

Creating People-centred Schools

School Organization and Change
in South Africa

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The SAIDE Teacher Education Series

Saide 
South African Institute
for Distance Education

Creating People-centred Schools

School Organization
and Change in South Africa

Learning Guide

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Creating People-Centred Schools
ISBN 978-0-9869837-1-9

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1ST EDITION EDITOR: John Gultig, Dawn Butler
1ST EDITION VIDEOTAPE: Kagiso Educational Television, with Themba Ndhlovu and John Gultig
1ST EDITION AUDIOTAPE: Ulwazi Educational Radio, with John Gultig and Mike Adendorff
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The first edition was funded by the WK Kellogg foundation. This digital version has been funded through the International Association of Digital Publications.

SECTION THREE

New contexts, new policies: new schools?

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Changes in the South African context

3.1

Introduction

Thuthuka teachers nod vigorously when Sindi comments, 'Wow, the apartheid system of education was oppressive. Thank goodness those days are over.'

'Yes, but we know they aren't really over. A particular culture remains. As a consequence, we know the difficulties we still face in our schools. And we also know that people continually criticize South African schools for not being able to meet the economic and other needs of the "new" South Africa,' adds Thulani.

'But what are these "needs" everyone talks about? Are they different from those of the past?' Sindi asks.

*'I think they must be,' says Nomusa. 'For instance, I know that I want my child to be computer literate. And I want her to be able to show initiative because, it seems, permanent jobs in big companies are no longer guaranteed for school-leavers. In other words, she must be able to make work for herself ... to be self-employed. I think we need to find out more about the **demands of this new context**,' says Nomusa.*

So, the Thuthuka teachers go off to do more 'research'. Thulani finds an article by a South African journalist which he thinks may provide interesting information about what the new government regards as important policy priorities, and what new educational legislation is being drafted to address these needs.



ACTIVITY 8: EDUCATION'S ROLE IN A CHANGING SOUTH AFRICA

Turn to Karen MacGregor's article – entitled 'South Africa: juggling education and economic development' (Readings, Section One, 'South Africa: New plans for new contexts'). This provides us with an overview of the contextual needs which are driving (or should drive) new educational policies in South Africa. Read MacGregor's article. When you have finished, answer the following questions in your workbook:

- How is South Africa changing – politically, economically and socially? What are the different kinds of knowledge and skills that learners need to live and work successfully in this new context? How do these changes impact on the *kinds of education* that schools must offer?
- What are the *organizational implications* of these changes? In other words, how will you have to change the way your school operates (and the way you work) in order to meet these new needs?



This activity should take you about 90 minutes. Think of MacGregor's ideas in relation to those expressed by speakers in Part 1 of your audiotape, as well as those expressed by Nel and McLagan in Reading 3.

Changes in South Africa's economic context

MacGregor suggests that the context we live in has undergone significant changes in recent years – economically, politically and socially – and that these changes are driving the new educational policies emerging from government. But, says MacGregor, many of these 'contextual circumstances' are not entirely of South Africa's making. So, while the political imperative to **democratize** after apartheid is a choice made by South Africans, many of the **economic imperatives** are driven by global factors over which we have little choice.

imperative: an urgent need

What are the key economic forces driving new education policies? MacGregor mentions three: **globalization, unemployment and new technologies**.



MacGregor's – and the new government's – suggestion that we have no choice over these economic circumstances is a controversial position opposed by, for instance, trade unions and the South African Communist Party. An acceptance that the government has no power over these circumstances allows it to enact policies based on the need to be globally competitive. This often means a cutback in social spending priorities like education.

Globalization

Since South Africa's democratic elections in 1994, we have re-entered the world economy. The economy of the country, therefore, has to develop and grow at a rate that is comparable to that of other countries of the world. The quality of the goods we produce should match that of other countries so that we can compete with them.

MacGregor's article states that, currently, South Africa is rated 93rd out of 178 countries on the United Nations Human Development Index. We need to develop economic capital (money and physical resources), as well as skilled 'human capital' (people with skills and education). The latter demand is an important educational responsibility.

This suggests that our current system isn't producing people capable of competing – in terms of producing high-quality goods cost-effectively – with their counterparts in other parts of the world. Many would argue that this is the reason for the renewed *emphasis on Mathematics, Science, Technology and business-related learning areas*, and for introducing OBE, with its focus on educating people to *think critically*, and to *do* things (rather than just *know* things).

Unemployment

MacGregor's article states that South Africa is 'a country with one of the highest unemployment rates in the world'. Estimates are that for every ten matriculants in 1996, only one was employed. How should the education system respond?

First, it is obvious that industry cannot accommodate all the learners from the schooling system. This means that the informal economy – small businesses – must become increasingly important. As a consequence, schools cannot simply give learners the skills and attitudes to work *for someone*. They must now give learners the skills and attitudes *that enable them to start their own businesses* and, in this way, provide employment for themselves and others.

This probably explains the increased *emphasis on life skills, business education, and skills such as innovation, risk-taking and problem solving* in the new curriculum.

Information technology and the information explosion

MacGregor begins her article with a story about a three-year-old girl who is confidently playing computer games. Computers have completely revolutionized the way in which we work. Through the Internet, more information is available to people than ever before. If your computer is linked up, you can connect with the worldwide network of information within seconds.

Furthermore, information and knowledge are 'exploding'. In the fields of science and technology, in particular, 97% of all human knowledge has been discovered in the lifetime of many people reading this guide. New information is being generated (and old information becoming obsolete) by the hour. This means that memorizing information is no longer the most important aim of learning. Rather, it is vital for learners to develop the *skills of using technology to access information*. Education should help young people to *understand and organize information and to use it to solve problems*.

It is logical, therefore, that the new policies should make frequent reference to ideas like 'lifelong learning', 'thinking skills', 'independent study' and 'portfolio assessment'. A society in which there are rapid changes in information, and where information is easily available, requires different skills from societies of the past.

This is probably another reason for the move towards an outcomes-based curriculum. Put simply, the new curriculum focuses on what learners can *do* with what has been taught, rather than on memorizing the information the teacher has taught. It is not enough for the teacher to say, 'I taught my class about the external structure of the plant'. He or she needs to ask, 'Can learners use what they know about the structure of a plant to identify different plants? Do they have the skills to find and organize new knowledge in this area? Can they use this knowledge to solve problems?' It becomes vital for learners to *demonstrate* that they are *able to solve problems, think critically, be creative, analyse*

information and use technology, because these are the skills needed for our economy to grow and our society to develop.

The teacher's role in the new curriculum changes too. The role of the teacher as the expert who transmits information and content to learners is no longer adequate (new information technologies often do this much better). Now it becomes vital for teachers to *plan meaningful learning activities* that give learners the *opportunity to use* their knowledge to *solve problems* and to *develop relevant skills and attitudes*.

Increasingly the teacher's role is managerial. Teachers need the skills to *manage people*, both in working collaboratively with other teachers and in managing learners. They also need to be able to *manage knowledge*.

Changes in South Africa's *political* context

As mentioned earlier, many of the economic changes in South Africa have global dimensions. But since South Africa's first democratic elections, there have also been enormous political changes that are specific to this country. The emphasis has been on getting rid of the legacies of apartheid, in particular segregation and inequality.

In many cases, legislation has been enacted to put in process the *racial integration of institutions* and to *equalize opportunities*. The Bill of Rights, for instance, enshrines the principles of equality, non-racism and non-sexism. One of the key features of the South African Schools Act of 1996 is the integration of 19 education departments into one national, and nine provincial, departments. And the Schools Act also promises nine years of compulsory schooling for every child.

But there is also an emphasis on *deepening democracy*. One example, for instance, is placing school governance in the hands of the school community – the parents, educators and learners. This signals a move away from the highly centralized and tightly controlled system of the past.

The shift towards giving schools greater control over their own resources has been happening in other countries, such as Australia, Britain and America, for a number of years. So, even here, global trends in modern political thinking about democracy, equity, justice and decentralization are influencing our educational policies and practices.

Aside from new structures, schools are also central to building a new culture of tolerance in South Africa. One way in which this will be achieved is through *building more democratic and participative structures* – from schools to national parliament. Another way will be through *teaching learners the skills and attitudes* that will enable them to participate critically in our new democracy.

This might explain new learning areas, such as 'human rights education'. But it also explains why the new policies suggest that *all teachers should participate in management and constantly learn themselves*. Later, when we talk about schools as 'learning organizations', we will expand on this idea.

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Changes in South Africa's *social* context

The new curriculum encourages learners to develop *attitudes* of tolerance and understanding for people who are different from themselves. The *social aim* is to change people's attitudes away from the prejudice and stereotyping of the apartheid era.

In addition, it reflects a global move towards a world in which the spiritual aspects of our existence are valued rather than simply our rational, thinking abilities. There is also a global concern about issues like environmental degradation which are becoming as important as an ability to make money or invent new things. This might explain the emphasis on *holism*, and on *educating the whole person*, in new policies. It also partly explains the shift in school organization literature towards holistic thinking, and the increasing emphasis on the role that people play in shaping organizational structures.

3.2

Changes in the organizational context

Introduction

As we have seen, many of the current changes occurring in South Africa are a consequence of changes in global contexts. Our next reading explores changes in the world of work, and their impact on the organizational structures of our schools and what we teach in them. In many ways, its argument is similar to that in the article by McLagan and Nel that you read earlier. But this next reading, 'Why bureaucracy no longer works', provides more detail about:

- how the *nature of work* is changing;
- why bureaucratic and hierarchical organizations are *no longer appropriate organizational forms* through which to do this work.

The article, written by an American couple, takes changes in *business* structures in the USA as its focus. As you read, think carefully about how appropriate the article is to schools in South Africa. In other words, *apply* the writers' ideas to your own work situation.



Set aside about 2 hours to complete this activity. We suggest that you re-listen to Part 1 of your audiotope and re-read Reading 3 before you do this activity.

ACTIVITY 9: THE CHANGING NATURE OF WORK – IMPLICATIONS FOR EDUCATION?

Turn to Pinchot and Pinchot's article titled 'Why bureaucracy no longer works': (Readings, Section Two, 'Organizations: The impact of global change'). You should find many of the issues – particularly the descriptions of bureaucracies – familiar to you by now. Now answer the following questions in your workbook:

- According to the Pinchots, how will you have to change the *way you work* in future? Are these changes similar to those suggested by *Curriculum 2005* or the South African Schools Act? (Don't simply summarize the reading. Apply the ideas to your school, and provide South African examples to illustrate your answers.)
- The table titled *Revolutionary change in the structure of our relationships* (last page of the Pinchot and Pinchot article) outlines seven features of bureaucracy and how these define the nature of our relationships at work. For each of the seven features, write a brief description (in a phrase, or a sentence or two) of how the relationships at your school will be likely to change if the Pinchots are correct.

Changing societies: what are the implications for schools?

When the Thuthuka teachers meet again, there is a new person in the group. It is the deputy principal, known to everyone as 'The Rake'. Many teachers are surprised to see him there, and a bit nervous that he will dominate the discussions. They also fear that they will not be able to speak their minds because he is a 'figure of authority'. However, The Rake thanks the teachers for allowing him to join their discussion group. He says he is just as eager as they are to work in a school characterized by good inter-personal relationships and a sense of purpose.

'This is a side of The Rake I've never seen before,' whispers Siphso to Nomusa. 'I hope he really is here on that basis rather than as a bureaucratic senior,' she replies under her breath.

Thulani starts the discussion by saying he hopes everyone has read the article by the Pinchots. About half of the teachers nod that they have, and the others shake their heads. The group goes on to discuss the article. Towards the end of the discussion, Sindi produces a summary of the main points she has picked out of the article.

The changing nature of work: implications for my school?

Notes by Sindi Nxumalo

What I found most interesting was the suggestion that most new work was going to be 'knowledge work'. The Pinchots describe 'knowledge work' as work that relies on reading, planning, problem-solving, or entrepreneurial skills. They say this kind of work requires individuals who are good at information gathering and teamwork, are imaginative, prepared to take risks and experiment, and who are self-directed. The Pinchots argue that unskilled manufacturing work - which requires workers with the ability to do repetitive, routine tasks - is employing fewer and fewer people because computers do this sort of work much better than human beings. The challenge for us is to prepare to carry out the functions that machines/computers cannot do.

This change in the nature of work has significant implications for our school. If you think of it, Thuthuka doesn't teach or even encourage characteristics like curiosity, collaboration (teamwork), experimentation, risk-taking, and the ability to care. Instead, we teach what the Pinchots say most schools do: blind obedience, working to the bell, the ability to sit still for long periods, to do mindless repetitive work, and endure boredom. But while these characteristics may be useful to workers destined for lives in manufacturing industries and bureaucracies, they are not the kinds of skills and knowledge that will prepare our learners to live and work in contemporary society, or to change our old society.

