the school “in 10 – 15 yrs time” (Andrea). There is consequently a new sense of purpose and strategic focus. According to Whiteley (1991, cited in Murgatroyd & Morgan, 1992: 83) visions provide people with a true challenge and purpose, which makes every member feel that he or she can make a difference. And Davidoff & Lazarus (1997: 46) contend that the vision “is the flame which lights the school”, which imbues the school with a sense of pride and direction.

The formulation of the vision and mission statements was conducted as an exercise in which all the different role players were involved. This collaborative approach is seen as very important: “It is vitally important to have everybody involved in the drawing up of the vision and mission statements” (Martin). Lucille believes it gives people a sense of ownership “when they are part and parcel” of the processes. The fact that they have been part of the process enabled members to identify with it; the vision has not been imposed from somewhere, but is their own creation. Caldwell & Spinks (1992: 53) argue that the vision of the school is likely to command a high level of commitment among the school community if the various stakeholders have been involved in the formulation of the vision. Senge (1990: 206) points out that visions that are imposed upon an organisation from one person or a group, at best, command compliance not commitment. And that shared visions command true commitment because it coincides with the members’ personal visions. Davidoff & Lazarus (1997: 46) also agree that working towards achieving someone else’s ideal will not work. For them the heart of a meaningful vision is that it belongs to everyone so that everyone can join forces wholeheartedly towards realising it. And as far as Caldwell & Spinks (1992: 51) are concerned, the “essence of self-management [my emphasis] is that the vision of the school has to be crafted jointly by the different components of the school”. Joining hands to draw up the vision and mission statements ensured inputs “from

different walks of life”, making “for a more holistic” school vision (Lucille). Sergiovanni (2001: 149) also insists that the vision of the school must incorporate the hopes and dreams, the needs and interests and the values and beliefs of every stakeholder in the school.

Judging from the importance that the interviewees attached to the vision and mission statements (Chapter 4, pp 44-51. I can understand why there is now a perception among the members of the school that “the vision and mission is absolutely essential” and that there are claims “that every school should have a vision and a mission” (Carl). Various assertions about the importance of the vision are made. Andrea contends that without a vision “the school is going about in circles or everybody is doing his or her own thing”. According to Lucille the vision “denotes your core function” and gives “purpose to your existence”. Caldwell & Spinks (1992: 37) similarly argue that the mission of a school explains why it exists in a particular community. According to Davidoff & Lazarus (1997: 46), if there is not an identified desirable future to work towards it is very easy for a school community to lose a sense of the purpose of the school and education. Murgatroyd & Morgan (1992: 84) forcefully state that “without vision, the school will end up somewhere else.” Very often schools develop negative self-images, partly as a result of a lack of a clear vision and sense of purpose. Such schools are usually demotivated by circumstance and external factors (Davidoff & Lazarus 1997: 45). Murgatroyd & Morgan (1992: 71) contend that without a vision statement that pulls the school community behind it, competing energies in the school will divert attention from consistent focus on achieving specific objectives.

The vision and mission statements “make people feel secure” (Andrea) and give them more self-confidence “to run projects” on their own and “to initiate projects” (Martin). Murgatroyd & Morgan (1992: 80-84) is an agreement that if there is a common understanding of where the school is heading, more independent actions will be performed to make the vision a reality. Such teachers are prepared to take risks because they know what they want to achieve and how their individual achievements fit into the broader picture of the school’s vision. Senge (1990: 208) furthermore pronounces:

Shared visions compel courage so naturally that people don’t even realize the extent of their

courage. Courage is simply doing whatever is needed in pursuit of the vision.

Lucille therefore believes the vision should serve as a guide for decision-making at all times. Murgatroyd & Morgan (1992: 83) concur that every time a decision is made, one should ask oneself whether it advances the achievement of the vision. The vision also serves as a guiding light when changes have to take place at the school. When the school's curriculum had to be changed, they "were reminded about [their] vision and mission" which emphasises their commitment to the community they serve (Dalene). Newton & Tarrant (1992: 221) are of the view that without a vision that provides a clear picture of an organisation's strategic focus, people can become confused and poor adaptors to change. Louis & Miles (1990: 219) point out that shared visions not only provide foci that mobilize and energize members for the difficult work of change, but also provide a sense of values and some security in the confusion that accompanies any change effort.

The importance of the visibility of the vision and mission statement is also highlighted by the respondents (Chapter 3, p 48). Being highly visible, it will serve to "continually" remind members and thus act as a "continuous motivator" (Martin). The vision and mission statement is therefore printed on all available space in documents that are distributed among the teachers. But responses like, "I don't exactly know whether the teachers read it or not" (Martin), and "There are others [teachers] who don't look at it often enough" (Dalene) as well as other comments in this regard clearly show that the vision is not at the forefront of all teachers' minds. As far as Murgatroyd & Morgan (1992: 84) are concerned, the vision has to be communicated constantly in all areas of the school. Caldwell & Spinks (1992: 53) also contend that leaders in the school should take every opportunity to bring the vision to the attention of the school community.

According to Davidoff & Lazarus (1997: 47) it helps to place the mission statement where it can be seen regularly, enabling it to become a public statement of the school's commitment to achieve certain value-laden objectives. The vision & mission statement of the school was also "supposed" to be put up on a big board in "the foyer of staff room" so as to indicate to the public the "type of environment that exists" at the school (Andrea). But unfortunately it never

materialised. What could be the reason for this? Could this be a sign that the vision is perhaps not treated seriously at the school?

The joint formulation of the vision of the school was accompanied by “compromises between the different groups as to what they wanted” (Martin). Murgatroyd & Morgan (1992: 69) however, caution that many long complex mission statements that are often the result of compromises among competing interests of staff members tend to be uninspiring. Such statements are rarely “owned” by anyone and even less often remembered. It is obvious from the data that the vision and mission statements of this school are too long to be easily remembered. According to Murgatroyd & Morgan (1992: 80) the key to the vision’s importance lies in its simplicity. The challenge therefore is to keep the vision as simple as possible. But I believe to arrive at a simple and inspiring vision, given the inclusive nature of the formulation, will need a lot of time. It will have to go through a long process of continual refinement. I don’t think one can expect miracles if you treat the vision formulation as a once-off event as has happened at the school.

Whilst the literature strongly accentuates the centrality of the pupils’ needs in the vision, there is no specific reference in the data to how the vision relates to the needs of the pupils of the school. This may be due to an unintentional omission on the part of the respondents or because of the way the questions were structured. According to Murgatroyd & Morgan (1992: 81) the vision should strongly respond to the needs of the pupils. For Caldwell & Spinks (1992: 50) the educational outcomes for pupils are the most important when it comes to the vision. Murgatroyd & Morgan (1992: 81) furthermore contend that the definitive test of a vision is linkage to the needs of the students.

Initially the emergence of the vision created a lot of enthusiasm among the teachers. And whilst the enthusiasm has been “sustained in many cases” (Martin), it is not true for everybody. As the vision of this institution is “to become a school of excellence”, it inspired various projects at the beginning towards the realisation thereof. But nowadays it so happens that they are “busy with projects that is in [their] vision and mission statement” without necessarily realising that the projects actually relate to the vision and mission (Martin). And when planning takes place at the

school “not everybody will check ... consciously” whether the plans are aligned to the vision and mission (Dalene). The fact that a lot of activities at the school are not consciously informed by the vision indicates that the vision is not always at the centre of what is happening at the school. Murgatroyd & Morgan (1992: 71) have the following to say about the importance of the pervasiveness of a shared vision in an organisation:

To achieve alignment and commitment to a shared vision, the statement that is produced needs to be something that is used daily by all staff [my emphasis] to justify their actions to themselves and to each other ... it is a statement that becomes so dominant in the thinking each person brings to their school that all activities and decisions [my emphasis] become justified against it.

