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Distance Education Project

Core Education Studies Course

Schools as Learning Communities

Umthamo 1

Schools: Organizations or "Disorganizations"?

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SCHOOLS AS LEARNING COMMUNITIES

Introduction

This umthamo introduces another strand of the Core Education Studies course: "Schools as Learning Communities".

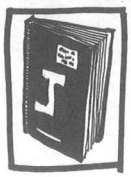
In the "Learning about Learning" imithamo, we are looking at what happens within an individual learner as s/he learns. In the "Helping Learners Learn" imithamo, we are looking at what happens between a teacher and learners in the classroom. In the imithamo of *this* strand, we will look at a bigger context: the school.

We saw that certain styles of classroom management can lead to more effective learning. Similarly, the way *schools* are organized and managed affects the quality of learning which takes place in them.

Ideally, schools should be communities. They should be places where different people all have a part to play, and work together in a supportive way, like the members of a family. So, this strand is called,"Schools as Learning Communities". The first umthamo looks at the way schools are organized.

Use A4 paper, or a hard-covered book, for the written activities, as you have done in other strands of the course.

We will once more be using the logos which appear below.



Journal

Thinking and Reflecting

Written Task or Report

Classroom or School

Key Activity

Reading and Thinking

Discussion

Face-to-face umkhwezeli

Concertina File for Portfolio

Time

Umthamo 1

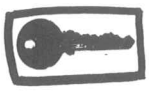
Schools: Organizations or "Disorganizations"?

Introduction

The *Task Team Report on Changing Management to Manage Change in Education makes an important point that although schools are organizations devoted to learning, they are not always "learning organizations".

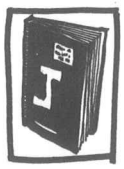
A task team is a committee of people, usually set up by a government department to find out about a certain issue. The people in a task team usually know quite a lot about that particular issue. Many task teams have been set up by our new government in South Africa to explore new ways of doing things.

In the Umthamo on "What do we know about Learning?", we found that children are very good at thinking, learning and adapting to change. Some schools are also good at **thinking, learning and adapting to change.** Such schools are learning organizations. Unfortunately not all of our schools have as yet developed the ability to **think, learn and adapt to change**. Such schools are not learning organizations. Because these schools are not able to achieve the objective of teaching and learning, for which they were established, we could describe them as "disorganizations".



Your Key Activity in this umthamo will involve conducting a survey (asking a number of different people questions) in order to find out whether your school is a learning organization or a "disorganization".

Journal write



In your journal, write down the thoughts and feelings you have about your school *now.* Do you think it is able to think, learn and adapt to change? Do you think it is a learning organization or a "disorganization"? Why do you think this way?

In this umthamo we explore together what makes a school a learning organization or a disorganization. Here are the outcomes we are hoping for from this umthamo.

Learning Outcomes

When you have completed this umthamo you will:

- **have a greater understanding of schools as organizations or "disorganizations",**
- **be able to assess whether your school is a learning organization or not,**
- **have had a chance to think about, discuss and plan ways of improving your school as a learning organization.**

1:30

Unit 1

Is my school a learning organization?

So that we can look at schools as organizations or "disorganizations" in a practical way, we will start by asking you to read the description of Yellowwood High School, which appears on the following pages. The description is followed by a list of the strengths of the school, and a list of its weaknesses. As you read the story and the lists, think about the ways in which your school is similar to, or different from, this school. Maybe, in the next edition of this umthamo, we can replace this description with a description of *your* school.

1:00

Reading 1: The story of Yellowwood High School

Yellowwood High School is situated in Don Park, an urban area which houses middle - and working - class families, with a sprawling informal settlement not far away. It is coeducational, with approximately 1 000 students and 37 teachers, including the principal, Mr. Strider, and two deputies, Mr. Witbooi and Ms Molefe. The teacher:student ratio is 40:1.

The school, which is fairly new, has few physical resources. The grounds, while quite large, are tidy but undeveloped. Don Park is a particularly windy are and seasonal winds often make the school grounds uninviting to be in. There are few trees and plants, so little protection is offered for students from sun, wind and rain during breaks and physical education classes. There are no rugby, netball, soccer or hockey posts, or proper cricket pitches. There is a shortage of classrooms, and to address this space shortage temporarily, some prefabricated classrooms have been erected. Classrooms are fairly crowded, and in most there are not enough desks, so students have to share desks. There is also no hall, and so all assemblies are held outside. This means that students and teachers are exposed to the weather and often it is extremely hot or extremely windy.

In the grounds of the school during informal times you will find students most frequently separated by gender and race - boys seem to stay with boys and, likewise, girls with girls. Similarly, the various race groups at the school do not seem to mix very easily. Formally structured sports and other cultural events do, however, intentionally attempt to reflect a mixture in terms of both race and gender.

There are few teaching aids in the school: three overhead projectors, one TV, and three rather old computers for student use. There is one science laboratory with very little equipment in stock. A secretary serves as receptionist, and provides administrative support and backup for the principal. In her office there is one roneo machine and one photocopier. Both machines are fairly old, and tend to break down frequently. As a result, only certain teachers are allowed to use the machine. This causes tension among the staff, because teachers sometimes do not have the resources they require for a lesson, since copies have not been made in time. There is a library at the school. However, there are very few books in it; most of them are tattered and in very poor condition and rather dated.

Reference books and books that can be used for research purposes are extremely few and very outdated. The number of books in the library seems to drop dramatically each year.

A caretaker lives on the property. His job is to look after the school after hours (which he does very well), to keep extra keys for each room so that the rooms can be opened, and to do general maintenance work. He has a good relationship with the students. The school is prone to vandalism, and often after weekends there are many more broken windows and desks, and some doors have disappeared. The caretaker's time is therefore more or less cut out for him. He does not seem to be able to keep up with his maintenance responsibilities.

While there is a school uniform - blue dresses for girls; flannel pants, white shirts and blue ties for the boys, blue jerseys and blazers - only about 60 per cent of the students come to school in their uniforms. School begins at 8: 00 a.m. and ends at 2: 30 p.m. The timetable, changed and developed recently by the principal and two senior teachers, runs on a seven-day cycle, with 50-minute periods. Teachers' free periods average two per week, with heads of department having five or six periods per week free. The timetable seems to be working effectively at present.

Inside the school building, the entrance boasts several framed awards on the walls for athletic successes in interschool competitions. The staffroom is a long room, with tables (covered with plastic tablecloths) running along all the sides. Teachers tend to sit in the same places every day. The notice board has some outdated notices of

courses and workshops being offered by inservice projects, current and old notices about sports fixtures, and notices from the Department of Education dated about a year ago. Current community activities are also displayed on the notice board. A teacher union notice has graffiti scrawled on it - an indication that some staff disagree about the issue of union affiliation.

As you walk past the classrooms, you will find many of the teachers talking, and the students listening passively. Often the teachers are facing the boards rather than the students, and writing, while students copy down notes. In some classes it's hard to believe that there is a teacher in the class, as pieces of chalk fly around, students brawl and hysterical laughter can be heard down the corridor. In other classes, however, students are working together in groups, and appear to be focused and enthusiastic. The matric results fluctuate from year to year, but the average pass rate is about 60 per cent.

Teachers tend to arrive in the staffroom soon after the break bell has rung, and to leave often some five or ten minutes after the end of break. Staffroom chatter tends to be mainly about problematic students within school life. For the rest, conversations relate to life outside the school weekend activities, topical discussions and general gossip. There are frequent murmurings about the ineffective school management, and frustrations about issues such as unfair treatment of staff. Many teachers express frustrations at the lack of direction of the school, and there is a tendency to identify problems and issues without the commitment to finding solutions to them.

Relationships between the teachers tend to be fairly relaxed. Many are on first-name terms with one another, but the older teachers are not addressed by their first names by any staff members. There are some definite staff cliques which seem to be based on broad political alignments. Young teachers find it very difficult to express their views about anything controversial, and male teachers tend to be more dominant than females. There are three white teachers (all women) on the staff, and one African. The rest of the staff are either 'coloured' or Indian. The white teachers sit together at breaks (and at meetings), and the African woman usually sits on her own.

