

CHAPTER 1

ORIENTATION

1.1 INTRODUCTION

Educational under-achievement in deprived areas in South Africa, particularly in inner cities, small towns, suburban and rural locations is an acute problem. Where multiple disadvantages combine, the odds weigh heavily against educational success. Despite this, school effectiveness and school improvement have been implemented by many schools that face the most difficult challenges. How do these schools cope with the odds faced by schools in disadvantaged areas?

The term disadvantage, defined as unfavourable conditions or circumstances, detriment or prejudice, includes social and material factors such as income, unemployment, housing, health and environmental conditions. The term simply means poverty (National Commission on Education 1996:2). Disadvantage limits access to educational opportunities and reduces the ability of learners to benefit from schooling. The link between disadvantage and educational performance has so far proved too difficult to break for policy-makers at a national level (National Commission on Education 1996:3). However, many individual schools in disadvantaged areas have been able to succeed, by means of a shared vision, mission, determination, dedication, providing a challenge to all learners whatever their perceived capabilities, and by pursuing particular policies and practices. It is this phenomenon that will be described and analysed by means of case studies of schools which have succeeded against the odds. A successful school is one in which learners progress further than might be expected with due consideration of its intake (Peter Mortimore, National Commission on Education 1996:8).

The important thing about the core characteristics of and conditions for school effectiveness is that they apply to those schools whose performance is continually improving over time, whether they are large or small, rural or urban, primary or secondary. School improvement is essentially about the strategies for, and underlying process of change, by which a school can develop on a continuous basis. In the case of schools that face a range of problems, due to a disadvantaged environment, the study focuses on those which recognise the need to improve, define success

criteria, and embark on long-term improvement. Two issues are of pertinent importance in this regard, namely Total Quality Management and Whole School Evaluation.

Total Quality Management (TQM) and school success are two sides of the same coin. The concept of TQM is all-encompassing. Total means that an entire organisation must adapt itself to quality management; quality implies that everything done must be based on principles of quality, and management means that accountability for results rests with school managers. A shift to TQM cannot be done lightly because it will raise many issues regarding expectations, commitment and endurance (Wendel et al 1996:116).

The National Policy on Whole School Evaluation (2001) introduces an effective monitoring and evaluation process that is vital to the improvement of quality and standards of performance in schools. The focus is primarily on the school as a whole rather than simply on individuals and their performance. As a process, whole-school evaluation is meant to be supportive and developmental. Its main purpose is to facilitate improvement of school performance through approaches characterised by partnership, collaboration, mentoring and guidance (Department of Education (DoE) 2001).

1.2 MOTIVATION OF RESEARCH

Surveys of schools in disadvantaged urban or rural areas indicate that across the system as a whole the residents of these areas are poorly served by the education system. Learners have only a slim chance of receiving sufficiently challenging and rewarding teaching throughout their educational career (Mouton 2001:5). However, it is possible for a school from a disadvantaged area to succeed against the odds. Examination and test results do not tell the whole story.

It is assumed that case studies in which the features, problems, strategies and initiatives of schools within disadvantaged circumstances that are successful are described and analysed could be a powerful mechanism for encouraging good practice and thus helping others to raise standards. The study will bring the determinants of school success to the fore for future application in planning, controlling, coordinating and monitoring of school effectiveness and improvement notwithstanding disadvantaged environments.

1.3 FORMULATION OF THE PROBLEM

This research investigates the performance and achievement of learners, teachers and schools against the background of school effectiveness and school improvement in disadvantaged environments. The following research question guided the research project: Which factors determine school success in a disadvantaged environment?

This research question implied the following sub-questions:

1. What role does TQM play in school effectiveness and improvement?
2. What is the role of whole school evaluation in school success? How can the involvement of the learners, teachers, parents, the education department and the community at large, through a shared vision and mission, realise school success notwithstanding a disadvantaged environment?
3. What is the role of the Department of Education in improving or promoting school success in disadvantaged communities?
4. How can findings on the determinants of school success in disadvantaged environments be optimally utilised in education management?

1.4 FORMULATION OF HYPOTHESIS

The hypothesis of this study can be formulated as follows:

TQM principles and practices are inherent in successful schools in disadvantaged settings.