For Murgatroyd & Morgan (1992: 79) the vision of an organisation only becomes a reality once it is widely shared and begins to permeate all aspects of the organization’s activities. Making the vision part and parcel of the members is evidently not something that just happens out of the blue. According to Louis & Miles (1990: 293) “gaining real ownership of visions by school staff is critical and requires serious time investment, patience and empowerment for success”.

The crafting of the vision was conducted as a once-off event at the school. However, O’Neil (1995: 22) argues that it is important to establish a continuing visioning process as opposed to a once-off vision statement writing exercise. It is a process that requires a lot of reflection and mutual understanding. To treat visioning like an event, according to O’Neil, can even be counter-productive as people may react negatively to the fact that such a vision statement does not make a difference. He points out that if you are serious about visioning, you need to continually spend twenty to forty percent of your time reflecting and articulating together what it is that you earnestly want to create. Spending such a lot of time on visioning may not be plausible in schools with limited human resources. But I suppose it will always remain important to spend a lot of time to develop your vision into a compelling reality in your organisation.

The data abounds with positive statements about the vision. There are claims that the vision provides strategic focus; that it is essential; that it provide stimulus for individual initiative to work towards the realisation thereof. Yet the school’s vision is not the “force of immense power”

in the members' hearts that Senge (1990: 206) talks about. The question is why? It is evident that the school's vision is not prominent in a number of the teachers' minds. Neither is the vision drawn on as a justification for all activities and decisions of the school. It appears as if the vision finds itself on the periphery of the organisation and only occupies the centre stage occasionally. The fact that the visioning at the school occurred as an event rather than an ongoing process also did not help to make it grow into a powerful force.

Participation and collaboration

The data indicates that the school has a history of participatory decision-making. Most of the time issues are discussed vigorously before any decisions are taken. This is done to avoid dividing the house by resorting to voting. Decisions are rather based on consensus. The approach "not to always vote ... or rule by majority, but rather try to convince people" has also been emphasised by COL (Andrea).

Claims that the school has always been characterised by a culture of joint effort are supported by citing the collaborative approach to events such as the matric farewell, the Mr & Miss X school show, the awards evening and the school's family day (p 54). Again, the data also underlines the role that COL has played in stressing the importance of an inclusive approach in all the activities of the school.

The COL project highlighted the importance of the support of the different role players "to achieve certain things" (Andrea). One of the most significant lessons of COL, according to Martin, is the fact that "you must always strive to get all role-players to buy into" whatever the school attempts to do. Going about it in that manner makes "achieving your goal ... so much easier" (Martin). This inclusive approach apparently even assisted with the very sensitive and potentially explosive issue of redeployment of teachers. "It didn't change the problem [of redeployment], it didn't change the resentment ... but people still realised that we have to do things as a team" (Martin). Martin always believed that an inclusive approach is beneficial to the school as it is "so much easier to implement" plans that resulted from such a process.

Research done by Kurt Lewin showed that people are likely to positively change their behaviour when they are participants in the analysis and solving of a problem, and they are likely to implement decisions they were part of (Weisbord, 1987: 88-89). According to Gilbert (1993: 97) the staff of a school is its most important resource and their commitment to decisions – which is enhanced by greater participation – is likely to be crucial in ensuring effective implementation of action plans.

A further demonstration of the positive effects of a collective approach in the school is the way the allocation of the teaching workload takes place at the beginning of the year. Different teams of grade groupings meet under the supervision of the heads of their department. Going about it in this fashion helps to make everybody happy “or at least, if [they] are not happy, [they] have an understanding of why it had to be that particular way” (Martin).

This collaborative approach at the school serves to promote good working relationships among the teachers. According to the respondents it makes people want to support the different activities of the school, hence promoting the interests of the school. Sizer (1986, cited in Preedy, 1993: 152) argues that for schools to become better, teachers and students should be given the space to take full advantage of what each has to offer by means of increased and substantial participation. Schmuck and Runkel (1994: 8, 9) point out that individuals and groups usually have abilities, information and skills beyond their responsibilities; often the knowledge and skills needed to innovate and implement new programmes are already available in the organization, ready to be utilized towards organisational improvement if recognized and affirmed. By making use of a participatory approach, these resources can be tapped to the benefit of the organisation. Goal achievement is enhanced in this way.

The pupils are also actively encouraged to participate in the running of the school. This is especially so with regards to programmes of a social nature like awareness programmes on Aids and sexual diseases, as well as the running of the Mr & Miss X school show. Participating in such activities not only makes them partners in the running of the school, but also empowers

them by teaching them valuable organisational and leadership skills. By entrusting them with more serious decision-making such as the election of prefects, a sense of accountability and responsibility towards what is happening at the school is cultivated among the pupils.

It is remarkable to note how closely the widespread participation in the activities of the school resembles what the literature says about participation in self-managing schools. According to Gilbert (1993: 97) school-based management offers the opportunity for greater participation in decision-making. Lunenburg & Ornstein (1991: 39) and Midgley & Wood (1993: 246) regard shared decision-making as central in self-managing schools. Lunenburg & Ornstein (1993: 37) contend that the authority to make decisions in self-managing schools is shared among the school's major stakeholders, including teachers, parents, pupils and other community members. Beckmann and Blom (2000: 3) remind us that in hierarchical organisations, teachers feel less responsible and therefore less accountable for their actions due to the fact that they do not have the authority and power to affect others' behaviour. Utilising collaborative decision-making processes, however, has the potential to create an environment where teachers take greater control of their work and accept responsibility and accountability for decisions that were previously regarded as the concern of the principal.

French and Bell (1995: 94) make the following pronouncement about the organisational benefits of participation:

... Research demonstrated that most people desired increased involvement and participation, had the ability to energize greater performance, produced better solutions to problems, and greatly enhanced acceptance of decisions. It was found such group's dynamics work to overcome resistance to change, increased commitment to the organization, reduced stress levels and generally made people feel better about themselves and their worlds.

However, notwithstanding the apparent high levels of participation by staff members in the activities of the school, the decision-making at the school is viewed by some as unproductive and ineffective. This is unlike in the past when the school "had a tradition of doing that [implementing decisions and having report backs] at the school. It was part of what was right at [our school]. And all those things have slowly been eroded ... and those are things that were also

mentioned at the [COL] training” (Andrea). According to Andrea, they don’t always know what they have decided in the meetings, “[they] don’t know who’s responsible for implementation of certain projects or tasks and who’s accountable.”

I find it very difficult to unravel the apparent contradictions between the claims about unproductive and ineffective meetings on the one hand, and the assertions about consensus decision-making processes and the strong views on the organisational benefits of substantial participation and collaboration with regards to the activities of the organisation by the members on the other. Perhaps the complexity of schools as organisations results in higher degrees of ambiguity (Bush 1995) than one expects. It is perhaps a natural tendency to expect organisational life to be ordered, understandable and even predictable: but reality is not like that. Perhaps it is one of the challenges of successful leadership to be able to tolerate contradictions and ambiguities, and work with these as strengths rather than weakness.

As my research goal is merely to ascertain whether the COL intervention had an influence on the perceptions of management of the staff, it is not part of my brief to examine issues around the implementation of the programme, whether successful or otherwise. I therefore did not probe more deeply to uncover explanations for these seeming contradictions. However the debilitating and demoralising effects of the redeployment of teachers may have played a role in this regard, especially in view of the claim that decision-making has been ineffective in “the last year or two”. The substantial decrease in teachers due to the redeployment of teachers has also not made it easy to provide enough time for genuine collaboration. Another partial explanation for this state of affairs may be that the entire senior management of the school left 4 to 5 years ago (they all took severance packages).

