Creating People-centred Schools

School Organization and Change in South Africa

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Learning Guide

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SECTION ONE

Introducing the module

What do we want to achieve in this module?

Introduction

This module on *school organization and change* tackles a key question in South Africa's educational transition, namely:

> **How do we need to change our thinking about the ways in which schools are organized in order to create schools that provide better learning opportunities for learners and a more democratic working environment for teachers?**

In order to offer answers to this question, this module introduces you to some contemporary approaches to *school organization* and *management.* While we hope many people involved in school management (particularly principals and deputies) will study this module, it is not aimed primarily at management personnel. The revitalization of our schools as organizations cannot be left only to those traditionally regarded as managers; ordinary teachers have a crucial role to play. A key outcome is that you, the teacher, should reach the end of this module with an enhanced ability to *begin changing, or contributing to positive change* in the way you operate in your school.

We aim to answer the following related questions on the way to answering our key question:

- Why are most South African schools currently organized in *authoritarian and bureaucratic* ways?
- What *alternative and more democratic forms of school organization* could we introduce in our schools to replace these forms of organization?
- *Why* is this kind of *change important*?
- *How* do we go about changing schools, and how do we manage the resistance we are likely to encounter in making these changes?

A central concept that will emerge is the notion of a *learning organization*. Your instinctive response might be, 'But all schools are learning organizations … they are all involved in teaching and learning!' But we mean something different. It is our belief that a learning organization is an institution in which members:

- constantly reflect on their work;
- discuss their work as a team rather than as isolated individuals;
- learn from their mistakes;
- change and improve their work.

If we accept this definition, then all kinds of organizations can become learning organizations. But we will expand on this later. All the democratic approaches to school organization that we introduce in this module share the aim of turning schools into learning organizations, but they differ in their understanding of :

- *what a learning organization looks like in practice*;
- *how we go about changing schools* so that they become learning organizations.

Why should you study this module?

Many people talk about the need to restore the culture of learning and teaching in South African schools. The national matric pass rate is low. Often, it seems that teachers are demotivated and learners are not interested in schooling.

The new national Department of Education (DoE) has introduced a number of education policies since April 1994. These changes will impact directly on teachers,

This icon indicates the particular week of study in which you should begin working on the section it introduces.

so we cannot ignore them. Even more importantly, almost all the new policies stress *participation* and suggest increased management and leadership responsibilities for *classroom teachers.* In order to respond positively to these suggestions, we need to develop our understanding of how schools function and how we can participate meaningfully in their functioning.

Inevitably, these suggested changes have received different responses from teachers. Some teachers have welcomed them with warm enthusiasm, while others are indifferent or even hostile. Why are the responses so varied? Will these changes bring the transformation that the South African schooling system needs? How can we help teachers and managers in schools to deal with the demands and pressures brought about by the changes?

This module recognizes that many schools will find it difficult to respond to external and internal challenges because they are organized in an inflexible, hierarchical way. Certainly, schools face many other serious problems, such as a lack of learning resources, shortage of classrooms, and large classes. But this module will focus on how we can begin making a difference – despite these other constraints – in the *ways in which our schools are organized.*

hierarchical: organized into a system of higher and lower ranks, each with a different level of power and status

1.2   How does this module teach?

Introduction

This module 'teaches' in two ways. It teaches through:
- the *content* it covers: in other words, through *what* it teaches;
- the *style* in which it is written: in other words, through the *way* it teaches.

So, as writers, we not only aim to inform you *about* key school organization principles but also attempt to *demonstrate* these principles in the way we teach. In addition, we rely strongly on your *participation in the activities* we set which often require you to practise the ideas introduced in this module in your own school. We believe that our style of teaching works best if you also try new ways of learning, rather than only concentrating on increasing *what* you know. We think our style of teaching – which is conversational, interactive, and grounded in the experiences of teachers – will make your learning more meaningful and enjoyable.

We attempt to ground school organization theory in the lives of school teachers by taking a *case study* approach to education. We teach the different approaches to school organization and change through the discussions and activities of teachers at an imaginary school called Thuthuka as they try to do something about improving their school.

The case study: Thuthuka School

Thuthuka is situated in a 'township' just outside Durban in KwaZulu-Natal. It has been ravaged by political violence in the last decade. Many houses and schools are empty shells – with no window panes or doors – and many dwellings have been deserted since their owners left at the height of the violence.

Thuthuka school buildings are dilapidated – some broken windows, some class-room doors missing, some chalkboards with holes in them – but they are clean. At times they are used by members of the community for church and community meet-ings. A School Committee was elected six years ago, but few members are active. In reality, the principal and his management team take most of the decisions relating to the day-to-day running of the school. It seems that while the community uses the school facilities, it does not feel the need to be involved in Thuthuka's development and management.