There is a strong sense of demotivation at the school. One manifestation of this is that very little is happening at he school after hours. In this regard, the first term is the

busiest because of sports activities and meetings. Another manifestation of the low morale of teachers is that there is an extremely high rate of absenteeism - sometimes up to ten teachers are absent over a period of a few days, and seldom is there a day when every teacher is present at school.

Staff meetings are held fortnightly for two hours. The agenda is drawn up by the deputy principal, and the meetings usually relate to the nitty-gritty of running the school. The real decision-making power rests with Mr. Strider and his two deputy principals. Consultation with the staff about decisions is mostly so that the staff can rubberstamp the decisions which have already been made. The staff is usually asked to vote; however, staff decisions can be vetoed by management. This apparent democracy yet real lack of accountability is a source of frustration to many staff members, who feel powerless and angry in the situation.

There is no staff development programme at the school, but some teachers are engaged in studying for an undergraduate degree or postgraduate B.Ed or M.Ed; they often take leave to study for their exams. This usually coincides with exam time at the school, and causes a certain amount of tension among the rest of the staff who feel resentful about having to carry their load. A few other teachers voluntarily attend nonformal courses offered by inservice projects. Professional development thus depends entirely on the commitment of individual teachers. Several teachers have tried to institute a staff development programme, but have met with resistance from the principal, who says that 'the time is not right for such an initiative, although I wholeheartedly support it in principle' and with apathy from the rest of the staff.

No teacher appraisal takes place at the school, since the former departmental system of evaluation was rejected by the staff, and no other system has been put in its place. Despite the lack of formal appraisal however, it is interesting to note that one or two teachers are involved in their own form of self-evaluation, and are trying to get the school to consider this as an option for general teacher appraisal.

The management style is one which focuses on administrative efficiency with the emphasis on paper work being done timeously. Teachers' record books are handed in to the principal fortnightly, and he scans them and returns them without comment. Mr. Strider usually visits

teachers' classes when there have been problems or complaints, but otherwise his attitude is one of leaving the teachers to get on with their work. His main concern is with regular testing and a good pass rate in exams. He is not entirely trusted by the staff. He insists that his 'door is always open', and seems approachable and pleasant, but teachers on the whole perceive him to be authoritarian, rigid and rather dogmatic. He is extremely defensive when staff members confront him about various issues. His good administrative skills result in a relatively smoothly run school.

The staff find the one deputy principal, Mr. Witbooi, aggressive and unreasonable. He is the metalwork teacher, has a light teaching load, but is seldom in his classroom and always complains about being too pressurised. The other deputy, Ms Molefe, is very quiet, and invariably supports the principal in his decisions. However, she is also fairly sympathetic to staff concerns, although she does not seem able to do much about them.

There is a management council at he school, comprising the principal, the deputies, three parents and two community leaders, one of whom is a religious leader. One of the parents is an accountant. The council meets on a quarterly basis and occasionally on an ad hoc basis when there are urgent matters to discuss. It has been very difficult for the school to draw community people onto the management council, and in this instance the two community people do not attend meetings very regularly. The management council tends to concentrate mainly on the financial management of the school. Teachers request representation on the council from time to time; however, this has not been successful. A general feeling of mistrust exists between the staff and the management council. Staff perceive it as an 'old style' council undemocratically set up and not representing or reflecting staff issues. The principal has blocked all attempts by the staff to transform it into a more representative governing structure, with student representatives as well as elected teachers sitting on the structure. The principal is aware that legislation regarding school governing bodies has changed and that he will be required to set up a democratic, representative body but he has no idea of what this will entail, and whether he will be able to rise to the challenge, and therefore fears it.

When parents' meetings are held, generally very few parents turn up to the meetings. The teachers are concerned by the lack of parental involvement, particularly because

drug abuse is becoming an increasingly problematic issue in the neighbourhood, and there have been several cases of students in possession of drugs at school. The community within which the school is located is predominantly Christian, with a fairly strong Muslim community.

Heads of department are in the following subjects: Maths, Science, English, Afrikaans, History and Geography. There is no school counsellor, and the school nurse and school psychologists never seem to visit the school. The medium of instruction at the school is English, although for most of the students at the school, English is a second language.

Because of the general dissatisfaction at the school, after much pressure from a few teachers, a workshop was held which aimed (initially) to provide a mechanism for the staff (as a whole) to express their concerns with a view to finding a longer-term solution to addressing them. The following are some of the strengths and weaknesses highlighted by the staff during the workshop:

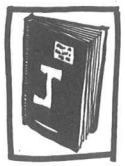
Strengths:

- *Well cared for (neat) grounds and school building.*
- *Attempts being made to integrate the school on racial and gender grounds.*
- *School administration, including timetable management, generally well done.*
- *Athletics successes.*
- *Some attempt at creative teaching.*
- *Teacher collegiality evident at times (fairly relaxed relationships).*
- *Regular staff meetings (although the way they are run is problematic).*
- *Individual teachers taking initiative in terms of self-appraisal and self-development.*
- *An active though misrepresentative management council.*

Weaknesses:

- *Overcrowded classes.*
- *Lack of physical resources.*
- *Lack of adequate sporting facilities.*
- *Lack of a culture of teaching and learning.*
- *Low teacher morale.*
- *Discipline problems with students.*
- *Cliques on the staff.*
- *Division and mistrust between management and general staff.*
- *Lack of vision.*
- *General mistrust and conflict among staff members.*
- *Lack of accountability.*
- *High absentee rate of teachers and students.*
- *No staff development.*
- *Lack of parental involvement in the school.*

Journal write



Write in your journal your response to the story of Yellowwood High School. What do you think and feel about this school? What questions does the story raise in your mind? Are there thoughts and feelings about your own school which have come up as you read the story?

Key Activity

The Key Activity of this umthamo comes at the beginning of the umthamo. You will not carry out this Key Activity in the classroom: it involves working with the school as a whole. The activity requires you to carry out a *survey*; in it you will find out what a variety of different people think about your school.

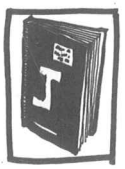
Purpose

You have read about Yellowwood High School and its strengths and weaknesses. The purpose of this activity is for you to assess the strengths and weaknesses of your school. From there you will go on to decide whether *your* school is a learning organization or not, and to think about ways to make it a better learning organization.

In order to do this, we would like you to use the questionnaire which appears at the end of this umthamo (Appendix 1). We have made 8 extra copies of this questionnaire for you. We would like you to ask different people involved in your school, such as teachers, parents and learners, to fill it in. You might need to help some of the people to fill it in, or do it for them.

Once all the people have answered the questions, you will have to count up the answers. You will fill them in on a table, and work out the strengths and weaknesses of the school. You will probably find that different people have different opinions about the strengths and weaknesses of the school. You will need to write a short report about this. In the report, you should make suggestions about some ways your school could move forward and perhaps begin to change.

Journal write



Before you begin conducting the survey, write in your journal. Write about the strengths and weaknesses which you *think* your school has.

Steps in Conducting the Survey

Step Number One: Filling in the questionnaire yourself

As a first step, fill in the questionnaire yourself, so that you get a feeling of what the task is about. Use one of the questionnaires you have been given as a handout.

Step Number Two: Selecting the participants

Decide who you are going to ask to fill in the questionnaire. We suggest you select the following numbers of participants.

2 learners.

2 teachers.

2 parents (1 of whom is on the school governing body, if possible).

2 school managers (the principal and deputy principal)

If your school is small, and does not have a deputy principal, include only 1 person from each category.

Mrs Noma Dyantyi and her sons. Denis and Anele are learners at Ngwevana School.

To avoid being accused of bias (having favourites), get a list of possible participants in alphabetical order, and number the list. Write down the numbers separately on a piece of paper and put them in a paper bag. Pull out from the paper bag a single number at a time. Keep doing this until you have the required number of participants. In this way, you will have made a bias-free, or random, selection. If you select somebody who is not happy to take part in the survey, then you will have to pick another number to replace this person.

