Service Delivery Research Project

Office of the Presidency

The School Sector

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1. The Problem: Poor School Performance in South Africa

1.1 Learner scores

The SACMEQ II[1] scores for Mathematics at Grade 6 level show that South Africa is outperformed by eight surrounding countries, many of which, including Mozambique, Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania, are much poorer, with gross domestic products in the order of one-tenth to a one-fifth of South Africa's (van der Berg and Louw, 2006a). South Africa's underperformance relative to many developing countries is confirmed by the other international comparative test results in high school maths and science and primary school literacy: TIMSS[2] (Reddy, 2006) and PIRLS[3] (Howie et al, 2007). It is clear that South Africa has a very inefficient school system. Even among the richest 20% of schools, South Africa is outperformed by Mauritius and Kenya and in all the other quintiles[4] the South African mean scores fall below those of the SACMEQ II all-country means (van der Berg and Louw, 2006b). This is not in any way an argument to reduce spending on schools; rather, it is to emphasise that most South African schools can do far more with the resources at their disposal than they currently do.

1.2 Teacher subject knowledge

Very poor teacher subject knowledge accompanies the low learner scores. Teacher development programmes are increasingly testing teacher knowledge as a means of assessing developmental needs and measuring the effect of interventions. Teachers are reluctant to have their subject knowledge investigated, and refused to participate in the teacher test component of the SACMEQ exercise in 2001. However, and number of donor-supported projects have been assessing teacher subject knowledge, as a means of identifying teacher needs and tracking the impact of teacher development initiatives. One example is the Khanyisa programme, which worked in 1000 schools in four districts in the Limpopo Province (Taylor and Moyana 2005). A Baseline Study was conducted in 2004 in 24 primary schools selected at random in two rural districts. One component of the study was to administer a Literacy and Mathematics test to Grade 3 teachers. The tests were constructed by selecting items from tests designed to assess the knowledge of Grade 6 learners. The average score in the Maths test for 25 teachers was 10 correct responses out of 15 items (67%). Only one teacher scored 100% correct (15) while three scored below 50%. The average score in the Language test for 23 teachers was 13 correct responses out of 24 items (55%). The majority of teachers scored between 7 and 12 marks (29% and 50% respectively) out of a possible 24 marks; 12 of the 23 teachers scored less than 50%, with a lowest score of 22%. Only one teacher scored higher than 75%. A number of other examples indicate that the very disappointing Khanyisa results are part of a pattern across provinces, school subjects and grade levels (Mabogoane and Pereira, 2008; Taylor, 2009). Although the generalizability of these project findings can only be established when there is more information on representative samples of the

[1] Southern and Eastern African Consortium for Monitoring Education Quality, a consortium of 14 African countries coordinated by UNESCO.

[2] Trends in Mathematics and Science Study, an international comparative test on Maths and Science at Grade 8 level.

[3] Progress in Reading Literacy Studies, an international comparative test at Grade 4 level.

[4] The quintiles are poverty rankings.

population, such as will be provided by the 2007 SACMEQ study, it will be surprising if the results are very different to those found to date.

Despite their poor subject knowledge, the large majority of South African educators are considered to be appropriately qualified, as indicated by a Senior Certificate and a minimum of three years of appropriate training. Educator qualifications have increased significantly in the last two decades: in 1990 only 53% of educators were appropriately qualified; by 2008 this had increased to 94.4% (Department of Education, 2009). This dramatic increase in the proportion of teachers reaching qualified status is in stark contrast to the absence of any discernible improvement in learner performance in the same period, a striking case of qualification inflation.

1.3 Time management

The inefficient use of time is a prominent feature of many South African schools. Poor time management occurs at three levels: getting to school, getting to class, and covering the curriculum when in class. These practices point the way for principals to exercise stronger instructional leadership in directing schools towards the more effective use of time in delivering the curriculum. An analysis of data collected from principals and teachers during the SACMEQ II study revealed high levels of teacher absenteeism and late-coming, as reported by principals (van der Berg and Louw, 2006a). This problem is particularly widespread in the 4 lowest quintiles of the system, where 97%–100% of principals reported it as a problem. A substantial proportion of schools (26%) in the most affluent quintile reported experiencing the same problem.

Leave, and in particular the abuse of sick leave by teachers, offers another gap for teachers to spend less time at school. Teachers are entitled to 36 days sick leave over a 3 year cycle, and it seems that teachers have come to see this leave as an entitlement which must be taken, rather than as a generous service benefit in case of serious illness. A recent study by the HSRC (Reddy et al, 2010) found that the public school system has a leave rate somewhere between 10 and 20%, this wide margin of error indicating poor data systems for monitoring teacher leave. This is in contrast to a rate closer to 5-6% in developed countries. The HSRC study estimates that over three quarters of leave is of one or two days duration, and therefore does not require a doctor’s certificate; the way in which this leave is abused is clearly shown by the incidence of leave for Mondays and Fridays being twice that of Tuesdays and Thursdays, respectively.

Furthermore, when they are at school, it seems that many South African teachers spend less than half their time teaching. This finding was identified by Chisholm et al (2005), who, through a national survey verified by case studies in 10 schools, concluded that:

- Teachers worked an average of 41 hours per week, out of an expected minimum of 43.
- In all, 41% of this time was spent on teaching, which translated to 3.4 hours a day;
- 14% was devoted to planning and preparation, and
- 14% was spent on assessment, evaluation, writing reports and record keeping.

In contrast to this generally very lax picture, the two studies on poor South African schools that perform relatively well by Malcolm et al. (2000) and Christie et al. (2007) found that, without exception, time was a highly valued commodity in successful institutions: not only was punctuality observed during the school day, but additional teaching time was created outside of normal hours. Ensuring the effective use of time in any institution is essentially a leadership responsibility, and it appears from the available evidence that it is a responsibility that the large majority of South African principals are simply unable to rise to.

1.4 Instructional Leadership

Another important management dimension is the responsibility of the principal and her team to ensure not only that teachers are in class and teaching during school hours, but also that teachers cover the curriculum effectively when they are in class. Elmore (2008) uses the term 'internal accountability systems' to signal the processes through which schools maintain effective curriculum delivery. These processes include designing school improvement strategies, implementing incentive structures for teachers and support personnel, recruiting and evaluating teachers, brokering professional development consistent with the school improvement strategy, allocating school resources towards instruction and buffering teachers from non-instructional activities.

Raudenbush distinguishes between two forms of instructional practice, namely *isolated idiosyncratic practice* that is rarely open to public inspection and *shared systematic practice,* with shared aims, assessment tools, and instructional strategies, active collaboration, routine public inspection of practice and accountability to peers (2009:172). Elmore's term for the former kind of practice is 'atomized', and dismissively notes that: 'Atomised schools are schools in name only: essentially they are the congealed residue of private interests' (2008: 50). On the other hand:

> A school with a well-developed approach to curriculum and pedagogy, routine grade-level and content-focused discussions of instructional practice and structured occasions to discuss student performance is a school with relatively high internal accountability. (ibid:46).

