

CHAPTER 3

CONTEXTUAL REALITIES OF SCHOOLING IN MPUMALANGA

3.1 INTRODUCTION

One of the most important observations of chapter 2 was that school-based management is not new. It has been and is being practiced in varying degrees by school systems throughout the world. The aim is to empower the school to achieve its core competence in providing learners with learning opportunities in an authentic and meaningful context. Some schools have been able to function well despite exposure to both rural and urban hardships, as an alleged response to the problem of improving the learning culture yet others are failing to improve the learning culture. It did so by identifying what strategies could enable learners and teachers to become more resilient and thus more able to contribute to the revitalization of a healthy learning culture. Therefore, it is likely that these strategies will be prominent in any approach aimed at improving the learning culture in South Africa especially within rural communities in Mpumalanga.

The resiliency shown by some schools in the rural communities of Mpumalanga serves as the basis of this inquiry.

As school-based management rests on a commitment to situational management and leadership, that is, what works best in one place may not work best elsewhere (Prasch1990:2), therefore, the aim of this chapter is to present and discuss the contextual realities of the learning culture of schools within rural communities in Mpumalanga. These will be explored through discussing the school-based management and leadership, functioning of the school governing body, provision of educational facilities and resources, learner-educator and learner-classroom ratios, the culture of learning and teaching, teacher qualifications, parents' level of education, discipline, safety and learning atmosphere and assistance from the department of education.

3.2 SCHOOL-BASED MANAGEMENT AND LEADERSHIP IN MPUMALANGA

3.2.1 Background to self-managing schools with reference to South Africa

The education system in South Africa has changed dramatically, so is school management system in Mpumalanga. The Mpumalanga Department of Education (MDE) has embarked on a process of restructuring its institutions to be in line with the new challenges (Mpumalanga Department of Education 2001:2). The South African Schools Act, 1996, has already devolved many responsibilities to school level in terms of section 20 and it provided opportunities for schools to take on even more responsibilities in terms of section 21 (2.2). Self-management refers to the following aspects of schools:

- In each school there is power sharing. Two teams working co-operatively share responsibility: a school governing body and a school management team.
- Each school designs its own learning programme within national guidelines which suits its learners' needs and interests.
- Each school does its own development planning. Each school community develops its own vision and Mission Statement, decides on its own priorities, and draws up its own action plan.
- Each school arranges its finances in ways to meet its own needs and plans. The school draws up its own budget – based on funds received from the government, and supplemented by school fees and other fund-raising.
- Each school manages its staff in ways which motivate them to provide the best possible teaching and learning for all learners in the school, that is, develop the school as a learning organisation
- Each school negotiates its own codes of conduct and policies, and implements them in ways which the community members: parents, learners and teachers understand and support.
- Each school manages its own physical resources, and is responsible for maintaining and developing the school property and equipment.

3.2.2 The role of education department

The role of the national and provincial education departments is to support self-managing schools at many levels:

- to provide a broad policy context for schools;
- to build capacity, that is, provide training and guidance, in schools so that they can develop all the skills required to do their work effectively and efficiently;
- to monitor schools and ensure that they are working within the guidelines provided by the policies (Mpumalanga Education Department(a) 2002:5-7).
- To promote HIV/AIDS programme. As Padayachee (2003:8) states: Over the past years, the education response to HIV and AIDS has gained momentum.

3.2.3 Management and leadership in Mpumalanga rural schools

The South African Schools Act of 1996 requires the principals, teachers, learners and parents to participate in leading and managing schools. However, in the rural communities of Mpumalanga very often it is the school principals and the school management teams who end up taking responsibility for making things happen.

Some principals in Mpumalanga do not empower teachers to act decisively and any constructive suggestion is regarded as counter-productive. Hence the teacher empowerment is part of the school- based management (SBM). Therefore, teachers must be empowered to do what they do best, which is to teach learners. Teachers are empowered when they can act as, and are treated as professionals. The poor learning culture in the rural communities of Mpumalanga is attributed to lack of teacher empowerment.