Step Number Three: Preparing the participants

a) Explain the purpose of the survey to the principal and all the others who will participate in the study. You will need to approach this very carefully, and show that the survey will not only benefit you, but can be of help to the school as well.

b) Emphasize to the principal and other participants that the information collected will be treated in the strictest confidence, and no names will be filled in on the forms. After the questionnaires are completed, the participants will place them in envelopes, seal them, and hand them to you. In the situation where it may be necessary to interview participants, reassure them that you will not tell anyone what they have said.

Step Number Four: Conducting the Survey

When you have chosen the participants, arrange a venue where you can conduct interviews or guided completion of questionnaires with learners and teachers. Give each participant a copy of the questionnaire, and help them to complete it. Nine copies of the questionnaire have been given to you as a separate handout.

Note that participants may disagree with a statement, or they may agree weakly, strongly or very strongly. If a participant claims not to know about a particular statement, you could ask them to go and find out about it, and arrange for them to fill in their answer later. Try not to leave any statement blank, without a response. If there is a blank, this will suggest "disagree".

Step Number Five: Analysing the Data

When the questionnaires have been completed and you have conducted all the interviews, you need to start analysing the data (counting answers and drawing conclusions from them).

You may feel a bit scared of the forms, and the adding up involved, but give it a try! Once you start doing it, it won't be so difficult. It is your first attempt (probably) at conducting a survey. Please ask for as much help as you need at your face-to-face session, from colleagues and abakhwezeli.

Each of the 6 themes on the questionnaire has five statements which participants will agree or disagree with.

a) For each theme, there is a table to fill in (given to you as a separate handout). **Look at the sample which appears in the Appendix while you do this. We have given 8 sample answers to Theme 1: School Climate, and have entered the answers in a table.**

b) Add up the answers for each statement, (**0** for **disagree**, **1** for **weakly agree**, **2** for **agree**, and **3** for **strongly agree**). Give separate totals for each 'stakeholder' group (i.e., management, teachers, parents, and learners). This will help you to see whether these different groups of people see the school differently.

c) Then add up <u>all</u> the stakeholder's totals, to get a total for each statement.

d) Lastly, add up your 5 answers, to get a grand total.

Step Number Six: Identifying the Strengths and Weaknesses of Your School

If you have interviewed 2 people in each category, the highest possible total for each statement is **24**. The highest possible total for each theme is **120.**

Note: If you have interviewed 1 person in each category, the highest possible total for each statement is 12. The highest possible total for each theme is 60.

For a theme to be a strength in your school, you need to have a total of more than 30.

For a theme to be a **strength** in your school, you need to have a total of **more than 60.** If you look at the sample data analysis of School Climate in Appendix 2, you will see that this school is a borderline case; it has a score of **60** for School Climate. It is neither strong nor weak. This means that there is a lot of room for improvement.

Write down the themes in which your school is strong and those in which is it weak. If your school is strong on four out of six themes, it is a learning organization. If it is strong on only one or two out of six, it means the school is not meeting the needs of the people it is supposed to serve.

Steps Number Seven and Eight: Working with the Results (see page ...)

You should do this part of the activity after you have worked through the rest of the umthamo.

Unit 2

Understanding what a school is

The following activities will help you think about what is the same about all schools, and will give you a chance to compare schools with other kinds of organization. We hope that your understanding of what a school is will become clearer through doing these activities:

Activity 2.1: Comparing schools

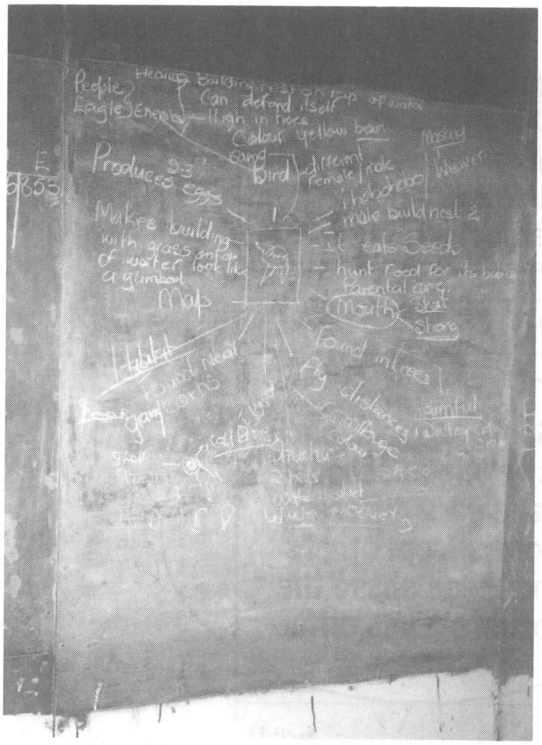
Are schools in South Africa, or in the world, similar to each other? This activity will give you 2 ways to think about this question.

The first way

Here is a comparison we made between 2 neighbouring schools. Draw a similar table and write down similarities and differences between your school and a nearby school.

Comparison of 2 schools

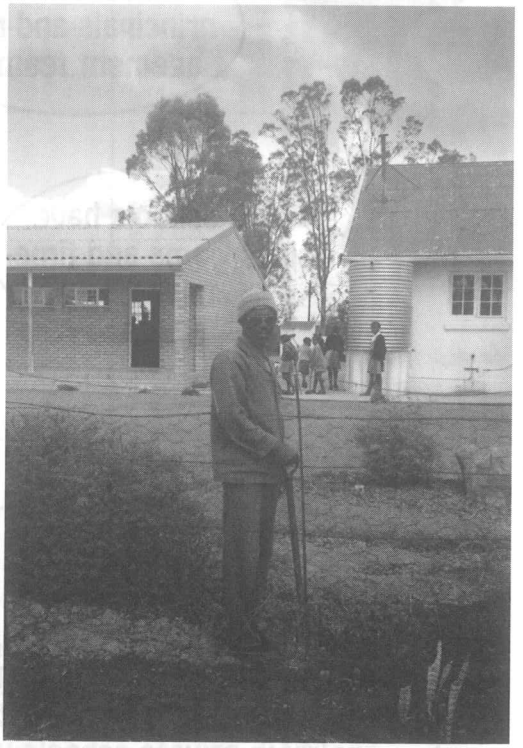
Ngwevana school	*Mpongo school*
3 teachers	*4 teachers*
Grade 1-7	*Grade 1-6*
3 classrooms	*4 classrooms*
Completely multigrade (Grade 1 & 2 together; Grade 3 & 4 together; Grades 5,6 & 7 together)	*Partly multigrade (Grade 1 & 2 together; Grade 5 & 6 together, others separate)*
Principal teaches Grade 3 & 4	*Principal teaches Grade 3*
On a remote farm	*In a small town*
Learners come largely from the farming community	*Learners come largely from the farming community*
Some older learners in higher classes (some 20-year-olds)	*Learners near to the average age for the grade*
Classrooms made of wattle and daub, and some corrugated iron	*Brick-built classrooms, 2 taken over from CED; 2 new.*
Gardens and a rough playing field cleared by staff & learners	*Well-established school grounds*
Learners and staff responsible for upkeep of grounds and buildings	*Groundsman responsible for upkeep of grounds and buildings*
The school has a phone, but no office	*The school has an office and a phone*
Good teaching and learning takes place in the classrooms	*Good teaching and learning takes place in the classrooms*



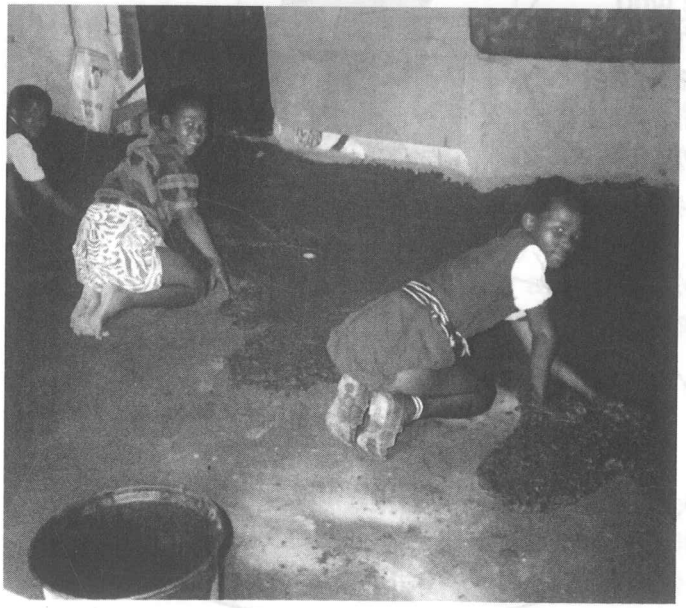
Good teaching and learning at Ngwevana.