In a study commissioned by the Ministry of Education in 2007, Christie et al reviewed a sample of 18 secondary schools serving poor communities but which succeeded in achieving good Senior Certificate results. The study concluded that all these schools:

- were focussed on their central tasks of teaching and learning with a sense of responsibility, purpose and commitment;
- carried out their tasks with competence and confidence;
- had organisational cultures that supported a work ethic, expected achievement and acknowledged success;
- had strong internal accountability systems in place that enabled them to meet the demands of external accountability, evidenced most particularly in terms of Senior Certificate achievement (Christie et al, 2007:5).

Hoadley and Ward (2009) surveyed 200 schools in the Eastern Cape and Western Cape to investigate school management practices. They found that the majority of principals described their main activities as administration and disciplining learners. This is in contrast to the conclusion of the international literature that school managers should focus on the task of "instructional leadership", a set of systems which propel teaching and learning in the school (Leithwood et al, 2004).

1.5 Professionalism

Professionalism has been a much discussed topic for many decades, and two features stand out as the central attributes of well established professions, from medieval times the priesthood, medicine, and the law (the spirit, body and social conduct), and a host of newer occupational groupings since the advent of modernity in the nineteenth century (Gamble, 2010). First is the existence of a specialized knowledge base which provides the foundation for occupational practice. Society accords professional autonomy over standard setting, quality assurance and the regulation of its members to a defined group of practitioners because they possess a knowledge base which is a more reliable guide to practice than any developed by contending groups.

The second characteristic of a profession is that its members adopt a cooperative style of working, both within any institution and across institutions. Thus, doctors consult each other in hospital corridors, attorneys discuss cases with their peers and refer their clients to specialist practitioners. This interdependence is in marked contrast to the kind of 'atomised' behavior of teachers which Elmore describes above. Professional practice is regulated by a collegial form of organization which plays a role in the continuing professional development of members and is instrumental in maintaining the standards of both training and practice. In most western countries professional teacher bodies coexist with unions, although the former are generally smaller and less influential (Sykes, 1998). South Africa has a number of teacher unions, but the terrain is dominated by the South African Democratic Teachers' Union (SADTU), which was formed in 1989, with the primary purposes of supporting the mass democratic movement to bring down apartheid and gain equal employment opportunities for black teachers. This tradition of militancy and overt political activity continues today.

We illustrate the point by describing the illegal protest action mounted by SADTU in Soweto in June 2009. This is an important example, since it is the only one which has been systematically recorded (Fleisch, 2010), but which illustrates the kinds of incidents which commonly occur in many schools, districts and provinces throughout the country. Although the latter are generally much smaller in scale and less obtrusive to the public eye than this particular Soweto event, it is common knowledge that teachers frequently disrupt schooling for meetings, bar district officials and principals from entering classrooms, 'suspend' district officials whose decisions they don't agree with, and the like. However, the event we describe below is also considerably smaller in scale and more restricted in duration than both the 2007 month-long illegal teacher strike – widely perceived as a prelude to the 5-yearly meeting of the ruling African National Congress in Pholokwane in 2007 and the downfall of President Mbeki the following year – and the 2010 national strike by an estimated 1 million public sector workers, both of which were accompanied by widespread violence and intimidation. In the first two weeks of June 2009, the regional structure of SADTU embarked on a stay-away to protest against actions on the appointment of school managers by the local district office. In the process, hundreds of teachers missed more than

two weeks of work, thousands of school children, including learners in the final years of secondary school missed their mid-year examinations, a number of principals and teachers were assaulted and many more were intimidated. The mood is captured by SADTU spokesperson, Ronald Nyathi when he warned that schools found operating the next day would be 'disciplined': "tell us if there is a principal at a school and we will remove them. Some people will lose their cars. Some people will be admitted to hospital" (Sowetan, 8 June 2009). Further, the SADTU leaders reassured the teachers at a meeting that they should not be concerned about the 'no work no pay' rule as the education directors who were responsible for monitoring strike action were supportive of the union action. While the union paid considerable attention to the procedural legalities associated with the educator appointment processes, they showed little concern about compliance with many other aspects of the legal framework, such as damage to state property, absence from work without good reason, inciting other personnel, intimidating fellow employees and learners, preventing other employees from exercising their rights, and refusing to obey a legal restraining order obtained by the provincial MEC for Education. It would be hard to imagine behaviour which is more antithetical to the ideal of a professional body.

It seems that the district did not follow procedure either and this provided a gap for union action. Unions exploit bad practice in the bureaucracy. The specific issue around which the Soweto strike of 2009 consolidated – the promotion of teachers and other officials – fuels widespread public perception that union activity is primarily about advancing the authority and benefit of its members. Under these conditions a principle function of unions, political parties, party factions, and other groupings of convenience is to act as patronage networks which distribute opportunity to their members. In interviews with teachers and union officials Zengele and Coetzer (in press) reveal that principal positions in schools are considered as 'open for deployment' by SADTU.

1.6 Conclusion

Tendencies to opportunistic practices by teacher unions illustrated by the Soweto strike of 2009 are not confined to education: as von Holdt (2010) has observed in the health sector, the mechanisms which drive the public service are not the ethics of service delivery but class formation, accompanied by ambiguity towards expertise, because of the implication of expert knowledge in the ideology and technical apparatus of colonialism, and it appears that these features are characteristic of the large majority of government sectors (Butler, 2010). The present study aims to show that, even in the absence of a political solution to the crisis which grips South African schooling, much can be done to promote good institutional practice at the school level. We build on the work of Malcolm et al (2000) and Christie et al (2007) on the practices prevalent in schools which serve poor communities but which perform well above the norm. We set out to elaborate the understanding provided by this work of the strategies used by teachers and principals to optimize educational opportunities for poor children. We end with recommendations, directed to principals, school governing bodies and the communities they represent.

2. Design and method

2.1 Theoretical framework: indicators of good school practice

We adopt a medium-grain approach to our research question: investigating the link between school level learning and institutional practice. The study focuses on high schools, and learning outcomes are measured by school mean performance on the annual national Senior Certificate examinations. One of the few well established research findings about schooling is that the largest influence on learning, outside of the home, occurs in the classroom, and is thus heavily dependent on teacher characteristics. However, our study does not venture into the domain of the classroom, focusing instead on school level practices, assuming that institutional culture establishes conditions conducive to learning, without which teachers are severely hampered in their work.