The school has an enrolment of just over 950 learners from Grades 8 to 12 and 28 teachers (including the principal, the deputy and three heads of department). This translates into a teacher-learner ratio of 1:34 (but classes are often larger in practice). Over the past seven years, the school has never had a formal school inspection and seldom sees departmental officials.

The general atmosphere at the school is rather 'laid-back' and often gives the impression of quiet chaos. There are always teachers and learners standing around in the school grounds or walking around outside the school. Although a bell rings to indicate new periods, both teachers and learners take their time in changing classes. It is often difficult to distinguish between senior learners and teachers: they look the same age and wear similar clothing. One teacher told me that teachers were 'demor-alized' and all the talk of 'restoring the culture of learning and teaching' was a 'joke'.

laid-back: relaxed

The teachers

In this module we meet a small group of teachers at Thuthuka School. The only thing that has brought this rather diverse group of teachers together is their concern about their school and their keenness to improve it. There seems to be a shared under-standing that something needs to be done, but no one is really sure how to go about it. Although they have heard about various new education policies and the need for change, the Thuthuka teachers are uncertain about what this means for them and their school.

Thulani Shabalala has taught for four years. He joined Thuthuka two years ago from a farm school some distance away so that he could be nearer the local univer-sity where he is enrolled as a part-time student. He has recently been made Acting Head of the Languages Department. Thulani is doing a course in school manage-ment, although he does not aim to become a principal and rise through the ranks because his real passion is working with children.

Nomusa Ngubane has been teaching at Thuthuka for nine years. She is among the oldest members of staff and is a dedicated Science teacher who has consistently produced good 'matric' results. She is also studying part-time for a Further Diploma in Education. Nomusa has an enquiring mind and has been heard to say: 'Pretending you know for fear of ridicule is a sign of stupidity'. But her constant questioning does sometimes irritate her colleagues.

Sipho Gumede is another long-serving member of staff who is known for challeng-ing anything anyone says. He has a BA degree and has enrolled for three different diplomas and degrees in the past four years. He seems to know a little of everything and hates to lose an argument.

Sindi Nxumalo is a Maths teacher who spends long hours after school working with learners who have problems. She has been teaching for five years. She is regard-ed as 'strict', but is also generally respected by learners because of the time she gives them. Sindi tried to start a school netball team but eventually gave up because money and equipment were constantly being stolen.

1.3 How should you study this module?

What are the components of this module?

This module has four important components:
- This *Learning Guide*, which operates as your 'teacher'. The Learning Guide will structure your learning, explain concepts, and direct you to other parts of the module at appropriate times.
- *Readings,* which you could consider as a 'resource person'. This Learning Guide will direct you to edited Readings in which people working in the field of organizational change share their experiences and ideas with you.
- An *audiotape*, which contains interviews with school organization experts and policymakers, as well as excerpts from conversations where teachers talk about the difficulties of implementing change in schools.
- A *videotape*, which tells the stories of a number of South African schools through interviews with teachers, learners, principals and parents who have embarked on changing their schools.

In addition, you need a *workbook* in which you will do all the activities as well as record any other ideas you may have. This will act as a *portfolio* of your thinking and development. We suggest you purchase a hardcover A4 book or a file for this purpose.

Important learning suggestions to keep in mind

Consider the module as a conversation and not as a didactic textbook

The Learning Guide is not an old-fashioned textbook that you must read and learn by rote. We have written the Guide as a *conversation* about changing schools. In particular we will talk about the implications of more democratic school structures for you, the teacher. We will also explore ways in which ordinary teachers can involve themselves in changing schools into organizations they feel comfortable working in.

When you see this icon, stop reading. Think about the question or problem we have raised. You might want to make notes in your workbook.

Like all good conversations, the Guide works best if you *participate*. In order to encourage this, we have inserted many activities and requests to 'think!' in this module. *These are indicated by the icon you see in the margin.* In fact, it is probably true to say that *your work* is the most important part of the Guide. If you don't do the activities, you will miss out on the most central and important part of the learning experience we have designed for you.

It is essential to re-read sections

You will notice that the Guide often suggests going back and reworking something you have already completed. We do this for a reason. There is a lot of evidence to suggest that *understanding* (as opposed to rote learning) develops in *layers*. Think about how we get to know things in the world. When we are first introduced to an idea it seems strange and confusing. It is only once we *think* and *talk* and *read* and *write* about these things *again and again* that their full importance becomes clear to us.

