

https://dspace.org/

Implementation : the 'Black Box' of school improvement.

Naidu, Divealoshani

2013-10-04
http://hdl.handle.net/10539/13189

Downloaded from a DSpace repository. https://dspace.org/

Implementation: the ‘Black Box’ of School Improvement

Divealoshani Naidu

A thesis submitted to the Wits School of Education, Faculty of Humanities, University of the Witwatersrand in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Johannesburg

2012

ABSTRACT

The focus of this study was the challenge of implementing school improvement interventions from inception through the system to the school, within a framework of the multiple layers of South Africa's complex education system. These are the macro level, (the provincial and national political and bureaucratic decision makers), the meso-level (the role and function of district offices and external agents), and the micro level (local contexts at the site of the school). This study does not intend to evaluate school improvement interventions but rather to research and interrogate the mediation of the interventions at various levels and within the contextual realities of an education system in transition. The problem is three-pronged and is premised on understanding the link between the study of implementation and of school improvement within education in transition. The hypothesis put forward is that, on the one hand, contextual realties, contestation and contradictions at various levels of a complex organization shape the outcomes of a school improvement intervention. On the other hand, school improvement strategies must be further located within the framework of implementation in order to explore the complexities of getting things done in an emerging democracy. The challenge posed is whether a coherent link between implementation and school improvement can be achieved while taking into cognizance the three levels and the contextual realities informed by the legacy of the past. I identified two case studies of school improvement initiatives undertaken in the Gauteng province. The first was initiated during the first phase of the new democratic government, an EQUIP intervention programme initiated by the first Member of the Executive Council (MEC) for education in Gauteng. I chose EQUIP because the design and initiation of this intervention symbolized the political ideology of this first period of government. The second school improvement initiative, the Education Action Zone (EAZ) intervention, was chosen because it reflects a significant shift in political ideals in the second period of government. This study argues that school improvement in the emerging South African context must respond to the contested nature of transforming societies and the serious lack of cohesion and capacity at all levels of the system. In order to respond to this difficult terrain, implementation within a cyclic model must be an integral part of the design of a school improvement intervention. There must be a clear understanding of the political, cultural and technical nuances in each of the three environments. Implementation is dependent on actors in them, and the contextual realties shape the level of agency played by the people in each. The linkage also determines the fidelity, compliance, and communication of the message of

the intervention as actors within each have different levels of power and authority to influence the change process.

KEYWORDS: implementation; school improvement; reform interventions; transformation

DECLARATION

I declare that this thesis is my own unaided work. It has not been submitted before for any degree or examination at any other University.

Signed:_____

Divealoshani Naidu

Date : 04th September 2012

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to acknowledge my supervisors. To Professor Brahm Fleisch thank-you for the excellent supervision and for being supportive and understanding during my many trials and tribulations. Professor Tony Bush for agreeing to supervise my work and providing me with invaluable support and guidance. Thank-you Professor Bush for your meticulous supervision, you gave me the tools to complete my thesis. I feel very privileged to have worked with two outstanding academics for whom I have great respect and admiration. I also wish to acknowledge the Spencer Foundation for the support provided to me.

My special thanks to the principal and staff of the schools in my study. I also wish to acknowledge all Gauteng Department of Education officials and the National Business Initiative (NBI) for all documentation and information provided for this study.

I would like to thank my family. A very special thank-you to my husband Veeran who supported me and urged me to keep going. He also took on many chores and made me many cups of tea as I plodded along. I want to acknowledge my son Thesan, my son-in-law Brandon and my daughter Savarna; just knowing they were there for me helped through all my endeavours. I hope my perseverance will inspire them to believe that it is never too late and that they can achieve whatever they set their minds to. To my sister, brothers, my sisters-in law and nieces and nephews, thank-you for the encouragement and support in all my work.

I want to thank my housekeeper Gloria who managed my household with a quiet understanding allowing me the time to pursue my writing. I am sure that her daughter Eunice will be inspired to achieve her aspirations.

I would like to thank my friend Denise Vythilingam for her assistance with the formatting of my thesis.

DEDICATION

I especially want to acknowledge my late parents who were totally committed to the education of their children. I want to believe that the sacrifices they made during difficult times to provide for their children have been truly rewarded. I owe all my achievements to my parents.

This thesis is dedicated to my first grandchild Ashleigh Cecilia Williams who brought into my life a renewed energy and inspiration. I hope that this dedication will inspire her to achieve success in her life.

ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

ANC	African National Congress
COLT	Culture of Teaching and Learning
CCOLT	Committee on the Culture of Learning and Teaching
CIE	Catholic Institute for Education
COSAS	Council of South African Students
COSATU	Congress of South African Trade Union
DoE	Department of Education
EAZ	Education Action Zone
EDUPOL	Education Policy and System Change Unit
EPU	Education and Policy Unit
EQUIP	Education Quality Improvement Programme
GEAR	Growth Employment and Redistribution Strategy
GDE	Gauteng Department of Education
IDSO	Institutional Development and Support Official
MEC	Member of the Executive Council
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
OFSTED	Office of Standards
R&D	Research and Development
RDP	Reconstruction and Development Programme
SABC	South African Broadcasting Corporation
SADTU	South African Democratic Teachers Union
TIMSS	Third International Mathematics and Science Study
TSP	Thousand Schools Project

CONTENTS

CHAPTER ONE 1

INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY:THE SOUTH AFRICAN CONTEXT 1

1.1 INTRODUCTION 1

1.2 BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY 1

1.3 SCOPE OF THE STUDY 4

1.4 PURPOSE AND RATIONALE FOR THE STUDY 5

1.5 THE SCOPE OF THE RESEARCH 6

1.6 EXPLORING THE DYNAMICS OF IMPLEMENTATION 7

1.7 PROBLEM STATEMENT 8

1.9 EDUCATION IN TRANSITION 12

1.10 ORGANISATION OF THE THESIS 14

CHAPTER TWO 17

THE LITERATURE REVIEW 17

2.1 INTRODUCTION 17

2.2 SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT LITERATURE 17

2.3 THE POLITICAL LENS OF SCHOOL REFORM 19

2.4 POLICY POWER AND THE STATE 20

2.5 STATE-DRIVEN INITIATIVES 21

2.6 THE SOUTH AFRICAN CONTEXT 22

2.8 SOME SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT MODELS 25

2.9 THE CULTURAL LENS OF SCHOOL REFORM 28

2.10 IMPLEMENTATING SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT 30

2.11 THE EVOLUTION OF IMPLEMENTATION RESEARCH 31

2.11.1 The Initiation Stage 34

2.11.2 The Implementation Stage 35

2.11.3 Compliance Mechanisms....36
2.12 OVERVIEW....37
CHAPTER THREE....39
RESEACH METHODOLOGY....39
3.1 THE QUALITATIVE APPROACH....39
3.2 RATIONALE FOR THE CASE STUDY....39
3.3 THE CASE STUDY APPROACH....41
3.4 THE CASE STUDY DESIGN....41
3.5 SITE SELECTION....42
3.6 THE SAMPLES....42
3.7 DATA COLLECTION....46
3.7.1 The Elite Interview....46
3.7.2 In-Depth Interviews....47
3.7.3 Focus Group Interviews....47
3.7.4 Confidentiality....48
3.7.5 Data from Documents....49
3.8 DATA ANALYSIS....50
3.8.1 A Case Study Database....50
3.8.2 Analysing the Data....50
3.8.3 The Cross-Case Analysis....51
3.8.4 The Challenge of Going beyond the Text....52
3.8.5 Reliability and Validity....52
3.9 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY....53
3.10 OVERVIEW....54
CHAPTER FOUR....55
THE EQUIP CASE STUDY....55

4.1 THE EQUIP MODEL 55
4.1.1 EQUIP: A School-Based Intervention 55
4.1.2 Political Influence 57
4.2 ENVIRONMENT ONE: THE POLITICAL ARENA 58
4.2.1 Intervention, Initiation and Formation 59
4.2.2 Locating the EQUIP Strategy 60
4.2.3 Technical Factors that Impact on Implementation 62
4.3 ENVIRONMENT TWO:MESO -LEVEL 71
4.3.1 Factors Influencing Implementation 71
4.3.2 Providers Co-Construct the Model with Schools 73
4.3.3 An Externally Driven Intervention and District Readiness 76
4.4 ENVIRONMENT THREE: MICRO LEVEL 79
4.4.1 Criteria for Selection of Schools 80
4.4.2 The Agency of the Funda Principal and the Equip Intervention 85
4.4.3 Implementation at Funda Secondary School 89
4.4.4 Jabula High and Local Level Politics 90
4.5 OVERVIEW 96
4.5.1 Macro-level Anomalies 96
4.5.2 Meso-Level Implications 97
CHAPTER FIVE 100
THE EAZ CASE STUDY 100
5.1 INTRODUCTION 100
5.2 ENVIRONMENT ONE:MACRO-LEVEL 102
5.2.1 Intervention, Initiation and Formation 102
5.2.2. Pressure and Accountability versus Collaboration 104
5.2.3 EAZ Becomes a Top-Down, High–Pressured Intervention 106

5.2.4 Bureaucratic Interpretation of the Political Brief 107
5.2.5 The EAZ Strategy 110
5.2.6 Structure and Location of the EAZ Team 111
5.3 ENVIRONMENT TWO: MESO-LEVEL 115
5.3.1 The Construction of Power and Authority: The EAZ Teams 115
5.3.2 Communication and Networks 118
5.3.3 Resources 120
5.3.4 Compliance Mechanisms 121
5.3.5 Inclusion or Exclusion of Districts 122
5.3.6 The EAZ Strategy versus Districts 123
5.3.7 Local Level Politics and Climate 125
5.3.8 The District Response 127
5.4 ENVIRONMENT THREE: EAZ MICRO-LEVEL 129
5.4.1 Implementation, Intervention Impact, and Evaluation 129
5.4.2 Criteria for selection of schools 130
5.4.3 Lama High School: School Context Shapes Implementation 131
5.5 THE STORY OF SOUTH SECONDARY 141
5.5.1 Local Level Politics 142
5.5.2 The Principal as the Local Change Agent 144
5.5.3 Local Level Interpretation of Cracks in the System 146
5.5.5. The District Response to the South Secondary 148
5.6 OVERVIEW 151
5.6.1 Macro level Political Justification for the EAZ 151
5.6.2 The Meso-Level 151
5.6.3 Implementation at the School Level 152
5.6.4 Local Level Agency and Gate-Keeping 153

5.6.5 Socio-Historic Context of Schools 153
5.6.6 Pressure 153
CHAPTER SIX 155
A CROSS-CASE ANALYSIS 155
6.1 INTRODUCTION 155
6.2 ISSUES OF IMPLEMENTATION AT THE MACRO LEVEL 156
6.2.1 School Improvement Interventions Led by Political Imperatives 156
6.2.2 Conceptual Complexity at the Macro-Level 158
6.2.3 The Location and Champion of Interventions Matter 158
6.2.4 Contradictions and Contestations at the Macro Level 160
6.2.5 The Political/Bureaucratic Divide 161
6.2.6 Technical Constraints 162
6.3 THE MESO-LEVEL 165
6.3.1 District Dilemma 165
6.3.2 District Exclusion: Implications for Implementation 167
6.3.3 Districts are Critical 168
6.4 THE MICRO-LEVEL 169
6.4.1 The School Context 170
6.4.2 Power and Politics in Schools 170
6.4.3 Technical Factors Impact on Implementation 172
6.4.4 Schools' Organisational Systems and Structures 173
6.4.5 School Culture Shapes Implementation 175
6.4.6 The Principal as Gatekeeper or Change Agent 176
6.4.7 Accountability and Compliance 177
6.4.8 Development and Support Versus Pressure 179
6.5 OVERVIEW 179