Seven indicators of good school practice are suggested by the South African literature discussed above. These are shown in Table 1, which also shows the criteria used to classify practices on each of the indicators. Practices may be rated as 2 (Strong), 1 (Middling), or 0 (Poor). The rating of each indicator was done by triangulating the interview responses from 4 separate interviews with staff members at each school (see Section 2.5 below for details). SMT refers to the school management team.

Table 1: Indicators and rating criteria

Indicator	Rating criteria
1. **Strategic leadership**: school has a coherent focus on teaching and learning; the SMT directs and provides space for collegial activities on curriculum, pedagogy and assessment. Parents are an integral part of institutional systems.	Unanimity among interviewees on good strategic leadership at the school, with corroborating evidence (examples of systems): 2 Majority agreement, with some supporting evidence: 1 No supporting evidence, or mixed classification: 0 Collegial work is often only apparent when activities related to indicators 5 and 6 are visible.
2. **Curriculum leadership**: management directs curriculum planning and monitoring	Strong systems AND regular monitoring; books issued to each child to keep: 2 Some evidence of systems AND infrequent monitoring (once a year): 1 Little or conflicting evidence of curriculum management systems: 0
3. **Time management**: (1) teachers and learners punctually in school, in class and (2) pacing curriculum delivery; (3) minimum days lost; (4) can be supplemented by additional classes outside of school hours	Unanimity among interviewees on 4 indicators; supporting evidence (examples): 2 Some agreement on 4 indicators; no undermining evidence: 1 No agreement; contradictory accounts by interviewees: 0
4. **Professional behaviour**: (1) ethical comportment; (2) importance of subject knowledge; (3) intrinsic motivation.	Unanimous that all 3 professional characteristics are present in the school: 2 Two of the 3 elements present: 1 One or no elements present: 0
5. **Collegial practice on curriculum delivery**: routine grade-level and content-focused discussions of curriculum delivery among staff	Regular discussions among all phase, grade level or subject teachers > 2/term: 2 Some structured discussions 1-2/term: 1 No systems, may happen informally: 0
6. **Collegial practice on assessment**: regular structured occasions to discuss student performance	Regular discussions at phase, grade or subject levels ≥1/term: 2 Some structured discussions 1-2/year: 1 No systems, may happen informally: 0
7. **Induction**: well defined process of inducting and mentoring new teachers into the school	Unanimity on presence of a structured process, including mentoring: 2 Some evidence and informal or no mentoring: 1 None: 0

2.2 Research question

Which configurations of school level activities, as defined in Table 1, are best related to Senior Certificate results?

2.3 Research Design

The project focuses on high schools which serve poor communities in two provinces. The research design consists of two components: a survey in which a semi-structured questionnaire was sent to 100 schools, and a case study component which studied eight schools in detail.

2.4 Sampling

In order to eliminate schools which serve learners from higher socio-economic families, we restricted the population for case study schools to quintiles 1-3, except in the Eastern Cape, where one quintile 4 school was added because of the paucity of schools achieving good SC results.

It is not enough to establish that well performing schools exhibit certain practices; if poorly performing schools exhibit the same characteristics then it means that we have not correctly identified the factors which make for good performance. This is a feature of the design of the present project which has not been present to any great extent in previous work of this kind. We sampled across the performance spectrum in order to maximize variation on our indicators.

The Eastern Cape was chosen as a province which predominantly serves the poorest children, and which generally performs very poorly. The Free State was selected because it is also predominantly poor and rural, but generally gets better results than the other very poor provinces. Three school districts were selected using convenience sampling. In the EC the Port Elizabeth district was selected, in order to minimize travel costs. Similarly in the FS, the two districts, one urban and one rural, were selected because of relative convenience of access.

The next task was to stratify the schools in each district into good (pass rate > 70% over last three years), moderate (50-70%) and poor (<50%) performing schools. For the case studies, the intention was to select schools using the following criteria: 50% from the moderate category, and 25% from each of the good and poor categories. However, we were unable to achieve these quotas because of the paucity of moderate and good schools in the 3 townships which constituted our population. Cases study schools are shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Case study schools

Province	**District**	**School**	**SC Results**			
			2007	**2008**	**2009**	**Description**
Eastern Cape	Port Elizabeth (urban)	1		50%	64%	Moderate
		2	37%	42%	43%	Poor
		3	38%	45%	56%	Poor
		4	65%	53%	38%	Poor
Free State	Lejweleputswa (rural)	5	<60%	<60%	<60%	Poor

		6	50%	60%	71%	Moderate
	Motheo (urban)	7	45%	64%	60%	Poor
		8	84%	92%	72%	Good

Key: Good: consistently >70% over 3 years, Moderate: 50-70%; Poor: <50%

The survey schools were also selected according to SC results, but a broader poverty range (quintiles 1-5) was included in the population, thus including schools serving the full SES range. We chose at random a total of 20 schools from each of the two Free State districts and 60 from the Eastern Cape.

2.5 Method

Case Studies

Four interviews were conducted in each sample school, with the following respondents:

- The principal, deputy or senior HOD
- A teacher who teaches an academically orientated subject, e.g. Life Sciences/Biology, Mathematics, Geography, History
- A teacher who teaches a vocationally–orientated subject, e.g. Agriculture, Hospitality Studies, Tourism, Technology (Computer Application, Mechanical or Electrical), Consumer Studies, etc. If the school does not offer vocationally-oriented subjects, then a second teacher responsible for an academic subject was selected.
- A focus group consisting of 3 or 4 teachers who were available at the time.

The interviews were semi-structured, with most answers containing explanatory comments by the respondent, which were written down by the interviewer.

Survey

An outline of the project, together with the letter from a President's office was sent to schools by fax. The principal was then contacted by phone and invited to participate in the study. If s/he agreed, the structured interview schedule was sent by fax. Schools which did not respond promptly were called, up to 3 times. A return rate of 57% was achieved. Responses were recorded in an Excel spread sheet, and analyzed according to the scheme shown in Table 1.

Methodological difficulties

The quality of school management practices are notoriously difficult to assess. The major difficulty is that studies of this kind depend in large measure on self report data derived from the parties who have an interest in presenting their practices in the best light. Different members of the staff of any one school are also likely to have different interpretations on the state of the school. We addressed this problem by conducting interviews with a number of respondents in each school, and triangulating the data, constructing a picture of the school from the overlapping descriptions of the various interviewees.