As far as participation by parents in the activities of the school are concerned, there is a reluctance on their part to become involved. The school regularly organises parent evenings at the school. “But then it’s usually the parents whose children are not causing problems at the school who attend these meetings. The parents you would like to see do not attend” (Carl). The

lack of interest displayed by such parents in the schooling of their children may be construed as one of the main factors why these children are so problematic at school.

There is a perception among the interviewees that the lack of parental involvement is characteristic of parents emanating from disadvantaged areas. “I think, no matter which school you go to in the disadvantaged areas, you’ll find that it’s going to be a small group of parents who really become involved” (Dalene). This also applies to the involvement of the parents in the Governing Body of the school: “... parents [with skills] who should become involved [on the Governing Body] don’t want to become involved” (Dalene). It should not be difficult to understand why there is such a reluctance from these parents to participate in the activities of the school. Being involved in a daily battle for survival, poor people rarely still have the inclination to get involved in activities that they perceive to be peripheral to their existence. Parents in poor communities may also experience a sense of powerlessness, believing that there is nothing that they can possibly contribute towards the overall welfare of their children’s schooling. But I believe parents, poor or not, who value the education of their children usually show much more interest in the activities of the school. The challenge for schools and all interested parties in society at large therefore appears to be to instil in parents an appreciation for the education of their children

The fact that parents never used to be involved in what was happening at school in the past also contributes to this apparent apathy on the side of the parents. “We’ve always done everything on behalf of the parents [my emphasis] and pupils” (Andrea). However, the introduction of School Governing Councils (SGC) with its wide-ranging powers in public schools has the potential to change this apathy towards school activities among the parents. As a result of the COL intervention, the parents on the school’s Governing Council, for example, were the driving force behind the establishment of a computer centre at the school.

COL played a big role in empowering the previous Governing Council to play its rightful role. However, there has been no succession plan or strategy to transfer the acquired skills from the one SGC to the next one. The chairperson of the previous SGC took it upon himself to perform

this task but unfortunately passed away. The resultant loss of expertise clearly shows that an organisational plan is necessary to ensure the transfer of skills. But I believe SGC's are unlikely to bring about a cultural change with regards to parental involvement as only a miniscule part of the overall parental body seems to be involved in SGC structures. SGC's need to become more mass-based for them to facilitate wider participation by parents.

Planning

The teachers regard planning as one of the most important aspects of the COL intervention. The COL catch phrase "proper, prior planning prevents poor performance" made a big impact on the members of the school. Though not familiar to the members, it served as a forceful reminder of the principles involved:

I believe in planning things timeously so that it can run effectively ... I don't believe in labour-intensive things ... I believe the work lies in the planning. When the actual event takes place ... the event is over already because you've done your homework properly (Lucille).

In the past planning used to be top-down, but it is nowadays characterised by an inclusive approach. To allow everyone to make an input as far as the plans are concerned, the staff breaks up into teams. The various teams focus on all the different facets, from teaching and learning, to administrative tasks, to sport, culture and so on. This inclusiveness "gives people a sense of ownership" (Dalene), and consequently helps to ensure that the plans are pursued as "it is not something that has been forced upon [the staff] from the top by management"(Carl). Having been part of the planning phase results in people knowing what is expected of them.

Ownership of the school's plans inspires people to pursue them in the face of all kinds of pressure. A parent meeting that has been scheduled for a particular date, can easily be postponed if something else crops up, especially if the parents are not aware of the date yet. But they try to stick to it: "... that is our plan. You adhere to it with all the pressures [involved] ..." (Martin). Not all the plans are implemented, and managing to execute about 70% of the plans is regarded

as “extremely successful” (Dalene). The extensive plans for the school year eliminates the need to do things on an ad hoc basis or haphazardly. Dates are set at the end of the year for all the activities of the new year.

But the accent on thorough planning that was brought back to the school by COL had further consequences. It helped the school to re-establish proper work ethics. “ ... People realise ... we cannot just let things slide ... I think it [the emphasis on advanced planning] has helped to maintain and to reinforce the work ethics that has always been at the school” (Dalene). The insistence by COL that the school should stick to the timeframes of their year plans instilled a new sense of discipline. Teachers came to realise that they had to be more disciplined and meet the deadlines that they themselves had set. Consequently, “basic things” like the handing in of question papers with memoranda and record books on time are being reintroduced at the school. They refer to it as “moving back to basics” (Martin). Being pressurised by COL to meet the deadlines caused these “basics” to have become part again of the staff. Significantly these basics were part of the school “prior to 1994” (Martin). This assertion seems to corroborate my earlier conclusion that the vacuum that was left as a result of the departure of the entire previous senior management could not be filled overnight.

There is nevertheless a strong view that the school suffers under crisis management due to the partial implementation of the year plans. And whilst planning is regarded as one of the most significant facets of COL, it appears not to have had the desired effect. At least as far as some of the respondents are concerned:

I think it [the planning part] stands out in all our minds and it stopped. And I think, maybe more so, because maybe we are not implementing it. We keep asking: “where is proper, prior planning for the school now?” (Lucille).

The point is illustrated by referring to a family fun day that did not materialise due to two events external to the school’s programme. There is a belief that if “proper” planning were done, the event would have become a reality. Even the fundraising banquet with former labour minister Tito Mboweni is seen as a failure due to a lack of proper planning. Andrea believes that the event

had the potential to raise close to a million rand. But she does not engage herself in a blaming game: “ ... I think all of us must take responsibility for that” (Andrea). So even at this juncture there is a prevailing sense of “us” being jointly responsible and accountable for what is happening at the school. So, whilst this reference highlights an apparent contradiction, it also serves to endorse the sense of joint responsibility and collaboration that was discussed above.

A similar contradiction to that which was discussed under the section on participation and collaboration (pp. 80-85) thus seems to be prevailing with regards to planning. On the one hand, there is a strong emphasis on the positive spin-offs of thorough advance planning, but on the other hand the usefulness of the whole planning exercise is being questioned. The contradictions under these two separate themes appear to corroborate one another. These contradictions may be a reflection of a real dichotomy that exists in the school. If so, it may be a classic case of being aware of what the right thing is to do, but being unable always to do it. The contradictions may nonetheless be nothing more than differences in perceptions resulting from different understandings of their reality (Bassey, 1995).

There is constant mention of “strategic planning” when referring to year plans in the data. There is even allusion to a needs analysis. Yet there seems to be no long term planning beyond the year plans. Lucille believes a lot of long term planning is needed to promote the school and to ensure that the number of pupils attending the school is not dwindling away. The lack of long term planning is seen as another reason for “crisis management” at the school:

There hasn't been any strategic planning ... I'm more and more realising the difference between doing urgent things and doing important things. And if you are doing important things then you are on the right track, then you are going somewhere. But when you are doing urgent things ... then you are crisis managing (Lucille).

One expects long-term planning to be pervasive in an organisation that is driven by a shared vision. The seeming lack of long term planning may help to explain why the vision of the school appears not to be engraved in the minds of the school members. Strategic planning cannot be separated from an organisations' vision. According to Davidoff & Lazarus (1997: 67) strategic

planning in schools include the identification of past, present and future trends and realities in education; vision-building; goal-setting; identifying the strength and weaknesses of the school as well as the opportunities and threats both inside and outside the school that facilitate or impede the achievement of goals set; the development of action plans towards achieving the goals; setting up appropriate structures and procedures; mobilising material and human resources to realise the plans; and ongoing evaluation and development. What is thus perceived as “strategic planning” with regards to year plans does not coincide with the description thereof in the literature.