Even the way we work and relate to each other - the way our school is organized - is outdated. It discourages teachers from working in ways which would make both them and their schools successful today. The Pinchots present a familiar argument: contemporary society is characterized by rapid change and huge amounts of information (which is also changing constantly). This makes current work patterns - where people are responsible for one function or task, which they do alone - unsuitable. Simply put, individuals cannot keep up with the complexity of the knowledge required to do particular jobs. This leads the Pinchots to a number of suggestions regarding work:

- Tasks will increasingly be performed by project teams. This allows different specialists to share their knowledge in order to develop the best (and a holistic) solution to a particular problem. So, for instance, a team could draw on the expertise of psychologists, managers and a subject expert to solve discipline problems, rather than leaving them all to The Rake!
- These project teams will be temporary, and will change as the challenges facing schools change. So, instead of permanent job functions - like 'principal' - temporary project teams will be established to raise funds, or run an adult education course, or deal with school fee problems instead of leaving all this to the principal.
- Because the environment in which we work is becoming increasingly complex - with huge amounts of information to become familiar with, it is likely that there will be much more co-ordination and discus-

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”



Again, we'd like you to notice *how* Sindi writes her 'notes'. First, she accurately summarizes the Pinchots' main argument. But then – and this is important – she *applies* their ideas to her own situation.

Try to model the way these teachers develop their arguments in your own essays/presentations.

sion between peers rather than having managers instruct project teams. This 'top-down' management is simply not efficient because managers cannot be expected to keep up to date with all aspects of schools.

- Finally, the Pinchots argue that the rapid changes in knowledge and society require workers who are multi-skilled. They say that we will need to be able to move between jobs – and understand a little about other people's jobs – in order to work efficiently. This seems to support the current emphasis on lifelong learning, and on schools needing to reflect constantly on their work and learn from their mistakes.

The Pinchots believe that bureaucracies are too rigid and rule-bound to operate successfully in this new kind of society. The reliance of individuals on rules and procedures will hinder their abilities to innovate, work in teams, care for others, and take advantage of opportunities that present themselves.

Thuthuka teachers think about the implications of these changes for their school

*There is heated debate among the teachers about ideas in the article. The Rake says he finds it interesting that new organizations still need rules and someone who makes decisions. What is different, he says, is the **nature of these rules** and the way **in which authority is achieved and then used**.*

'Yes,' says Thulani, 'teachers need to be given more flexibility to innovate within the school, and to make decisions about their own teaching and the way in which the school is run. The challenges are too big and the situation is changing far too rapidly for all decisions to be made by principals and the department. We all need to be able to talk about things and contribute our ideas. This will encourage teachers to take "ownership" of schools: they will be more imaginative, more motivated and ultimately more responsible.'

The Rake agrees: 'Yes, it would also give the school the capacity to take advantage of new opportunities ... to be more "competitive". At the moment the head is simply too busy with day-to-day management issues to think about the future of the school. I think a small development committee – made up of teachers with skills in this area – could begin thinking about our future direction and start giving our school a distinct identity by offering new and interesting programmes. We could also branch out and offer programmes in areas where there is a need, like adult literacy training – and thereby earn some income for our school.'

Nomusa – who was involved in a Learning Area Committee – suggests that the new outcomes-based curriculum already reflects many of the changes that the Pinchots mention. 'It's based on the principle that teachers are curriculum developers and not simply implementers of a syllabus. Teachers are regarded as people able to make choices and design appropriate learning activities,' she says.

*'But it also suggests that because of the increasing complexity of the curriculum – for instance, I can't be expected to know everything about **all** of the subjects that make up my learning area – teachers must work together in teams so that they can share their expertise in different subjects,' Nomusa continues. 'This means that we will need to be "multi-skilled". We **do** need to know a little about the other subjects in our learning areas so that we can develop a good, integrated curriculum. In addition, we need to learn more about designing learning materials, about computers, about ...'*

'OK, OK, you're terrifying me,' says a teacher who has just joined the group. 'I think you are right about Curriculum 2005 ... it does say all these things. But I really do think that this means we have to begin learning ourselves. And I think I'd need help from other teachers in this school too.'

Conclusion

It is evident that the world in which we live is changing significantly. And, as the Thuthuka teachers realize, these changes are reflected in the changes that *Curriculum 2005* proposes for South African education. Schools prepare young people for the kinds of roles they have to play in society. If these roles change, then obviously our curriculum needs to change too.

But we also know that organizations take their particular form from the needs of society at particular times in history. So, while bureaucracies and hierarchies may have been appropriate in stable societies that required the efficient performance of repetitive tasks, they are not appropriate in contemporary societies. This suggests that South African schools also need to reassess the way in which they organize their work and the kinds of relationships they encourage. As we have seen, many of the suggested innovations of *Curriculum 2005* cannot be implemented because of the way Thuthuka is organized.

What have we learnt so far?

- Schools don't exist in a vacuum. They are meant to prepare learners for the challenges of life – economic (including work), social, political and cultural. As these **contexts** change rapidly, new demands are placed on the education system that cannot be ignored.
- We examined the following important trends and forces that are shaping educational policies and impacting on schools in South Africa:
 - **Global economic competition** – more South Africans need to be more competent, particularly in more economically productive areas such as science, technology and business, but also in creative and critical thinking and problem solving.
 - **Unemployment** – new technologies, which are leading to increased levels of work automation, mean that labour-intensive enterprise and the capacity of big business to create jobs are waning. Schools will have to equip learners with the attitudes and skills to start and run businesses of their own.
 - **New technologies, especially information technology** – knowledge is widely available, but also becomes rapidly obsolete. People may find themselves de-skilled more than once in a lifetime, and need to be equipped to adapt, to access and organize information, and to think for themselves throughout their lives.
 - **Political needs in post-apartheid South Africa** – for example, preparation for participation in democracy, promoting tolerance of differences, eliminating racist and sexist attitudes and other prejudices and stereotypes, equity and social justice, and respect for the shared environment.
- There have been changes in organizations to meet the demands of these new contexts, in particular a move away from bureaucratic organizational structures:
 - a move **away from** over-specialization and isolated functioning of employees, rigid bureaucratic lines of command, decision-making only in the hands of management, and top-down co-ordination;
 - a move **towards** cross-disciplinary teamwork, multi-skilling, flatter hierarchies, more participative decision-making, and co-ordination among peers.

These changes have implications for the *curriculum* and *teaching* in schools, as well as for their *organization*.

“
 ... the increasing
 complexity of the
 curriculum requires
 that teachers work
 together in teams ...
 to share their
 expertise
 ”

3.3

Organizing South African schools: what do new policies say?



Introduction

As stated in the MacGregor reading, the Department of Education has issued a series of new education policies, all with the broad aim of redressing the legacies of apartheid. But there are *different* legacies – inequality, a lack of democracy, and an education out of touch with global conditions. Thus, the many different policy proposals aim, in different ways, to:

- equalize education provision;
- democratize decision-making;
- prepare South Africans for life and work in the 21st century.

We will not explore the policies in detail. Our interest is in suggestions about new ways in which schools should be *organized and managed*.

Some key policy changes

Thulani has been scrabbling in his briefcase while the discussion about the Pinchot article has been going on. He is sure he received a document from the department in which many of the ideas that are emerging about 'new' schools have been summarized. Eventually, he finds it. He rushes out to photocopy a couple of pages which he asks the staff to read. Here they are ...

Four key shifts in thinking about school management

- The success of schools will be measured by what they achieve (by their 'outputs'). No-one will be interested in whether the school is neat, or quiet, or newly painted. Instead they will ask things such as: 'What are its results? Do many learners drop out of the school? Are learners displaying lifelong learning qualities?'
- The school will need to provide evidence that it is achieving good educational standards. It must write down what its desired outputs are. It might say: 'The pass rate for our school-leaving class must be 80%', or 'Our choir must involve 40 more children than last year', or 'The number of Grade 7 pupils doing Science must increase to 30 next year'.
- The school must then decide how it will achieve its desired outputs, and also set in place a process where it continuously assesses and reassesses its progress towards achieving these outputs.
- The school must involve as many educators, learners and parents in this process as possible. There is a simple reason for this inclusive and transparent process: if everyone has discussed the school's desired outputs and all agree with them, then everyone is more likely to be motivated to participate in ensuring that these are achieved.

But Thulani found another part of the booklet even more interesting. It suggested that the ways of thinking and the assumptions underlying OBE also informed the new approaches to school organization and management.

OBE and participatory management: the similarities

Consider the following:

- OBE says an educator's success will be measured by learner outcomes; participatory management says a school's success must be measured by its learning outputs.
- OBE says educators must provide evidence for learning success by defining performance indicators; participatory management says schools must do the same.
- OBE says educators must continually assess their own and their learners' progress; participatory management says schools must continually assess or evaluate their progress towards their desired 'outputs'.
- OBE says teaching should be learner-centred, and that outcomes and performance indicators must be made known to learners; participatory management talks of a people-centred approach with pre-defined and transparent performance indicators.

A first tip, then: if you understand the 'paradigm shift' – the change in ways of thinking – in teaching, you can apply these to management as well.

The final section that Thulani photocopies from the document summarizes the key changes in the way 'new' organizations are being organized. He wonders whether these are, in any way, the features of a 'learning organization' ... something they are hearing a lot about, but of which they still have only a hazy understanding.

Changing schools: from 'top-down' to 'participatory' management

1 Principals lead rather than instruct

Principals who operate as leaders realize that their status as 'principal' is dependent on the support of their staff. In other words, their status depends on their ability to lead and motivate their team of educators so that they make changes. In the past, most of us simply respected and obeyed school managers because of their high status rather than their ability to lead and get things done. There was often a 'them' and 'us' attitude.

In 'new' schools, the principal must be seen as leading learners and educators (...) to achieve desired outcomes, rather than as instructing them.

2 The decision-making hierarchy becomes flatter

In the past, decisions were made at the top and then passed down through a clearly defined hierarchy: the principal, to HoDs, to educators, and then to learners. There are a number of problems with this hierarchical style: it is undemocratic and does not fit well with the new democracy in South Africa; decisions often get lost or are misunderstood as they are passed down the hierarchy, which means things often don't get done or get done badly; it creates a 'don't care' attitude among many educators and learners because they have no power to shape the school (...) This makes it difficult for change to occur.

'New' schools should be trying to reduce the rungs on the hierarchical ladder to produce flatter, more open, and more participative structures. This will allow better information flows, and creates an atmosphere in which all members feel a sense of 'ownership'. This, in turn, makes it easier for managers to lead rather than instruct.



These three excerpts are adapted from an official Department of Education 'training' booklet, titled *Curriculum 2005: Implementing OBE 3 – School Management* and published early in 1998. Note how (and in which ways) the department shares the views expressed by McLagan and Nel, and the Pinchots, about the nature of 'new' organizations. Also note down how you may be required to change the ways in which you work.

aspiration: a strong desire to achieve something important

3 The roles we play in schools become more flexible

Our country is changing rapidly. But many of our schools still lock educators into very fixed roles and responsibilities.

'New' schools require a much more flexible structure so that they can adapt to change. This would mean making it possible for an ordinary teacher to do some public relations work for the school because that teacher is good at it, and because the desired output of a better school image is more likely to be achieved if he or she does it rather than the principal. Likewise, the principal may teach Maths because, in this way, the school's other desired outcomes – better Maths results – may be achieved. Roles and functions need to be reassessed so that individuals have the capacity to respond quickly to changing situations and new demands.

4 Responsibility is shared: we can't simply blame the principal

The move towards a more flexible and less hierarchical structure means that responsibility is shared. Effective teamwork is the hallmark of successful learning organizations. When teams can be brought together to serve the needs of the moment more quickly, then more effective results can be achieved. Tying down individuals into separate and independent areas of responsibility can inhibit the capacity of an organization to respond successfully to sudden change.

If a 'culture' of teamwork and brainstorming has been developed at a school, it is likely that the imagination and creativity of people will be much greater. The task teams that work together are far more likely to solve particular problems imaginatively than if a single individual – perhaps the principal – is held responsible for doing this.

5 Leadership is about empowering participants, not wielding power

Some schools invest too much authority and control in too few people. Creating a collaborative management culture requires that those in senior management positions learn to see their leadership role as that of empowering others in the organization, rather than controlling them.

Leadership then becomes a process of building and developing participation and collaboration. In other words, good principals acknowledge that they don't know everything, draw on the expertise around them, and actively develop this expertise.