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS 180
7.1 INTRODUCTION 180
7.2 THE COMPLEXITIES OF GETTING THINGS DONE 180
7.2.1 Key issues at the macro level 181
7.2.2 Key issues at the meso-level 181
7.2.3 Key issues at the micro level 182
7.3 UNDERSTANDING THE SHIFTING TERRAIN 183
7.4 THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS STUDY 184
7.5 TOWARDS AN ADAPTED MODEL OF SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT 185
7.6 RECOMMENDATIONS 187
7.7 CONCLUSION 188
REFERENCES 189
APPENDICES 205
APPENDIX A: Request for an Interview 205
APPENDIX B: To participants in this study 206
APPENDIX C: Semi-structured interview schedule target: Elite interview 207
APPENDIX D: Semi- structured interview guideline: EAZ Provincial Team 209
APPENDIX E: Semi -structured interview guideline: EQUIP business partners 212
APPENDIX F: Semi-structured interview schedule- EQUIP Service-providers 214
APPENDIX G: Semi-structured interview schedule: EQUIP/EAZ 216
APPENDIX H: Semi-structured interview schedule for schools (EQUIP/EAZ) 217

Table of Figures	**Page**
Figure 2.1: Environments influencing implementation ofSchool Improvement	34
Figure 3.1: Framework of interview sites for the study of the initiation and implementation of the EQUIP Intervention	44
Figure 3.2: Framework of interview sites for the study of the initiation and implementation of the EAZ Intervention	45
Figure 7.1.*A School Improvement Intervention Model that integrates Implementation* (as adapted from Nakamura & Smallwood, 1980:27)	186

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY: THE SOUTH AFRICAN CONTEXT

1.1 INTRODUCTION

During the post-apartheid era, the pressure to address past inequities and problems in South Africa has led to a variety of policies intended to eradicate past injustices and a frantic search for reform and transformation models. These were supposed to help the various institutions of society become fully-fledged, all-inclusive and equal, as they embraced the principles embedded in the Constitution. One sector which needed such reform was education, which was suddenly presented with various school reform models aimed at tackling a large number of schools that were performing well below expectations (Asmal, 1999). The problem with these schools was that most were products of the turmoil and crisis of years of struggle for liberation. After the struggle had been won, the establishment of a democratic government and a unified education system in South Africa gave rise to problems in a majority of schools and the need to address a system steeped in inequity, non-compliance and dysfunctionality (Maja, 1994). These challenges resulted in a search for effective school improvement strategies.

The locus of this research is the South African educational environment during the years of transition, a period in the history of education that has been one of transformation towards democratic ideals. The reality, however, is that many of the challenges that impacted society during this period and had to be redressed, including education, were the legacy of apartheid. This state of transition thus raised several issues that are linked to the political, social and economic agendas and which influence our understanding of the processes of reform in education (Buckland & Hofmeyer, 1993).

1.2 BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

School improvement and school reform[1] are priorities on the agenda of most public education systems. In the context of this study, 'school reform' alludes to educational

[1] The concepts 'school reform' and 'school improvement' are used interchangeably in this study.

changes from past systems to the envisaged new systems, goals and improvements, focussing on breakdowns in schools, especially as reflected by South African learners' academic results and progress. Against this background there has been a proliferation of improvement programmes and designs, the result of each new political or bureaucratic leader being challenged to improve the output and functionality of public schools, and consequently scrambling to achieve quick visible results. This approach privileged existing paradigms on school improvement, but these often presupposed that the educational arena was logical and neutral. The result was a school improvement intervention born in the macro-level arena that almost invariably faced the pitfalls of a complex and contradictory environment that emerged almost as soon as the ink dried on the paper. The focus of this study is the challenge to implementing school improvement interventions in South Africa, traversing the first phase of the South African democracy under the ministry of Professor Sibusiso Bengu (1994-1999) and the second phase under the ministry of Professor Kader Asmal (1999-2004).

The first phase of the new democracy achieved major successes in establishing a single department of education both at national and provincial level. It was during this phase that both legislature and policies embracing the principles of the new democratic Constitution were promulgated, under the first Minister of Education Professor Sibusiso Bengu (1994-1999). The legislature and policies of this period targeted transformational issues of equity, equality and quality of education. New policies, however, did not necessarily translate into an instant solution to the real problems facing most schools in the country, and the lack of quality education soon became evident. Discourse on the lack of a culture of teaching and learning emerged and it was clear that those schools which had been the battlegrounds during the apartheid era were severely eroded. Several attempts at school improvement during this first phase did not yield the expected results and the pressure for more visible signs of improvement began to grow.

The second Minister of Education, Kader Asmal, responded to the dysfunctional situation in a great number of schools in the country through his *Call to Action* speech (1999), in which he acknowledged that while "we had spent the first five years of the new democracy developing excellent laws and policies, our education system was facing major problems and … large parts were dysfunctional". He also identified some of the features that were causing the system to fail, such as: inequality in access and facilities still affecting the poor

and rural communities; low teacher morale; the vulnerability of many schools to social evils and crime; indiscipline of principals, teachers and learners; the inability of educators to cope with new demands of racial integration; and new curricula and pedagogy.

Asmal identified the failure of management and governance and the lowered morale of schools experiencing repeated failure as contributing to the failure. Having recognised some of the major problems in the system he announced nine priorities for the next five years, under the slogan of *Tirisano,* which called for a collaborative effort to restore the dysfunctional schools. It was evident that school improvement was featuring on the national agenda.

In addition to the concerns above, in 1995 the Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC) conducted tests in Mathematics and Science in more than 400 primary and secondary schools as part of the Third International Mathematics and Science Study, known as TIMSS. The tests were conducted in Standard Five and Six, targeting approximately 15,000 students. The main findings were that South Africa's results compared to the 45 countries participating in the TIMSS tests were amongst the lowest. Whilst Howie (1997:10-11) lists a number of contextual, historical and curriculum related reasons for the poor results of South African students it was evident that reform in education was facing enormous challenges.

The newly established democracy in South Africa could not ignore claims that too many schools were not performing at acceptable levels, and politicians and education departments were forced to address this growing concern. The result has been a number of solutions that were quickly implemented. As Senge (1994) has warned, the pressure not to do something immediately may feel more powerful, but any relief is temporary and the symptoms often worsen. School improvement remained a challenge and the inability to respond to the underachievement of schools resulted in both politicians and bureaucratic structures initiating successive strategies without careful analysis of what would work and what would not. There was an urgent need to gain an in-depth understanding of school improvement and to extend relevant theories to include the contextual realities of an unstable, transitional context.

1.3 SCOPE OF THE STUDY

In the South African context, as in many developing countries, reformers were contending with an inheritance of historical factors and a resultant apathy to change that intensified the work of those attempting to bring about school improvement and change. Many early attempts at reform did not result in the intended changes at the school level (Chisholm & Valley, 1996). However, in theorising and analysing school improvement, it was also necessary to locate the interventions within the global arena, which raised the prospect of a state in transition having to deal with severe internal contradictions and position itself within the global arena. Global influences often lead to local decisions which may at times be in contradiction to local realities.

One of the premises of this study is that the failure to achieve the goals of improvement programmes is not necessarily due to a lack of funds or good design, but largely to issues of implementation in a complex and dynamic local arena. It is this 'Black Box' of issues impacting on implementation that is the focus of this study. Carrim and Shalem (1999) argue that literature on school improvement may not always be applicable to the specific conditions that have damaged schools in South Africa, and have listed a range of problems from poor infrastructure, facilities and administration to poorly trained, de-motivated educators and conflict or tension between stakeholders. Botshabelo (1996), in his studies on township schools, emphasised the socio-economic problems of schools, including poverty, crime and violence. While similar to deprived areas in many other countries, Carrim and Shalem (1999) stress that the complexity of the South African context is a result of many years of disruption and on-going politically motivated suppression of quality education that have created conditions of decay or militant defiance.

For this reason, a systemic approach to the analysis of these improvement programmes was needed to understand the contextual complexities. Christie (1998) has argued that the reason strategies for a realistic, holistic and successful intervention failed was that they did not explore the entire education system, from the origins of the interventions to the sites of the school. Against this backdrop, the study will outline the context within which the Gauteng Department of Education (GDE) was required to respond to the national political imperatives without undermining issues of transition within the national Department of Education (DoE). Gauteng is one of nine provinces, and as the economic hub of the country, the challenges to the Department have been immense.

The study will further explore how a broader social, political, economic and historical context has contributed to complexities at the various levels of the system, including the local level of schools. Through case studies of two school improvement initiatives in Gauteng, it will explore 'the Black-Box' of various factors that have imposed constraints on the programmes and extend the theoretical discourse of school improvement to include the complexities of implementing change within an education department facing transitional dilemmas.

Datnow, Hubbard and Mehan (2002) describe implementation as a set of interrelated conditions and consequences in a social system shaped by power, politics and context within the various levels of the system. This notion, while it is supported by literature on implementation, is not foregrounded in the school reform/improvement literature, but rather design of reform models and impact at the level of the school dominate the discourse. Key issues that shape a state in transition include power, politics, socio-economic factors and history. An analysis of reform initiatives in these contexts therefore requires different theoretical lenses and a discourse relevant to states in transformation or development. These will be discussed in the next sections and in depth in Chapter Two.

1.4 PURPOSE AND RATIONALE FOR THE STUDY

This study arises from my personal experience in the transitional education terrain of South Africa before and after democracy. Like many South Africans, I wished to see a dramatic improvement in the education of the majority, however, from working in a school and then in the provincial office of the GDE, I witnessed and was party to repeated attempts at school improvement, with the feeling each time that we were moving ten steps forward and then nine steps back. There was an urgent need to understand why interventions were not necessarily achieving identified goals or resulting in sustainable change in schools, in other words, what was contained in the 'Black-Box' of implementation of interventions through the system?

Although much has been written about the causes of problems in schools and the inherited injustices of apartheid, further research was needed. While most studies on school improvement tend to focus on non-compliance at school level, few have focused on locating it within the system, from initiation at macro level to institutionalisation at micro

level. This focus is critical, since issues of implementation across these layers ultimately determine the shape and impact of any type of intervention.

The framework for this study focuses on the multiple layers of a complex education system, namely the macro level (the provincial and national political agenda of the ruling party and bureaucratic interpretation of political mandates); the meso-level (politics, emerging organisational challenges and the role and function of district offices); and the micro level (local level politics, power and socio-historic contexts at the site of the school). This study does not intend to evaluate school improvement interventions but rather to research and interrogate the mediation of the interventions at various levels and within the contextual realities of an education system in transition.

There is a need to understand and to analyse the 'Black Box' of implementation of school improvement initiatives. It is hoped that this study will provide some answers regarding concerns raised by the waves of school improvement strategies that were not yielding the desired results. This will be achieved by examining contradictions and contestations in the implementation arena and providing positions and arguments from which possibilities of school improvement can be achieved. The researcher's passion for improving schools lies behind the commitment in this research to contributing to both the theory and practice of school improvement design and implementation.

1.5 THE SCOPE OF THE RESEARCH

The researcher identified two key school improvement initiatives undertaken in the Gauteng province. The first, the Education Quality Improvement Programme (EQUIP) intervention, was initiated during the first phase of the new democratic government by the first Member of the Executive Council (MEC) for education in Gauteng. I chose EQUIP because the design and initiation of this intervention symbolises the political ideology of this first period of government. The second school improvement initiative, the Education Action Zone (EAZ) intervention, was chosen because it reflects a significant shift in political ideals in the second period of government. The second MEC for education in Gauteng was required to respond to the changing imperatives of the ruling party (Asmal, 2000).

The EQUIP intervention aimed at improving the quality of education in schools while the EAZ intervention aimed at improving their delivery and functionality. Both interventions were geared to maximising learner achievement and both raised much controversy as they responded to the political imperatives underpinning the respective government's strategies. More importantly, in exploring issues of design and implementation of these two initiatives, the argument raised is whether initiatives designed by politicians to respond to political constituencies and mandates necessarily fit the needs or structures of the bureaucratic systems or the schools.

1.6 EXPLORING THE DYNAMICS OF IMPLEMENTATION

To understand why school improvement initiatives do not achieve targeted goals, I link the research to the study of implementation as a process required for their success or failure. Designing and developing school improvement programmes in many instances is a technical exercise responding to political or bureaucratic imperatives. Well-designed policies and programmes will remain just that if they do not achieve the desired outcomes at the level where it matters most. Implementation, however, is dependent on politics, power, resources, historical and sociological factors and territorial jurisdiction at all levels of a system (Nakamura, & Smallwood, 1980).