Towards organisational learning

The COL programme seeks to enable schools to become “learning schools” that operate as dynamic systems, where teamwork is central, where decision making is inclusive, where schools take charge of their own development, etc. (Centres of Learning: Implementation guidelines, nd).

There are evidently ongoing attempts at improving the school. The staff is described as a dedicated group of people who are “always trying to improve things in different ways to improve the school” (Andrea). Dalene sees it as the “biggest challenge” to implement the lessons from the COL project so as to improve the “service at the school”.

The staff came to realise that continuing “training” is needed to keep up with developments in the education field. “If you don’t stay abreast with the latest trends, you are going to be left behind” (Lucille). Ongoing “training” is seen as a way of keeping people on their toes. And the more you are exposed to new ideas “the more you’d want to know” (Lucille). Senge (1990) describes learning organisations as:

... Organizations where people continually expand their capacity to create the results they truly desire, and where people are continually learning how to learn together.

But the “ill-informed will just accept the positions they are in and think what they are doing is right” (Lucille). They do not base their assessment of a situation on an objective evaluation

thereof. Senge (1990: 7) points out that the ability to look at reality objectively is an indispensable part of a learning organisation.

According to Martin schools should follow the example of the corporate world concerning continual training. An insurance company like Metropolitan for example, takes even their top salesmen for training twice a year. Similarly teachers need to be “refreshed”. However, it appears the assumption is that such ongoing learning opportunities must be provided, not by the school, but by somebody else, presumably the Education Department. This may point towards a need for capacity building at the school, which may enable them to provide such programmes themselves in the future. Senge (1990) contends that few organisations encourage the growth of their people, resulting in immense untapped resources. O’Neil (1995: 521) furthermore asserts that many people in education appear to regard themselves as disempowered. He argues that where people at all levels of an organisation view themselves as powerless, such a situation is characteristic of an organisation that has a very low ability to learn.

COL is believed to have facilitated rapid development at the school. There is recognition that such programmes are needed “all the time”. Learning is viewed as a never-ending process and “death comes when there is no more room to grow or to develop” (Lucille). According to Fullan (1993, cited in DuFour, 1997) the development of a learning school in which all staff members continually increase their knowledge and skills is indispensable to the achievement of ongoing school improvement. Lipton and Melamede (1997: 33) are of the view that healthy systems must embrace learning as fundamental for survival, and that learning as a creative and ongoing process should be the basis of the education system.

COL introduced the idea of continual staff development at the school. A structure was established to co-ordinate the whole development process. “Everybody realised the need to develop the staff consistently” (Andrea). But whereas a few programmes were initially organised, “things just died” subsequently (Andrea). One of the reasons for this was that people felt there was no time to do it. There is still a belief among some staff members that the school needs ongoing staff development programmes. DuFour (1997: 81-82) reminds us that the

structure and culture of the public school militate against the establishment of a learning organisation for the educators within it. The approach to professional growth is not only fragmented, but it is also characterized by a passive training approach. DuFour (1997: 81-82) continues:

Long-term school wide commitments to an area of professional growth [are] the exception rather than the rule ... this traditional model of professional development is so entrenched in many school districts that educators have difficulty envisioning a school that operates as a learning organization.

Nevertheless COL inspired a willingness among staff members to take responsibility for what is happening at the school:

... whatever is going to happen to the school – where the school is going to be in 10 years, 15 years or 20 years time – is going to be our responsibility, not that of the department's [of education], not any outside body's, but primarily the community's; the school community's, i.e. the parents, the learners and the teachers (Andrea).

It has been “a rude awakening” for them as they all come from an era when the Education Department used to be viewed as responsible for everything happening at the school. Even though there are still some staff members who don't believe that the school is their responsibility, “the majority of the staff, through this COL project has come to realize that if we don't do something about it, nobody else will” (Andrea). They came to realise that the initiative will have to come from them to bring about any changes that they wish to see at the school. They have to ensure that the school stays relevant and competitive. In systems thinking, according to Senge (1990: 78) everyone is allowed to share responsibility for problems that occur in the system. Senge (1990: 12-13) pronounces:

... At the heart of a learning organization is a shift of mind – from seeing ourselves as separate from the world to connected to the world, from seeing problems as caused by someone or something ‘out there’ to seeing how our own actions create the problems we experience. A learning organization is a place where people are continually discovering how they create their reality. And how they can change it.

COL also brought about a realisation among some staff members that they should not operate in isolation of one another, but that they should endeavour to pull their strengths together for the common good of the school. They have come to discover that they have a bigger role to play than to just merely attend to their own duties in their own little corners. To promote the common goal of the school they came to realise that they need to be involved in decision-making at various other levels and to interact with the different role players. We saw above that a substantial level of participation and collaboration is prevalent in the school. However, the way in which educational institutions are designed and structured enhances the idea that a teacher's job is basically individualistic in nature (O'Neil, 1995: 21). According to Lipton and Melamede (1997: 36) in most schools there are traditionally "a prevalence of isolation and fragmentation operating through fixed roles, rigid rules and limited resources [my emphasis]" rendering them "learning disabled". Meyer (2000: 262) asserts that in situations where people are performing outstanding jobs in their separate corners, often oblivious of what others are doing, the collective intelligence of the members is largely eroded and such organizations are not able to perform at their optimum level.

The fundamental challenges in education as in business involve fundamental cultural changes that call for collective learning. People at various levels of the organisation must, together, think about significant and lasting solutions and then join hands to realise those solutions. But for a school to become a learning organisation, all its different constituencies need to work together: from the few committed teachers with brilliant ideas, to the principal, the leader of the local educational office and the people in the community who form part of the school (O'Neil, 1995: 21). Meyer (2000: 260) also points out that learning organisations make use of more horizontal processes and there are greater levels of inter-dependence, which allow people to learn together irrespective of their positions. To enable more movement towards learning at the school, there is thus a need for more fundamental changes so as to embrace collective learning by all its members at all the different levels of the school on a more ongoing basis.

There are clearly traces of a systems approach present in the school. A number of changes at the school were brought about due to an awareness of changes in education and in the community.

The curriculum has been changed in response to the changing situation in education, the loss of experienced teachers, changes in the profile of the pupils of the school, etc. Even a simple issue like the date of the matric farewell has been approached within the broader context of the school's results. Consequently it has been moved to the first or second week of the third quarter to cause minimum disruption of the pupils focus on their schoolwork. There is also an appreciation of the fact that the pupils are social beings whose social problems need to be taken very seriously. They seem to realise if such social problems are just ignored or wished away, they will not disappear but impact negatively on their scholastic progress. So seriously is it viewed that the school decided to stretch its paltry resources and employ a social worker from its own funds. The pupils' personal problems are, as a result, being taken care of by a professional. And the services of the social worker have eased the task of the teachers and the managers, allowing more time to focus on their teaching task.

System thinking enables one to look beyond the face value of events and details and see the underlying patterns connecting them (Senge 1990). Owen (1981: 253) agrees that events usually don't happen in isolation or from single causes. A systems approach underlines the importance of seeing events as manifestations of inter-connected forces, problems, causes, needs, etc. Thus highlighting the fact that organisations are complex systems. According to Senge (1990) the ability to see the underlying causes of problems enables you to identify where actions and alterations in structures can result in meaningful and lasting improvements.