6 Developing rather than delivering expertise

Schools create processes and structures that develop this expertise, rather than having a few (usually management people) continue to deliver their own expertise. In order to make best use of the expertise in schools, a system of staff development is vital. There are at least three necessary kinds of development process:

- *In OBE schools, all members of the school have a management role. This requires an effective system of staff appraisal and high quality staff development policies that match the needs and aspirations of both individual staff and the organization as a whole.*
- *In a rapidly changing environment, educators will have to update their professional and subject content knowledge regularly so that they can continue to develop appropriate and useful learning in their learners. (...)*
- *Educators may also be asked to play an entirely different role. For instance, there may be no demand for a Biblical Studies teacher, but a great demand for teachers of Computer Literacy. Good schools will develop processes and structures which encourage the development of flexible educators who can teach well in different areas.*

7 Commanding respect through stature, not status

Principals and teachers in 'new' schools command respect without having to use their

status in a threatening way: respect (and authority) is achieved through the stature of the teacher or principal. In old-style schools (or companies), status was entrenched through certain privileges, like company cars, or special parking, or names on the doors of senior managers. Such distinctions between 'the management' and 'the workers' created mistrust and resentment.

New schools, like other organizations, should try to move towards a system where an individual's position in the hierarchy is not the only basis for respect. Instead, this respect will be gained by demonstrating to other teachers and learners that they are worthy of it because they can get things done.

8 Emphasis is on effective schools, not simply on efficiency

In the past, many schools and classrooms were efficiently run. In other words, they were neat and quiet. But strangely, many still produced poor matric results or had high drop-out rates. In other words, the schools weren't educationally effective. They were not producing desired learning outcomes or outputs.

In recent years, an emphasis has been placed on the effectiveness of schools as learning organizations. This involves a commitment to continuous development and improvement, and a constant striving for small but significant improvements in a process which involves everyone in the school. A school's success will be measured by its meeting pre-defined and measurable performance indicators that must be related to its key function – educating young people.

9 Creating a culture of learning rather than controlling behaviour

In the past, some school managers assumed that educators (and learners) in the school would not be able to work without constant direction and supervision; without tight control. In 'new' schools, the approach should be to ensure that the agreed-on outputs are being achieved by entrusting educators and learners to work towards these without constant supervision.

The task of school managers – who include principals, HoDs and ordinary educators – is to create and develop such a culture that enables committed educators and learners to do their work. However, such a culture should also have mechanisms for dealing with the few individuals who don't do their job. But decisions to 'reprimand' should be agreed upon by educators, and should always include suggestions as to how that educator could improve. In other words, it's about creating a system where good teachers are rewarded and poor teachers are held accountable. But rather than the latter being through the reprimand of the principal, it should be through a system which makes it 'natural' to work hard and work well.

The Rake found this 'list' interesting and suggested it was a good 'checklist' for Thuthuka to use when evaluating how well the school was transforming itself. But he also suggested that the staff look at another Department of Education document on school management and change in order to deepen their understanding of how to go about transforming Thuthuka.

A new school organization and management policy for South African schools

Up till now we have questioned whether the old hierarchical and bureaucratic ways of organizing schools are the most appropriate for our new circumstances. We argued that hierarchical organization is an increasingly inefficient and inadequate method, given the new challenges we face. The new government regards a transformation in the way schools are organized and managed as **crucial**. But:

- What do they say about the way schools should change?
- What implications do the new policies have for individual teachers, and for the schools in which they work?

The best place to find answers to these questions is in the policy documents themselves. We will concentrate on **one** of these documents. During 1996, the national Department of Education established a task team to review South Africa's educational system and to make recommendations to improve the management of education. It produced a report called 'Changing management to manage change'. The vision of the report is of a more participative and less hierarchical form of school management. Before you turn to the Reader to read an excerpt from the report, however, take a look at the cartoon sequence on page 65, taken from the report:



Don't spend more than 20 minutes on Activity 10. Discuss your impressions with fellow students.

ACTIVITY 10: ANALYSING THE CARTOON

The first two scenes in this cartoon sequence are self-explanatory: they suggest that teachers, who were government puppets, have now cut themselves free. What is interesting is the third scene. Here the 'liberated' teacher is standing on a pedestal, teaching in a way that is no different from the past. What is the cartoon sequence suggesting, do you think?

Be careful of changing structures without changing cultures!

The Thuthuka teachers have some fun analysing this cartoon sequence. There is an interesting debate and discussion as they think of examples to show how teachers – at their schools, and sometimes including themselves – have been puppets, even though they pretended they were in charge and completely in control. But let's hear from the teachers. Here is Sindi's interpretation of the cartoon sequence:

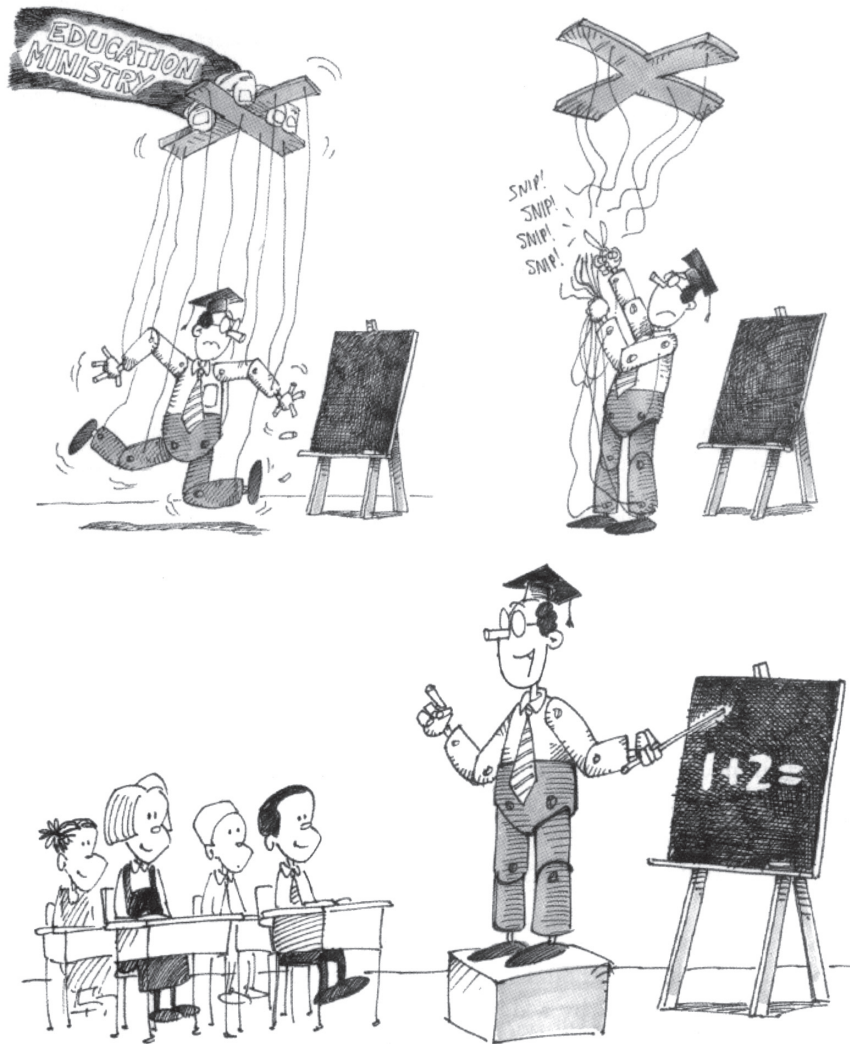


Figure 3.1 Principals and teachers have consistently been at the receiving end of top-down management instructions. The challenge now is to create a new culture and practice of teaching and learning. (Source: EMD Task Team/Dept of Education, Pretoria)

An analysis of the cartoon sequence

by Sindi Nxumalo

Scene 1 shows the teacher under the direct control of the Education Ministry. The teacher represents all teachers who are puppets of the system and have very little control over their work. For example, the curriculum is planned centrally by the ministry; teachers receive top-down orders, and are required simply to implement and administer the curriculum. The ministry decides and prescribes, and the teachers do exactly as they are told.

In scene 2, the teacher cuts himself loose from this top-down control. For the first time, teachers can stand on their own feet. Now, at last, they have freedom to design and structure their work in the best way they can. From now on, the ministry will set only broad guidelines. This enables teachers to become real professionals, to take control, and to make serious decisions about their work. They are no longer puppets!

The third scene is the most interesting, however. Clearly, the same teacher – who has wanted and gained freedom from top-down orders – is depicted. Thus, we would expect him to be more sensitive to the needs of the learners as well. But, instead, he has placed himself on a pedestal (making him superior to the learners). He still perceives himself as the giver of information, and the leader of instructional activities. He could have used this opportunity to become a mediator and a guide, encouraging the learners to be active, but he has not done so. Instead, he plays the old role of active teacher with passive students.

Sindi thinks the point being made is similar to the point that Hopkins et al. made about the link between culture and structure. These writers argued that change is often characterized by a change in structures (the appearance of change), without any change in the culture of the organization (the reality of change). Sindi suggests that the task team cartoonist is warning teachers that the recommended new structures might lead to the *appearance of change* only, unless they change the way they teach and relate to each other, that is, begin changing the *culture* of South African schools. She convinces the others that because the teacher continues to teach in the old authoritarian, teacher-centred way, even though he now has the freedom (more open structures) to design and develop curricula and teach differently, he hasn't yet understood the real meaning of the changes that have taken place. The work on the teacher's attitude is still incomplete. The teachers also feel that this cartoon sequence has a similar message to the one conveyed by the experience of St Mark's School (see page 44).

In a way, the next cartoon sequence, shown on page 67, also deals with the problem of changing schools. In particular, it asks the question: 'How effective are school management training courses in improving management practice at schools?' What do you think the cartoon sequence's answer to this question is? Can you think of a caption for the cartoon which appropriately reflects what it is saying about management training?



As you look at this cartoon sequence, do you:

- notice that scenes 1 and 3 are identical except for the fact that, in scene 3, the principal's office now has a diploma hanging on the wall? What do you think the cartoonist is suggesting by this?
- see the mark the principal has achieved (in scene 2)? What do you think the principal has learnt? Has anything changed as a result of the principal's management course?

Figure 3.2 Management training. (Source: EMD Task Team/Dept of Education, Pretoria)

The Thuthuka teachers also enjoy discussing this cartoon sequence. Here is Thulani's interpretation of it:

Analysing the 'management training' cartoon

by Thulani Shabalala

The first scene shows the principal reading the newspaper in his office, with his feet on the desk. Outside, the learners are behaving in an undisciplined way, the school building is in disrepair, and the teachers are completely demotivated. They are just standing there, watching the children being destructive and making no attempt to change anything.

The principal then decides to go on an education management course

where he learns about teacher motivation and student discipline. He gets his diploma (with an A+ mark!), but it seems his learning doesn't give him any ability to address the problems in his school. Even more problematic is the fact that the course, quite clearly, has not changed his attitude to his job: he is still reading newspapers while the school falls apart outside!

Why is this so? I think the cartoonist suggests that it has to do with at least two issues. First, the course was an old-style 'teacher-talk' training session. While this may sometimes be necessary in education, it would seem that management courses must include activities in which the principal practises some of the ideas he is being taught. Otherwise, he will not be able to make a difference when he returns to the school. The course also needs to deal with his attitude to his job. Despite all the knowledge, he will not improve management without the will to change things.

Second, I think that he is ineffective in dealing with the school's problems because he attempts to do so alone, rather than as a team with other teachers. He seems to manage (or not manage!) as an old-style principal who is isolated in his office, rather than as a 'hands-on' principal who consults and works with teachers and learners to solve problems.

Perhaps the course and the principal treat the school's problems in little bits, rather than trying to get a 'whole' picture. This would result in their addressing obvious issues - like learner discipline - rather than asking questions such as, 'Why are learners undisciplined? What impact does the way in which the school is managed, or how teachers teach, or learners' family backgrounds, have on learner behaviour?'

I would give it a caption something like: 'In the past, the content, methods and location of education management development have mostly been inappropriate'.

Both of Thulani's ideas - the need to work as a team, and the importance of *examining the possible relationships between aspects of a bigger problem* - could be described as characteristics of what people call *holistic (or systems) thinking*. The task team's report, generally, takes a holistic approach to school organization. Later in this section, and then in Section Four, we deal with holistic and systems thinking in more depth.

The 'Changing management to manage change' report is, as you may suspect, critical of the traditional, hierarchical management that is characteristic of so many South African schools. Instead, it favours more democratic and participative ways of organizing schools. This involves changing the structures of school management, as



Compare this new structure with the earlier cartoon of a hierarchical structure (page 21). Notice that both have pyramid shapes with someone clearly in charge. The difference is that the second pyramid is *flatter* (indicating that more people share decision-making powers), and the people in the bottom half *support* the leader (rather than be crushed by the leader!).



Figure 3.3 A 'flatter' pyramid which encourages participation

well as changing the culture and ethos in schools. The task team argues that schools should manage themselves as far as possible, and that decision-making should involve all staff and stakeholders. In effect, they argue for 'flatter pyramids', with responsibility shared in collaborative ways by more people.