Datnow, Hubbard and Mehan (2002) argue that reform implementation is a co-constructed process within a context and that people's actions are dependent on social and historical settings. Thus, at a local level of the school, context shapes implementation. This study extends this notion to include the political and bureaucratic settings within the system from the macro to the micro level, in particular of the education system and the pressures and constraints that impact on implementation in light of the complexities of an education department.

This study foregrounds implementation within a complex and emerging system to unravel some of the reasons initiatives may not bring about the desired improvement. There has been a great deal of focus on the divide between policy development and policy implementation, and Mclaughlin (1991), Murphy (1991), Nakamura and Smallwood (1980), and McDonnell and Elmore (1991), reveal the fragmentation between policy intention, the difficulties of actually getting things done and the eventual and often

detrimental outcomes at the local level. Murphy (1991) further points to the need to examine the conditions, resources, and processes in the study of implementation. The problem explored in this study is therefore located within the fields of school improvement and implementation.

1.7 PROBLEM STATEMENT

The problem that needs to be resolved in this research is three pronged and is premised on understanding the link between the study of implementation and the study of school improvement within education in transition. The hypothesis[2] put forward is that, on the one hand, contextual realities, and contestation and contradictions at various levels of a complex organisation, shape the outcomes of a school improvement intervention. On the other hand, this research will argue that the study of school improvement strategies must be further located within the framework of implementation in order to explore the complexities of getting things done. It focuses on the problem of attempting to get things done in an emerging democracy that is fraught with issues of power, politics and the dilemma of establishing democratic principles within a legacy of inequities and contradictions.

The challenge posed by the study is how a coherent link between implementation and school improvement can be achieved while taking into cognisance the three levels of Gauteng's educational structures: macro (provincial office), meso (districts and external agents of change), and micro (schools and school communities), as well as the contextual realities informed by the legacy of apartheid.

The questions raised by the concerns with school improvement locally, and in international literature, directed this research to examine issues of implementation with focus on the main environments of the education setting, from the macro to the meso, and finally the micro location at school level. This will be explored through an analysis of the two case studies as stated above. Some key questions that guided the investigation at the various levels were:

[2] Webster's Dictionary defines 'hypothesis' as an assumption made for the sake of an argument. Hypothesis is a starting point for making a case.

At the macro level (provincial structures: political and bureaucratic), the following key implementation questions will direct the analysis ofthe initiation of improvement programmes:

- What are the factors that influenced the initiation and design of improvement strategies?
- Do the political, cultural and transitional conditions in the country determine what happens in education?
- Does the champion of the intervention influence compliance?
- Does the location of these interventions matter?
- How do macro-level decisions determine implementation in complex organisations?

At the meso-level (districts), key implementation questions relate to analysis of mediation of improvement programmes by districts:

- How are implementation strategies communicated to this level?
- How does the structural organisation of the districts support implementation?
- What is the relationship between the districts and the schools in relation to the interventions?

At the Micro level (schools), key implementation questions relate to analysis of mediation and interpretation and implementation of improvement programmes:

- How do the historical, political, social and economic challenges influence the agency of implementation in schools?
- What are the factors of contestation and contradiction at the school level?
- How are the interventions adapted and adopted to fit the contextual realties?
- How do issues of transition impact on the implementation of programmes?

Through an analysis of these questions, using the appropriate methodology, theories and literature, it is hoped that this research will assist in adding to the dialogue and theories on school improvement and implementation within a complex environment. It will also

unravel the mysteries in the 'Black-Box' of implementation that often plagues both policymakers and designers of interventions.

1.8 GUIDING THEORIES

A detailed discussion of theoretical orientation and methodology will be presented in later chapters but it is necessary here to explore some of the underpinning theories, drawing attention to how the tensions and contradictions between school improvement and implementation, in the context of an education system in transition, have been integrated in this study.

In attempting to understand what makes things happen in a complex and challenging context, the researcher problematises implementation and the influence of power, politics and the problems of transitional struggles within the socio-historic context and how they play out at different levels of the organisation. The task has been described from a 'critical analyst'[3]perspective (Ball, 1994) as being concerned with examining how patterns of social and political transformation create pockets of contradiction, contestation and agency throughout the education department, from the macro level to the local level of the school.

For this reason Giddens's (1984) theory of structuration begins to locate the role of agency of individuals in shaping and leading change. Giddens argues that structures or traditions can be changed by the actions of people and locates human agency within social structures. Thus, the human agency within the structures of an education system can impact on the mediation of change. Giddens (1984) highlights aspects of the structuration theory which impinge upon empirical research in the area of social science. Aspects relevant to this study are the role of human beings as agents, the study of context bound by time and space, social identities and the 'position–practice relations' associated with them, and, finally, power asan underestimated means of control. Giddens (1984) also emphasises the need to concentrate the analysis in social research on contextually situated activities. In this study, the emerging structure of the GDE and the role players, both political and bureaucratic, will be considered in the shaping and implementation of interventions.

[3] Critical theory embraces the analysis of society in its totality in its historical specificity.

In order to further understand the terrain of the study, especially within the period of transition, the researcher draws on Fullan's (2003:22-25) interpretation of the complexity theory. The argument he presents is that the process of change within organisations such as education is both unpredictable and complex. This theory allows for the study of a complex transitional system with dynamic interactive forces.

Thus, when analyzing the implementation of the two school improvement interventions in an education system in a state of change and uncertainty, several complex factors need to be considered. These factors revolve around three broad areas: i) the role of power, politics and agency in an emerging democracy; ii) the process of implementation in a complex education environment; and iii) the role of the organisational structures and systems.

On the issue of implementation, Yanow (1990) provides a theoretical framework that focuses on organisational levels, actors and inter-organisational issues. Each of the following lenses has been adapted to fit into a framework for the analysis of implementation:

- The human relations lens, through which are looked at the behaviour of individual actors within organisations and traits of interpersonal behaviour.
- The political lens, through which are examined dynamics within groups and relations between and among groups.
- The structural lens, which focuses on the organisation itself as a designed set of behavioural rules.
- The systems lens, which is used to target organisations as they relate to one another in a particular environment. (Yanow, 1990).

These lenses are part of an organising frame for the exploration of the macro, meso and micro levels of the two case studies. Weiner (2009) argues that in examining change in an organisation there is a need to examine organisational readiness. He ascribes the theory of organisational readiness to a shared psychology in which organisational members feel committed to implement change and are confident of the ability to do so. Organisational readiness, according to Weiner (2009), is a precursor to successful implementation. It is therefore necessary to understand the dynamics of an education system undergoing major transition and the state of readiness.

1.9 EDUCATION IN TRANSITION

A brief overview of the status of schools and education in South Africa prior to 1994 contextualises the study in a time of racial division. The apartheid era was marked by great differences between white and black education. Black or 'Bantu education' was designed for the sole purpose of promoting the oppressive ideology of the state, and Samuel (1990) described schools of the time as overcrowded, providing inferior education aimed at keeping the black majority unskilled. In this climate there was a high failure and drop-out rate. The turning point in the history of education in South Africa came with the '50-50' ruling in 1974 that forced black schools to teach at least half the subjects in Afrikaans. Resistance and anger against this rule led to student revolts in Soweto that began in 1976 (Nasson & Samuel, 1990). The instability, defiance and unrest spread to schools throughout the country and lasted until the advent of universal suffrage in 1994. Cross (1992) argues that the legitimacy of education and schooling was eroded as the youth became increasingly militant, and it is within this context that the urgent need for improvement in schools arose. Schools were now referred to as 'dysfunctional,' with repeated references to a breakdown in the 'culture of teaching and learning,' and growing pressure on the new democratic government to address problems in all the schools.

Schools and schooling in South Africa cannot be detached from the political, social and economic challenges of a country in transition. As a result, transitional agendas located in the political, economic and social history of the country targeted issues of social justice and redress. However, a contradiction often emerges when the drive to establish an education system strives for the ideal, while political, social and economic realities at various levels are not ready, do not have relevant capacity, or are struggling to gain legitimacy. Taylor, Muller and Vinjevold (2003:10) claimed that instilling legitimate authority and accountability within every sphere of the public system was one of the most daunting tasks of the new democracy

This study problematises the realities of an education system in transition. In understanding the development of South African education it is necessary to acknowledge the issues that emerge from almost 40 years of apartheid, the dismantling of old systems and structures, the upheaval caused by years of struggle and the idealistic goals of an

emerging democracy. After 1994 came a period of major change, as the country needed to transform very quickly from an extreme ideology of apartheid to one of democracy. Changes to democratic principles had to be almost immediate as no signs of apartheid would be tolerated in the new democracy. Education had been used to maintain and support the principles of apartheid, and at all levels was central to the years of struggle. Restructuring needed to incorporate the principles of transformation to a new democracy, and this complexity in the education arena was subjected to the socio-economic and other upheavals facing the country.

It is in this context that the two case studies were examined, and in which it is important to problematise the struggle to become 'free citizens.' It is necessary to explore the tools or support an individual required to participate in a developing democracy. An understanding of the intensity of the struggle in a developing world is necessary, especially when examining why implementation does or does not happen. Freedom does not happen once liberation is obtained. Paulo Freire (1972) refers to the 'fear of freedom' which afflicts the oppressed, arguing that those who have suffered years of oppression will need to eject the internalised image of the world of oppression and replace it by individual autonomy and responsibility. Freire (1972) claims that it is thorough 'praxis' (action and reflection) that people liberate themselves: "critical and liberating dialogue, which presupposes action, must be carried on with the oppressed at whatever the stage of their liberation" (Freire, 1972:47).

The argument raised here is that, in attempting to address the problems in districts and even in schools, raised by the two cases studies, the gaps created in transforming education from the old to the new are fundamental. An assumption was made that changing systems and structures and developing new policies would automatically equip people for their new roles. The ability to change from an oppressive system to the envisioned one requires more than political and technical decisions. A better understanding of these realities can contribute to improved implementation through the system.

Against this backdrop, this study therefore draws on theoretical underpinnings in both school improvement literature and implementation literature and foregrounds issues of contestation and contradiction at the macro, meso and micro levels of the system.

Contestation and contradiction are caused by several factors, including policy idealism, a struggle for power and legitimacy and the realities of implementation.

Several academics of education change since the advent of democracy have begun to make claims about the breakdown between policy and implementation. For instance, Sayed and Jansen (2001) claim that policy idealism seldom matches classroom realities and argue that it is imperative to examine education changes within the contexts of a country in transition. Motala and Pampalis (2002) argue that implementing education reform policies leads to social contestations, which must be examined in order to understand their effect on the reform agenda. School reform is not the sole agenda of schools but a wider social and political agenda. The researcher extends arguments made by Motala and Pampalis (2002) about the analysis of the implementation of school reform to include issues that give rise to contestation and contradiction at all levels of the system, such as power and authority, social and organisational contexts, and human agency.

1.10 ORGANISATION OF THE THESIS

The thesis is organised into chapters as follows.

Chapter Two reviews the literature on trends in school improvement, its evolution and school effectiveness locating various approaches to it. The wide range of literature in this area is placed within three categories: the political underpinnings of school improvement interventions; the cultural context that influences implementation of interventions; and technical issues that influence the design of programmes. Each of these categories is critiqued in relation to the South African school improvement experiences. This chapter links school improvement literature to literature that traces the evolution of implementation and explores various approaches to implementation in different organisational structures. It identifies the importance of foregrounding implementation as a condition for success of an improvement strategy. It reveals the framework within which implementation of the two case on studies school improvement were investigated.

Chapter Three describes the research methodology, the research design and the sample design, as well as justifying the case study approach. The aim of the cross case analysis and the limitations of the research are presented.