Teachers, in many schools in Mpumalanga, are not involved in decision-making. Literature indicates that teachers tend to express greater expectations for and desire to participate in decisions related to classroom instruction, but have considerably less desire to participate in administrative and management decisions. Literature also indicates that

teachers' willingness to participate in administrative duties is influenced by their relationship with their principal. Teachers are more willing to participate if their relationship with their principal is more open, collaborative and supportive. They are much less willing to participate if their relationship is closed, exclusionary and controlling. Had they been involved, they would know why such decisions are made and feel motivated to put them into practice. As a result they would feel a sense of responsibility for the school. Therefore principals need to be democratic leaders who do not make decisions alone. Of course, there are circumstances, which might not be appropriate for principals to ask other people for their opinions or to negotiate with them. Regardless of what style of leadership is practiced, the final decision rests with the principals. However, this does not mean that teachers must be sidelined when important decisions are taken. Principals in Mpumalanga must understand that they would not give up their authority by sharing decisions with teachers.

The South African Schools Act of 1996 requires the principal to form a school management team made up of deputy principal, head of department and senior staff. This structure is responsible for the running of the school and putting the school policies into practice. Many schools in Mpumalanga do have the school management teams (SMTs) which work hand in hand with their principals. The SMTs in many rural schools have been engaged in controlling the day-to-day operational and professional activities in their schools while some are not.

As schools have been allocated section 21 which gives them extra function to control their own finances (2.3), some principals in Mpumalanga are not well equipped in handling the public funds. This is frequently a source of conflict with teachers. In some schools there are no financial policies and where there are any, principals and teachers do not adhere to it. As a result, the culture of learning is severely affected.

Power sharing within schools is minimal. Self-managing schools have been allocated powers to make policies and decisions that suit their own community's situation. Within each school, power is shared between two groups which are equally important: the school

governing body and the school management team. Some principals in the rural communities of Mpumalanga work very well with these structures while others unable to do so.

The SASA requires principals to involve learners in decision-making. Many schools in Mpumalanga do have learners in SGBs. Although learners are part of SGBs, they are not fully involved in decision-making. As Harber and Trafford (1999:45) state that children in schools are not commonly regarded as socially competent when it comes to making decisions on a range of issues that affect their institutional lives. This traditional exclusion of learners from consultative process, the bracketing of their voice, is founded upon an outdated view of childhood which fails to acknowledge children's capacity to reflect on issues affecting their lives. This perception is common in many schools in rural communities of Mpumalanga. Literature indicates that many of the structures and processes which characterise effective schools in meeting the needs of their learners align with democratic principles and practice, in that learners in effective schools are fully involved in the life of the school (Harber & Trafford 1999:45).

3.3 FUNCTIONING OF THE SCHOOL GOVERNING BODY

The functioning of the school governing body seems to be at a reasonable level, as the national indicator is 79,3% and in Mpumalanga 76,3%. The functioning of the SGBs at schools in the different provinces shows small variation. The indicators for the different provinces range from 73,1% in the Free State to a high of 83,4% in Gauteng. The SGBs have contributed to a large extent to the effective functioning of the school as they are rated at a level of 79% (Mpumalanga Department of Education (b), 2002:30).

SGBs are involved in the following activities:

- maintaining a bank account
- preparing an annual income and expenditure statement
- ensuring financial statements are audited and examining financial statements

- Presenting an annual report to the parents (Mpumalanga Department of Education,(b) 2002:30).

Currently (2004) schools in Mpumalanga have obtained section 21 status with certain functions. These include:

- To maintain and improve the school's property, and buildings and grounds occupied by the school, including school hostels, if applicable;
- To determine the extra-mural curriculum of the school and the choice of subject options in terms of the Provincial curriculum policy;
- To purchase textbooks, educational materials or equipment for the school; and
- To pay for services to the school.

3.4 ADMISSION OF LEARNERS

One of the functions of the SGB is to determine the school's admission policy which is in line with the constitution of the country. This function is crucial. The South African Schools Act, 1996, state categorically that public schools should admit learners without discrimination. This implies that no admission tests should be administered. Cases of discrimination have been reported in the Mpumalanga schools. This resulted in the formation of task team which looked into the issue of persistent allegations pertaining to improper and unfair procedures in the administration of admissions of learners to schools.

One of the findings of the task team was that the learners from formerly disadvantaged communities felt scared in the integrated schools. They are unhappy and feel abused, both physically and mentally by both learners and teachers (Mpumalanga Department of Education 2002:12).