Figure 3.3 represents a 'flatter' pyramid which encourages participation. But note that participative organizational styles do not mean anarchy and no leadership. Instead, 'flatter, more participative' structures mean that leaders **consult** and **seek the support** of a wide range of stakeholders when making decisions. But they still mean that decisions **must** be taken!

The task team recognizes that changes of this sort are difficult to achieve in that they have to do with **changing cultures** and not simply school structures. Here are two quotations from the task team report:

*The task of **instilling the new attitudes, skills, knowledge and understanding** is at the heart of the challenge we face in transforming governance and management. The task may be daunting, but it is not impossible.*

*What we are proposing represents a radical **culture shift** for schools and their established ways of working ... Clearly most schools presently have only a limited awareness of the potential for planning which could be done at the school level, and they generally lack an understanding about the skills required.*

Now that you have dipped into the task team's report – and understand some of its thinking about school management and change – we'd like you to deepen your knowledge by reading a chapter from the report, and by listening to Nomlami Mahanjana, the director of human resources development in the Department of Education.

ACTIVITY 11: READING THE TASK TEAM'S REPORT

Turn to and read a chapter from the report entitled 'A new plan for South African schools' (Readings, Section One, 'New Plans for New Contexts'). Once you have completed this, turn to Part 3 of your audiotape (which begins *after* the narrator asks you to complete Activity 5) and listen to Mahanjana explain why the report was written. Also, note the criticisms voiced by school management expert Stella Kaabwe. Then answer these questions in your workbook:

- a Who bears primary responsibility for bringing about change at school level?
- b What is meant by 'school self-management'?
- c What does the task team mean by 'schools as learning organizations'?
- d What 'capacity building' is required at school level? Who should help the schools to build that capacity?

Understanding the 'Changing management to manage change' report

The task team report gives a picture of how schools of the future should be managed. It suggests that all management activity in South African education should aim at creating an environment for more effective teaching and learning. This would include better teaching of learners, as well as schools that considered learning, reflection, and the capacity to innovate, as ongoing features of their own existence. Better learning, then, becomes the criterion for judging the quality of educational management. In other words, management is not an end in itself.



Think back to the work we have done on the relationship between structure and culture in the process of changing schools. Does it sound as if the task team – from what you have seen in the cartoons and read in these two quotations – would agree with the approach to the structure/culture dialectic we have taken so far?



This activity should take no more than 1 hour.

In order to achieve this, the report advocates giving schools a great deal more decision-making power. Each school, and the teachers in it, should be the centre of educational activity and the focus of change. Schools should no longer be the recipients at the bottom of the education system hierarchy, as was the case in the past. But this 'flatter' hierarchy requires that schools introduce better and more democratic internal school management and teacher self-management processes, rather than relying on directions from above. Essentially, its vision is that

schools, as the centres of teaching and learning, must be placed at the centre of education management, rather than at the bottom of a hierarchical and bureaucratic management pyramid.

We have mentioned that the suggested changes in authority structures in schools could be represented by a move from steep pyramids to much flatter authority pyramids. But there is an associated shift evident in the way schools relate to departments. As the cartoon below suggests, the department should support schools – provide the *foundation* for good schooling – rather than crush schools with a top-heavy bureaucracy and ministry.

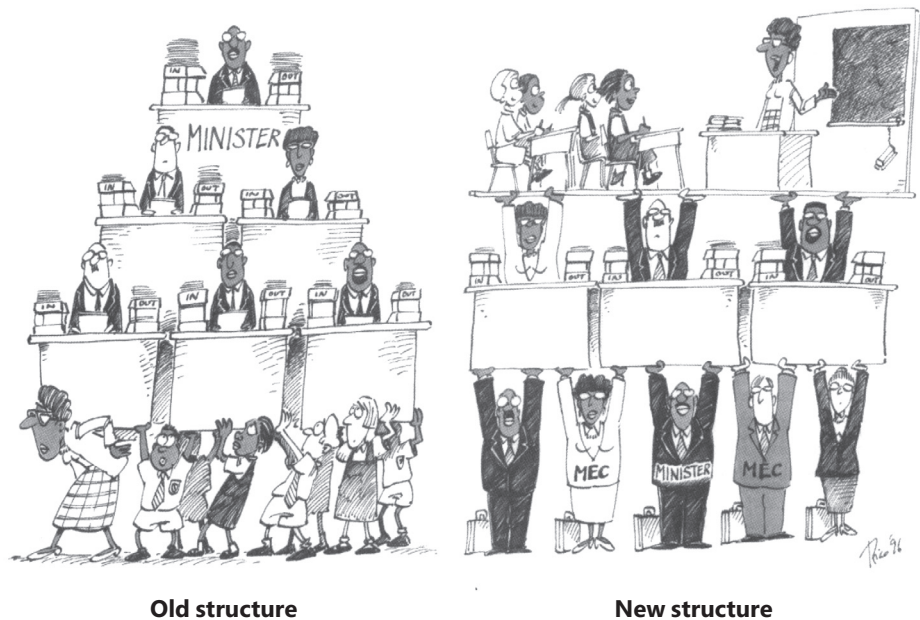


Figure 3.4 Schools, as the centres of teaching and learning, must be placed at the centre of education management, rather than at the bottom of a hierarchical and bureaucratic management pyramid

Part of this transformation must be the development of each school as a *learning organization*. This includes ideas such as:

- schools developing clear 'values' and 'missions' which will drive their progress (rather than these being dictated from above);
- schools operating in a participative and collaborative way, both in relation to the national department and the staff at schools (who should all be involved, in some way, in managing the school);
- schools creating processes and structures (and a culture) that make ongoing reflection and discussion about their performance – and then action to improve performance – part of their normal functioning.

But the report warns that neither changing organizational *structures*, nor retraining principals and deputies in management, is enough to ensure that necessary transformation takes place. They can result in the mere *appearance* of change rather than in real, lasting change. What else is needed, then?

- Changed norms, values and attitudes on the part of the teaching staff. This is not easy to achieve: many will be unreceptive to new ideas. Most people think in a fragmented way about problems, and look for single solutions. They tend not to think about individual problems as related to larger problems.
- A commitment to change, and the competence to manage change in practice (i.e. not just theoretical knowledge of management 'recipes') on the part of principals and deputies.
- Drawing on all possible sources for support: other schools, other levels of the education system, parents, business, NGOs and teacher organizations. This will assist where schools simply don't have the current capacity to deal with all the proposed changes.

Disputes about the way forward at Thuthuka

'So what do we do, now that we've read the report?' asks Thulani.

Sindi suggests, 'We need to take all principals and HoDs and train them in participative management skills. After all, the problem is that these people were never trained for leadership positions. When they do get some training, it is generally irrelevant, and there is no follow-up that could help them with implementation.'

'In addition, the department should appoint good quality teachers and all the 'dead wood' should be encouraged to take severance packages. Teachers should be re-trained, and those who continue to teach badly should be fired. Unless we have strict rules – and an effective mechanism of ensuring that these are adhered to by everybody – we cannot hope to restore the culture of learning and teaching,' Sindi continues.

Thulani agrees. 'You know, we sit here for long hours thinking about how we can make this school a better place for all of us, and in particular for the learners. But it will all come to nothing because of the type of teachers we have here. Can any one tell me why other teachers won't join this group, even though we have invited them almost every day?'

'I sometimes don't blame the teachers, though. It is these hooligan learners we have to deal with who make some of us lose hope and give up,' argues Nomusa.

A lot more is said. Here is a taste of some of the comments:

- *'Lack of discipline is the cause of the destruction of the culture of learning and teaching. We need to go back to basics. Learners should be learners, and unless we emphasize and enforce respect, we may as well forget it.'*
- *'Abolishing corporal punishment, inviting illiterate parents who know nothing about education to dictate to teachers, and allowing the state to shirk its responsibility in the name of decentralization, is a recipe for disaster.'*

At this point, The Rake intervenes. 'I can understand that changing this situation seems impossible. The situation feels so overwhelming. But perhaps we are getting stuck too quickly. If we persisted with ideas on how to change, we would feel less pessimistic. We should do this as our next step. But first, there's another thing that strikes me about the points we are making. Each of us seems to pick out one point – poor discipline, disinterested teachers, or illiterate parents – and to see it as the root of all problems. In my experience, that's seldom the case.'

The dangers of 'atomistic' thinking about change

What The Rake goes on to describe is the dangers of 'atomistic' thinking. This is a kind of thinking where we see problems in isolation, rather than as part of a whole. This, he argues, has led Thuthuka teachers to regard the training of managers, the quality of the teachers, and poor discipline, for example, as separate events, rather than to explore possible *relationships* between each of them.

atomistic: fragmented; the characteristics are not linked or related to one another



Holistic or systems thinking is a vital ability for those people interested in change to schools and organizations. Thus, we deal with it in far more depth later in this section, and then again in Section Four.

For instance, one teacher says the 'dead wood' teachers are the cause of poor quality teaching. The effect of such atomistic thinking might be a decision to fire these teachers. But what if this doesn't lead to better teaching? What if:

- the **cause** is more complex? Perhaps it has to do with poor management **and** dead wood teachers **and** undisciplined learners **and** a lack of parental involvement;
- the **effect** – firing the 'dead wood' – **causes** new problems? Perhaps other good teachers would be angry because their friend had been fired, or start to feel insecure because they may be fired, or learners might feel insecure because of the changes at the school.

As an alternative to this approach, the report proposes that change agents should follow a **holistic** approach to changing schools. Holistic approaches focus on the whole school, in particular on how the different functions of the school (teaching, discipline, management, etc.), and the different players (teachers, learners, parents, managers, etc.), **work together and influence one another**. Holistic thinking is similar to the dialectical thinking we spoke about when considering the relationship between structure and culture.

Holistic thinkers don't simply see problems – like ill-discipline – as having one **cause** or one **solution**. Instead, they would argue, it is necessary to explore the many possible causes of ill-discipline, and attempt to understand how they relate to each other. The 'solution', then, is to create an environment which makes ill-discipline unlikely, and to constantly reassess our 'solution' and make adaptations where necessary.

What have we learnt so far?

- We learnt that the Department of Education expects the style of school organization and management to change in key ways:
 - from managing organizations to leading people;
 - from vertical hierarchy to flatter structures;
 - from fixed occupational roles to more flexible roles;
 - from individual responsibility to shared responsibility;
 - from wielding power to empowering organizational members to take decisions;
 - from delivering expertise to developing the expertise of organizational members;
 - from expecting status to provide authority to realizing that authority emerges from stature and performance;
 - from managing efficiently to managing so that schools are educationally effective;
 - from attempting to control behaviour to creating a learning culture.
- In addition, a department task team repeated, but added more depth, to a number of these points:
 - Management is not an end in itself: it should aim at creating an environment for more effective teaching and learning.
 - Each school, and the teachers in it, will be the centre of activity and the focus of change: they will no longer be the recipients at the bottom of the education system hierarchy.
 - Increasing school self-management and teacher self-management

require 'flatter' hierarchies, both in the education system and within schools, and support rather than instructions from above.

- Neither changing organizational **structures**, nor retraining principals and deputies in management, is enough to ensure that necessary transformation takes place. Instead, they can result more in the **appearance** of change rather than real, lasting change.
- Changing the culture of the teaching staff is not easy to achieve because many will be unreceptive to new ideas. Most think in a fragmented way about problems, and look for single solutions. They tend not to think about individual problems as related to larger problems.
- All activity in the school should be driven by the values and mission of the school, on the basis of all participants feeling 'ownership' of the school's mission. This requires encouraging all staff and other stakeholders to participate and collaborate in decision-making and problem-solving.
- The school needs to see itself as a 'learning organization', managing change as an ongoing process, and supporting individual development **and** its collective learning.

What makes a school 'good' or 'effective'?

3.4

Introduction

The task team's report, 'Changing management to manage change', frequently refers to the need for 'effective' schools or 'quality' schools, but it never really explains what is meant by 'effective' or 'quality' or 'good'. In order to change schools, we need to know:

- **what** makes schools good or effective – the kind of schools we want;
- **how** we might go about changing our schools to become such institutions.

ACTIVITY 12: 'GOOD' SCHOOLS I KNOW

Think about two schools that you would consider to be 'good' (or 'effective') schools.

- a** First, describe four characteristics that you think make these schools 'good'.
- b** Second, explain why you think these are key features of a 'good' school.

In order to make this activity 'real', we suggest you think of the kind of school to which you would want to send your own child. Otherwise, draw on your experience as a learner: what did you like about your school and what did you wish your school offered you?



This activity should take you about 30 minutes.

Two approaches to defining a 'good' school

While there is some agreement, in most cases teachers list entirely different characteristics when describing what they think is a good school.