Chapter Four unravels the EQUIP strategy from the time of its inception to the time it reaches the schools. It locates the strategy within the state ideologies of the new democracy and explores the macro-level contestations within the political and the bureaucratic context. It explores the issues of an emerging state and the development of a school improvement intervention as a partnership with the business sector. It describes meso-level issues and the impact on both the district and the non-governmental organisations (NGOs) implementing the strategy. At the micro level, two schools are explored in depth, to determine local level responses to the EQUIP intervention. In order to verify and validate findings, a further three schools were investigated and officials related to the two schools were interviewed. This chapter also includes narratives and interviews with personnel from other implementing agencies, such as the NGOs.

Chapter Five narrates the EAZ strategy from its inception to its reaching the level of the school. The same pattern is followed as in the EQUIP case study. This chapter explores issues of implementation of a top-down strategy that challenges the fabric of the newly established principles of democracy by using unorthodox and forceful measures to demand compliance. It explores all role players in the intervention, from the political office at the provincial level through the implementing EAZ team. It investigates both district and school responses to the intervention.

Chapter Six focuses on the cross case analysis of the macro level, meso and micro levels. At the macro level, it explores the emerging trends and issues that impact on implementation and analyses the two cases within the changing imperatives of the political context of South Africa. At the meso-level, the similarities and differences of the two case studies reveal contradictions and constraints at the level of the district. At the micro-level of the school the cross-case analysis reveals the complexities and the severe constraints at the local level where the outcomes of the intervention matter most.

Chapter Seven summarises the findings and makes recommendations for implementation of school improvement in the unique South African context. It explores the underlying

causes of constraints and non-implementation and contributes to the literature and theory of the implementation of school improvement. It highlights contradictions and contestation unique to a state occupied with transition.

CHAPTER TWO

THE LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter explores literature in two areas, namely school improvement and implementation. School improvement literature spans many countries and various attempts at improving the delivery of education and opportunities for learners in public schools. It is almost impossible to examine all innovative programmes since these are vast and varied, but key aspects of school improvement will be explored through technical, political and cultural lenses. In the area of implementation the evolution and key issues are explored as a key to understanding why school improvement attempts unfold the way they do.

2.2 SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT LITERATURE

School improvement has been the focus of governments and academics in most countries, with designs and approaches to it evolving as each attempt is critiqued and evaluated. Attempts range from school-by-school reform initiatives to large scale initiatives targeting many schools. There have been programmes that were externally conceptualised and driven, such as the Research and Development (R&D) approach of the early 1950s to the 1970s in the United States of America (USA). This approach focussed on specific subject areas such as Mathematics, Science and Biology with programme developers who were identified academics and experts outside the school. The main criticism of this approach was that it was located outside the school, that it was a 'top-down' approach and thus difficult to implement. Later there was a shift to a school-based approach, which included the school in the decision making processes, but unlike the R&D approach it did not focus on curricula or teaching and learning (Calhoun & Joyce, 1998).

In the USA there was wide scale reaction to the Coleman Report (1966), which implied that schools had little or no effect on student achievement. This sparked research into factors that made schools effective (Reynolds, Bollen, Creemers, Hopkins, Stoll, & Lagerweij, 1996). Fuller and Clarke (1994) record two major frameworks that have

evolved since the 1960s, and the Coleman report, describing these two camps on school effectiveness as competing models for how schools work. The first is 'policy mechanics,' practitioners of which search for universal characteristics of effective schools. Based on a 'production–function' metaphor that identifies inputs likely to yield achievement, this approach is useful to policymakers who wish to centralise what should be happening in school, and leads to the effective school 'lists' that are expected to be replicated in all schools.

According to Clarke, Harris and Reynolds (2004),the interaction between the school improvement and the school effectiveness communities began in the 1990s.They refer to the following early voices calling for a merger of approaches and insights (Gray et al., 1996; Hopkins et al., 1994;Reynolds, Hopkins & Stoll, 1993). This interaction began to focus on the contextual factors of schools as levers of school improvement. Reynolds, Hopkinsand Stoll (1993) argue that school improvers need to have knowledge about those factors within schools and classrooms that may be manipulated or changed to produce school improvement. They also argue that school improvement strategies provide the ultimate test for establishing whether there is a causal link between school processes.

The second camp or school of thought, according to Fuller and Clarke (1994), comprise the 'classroom culturalists,' who emphasise the location, culture and diversity of schools. They emphasise the need to acknowledge local conditions and how inputs are conditioned by the cultural conditions of schools. This view led to reviews of school reform or improvement, and examining various strategies to identify how technical inputs are culturally constructed and understood by various role-players in the school. It was also important to understand why the same factors influenced achievement in one school but not in another. It was necessary to understand the contextual situation of schools to know what works and what does not (Fullan, 1993). Politics, culture and technical design became the key areas of analysis of school improvement research.

It was therefore convenient to arrange the wealth of literature around these key aspects of school improvement, and viewing it through technical, political and cultural lenses allowed for a more ordered approach. The technical focus looks at problems on the design of the model itself, whether it was implemented as intended and whether the model 'fits' the context of the school. The political focus recognises the impact of micro and macro

political influences on the school and the improvement process. The third focus on the school is through a cultural lens, in and around the schools as a powerful dimension of school improvement (Fleisch, 2002:98). Exploring school reform through multiple lenses contributes to our understanding of the 'structures,' 'strategies,' 'practices' and 'relationships' associated with change processes through the various levels of mediation.

2.3 THE POLITICAL LENS OF SCHOOL REFORM

The role of the state in education reform is increasing with the demand for production in response to increased resources in education. States have over time, and more especially in recent times, placed an emphasis on education and delivery, with an increase in funding to education and thus increasing pressure on education departments to improve delivery. Wohlstetter (1991) argues that a major challenge facing state policymakers is a demand for high level of accountability in education and that what is needed is an accountability mechanism to track the progress of education reform. This has led to ongoing debates and policy making on education reform, despite the view that there is little evidence of local acceptance or policy–into–practice of state mandated reforms, yet the mandates on education departments and local authorities increase and reforms are more demanding as the interplay between state-level and site–level appears to be more complex (Hannaway & Crowson, 1989). Education reform is as much an educational process as it is a political one, and because of political pressure there may be a drive from political decision-makers for symbols of reform. While symbols may be positive visual motivators, a problem occurs when there is no congruence between symbols and substance (Fullan, 1993). There has also been a trend for ruling parties or newly elected ministers to mark their reign with an education reform initiative reflecting the ideology of the period. Taylor, Rizvi, Lingard and Henry (1997) refer to the politics of educational change, arguing that progressive change and the impetus for it are highly susceptible to contextual factors and prevailing ideologies. Political dynamics at the level of the state may influence the design and initiation of a strategy at various levels of the system, and influence what and how it is implemented.

There is increased evidence that the implementation of school reform initiatives is greatly influenced by the politics at the meso and micro levels. The micro politics at the local level cannot be ignored, and educators respond to the power and politics within the school.

Within the school context, especially in the South African context, there are several pockets of power. The politics and power at the local level of the school are not always hierarchical and thus the locus of power and authority depends on the contextual factors. The way in which the initiative is communicated to the school will determine the level of implementation. Reform initiatives have a greater chance of success when teachers and local stakeholders are involved in the initiation, development and implementation.

2.4 POLICY POWER AND THE STATE

The state should not be seen as a neutral, homogenous arena. In understanding the changing South African scene, the complexities of power struggles, differences within all levels of the state, departments and individuals must be acknowledged (Chisholm, 2004). Ball (1990) explores three levels or dimensions of 'education policy making' derived from Althusser (1969), namely the *political*, which leads to an analysis of the changing nature of influential groupings and policy processes; the *economic*, which is a consideration of state funding for education and the outputs made by education; and the *ideological*, that is the ways in which policy represents the dominating views of the period.

Policymaking and reform initiatives of the new democratic Republic of South Africa (RSA) were embroiled in these three dimensions. The country's 'Growth, Employment and Redistribution strategy' (GEAR) of 1996 targeted the need for growth and development in the country, while at the same time the Reconstruction and Development Policy (RDP) of 1994 aimed at redressing evils of the past and bringing about equity and equality, however tensions between the economic goals and the need to redress past inequities soon emerged. All of the goals were underpinned by the ideology of democracy, collaboration and empowerment of people at all levels (Motala & Singh, 2001). While GEAR and RDP focused on addressing past inequities, the question of quality and addressing deficiencies in schools remained a major challenge. These struggles unfolded in the second period of government, when minister Asmal was faced with the problems of non-implementation and dysfunctional schools. Jansen (2001) believes that, as the state moves towards implementation and reviewing policies and reform in education, there is an increased need to challenge idealism and pressure groups who dominated the transition period in education.

2.5 STATE-DRIVEN INITIATIVES

In the English political context of the 1980s and the 1990s, the public sector was subjected to 'accountability-driven' reforms in line with the Thatcherite neo-liberal agenda. During this phase, education reform initiatives included the 1988 Education Reform Act, the introduction of a National Curriculum and the creation of the Office of Standards in Education (OFSTED), which drove school improvement by the need to raise 'standards'. The concern with schools not achieving standards led to several state-driven initiatives for school improvement (Barber, 1998). The next phase emerged with the election of the Blair government, which focused on 'resource-driven' and 'collaborative' reform initiatives, such as the Education Action Zones (Chapman & Allen, 2006). Chapman and Allen (2006) argue that the impact of this genre of reform was at most 'patchy' and they confirm that local level capacity and leadership had a great influence on the outcomes. The next phase of reform in the UK, according to Chapman and Allen (2006), shifted towards a 'differentiated prescription based reform' which takes the collaboration element of the EAZ strategy and links it to prescriptive 'National Strategies' that may be applied according to the local contexts of schools. Again, the impact of this new wave is not conclusive. These are examples of how political ideologies drive the look and feel of a school improvement strategy.

Policymakers often lump together ineffective schools, with little understanding of what constitutes an ineffective one, and schools are often labelled, as in the UK-based evaluations by OFSTED, with indicators used to declare them as 'failing.' The OFSTED method of labelling failing schools is criticised as it does not always consider their context, for example deprived and disadvantaged areas. The complexity of context and the varied factors contributing to schools in trouble gives rise to the need for more research into what prevails in individual schools. School improvement initiatives very often fall between the cracks of political idealism versus the realities of implementation (Myers, 1996).

School improvement initiatives are also subject to changes and a lack of clear understanding within the ministries of education. A school reform initiative for the difficult schools in Brazil failed as a result of lack of consensus and understanding within the education department. An initiative of the secretary of education in collaboration with

NGOs collapsed when she stepped down from her position, as the school supervisors had felt threatened by the NGOs and did not encourage her to continue the programme. After a year that seemed promising to the schools the project was terminated (Ednir, Ceccon, & Van Velzen, 2006), but it stands as an example of how decisions are made despite the goals and intentions of a project.

In contexts of uncertainty and constant change, establishing systemic support and continuity for projects becomes a challenge. The emerging South African context was fraught with uncertainty and constant changes. Political uncertainty, lack of clarity, meso and local level politics, and high turnover of personnel explain why initiatives fail or are not sustained (Fleisch, 2002).

2.6 THE SOUTH AFRICAN CONTEXT

The education agenda in South Africa, on establishing the new democracy, focused on two major imperatives. It had to establish a new education system and structure to replace the past fragmented education departments and had to embark on replacing the policies of the old regime**.** Manganyi (2001) argues that there are complex political, attitudinal, economic and even psychological forces at work in societies in transition, and these drive the need to replace existing beliefs and practices with new ways of conducting business. This called for the initiation of novel ways of addressing problems. In this newly achieved democracy, reconstruction and development to address the legacy of the apartheid government was high on the agenda of the government.

One of the early tasks of the new government was to respond to the breakdown in the former African schools, in which there was continuous reference to the absence of a culture of teaching and learning. In order to jolt communities, schools and the educational authorities into realising the crisis, the national Department of Education (DoE), in collaboration with the South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC), commissioned a controversial television series called *Yizo Yizo.* The Research for this series, conducted by the *Laduma Film Factory*, compelled stakeholders in education, from parents to educators, to face the harsh realities of the state of many schools across the country. The provincial and national education ministers responded by allocating resources to the improvement of schools.