3.5 PROVISION OF SCHOOL FACILITIES AND RESOURCES

The crux of SBM is to ensure that schools are provided with adequate facilities and resources in order to establish a conducive learning and teaching environment. Project 7 (School Infrastructure) of Program 2 (School Effectiveness and Teacher Professionalism) of the Implementation Plan for Tirisano commits itself to ensuring that all schools meet the minimum physical and infra-structural requirements necessary to establish and support a conducive learning and teaching environment. The availability of school facilities in Mpumalanga (48,4%) is below the national average of (52,6%). Classrooms are not suitable for learning and this hampers the quality of education in this province. 4% of educators are teaching classes with more than 50 learners (Mpumalanga Department of Education (b) 2002:49). In 1997, about 1200 schools were without telephones in Mpumalanga (Bot 1997:3). The economic implications of the backlog of schooling facilities in South Africa are enormous (Sapere & Mills 1992:42).

Learners who attend schools that lack resources come from homes that are similarly or more disadvantaged.

In addition, C2005 encourages the use of resources outside of the classrooms, and learners to take responsibility for their own learning. The C2005 form of pedagogy cannot be promoted effectively without access to and efficacious utilisation of adequate facilities and resources (Mpumalanga Department of Education (b) (2002:23).

As has been indicated, Mpumalanga is particularly under-resourced with respect to school facilities and resources. Table 3.1 shows findings of survey on school facilities in Mpumalanga and RSA (Mpumalanga Department of Education (b) (2002:37).

Table 3.1: Indicators for facilities in Mpumalanga

School facilities	Percentage
1.1 Libraries	22,8%
1.2 Sports field	39,1%
1.3 Availability of playgrounds	48,5%
1.4 The availability of staff rooms	49,5%
1.5 General condition of school	56,8%
1.6 Offices for the principals	57,4%

The consolidated national indicator for facilities was at 52,6% and the provincial 48,3%, implicating that Mpumalanga does not have the facilities of the other provinces.

The situation is especially acute in rural areas. Hartley (1998:17) found that a total of 12.18% or 230 schools in Mpumalanga are without any on-site toilet facilities. Mabuza (in Collings 1999:21) states that there are no toilet facilities in 12% of the province's 2400 schools. The majority of the remaining schools use pit latrines, which are often inadequate as well as few in number and are insufficient for the numbers of users. Sapere & Mills (1992:42) state in some instances, schools of up to 1000 learners have no toilets at all and where facilities do exist, they are often blocked and seldom hygienic. These conditions, pose significant health hazards to learners and teachers alike.

The conditions of the buildings at some schools are very poor. Hartley (1998:10) found that many of the schools were unsuitable for learning. Thus, the provision of facilities and resources to schools remains an important element in the establishment of a culture of learning. There is a growing consensus in the literature that adequate and decent facilities do indeed create a positive environment, affecting the working conditions of the staff and the overall learning environment.

The provision of the infrastructure in Mpumalanga schools remains considerable. According to Chisholm & Vally (1996:13), many teachers entertain the view that

improving school buildings and facilities alone will not make a difference to school quality, rather the key to improving school quality lies in the classroom processes of teaching and learning. While this may be true, their findings in Soweto schools indicated that in contexts where schooling has collapsed, the condition of school buildings and facilities made an incalculable difference to the climate of learning. It seemed that the morale of both teachers and learners were negatively affected by the presence of a poor physical environment.

In an effort to address the backlog in the provision of facilities, Mahlangu (2003:12) mentioned that the Department of Education has built 428 classrooms, 28 special rooms, 29 administration blocks and 642 toilets and renovated 154 schools. Furthermore, 36 schools were fenced 14 water connections were made. Although these facilities have been provided, his speech has also revealed that there is a huge backlog in the provision of school facilities in Mpumalanga. Table 3.2 indicates school facilities planned to be attended in 2003 financial year.

Table 3.2 School facilities planned for 2003 financial year

School facilities	Number of facilities
1.1 Classrooms	917
1.2 Special rooms	20
1.3 Administration blocks	69
1.4 Toilets	1 964
1.5 Schools to be renovated	135
1.6 Schools to be fenced	57
1.7 Schools to be electrified	83
1.8 Schools to be supplied with water	96
TOTAL	3 341

The above-mentioned figures illustrate clearly that there is a huge backlog in the provision of educational facilities in Mpumalanga.