'I think a good school is one with a high matric pass rate, with good facilities, and highly qualified teachers,' says Nomusa.

Sipho disagrees. He says he attended a school in a rural area which had very poor facilities (no electricity or library, for instance) and poorly qualified teachers, but it had an atmosphere in which teachers and learners worked hard and produced interesting and innovative teaching (and fairly good matric results).

'So, Nomusa, I think a good school is one with motivated learners and committed teachers,' argues Sipho. 'Obviously good resources and qualified teachers are important, but I think an atmosphere which motivates teachers and learners is more important. I remember feeling encouraged by the fact that my own teachers were constantly meeting to discuss how to improve the school as well as improve themselves. I think this motivated learners like myself to achieve good results.'

'But would you send your children to this school?' asks Thulani provocatively. 'I know your kid is at Wildwood, a former Model C school with qualified teachers and good resources.'

*Sipho responds immediately. 'That's true. But you also know that I pulled my kids out of another former Model C school – which even had a huge computer centre – because there was such tension there. Kids seemed demotivated and undisciplined, and teachers disinterested. So Thulani, as I said, resources are important but **not** as important as relationships and the atmosphere within the school.'*

How does your choice of features of a good school compare with these? If your features are different, don't be dismayed. In fact, just as Nomusa and Sipho prioritize different features, so do the many research studies worldwide on the issue of 'good' schools. In an attempt to make sense of the many different responses, writers have divided the research into two broad categories:

- A **school effectiveness approach** which generally uses **quantitative** methods, for instance the 'counting' of resources or qualifications, to develop criteria that characterize schools defined as effective because of their good results. It focuses on what **inputs, such as adequate resources and qualified teachers**, are needed for schools to produce **desired outputs or end-products**.
- A **school improvement approach** which is more action- and development-oriented. It uses more **qualitative** research, such as interviews and classroom observation, to explore the **processes of teaching, learning and change**. School improvement studies tend to define learning more broadly than as merely good results: they talk of educating a whole person. There is often an assumption that improved teaching processes are all that are needed to produce quality learning.

You will notice that Nomusa emphasizes the importance of the **resources** – the inputs – required in order to achieve a particular end-product, which she measures in terms of matric results. Sipho, however, argues that a **good atmosphere and motivation** – the processes of schooling – are the characteristics of a 'good' school. He seems to define a good school as one with happy, hardworking, and motivated learners rather than as one that simply has good matric results.

As you will notice, the way we define 'effectiveness' depends on what we see as valuable in schooling. Nomusa's criterion of a 'good' school is one which produces good matric results, while Sipho suggests that a 'good' school is one which encourages and supports learning and motivation. A businessperson's definition of a good school may be one that produces high pass rates in Maths and Science: in other words, a school that prepares learners for the workplace. However, parents might value a school which develops their child's interpersonal skills and curiosity about learning.

This shows that schools can be judged on a number of **different criteria**. Before we make judgements about what makes a school 'good', we need to know what



Into which category of thinking do your ideas in your answer to Activity 12 fall? Do they focus on results, and on the need for resources and facilities to help achieve them, or on the need for dedicated and creative teaching? Are matric results the best way to judge the quality of a school? Is it legitimate to say that you will focus on making internal processes better, even if the matric results remain very bad?

criteria we are using. In order to do this, we will explore the two approaches to researching schools mentioned earlier: school effectiveness and school improvement research. While we will distinguish between the two approaches, we must emphasize that they are not mutually exclusive: we can learn from both.

mutually exclusive: here this means that if one theory is true or valid, the other theory cannot be (the writer is saying this is *not* the case here)

What does school effectiveness research say about 'good' schools?

Research on school effectiveness began in the 1970s, when researchers in Britain and the USA noticed that some schools achieved better student results than others. Based on this criterion – *good student results* – they called these schools 'effective schools'.

But what was it about these schools that 'caused' them to produce good learner results? School effectiveness researchers hoped that if they could isolate the characteristics which made these schools 'effective', then other schools could be made more effective by developing the same characteristics. So, their next step was to carry out large surveys on the schools they had described as 'effective' to see what features these schools had in common. They assumed that there was a link between these characteristics and the good learner results all these schools had produced.

Many different lists of characteristics were drawn up by different researchers, but most lists showed similar characteristics. Here is a list of the features which a large number of effective primary schools had in common. It is taken from a book by Sammons, Hillman and Mortimore (1995):

- professional leadership (which includes building participation by teachers)
- shared vision and goals
- a learning environment (a structured day, time-on-task, etc.)
- concentration on teaching and learning
- purposeful teaching
- high expectations (expecting the best from teachers or learners)
- positive reinforcement (rewarding good work among teachers and learners)
- monitoring progress (setting criteria and monitoring these)
- learner rights and responsibilities
- home-school partnership (good links with parents)
- a learning organization (staff development; focus on reflection).



These research findings can be found in Sammons, P., Hillman, T. and Mortimore, P. 1995. *Key Characteristics of School Effectiveness Research*. London: Institute of Education.

Two other useful summaries of effective schools research are Brighouse and Tomlinson. 1991. *Successful Schools: Education and Training Paper No 4*. London: Institute for Public Policy Research; and Reid et al. 1987. *Towards the Effective*

What did Thuthuka teachers think of this list of features of 'effective' schools?

Nomusa points out that this approach supports her initial views, but Thulani is prepared to argue against the effective school researchers. 'Don't you think this might be a problematic way in which to define a good school?' he asks.

'But what other way is there, except through comparing test results?' responds Nomusa. 'We know that results are important to parents who are looking for a school for their children.'

*But Thulani persists, 'Yes, but I think that effectiveness is **much more** than simply good test results. The school Thandi goes to also teaches children to think critically and creatively. So I do want a school that produces good results, but I know that this is often only a measure of a learner's ability to remember large amounts of information.'*

While the Thuthuka teachers cannot agree on whether the criterion of matric results is a valid one or not, there is no disagreement about Mortimore's characteristics of effective schools. All the teachers agree that a school which had these characteristics is likely to be a good school.

But they do have a problem. As Siphon puts it: 'I have two difficulties. First, it's all very well to tell us what an effective school must have in place. But this tells us

*nothing about the dynamics of the school. It tells us nothing about the processes, the culture, the feelings, within the school. Surely these have an impact on schooling? And second, it gives us no idea about **how we can get our school to develop these features.***

*The Rake makes another point (which again reveals his holistic thinking): 'It seems to me that a lot of the features on Sammom et al.'s list aren't really separate. They happen together. If there is "professional leadership of the staff by the head", this is likely to be based on having a "shared vision and goals". If there is "a learning environment", this is likely to involve "purposeful teaching" or "setting high expectations". So I think **these features interact with each other. We cannot think about them separately.***

“
... school
effectiveness research
tells us what an 'effective'
school is, but not
how to change
schools ...
”

Some weaknesses of school effectiveness research

As Nomusa (and even Thulani) point out, school effectiveness researchers may be correct in using learner results as an indicator of how effective a school is. But as Siphos and Thulani say, this is a **very limited view** of 'effectiveness'. It doesn't focus on things which cannot be measured, such as the **quality** of teacher-learner interaction, the learning of interpersonal skills, or happiness. And, crucially, school effectiveness research gives 'ineffective' schools no idea of the **strategies** they could use to become effective. The Rake also puts his finger on a key weakness of much of the school effectiveness research: it tends to see different features **in isolation** from one another, rather than holistically.

So, while school effectiveness research has provided important insights into what good schools are, there have been criticisms similar to those made by the Thuthuka teachers. Critics have argued that school effectiveness researchers tend to:

- define 'effectiveness' **too narrowly**;
- define it mainly **in terms of results or outputs**;
- assume incorrectly that weak ('ineffective') schools could be improved by **developing the same characteristics** as effective schools;
- neglect to explain **how we make change happen** (i.e. they tell us **what** an 'effective' school is, but not **how** to change);
- treat complex institutions like schools too simplistically; the characteristics given in lists are misleadingly simple, and don't begin to explain how they change as they interact with one another in particular schools;
- ignore the importance of different **contexts** (for example, developed or developing countries) and the way they might affect a school's ability to function.

In response to these criticisms, researchers have attempted to find more sophisticated answers to the question, 'What makes schools "good"?' Let us compare Sammom et al.'s results with those from more recent school effectiveness research in Africa.

School effectiveness research in developing countries

Here is a *summary* of the characteristics of effective schools in developing countries, based on the work of two researchers, Levin and Lockheed.

'Effective' schools in the developing world

Necessary inputs

- *Curriculum*: The curriculum content needs to be relevant to the experience of learners, properly sequenced, and appropriately paced.
- *Instructional materials*: Where textbooks are available and are used by teachers, learning is greater.
- *Time for learning*: Time on task, as well as repetition, promote learning.
- *Teaching practices*: Effective schools encourage active learner involvement, including dialogues and debates among learners and teachers.

Facilitating conditions

- *Community-school relationship and parent involvement*: Schools are more effective when the community contributes to the school and participates in school activities. The school, also, contributes resources and programmes to the community.
- *School-based professionalism*: The principal has a crucial role in school effectiveness. Also, teachers play an important role in shaping the school. At the same time, effective schools take steps to improve teachers' skills and knowledge. Teachers' autonomy must be balanced with their accountability; the school and the teachers are jointly responsible for producing good results.
- *Flexibility*: Effective schools are able to adapt to local needs and conditions, especially in terms of making curricula relevant, making adjustments to level and pace, organizing flexibly to make the best use of resources, and being flexible in teaching methods.

The will to act

- *Vision*: For schools to be effective, there needs to be a commitment on the part of government, political parties, business, parents, and learners to a vision of excellence.
- *Decentralized solutions*: Effective schools need to have a high degree of autonomy, while being accountable to parents and the local community. Responsibility shifts from central bureaucracies to the school level.



This summary is based on research findings in Levin & Lockheed. 1993. *Effective Schools in Developing Countries*. London & Washington, D.C.: Falmer Press.

ACTIVITY 13: COMPARING 'EFFECTIVENESS' RESEARCH FROM DEVELOPING AND DEVELOPED COUNTRIES

- Read through the lists compiled by Sammon et al., and Levin and Lockheed carefully. Write down all elements they have *in common*. (Sometimes the same point is explained in different words, so be careful!)
- List any differences between the two lists.
- Suggest which characteristics emerge as common to 'good' schools, regardless of context.



This activity should take about 40 minutes. Re-read your answer to Activity 12 before you tackle Activity 13. If you have the video, you may want to watch from the beginning to the title 'The school-as-organization approach'.

Thuthuka teachers' responses

These questions lead to a lot of discussion and debate at Thuthuka. A number of teachers say, quite categorically, that research from 'elsewhere' – like Sammon's research – isn't relevant to South Africa. But when the group analyses the two lists more carefully, they find that while there are important differences – which reflect the different educational priorities of different contexts – there is also a great deal of overlap.

Of particular interest to Thulani is Levin's and Lockheed's third category of features – titled 'The will to act' – which is not mentioned at all in school effectiveness research in the developed world. The teachers wonder why this issue is important in schools in developing countries.

'Maybe this is because in so many schools in the developing world there is a sense of lethargy,' suggests Sipho. 'Teachers often feel that someone else – the government, for instance – should do things for them. Perhaps in developed countries teachers have been given a great deal more control – through decentralization – and also have a better attitude. In other words, perhaps "the will to act" is simply assumed to be in place in schools in developed countries, while it still has to be built in developing countries.'

'Hmnn, that's interesting,' comments The Rake. 'Maybe that's what the COLTS campaign in South Africa is all about ... it's about building the "will to act". It also reminds me of that Hopkins article where he argues that changes to **structure and culture** are necessary. The will to act seems to have both structural and cultural implications: more responsibility and power needs to be given to schools, but we also need to inculcate in teachers an attitude which allows them to use this more responsibly. For instance, they need to be able to develop a "vision" for their school, and then have the "will" to work towards it.'

But Nomusa wants to move on. She notes more 'significant' differences between the lists.

'First, one of the differences is that the availability of textbooks is seen as a crucial indicator of an "effective" school in developing countries, but it isn't mentioned in the research from developed countries. Again, this is probably because **all** schools in developed countries have textbooks, so these are not a factor!' says Nomusa. 'Second, the issue of "flexibility" – of adapting the curriculum to local needs – is regarded as an important indicator of an "effective" school in Africa, but isn't mentioned in Sammon's research. Perhaps this is important in Africa because things change so rapidly, and because our conditions are so diverse ... which may not be the case in Britain, for instance.'

The discussion continues for some time. The teachers note that, in the developing world, the involvement of the community is much more important than in the developed world (where 'outside involvement' is limited to parents). They also suggest that some features which seem not to apply to both developed and developing countries are, in fact, common but are simply expressed differently. An example is Sammon's reference to 'purposeful teaching'. This is picked up by Levin and Lockheed in a number of places – for instance, in the references to a curriculum that is 'properly sequenced and appropriately paced'; and to 'time on task'.