Resources were allocated to special programmes that would focus on redressing past inequities. The *RDP*, *Policy Reserve Fund* and the *Conditional Grants* were allocated to improve production and delivery in schools. Programmes such as the *Thousand Schools* initiative, and the *Education Quality Improvement* projects, were early partnerships for school improvement by the DoE. The *Thousand Schools* project was a school-by-school, whole school approach to school reform, but evaluation failed to show any significant improvement in learner achievement or school reform. There were indications of problems with the design by the NGOs contracted to this project, as well as many implementation problems, which the evaluators put down to a lack of adequate knowledge and a failure to analyse the contextual realties of the schools (Fleisch, 2002). The *Education Quality Improvement* project, which is still being used in many schools, is also a whole school, school-based project. The first evaluation of this project, conducted by Schollar and Associates (1998), recorded no major impact on school improvement. While a great deal of resources were spent on these early initiatives, the impact on schools was not very good.

The pressure for school improvement increased and the second Minister of Education, Kader Asmal, began to exert top-down pressure on schools with random visits and threats to hold school principals accountable. Provincial ministers also responded with their own versions of school reform as the pattern for these new strategies began to change from 'inside–out' and school-based to high pressure 'outside-in' (Fleisch, 2002).

2.7 THE TECHNICAL LENS OF SCHOOL REFORM

The following literature on school reform, and its failure, focuses on what is termed the technical aspects. While it is difficult to separate the political, cultural and technical aspects of school reform designs and implementation, examining reform literature though these lenses helps see their influence on and role in school improvement. The technical lens examines school improvement programmes in terms of the design of the reform models, the fidelity of implementation, and an analysis of the suitability of the model to the local context of the school. Literature on the designs of various reform initiatives over time has been arranged to illustrate the various trends and movements as designers responded to findings from various efforts at reform. The fact that, even today, reformers are still

grappling with reform techniques and design gives an indication of the complexity of school reform.

In reviewing literature in this area of work, strategies emerge, such as the policy mechanics that begin to evolve and move into the culturally constructed character of school improvement (Fuller & Clarke, 1994). There is also a move from the top-down approach to recognising the school as the centre of change. Hopkins (1998), in his assessment of school improvement as a strategy for change, points to the differential impact of school improvement strategies and the links to student achievement, pressure for which was increasing in realisation that schools were at different levels of effectiveness.

Some writers made the assumption that 'lists' of characteristics of 'effective 'schools could be applied to all schools in the same way, based on the assumption that all schools have the same needs. Hopkins and Slavin argue that policymakers should be looking at differential school capacities and strategies that enable a school to move from where it is rather than where they think it should be. They also focus on whole school improvement strategies rather than single or isolated interventions. This approach would also assist in choosing or deciding which model would work when programmes are taken to scale. In most cases there were definite signs of success during the pilot phase but major problems arose when the same model was taken to scale. Thus, instead of a 'one size fits all' approach, Slavin (1998) proposed that schools be characterised by assessing their state of readiness, with three different categories of schools, based on their capabilities, relationships, and history.

The strategies appropriate to each of the categories are the *seeds*, i.e., schools that have the capacity to grow and bear fruit and that need time, nurturing and protection. The *brick* schools, meanwhile, are those whose staff is willing to engage in a reform process. They have good staff relations and a positive orientation to reform, however they cannot begin reform without the relevant support and tools. Thirdly, the *sand* schools are those in which no attempt at reform will yield results, but rather it is like trying to build a solid structure with sand. There is so much turmoil in these schools that the only approach may be radical reconstitution (Slavin, 1998).

Hopkins, Ainscow and West (1996)also made a contribution to an understanding of different classes of schools by developing a typology of their 'growth state', distinguishing between three types: type I, being failing schools, type II, being moderately effective

schools, and type III, being generally effective. He went on to suggest a basket of strategies to make type I moderately effective, type II more effective, and type III able to maintain effectiveness. The basic assessment of type I schools is that they are unable to help themselves, and with a 'carrot and stick' approach they are ineffective. These schools require a high level of external intervention and support. The main focus in Type II schools is the shift to instructional priorities, to learning and teaching.

The overall strategy is to build instructional capacity in the school, and to begin to decrease reliance on external support, although these schools will need some help in developing their 'development plan' and putting it into effect. The main strategy in type II schools is to transfer reliance on external support to school-based support networks, school consortia, and school pairing schemes. On the learning front, the aim is to raise expectations for achievement. Type III schools may be able to embrace change with minimum support.

Hopkins et al. (1996) and Slavin (1998) point to a need to recognise the differential state of schools and to develop intervention policies, whilst choosing strategies with the context of school in mind. Slavin (1998)cautioned against applying the wrong strategies to the wrong schools as this results in very little, if any, change. In the South African context, early school improvement designs assumed that all schools would respond in the same way to the same strategy, however they range from schools with excellent physical and human resources, which are highly successful, to those that lack basic physical and human resources and are dysfunctional. In this context, both Slavin's and Hopkin's differentiation of schools would therefore contribute to designing strategies that target differing needs.

2.8 SOME SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT MODELS

The South African discourse also included debates on school effectiveness and school improvement strategies. The question related to what makes schools effective has been a difficult one to answer, as different foci on school effectiveness have resulted in different variables that answer the question. The variables range from financial inputs per student, to classroom management, teaching time and strategies to school organisation systems and leadership (Scheerens, 2000). There are many lists of factors or characteristics that make schools effective; however, Barber (1998) argues that these lists do not indicate how to make an unsuccessful school more effective.

The implications of recent international school effectiveness and school improvement research for school improvement are that the boundaries that developed between school effectiveness researchers and school improvement practitioners belong to the past. Reynolds illustrates how both schools of thought have contributed to a new paradigm, thus the fragmented thinking of the 1980s is merging into a more pragmatic approach. It will be necessary to study key characteristics of this new paradigm and some of the programmes that have utilised this approach. Emerging trends also see the use of evaluation, accountability, developmental planning, curriculum reform, and pressure and support as approaches to school improvement (Barber, 1998; Cuttance, 1998; Dalin, 1998; Lander & Ekholm, 1998; McCulloch, 1998) Reynolds (1998) also asks an important question as to whether initiatives should be developed externally or whether programmes that are developed at the site of the school have a better chance of success.

Another relevant question is whether school effectiveness and school improvement paradigms have the ability to assist schools located in poverty. Wrigley (2006) argues that the both school improvement and school effectiveness paradigms regard schools as 'quasi autonomous' and do not give serious thought or engage critical issues that plague communities. These 'poor' schools are framed within a deficit model, but school improvement designs which are not located within specific contexts are unlikely to succeed in addressing the real needs.

Two approaches that had a major influence on education reform designs in South Africa were the R&D approach and the site-based school improvement approach. The R&D approach was an externally driven reform strategy that experienced several implementation problems. In the field test the approach yielded excellent results but failed in public schools for several reasons. The design and conceptualisation of the strategy took place far from the school, mainly by researchers removed from it. On the other hand, the school-based approach clearly placed the school at the centre of the decision-making process. Lessons learnt from this approach pointed to the need for several elements contained in the R&D approach. Calhoun and Joyce (1998) clearly conclude that there is much to be learnt from the approaches, both of which have potential for success and limitations. Whether the intervention is top-down or site-based, success or failure at the school level depends on the convergence of the two. The 'inside-outs' had to concede the centrality of achievement and

the importance of measuring outcomes, while the 'outside-ins' had to concede that without 'inside-out' implementation strategies no reform could work (Muller & Roberts, 2000).

More recent literature on school improvement is pointing to a convergence of several approaches and the analysis of various paradigms indicate the need to extract what works and learn from what did not work and which reform strategies 'fit' the context of the school. Slavin categorised school improvement models into three different groups:

- Organisational Development models - strategies that target the school organisation using principles of engaging the school staff towards school development by providing external support. These models have resulted in pockets of success but no evidence of sustained reform on a large scale.
- Comprehensive Reform Models - provide schools with specific materials and packages for teachers, learners and managers. They also provide prescribed packages for governance and school organisation.
- Single Subject Models - target specific subjects such as 'Reading Recovery' and in South Africa the 'At Risk subjects' projects for Mathematics and Science (Slavin, 1998).

Slavin and Fashoda (1998),and Stringfield, Millsap and Herman (1998), in their analysis of the impacts of the programmes on teaching and learning in schools, found that results were promising even though there may have been a need for more in-depth evaluation. They stated the importance of examining whether these models were implemented with integrity, intelligence and sensitivity to local needs. Having examined ten promising programmes, among them the 'Comer School Development Programme', 'Success for all' and 'Reading Recovery,' Stringfield, Millsap and Herman (1998) concluded that none were 'miracle cures' but neither were they failures. What was needed was to learn from the successes of these programmes and build on them. Evolving better designs and continued evaluation was required. The argument is thus for the technical focus on better designs and monitoring of improvement strategies.

Fullan (1992) has argued that neither top-down nor bottom-up approaches work on their own, and suggests that the solution is not more or less centralisation but increased negotiation between schools and the various levels, and investment in capacity at all levels. This notion of thought is in line with a belief that sustaining reform relies on support from

multiple levels that are too often not well coordinated (Datnow, Hubbard & Conchas, 2001).

2.9 THE CULTURAL LENS OF SCHOOL REFORM

Culturalists critique technical approaches, such as the 'policy mechanics' and the R&D approach for their failure to succeed because they ignore the culture of the school. Levin (1998) refers to education researchers such as Fullan, Hargreaves, Cuban and Evans, who argue that they have opened the 'Black Box' of what happens in schools when school change does or does not occur as a result of implementation of reforms. They assert that, within the 'Black Box', schools have a distinctive culture, and that school culture in its societal, localised and personal dimension shapes processes that take place in schools and can limit or promote goals advocated by policymakers. School culture, as in organisational culture, can be very complex. Schien (1992) asserts that if the organisational culture of a school is defined as the level of '*basic assumptions and beliefs'* of people in the school or organisation, then these determine the way in which the organisation or school constructs its convictions and behaviour. This view is supported by Hubbard, Mehan and Stein, (2006), who view school reform as a socially constructed phenomenon that is adapted and shaped by the individuals in the school. While most literature focuses on school culture, it can be argued that organisational culture, in education systems, not just in the schools, contributes to the contestations and contradictions to change at all levels, although the literature focuses on school culture.

Datnow, Hubbard and Mehan (2002) propose that the reform implementation process in the schools can be described as a 'conditional matrix'. The reform process in schools is not a simple technical or mechanical process, nor does it proceed in a linear fashion. They advocate that, in the reform process, the 'agency' of educators determines the constraints that may be imposed. The action of the educators as agents in the process is shaped by the cultural and structural environment of the school, which thus becomes a highly contested terrain with resistors or supporters of initiatives. A school that is operating on a contained view of the world may become imprisoned by perspectives that are entrenched and are therefore subject to complex processes shaped by the structural and cultural features of the school. This idea of co-construction is helpful in studying the mediation of reform in the

school. Culture is an important dimension of school reform as it can dictate the extent of change, and in most schools, deep systemic change may take substantial time. Evans (1996) cautions that if the realities of human nature are not considered, changes may be superficial and unsustainable.

Any programme must be mediated at the school level so that it is adapted to suit the local context, while school improvement strategies must be underpinned by an understanding of school structure and culture. Hopkins, Ainscow and West (1996) argue that technically schools are at different levels of readiness and that the culture of the school may place schools in varying categories. 'Stuck' schools are the failing schools, the culture of which is one of mediocrity and helplessness. Conditions are poor and self-esteem and expectations of learners and educators low, and they usually need to work on internal conditions before they can attempt any reform strategies. The 'wandering' schools are those that have no clear direction, and try everything but seldom finish anything. The 'promenading' schools are the traditional schools, which have in the past been impressive and maintained the status quo. They are difficult to change. The 'moving' schools are the ideal type with a healthy mix of change and stability, and with an environment that is open to new ideas and changes.