Take, for example, the interpretation of the various interviewees from one case study school on the question relating to school culture. Interviewees were asked to rate their school according to one of three scenarios: Lion, Zebra or Ostrich, defined as follows:

10. Read the following scenarios and decide which one describes the culture of your school best. Tick one of the boxes below.		
LION	ZEBRA	OSTRICH
Lion scenario: Teaching and learning is the most important task of our school. We all work hard and we expect and get only the best from our colleagues and learners. We communicate well with each other and we are praised when we achieve. Our leadership is strong.		
Zebra scenario: Everything is mostly OK at our school but not always. Some work hard and others do not. Things are reasonably organized and we communicate with each other on a fairly regular basis. If we try hard and do well we may be praised, but we not expect this. Our leadership is sometimes strong and sometimes weak (like a zebra's stripes).		
Ostrich scenario: Our school is not well-organized and we often do not know what is happening because communication is poor. We do not really expect to do well at anything and, if anyone should try to do well, there is no praise, so why try? Our leadership often have their heads in the sand (like an ostrich) and they do not notice what is wrong. If they do notice they do little about it.		

This question relates to indicator 1: Strategic leadership. Two respondents from School 1, a comprehensive, chose Lion, while a third opted for Zebra. Using the criteria listed in Table 1, we rated the school as 1 on Indicator 1, since there was not unanimity among the respondents, but there was a majority view, with some strong but not overwhelming supporting evidence for good strategic leadership.

The degree of wishful thinking evident in some of the responses is illustrated by the fact that 2 of the 3 individual interviewees at School 4 chose the Lion option to describe the culture of the school, despite a decline in performance from 65% in 2007 to 38% in 2009. This is not to question the integrity or sincerity of the respondents under extremely adverse circumstances, but to illustrate the difficulty of judging one's own performance in the absence of any objective point of comparison. We used a triangulation technique to weigh the evidence from the different interviewees at each school, and generally only scored an attribute as being present if there was consensus across interviews.

While triangulation does not remove all uncertainly as to the extent to which the reports of respondents add up to 'what really happens' in any school, it does provide a good filter for idiosyncratic ideas and wishful thinking. It is of course also difficult to obtain consistent results with this method, a problem which we addressed by getting members of the research team to rate schools independently, compare results, and then discuss any discrepancies in the original rating.

3. Case study findings

The dilemma in reporting the findings of case studies is to balance a suitable degree of detail in order to capture the flavor and texture of the schools in the sample, on one hand, with the danger of flooding the reader with detail to the extent that the overall pattern is obscured, on the other. We have decided to present detailed pictures of only two schools (Tables 3 and 4). We follow this micro-analysis with a

summary of the same data for all 8 case study schools (Table 5). The third level of analysis is to summarise the survey data from the 57 respondent schools (Section 4), in order to speculate on the generalizability of our case study findings to the project population, quintile 1-3 schools in three township in poor provinces.

3.1 Context of the two case study schools

The two schools we have chosen to describe in detail are both drawn from the same urban area in one province and serve very poor communities, including a high proportion of children living in informal settlements. The two schools differ very markedly in their performance, with one regularly in the top 5% of schools in the province, and the other consistently performing very poorly. It is true that the poorly performing school draws a good proportion of its learners from an impoverished rural area in a neighbouring province, which undoubtedly adds to its burden. Yet one gets the impression that the principal at the well performing school would not let this additional disadvantage deter him from making the most of his circumstances were he principal at that school.

In both schools many learners are hungry, although neither has a school feeding scheme for its learners. The principals reported that they do not qualify for feeding schemes and struggle to get by financially because of the quintile classification of their schools. At both schools learners take Home Language (Sotho, Tswana, isiXhosa) and English First Additional Language, all subjects are taught in English and all examinations are written in English. In some classes staff will answer questions in the mother tongue, but conduct the class in English while in other classes, where teachers and learners both struggle with English, classes are conducted in the mother tongue, but learners expected to do all their writing in English. Most learners live in communities where they hear or read no English and have no resources like newspapers, magazines, books or even television. Their schools do not have libraries. For many learners and teachers language is a barrier to learning and the obstacle of language must first be overcome before learners can come to understanding mathematics, physical science or geography. Learners struggle to understand concepts, interpret questions and write coherently because of the poor quality of their language skills and some teachers struggle to communicate their subject content effectively.

Both schools officials indicated that they are strongly focused on improving the Grade 12 pass rate. The best staff members teach Grade 12 and in some schools Grade 11. Grade 12s attend timetabled classes from 7:00 to 16:00 every day and in many cases on Saturday morning and over holidays.

Teachers are only able to use one teaching method and that is the *chalk and talk* method because they have no resources to try any other. They teach over-large classes in overcrowded classrooms with no resources except textbooks and often they do not even have enough textbooks, so learners have to share. Some teachers use different text books and the internet at home to make notes for their learners and then struggle to make photostats at school because of budgetary issues. Principals are concerned about the security because of theft and vandalism in the communities.

3.2 School 8: A centre of excellence

The present school moved into the buildings, which were built for a primary school and then used as a college, in 2000. A room with a sink is presently used as a laboratory and a storeroom as a library. The school has 946 learners and 34 staff members. The SMT consists of the principal, 2 deputies, 5 HOD's and 2 senior teachers. There are 3 clerks and 2 cleaners.

The head, Mr K, arrived in 2006. According to him, discipline and academic achievements are the school's strong points while funding and a shortage of classroom space are their biggest challenges. The school has been classified as Quintile 4, in spite of the fact that 70% of the pupils live in the nearby squatter camps. Frequent requests to be re-classified have had no positive results. As the school was built for primary school learners, the classrooms are small and have to accommodate as many as 58 learners. Assemblies for the whole school are held on Friday mornings in an open space between classrooms and no sporting facilities are available. The school choir is excellent and takes part in zone competitions.

Since 2000, School 8 has always had good Grade 12 results (above 80%) pass rate and has always been first 50 schools in the province. The pass rates since 2005 were: 2005, 86%; 2006, 88%; 2007, 84%, 2008, 92%; 2009, 72%. The big dip in 2009[5]has been of tremendous concern to the school and turnabout strategies were immediately put into place. A copy of these strategies was developed where, among other items of information, possible factors leading to the decline in the pass rate are explained.

Six staff members were interviewed: Mr A, the deputy principal has a BA Hons with 27 years of teaching experience and is currently teaching Life Sciences; Mr B, who is teaching Life Sciences, English and Natural Sciences, has 16 years of teaching experience and his credentials are UDES, B Admin, ACE in Biology and Certificate in Computer Literacy; Mr C, a new teacher (3 years experience), teachers Tourism, Social Sciences, Art & Culture and Technology, and has a B-Tech in Tourism /Management and a Post Graduate Certificate in Education; and a focus group consisting of three teachers. Table 3 shows the information gleaned largely from the 3 individual interviewees; where the focus group features, this is mentioned.