After further discussion, the teachers agree that the context in which schools operate can make a difference, but that many issues – such as the involvement of learners, teachers and parents in decision-making; committed teachers and structured learning time; good leadership by the principal (expressed under 'school-based professionalism' in Levin's and Lockheed's list); and ongoing professional development for teachers – are characteristics common to 'good' schools around the world.

The teachers also agree that schools in developing countries face enormous difficulties (such as shortages of learning resources and few classroom structures), which often makes it easier for teachers simply to accept the situation rather than to change it. In these situations, the problems seem so large that people simply give up: teachers may not know **what** or **how** to change things, or there may be little support

lethargy: apathy, an inability to move oneself to act

COLTS campaign: Campaign to revive a Culture of Learning and Teaching in Schools

for change. So it is often easier to say, 'That is just how things are.'

'Yes,' says The Rake, 'that is exactly our difficulty, but it also points to the reason why Levin and Lockheed say that the "will to act" is so important in the developing world context. It seems that those schools where heads and teachers (and learners and parents) have overcome this defeatist attitude, have moved beyond simply asking for more resources. They are now working together to make changes – and are beginning to deliver good results.'

'So, are you saying that a lack of resources is not the biggest factor inhibiting change? Are you saying that a bigger factor is the attitude of stakeholders?' asks Thulani.

'Well, I think the research suggests this,' responds The Rake. 'But do you know what I like about Levin's and Lockheed's list? It is the fact that they group factors – they start seeing these characteristics as linked. While Sammon's list is completely atomistic, Levin and Lockheed suggest that, for instance, necessary inputs include structural things – like the availability of instructional materials and relevant curriculum – as well as cultural issues – like "time on task" and interactive learning. In other words, it's not an "either/or" question. To develop effective schools we need better resourcing, but this alone will not bring about a good school. We also need better teachers, and better attitudes among teachers ... and this we can begin working on at Thuthuka right now.'

But how do schools begin the process of change that The Rake is talking about? While Thuthuka teachers now have some guidelines on *what* to change if they want to make their school an 'effective' school, school effectiveness research has offered them very little on *how* to change their school (except that The Rake will ensure that all their planning is holistic!).

We will now turn to the other group of researchers mentioned earlier, called 'school improvement researchers'. This group has developed a different approach to answering the question: 'What makes a school "effective"?' They suggest that what actually happens inside schools and classrooms is what makes the difference between 'good' schools and 'bad' schools. But even more importantly for the Thuthuka teachers, they offer some help on *how* to change a school. Let's have a look at this research.

What does school improvement research say about 'good' schools?

School improvement research starts from the basic assumption that teaching and learning are the main activities of a school. Therefore, efforts to improve schools must have an impact on the teaching and learning in the school. In other words, the organization and management of a school only exists so that learning and teaching can happen effectively in the school. These researchers say that there is absolutely no point in a school having an efficient administration – for instance, a school which is quiet, which runs on time, where all paperwork is efficiently filed, and where all teachers are in their classrooms teaching – if all this efficiency does not improve the school's teaching and learning.

Likewise, they argue that quantitative factors – like a school with good resources and qualified teachers – do not necessarily produce good education. And they also suggest that good results are not necessarily an *indicator* of good education.

In Section Four we introduce you to a number of school change case studies that illustrate 'school improvers' at work. The video also provides local examples of school change processes that are informed by 'school improvement' research. But, increasingly, researchers are arguing that these two approaches are *not* contradictory. In fact, they argue, the approaches are complementary.

Let's see what two school improvement researchers, Heneveld and Craig, say. This overview of the findings of school improvement research is based on material found in their book *Schools Count* (1996).



The *Sunday Times* newspaper runs an annual top schools survey in South Africa. Although controversial – some argue that it promotes unhealthy competitiveness – the survey is interesting in that it highlights schools that produce very good education despite having very poor resources.

incremental: increasing by stages, not all at once



Heneveld and Craig's findings are based on original research found in a 1996 World Bank report entitled: 'Schools count: World Bank project designs and the quality of primary education in sub-Saharan Africa'. But the idea that the two research approaches are 'growing together' is increasingly popular. You might want to read Reynolds et al. 1996. *Making Good Schools: Linking School Effectiveness and School Improvement*. London: Routledge.

What is a 'good' school? The findings of school improvement research

The school improvement approach aims to bring about valuable changes in *student learning outcomes*, in *teachers' skills and attitudes*, and in the *organizational functioning of schools*. While this approach draws on the school effectiveness approach, it emphasizes the *processes of change* in a school rather than the relationship between inputs into a school and its outputs.

The strength of school improvement research, we believe, lies in its concentration on *how change occurs* in school systems. This research tends to be *holistic* and *action-oriented*. In other words, it often proposes *improvement strategies* that seek to *achieve long-term goals*. Some school improvement researchers argue that change should be slow and incremental, while others urge dramatic restructuring. In either case, the key themes identified by the main researchers on school improvement include:

- the importance of effective leadership;
- the importance of shared vision-building and support for school improvement strategies throughout the organization and, ideally, at both school and district levels;
- the importance of active initiation and participation by all stakeholders;
- the importance of changing behaviour and beliefs as well as structures;
- the importance of collaborative planning and decision-making;
- the importance of organizational policies that support action and press for continual improvement;
- the importance of staff development and assistance in developing resources;
- the importance of monitoring efforts towards accountability and improvement;
- the importance of recognizing when jobs are well done.

After working in developing countries (Bangladesh, Colombia and Ethiopia), Per Dalin and colleagues published their findings which showed that the results of school improvement efforts in these countries were not very different from school effectiveness results. In schools adopting a school improvement approach, the following characteristics were evident:

- the in-service training process is well-implemented, regular, relevant and practical;
- the school works actively on the adaptation of the curriculum and the production of local teaching-learning materials;
- the principal is motivated, plays an active co-ordination and support role, is an instructional leader, works closely with teachers, encourages teachers, and shares responsibilities;
- there is a team spirit in the school where teachers co-operate, student attitudes towards the reform is positive, and teachers help each other with teaching problems;
- supervision is regular, shared between the supervisor and the principal, and is a combination of pressure and support;
- the school experiences more success, more positive students, teacher co-operation, professional exchanges and extra resources;
- the school gets more support from the community; parents are more interested in the schooling of their children; the community gives material support and financial support.

In the end, Heneveld and Craig conclude that the two approaches to school change – school effectiveness and school improvement – should be integrated in a way that they complement each other.

What are the weaknesses of school improvement research?

We have already looked at some criticisms of school effectiveness research. School improvement research also has its critics. In particular, these critics suggest that:

- School improvement research is often not as rigorous or objective as school effectiveness research. The critics argue that this is because the school improvement approach usually relies on interviews and observations, while school effectiveness research collects data like exam results, the number of books available in a school, and the amount of time teachers spend in classrooms. They argue that this quantitative research is more objective than school improvement research (which is largely qualitative).
- School improvement research often concentrates its attention *inside* schools, without locating these schools in their broader contexts. Critics suggest that it does not really address the question of *why* there are differences in quality *between* different schools. They say school improvement researchers seem to assume that 'good schooling' always means the same thing, and that it is available to everyone. They do not question what 'quality' is, and why some schools have it and others don't.

rigorous: careful, systematic and precise
objective: not influenced by personal feelings

But, despite these criticisms, school improvement approaches are currently probably more widely used by people attempting to change schools than school effectiveness research. This is largely because school improvement approaches tend to focus more on *how* we improve schools and on the importance of human agency (as opposed to resources) in changing schools. School effectiveness research is still used in large policy studies, and does provide useful information about the characteristics of effective schools.

human agency: the ability of people to achieve the goals and results they desire

In fact, as we have suggested, the two approaches are 'growing together'. In other words, both approaches have learnt from each other and have thereby improved their research methodologies. A 1996 publication – *Making Good Schools: Linking School Effectiveness and School Improvement* by Reynolds et al. (London: Routledge) – includes a number of studies in which writers show how the two approaches are growing together. Stoll et al. provide an interesting comparison of the two traditions, shown in Table 3.1 on page 82, in the same book.

Table 3.1 The separate traditions of school effectiveness and school improvement

| School effectiveness | School improvement in the 1980s |
|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focus on schools • Focus on school organization • Data driven, with emphasis on outcomes • Quantitative in orientation • Lack of knowledge about how to implement change strategies • More concerned with change in learner outcomes • More concerned with schools at a point in time • Based on research knowledge • Limited range of outcomes • Concerned with schools that are effective • Static orientation (school as it is) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focus on individual teachers or groups of teachers • Focus on school processes • Rare empirical evaluation of effects of changes • Qualitative in orientation • Concerned with change in schools exclusively • More concerned with journey of school improvement than its destination • More concerned with schools as changing • Focus on practitioner knowledge • Concern with multiple outcomes • Concern with how schools become effective • Dynamic orientation (school as it has been or might be) |



Looking for better schools in South Africa

We will now examine a South African study which has used elements of both approaches in order to find what makes a school effective. The study refers to 'good' schools as 'resilient' schools.



This activity should take about 45 minutes. As you listen to Potterton and Vinjevoold talk about the two projects, try to link the way they go about identifying 'top' or 'resilient' schools with the processes and criteria used by the school effectiveness and school improvement approaches that you have learnt about.

ACTIVITY 14: THE SEARCH FOR BETTER SOUTH AFRICAN SCHOOLS

Before you start reading, turn to Part 4 on your audiotape, which begins just *after* the narrator asks you to complete Activity 12. Listen to Mark Potterton, one of the researchers, and to Penny Vinjevoold, a researcher in another South African investigation – The Top 100 Schools Project – as they explain:

- how the researchers went about identifying 'good' schools;
- what they discovered about the characteristics of 'resilient' and 'top' schools.

The excerpt begins with Andrew Schofield explaining how he understands the differences between school improvement and school effectiveness research approaches. As you listen, note any points of interest in your workbook. In particular, note any concrete examples that Potterton or Vinjevoold may provide to illustrate the differences between the approaches.

The 'resilient schools' research

In 1997, Christie and Potterton carried out a study on schools in South Africa that were managing to continue to operate in difficult circumstances while schools around them were breaking down. To identify these schools, the researchers did *not* use the criterion of test results. Instead, they state: 'Our criteria for identifying schools were deliberately vague: we asked individuals and organizations to recommend schools that they thought were operating well under difficult circumstances ...' The researchers drew up a list of questions and interviewed principals, teachers and, where possible, learners. The aim was to draw out patterns of what was common in all the 32 schools they studied. Although this study aimed to identify 'effective' schools in South Africa, it did not rely on 'school effectiveness' research alone. In fact, the qualitative methodology used (visiting schools, conducting interviews, and observing school processes, rather than counting or measuring inputs), and the study's emphasis on processes rather than exam results, indicate – arguably – that this research project was closer to the school improvement approach.

We'd now like you to read the summary of Christie's and Potterton's major findings (Readings, Section Four, 'Strategies for school change'). Then complete Activity 15 in your workbook.



This is a long but important activity. We are now asking that you 'integrate' the different ideas you have learnt and begin building your own 'theory' of what makes schools 'good'. Spend about 2 hours on this activity. We suggest you re-listen to Parts 1-4 of your audiotape before you begin.

ACTIVITY 15: SOUTH AFRICA'S MOST 'RESILIENT' SCHOOLS

- a** Look back at the following:
- Sammon's list of characteristics of effective schools (page 75);
 - Levin's and Lockheed's list of effective school characteristics in developing countries (page 77);
 - Heneveld's and Craig's list of key themes identified by school improvement research (page 80);
 - Dalin's list of results on school improvement research in developing countries listed in the Heneveld and Craig excerpt (page 80);
 - Christie's and Potterton's list of characteristics of resilient schools (Reader, pages 94–99).

Note the points which you think are similar in each list. What does each list have that is different from the others?

- b** In the introductory paragraph to their research report (not included in the reading), Christie and Potterton write: 'This should not be read as a checklist of discrete characteristics that could be unproblematically transferred from school to school.' Think of the criticisms of both school effectiveness and school improvement research. How does the comment by Christie and Potterton relate to the criticisms of this research?

Thuthuka teachers' responses

After some discussion, the Thuthuka teachers are able to identify many similarities. In fact, they find more similarities than differences. Thulani sums this up by saying, 'I really think that Heneveld and Craig have a point when they say that school effectiveness and school improvement research are 'growing together'. We should use these approaches together, and draw strengths from both.'