Good teaching and learning at Mpongo.

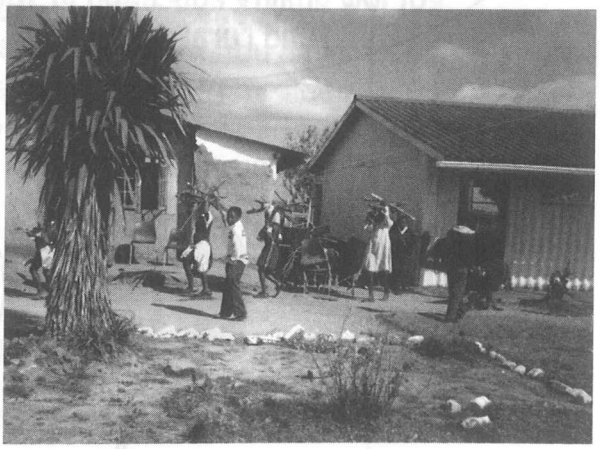
Principal and Staff at Ngwevana.



Caretaker at Mpongo (also SGB member).



Smearing the floor at Ngwevana.



Ngwevana learners collect firewood in winter.

The second way

Here is what some university students said in response to the question: 'Are schools in South Africa, or in the world, similar to each other?' Read these ideas, and then discuss the question with a partner. Which students do you agree with? Or do you have other ideas?

"All schools are about teaching and learning."

"All schools have principals and management teams."

"All schools have classrooms and timetables."

"Some schools, such as religious schools, have very different norms from others and these shape the learners' lives differently."

"To say schools are the same would be outright idiocy!"

"But in South Africa learners have been divided on a racial basis. Those who attend different schools have differing experiences with the rich getting a better quality in private schools whilst the poor got low quality education in Township and rural schools."

"There are schools for example where learners and teachers arrive and leave when and as they please, there is no time table, there is a high incidence of crime and abuse, drop out and failure rates are high etc."

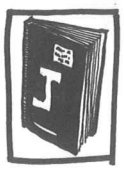
Activity 2.2: Comparing schools with other organizations

There are many different kinds of organizations. Copy the table below and fill in the spaces to show the differences and similarities between a school, a hospital and a bank.

	Hospital	Bank	School
What kind of people go there?			
Why do they go there?			
Who works there?			
Who leads/manages the organization?			
What aim/s does the organization have?			
How does the organization measure its success?			

Activity 2.3: So, what is a school?

Now you have looked at the ways in which schools are the same, and ways in which they are different. You have also looked at ways in which schools differ from other organizations. You are ready to discuss, with a partner, or with a group of colleagues or friends the question: **"What is a school?"**



Journal write

Make some notes of your ideas in your journal before you go on to the next section. Share your ideas with other teacher-learners at the face-to-face session.

2:30

Unit 3

Schools as Organizations

You probably found it very difficult to come to a final conclusion about what a school is. We need common way of looking at schools, and understanding better what goes on in schools. This should help us improve our schools, building on strengths and improving weaknesses.

One way of understanding schools is to look at them as organizations. Of course, this is not the only way of looking at schools, but this is how we will explore it in this umthamo. **Reading 2**, which is adapted from the same book as the story of Yellowwood High School, gives us a framework for understanding schools as organizations. Read it carefully now.

1:00

Reading 2: A Framework for understanding schools

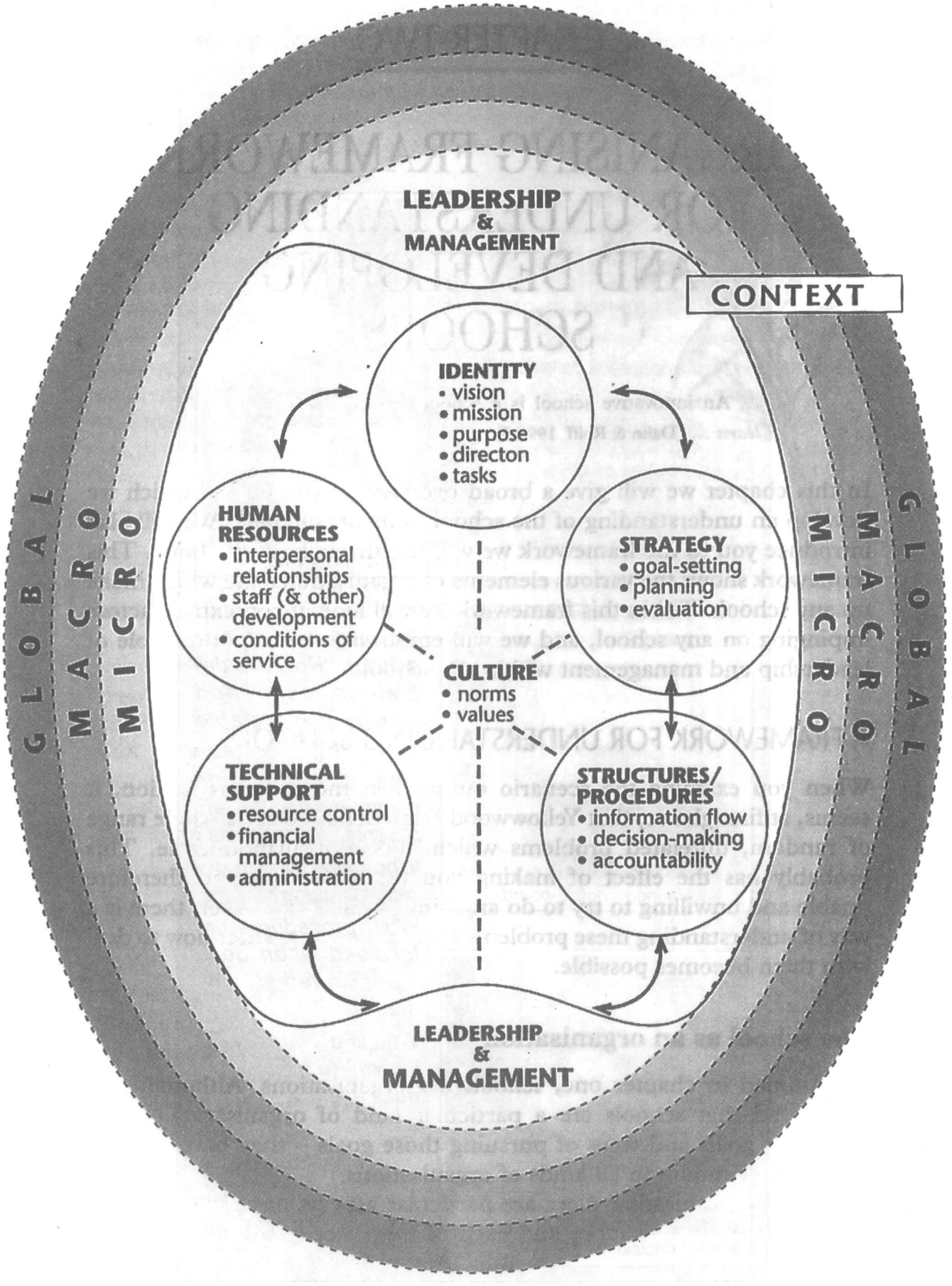
(based on Chapter 2 of Davidoff, S & Lazarus, S. 1997. The Learning School. Juta and co., Ltd.)