3.6 LEARNER-TEACHER AND LEARNER-CLASSROOM RATIOS

School enrolment refers to the actual number of learners that the school has absorbed for that particular academic year. The actual number of learners enrolled in a particular school varies substantially by school, province and is dependent to a larger extent on a number of factors: the size of a community; its population; the socio-economic context; the availability of facilities and resources; and the new admission policy for grade one. These factors also determine the learner-teacher and learner-classroom ratios.

The survey conducted in Mpumalanga in 2001 revealed that the learner-classroom and the learner-teacher in Grade 3 are almost the same. In some instances some teachers are teaching more than one class in one classroom.

3.7 LACK OF TRANSPORT FOR LEARNERS

It is a common experience for learners in Mpumalanga to walk long distances to schools daily. This is mainly because schools are sparsely distributed. As Padayachee 2002:6) states: *we have utilised the scholar transport subsidy to assist learners to travel to neighbouring schools. I indicated last year that this option cannot provide a long term solution to the challenge. As such, despite the 37 contractors appointed in transporting about 4400 learners, we will still have learners who are still walking long distances to school.* The distance factor is counter-productive because by the time children reach the school they are already tired (Duma 1995:90) and are unable to concentrate in their lesson.

3.8 THE CULTURE OF LEARNING AND TEACHING

Many teachers and learners in Mpumalanga view teaching and learning as their primary purpose. (I have been a principal in this area for more than 23years and have seen what transpires at schools). My personal experience with regard to teaching and learning is that some teachers and learners are committed to teaching and learning while others are not. Some teachers are knowledgeable about their subjects while others are not. Teachers have well-structured learning programmes.

Both teachers and learners arrive on time and remain at school for the allocated time for tuition. Of course, there are learners who arrive late and disappear before school out. However, teachers are able to organise and manage learners effectively, creating a good atmosphere for learning to occur. Lewis (2000:20) states that according to former education MEC Craig Padayachee, the Mpumalanga Department of Education has monitoring tools aimed at improving the matric pass rate. These included new study guide, close monitoring of classroom activity and encouraging teachers to help learners after school hours. Learning is based on mutual trust. Teachers are able to use the limited resources effectively. Some teachers follow the homework timetable and encourage learners to do well in their learning areas.

3.9 LEARNERS ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENTS

3.9.1 The matriculation results of previous years

It is common for people to measure the functionality of the schools in terms of matric results. However, matric results are not the only instruments that indicate whether a school is functional or not. Matric results in this study have been used to illustrate how learners perform academically.

Table 3.3 Comparison of examination results: 1994- 2000 Mpumalanga Province

Year	1994	1996	1998	1999	2000
% passed	47%	47%	53%	48%	53%

Table 3.3 illustrates that the learners' performance has remained fairly low though it improved slightly. This implies that there is a need for learning culture to be improved in Mpumalanga.

Because of the fact that the study is confined to rural schools within the Mpuluzi circuit, Table 3.4 shows the ranking of all schools within the Mpuluzi circuit according to specified pass rate intervals.

Table 3.4 Schools ranked according to specified pass rate intervals: 2001.

Name of school	Pass rate intervals.	% obtained.
	0 – 9.99%	
	10-19.99%	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Simtfolile High • Phambili High • Lilanga High 	20 - 29.99%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 22.76% • 28.17% • 28.41%
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • EnKhanini High • Rev S.A. Nkosi High • Methula High 	30 - 39.99%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 31.91% • 34.81% • 37.50%
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • M.P. Magagula High • Chief T.D. Nkosi High 	40 - 49.99%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 46.88% • 49.74%
* Mayflower High	50 - 59.99%	59.63%
	60 - 69.99%	
* Mpuluzi High	70 - 79.99%	79.69%
	80 - 89.99%	
	90 - 100%	

3.10 TEACHER QUALIFICATIONS LINKED TO SUBJECTS

Literature indicates that teachers who are qualified and experienced in the content area that they are teaching, significantly influence the performance of learners. The findings of the survey conducted in Mpumalanga in 2001, shows an improvement in the qualifications of teachers in the key subjects of mathematics, general science and biology

in terms of grades. 41% of the teachers involved in the survey had a qualification in mathematics lower than or up to Grade 9 and 43% had a qualification in Science at Grade 9 level or lower (Mpumalanga Department of Education,(b) 2002:29). Many teachers had qualifications in Biology. The survey also revealed that 89% of Grade 3 teachers were qualified, while 23% of all the primary school teachers were either un- or under-qualified (Mpumalanga Department of Education,(b) 2002:29).