The approach to the prefects also speaks of an appreciation of how the different parts of the organisation work together for the common good of the organisation. Realising the important role that the prefects play within the school, it was decided that they should go through a leadership course to prepare them for their task. The training programme, which is presented by the teachers themselves, resembles the COL training programme. This new approach to the prefects is all about "new ideas all the time" (Martin) to bring about improvement. Lipton and Melamede (1997) argue that in schools that operate as dynamic systems capable of continual learning and growth, decision-making is informed by the understanding of the inter-relation of all aspects of a system. These schools seek to increase the capacity of each member, realising

that the capacity of the system grows as a result. This enables it to constantly and creatively adapt the organisations to the changing needs and conditions of the environment.

Unfortunately there are also clear signs of a non-systemic approach in the school. There seems to be a general lack of “proactive processes” (Andrea), causing the school to go from one crisis to another. Sometimes it feels as if “we [the school] are drowning in a series of conflicts and problems” (Andrea). There are also references to crisis management (p 63). The approach to disciplinary problems is also viewed by some as short-term alleviation of the symptoms. The fundamental need to feel secure and safe at school is apparently being neglected. This is seen as a contributing factor to the problem of late coming and absenteeism. Even fundraising does not take place within the context of a comprehensive strategy. A lot of energy is spent on raising funds for the matric farewell, for example, while the broader financial problems remain unresolved. The staff development programme is also fragmented and geared towards alleviating the symptoms of fundamental problems. A stress management workshop, for example, forms part of the staff development programme “because some teachers have been having problems coping with stress in their lives” (Dalene). This non-systemic approach to events at the school result in the staff being “caught up in doing the day to day running of the school ... forgetting that [they need to work] towards achieving broader objectives” (Andrea). The apparent lack of strategic planning thus seems to have a direct bearing on the presence of the non-systemic approaches.

According to Senge (1990) non-systemic approaches focus on short-term easing of the pressure caused by symptoms. Ameliorating the stress caused by the symptoms of a problem decreases the need to find more fundamental solutions to the underlying problem. The side effects of the symptomatic solution, in turn, make the accomplishment of a fundamental solution more difficult to attain. Owen (1981: 252) furthermore contends that due to the inter-relation and inter-dependency of the subsystems, any substantial change in one subsystem results in compensatory or retaliatory changes in other subsystems.

Andrea's suggestion that they need to change their mindset at the school to implement what they have learnt at the COL programme points in the right direction. Meyer (2000: 256) agrees that a learning organisation is only possible if a major paradigm shift occurs in the thinking and behaviour of individuals and teams in the organisation. There is an awareness "that it will [not] happen overnight" to get their different backgrounds and philosophies into "a unit that has a common understanding, a common vision" (Andrea). O'Neil (1995: 23) concurs that creating a learning organization is not an overnight enterprise. People first have to go through a learning process that will eventually lead to their beliefs, worldview and ultimately their skills and capabilities to change. O'Neil emphasises that "most things that really matter in life take discipline and years of practice". But the data does not show that the school seems to be involved in a comprehensive learning process that will facilitate a major paradigm shift.

It is clear that for the school to truly become a learning organization, it will have to overcome some serious hurdles along the way. With the redeployment process having cut the staff to the bare minimum for the school to survive, finding time for genuine collaboration will have to be attained at the cost of a lot of sacrifices. And to get the staff members, who have been so dispirited by the devastating redeployment process, to commit themselves to serious collaboration is not going to be easy. Furthermore, there is a general lack of resources that support the priorities of the school.

But learning organisations are all about capacity building, about self-organising, about continually discovering how to create or change your reality, about expanding your ability to solve problems, about continually increasing your knowledge in order to achieve ongoing improvement. Empowering the school to become a learning organisation may enable it to eventually get rid of contradictions such as those that have been discussed above under Participation and collaboration and Planning. And it could enable the vision of the school, through an ongoing process of visioning (which is characteristic of learning organisations), to become the "powerful force" of which Senge (1990) speaks, that will "compel courage" to simply do "whatever is needed in pursuit of the vision".

Resources

Coming from an era when the Department of Education used to be responsible for almost everything regarding the school's resources, it has been difficult for teachers to make the transition to a situation where they now have to maintain and sustain things at the school. There is hardly any financial or other material support from the Department. COL, in assisting the school towards self-management, has put a lot of emphasis on the issue of becoming self-reliant.

Taking responsibility for the maintenance of their own classrooms forms part of the strategy to broaden ownership and responsibility for the school's resources. Teachers have started to repair and paint their own classrooms. Initially there was resistance. Martin puts it strongly: "It is not my job to clean my class. It is not my job to paint my class". But with the assistance of the COL programme, teachers started to realise that in the absence of support from the Department of Education, they just have to roll up their sleeves if they don't want to allow the school to gradually disintegrate.

The teachers realise that the same change in mindset needs to set in amongst the surrounding community. Thousands of rands are spent every year on repairs as a result of vandalism. The stealing of things like door locks and copper pipes bears testimony to the destructive impact of poverty on schools situated in poor communities. There is also the seemingly mindless destruction of thousands of rands of windowpanes every year. The challenge is to educate the community "that everything that is broken has to be paid for in some way by the parents" (Carl). If the community can be won over to view the school's property as their own, which they need to protect at all times, invaluable scarce funds could then be channelled to areas of real need.

Maximising the available resources is indeed one of the more serious challenges the school face. The school has to manage the limited funds at its disposal efficiently. Having to cope with limited resources – not being taken care of by the Department of Education anymore – led to the introduction of budgets at the school. It took some convincing to bring some of the teachers to accept the fact that things have changed. They had to realise that they can no longer "like in the

past” pick up a phone and summons “public works” to come and fix things (Martin). They had to learn to live by the dictates of their budget. If there is no provision in the budget for a particular item, they just have to endure the discomfort and disruption of waiting until funds become available. Obviously such a situation can be very detrimental to the teaching and learning that has to take place at the school. If the Department of Education, for example, does not provide a substitute teacher when one of the staff members is on sick leave and the school is not in a position to employ a teacher out of its own funds, then teaching and learning in the school is adversely affected.

Making the most of the available resources also involves utilising whatever the parents have to offer. Even just assisting by encouraging and motivating their children to take their schoolwork seriously is invaluable in these circumstances of deprivation. But as was discussed above, most of the parents coming from impoverished backgrounds have too many other concerns to pay much attention to what is happening with their children at school. Furthermore, the very same poor community has to be mobilised for fundraising activities. There is also the avenue of utilising the actual skills of parents when it comes to the maintenance of the school. With so many parents working at all kinds of places, there is a wealth of available resources to be tapped for the benefit of the school. A group of parents with the necessary skills has, for example, taken on the job of repairing and maintaining the school’s overhead projectors. An attempt was made at some stage to build up a database of all available skills among the parents. Unfortunately it was not pursued. It seems to form part of those projects that were planned and subsequently did not materialise. But why would a school that is desperate for any sort of financial assistance abandon a project like this?

An inventive way of just how one can supplement the school’s meagre resources is the employment of the voluntary services of a former colleague who has retired. He assists with the vexing and taxing issue of disciplinary problems among the pupils. And with the huge amount of time that disciplinary problems of pupils in such schools consume, such assistance is more than welcome.

Forging partnerships between the school and sections within society – be it the Department of Education, Industry or the parents themselves – is also perceived as part of a strategy to overcome the lack of resources. It is believed that achieving such partnerships will not only help to provide material resources but the witnessing of such support could motivate both teachers and learners to perform at their best. The question again arises: Why is this not being pursued? Could it be that the teachers find themselves being overwhelmed with teaching duties, allowing very little time for anything else?