Table 3: Profile of School 8

Indicator	Class	Supporting evidence
1. Strategic leadership	2	The 3 individual interviewees were unanimous in choosing the Lion scenario. This is supported by the fact that the school, unique among the 8 case study schools, has strong systems in place for communicating with and involving parents in the education of their children. Leadership is seen as a team effort. All staff members, from G 8 – 12, are praised and receive certificates of performance when a set benchmark is reached. Staff members are often consulted and every effort is made to satisfy their specific requests. Another unique feature of the school is the appointment of a staff member to look after learners' welfare, such as organizing social grants for orphans, and learners in need of care are referred to her.

[5] In 2008 the Grade 12 cohort was the first to write the new SC curriculum. It is acknowledged that the exams were considerably easier than they had been in previous years. In 2009 the exams were made more difficult, which would explain the decline in the results obtained by the school.

		70% of parents attend parents' meetings or will make arrangements to see staff early in the morning or after work. Employers are notified when parents have an appointment with the school. Parents are advised to see that their children leave for school on time, and are notified if children persist in coming late and asked for an explanation.
2. Curriculum leadership	2	Planning is done collegially and monitoring is systematic. There was agreement among interviewees that a year plan for the following year is done at the end of the year so that teaching starts on the first day of term in January, after a short assembly, and the curriculum is completed before the end of the year to provide time for revision. Learners also receive their books and stationery at the end of the year for the following year, and a strong book retrieval system is in place, controlled by an LTSM Committee. G11-12 learners have their own books, but G8-10 have to share because of shortages. Another innovation at the school, aimed in part at addressing the problem of textbook shortages, is to hold regular study periods after school in the afternoon, where learners do homework exercises using shared books. Parents are advised to check learners' books every day to see if there is homework, if not, the parent must ask the child to explain. Reports are handed to learners and their parents and they will have to give reasons to teachers for low marks and make commitments of how they will work with staff for improvement. The school governing body (SGB) is very active in this regard.
3. Time management	2	No time is wasted and every minute counts. G12 learners have no free days throughout the year, start school early and attend on Saturdays and during school holidays. A 2 week programme was prepared over the World Cup holiday. Only one day was lost during the year to non-curricular activities, when the school selected its athletics team (interviews were done prior to the strike in July, and it is not known to what extent teachers participated in the strike). There was unanimity among our interviewees that school always starts and ends on time and that staff and learners return promptly after breaks. Teachers arrive at 6:50 or 7:30 and leave at 14:40 or 16:10 according to a set timetable. Teachers have briefing sessions every morning from 7:30 to 7:45 while staff committees meet during lunch or after school and the SMT meets fortnightly, or immediately for urgent matters. An alternative timetable is used to cover for absent staff. The gates are locked during the school times, and learners are not allowed to leave during break.
4. Professional behavior	1	A professional teacher is defined as one who adheres to the ethics of the profession, as set out in the SACE code of conduct, which is distributed to and workshopped with all teachers. There is agreement that teachers require more knowledge of their subjects, but there is no evidence of individual teachers, subject departments, or the school taking systematic responsibility for this. The district does organize occasional subject-based workshops for teachers and attendance is compulsory. An annual workshop organized by the school at an outside venue mostly deals with non-academic issues, such as HIV-AIDS. One interviewee listed a number of characteristics which characterize professional behaviour: teach on time; be prepared every day; mark on time; give feedback. Another teacher summed up the one element of our 3 essential characterisitics of professionalism missing in the school: 'It is being fully trained to do the job you're doing and getting workshops to further your knowledge.' The passive tense in the quote reveals the one professional element which is missing in the school, and which probably inhibits the school from being one of the very best in the country.
5. Collegial practice on curriculum delivery	2	In this school there is a strong institutional approach to collaborative practice on curriculum delivery. Everything is prepared on time: timetables, allocation of grades and subjects. The school organizes workshops for teachers on school-related matters e.g. learners with HIV; motivation and the implementation of NCS. Learning facilitators are invited to talk to new teachers. Assistance will be received for all problems. Teachers may use school transport to visit other schools to learn from experts. Teachers may acquire any textbook needed as a resource.
6. Collegial practice on assessment	2	As confirmed by all three interviewees, learner performance is discussed through regular meetings at subject, departmental, staff and parent levels, and also informally between teachers. Mr A gave the example of how, at the end of the first term exams, marks are analysed and teachers made commitments and improvement plans. G12 learners who did not do well make their own commitments during conversations with staff. Parents are called in with their children to work with staff to support the poor performing learners. Class teachers are asked to look out for needy learners and report them to related committees.
7. Induction	2	A supervisor is appointed for every new staff member, who is introduced to staff and a school

into the school		tour is done. The new staff member receives and discusses the timetable, policies, year plan with her mentor. The HOD gives information on subject knowledge, assessment and examination information. The new staff member is introduced to his/her classes by senior staff. The aim is that the new staff member becomes part of the school family, understands the lines of communication and has a mentor to learn the ropes

3.3 School 7: The bad news

The school started in 1978 and caters for 725 G10 – 12 learners, but can cater for over 1000 learners and is shrinking in size as it. The Grade 12 class has 173 learners. Mr M became the principal in 1998. There are 34 staff members and a SMT of 8 with 2 deputies and 5 HODs. 60% of the learners are isiXhosa-speaking from the Eastern Cape and stay about 7 – 13 km from school. The school offers no transport and late-coming is a perennial problem. The school experiences security problems and vandalism and theft are rife**:** for example, the school had 2 computer centres with 26 computers each, but now it has only 1 computer centre with 17 computers.

The pass rate for the past 3 years was: 2007 - 45%; 2008 - 64%; 2009 - 60,3%. A school improvement plan has been made which includes providing textbooks for all G12 learners and allocating the hard-working staff members to G12.

Six staff members were interviewed. Mr A, is an HOD with 30 years experience at the present school. He has qualifications in JSTL, ABET, NPDE and ACE. Ms B, is a History and Life Orientation teacher with a PTD, FED,ACE, Bed (Hons) to her name. She has 25 years of teaching experience. Mrs C, is a Consumer Studies teacher with 23 years experience. She has a HEd, STD and BEd. The Focus group consisting of three teachers, responsible for teaching English First Additional Language, Geography and Mathematical Literacy.