This framework is an interesting way to categorise South African schools as we will discover that many of our 'stuck' schools are despondent and have developed a culture that is not conducive to teaching and learning, hence the national campaign to restore the culture of teaching and learning. The previously privileged schools can be described as the 'promenading' schools as they still attract top learners and are able to maintain academic results.

The culture of schools is determined by their socio-political history, and in the South African context it is vital for policymakers and reformers to understand their cultural and historical contexts as this will help determine the political, technical and cultural issues to be considered when planning school reform initiatives. The particular context of many South African schools forces one to acknowledge that they are not neutral organisations, and as Ngoma–Maema (1999) has argued, exploring forces, both internal and external, provides insight into why particular schools resist change. She cites the political contestations that exist in schools, especially those that were in the forefront of the

struggles against apartheid. There are also the economic and social factors that have created major disparities in schools, and she highlights internal forces such as power and politics that determine decision-making in many schools. The many variables in the context of South African schools must be considered when examining schools and the way in which they respond to change. It is also necessary to examine the dynamics of implementation in order to further understand the trajectory of school improvement interventions.

2.10 IMPLEMENTATING SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

In attempting to understand why school improvement interventions succeed or fail it is necessary to examine studies on implementation and the link between dynamics of implementation and school improvement. Elmore and McLaughlin (1988) linked policy and reform and examined the dynamics and connections between policy administration and practice. While most of the literature on implementation targets the implementation of policy, the initiation, structures and agencies for the implementation of school or education reform initiatives are subject to the same environment and processes. The policy implementation literature is helpful in exploring the complex phenomenon of implementation.

Implementation is defined as a process of putting into practice an idea, a programme, or activities and structures that are new to people. Fullan (1991) acknowledges the difficulties related to planning and coordinating a multilevel social process involving thousands of people. McLaughlin (1991), in examining empirical research on policy implementation, claims that it is very difficult to make something happen across layers of government and institutions. She claims that opportunities for co-optation, symbolic response or non-compliance are greater in the multi-layered world of schools and education systems. The relevant frame of analysis is the implementing system as this allows the researcher to focus on the institutional context, which is fundamental to the implementation process. She argues that the analysis must reflect the multi-staged character of the implementation process in order to determine issues of implementation at various points of the process. Research and reflections on implementation, as with literature on school reform, have gone

through an evolutionary process, with each phase unveiling its complexities and dimensions.

2.11 THE EVOLUTION OF IMPLEMENTATION RESEARCH

McLaughlin (1991) refers to Pressman and Widavsky, who as early as 1973 were the first implementation analysts to show that implementation of even the best planned and most promising initiatives depended on the interpretation and actions of individuals throughout the system. Odden (1991), in his analysis of early implementation research based on the school reform initiatives in the 1960s and 1970s in the USA, concludes that conflict between local level priorities and values, and state initiated programmes, inevitably resulted in contradictions. The second stage of research claims that over time there was compliance at the local level. The next stage of research, however, begins to question issues of quality and impact; in other words do the programmes really work at the local level? Thus, implementation research began to focus on new and complex issues such as fidelity, sustainability and impact at the local level. McDonnell and Elmore (1991) argue that implementation should focus on policy instruments, such as resources, mandates, inducements, capacity-building and system-changing. The focus on the micro implementation issues at the school level, and the connections between these and macro implementation concerns began to dominate the literature.

It became clear that implementation is not automatic and that not enough thought was being given to issues of implementation. It was becoming the 'Black Box' that could determine whether or not an initiative or policy would achieve the intended goals. It was also becoming clear that implementation could not be mandated or directed from the top and it was not easy to make things happen. Factors such as institutional context, resources, political support and opposition, information, support and past policy choices are factors that determine the route and outcomes of an implementation process. In addition to these factors at the local level are size, intra- and inter-organisational relations, commitment capacity, and political and social complexities (McLaughlin, 1991). Whether implementation happens at the local level also depends on the will of the local level actors and whether they perceive any value in committing to action. Will or commitment, unlike

capacity, cannot be achieved through training or even pressure. While McLaughlin's study focuses on empirical findings mainly at the local level, these could be applicable to all levels of a multi-level organisation. Both organisational structures and environment and individuals, especially those at the end of the implementation chain, are equally important for implementation, which thus entails a cyclical and complex negotiation process. The analysis of what happens through a multi-level organisation needs to include understanding of the assumptions made about implementation.

Nakamura and Smallwood (1980) define implementation as the process of carrying out 'authoritative public policy directives,' and for the purpose of examining implementation processes involved in the process of school reform interventions; their conceptual model provides a framework. The very early classical model of organisation minimised the significance of implementation as it was based on the assumption that the policy process was a pyramid of control with a central top-down command structure that allowed little or no discretion to subordinate administrators. According to Nakamura and Smallwood, this model rests on a number of preconceptions about the policymaking and implementation process:

- It is bounded, separate and sequential
- The boundaries exist because:
    - there is clear division of labour between policymakers and policy implementers
    - policymakers decide on the goals of the policy
    - policy implementers possess the technical expertise, obedience and will to carry out the policies as specified.

This model implies that the process of implementation is sequential and chronological, and presupposes that the implementation arena is neutral and objective.

Nakamura and Smallwood (1980) then trace policy implementation through the 1970s, revealing a shift from the classical model as they refer to Pressman and Wildavsky, Van Meter and Van Horn (1975), who argued that implementers were key actors in the policy process. They also stressed the human and psychological factors that influence

implementers, and present McLaughlin's (1980:15) view that focused on interpersonal relationships between policymakers and implementers.

She describes three types of relationship:

- *Mutual adaptation*, which describes successful implementation as a process of modification and adaptation of the project design, setting and personnel at the local institution during the course of implementation.
- *Co-optation*, signifying adaptation of the project design. In this process the project is modified to conform to traditional practices at the local level that the innovation was expected to replace. This may occur because of resistance to change or inadequate skills or help.
- *Non-implementation*, when projects simply break down or are ignored during the implementation phase.

Later analysis of the implementation process argues that implementers play an even more substantial role. Bardach (1977, quoted in Nakamura and Smallwood, 1980:15-16) refers to the 'implementation game,' in which he compares implementation to 'an assembly process' of putting a machine together and making it run. In his analysis he shows how implementers try to exercise control through bargain manoeuvring, with strategies, tactics and communication, or lack of it, and finds some who are unwilling to 'play' or change. In addition to these games, Rein and Rabinovitz (1978) analysed the circular nature and fluidity of the implementation process, a view supported by Nakamura and Smallwood (1980), who emphasise a shift in more recent studies in which the policy process is a circular, fluid and reciprocal series of interrelationships between actors in the policy arena. They came to the conclusion that the conceptual framework of the policy process can be conceived as a cyclical system with three functional environments. These are the policy formation arena, the implementation arena and the policy evaluation arena, each with its actors and linked by communication and compliance.

This principle of circularity between the three levels on which the implementation of school improvement depends is depicted in figure 2.1 (below).

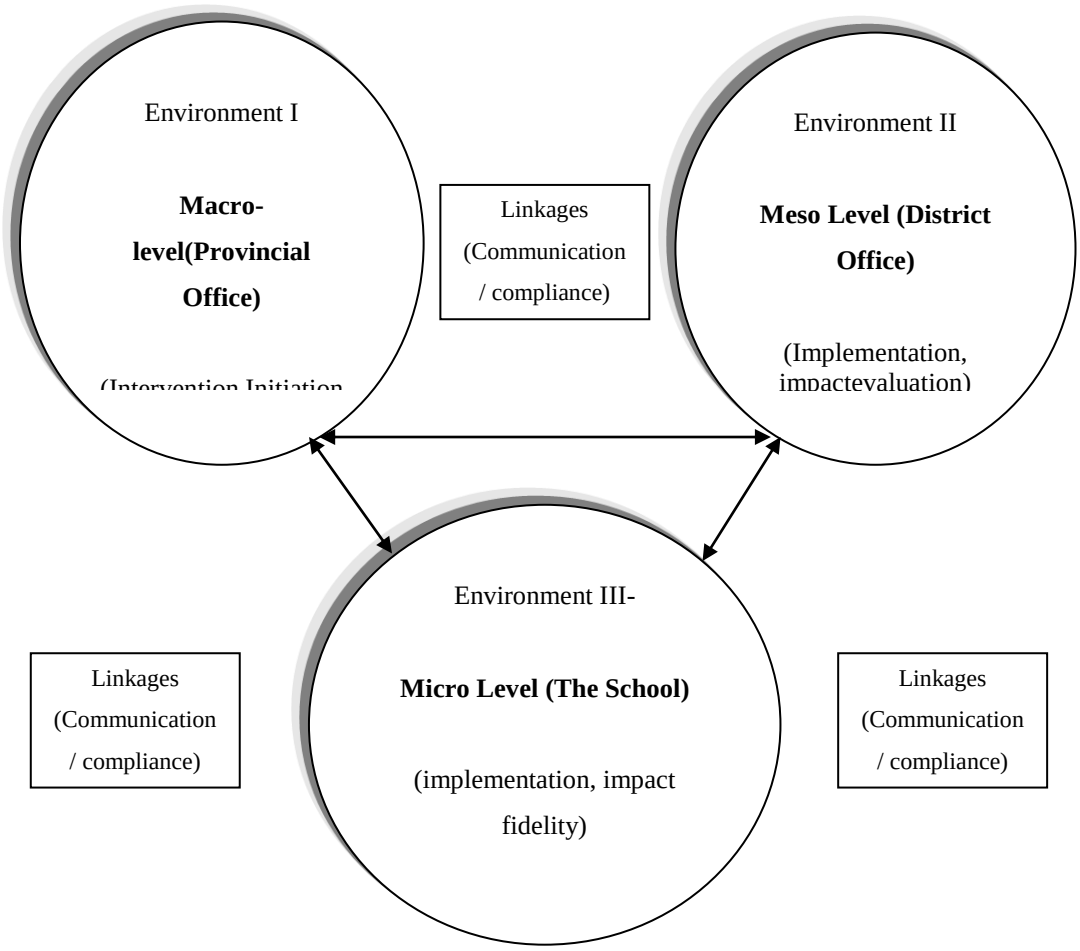


Figure 2.1: Environments influencing implementation of a School Improvement Intervention (as adapted from Nakamura & Smallwood, 1980:27)

2.11.1 The Initiation Stage

At the initiation level, a policy or project process begins to set the implementation environment. At this stage, identification of the project goals, the problem area, the priority of the problem and the target persons to benefit from the project are decided. Design of the project is also planned, with key actors and resources identified, and indicators set for the measuring of benefits. Nakamura and Smallwood (1980) also point out the potential constraints, such as technical limitations that occur when the initiator has inadequate information or is a policymaker with limited technical knowledge. A lack of clarity of the solutions can result in conceptual complexity as implementers may not agree on the

definition of or solution to the problem. These factors at the initiation stage have a direct influence on what takes place during the implementation stage. Other factors, such as political, cultural and technical issues, will also influence what happens during implementation.

2.11.2 The Implementation Stage

Nakamura and Smallwood (1980:46) identify three key influences within the implementation environment. These are: i) the actors and arenas, ii) the organisational structures and bureaucratic norms, and iii) communication networks and compliance mechanisms. They argue that within a public sector, such as a government department, implementation involves actors at various levels and this can become a very complex process. They assert that multiple arenas, such as departments of education, require linkage between the various actors, and that in multiple arenas it is easy for responsibility of implementation to 'fall between the cracks,' as those involved assume that implementation is somebody else's responsibility. Those at the top think it is the responsibility of people at the bottom, while those at the bottom look for guidance and specification from those higher up. The implementation environment includes a variety of actors, from the recipients of the intervention, in this case all actors in the school and outside of the school, to the media, intermediaries or implementers, such as the EAZ teams or EQUIP teams, district officials and other partners in business or community structures. Each of these can influence the course of the implementation process.

In accordance with organisational theories, Richard Elmore's four institutional models are quoted by Nakamura and Smallwood (1980:54), to show how each model views implementation:

- The *systems management model* views implementation as a goal-directed activity. This relates to the classical bureaucratic approach described above.
- The *bureaucratic process model* views implementation as a more routine process of continually controlling factors. This approach is also in line with the classical approach

- The *organisational development model* views implementation as a participatory process in which implementers can shape outcomes and claim them as their own.
- The *conflict and bargaining model* views implementation as a conflicting and bargaining process. This process begins to fit into the principle of 'circularity'.