That is why we ask you to go back and rethink things that you have already done. We believe that learning about something is a *continual process of construction*

and reconstruction. Often something that we have already learnt, something that we take for granted, or with which we are already familiar, looks very different when we revisit it.

Your learning must include a constant application of theory to practice

You will notice that we begin all our sections in a school and with teachers. In other words, we begin with practice and then go to theory only when we believe theory can offer us some practical ways out of a problem we face. Finally, we return to the school to see *how* the theory we have studied is useful. Ultimately, though, *only you can relate these ideas to a context with which you are familiar*. We don't want you simply to learn things so that you can pass the course. The many activities in the Learning Guide should encourage you to apply what you are learning to practical situations. *These are indicated by the icon you see in the margin.*

We also believe you should set aside time to **talk with other students**. Talking about school organization issues – especially if you have debates and arguments, and share practical experiences – is an effective way of studying this module. It allows you to 'ground' many of the theoretical ideas presented here in the realities of your own contexts.

Stop reading when you see this icon. Follow the instruction in the activity and then write your answer in your workbook. .

Learning is about being critical and being able to disagree with us

Don't be afraid to disagree with us. We will present you with a number of approaches to school organization, and often suggest that all of them can be right *and* wrong! In other words, we don't believe that everything we have written in this module is the absolute truth. Rather, we present you with a *point of view and a story*. It is up to you to decide whether you agree or disagree with our point of view and our story. We welcome your opposing opinions because it means that you are becoming part of the conversation.

Whatever position you take, however, **has to be argued**. You cannot just say, 'I disagree because I don't like it.' Similarly you cannot say, 'I agree because I like it.' *You need to justify your choices*.

Keep a record of your learning: write down all your ideas in your workbook

A vital learning skill that you should develop is the ability to plot and evaluate your own progress. But this is only possible if you keep a record of your understandings throughout the course. Then you can return to your early work and see how your understanding has changed. This makes your workbook a very important part of your learning strategy. It will become the record of your thinking – and the changes in your thinking – about school organization and change.

You should do all the required activities in your workbook. Also write down any other comments or ideas that enter your mind as you learn. The activities you are asked to do are formative and continuous self-assessments. In other words, they are designed primarily to help you learn (rather than 'measure' your learning). As with the readings, we will sometimes ask you to go back to an activity you have done in your workbook and revise it in the light of new understandings that you have developed.

Regard the Reader as a 'resource person'

The Readings are short extracts from articles we think are useful in understanding key aspects of organizational theory and school change. We will often ask you to shift between the Guide and *Readings*. However, we want you to read these excerpts with a particular goal in mind: you need to *use the ideas to address the problems set in the case study or activity* that precedes or accompanies each reading.

Simply memorizing the reading is pointless! Try to see these readings – this 'theory' – as the thought-through experience of other educators. We suggest that you treat the readings as you would an experienced or suitably qualified person that you would go to for advice when you have a problem. You wouldn't simply memorize their advice – you would *use* it!

Use the audio and video tapes as vicarious 'experiences'

vicarious: instead of directly experiencing something ourselves, we experience it through our imagination while watching others

It is quite easy – and tempting – simply to listen to the audiotape or watch the video before working through the module. But this is not the best way to listen or view. The Learning Guide has structured the 'experiences' contained on the video and audiotape into the learning of particular concepts. We will refer you to either the video or audiotape by inserting icons in the margin at the appropriate place in the Guide. Viewing or listening at the appropriate time – with ideas and questions from the Guide and/or a Reading in your head – will make the use of the video and audiotape much more meaningful.

When you see this icon, stop reading. Turn to the video/ audiotape and watch/listen to the excerpt indicated. Then write down in your workbook any queries or observations you may have.

The videotape tells the stories of schools where staff are busy changing organizational structures and processes so that they become more participative and democratic. It *illustrates* two important approaches to school organization and change.

The audiotape consists mainly of interviews with, and debates among, important policymakers and school change experts. It also aims to clarify key concepts through linking these to the everyday practices of school change.

If you wish, watch or listen to these tapes ahead of time, but do so again when the Guide asks you to do so. And try not to ignore our requests for you to view something a second time. Remember, we are doing this on the understanding that you will see and learn a lot more *once you know more.*

1.4 What are the module's desired learning outcomes?

At the beginning of this section, we suggested that this module's key outcome is to:

> … develop your understanding of a number of contemporary approaches to management and school organization so that you – as a classroom teacher – can begin changing your school into a more democratic and efficient organization …

In order to build this key outcome, the module has a number of related outcomes. You should demonstrate an ability to:

- Explain the key characteristics of *hierarchical* and *bureaucratic* organizations.
- Explain why hierarchical and bureaucratic forms of organization were useful ways to organize institutions *in the past*.
- Explain how *societies are changing*, and *how* and *why* these changes are making hierarchical and bureaucratic forms of organization obsolete globally and in South Africa.

obsolete: out of date; no longer useful

- Explain some of the *reasons why* South African schools tended to be organized in particularly authoritarian and hierarchical ways.