COL introduced the school to the idea of massive fundraising projects as apposed to lots of small labour intensive efforts. They were also taught how to draw up big business plans and present these to prospective sponsors. As a result, they decided to host a major banquet with Tito Mboweni (the then Labour Minister) as the guest speaker. Telkom was so impressed with the effort that they committed themselves to a substantial donation towards the establishment of a computer centre – the project for which the funds of the banquet were earmarked. Unfortunately, no similar major projects were undertaken thereafter. The energy and the drive for such endeavours seem to have dissipated after the conclusion of the COL project.

There is also a perception among staff members that the school is not making optimum use of the resources at its disposal. There is a view that the computer classes are totally under-utilised and that there is much more scope to capitalise on such a resource to the benefit of the school. Even the technical section of the school could be employed to the benefit of the school. However, exploiting the facilities of the technical section is juxtaposed by concerns about vandalism and theft. You also need material to conduct skills training programmes for members of the community. But unless it is given a test run, I suppose the school will never be able to tell if it will work or not.

The availability of resources or the lack thereof has a direct bearing on teaching and learning in the school. The restructuring of teacher posts by the Department of Education resulted in a substantial decrease in teaching posts at the school. The school was consequently forced to make major changes to its curriculum to be able to survive with fewer teachers. In narrowing the

curriculum down, many pupils were left with no other option but to take subjects outside their preferences. With classes bursting at the seams, individual attention and even group work (which is supposed to be at the centre of the new Outcomes Based Education) is near impossible to achieve. Teachers hardly have any time to attend to anything outside their own classes however important it may be. Those teachers who dare to take the initiative with regards to strategic issues outside the classroom, do it at the cost of their pupils' learning. Time for collaboration comes at a high cost – genuine sacrifices have to be made. This lack of time to attend to anything else may explain why so many wonderful ideas at the school never seem to come to fruition. Or is there a lack of commitment from a substantial number of the teachers? But just how committed can one expect teachers to be who battle everyday with overfull classes, and pupils who generally do not seem to be highly motivated?

The non-provision of textbooks and stationery by the Education Department to such an impoverished community just exacerbates an already difficult situation. Buying textbooks and stationery is not a priority if you are poor or unemployed. The lack of other resources like audio-visual equipment just worsens an already difficult teaching and learning situation. Even participation by the pupils in extra curricular activities is effected by the lack of resources. The lack of playing fields and the transport costs involved in playing against other schools are serious impediments that have to be taken care of.

It is no surprise that the school has lost almost all the top learners that it used to draw to former Model C schools with their comparably considerable resources, and that it nowadays attracts learners from mainly poor backgrounds with all the problems that goes with it.

Access to the resources can go a long way to addressing some of the problems the school has to be content with. For the school to be able to employ extra teachers like your more historically advantaged schools can make a huge difference. Not only will they be able to expand the curriculum to provide more adequately for the needs of the pupils, but classes will also become smaller and more manageable, allowing for more individual attention. Such a situation can only enhance the quality of teaching and learning. Precious time will become more readily available for the all-important need to collaborate towards the advancement of the objectives of the school.

The brutal irony is that schools in impoverished communities that need so much more have so much less resources.

Wylie (1994, cited in Dalin, 1998: 20) claims that schools in poor communities have greater financing problems than others, and that they lose pupils to other schools more easily. This is very disquieting, especially in view of Whittaker's (1993: 5) contention that the survival of self-managing schools is linked to their ability to recruit pupils. A number of critics of school-based management ominously claim that the gap between schools that have and those that do not, (in the USA) is widening (Nuthal, 1993 cited in Dalin, 1998: 19). Evidence in the USA has shown that self-management is less capable of providing equal educational opportunities for all than the centralised system it replaced (Dalin, 1998: 19). Dalin (1998:19) further states:

In a market system there will, by definition be losers, or schools that are unable to attract their fair share of pupils. The consequences are reduced income, fewer teachers ...

At the end of the day the real losers are the pupils. That there already appears to be a widening of the gap (a gap that is already so wide!) between poor and rich schools at this early stage of self-management in South African schools should be cause for concern. Already schools are closing down in many African townships because of the exodus of pupils from these areas. Is it just a natural consequence of the years of neglect that these schools had to endure during the apartheid era? Or is it a fatal combination of the introduction of self-management into a situation of desperate inequalities?

Resources are not everything, but there may be a need to give serious consideration to Hopkins *et al.*'s (1994: 16) assertion that the aspirations of self-managing schools can only be achieved if financial plans are in harmony with educational plans, and if resources are allocated to support the priorities of the school.

Reflections

A dichotomy between positive and negative assertions seems to run through just about all the themes. While there is an appreciation of the crucial role that the vision can play in the organisation, the reality in the school seems to speak of a vision that often finds itself at the back

of a lot of the members' minds. Positive statements about participation and collaboration and the benefits thereof are contrasted with views about unproductive and inefficient meetings and a lack of cooperation. There are apparent contradictions between the assertions about the positive spin-offs of the year plans on the one hand and the claims that the planning is not been taken seriously enough. There are signs of both systemic and non-systemic approaches visible in the school. It is obvious that the shared meanings with regard to these themes do not seem to be either wide or deep enough. While there are thus clear indications that the COL project had an impact on the perceptions of the teachers about management, the changes in perception appear not to have been comprehensive enough to cause a (significant?) paradigm shift among the teachers of the school.

Chapter Six: Conclusion

In this chapter I summarise my main findings. I also reflect on the potential value of my research both in terms of practice in schools and by drawing attention to areas for possible further research.

Finally, I communicate the limitations of my research.

Summary of main findings

It is striking that this school with its excellent scholastic record, only formulated a **vision** and mission statement after it became involved with the Centres of Learning (COL) project. Nonetheless there are claims that their vision has always been there, even though it was never written down.

All the different stakeholders participated in the drawing up of the vision and mission statements. It provided them all with a sense of ownership of the vision. It also helped to mould a more holistic picture of the desired future. However, a rather long mission and vision statement that seems not to be remembered easily has been formulated.

The vision crafting exercise engendered a lot of excitement, providing everyone with a new sense of purpose and strategic focus. The vision is seen as denoting the core function of the school. Members believe that without it the school will be going in circles. Not only does the vision make the teachers more goal-orientated, it also acts as a guiding light during times of uncertainty when changes are effected.

The visibility of the vision is seen as quite important. Every opportunity is grasped to bring the vision to the attention of the members of the school. But the vision is evidently not as visible as is needed because the data clearly suggests that the vision does not occupy a very prominent position in the minds of a substantial number of the school's teachers.

The initial enthusiasm that the vision produced has not been sustained. And whereas the vision inspired different projects at the beginning, the staff nowadays engages in activities without necessarily realising that those activities actually relate to the vision.

Whereas the school has a history of participative and consensus decision-making, the data underlines the clear role that COL has played in stressing the importance of an inclusive approach to the activities of the school. This inclusive approach not only enhances goal achievement, it also helps to deal with sensitive and potentially explosive issues such as the redeployment process in a mature manner. **Collaboration**, furthermore, is promoting good working relationships among the teachers and fuels a willingness to be supportive of the different activities of the school.

The pupils are also actively encouraged to participate in the running of the school. Through their participation they learn valuable organisational and leadership skills, and cultivate a sense of accountability and responsibility towards the school.

However, notwithstanding the apparent high levels of participation by staff members and even though the COL programme spent time on effective decision-making practices, decision-making at the school is viewed by some members as unproductive and ineffective.