Whatever the organisational structure, implementers must also deal with other issues, such as internal organisational procedures, resource allocation and bureaucratic norms. Every organisation has a variety of internal procedures that can influence implementation efforts. These are established by the internal culture and politics of an organisation or institution. Nakamura and Smallwood (1980) argue that some of the more crucial procedures are the 'communication processes' within an institution or organisation. Some of the communication factors are the clarity and accuracy of communication within an organisation or institute, and the responsiveness to communication. For example, if a message is communicated within a hierarchical structure it may fail to get the response of those it is addressing, which reflects the political structure within the institution. Another factor is the complexity of processes within an organisation or institution, increased by decision-making structures and processes. The more levels and clearances the greater the complexity. Allocation of resources is another key factor in the implementation process, with money, time and personnel identified as important resources. Murphy (1991) also stresses the adequacy and competency of staff as crucial to implementation. In addition to these resources, 'power' is a critical administrative resource, which with knowledge can greatly influence other role-players. Bureaucratic norms of an institution are guided by the internal social and cultural norms of an institution, which can make it more or less responsive and flexible.

2.11.3 Compliance Mechanisms

In this complex environment, consisting of different actors and institutional links, compliance mechanisms may be necessary to hold together the process. A critical consideration to address resistance or circumvention may be a network that consists of compliance mechanisms. The concept of compliance, within a political system, points to notions of control, power, authority, and influence (Nakamura, 1990), hence, in an intervention strategy, implementers can use negative and positive sanctions to secure

compliance. The implementation environment, as presented, is made up of diversity, fluidity and complexity with regard to the actors, arenas, imperatives, linkages and compliance mechanisms. This leads to the view that implementation must be seen as a co-constructed process.

In most studies on school reform, the focus has been on what happens at the local level of the school. Educational reform as a co-constructed process is advocated by Datnow, Hubbard and Mehan (2002), who warn against portraying implementation as linear or a mechanical process as this undermines the role of active agency played by actors at different levels in shaping the intervention. However, education and actors in education exist within a bureaucracy which is sometimes so large that a top-down approach with some elements of hierarchy is unavoidable. This is especially true of democratic governments, which need to make sure that public institutions remain accountable to those they serve. Odden (1991) cautions that a balance between accountability and local level autonomy must be found.

Palumbo and Calista (1990) state that it is not always true to declare an initiative a total failure, particularly if the inputs of a policy or project design are transformed into outputs or a policy redesign. However, what happens in the period between the input and design to the output stage is the Black Box of implementation, which research has opened to allow for a study of this nature to examine, through multiple lenses, the process of school improvement polices.

2.12 OVERVIEW

The literature review raises several issues for consideration in the research. Viewing school improvement initiatives through the political, technical and cultural lenses has led to fundamental considerations about the reform process in schools. This is further entrenched by the circular and iterative nature of implementation. There is an emerging idea that school reform is dependent on how the system interprets, modifies and implements the reform ideas, and these depend on the political and cultural environment of the system, with each imposing agencies of implementation. It is also clear that all schools may not have the capacity to engage with reform initiatives, thus the questions that need to be answered are:

- Under what conditions will the reform effort work best?
- How do the agencies within the various environments and networks ensure institutionalisation, fidelity and longevity of the changes?
- What questions should politicians and education departments be asking in order to ensure that programmes, when taken to scale, will achieve the intended outputs?

It is also clear that not all schools may have the capacity to engage with reform initiatives, and many of these questions become even more relevant when applied to developing countries and countries in transition. In these countries, characteristics of school effectiveness and models of school improvement do not necessarily target the needs of schools where basic infrastructure is lacking or where the social and psychological issues of people outweigh conventional goals as described in much of the school effectiveness and school improvement literature. Harber (1999) claims that, while checklists of an 'effective school' may be of referential value to developing contexts, they must allow for the 'flexibility' of alternative thinking and solutions that are more important for specific contexts.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEACH METHODOLOGY

3.1 THE QUALITATIVE APPROACH

The researcher was positioned to examine the phenomenon from within constructs and analytical frameworks that would not be based on any pre-determined assumptions. This was not a problem as interest in this research was based on a realisation of the need to explore this area within the reality of the emerging educational context. The researcher was looking for answers based on sound empirical evidence that would inform not only individual work but also the decisions being made in the country. In order to ensure that the researcher did not unconsciously interpret data from any bias, but became immersed in the relevant literature and considered a research strategy that would allow for exploration and coming to grips with the real issues underpinning school improvement in the South African context. A research strategy that is qualitative in nature enabled me to investigate this complex and dynamic process in depth (Strauss& Corbin, 1990). Phenomenological inquiry or qualitative research allows one to understand a phenomenon in context-specific settings that lend themselves to enquiry in an educational setting. Hoepfl (1997) asserts that qualitative research opens up avenues in the complex and dynamic setting of education, allowing the researcher to gain an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon. The insights and new perspectives are gained through epistemological experiences that are as close to the natural settings as possible. The education arena, like most social settings, is complex and messy. While I knew the primary questions I wished to explore, the emergent nature of qualitative research allowed me to explore the best ways of making sense of the cases.

3.2 RATIONALE FOR THE CASE STUDY

At the time of the research, the researcher was in the employment of the GDE in the training unit for Educational Management. I was not directly involved in either intervention in the two case studies in this research, however, I was troubled by the need to understand how interventions were translated into actions and why interventions were not

necessarily yielding the envisaged results. As both interventions were outside the scope of my work in the Department, I was able to explore the interventions from a relatively objective view.

In deciding on the school improvement interventions for this study, I realised the need to examine an intervention strategy as a complete unit. This allowed me to trace the intervention from its inception through the system to the level of the school. The use of the qualitative case study approach allowed for a detailed study on a single intervention strategy as a social unit. This approach allowed the researcher to focus on the complexity and contextuality of the issues. Stake (1995) refers to problems that are the foci of the study. In each of the cases, the issues and problems facing implementation of school reform are not simple but intricately linked to political, social and organisational contexts. The ability to investigate a phenomenon within its contextual boundaries allowed me to investigate both selected cases in their real-life situations. This kind of comprehensive study involved individuals, groups and the organisation (Yin, 1993). Merriam, (1998) also argues that the strength of a qualitative case study is that it allows the researcher to investigate complex social settings made up of multiple variables, as well as an in-depth understanding of a phenomenon. The qualitative case study approach was a vehicle that was used to explore the phenomenon of 'implementation' within the complex education terrain.

The researcher chose two school reform intervention strategies in Gauteng for in-depth study. Two cases or interventions were purposively chosen as each was located in two different stages of government and transformation, one being an outside–in, bottom–up strategy, the other a top-down strategy. Thus, each case would serve the purpose of examining political, social and technical responses to school improvement strategies, located in two different periods of education transformation. The overall scope of the inquiry was to examine the unit of analysis 'implementation' within the system in the two different periods (Yin, 1994). The literature on school reform and improvement pointed to the need to explore what happens in the system during the process of reform and not just the impact of the reform. It is necessary also to understand the processes through which interventions may or may not lead to institutionalisation.

3.3 THE CASE STUDY APPROACH

Yin (1994) describes specific types of case study as 'Exploratory, Explanatory and Descriptive,' while Stake (1995) includes 'Intrinsic, Instrumental and Collective' types. The case study that allows one to understand more than what is obvious is referred to by Stake as 'Instrumental,' an approach that may be used to understand better the processes or events. The case study methodology allows for an in-depth, holistic investigation focusing on issues that are fundamental to understanding the process of implementation of the reform interventions. This approach is further supported by Yin (1993), who argues that the case study method supports the investigation of a particular phenomenon and the context within which it is occurring, because the context contains important explanatory variables about it. In this case, the phenomenon under investigation is the implementation process of two school improvement initiatives within the context of the GDE.

An important characteristic of case study data collection is the use of multiple sources from multiple sites (Yin, 1993), and it allows for multi-perspective analysis in which the researcher considers not just the voices of individuals but also those of relevant groups of actors and the interaction between them. This approach lends itself to the concept of implementation as a circular and conditional matrix, as conceptualised by views on implementation (Datnow Hubbard & Mehan, 1998; Elmore & Mclaughlin, 1998; Nakamura & Smallwood, 1980).

3.4 THE CASE STUDY DESIGN

The focus of the study was on issues of implementation and how these are mediated in the three phases, identified in the literature *initiation*, *implementation* and *institutionalisation*. These were reflected in choice of the three sites for the research: the initiation phase was investigated at the provincial head office of the GDE; the implementation phase at the district level and the agencies of the intervention; and the institutionalisation phase at the school site. Merriam (1998) suggests that the inclusion of multiple studies is a strategy for enhancing the external validity or generalisablity of the findings. The two cases selected for this study were chosen because of the contrasting design of the intervention strategies and the location of each in the two distinct political phases of the state. The EAZ strategy,

as described above, was a top-down, internal strategy while the EQUIP strategy was a bottom-up, outside–in strategy. Each case was investigated separately and then compared.

3.5 SITE SELECTION

School development and school improvement work began in Gauteng after 1994, however, this study will focus on two key intervention strategies:

- The EQUIP programme, which was a whole school site-based initiative driven from the outside by a business initiative and a non-governmental agency in partnership with the GDE. This intervention began in the first period of the new democracy between 1994 and 1999.
- The Education Action Zone (EAZ) intervention, which is a highly centralised, high pressured, top-down model. This strategy was initiated by the second MEC from 1999.

The dynamics or factors influencing each intervention from the point of initiation through to provincial, district and school level were investigated. The lenses through which these factors were examined were the technical, cultural and social factors at the various levels and the theoretical framework pertaining to implementation. However, one must bear in mind that this is not a linear process but one in which events and factors at one level can feed back and alter decisions made during previous stages.

3.6 THE SAMPLES

I realised the complex arena that I was entering required a very structured design and careful planning to ensure that the research targeted the main role-players on each level. The various levels and key role-players on the various levels of each intervention were mapped out (Figures 3.1 and 3.2, below).Two schools were selected in each intervention for the purpose of this study.

In each of the interventions the two schools chosen were the ones that responded well to the intervention and another that did not respond very well to the intervention. In the EQUIP, new schools were selected each year and the intervention did not target improved learners' results, so the researcher relied on the service providers to recommend a school

that responded and one that did not. In the EAZ strategy, a school that had shown visible signs of improvement and one that had not shown a significant increase were identified. The selection of the EAZ schools was made in consultation with the district officials. It was hoped that this type of sample would yield information on these extremes and thus shed more light on critical issues that do or do not make interventions work (Hoepfl, 1997). The figures below outline the sample design of the two cases. The researcher used both *purposive* sampling to identify key informants, and snowball sampling to identify other informants who would verify, triangulate or support issues. Snowball sampling was used to identify interviewees in addition to those identified as key informants. This was an iterative process as further interviews were conducted when additional information was required or to verify information received. Henning, Van Rensburg and Smit (2004) argue that the ultimate aim is to develop the cases so as to tell the story.