Table 4: Profile of School 7

Indicator	Class	Supporting evidence
1. Strategic leadership	0	Because of chronic late-coming by learners, a period register has been introduced where a class representative has a form and fills in the number of learners in class during every period and every teacher has to sign during every period. At the end of the day the HOD collects these forms to find out which of the learners and teachers were not in class. The principal compiles accountability forms and arranges disciplinary action. The school is characterized by lack of commitment, motivation and discipline on the part of many learners and some staff members e.g. learners do not hand in work and a few teachers did not hand in their marks on the due date. According to the HOD about 5 – 6 teachers are guilty on this account and are tainting the image of the school: according to the DP they are pushed and developed to attend classes at all times and their work and punctuality are monitored.
2. Curriculum leadership	1	The interviewees agreed that there is a year plan for the subjects they teach, which is checked by the senior teacher or HOD. Both the teachers said they complete the curriculum of each subject before the final assessment. However the HOD, Mr A disagreed saying only curriculum for Grade 12 subjects is completed He described his role in ensuring quality learning and teaching in his school as follows: teacher and learner portfolios are controlled according to the assessment programme for the whole year; a subject moderation tool is used and teachers are called in for discussions particularly where improvements are needed; the quality of tests is monitored.

		Ms B says that subject meetings are held once a term to discuss learner performance. SMT usually refer to results when dealing with teachers on misconduct. There is a shortage of Grades 10 and 11 textbooks but all Grade 12 learners have textbooks which they take home.
3. Time management	0	Learners leave the school grounds during break to find food and often do not return or return late. Ms B noted that all staff receive the timetable at the beginning of the year. She also noted that staff go back to class on time but the learners do not. Mrs C noted that when staff is absent there is no system in place to take care of the learners.
4. Professional behaviour	0	According to Mr A, professionalism is the ability to approach your work in a positive manner, to be punctual, co-operative, diligent, accommodative, to share information with others and to develop skills to present your subject well. You must have a sound relationship with all stakeholders and be prepared to assist learners. He does not think all the teachers in the school are professional as they display unprofessional conduct such as late-coming, laziness and confrontation with officials. Ms B voiced her understanding of professionalism as one who respect themselves and honour their duties and responsibilities. Mrs C voiced similar sentiments. Both the teachers feel they behave professionally as they respect their duties, come on time and do their work. A certain number of bursaries for staff study are received from the Department, but there are no incentives except a once-off bonus which does not cover the expenses accrued during the time of study.
5. Collegial practice on curriculum delivery	1	According to the majority of interviewees, teachers do work regularly with each other via informal discussions, regular meetings on curriculum issues and also team teaching. The focus group participants all agreed that there is a culture of learning amongst the teachers at the school. In many instances there is interaction to share knowledge. Teachers ask colleagues to explain certain aspects of the work to the learners; informally discussing problematic areas of subjects; departmental meetings on e.g. problem-solving. However, the Deputy Principal's comments regarding 5 or 6 teachers who are tardy in meeting deadlines tends to contradict these views.
6. Collegial practice on assessment	1	There was no unanimity on the question of working together on assessment issues, with two teachers saying that regular subject/phase meetings are held, but the DP disagreed, saying that teachers only have informal discussions.
7. Induction into the school	0	The school does not have a policy on inducting newly qualified teachers into the school.

3.4 What separates Schools 7 and 8?

Schools 7 and 8 are, respectively, the worst and best performing schools in our sample of 8 case study schools. Nevertheless, in addition to their very poor socio-economic environment the two schools have much in common: timetables, year plans, and attitudes to professionalism, for example. The most striking difference between them is in the mood among managers and teachers alike. Compare the 'pushing' and 'monitoring' of staff and students at School 7, with the sense of purpose and pride in doing a job well at School 8. It would seem that teachers work harder in the well performing school, but the reward of good performance is what motivates them. This sense of purpose appears to be the most central element of this very successful institution. However, it is also the most difficult to replicate, because it arises in response to leadership, which depends on a particular blend of personality and skill, which is not simply transferable through training.

Individual and distributed leadership

The energy and vision driving School 8 is obviously the principal, who has organized his school into a team effort. There is a clearly defined division of labour among staff: a learner welfare committee looks out for vulnerable children, and a book retrieval committee looks after the books, to name just two

functions. This is distributed leadership writ large. The extent to which teachers feel an integral part of the institution was summed up by one of our interviewees:

> ‘Even if the principal dies, the school will continue because the systems have always been in place. The principal will not rest before a problem is solved’.

This quote illustrates both the power of apparently self-perpetuating systems, and the force of the principal as the dynamo driving them.

Parents are very much part of the distributed leadership team. All our case study schools, with the exception of School 8, understand that parental involvement is important but have resigned themselves to very low levels of participation by their parent bodies. School 8 is an outstanding exception, connecting formally with parents through well attended PTA meetings, the hand-over of reports, and face-to-face discussions about learning difficulties. Parents are urged to engage with their children daily about homework and other school matters. The School Governing Body is very active.

To what extent the charisma and energy of the principal at School 8 can be replicated by training, and to what extent it can be mandated by policy are key questions for the project of improving functionality of the SA school system. Mentoring by a competent principal over an extended period should probably play a central part in assisting trainee principals to acclimatize themselves to leading a successful school.

Systems

Effective systems drive the teaching/learning programme of any school: the central systems are time management, curriculum delivery, assessment, book procurement and retrieval, and professional development of staff. Effective systems are made possible by good leadership, which inspires staff to extend themselves in the interest of a greater goal. But it is the systems which channel this energy into productive activity. On the issue of **time management**, the way the two institutions manage the problem of learner absenteeism is instructive. At the weaker school, there is a cumbersome reporting procedure, which culminates in the principal disciplining the learner. But it seems to be a perennial problem that the reporting procedure may diminish but not solve. Compare this with the very simple but effective strategy at School 8, where the gates are kept locked during school hours, including breaks. The school is determined to use every hour of every school day available for teaching and learning. Interestingly, a number of schools in our case study sample, including poorly performing ones, held afternoon, weekend and holiday classes for G12 learners, while at the same time exhibiting rather loose timekeeping during the normal school day. It seems grossly inefficient to allow sloppy punctuality arrangements in the school, and then feeling the need to make up time after school. School 8 does both, obtaining maximum use of the school day and adding time around this.

Regarding **curriculum delivery** systems, School 8 gets ready for the new year in advance: timetables are prepared and books handed out at the end of the preceding year, so that teaching can start on the first day of the year, after a short assembly. Another example of the can-do problem solving skills of the principal at School 8 is the way he ameliorates the severe inhibitions placed on learning by book shortages. The school has a system of routine afternoon study classes, which teachers supervise in

rotation, without additional pay, and where learners do homework exercises sharing available books. School 7 also has curriculum systems in the form of year plans, subject meetings and book distribution, but there was disagreement among our interviewees concerning their precise nature and degree of implementation.

Similarly, both schools have **assessment procedures**, which include formal meetings on moderation, quality assurance and implications for teaching. But here too, School 8 stands out with a tightly integrated system which engages learners with teachers and parents in tracking the progress of individuals and classes. This is in sharp contrast to the inconsistencies in the accounts given by our different interviewees at School 7.