There appears to be a contradiction between the claims about unproductive and ineffective meetings on the one side, and assertions about consensus decision-making processes as well as strong views on the organisational benefits of substantial participation and collaboration with regards to the activities of the school on the other side.

Parental involvement in the activities of the school is negligent. There is a strong belief that most of these parents' non-committal attitude towards the activities of the school stems from the fact that they come from poor backgrounds. Their daily battles for survival do not seem to allow them much room for involvement in anything else that may appear peripheral to their existence.

It is however, hoped that the advent of the School Governing Councils (SGC) with its wide-ranging powers will facilitate the involvement of the parents. With the impetus given by the COL intervention, the parents of the previous SGC were, for example, the driving force behind the establishment of a computer centre at the school. Whereas COL managed to empower the previous SGC substantially, there has nonetheless been no succession plan or strategy to transfer those skills onto the next SGC.

The Centres of Learning's emphasis on **planning** made a big impact on the teachers of the school. Their catchphrase "proper, prior planning prevents poor performance" served as a forceful reminder of the principles involved. Whereas planning used to be top-down in the past, it is nowadays done collectively. This inclusive approach gives teachers a sense of ownership and serves as an impetus for collaboration. Although not all the plans are executed, the extensive planning that takes place, eliminates the need for any haphazard activities according to some of the teachers.

The accent on thorough planning by COL also assisted the school to re-establish sound work ethics. COL's insistence that the school should abide by the timeframes of their year plans instilled a new sense of discipline. It is significant to note that 'these basics' were part of the school prior to 1994. This seems to indicate that the vacuum that was left by the departure of the entire senior management round about 1994 could not be filled overnight.

There is nevertheless a strong view among some staff members that the school suffers under crisis management due to the partial implementation of their year plans. As far as they are concerned, COL's emphasis on planning did not have the desired effect at the school. A similar contradiction to that which was discussed under *Participation and Collaboration* thus seems to prevail with regards to *Planning*. On the one hand there are strong claims about the positive spin-offs of thorough advance planning, but on the other hand, the usefulness of the whole planning exercise is being questioned. Because of the nature of my research question I did not probe deeper to try and unravel these contradictions. These contradictions may be a reflection of a real dichotomy that exists in the school. If so, it may be a classic case of being aware of what the

right thing is to do, but being unable always to do it. However, the contradictions may be nothing more than differences in perceptions resulting from different understandings of their reality (Bassey, 1995).

There is recurrent reference to "strategic planning" yet there appears to be no long term planning beyond the year plans. What is perceived as strategic planning in terms of year plans does not coincide with the description thereof in the literature. The lack of long term planning is believed by some members to result in "doing urgent things" rather than "doing important things". The seeming lack of long term planning may help to explain why the vision appears not to be pervasive in the school. One expects the vision of an organisation to feed into its strategic planning and vice versa.

Even though the school cannot be depicted as a **learning organisation**, there are clear signs of organisational learning taking place. There are continual attempts at improving the school. COL made the staff to realise that ongoing training is needed to stay abreast with the latest trends and developments in teaching. But there appears to be a sense of powerlessness in this regard as it seems that the ongoing learning opportunities are expected to be provided by someone else, presumably the Education Department. This may point towards a need for capacity building at the school, which may enable them to provide such programmes themselves in the future.

COL introduced the idea of continual staff development at the school. But after a few programmes the staff development committee appears to have come to a standstill. One of the contributing factors is believed to be a lack of time for such events. What happened at the school is in line with the assertions in the literature that the structure and culture of the public school militate against the establishment of a learning organisation, and that the approach to professional growth in these institutions is fragmented (DuFour, 1997).

COL also brought about a realisation among some staff members that they should not operate within their own little corners but that they should endeavour to pull together for the common good of the school. They came to realise that they need to be involved in decision-making at

various levels and to inter-act with the different role players in order to tap their collective intelligence.

There are traces of a systems approach in the school. A number of changes at the school resulted from an awareness of changes in education and in the community. Changes to the curriculum in response to changes in the environment of the school and employing a social worker to attend to the social problems of the pupils, show an awareness of the interconnectedness of forces, problems, needs, etc. of their organisation's complex systems. Likewise the recognition of the important role of the prefects by developing their leadership skills speaks of an appreciation of the fact that by increasing the capacity of one sector, the capacity of the whole system grows.

COL inspired a willingness among staff members to take responsibility for what is happening at the school. The majority of the staff came to realise that if they don't ensure that the school stays relevant and competitive, nobody else will. It has been "a rude awakening" for them as they all came from an era when the Education Department used to be viewed as responsible for everything happening at the school. It is a further sign of systems thinking when responsibility for problems is shared and members strive together to continually create their reality.

Unfortunately there are also definite signs of a non-systemic approaches in the school. There are claims of a general lack of proactive processes, causing the school to go from one crisis to another. The approach to disciplinary problems is also viewed by some as short-term alleviation of the symptoms, whilst neglecting the fundamental need to feel secure and safe at school. A lot of energy is apparently spent on isolated fundraising events, leaving the broader financial issues unattended. Likewise the staff development programme is fragmented and directed at alleviating the symptoms.

COL has put a lot of emphasis on the issue of becoming self-reliant. Taking responsibility for the maintenance of their own classrooms formed part of the strategy to broaden ownership and responsibility for the schools **resources**. But the teachers realise that the same change in mindset

need to set in amongst the surrounding community to save thousands of rands that is being spent every year on repairs as a result of vandalism.

The fact that the school has to manage the limited funds at its disposal as efficiently as possible has led to the introduction of budgets. But it took some convincing to bring some of the teachers to accept the fact that things have changed and that they have to live within the dictates of their budget. Making the most of the available resources also involves utilising whatever the parents have to offer. A group of parents have, for example, taken on the job of repairing and maintaining the school's overhead projectors.

But there is a perception among staff members that the school is not making optimal use of the resources at its disposal. The computer laboratory and the technical section of the school are being mentioned in this regard. But exploiting the facilities of the technical section is juxtaposed against concerns about vandalism and theft and the need for extra material to run skills training classes for members of the community.

COL introduced the school to the idea of huge fundraising projects as apposed to lots of small labour intensive efforts. They were also empowered to draw up big business plans and present it to prospective sponsors. But the drive for such endeavours seems to have dissipated after the conclusion of the COL project.

The availability of resources or the lack thereof has a direct bearing on teaching and learning in the school. The substantial decrease in teaching posts at the school as a result of the redeployment process forced the school to make major changes to its curriculum. This in turn forced many pupils to take subjects outside their preferences. And with classes bursting at the seams, individual attention and even group work – central to Outcomes Based Education – is hard to come by. Even participation in extra-curricular activities is effected by the lack of resources.

It is no surprise that the school has lost almost all the top learners that it used to draw to former Model C schools with their comparable extensive resources. Access to the necessary resources can go a long way to address some of the problems the school has to contend with. Extra teachers, for instance, will enable them to expand the curriculum and reduce the class sizes. Precious time will also become more readily available for the all-important need to collaborate towards improvement at the school.

Finally, the **overall impression** that I get from the data is that much of the COL intervention does not seem to have had a lasting effect on the culture of the school. It is as if whatever has been introduced to the school has not been allowed to take root and flourish. Nevertheless, the school clearly gained something from the intervention. There clearly seems to be a greater appreciation of participative management processes and the benefits thereof for the school. The reintroduction of proper, prior planning that used to be part of the school, played a decisive role in re-establishing sound work ethics at the school. A sense of some sort of organisational learning has also been introduced at the school. The realisation by some (although it may be not wide and deep enough) that they now have their destiny in their own hands is an especially critical development. Obviously much still needs to be done to move away from the fragmented and passive approach to staff development. And whilst the vision is not a compelling force in the organisation, it nevertheless produced a strategic focus (irrespective of how strong it is) at the school. The insights and skills they acquired concerning resource management will also stand them in good stead. These newly acquired perceptions need to become more widely and deeply entrenched in the organisation for it to have any lasting effect on the organisational culture of the school.