In their book entitled, "The Learning School", Sue Davidoff and Sandy Lazarus explain that each school organization consists of various parts. These parts work together to keep the school going. For a school to be healthy, all the parts have to function well. It is only then that really effective learning and teaching can take place.

If we understand how these parts work together, it helps us to understand our school's particular problems. We can then start to think up useful solutions to them.

On the next page is a diagram taken from "The Learning School". It shows the different parts of a school's organizational life. We have tried to make the meaning of each part clear by asking a few questions. It is by asking these questions about your own school that you can find out about its Culture, Identity, Strategy, etc. As you read the questions, start thinking what the answers for your school are.

Elements of Organisational Life



The Culture (or Climate) of our school: "the way we do things"

How much energy and motivation do we put into what we do?

How do we relate to one another?

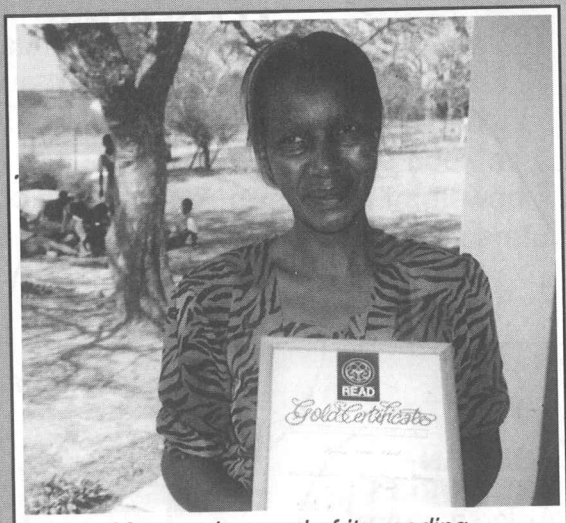
What is our attitude to teaching and learning?

The Identity of our school: "Who are we, and where are we going?"

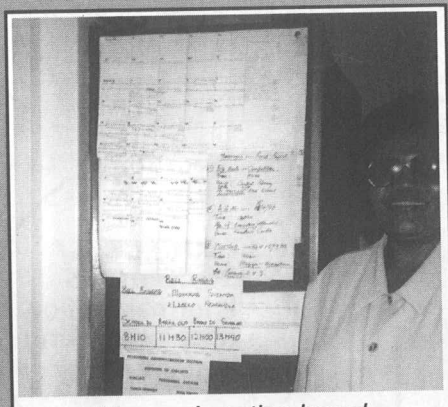
What are we known for?

How do people outside the school see us?

What are our aims and our policy?



Mpongo is proud of its reading.



Mpongo's notice-board.

The Structures and Procedures of our school: "How are decisions made, and who is accountable to whom?"

How is information communicated to staff, parents, and learners?

Who is involved in decision-making?

What procedures are followed when decisions need to be made?

Who is accountable to whom? (e.g. To whom does a teacher have to answer, if s/he does not do a good job? The principal? The learners? The parents? The community? The department?)

Making decisions at Smiling Valley.

The Strategy of our school: "What are our goals, and how will we get there?"

What aims and goals has our school set for itself?

How does it plan to achieve these goals?

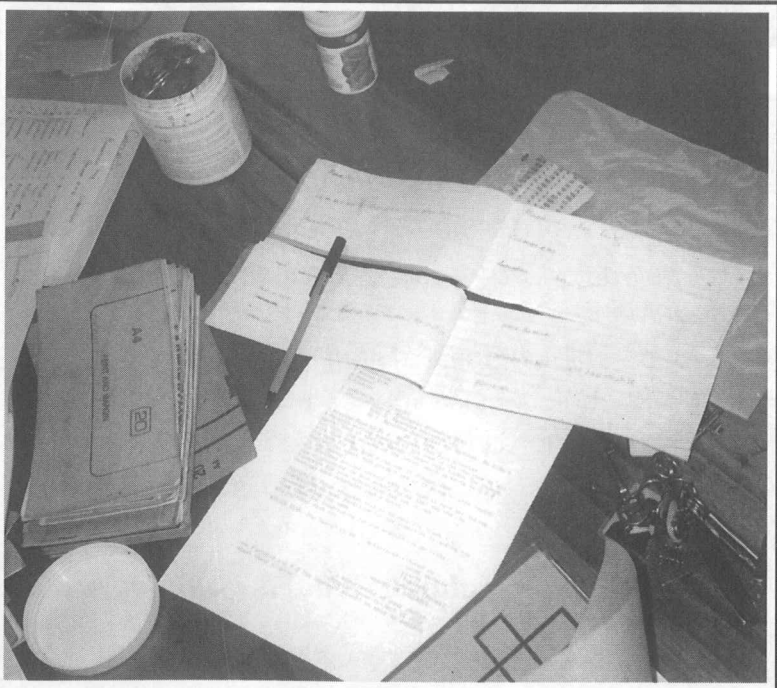
What systems of appraisal has it set up, for teachers, learners and the school as a whole?

The Technical Support our school has: "Who administers the school, and how are resources controlled?"

Do staff and management have help in administering our school?

Who takes care of the resources of our school (e.g. buildings, equipment, books)?

How is the finance of our school managed?



Management of money and resources at Mpongo School.

The Human Resources of our school: "How are people cared for and developed?"

Are teachers encouraged and helped to get involved in in-service training?

Do people in the school work well together?

Is conflict between people dealt with constructively?

Are the conditions of employment fair?

How are new staff members recruited and introduced to the school?

A Teachers' Workshop, held at Ngwevana.

The Leadership and Management of our school: "Do we have creative and responsible leadership?"

Is the school well directed? (leadership)

Is the well-being of the school effectively maintained? (management)

Is the leadership potential of staff members, and of learners, developed?

How is power and control exercised?

Are appropriate styles of leadership and management adopted?

The Context of our school: "What is going on around our school?"

In what kind of area is our school (rural, urban, poor, rich, secure, unstable)?

What is the situation of our country, within which our school finds itself (political, economic, climatic,...)?

What current world trends are influencing our school?

Ngwevana has a rural context.

If you are interested in reading further about schools as organisations, your Centre Co-ordinator will soon have a copy of this book "The Learning School" in the Resource Library.

Activity 3.1

The table below gives information about the organizational life of Yellowwood High. Read it carefully. Discuss with a partner what you might include if you were to draw up a similar table describing your school.

Elements of Organizational Life	*Yellowwood High*
Culture	*Teachers are not highly motivated. They leave early after school, leave the staffroom late after break.* *The principal is distant from his staff. Younger teachers and women teachers tend to be passive and submissive.* *There is not much enthusiastic learning happening in classrooms, and not much discussion about learning in the staffroom.*
Identity	*Yellowwood High has a strong sporting and academic identity. It is known for its victories on the sports field, and its good exam results.*
Strategy	*YHS does not seem to have clear goals, or a plan to achieve them.* *There is no teacher appraisal, though some use a form of self-evaluation.*
Structures and procedures	*Decision-making does not involve all staff members actively. The principal and deputies make most decisions.* *Teachers do not seem to be accountable to anyone (e.g. They are often absent, and take time off for their own studies).*
Technical support	*There is a secretary, mainly to help management.* *Physical equipment, buildings, library and playing fields are inadequate.* *Only certain teachers have access to resources, e.g. photocopier.* *Finances are well taken care of by the management council.* *The caretaker cannot keep up with all his work.*
Human resources	*Staff get on quite well, though there are divisions based on race and gender, and conflict around union affiliations.* *There is no encouragement for staff to develop themselves. Some voluntarily attend in-service courses.* *Conditions of service are unclear (e.g. study leave for teachers writing exams).*
Leadership and management	*Mr Strider does not value, or utilize, teachers' talents and skills. His main concern is administrative detail. He is seen as authoritarian rather than inspiring.* *The management committee is not fully representative of the stakeholders in the school. It focuses mainly on financial management.*
The context	*YHS is set in an urban area housing middle and working class families. There is an informal settlement nearby.* *The community is predominantly Christian, though there are a number of Moslems.* *Drug abuse is becoming a problem in the neighbourhood.*

Activity 3.2 (Optional)

You might want to draw a similar table, and fill it in with information about the organizational life of *your* school. Use the questions from **Reading 2** to help you. You will be able to refer back to your survey to get some of the answers. Others will come from your own experience of the school, and perhaps from discussion with other people involved in the school.