Professionalism

On the question of **professionalism**, the views of teachers at our two comparator schools are very similar, emphasizing the ethical and to a lesser extent the knowledge components. However, the third element of professionalism – a sense of intrinsic motivation – is missing at both schools. One of our interviewees at School 8 spoke about the need for professional development:

> 'It is being fully trained to do the job you're doing and getting workshops to further your knowledge.'

The passive tense in this quote reveals the absence of intrinsic motivation: even teachers at our most outstanding school are waiting for training. This is the one element which inhibits the school from being one of the very best in the country, placing it into the category of Standard Good Practice and short of Professional Practice. Dedicated, energetic and innovative as School 8 is in giving its very poor learners a huge leg up in life, it lacks the one element that would make it truly self sufficient and able to place its matriculants into the highest echelons of achievers. This missing ingredient is the ability of individual teachers, and the institution as a whole, to be proactive in developing their own knowledge resources.

3.5 Summary of the case studies

A detailed analysis of each case study school is available in a separate Technical Report (Taylor et al, 2010). This section zooms out one stop from the micro-analysis of our two extreme examples, to look for patterns across all 8 schools (Table 5).

Table 5: Summary of Case Study school rating on 7 indicators

Indicator	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	Mean (max : 2)
1. Strategic leadership	1	1	0	1	0	1	0	2	0.8
2. Curriculum leadership	1	1	1	1	0	1	1	2	1.0
3. Time management	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	2	0.5
4. Professional behaviour	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	0.3
5. Collegial practice on curriculum delivery	1	1	1	1	0	1	1	2	1.0
6. Collegial practice on assessment	2	2	2	1	2	2	1	2	1.8
7. Induction into the school	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	2	0.4
Total (max: 14)	**5**	**6**	**5**	**4**	**3**	**6**	**3**	**13**	
	Mod	Poor	Poor	Poor	Poor	Mod	Poor	Good	

* Good: >70%; Moderate: 50-69%; Poor: <50%

School 8 is very much an exception, standing head and shoulders above the other 7 institutions, which all look much more like School 7 than the best performing school, even though our purposive sampling technique was intended to identify a wide range of institutional behavior. Indeed, it looks very much like we were lucky to find even one excellent school in the sample.

Our seven indicators can be classified into 3 groups according to the mean ratings exhibited by the schools. By far the best performance across the board was achieved on Indicator 6: Collegial Practice on Assessment, where all but 2 schools scored a maximum 2, with a mean rating of 1.8 across the case study schools. This is a hopeful result, given the central role of assessment in teaching and learning, and the need for teachers to meet regularly to plan, quality assure and monitor the assessment of learner progress. However, it would seem that the assessment system in most schools is an empty shell: structured activities seem to achieve little more going through the motions, but having little effect on learning.

A group of 3 indicators comprise the next best category: Strategic Leadership, Curriculum Leadership, and Collegial Practices on Curriculum Delivery. The first of these, and to some extent the second too, is the driving force behind all the other activities in the school: without good strategic leadership, focused on the curriculum it is hard to see how teachers can act in concert in conducting the business of the school. A mean of 0.9 across this group of indicators indicates that staff may understand the importance of this terrain, but are unable to establish functional systems for productive teaching.

Performance in the Case Study schools is worst on what are arguably the next two most important indicators: Time Management (mean 0.5) and Professional Behaviour (mean 0.3). It goes without saying that the less time teachers and children spend in class the less learning can take place, and 7 schools show little or no urgency about maximizing learning time, with school starting late, learners drifting into class in their own time after break, and days routinely lost to non-curricular activities. Bizarrely, many schools attempt to make up for lost time during weekends, holidays and after school, but this generally only applies to Grade 12 learners. In any case, desultory time-keeping practices in the institution send a bad message to learners, who are likely to become acclimatized to a loose attitude to time.

On the question of professional behavior, our literature survey identified 3 essential attributes: an ethical approach to work, understanding the importance of subject knowledge as a prerequisite for good teaching, and an intrinsic sense of motivation. Six schools listed only the first of these, only two mentioned the second, while no schools got the last one, which is perhaps the most important characteristic of all: without a self-directed sense of purpose teachers have a passive attitude to their work, which inhibits them from rising above their circumstances, and an attitude which is likely to be transmitted to their learners.

4. The Survey

The survey data continues the zoom-out process, putting the findings of our case studies into a larger perspective, where we attempt to understand how the patterns described in section 3 above are more generally applicable to the population. The population under study is schools falling into quintiles 1-3 in

two urban and one rural townships in two of the country's poorest provinces. One hundred survey schools were chosen at random from this population and 57 schools responded. The survey data is entirely of a self-report nature and, since it was derived from one respondent in each school, it could not be subjected to the stringent triangulation procedures applied to the case study data. For this reason is likely to be less valid as a reflection of 'what actually happens' in these schools, and less reliable as a tool for comparing schools. Nevertheless, the data provides some interesting additional insights, largely through its contradiction of our case findings, but also in some corroborating instances.

The survey instrument included a number of items from the interviews. One of these is the characterization of the school according to the Lion/Ostrich/Zebra scenarios. Among the case studies only School 8 can be classified as Lion, with all other schools coming well short of this class of leadership and organization. Also, School 8 is the only one to consistently perform above 80% in the SC exams, with the other 7 schools again well short of this achievement. A one-case correlation can never indicate association, but the hypothesis that Lion schools have a high probability of scoring in excess of 80% is strong. In the three districts comprising the study population we could find only one 80% school, and indeed had difficulty identifying schools consistently scoring over 70% (our Good category in Table 3), so this hypothesis cannot be tested in our population. Yet 35% of the 57 principals who responded claimed Lion status for their schools. Similarly, our case study sample shows that more than a third fit the Ostrich character, according to both SC scores and our indicators of institutional activity, while only 2 (4%) principals surveyed thought this applied to their schools. This would seem too low, and it seems clear that our criteria for classifying case study school activities are far more rigorous than those applied by principals in the survey sample.

We found case study schools not to make optimal use of time for teaching and learning. Yet survey principals seem well satisfied with their management of time: the timetable is followed in 100% of schools; the attendance register is completed in 95%; school starts and ends on time every day in 93%; children and staff return to class on time after break in 79%; time is seldom lost to extra-curricular activities in 49%; and in 96% of survey schools all teachers have a year plan, which is always checked by the HOD. There are two possible explanations for the discrepancy between the survey and case study data: one, the case studies are not typical of the population; or two, principals are satisfied with the way their schools function, because they have no sense of how things could be different, they cannot imagine a different future. While the case studies do not claim to represent the population, the discrepancy is too large to support the hypothesis that the case study schools are atypical.