About 25 198 teachers have been employed (Mpumalanga Department of Education 1998:13). Out of this number, 5 61 teachers were un(der) qualified. The majority of these unqualified teachers are found in primary schools.

It is evident that teacher qualifications in mathematics and physical science need to be improved. There needs to be a shift in emphasis from the upgrading of the whole qualifications of teachers to the upgrading of teachers in specific subject disciplines.

3.11 PARENTS' LEVEL OF EDUCATION

Literature indicates that the education level of the parents of a learner is an important factor that may affect learner performance. According to the Household Survey of October 2000 done by Statistics South Africa, 15% of adults in South Africa can neither read nor write. This has major implications for the nature and type of support that the learners can expect from parents regarding their schoolwork.

The level of parents' education in Mpumalanga (9.5) is the same as the national average (9.6) and needs improvement (Mpumalanga Department of Education,(b) 2002:22). It is evident that the challenges to overcome illiteracy remain great.

The current education policies of the national Department of Education are designed to raise the levels of education of parents as well as their children. For example, Programme 3 of the implementation Plan for Tirisano suggests a commitment by the Department to

reduce the level of illiteracy in the country, as well as to increase the provision of Adult Basic Education and Training (ABET).

Children can learn as much from their home environment as they do from formal schooling. Godsell (in McGregor 1992:133) states that if the cognitive processes addressed at school are not supported at home, learning is unlikely to be effective. Therefore, the roles of ideas, conversation, the written word, number and curiosity in the home are central to cognitive and intellectual development.

Singh & Msila (2003:17) indicate that parental level of education or low literacy discourages parents from helping their children with schoolwork. They further indicate that 90% of the parents did not know much about Outcomes-Based Education (OBE). As a result they are unable to help their children with schoolwork.

A lot of the parents or guardians in the Republic of South Africa and specifically in Mpumalanga had training not higher than Grade 12. The parents in the Nelspruit educational district had the highest indicator for training, while the indicator for the Ermelo and Eerstehoek educational district is the lowest (Mpumalanga Department of Education,(b) 2002:13). Hence this study focussed on the Eerstehoek educational district.

3.12 DISCIPLINE, SAFETY AND LEARNING ATMOSPHERE

The national indicator (60,6%) for discipline, safety and learning atmosphere depicts a generally safe and discipline learning environment. In Mpumalanga, the level is lower at 56.2%. The most important factors that influenced discipline negatively are the following:

- arriving late at school
- absenteeism of learners
- intimidation by other learners
- vandalism (Mpumalanga Department of Education,(b) 2002:34).

Literature indicates that it is necessary to create a disciplined and safety atmosphere at school to give the learners ample chance to access learning and provide a safe environment where teachers can perform their tasks effectively. Squelch (in Dekker & Lemmer1993:239) discusses the importance of discipline as a way of maintaining order and harmony in the school and classroom. Literature also discusses the types of behaviour of learners, teachers and its consequences that are not acceptable at school level. Disruptive and anti-social behaviour may have a deleterious effect on teaching and learning (Squelch in Dekker & Lemmer 1993:239).

Some teachers do not relate well to learners and are openly undisciplined. As Nxumalo (1993:55) states that teachers have open love affairs with schoolgirls, mix too freely with learners to smoke, talk and drink alcohol with them and use vulgar language in class.

Although the above findings are based upon a behavioural study of teachers and learners in the KwaMashu schools of KwaZulu-Natal, similar behaviour has also been observed in the Mpumalanga black schools as well. A number of cases of teacher's misconduct have been reported to the Department of Education. About 107 cases of misconduct have been handled (Mpumalanga Department of Education 1998:31).