WHAT HAVE WE LEARNT SO FAR?

We have now gained some fairly common understanding of what schools are like, and have looked at aspects of the organizational life of a school. The activities and readings have helped us to get a better understanding of how schools are similar to each other and how we can use this understanding to make sense of the problems that face schools.

An important point made by Davidoff is that we should see all existing problems as *interrelated and *intertwined. Lack of student discipline, a high crime rate, a high drop out rate, lack of parental involvement, a high failure rate, poor management etc. are all related to one another. They are not unconnected.

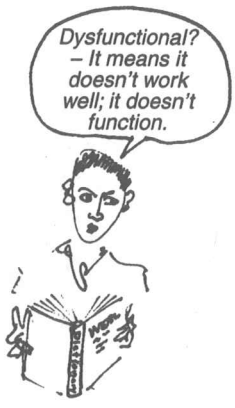
*They are like strands of hair braided together, or the different strings plaited together to make a rope.

Now that we have established this common base, we will look at the nature of the problems that are found in some South African schools.

Unit 4

Schools as "disorganizations"

Pam Christie is a South African educationist who has expressed her views on schools as organizations. She is Dean of the School of Education at Wits University and conducts research in the area of school development. In 1997, Christie worked on a study of *dysfunctional schools with the Committee for the Culture of Learning and Teaching (CCOLT). She gained a fresh insight into the collapse of the culture of learning and teaching in South African schools. Her involvement in this study *culminated in the writing of an article entitled "Schools as (dis)organizations: the breakdown of the culture of learning and teaching in South African schools".



In the article, Christie gives us an outline of the findings of the study, proposes a new way of explaining the "disorganization" and remedying it. **Reading 3**, which follows, is taken from this article. While reading this passage, see whether some of the things described remind you of your own school or a school you know.

Reading 3

Schools as "disorganization's"

(slightly adapted from Christie, Pam. 1997. "Schools as (dis)organizations: the breakdown of the culture of learning and teaching in South African schools")

In the CCOLT study of dysfunctional school, we identified four categories of problems: poor physical and social facilities; organizational problems; poor school/community relationships; and poor relationships between the education department and the schools (de Clercq et al. 1995).

Certainly, the schools we visited showed clear signs of organizational breakdown. There were problems with management and administration, including weak and unaccountable authority structures. For example, in one of the schools, the principal had not attended regularly for the past eighteen months and the school was run by a deputy who was reluctant to take full authority. In another school, the principal, who portrayed himself to us as a dynamic leader, was resented by staff for his lack of accountability. In most of the schools in the CCOLT studies,

information was poorly communicated; disciplinary and grievance procedures were vague or non-existent; staff meetings were not held regularly; and there was evidence that meeting procedures, record keeping and general administration were poor.

Furthermore, in the CCOLT schools, time boundaries were not maintained. Schools were unable to enforce a full working day or week for students and staff, and students, staff, and principals themselves often came late to school and left early. A common practice was for numbers of students to leave school premises at lunch break and not return for the rest of the day. Whole school days were cancelled for sporting activities, and schools readily closed early for sporting events. Unnecessary timetable confusions accentuated the sense of unpredictability about the school day. In short, boundaries of time no longer acted as stable predictors for school activities.

*Space boundaries were also transgressed. Problems from local communities spilt over into schools; violence of all sorts threatened the safety of students, teachers and principals; alcohol and drugs were peddled through fences; and the authority of the principal and staff did not prevail over the symbolic or material space of the school. In short, discipline and boundaries were simply not working, and their dysfunction was part of the culture – *the informal logic of daily life – of these schools.*

Other evidence of more complex organizational breakdown was the breakdown of formal relationships within schools. For example, interviews with stakeholders told of the absence of school vision and purpose; demotivation of students and their lack of interest in their studies; demotivation of teachers who felt underpaid, blamed for the problems and disempowered; demotivation and lack of professional skills of management who felt disempowered and unable to perform competently. All the interviews with the various stakeholder groups revealed the conflictual nature of relationships between management, teachers, students and parents and the negative effect this had on the school. They pointed to lack of respect, trust or co-operation among the different stakeholders, with each group complaining about the other's lack of motivation, commitment and discipline.

*everyone accepted it as the normal way to behave.

*However, the problems went further than this. What compounded them was what we identified as the reluctance of most school stakeholders to acknowledge their respective roles, responsibilities and *agency in dealing with their institutional and structural problems. In a range of ways, schools seemed to have habituated to their conditions, and done little about tackling problems that they would be able to address.*

For instance, schools did not undertake small repairs such as fixing plugs on stoves in the home economics room; instead, they waited (in vain) for the department to intervene. Broken windows, chairs, desks and electrical appliances were part of the everyday reality of these schools. Schools were sometimes unfenced in spite of complaints about intruders. Facilities such as libraries (however meagre) were often not used; in two of the schools the reason given for this was that the library was a lockable, secure room that needed to be used as a storeroom. Litter often lay about in the school grounds and classrooms, and there were few attempts to cultivate gardens or playing fields around the school buildings.

Most of those interviewed mentioned that they were the victims of an oppressive system which paralyzed them and made them indifferent and dependent. Feeling unfairly treated by the system and unable to perform their tasks, they masked their anxieties, fears and dissatisfaction by performing their tasks at a minimal level. They showed no interest or initiative in breaking out of these demoralizing patterns. There were almost no exceptions to this, and schools seemed to stifle what few proactive opportunities there were.

It seems clear that the breakdown of management and leadership within schools is an important part of their dysfunction. For a culture of teaching and learning to operate, it will be necessary to establish proper and effective management systems and structures with clear procedures, and clear lines of authority, powers, responsibility and accountability. It is also clear that many problems stem from the environment, and cannot be resolved at the level of the single school.

What is less clear, however, is how to explain and remedy the pervading negativity and apathy, the seeming lack of agency or will to tackle those problems that school principals could address for themselves, and the tendency to blame others for the problems.

Journal write

0:30

In your journal, write about your response to the article you have just read. How do you feel about it? What does it make you think of? Are any of the things Pam Christie reports happening at your school?

0:30

You will be given an opportunity to share what you have written in your journal at the next face-to-face session. If you have chosen to do Activity 3.2 and/or Activity 4.1, you should bring them to the face-to-face session, and share them in your small group during the same discussion.

1:00

Activity 4.1 (Optional)

If you feel you would like to understand and analyse this reading more thoroughly, this activity will give you a chance to do that.

Pam Christie groups the problems facing schools at present into 4 categories:

- poor physical and social facilities;
- organizational problems;
- poor school/community relationships;
- poor relationships between the education department and the schools.

She goes on to give a lot of detail about **organizational breakdown**. Write down the headings which appear below, and give 2 or 3 important aspects of organizational breakdown she mentions which fit under each heading. One has been done for you. You may find that you cannot fill all the gaps.

Categories	*Info. from the passage*
Culture	
Identity	
Strategy	
Structures and procedures	*Weak and unaccountable structures, e.g. 1 the principal had not attended regularly for 18 months.* *Time boundaries were not maintained, e.g. numbers of students left school at lunch break and did not return for the rest of the day.*
Technical support	
Human resources	
Leadership and management	
Context	

It would appear that, while schools are indeed a type of organization, in South Africa many schools are in fact at different levels of disorganization.