Here are some of the teachers' comments:

- *Sindi is struck by the similarity between Christie's and Potterton's '**sense of responsibility**', and Levin and Lockheed's '**will to act**': 'It seems to me that they are saying the same thing,' she says.*
- *The Rake notes the importance of good **leadership**. 'Although this can mean different things to different people, all the approaches mention the importance of the principal. But leadership also seems to include communicating with teachers, building a vision with them, and involving them in decision-making ... not simply handing out orders!'*
- *Sipho picks out a number of points on **teaching and learning**. 'It's clear that all of the lists have teaching and learning in a central role. Sammon's term – "a work-centred environment" – sounds good to me. There is also mention of the importance of time for learning. All the lists expect a lot of the teachers. I agree with the point that we should pay attention to involving learners more actively.'*
- *Nomusa comments, 'The South African study mentions that schools should be **safe and orderly places** for teachers and learners. This is not mentioned in the other studies, possibly because schools in other countries are not faced with violence and criminal elements as South African schools are.'*
- *The Rake sums up by pointing out the importance of **parent and community involvement**. 'This accords with my own experience that a school can never operate effectively if it doesn't have some parental support. In fact, good relations with the community around the school are essential.'*

What have we learnt so far?

- Since directionless change may be worse than no change at all, we looked to the findings of two key research approaches to give us a more precise sense of what a 'good' school might be.
- In answer to the question, 'What makes a school "good"?' we have seen that schools can be judged on a number of different criteria. Before judging that one school is 'good' and another is 'not good', we need first to reach agreement on the criteria for judging.
- The *school effectiveness* approach uses quantitative research methods to isolate the key characteristics of schools defined as effective because of their good results. It focuses on what 'inputs' are needed for schools to produce the desired outputs.
 - We found that research findings in developing countries like South Africa are similar to those in developed countries. But some factors – such as the involvement of the community, the provision of instructional materials, and the 'will to act' to effect improvements – are necessary to the production of good results in developing countries. In developed countries, however, these are either not as necessary, or are taken for granted.
 - Weaknesses of the approach are its narrow definition of 'effectiveness'; its failure to explain how to *bring about* change; and its oversimplified connection between certain key factors and success.
- *School improvement* research uses more qualitative research methods, such as interviews and classroom observation, to understand the *processes* of teaching, learning and change which these researchers believe are the key criteria of 'good' schools.
 - This approach argues that some of the factors identified as necessary for 'school effectiveness' do not *necessarily* result in better teaching and learning.
 - This approach has been criticized for not being as objective as the school effectiveness approach. However, it has also been criticized for focusing too much on processes within schools, without attempting to see these in the broader context of factors outside the individual schools which impact on quality.
- School effectiveness research and school improvement research have tended to use different criteria and different approaches. We need to understand both approaches, and to integrate their findings in ways which will help us to change our schools.
- The South African 'resilient schools' research has combined some of the techniques of both approaches in its attempt to avoid some of the weaknesses inherent in both.

Developing schools as 'learning organizations'

3.5

Are 'learning organizations' and 'effective' schools the same kinds of organization?

'We now have a fairly good idea of the kinds of features "good" or so-called "effective" schools seem to possess,' says Nomusa. 'I like that ... because it gives me some idea of what I should aim my change efforts towards ... it gives me a vision of what Thuthuka could be. But I am a little confused. The government and other people have said we should aim to be a "learning organization". Is this the same thing as an "effective school"?' she wonders aloud.

All the Thuthuka teachers have answers for Nomusa! Thulani is convinced that 'learning organization' is simply another name for 'effective school'. 'After all, every bit of research we have read says "good" schools prioritize quality teaching and learning,' he says.

Sipho disagrees: 'Sure! But that is so obvious! I think learning organizations must mean more than this. I remember the new department report on management saying something about learning organizations making change part of their organizational ethos. But what exactly does that mean?'

'I see I was right!' says Nomusa. 'We don't really know what learning organizations are! I think we need to read a bit more about them to see whether they are similar to "effective schools".'

The Rake agrees: 'I think there is a point in what Nomusa is saying. If I have to convince the management team of this school about the need for change, I need to be very clear about the kind of school I want Thuthuka to be. At the moment, if I were asked to describe a "learning school", I couldn't offer much more than Sipho and Thulani.'

'I don't know,' says Jabu (a new member of the Thuthuka study group) impatiently. 'I'd rather do something practical ... like visiting a school we know has transformed itself – Zizamele Secondary School, for instance. What if one or two of us visit Zizamele? There we could get firsthand information on how the teachers turned their school into the success it is today. I mean, we all remember that a few years ago they were even worse than we are.'

*After a some debate, the group agrees that the two options – visiting the school **and** reading further – should be done at the same time. 'Remember the Bush article we read earlier?' says Sipho. 'He argued that we need to use our own experience, and the experience of others, but that this won't give us the full picture. For instance, Zizamele is only one of many schools that have changed. So why don't we use the theory we have of effective schools, and the little we know about learning organizations, as a tool to analyse **how** Zizamele has changed?'*

This time it is The Rake who has been searching in his briefcase during the conversation. 'I think that's the best idea. I came across what I think is another good explanation of a learning organization from a book by Davidoff and Lazarus called The Learning School. They say it is:

an organization which is constantly and systematically reflecting on its own practice, and making appropriate adjustments and changes as a result of new insights gained through that reflection. In this way we are talking about professional teacher development (with the emphasis on 'people' change) and organization development (organizational change) in order to equip the school as a whole to become more effective in its purpose and goals.

Planning the school observation

The Rake offers to make arrangements with the principals of both schools, and Thulani and Nomusa are chosen to undertake the mission. They prepare for their two days away from Thuthuka by setting work for their classes, and their colleagues help them to draw up a roster for supervising their classes in their absence. A week later, Thulani and Nomusa present the group with a suggestion as to how they will 'analyse' Zizamele.

'We don't just want to say things like "this is nice", or "that is bad". So we have drawn up a kind of checklist in which we have attempted to synthesize the different lists of "good" school characteristics. We have also listed the few features we know that learning organizations have. We plan to use this as an "observation schedule" at Zizamele,' says Thulani.

'Did you find that any of the features from the school effectiveness lists clashed with any of the points in the school improvement lists?' asks Sipho.

*'We expected to find some disagreement, but we didn't. In fact, the lists overlapped, as we saw before. However, we **did** find differences of emphasis, and each list seemed to fill gaps in the other. I think that reducing all that research to simple lists probably makes the school improvement studies seem a lot more similar to the effective school research findings than they really are – after all, they are based on qualitative research that focused on processes. But, for our purposes, that didn't seem to matter – we wanted to make up a good list of qualities that we've discovered from a range of perspectives – and that's what we ended up with.'*

'What about the "learning organization" stuff?' asks Jabu. 'You seem to have found something to write about that already.'

'Just what we could glean from the paragraph in the Education Department report on change management (Readings, Section One), and from the quotation that The Rake gave us,' replies Thulani.

'Here is a copy of the list we will take with us to Zizamele. Although all our points are drawn from the combined lists of Sammon, Levin and Lockheed, Heneveld and Craig, and Per Dalin et al., in writing out our list we have made sure that some of our Thuthuka concerns get a mention,' Nomusa concludes.



Think about the relationships that have developed among the members of the Thuthuka group. In what ways does the deputy principal exercise leadership in the group? In what ways is information shared in the Thuthuka group? How does the Thuthuka group encourage participation without becoming anarchic?

Now think of your own participation in different teams, groups and meetings. What roles do you tend to play in each of these situations? Do your roles change as the situations change?



As you can see, this observation schedule is incomplete. As you proceed – and learn more about learning organizations – you may want to complete the final column. But why not use this schedule to 'check' your school?

Observation Schedule or Checklist

| Effective schools (characteristics from school effectiveness and school improvement research) | Learning organization characteristics | Zizamele characteristics |
|---|---|---------------------------------|
| <p>Management:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The principal has autonomy to act and take initiatives • Purposeful leadership – commitment to a clear vision • The ability to get the whole school to share this vision • The principal delegates responsibilities where possible • Leadership works closely with teachers | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Treat change as an ongoing feature of school's identity • Organization, staff and curriculum development important • Aimed at improving effectiveness – in coping with change, making best use of resources, etc. | |

| Effective schools (characteristics from school effectiveness and school improvement research) | Learning organization characteristics | Zizamele characteristics |
|---|--|---------------------------------|
| <p>Teachers:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Individual teachers have some professional autonomy in their teaching (accountability too!) • Teachers share responsibility for, and collaborate in, vision building, decision-making and problem-solving • Teachers' skills and knowledge are improved – by means of well-planned, regular, relevant and practical staff development • The above is ensured by encouragement, supportive structure, opportunities and flexibility | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supports individual and group learning, and innovation • Ongoing, systematic reflection on own practice • Learns from reflection – actually makes changes • More participative and inclusive decision-making structures | |
| <p>Teaching resources and teaching environment:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Curriculum actively adapted by the teachers, relevant to the learners' experience, jointly planned, appropriately sequenced and paced • All possible steps are taken to ensure that the necessary textbooks are available and used • All stakeholders committed to a structured school day/ to time on task | | |
| <p>Teaching:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Should be intellectually challenging • Should include active involvement and participation of the learners in lessons | | |
| <p>School ethos:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Positive ethos focusing on success, and recognizing work well done • Active participation of all stakeholders • A work-centred ethos • Policies and structure that support initiative and improvement • Flexibility – active commitment to adapting policies and procedures etc. to local needs and conditions; rigidity frowned on | | |
| <p>Parents and community:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • School engages with parents and community • Two-way support and sharing of resources, facilities and programmes | | |

| Effective schools (characteristics from school effectiveness and school improvement research) | Learning organization characteristics | Zizamele characteristics |
|---|--|---------------------------------|
| <p>Supervision and monitoring:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Seen as important, and should be regular – thorough record-keeping too • Aimed at improvement, not a bureaucratic end in itself • Shared, including responsibility for performance • A combination of pressure and support • Departmental support emphasized – a high degree of autonomy and responsibility for each school | | |

The two researchers enjoy their visit to Zizamele, but it is two weeks before they are able to catch up and present their report to the group.

The school observation report

Zizamele: an observation

by Thulani Shabalala and Nomusa Ngubane

Introduction

We were impressed by the order that prevailed at Zizamele. We arrived at 10:30 a.m. and the atmosphere was relaxed, warm and inviting, but it was obvious that everybody was busy. Although there were a few learners outside the classrooms, it was obvious that they were there for a reason. A sense of purpose permeated the whole school.

We met with Mr Dlamini, the principal. He seemed prepared for our visit and we were received with the same pomp and ceremony that our school reserves for the likes of the superintendent! Even before we started on our list of questions, he explained his school's mission. Later we were to hear the words, 'In our school we are committed to succeeding, we work collaboratively, and we constantly evaluate our school's progress ...'

Mr Dlamini introduced us to one of his HoDs, Ms Madlala. When we asked her what a learning organization was, she looked at us in some surprise and apologized that she couldn't really define exactly what is meant by a learning organization.

But she said she could describe what the school did, and we could decide for ourselves whether it was a learning organization or not. She explained that in their school the principal and his deputy are called 'head teachers'. She seemed to place much importance on this fact. It was not until later in the day that we were to understand why. She added that all the management team members understand their role as co-ordinating and motivating rather than controlling staff. Using herself as an example, she showed how, although an HoD, she sometimes took a secondary role when another member of the department with more experience and expertise took over the leading role. 'This is prac-

permeate: spread through every part of

tised at all levels at all times,' she claimed. 'Since we started seeing our roles in this way, a lot has changed. Staff are more likely to take initiative, and interpersonal relations have improved dramatically. I now look forward to each school day with enthusiasm.'

The development process

Having noticed that there was relative order and discipline, even in classrooms where there were no teachers at the time, we asked Ms Madlala how they managed this. 'With difficulty,' she laughed. She then explained the process the school had gone through. 'First, we went through a long process of involving everyone in the school in developing a mission statement, and then committing all school members to work towards achieving its goals. Second, we began developing a culture within the school where all teachers and learners were disciplined, but not by management ... we emphasized self-discipline. Obviously people do overstep the mark at times, but then other teachers or learners remind you that your freedom is not unlimited and carries responsibilities! You see, if you have committed yourself to achieving educational excellence - rather than being told you must do this or that by seniors - then you will work hard freely. That is why you will find learners and teachers hard at work all the time.'

Ms Madlala explained that the change didn't occur immediately, but that the inclusive process in drawing up the mission statement, the ongoing work to popularize the mission (it was on every wall in the school!), a small group of determined and innovative teachers, and an equally determined and decisive principal (or head teacher!), made things happen. 'It took time, and it taxed us emotionally, but I think it was worthwhile,' she told us.

Difficulties faced by the school

Thulani asked for a copy of the mission statement, but Ms Madlala said it wouldn't help us much. 'The most important part of a mission statement is the process the school goes through in drawing it up. A document alone can't bring change. The problem is that in the end it requires a real change of mind-set and a change in power relations. Many people resist this as they fear change, particularly if it will make them lose their status and authority. Even with us, the battle is not over yet, and I doubt if it will ever be,' she told us.