There has been a growing lack of trust and respect between learners and teachers. The absence of respect has led to a breakdown in relationships between the teachers and learners and between teachers and those in authority in education in South Africa (Donald et al 1997:23). Both principals and teachers became and are still hesitant to discipline learners because they were disempowered by the South African Schools Act of 1996, which abolished corporal punishment (Lethoko in Nemukulu 2002:19).

Absenteeism is frequent in the rural area of Mpumalanga. Learners do not remain at school for the entire school day. School attendance by learners and teachers is sporadic. Masitsa (1995:3) indicates that these days it is not a shame for secondary school learners in particular to go to school late and to go back home before the end of the school day or to stand and loiter outside the classes all day long. The level of absenteeism by learners in

the rural areas of Mpumalanga is often high on the paydays for old age citizens because many children accompany their grannies to pay-points to protect them from criminals who often snatch their monies.

Schools have adopted different strategies for combating lateness. Learners who arrive late at school are locked out of the school premises or are instructed to pick up papers in the school premises. Sometimes they clean classrooms especially in the afternoon.

Some schools were not fenced (see 3.5). According to the survey conducted in Mpumalanga in 2001, only 60,4% of the principals and 61,6% of the teachers indicated that they feel safe at school. This means that more than a third of the principals and the teachers did not feel safe at school to perform their task. Factors that are playing a role in determining the good learning atmosphere are the availability of safety fence, and good discipline.

3.13 ASSISTANCE FROM THE DEPARTMENT

The degree of assistance that a school receives from the department is seen as a factor that may have an influence on the functioning of a school, and therefore also on the performance of learners in that school.

According to the survey conducted in Mpumalanga in 2001, in which the principals had to indicate whether they agreed or disagreed with statements on whether departmental officials were helpful when dealing with the schools, the following Table 3.3 indicates the level of assistance from the department of education in Mpumalanga:

Table 3.5: Level of assistance from the department in Mpumalanga

Region	Percentage
1.1 Groblersdal	55,9%
1.2 Kwamhlanga	68,9%
1.3 Nelspruit	65,7%
1.4 Standerton	57,4%
1.5 Mpumalanga	62,6%

The above-mentioned data in the following regions were not available:

- Eerstehoek
- Ermelo
- Hazyview
- Malelane
- Moretele
- Witbank

These figures indicate that 62,1% of the principals agreed that departmental officials are helpful when dealing with the schools, while 37,9% disagreed. This may have negative impact on the culture of teaching and learning.

The new education policy requires the Department of Education to supply all learners with adequate textbooks and stationery free of charge. Of course, this exercise has been carried out in Mpumalanga although not adequately. Some schools receive these materials late in January and early February. This has negative impact on the learners' academic performance.

3.14 CONCLUSION

This chapter has attempted to shed light on the contextual realities of schooling in the rural areas of Mpumalanga. It did so by describing the background to self-managing schools, school-based management and leadership in Mpumalanga, functioning of the SGBs, provision of educational facilities and resources, learner-teacher and learner-classroom ratios, the culture of teaching and learning, teacher qualifications, parents' level of education, discipline, safety and learning atmosphere, and assistance from the department. Lastly, this chapter discussed the matriculation results of previous years in an attempt to illustrate the challenge to be met in restoring the culture of learning in this province.

This chapter has shown that governance structures are in place and that schools have been given section 21 status with extra functions. This chapter has also shown that Mpumalanga is under-resourced with respect of school facilities and resources and how these shortages affect the learners. Classrooms are overcrowded. This chapter has shown that the culture of teaching and learning occurs hence there are barriers to its effectiveness. The learners' performance has remained fairly low though it improved slightly. This is a clear indication that there is a need for learning culture to be improved. This chapter has also shown that there is a need for teacher-qualifications improvement in areas of mathematics and science. The level of parents' education needs improvement so that parents can be of great help to their children. This chapter has also shown that the level of safe and discipline is lower. As a result, learners do not perform well academically.

This chapter has therefore attempted to understand how various contextual factors have influenced the culture of teaching and learning in the rural communities of Mpumalanga. Chapter four will focus on methods and techniques to be used to conduct an in-depth investigation into the learning culture of resilient schools in the rural communities of Mpumalanga