- Explain the **key characteristics of new forms of organization**.
- Show how these changes would **impact** on an educational institution with which you are familiar.
- Explain the relationship between **structural** and **cultural** factors, and their importance in change processes.
- Use your understanding of structure and culture to **analyse change processes** at a school with which you are familiar.
- Explain the **key characteristics of a 'learning organization'**.
- **Develop a plan** for a school that has been restructured as a 'learning organization', and **plot your changed role** within this organization.
- Explain the key differences and similarities in two forms of educational research – **school effectiveness research** and **school improvement research**.
- Use these forms of research to explain **what** a good school is and **how** you can begin changing your own school to meet these criteria.
- Understand **constraints** on change – both personal and organizational – and **plan a change programme** which takes these into account.
- Understand the key differences between **school-as-organization** and **school-as-community** approaches to school change.
- Use knowledge about school change to **analyse problems** in schools and to **develop a school change programme** for an institution with which you are familiar.

How is the Learning Guide structured?

1.5

The structure

The Guide structures its teaching as a series of debates – of contrasts – between what we initially call 'old, hierarchic' and then 'new, participative' approaches to organization in general. First we explore this broadly, drawing strongly on the experiences and theory of business management (Sections Two and Three).

Later we pinpoint more specifically how these ideas apply to **school** organization. We also focus more tightly on the 'new, participative' approach to school organization (Section Three). But we demonstrate that, even **within** this approach, there are differences of emphasis. These occur in the research about **what** a good school is in Section Three (we characterize this as a 'school effectiveness' versus 'school improvement' debate), and within strategies about **how** to change schools in Section Four (we simplify the debate into one between 'a school as organization' approach versus a 'school as community' approach). These differences are illustrated on the video where we visit schools in the Pretoria region which are using school change strategies that fall within these different approaches.

We always begin with a **simple problem** that the Thuthuka teachers are experiencing. Then we refer you to readings which we believe provide new ways of thinking about the particular problem. Sometimes the readings offer direct solutions; at other times they offer a way of **thinking** in order to reach a solution. But most often readings show how our simple explanations are only **partly useful**.

Each section, therefore, develops a **skeleton** of the debate to which we then

proceed to add flesh. Make sure you understand the basics before you move towards the end of each section where matters become more complex. This style is deliberate. We want you to *understand the key differences* between the different approaches. But we also aim to demonstrate that, while there are differences, there are also important *similarities* in the ways seemingly different approaches understand school organization and change.

In addition, you should be able to develop these similarities into a 'checklist' which you can *use to assess your thinking* as you work to change your teaching and assessment practices. It is for this reason that we so often ask you to *apply* these ideas to practice, and to write down your ideas in your workbook.

How much time do you need?

We think this module needs about six hours of work a week for a period of about 20 weeks. In other words, you should set aside about 120 hours of time to study. But of course, different students work at different speeds, so you may well find you need more (or slightly less) time.

We suggest that you pace yourself by ensuring that you keep up with the weekly time guides we have inserted in the Guide. For instance, you will notice that 'Week 2' appears next to sub-section 2.1 (page 15). This means you should have completed all the work up to that point by the beginning of Week 2.

Generally, we would expect you to spend the 120 hours in the following way:
- *Reading time:* about 60 hours. This includes reading the Guide as well as readings in the Reader.
- *Activity time:* about 40 hours. This includes the time it takes you to think about your readings, listen to your audiotape, and write your answers in your workbook.
- *Assignment writing time:* about 20 hours. This is the time you will spend writing the assignments you submit to your tutors.

How will the module be assessed?

This module should be assessed using the listed outcomes as the basis of assessment. We understand assessment as a process that is continuous and formative, assessing your ability to apply ideas in practice and your development through the course. While you may still write a final exam, we do not believe it should be the major 'measurement' of your ability. Consequently, we suggest the following assessment breakdown:
- *tutor-marked assignment 1*, to make up 20% of your final mark;
- your *workbook* – which represents an assessment of how your understanding has developed through the course, and of your engagement with the course – to make up another 30%;
- *tutor-marked assignment 2* (or a final 'open-book' exam) – an integrative task which assesses your ability to draw relationships between the three sections and apply your knowledge to a practical case study – to count for the final 50% of your mark.

We hope that you will find this journey challenging, exciting and fulfilling. Good luck!

Themba, Carol, Nonhlanhla and Neil