Later Thulani's attention was drawn to a big notice on one of the doors: 'THINKING IS WELCOME AND WANTED HERE'. Without uttering a word, he pulled out his pen and wrote this in his diary. It had suddenly struck a chord in his mind. At break time, we got an opportunity to chat to two other teachers (Ms Mzolo and Mr Masuku) and some learners. Although these two teachers were not quite as openly enthusiastic about the changes in the school, they did not contradict any of the things said by the first two. There was general satisfaction with the way in which the school was managed. They kept coming back to the point that the staff took important decisions jointly, and that their leaders were very supportive and always willing to give them opportunities to prove themselves. 'You can do any creative thing you like in this place, and you will be given credit for it as long as it improves learning. In fact, there is so much going on that almost every staff member - with the exception of the Big Five of course - is a leader of some team or other,' said Ms Mzolo. 'But this doesn't mean that "anything goes". Ultimately the head teacher must take decisions, even unpopular ones!' Nomusa wanted to know who the Big Five were. Mr Masuku responded almost immediately, 'They are the ever-indifferent critics of everything and everyone. We have five of them here. Don't you have them in your school?'

Changing the attitudes of teachers

debriefing: here it refers to a meeting where all participants and other interested people look back on a past action and discuss what happened and what was accomplished

The short silence which followed was broken by a learner who came to ask for Mr Masuku. He jumped up and apologized as he hurried away. We heard that Mr Masuku was going to a meeting with the other three Maths teachers. For the past few days, the Maths teachers had been observing each others' lessons in their free periods, and they had agreed to meet briefly during break to plan the debriefing meeting of the whole department to be held after school. We learnt that this was quite a common practice at Zizamele. All departments planned their work together; teachers sat in on one another's lessons; and, at times, they invited colleagues from the local college of education and the university. What really surprised us was that we found learners being given a chance to evaluate their teachers.

Nomusa told Ms Mzolo that at Thuthuka some of us don't even speak to other staff. She joked that absenteeism would increase fourfold if someone suggested that we start visiting each other's lessons! Ms Mzolo replied that the 'family atmosphere' and 'teamwork' took time and effort to build. 'In fact, there is still some resistance but as people realize the benefits of working together they join the "family". The main thing is that we emphasize learning in this school. Actually, the whole school is committed to lifelong learning, and as teachers we all keep learning every day. We believe that sharing is growth, and being open to new suggestions is development,' Ms Mzolo told us.

Thulani's last question was about dealing with the irresponsible type of teacher who always had a reason not to be in class. Ms Mzolo said that the mission was each teacher's conscience; it was their 'remote control'. 'If colleagues transgress often, they get a fresh copy of the mission statement in their pigeon-holes. And they never know who slipped it in there! If this is ignored, the case is raised in our fortnightly meetings, and no one wants that because staff come down quite hard at that level. We would all do anything to avoid that.'



This activity should take about 1 hour. Its main aim is for you to *practise* using theory to *analyse* a practical example, namely, Zizamele Secondary.

ACTIVITY 16: ASSESSING ZIZAMELE'S 'EFFECTIVENESS'

Using Nomusa and Thulani's checklist or observation schedule, and their report on the visit to Zizamele, devise your own way of determining whether Zizamele:

- a** displays characteristics of an 'effective' school;
- b** provides examples of the characteristics we might associate with a 'learning' organization, as far as you can judge at this point.

A quick way to do this is to write a number next to each example that you identify in the report (pages 88–90), then write that number in the 'Zizamele' column of the observation schedule (page 86–88). For instance, near the beginning of the report, we read that most learners were in their classrooms, which reflected the sense of purpose felt throughout the school. Here you might jot down a '1', then transfer this to the Zizamele column of the checklist, next to the item which refers to the leadership getting everyone to share the leading vision of the school. But you can also write '1' next to the last item under 'Teaching resources and teaching environment'.

- c** When you have gone through the entire report carefully, examine your observation schedule (or checklist):
 - to see if there are characteristics which do not feature at Zizamele;
 - to see whether (assuming that Zizamele is a 'learning organization') there are specific ways in which a 'learning organization' may be more than what we expect of an 'effective' school.

Lessons from Zizamele Secondary School

Did you notice that Thulani and Nomusa concentrate on the structure, the value system, and the culture of Zizamele in their report? The structure seems to be 'flat' and participative rather than hierarchical (but the head still makes decisions!), and teachers work in teams rather than as individuals receiving instructions from above. The school culture seems to be characterized by more freedom for everyone, but also more emphasis on each person's responsibilities. People are internally controlled and self-disciplined, rather than being subject to external, forced control. Everybody – except, perhaps, the Big Five – values commitment to performance, openness with information, shared responsibility and rights, and lifelong learning. It seems to be common practice that the people who are involved in the doing, also make important decisions about their work.

However, it is evident from the discussions that the changes have taken time. They have not necessarily been easy and there is still resistance from some staff members. In the discussion, there was also mention of the fact that change implies a change in power relations, and this challenges the status and authority of some. All these factors would slow down the process, and we can conclude that change is a slow and, at times, painful process. The teachers did not expect there ever to be a stage when they would say that theirs is a perfect school. They shared a desire to *continue* learning, improving and innovating.

Features like this indicate that, at this point, Zizamele may have moved quite a long way towards being what we understand as a learning organization. There seems to be a focus on dynamic, forward movement, on constant reflection and a conscious openness to innovation. This is not necessarily true of all 'good' schools, democratic though they may be.

In a way, one of Ms Mzolo's responses provides a definition for a learning organization. She said:

The main thing is that we emphasize learning in this school. Actually, the whole school is committed to lifelong learning, and as teachers we all keep learning every day. We believe that sharing is growth, and being open to new suggestions is development ...

It would appear that *a learning organization is one that is committed to lifelong learning, and is open to new ideas*. Teachers at Zizamele sit in on each other's classes. Sharing and continuous evaluation have become the accepted way of doing things. The school, as well as most of the individual teachers in it, is committed to a set of outcomes, and it constantly assesses and reassesses its journey to this destination. Even mistakes made in this journey are treated as educational!

But let us not forget the need expressed by the Thuthuka teachers to find out what light *theory* can shed on their, and our, growing understanding of the learning organization.

Learning more about 'learning organizations'

ACTIVITY 17: THE FIVE DISCIPLINES OF A LEARNING ORGANIZATION

Peter Senge is probably the most significant contemporary writer on 'learning' organizations. You are going to read an excerpt from his best-selling book called *The Fifth Discipline* (Readings, Section Two, 'Organizations: The impact of global change'). But first turn to Part 5 of your audiotape (the first excerpt on side 2 of the tape) and listen to a number of South African experts explain what they understand by the concept 'a learning organiza-



Turn back to the Reader (page 51) where Hopkins et al. describe various types of school culture. Which of the four types of school culture seems closest to the 'learning' school?



Activity 17 requires you to read a complex reading. Take your time and read it more than once. Add these new ideas to what you already know about learning organizations, and to what the speakers say in Part 5 of your audiotape. Spend about 2 hours on this activity.

tion'. As you listen and read, make notes in response to the following questions:

- a What does Senge's view of learning organizations add to what you have already learnt about them?
- b How are Senge's five disciplines similar to, and different from, the characteristics which emerged as critical to 'good' or 'effective' schools?
- c How would you use Senge practically to begin transforming your school?
- d What similarities do you notice between Senge's ideas and those of the South Africans you listened to on your audiotape?

What Senge's theory tells us

Do you remember Ms Madlala saying that she did not think 'the battle' (to transform Zizamele) would ever be over? When we first read that, we may be inclined to think her remark pessimistic, but now Senge helps us to see that never being able to say that I – or my organization – have 'arrived' (at the end-point of enlightenment) reflects a dynamic, open-ended attitude to learning, development and the ongoing change that has become part of the pattern of our lives today.

Senge's strongest point is one already made by The Rake: think systemically! He warns about the dangers of breaking the world into separate elements to understand it. Instead, he suggests that we should continually ask questions so that we can find the (often-tangled) roots of problems, not just the symptoms. You will find excellent examples of this on page 110 ('The five whys') and page 112 ('Solving the problem of absenteeism systemically'). But Senge goes further than this. He suggests that even when we think we have found the roots, we must not stop thinking. Instead, we should continuously reflect on the wisdom of our action and assess how it is impacting on other parts of our school. In Section Four, we will introduce you to a simple action-reflection model which will assist you in implementing this kind of process in your school.

The five disciplines

Senge's systemic thinking also emerges in his suggestions about how to implement the five disciplines of a 'learning' organization. He says we should not implement and assess each discipline separately. Instead, they must work as a whole. This would suggest that there is little point in having a 'shared vision', for instance, if we don't have the 'personal mastery' to work through difficulties towards achieving this vision, and the teamwork and ongoing reflection to assess whether we are on target.

But probably our favourite demonstration of Senge's holism is the point he makes about how we should work towards organizations in which the combined intelligence of the whole is **more** than the sum of its parts, not less ... He warns, though, that very often organizations filled with intelligent people tend to do very stupid things!

And we would add a further warning to this. One of the unintelligent things that organizations sometimes do is to try to apply a theory such as Senge's (or a list such as Sammon's) as a 'recipe' to direct their own organizational development. No single 'formula' could possibly fit the very different structures, cultures and histories – and changing circumstances – of schools in widely varying contexts. Such a simplistic approach, like trying to model our practice on that of some other institution (remember Ms Madlala commenting that it wouldn't really help Thuthuka much to have a copy of Zizamele's mission statement?), is unlikely to help schools respond energetically to local circumstances, or to produce lasting change. On the contrary, Senge suggests that it is through constant reflection on our actions, and learning from our mistakes, that we are much more likely to build an 'intelligent' organization.

Reflection on our own practice, and learning from our mistakes, does **not** mean that we should not consult research and theory for the insights they make available.

simplistic: over-simplified, failing to reflect the complexity of reality

The lifelong learning, personal development and organizational development encouraged by the learning organization need not only be experiential. Tapping into other sources of knowledge and insight to keep ourselves alert as educators is one of the best ways of preventing the 'hardening' of our mental models, the acceptance of narrow formulas as cure-alls, and plain inertia.

What have we learnt so far?

By their very nature, schools that are 'learning organizations' will vary greatly. But they all tend to have most of the following characteristics:

- A shared commitment to a common vision, or mission.
- Part of this mission will be an active, supportive commitment to lifelong learning, not only for the learners, but also for the teachers (professional development) and for the school as a whole (organization development), to equip it to become more effective in achieving its mission.
- Openness to new ideas from within the school community (including teachers, learners, and other stakeholders), as well as from management and the education department.
- A 'flat' organizational structure that is more flexible and participative than hierarchical. Management see their role as co-ordinating and motivating, rather than controlling – they may even be subordinate to more junior staff in areas where the latter have greater competence.
- Staff may take initiatives, and tend to work in teams rather than as individuals acting on instructions from above. Thus, teachers have more autonomy – to be creative and generate new learning for the school – and more responsibility.
- Teachers are not 'checked on' all the time, but tend to be driven by their own commitment to performance and to shared goals. Indeed, they help one another to monitor and evaluate their own progress in practice.

3.6

Tutor-marked assignment 1



Understanding schools as learning organizations

As a first tutor-marked assignment, you should *use* the knowledge you have acquired about learning organizations as a *tool* to analyse Thuthuka School. The key question to answer is this:

To what extent does Thuthuka demonstrate the characteristics of a learning organization, and what are three important changes it needs to make to move towards being a learning organization?

We'd like you to answer this question in the following way:

- a** First, draw up a checklist (as Thulani and Nomusa did) of what you believe are the most important characteristics of a learning organization (including ideas you have gained from reading Peter Senge).
- b** Second, add a column to your checklist in which you list some of the actions and processes you would expect to find in a school that demonstrated a particular characteristic.
- c** Third, analyse how Thuthuka meets these criteria by giving it a score of between 1 (doesn't demonstrate these characteristics) and 5 (does demonstrate these characteristics) for each characteristic you have identified. Add a short comment as to why you allocated the particular score.

Here is an example:

| Characteristic | Indicators of the characteristic | Does Thuthuka demonstrate this characteristic? |
|----------------|--|--|
| Teamwork | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • regular school development meetings • more decision-making given to staff • significant amounts of team-teaching | 2 (some evidence, but seems confined to small group of teachers) |

- d** Finally, using your analysis as a basis, and with reference to readings you have done, write a two-page letter of advice to The Rake suggesting the actions Thuthuka should take to transform itself into a 'learning' organization. (A tip: pay particular attention to the readings by Hopkins, Christie and Potterton, and Senge.)