Ninety-six per cent of principals claim to support their teachers, and 70% say that their teachers work together through regular meetings or team teaching. Similarly, regular grade meetings on learner performance happen in 78% of schools. However, in only 53% do teachers complete the syllabus. The latter two responses do accord with the case study findings (Table 5). According to principals, 55% of learners have individual copies of books and are permitted to take them home. Regarding parental support, only 11% said they received strong support, 40% said they had very little, and 49% said that sometimes they received support. On district support, only 4% of principals rated this as excellent, with 44% saying it is 'mostly good' and 41% saying it is 'average'; these finding are largely not supported by the case study data, where teachers are generally not impressed by district support.

When asked about teachers' training needs most principals said that knowledge about how young people develop (38%), and knowledge about how to teach (35%) were what teachers needed most. Only 7 (13%) of respondents mentioned subject content knowledge. Given what we know about the poor state of teachers' subject knowledge, and given that subject knowledge underpins knowledge about how to teach, it is apparent that principals seriously underestimate the knowledge needs of their teachers.

5. Conclusion

Poor learner performance in the majority of South African schools is accompanied by very low levels of teacher subject knowledge, weak management practices and destructive union activity. With reference to the last of these, it is clear that powerful elements in the public sector unions are intent on perverting labour relations mechanisms in order to maintain their authority, which in turn provides the platform for accessing state resources, chiefly through domination of the recruitment and promotion of teachers, principals and bureaucrats. This process is destructive in two ways. First, it results in inappropriate people being appointed to positions for which they are ill equipped: under these conditions institutional dysfunctionality becomes the norm. Second, and far more important, channeling opportunity nepotistically signals that expertise is irrelevant and its development and deployment is not the way to get ahead; instead, the livelihood of teachers and principals depends on the cultivation of clan-like networks held together nominally by SADTU, but in reality these are cliques pursuing the material interests of their members. In Abbott's terms, mechanical forms of organization currently overwhelm professionalism and dominate processes of institutionalization (Abbott,1988, 324). Belonging to the clan is more important than using one's expertise to maintain the mutually dependent networks which hold together a modern society. In the face of these currents, pontifications in parliament about teachers needing to be in school, in class and teaching, handed down by successive presidents over the last 15 years, seem particularly futile.

This is a political problem between government and its union allies, and needs to be addressed, in the first instance, at the political level. This is about much more than disciplining the unions. It is also about the principles of organizing the public sector. An efficient civil service is powered by expertise and if expert knowledge is not adopted as the central principle of institutional organization, then the public sector mainly benefits its own officials with little trickling down to the potential beneficiaries of the developmental state.

A systemic solution to South Africa's schooling crisis seems a long way off, implicated as it is in the struggle to transcend three and a half centuries of colonialism, and in contestation within the ruling party and the state between the residual mechanical forms of solidarity which brought down apartheid and emerging inclinations towards modernity. Nevertheless, a slowly expanding research base, to which the present paper makes a modest contribution, indicates that, at the institutional level, much is possible in the short term under even the most trying circumstances. This is not to suggest that achieving excellent schooling under conditions of extreme poverty is easy, and the rarity of such institutions is ample testimony to the difficulties involved. But it is possible, as our case study School 8

attests, to provide a far better education to poor children than is currently the norm in something like 70-80% of the country's schools.

The enthusiasm and dedication with which teachers go about their work in excellent schools, in the face of the widespread institutional dysfunctionality and corrupt and illegal behavior by union officials, highlights one of the most startling yet hopeful contradictions which shows itself in all spheres of South African life. The majority of schools plod along desultorily. Teachers are periodically swept into the streets by union leaders to threaten life and limb of their law abiding peers. Very rarely, when an inspired principal shows them the non-material benefits of good teaching, they dedicate themselves tirelessly to providing the best education they can to their charges. This contradiction reveals the potential lying largely untapped in tens of thousands of schools around the country.

The place to start reforming any dysfunctional school is in the sphere of governance, where legislation provides wide-ranging powers to the School Governing Body, including staff recruitment. Getting the kind of skills onto an SGB able to select and support an excellent principal is the first problem in poor communities where unemployment and illiteracy are rife and the principles of institutional governance little understood. The use of local structures, such as churches or civic groups would seem to present promising possibilities; it would obviously be a conflict of interest for unions to be involved. Unfortunately, many poor communities prefer to keep the work local and to recommend friends or family for any employment opportunities: this is understandable in the short term, but in the long run it makes it that much more difficult for their children to get the educational foundation required to rise above these circumstances. School 8 shows how this foundation can be built, making maximum use of available resources to improve the life chances of its learners.

The dynamo of schools such as this is the principal, who inspires a sense of purpose, something which is perhaps not that difficult, if only one can show teachers the joy to be gained from children learning; without this perspective teaching can at best be perfunctory. If communities have any desire to improve local schooling, the place to start is to find an excellent leader. The extent to which existing school leadership can be improved has not been demonstrated in South Africa, and any attempt to do this must acknowledge that good leadership depends in part on a particular blend of personality and skill, which is not simply replicable through training. Nevertheless, better leadership would almost certainly be encouraged through mentoring and modeling processes. We would not want to over-emphasize the importance of the principal, at the expense of acknowledging that what happens in the classroom is the biggest factor in learning. The point, rather, is to indicate where to start. Selecting good teachers is an on-going task, and here too attitude and expertise should be the only criteria used for recruiting and promoting staff.

What the principal and staff do together in a well functioning school is to build systems which drive the work of teaching and learning. Parents are incorporated into an extended pedagogical team. A structured division of labour distributes functions and integrates curriculum delivery across the classroom, the school and the home. Our research study looked only at the school level, where central systems regulating the flow of work are time management, curriculum planning, assessment, book procurement and retrieval, and teacher professional development. While there certainly are standard

features to these systems, in general innovative solutions need to be found to local manifestations of the problems endemic to poor communities: learner hunger, poor punctuality, shortages of books and classrooms, and home conditions not conducive to parental engagement.

The present study also looks at the issue of professional behavior at the levels of both individual teachers and the school. We assume that professionalism is composed of three elements: ethical comportment, understanding the importance of subject knowledge as the foundation for teaching, and a sense of intrinsic motivation. The last element, and to a large extent the second one too, appear to be missing in the study sample. The large majority of the 8 case study and 65 survey principals underestimate the subject knowledge needs of their teachers, and those few teachers who do realize their own shortcomings in this area are dependent on the district for providing training. It is our hypothesis that if the teachers at School 8, and the school as an institution, took the initiative in building their own knowledge resources, the school would be lifted from its current status of standard good practice to that of a professional practice institution, where its graduates would be able to compete with any in the country. This is not to absolve districts and provinces from their responsibility regarding the professional development of teachers, but to indicate that much can be achieved at the school and teacher levels, while South Africa's much delayed developmental state continues to gestate.

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