Recommendations

In view of my research I want to make the following recommendations for practice in our schools:

Rather than approaching vision crafting as a once-off event, visioning should rather be approached as a continual process so that it can eventually become the “force of immense power” that Senge (1990) talks about.

Building capacity in schools to undertake strategic planning in the true sense of the word is of paramount importance to enable our schools to become proactive, and overcome the short-sightedness that seems to prevail in many of our schools, and to enable schools to engage in an ongoing visioning process.

There is a need in schools to devise strategies to make time available, however little it may be (notwithstanding serious human resources shortages) for the all-important task of collaboration in pursuit of school improvement.

Judging from the data, I am inclined to suggest that SGC’s in disadvantaged schools need extensive, ongoing capacity building opportunities to empower them for the wide-ranging mandate that is bestowed upon them by the South African Schools’ Act. Again, the Education Department has a special duty in this regard, especially as far as disadvantaged schools are concerned.

To provide for a transfer of skills from one SGC to another, it may be necessary to review the terms of serving SGC members. Arranging the their terms in such a way that one half of especially the parent component is replaced in the middle of a particular term may go a long way to overcome the problems created by continual changes of parental members on the SGC.

There is also a need to devise a strategy to motivate parents to become involved in the affairs of their children’s schooling. The data of my research suggest that parents are very reluctant to become involved in the education of their children. Apart from apathy, parents in poor communities may experience a sense of powerlessness, believing that there is nothing that they can possibly contribute towards the overall welfare of their children’s schooling. This mindset has to be changed.

Widespread campaigns are vital to make communities realise that the schools belong to them and that vandalising them amounts to destroying their own children's learning environment, and thereby encumbering their learning.

I believe a programme such as the COL programme, with such far-reaching possible implications, may need to be approached as a comprehensive process that needs to take place over a much longer period. Education is notorious for how slow change is taking place within it. Improvement efforts in schools take time and calls for lots of patience.

However difficult it may be, there is a desperate need to provide poor schools with the necessary resources to support the priorities of teaching and learning in those schools, otherwise the gap between poor and rich schools will continue to grow. This could result in huge numbers of school leavers being ill/unprepared to fulfil their role in the job market. Making more resources available to schools will obviously not in itself bring about miracles. These schools will have to be empowered to manage their resources responsibly in the interest of advancing quality education for their pupils.

Leadership and management development programmes are sorely needed in South African schools, especially in historically disadvantaged schools. Everyone with an interest in education (in fact, society as a whole has an interest in education), especially the Education Department should therefore endeavour to provide programmes of this nature on a continual basis.

Suggestions for further research

The value of case studies is believed to lie in its ability of providing insights that may be pursued in subsequent studies (Berg, 1998). The following are areas for possible further research which I have identified:

Given the impact that self-management appears to have on the ability of even disadvantaged schools to attract learners, and given the assertions in the literature about the negative impact of self-management on schools in poor communities (Wylie, 1994, cited in Dalin, 1998; Whittaker, 1993; Nuthal, 1993, cited in Dalin, 1998; Dalin, 1998), there may be a need to do research on the suitability of self-management for schools in South Africa with its legacy of inequalities in all sectors of the society. A similar reservation was highlighted by Ndhlovu (2000: 49) who questioned the appropriateness of “whole school development” programmes for South Africa on the grounds that they perpetuate underdevelopment and dependency. This claim needs to be explored, so that alternative approaches, more suited to local circumstances, may be developed.

Coupled with this may be a need to investigate the long term implications for education of the apparent exodus of learners from disadvantaged schools to historically more advantaged schools. Such a study may be able to indicate possible strategies to deal with this phenomenon.

I also believe there is a need for ongoing and comprehensive research on school improvement strategies for schools in poor communities. Christie’s (2001: 40) identification of the characteristics of “resilient” schools (schools that do well in spite of unfavourable conditions) may provide a useful starting point. But of course would need to know more than *what* should be in place: one needs to find out how to bring about such changes. Judging from the literature there appears to be comparatively little information about school improvement strategies for poor schools with their own peculiar demands.

Furthermore, I believe there is also a need to do research on why parents coming from poor backgrounds tend to shy away from getting involved in the schooling of their children. Deeper insight into this phenomenon may help to formulate appropriate strategies to deal with it effectively.

Limitations of my research

Being a single case study this research suffers from shortcomings one usually encounters in small-scale studies, namely that the findings may be true of this case, but not necessarily true of cases in different contexts and from different backgrounds. Even within the bounds of the case itself I was compelled to work with a relatively small sample of participants, and with only one data-collection tool. Naturally these are all factors which agitate against the generalisability of my findings. It may be salutary, however, to bear in mind the notion that case studies that are rigorously conducted **can** provide understanding of other similar cases (Berg, 1998). The question is thus perhaps whether or not the study has been sufficiently rigorous. I hope that I have demonstrated rigour in: maintaining my focus on the central research question, reviewing relevant literature to provide me with a frame of reference, obtaining and working with considerable amounts of qualitative data to gain an understanding of participants' experiences and views, and reporting and analysing the data in a systematic and coherent way.

Conclusion

This has only been an exploratory study and I do not pretend for one moment that I in any way provide definitive answers to questions related to the case. However, I trust that this study makes a contribution towards a deeper understanding of the impact on people's perceptions by education leadership and management intervention programmes in schools.

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Appendix A: Questionnaire

Has COL changed the way you view/approach management? Elaborate:

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Has COL changed the way you view/approach leadership? Elaborate:

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What would you regard as some of the most significant lessons of the COL project?

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What do you regard as some of the key challenges posed to you by the COL project?

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What do you see as some of the most important changes at your school as a result of COL? How sustainable are these initiatives in your view?

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Has COL impacted on your understanding of your own role in the school?

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Would you have like COL to have continued for a longer period? Why? Or why not?

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PLEASE FEEL FREE TO USE AN EXTRA PAGE OR MORE IF THE SPACE PROVIDED FOR YOUR RESPONCES IS NOT ENOUGH.

I WISH TO THANK YOU MOST SINCERELY FOR AVAILING YOUR TIME TO COMPLETE THIS QUESTIONNAIRE.

Appendix B: Interview schedule

What can you tell me about the COL project at your school?

In what way were you involved in the project?

Why did you decide to get involved in this project?

Has COL changed the way you view/approach:

Management?

Leadership?

Has the way you deal with problems changed?

Did COL influence the way you arrive at decisions?

Did COL have an impact on your approach to extra-curricular activities?

Has COL had an influence on your relationship with the outside world/ surrounding community?

What informs this relationship?

Did COL impacted on your relationship to the district office of the Education Department?

Has COL impacted on your understanding of your own role in the school?

Has the cooperation between the staff members been influenced by the COL intervention?

Has COL changed the way you see the role of the governing council?

How does the present situation of your school differ from your ideal school? What informs your view of your ideal school?

What do you think needs to happen to realise your ideal school?

Would you have preferred that COL continued for a longer period? Why? Or why not?

Tell me about some of your long term projects/plans at the school that has been inspired by COL.

What would you regard as significant lessons of the COL project?

What do you regard as key challenges posed to you and the school by the COL project?

What do you see as important changes at your school as a result of COL? How sustainable are these initiatives in your view?