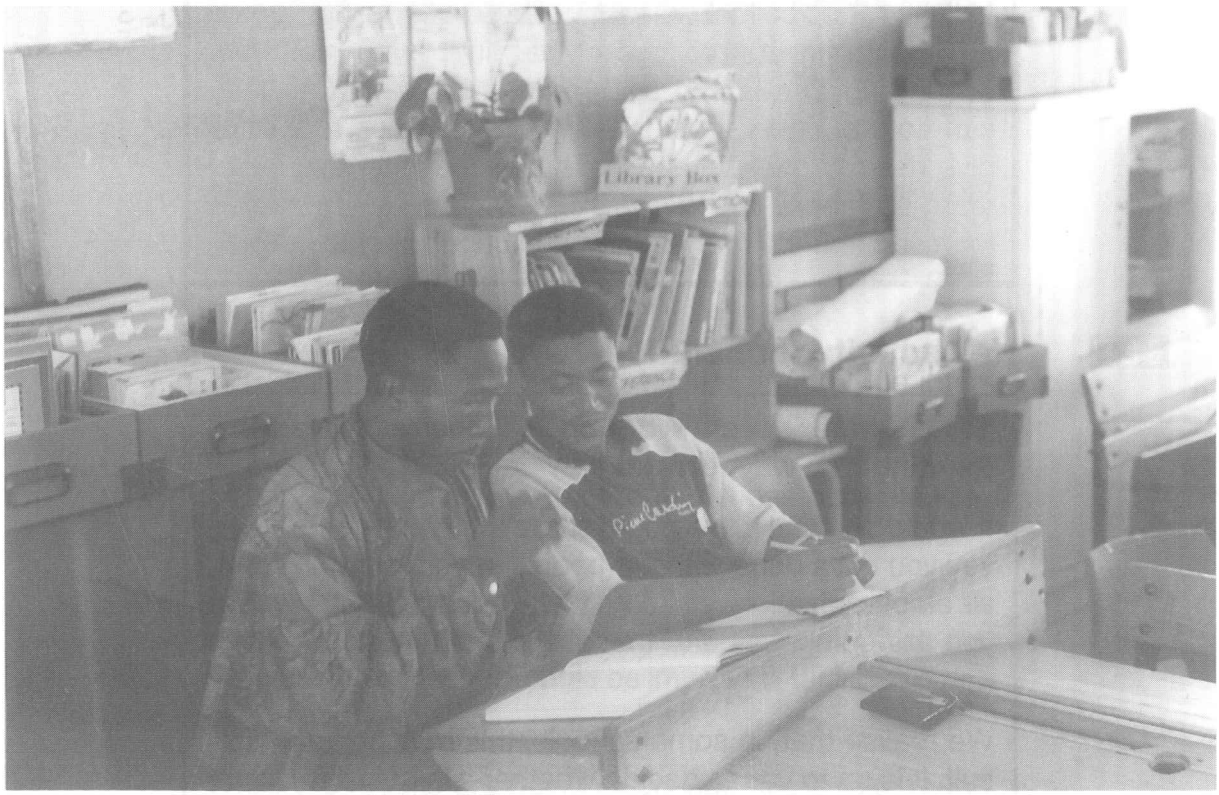
If schools

- cannot start a single day on time
- with a full staff complement in attendance and
- a less than five percent pupil absenteeism rate,
- if they are unable to experience a full working day for even one day in the calendar year,

then there is indeed reason to see schools as disorganizations.

Davidoff makes the point that what happens in one element of the system affects the whole, and that in the end it is the learner in the classroom that suffers. If we accept this point, there is indeed a need for serious concern.

The big question we need to ask ourselves now is what we should do in order to remedy the situation. Often it is easy to criticize and find faults with something and difficult to come up with constructive ways of fixing it.



5:30

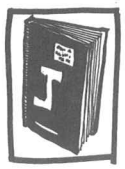
Unit 5

Healing the system - Building Schools as Learning Organizations

At one time or another, most of us have been part of a "great team", working on something together. It might have been in sports, at work, or in the church or community (clubs, stokvels, burial societies, choirs, etc.). You probably experienced trust, good relationships and acceptance. Maybe there were other factors which led to the achievement of good results (e.g. inspired leadership, skills training).

0:30

Journal write



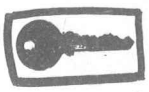
Write something in your journal about a time when you were part of a "great team". Write about why it worked so well.

Learning organizations are made of great teams. Over time, they develop the capacity to create and achieve what they truly desire.

Schools that are learning organizations operate as effective teams. They are able to direct their energies to improving the quality of teaching and learning. They make change part of their organizational culture. They support individual and collective learning as part of their purpose, or mission. In the process of learning, team members acquire new skills and capabilities that alter what they can do and understand. The new capabilities and skills give rise to new awareness. This new awareness leads team members to see the world differently. It enables teams to acquire further skills and capabilities.

3:00

Key activity (concluded)



Step number seven: Working with the results and thinking of a way forward

It would be ideal if you could share the results of the survey you have done with the people in your school. Then, as an organization, you could take stock of areas where you are doing well and those areas where you are not doing well.

We realise that, in some schools, this may be very difficult. It is up to you to decide whether it is possible. If you decide that it is not possible to share the results in your school, do 7B instead of 7A.

7A. Sharing the results

We suggest that you share the results with the principal first. Then see what you, together, would like to do with them. Perhaps you could discuss them with the governing body, and/or with the staff as a whole. Then there could be ways of sharing them and discussing them with the learners. You might even find a way to share the results with representatives from all these "stakeholder" groups at one time.

When you discuss the results, make it clear that these are simply the opinions of a few people. For a really good survey, you would need to interview far more people. This means that the results just give the school things to think about. The results are not "the whole truth about the school".

Try to keep the discussion away from blaming people. Participants should concentrate on learning about your organization, and seeing where improvements can be made.

For each theme, and each statement, it might be interesting to see whether management, teachers, parents and learners have the same opinion, or different opinions. If the opinions are different, discuss possible reasons for this.

After the participants have had enough time to look at, and understand, the results, discuss ways in which the situation in your school could be improved, taking it theme by theme.

While the results are being discussed, try to take rough notes. When the discussions have been completed, you will try to write down the main conclusions in a report.

7B. "If I ruled the school"

If you feel that your school is not open to discussion, look carefully at your results yourself. Study them theme by theme, and see whether opinions of different stakeholder groups are the same or different.

Think of things you would like to do to improve the situation, if you had the power to do so. Think of things you can do to improve the situation, even though you are not in a position of power.

Step number eight: Writing a report

Write a clear and detailed report of the main conclusions you have come to, on your own, or during discussions with other people.

Your report should have a section describing the strengths and weaknesses of the school. This section should also describe any differences in the perceptions of different stakeholder groups. You might like to give some explanations for these differences.

The report should also have a section entitled "Recommendations". In this section, you should describe steps which should be taken to improve your school as an organization. If possible, you should give the practical details of how these changes can be implemented.

This report is not one of your hand-in assignments, but it may be a very important report for your school. Remember, what happens in your school as a whole affects you, your learners, and the learning that happens in the school.

Read your reports to each other in small groups, at the final face-to-face session dealing with this umthamo.

Conclusion

This umthamo has covered a lot of ground, and introduced some quite complicated concepts. You may feel that you have not really absorbed everything in the umthamo. We would like to reassure you that a number of the concepts which have been introduced will come up again. You will have a chance to explore them more deeply and to gain confidence in handling them.

So, what have we done in this umthamo? In this umthamo, we have asked ourselves what a school really is. You have looked at your school as an organization, and done a survey to determine some of its strengths and weaknesses.

A framework has been suggested which can help us to analyse the organizational life of our schools. You have thought about your school in terms of that framework.

We have also looked at the disorganization which prevails in many South African schools at present. You have thought about your own school, and tried to determine whether it is a learning organization, or a "disorganization".

Finally, you have spent some time thinking of ways to "heal the system", and to move towards the situation where the stakeholders in your school work together as a "great team".

Before you leave this umthamo, look back at the outcomes at the beginning of the booklet, and assess whether you have achieved the outcomes.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Christie, Pam. 1997. *Schools as (dis)organizations: the breakdown of the culture of learning and teaching in South African schools.*

Davidoff, S and Lazarus, S. 1997. *The learning school.* Juta and Co., Ltd.