1.5 THE AIM OF THE STUDY

The research aim was to identify determinants for school success in disadvantaged communities, and disseminate the findings to managerial, policy and community stakeholders in education.

1.6 RESEARCH METHODS AND DESIGN

1.6.1 Literature study

Relevant data concerning the research problem was gathered from primary and secondary sources. As far as possible, recently published materials were used in collecting data. The literature was critically analysed, evaluated, examined, classified and objectively recorded.

1.6.2 Qualitative research

Principals, heads of departments and members of School Governing Bodies of schools in disadvantaged environments were interviewed to obtain the views, perspectives and experiences concerning the research focus. The study focused on four schools in disadvantaged communities, two rural, two urban. The methodology involved interviews, observations and document analysis.

1.7 DEMARCATION OF THE STUDY

The study was conducted in four schools in the Gauteng Province. These four schools which obtained successes in disadvantaged environments, two from rural settings and two from urban settings, were investigated in depth. It was assumed that these schools would render information-rich data with some applicability to schools in similar circumstances elsewhere in South Africa.

The provincial office of education was approached to facilitate the smooth running of this study.

1.8 DEFINITION OF CONCEPTS

1.8.1 Total Quality Management (TQM)

TQM in education organisations is the commitment of everyone, (parents, teachers, students, aides, service persons, governing body members, administrators and all others) to meet the requirements of customers collaboratively. Total (i.e. everyone is committed), Quality (i.e. meeting the requirements of customers), Management (i.e. collaboratively), is the day-to-day belief and behaviour of effective TQM organisations (Fields 1993:13).

1.8.2 Total Quality Education (TQE)

TQE is both a philosophy and a practice. The philosophy is that there should be continuous improvement in the quality of every person and of every process in the educational institution (Hayward 1999:22).

1.8.3 Futuristic orientation

A futuristic orientation towards education implies that the focus of education improvement must be process-oriented. This process requires that a school system and its environment of systems should be more concerned with developing the instructional capacities of an area, a school system, school or classroom to achieve an on-going process of improvement than with remedying perceived problems (Reilly 1995:93).

1.8.4 Healthy school

A healthy school has a creative and interactive relationship with its environment. Only in an open dialogue with the environment is it possible for the school to ‘protect’ its own culture and at the same time be responsive to community needs (Reilly 1995:111).

1.8.5 School improvement

School improvement is not an event, it is a process. It is also a never-ending process because there is and should always be room for improvement. “If you can dream it, you can do it” (Parsons 1994:37).

1.8.6 School effectiveness

School effectiveness entails a future vision of what should be, strong instructional leadership and a safe and orderly climate, conducive to learning. Thus, high expectations for achievement, mastery of basic skills and academic progress will be achieved (Hopkins 1994:3).

1.8.7 Participatory management

Participatory management can be described as an organisational system in which many staff members have opportunities to participate in decision making, planning and management (Scheets & Benson 1994:73).

1.8.8 Shared vision

A shared vision entails a governing force guiding each member of the organisation as measured by the consistency of the beliefs, values and assumptions with the everyday decisions and behaviours of the members (West-Burnham 1992:70).

1.9 DIVISION INTO CHAPTERS

The dissertation is divided into the following chapters:

Chapter 1: In this chapter the motivation for research, the formulation of the problem, the hypothesis, the aims of the study, the research design and the definition of concepts have been briefly described.

Chapter 2: This chapter focuses on school improvement and school effectiveness in disadvantaged environments by giving attention to *inter alia*:

- Leadership styles, interpersonal relations, innovation and quality;
- Teacher, learner and parental community involvement in education and decision making;
- The role of Total Quality Management in successful schools in disadvantaged environments;
- Objectives and needs assessment.

The study is organised according to a taxonomy of factors which determine school success in a disadvantaged environment (see section 2.2).

Chapter 3: This chapter covers the design and methodology of the empirical research of school success in a disadvantaged environment.

Chapter 4: This chapter deals with the analysis and interpretation of the empirical survey data.

Chapter 5: This chapter presents an overview of the research findings, conclusions and recommendations.

1.10 SUMMARY

In this chapter, a brief contextualisation of the study was presented, followed by the exposition of the research problems, research aims, research design and key terminology. This orientation serves as point of departure for the presentation of the literature study findings (see next chapter) and the empirical data (see chapter 4).