Appendix: Sample data analysis of School Climate

Management 1

Theme: School Climate	Disagree	Weakly agree	Agree	Strongly agree
1. The school is a happy and safe place				X
2. There are places for learners to go and do things outside class times				X
3. Learners and staff behave in a relaxed way			X	
4. Learners, staff and parents feel that their contribution is valued			X	
5. The school is welcoming to visitors				X

Management 2

Theme: School Climate	Disagree	Weakly agree	Agree	Strongly agree
1. The school is a happy and safe place		X		
2. There are places for learners to go and do things outside class times			X	
3. Learners and staff behave in a relaxed way		X		
4. Learners, staff and parents feel that their contribution is valued			X	
5. The school is welcoming to visitors			X	

Teacher 1

Theme: School Climate	Disagree	Weakly agree	Agree	Strongly agree
1. The school is a happy and safe place		X		
2. There are places for learners to go and do things outside class times		X		
3. Learners and staff behave in a relaxed way	X			
4. Learners, staff and parents feel that their contribution is valued	X			
5. The school is welcoming to visitors			X	

Teacher 2

Theme: School Climate	Disagree	Weakly agree	Agree	Strongly agree
1. The school is a happy and safe place			X	
2. There are places for learners to go and do things outside class times			X	
3. Learners and staff behave in a relaxed way		X		
4. Learners, staff and parents feel that their contribution is valued		X		
5. The school is welcoming to visitors			X	

Parent 1

Theme: School Climate	Disagree	Weakly agree	Agree	Strongly agree
1. The school is a happy and safe place				X
2. There are places for learners to go and do things outside class times				X
3. Learners and staff behave in a relaxed way			X	
4. Learners, staff and parents feel that their contribution is valued	X			
5. The school is welcoming to visitors	X			

Parent 2

Theme: School Climate	Disagree	Weakly agree	Agree	Strongly agree
1. The school is a happy and safe place			X	
2. There are places for learners to go and do things outside class times		X		
3. Learners and staff behave in a relaxed way			X	
4. Learners, staff and parents feel that their contribution is valued		X		
5. The school is welcoming to visitors		X		

Learner 1

Theme: School Climate	Disagree	Weakly agree	Agree	Strongly agree
1. The school is a happy and safe place	X			
2. There are places for learners to go and do things outside class times	X			
3. Learners and staff behave in a relaxed way	X			
4. Learners, staff and parents feel that their contribution is valued		X		
5. The school is welcoming to visitors			X	

Learner 2

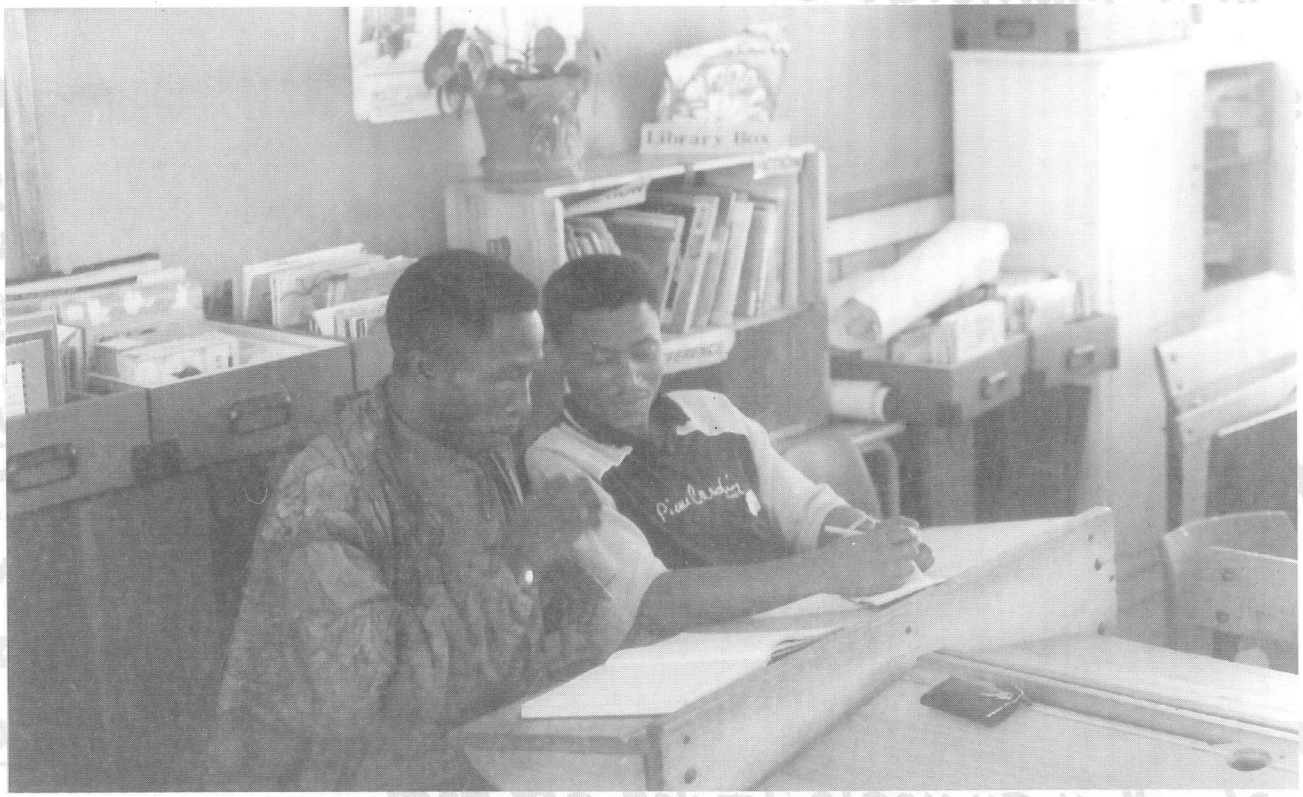
Theme: School Climate	Disagree	Weakly agree	Agree	Strongly agree
1. The school is a happy and safe place			X	
2. There are places for learners to go and do things outside class times		X		
3. Learners and staff behave in a relaxed way			X	
4. Learners, staff and parents feel that their contribution is valued			X	
5. The school is welcoming to visitors			X	

DATA ANALYSIS FORM

SCHOOL CLIMATE		Disagree (0)	Weakly agree (1)	Agree (2)	Strongly agree (3)	Total
1.	Management		X(1)		X(3)	4
	Teachers		X(1)	X(2)		3
	Parents			X(2)	X(3)	5
	Learners	X(0)		X(2)		2
	Total for statement 1					***14***
2.	Management			X(2)	X(3)	5
	Teachers		X(1)	X(2)		3
	Parents		X(1)		X(3)	4
	Learners	X(0)	X(1)			1
	Total for statement 2					***13***
3.	Management		X(1)	X(2)		3
	Teachers	X(0)	X(1)			1
	Parents			XX(4)		4
	Learners	X(0)		X(2)		2
	Total for statement 3					***10***
4.	Management			XX(4)		4
	Teachers	X(0)	X(1)			1
	Parents	X(0)	X(1)			1
	Learners		X(1)	X(2)		3
	Total for statement 4					***9***
5.	Management			X(2)	X(3)	5
	Teachers			XX(4)		4
	Parents	X(0)	X(1)			1
	Learners			XX(4)		4
	Total for statement 5					***14***
	Total for School Climate					***60***

There is a serious crisis in education. Students often do not want to learn and teachers do not want to teach. More than ever before in the recent history of this nation, educators are compelled to confront the biases that have shaped teaching practices in our society and to create new ways of knowing, different strategies for the sharing of knowledge. We cannot address this crisis if progressive critical thinkers and social critics act as though teaching is not a subject worthy of our regard.

The classroom remains the most radical space of possibility in the academy. For years it has been a place where education has been undermined by teachers and students alike who seek to use it as a platform for opportunistic concerns rather than as a place to learn.
(bell hooks - Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom. 1994. New York: Routledge)



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Schools as Learning Communities

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Themba Ndhlovu
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