In order to ensure that the relevant 'actors' and 'agents' in each of the cases were included, the three stages of the implementation system were identified as the initiation or macro level, namely the provincial office; the meso-level implementers, which were the district office or the NGOs; and the level on which institutionalisation should occur, the schools. The details of how data was collected from these participants are discussed in the next section. The relevant persons were then identified on each of these levels, with the interview plan depicted in the figures below:

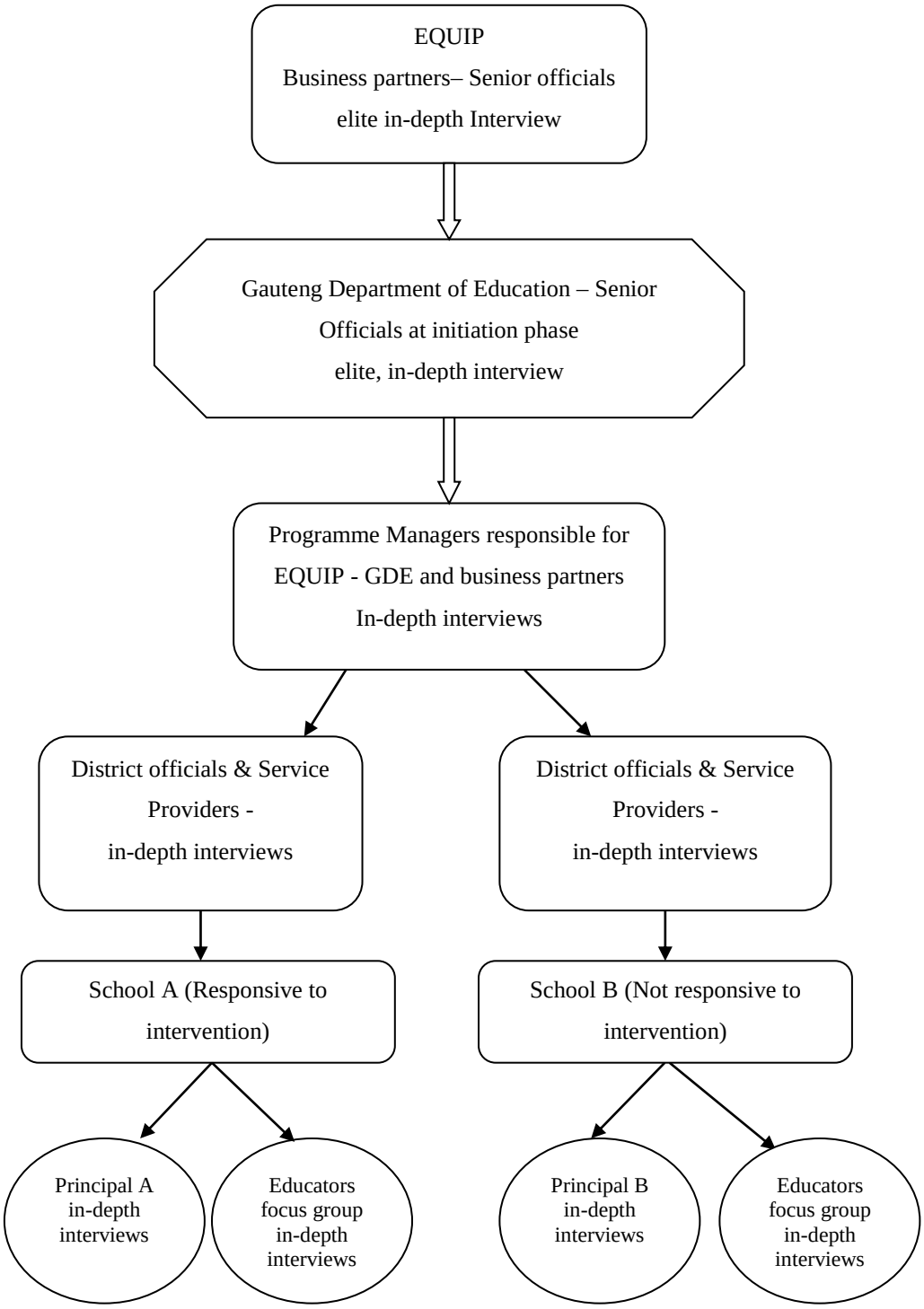


Figure 3.1: Framework of interview sites for the study of the initiation and implementation of the EQUIP Intervention

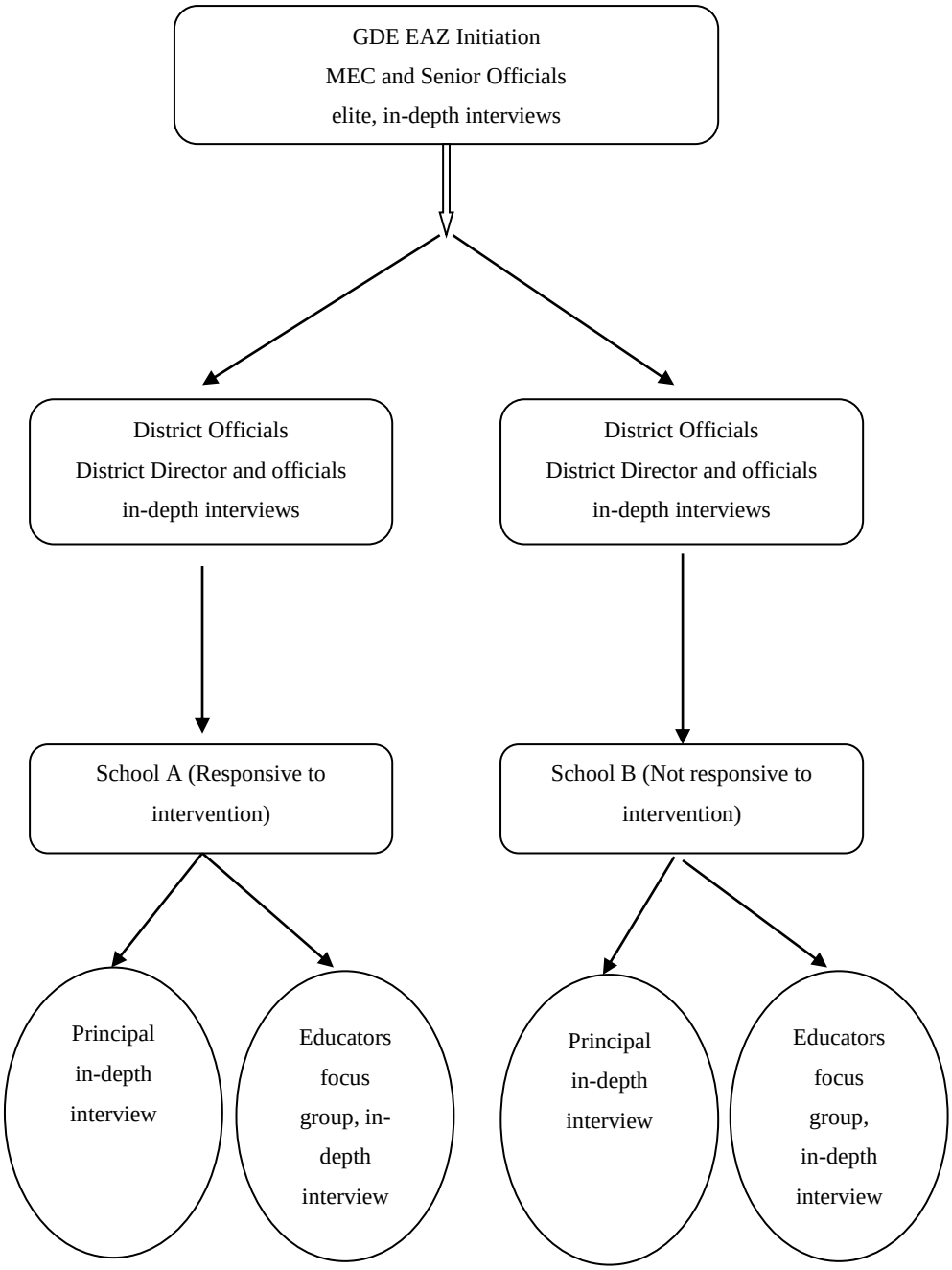


Figure 3.2: Framework of interview sites for the study of the initiation and implementation of the EAZ Intervention

3.7 DATA COLLECTION

Collecting data from various levels of the system was very demanding, as at each level there was a need to make sure that every opportunity was used to gain maximum information, whether through interviews or by gaining access to documents. The researcher needed to listen to various people in different positions with different views of the same process. This process was managed by focusing clearly on the issues that were being investigated. The advantage the researcher had was that my professional background and reading helped me probe and explore the issues. The researcher sometimes had to repeat visits, especially to the schools, and to go up and down the system several times. It was not a linear process but an iterative one. If, for example, information was gathered from a school, there was often a need to interview the relevant district officials linked to the school to verify the information. The case study approach allowed the space to manage the data collection in this way (Yin, 1994).

Interviews and documents, such as minutes of meetings, conceptual papers, related research papers, reports (internal and external), speeches and media reports were the primary data source. Semi-structured interview guides were prepared for each target group, which contained specific questions and issues as well as open-ended questions. Merriam (1998) recommends probing as a strategy to gain clarity and increased details during an interview. Where necessary, follow-up interviews were carried out either to verify information or gain more depth. Key role-players were the main informants, but follow-up interviews were held with other participants or officials in the interventions. In order to further verify data, interviews were conducted with other schools not in the samples, but in the selected interventions. Several interview types were used. There was a need to plan specific interviewing schedules for MECs and high ranking officials in the GDE, for the district officials, service providers, external partners and school level principals and educators.

3.7.1 The Elite Interview

The elite interview allowed the researcher to focus on the influential and prominent people in the organisation, who are normally the initiators of programmes and can provide an overall view of the organisation in relation to the programme. Walford (1994) argues that

an increased understanding of those in power, and how they achieve their aims, may place the researcher in a better position to influence future policy. However, Ball (1994) cautions that those in power are often skilled interviewees and may control the interview. He advises the use of an ethnographic interview, ceding control to the interviewee, but always bearing in mind the purpose of the interview.

Elite interviews were conducted with initiators, both political and bureaucratic, in both case studies. Open-ended in-depth interview schedules were used to focus the interviews. In the case of Equip the initiators of the programme from the business partners and the initiators of the programme in GDE were treated as elite interviews. In the case of the EAZ intervention, senior officials in the Department and the MEC were treated as elite interviews. The use of elite interviews in implementation research allowed the researcher to determine the state's timing and intent and to determine who and what was most influential during the course of the programme implementation.

3.7.2 In-Depth Interviews

In-depth interviews were conducted with all individual participants in both case studies. In-depth interviews, according to Marshall and Rossman (1995), allow the researcher to explore the area of concern and uncover the participants' meanings and perspectives. Interview schedules, with several open-ended questions for each category in each of the levels of study of interviewees were developed. The questions were designed to probe issues and factors relevant to the study (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994). Individuals such as district officials, service providers in the partnership and school principals were interviewed in this way. It was challenging as interview schedules had to be prepared for each category as reflected in the Appendix.

3.7.3 Focus Group Interviews

The educators in the sample schools were interviewed in a focus group, the purpose of which was to perceive how they experienced the interventions. In each of the schools an interview with a group of educators was arranged. The purpose of the focus group interviews was to assess whether the educators had sufficient information about the

interventions and to assess the role they played or did not play as local level 'implementers' of the interventions.

The advantage of a focus group interview is that it allows for discussion and expressions of differing views, and participants may listen to others prompting reactions from those who have not spoken (Marshall & Rossman, 1995).

A school not selected for the case study was selected as a pilot study, which allowed for a review of questions and informed the direction and design of the interview schedules

3.7.4 Confidentiality

In an environment of uncertainty and suspicion, it was important for the researcher to approach all interviewees with sensitivity. The researcher represented somebody who came from the provincial head office, so anyone approached might view the researcher with suspicion and question the agenda. In order to gain access, before I approached any interviewees I sent them a letter outlining the intentions of the interview, its purpose and the processes that would be followed. I assured all participants anonymity, and changed the names of the participating schools. Permission was sought from the school principals to interview educators, and even though some were not happy about this, they all agreed. The researcher used the following coding system to code interviewees from the different levels and to distinguish interviewees in the two cases.

Table 3.1: Codes for the two case studies, EQUIP and EAZ

EQUIP INTERVIEWS			
Elite	EQe1	EQe 2	
Service Providers	EQ Sp1	EQ Sp 2	EQ Sp3
Prov: Officials	EQ Po1	EQ Po2	EQ Po3
Dist. Official	EQDo1	EQDo2	EQDo3
Principals	EQp1	EQp2	EQp3
Educators	EQed1	EQed2	EQed3

EAZ INTERVIEWS			
Elite	EZe1	EZe 2	
Service Providers	EZ Sp1	EZ Sp 2	EZ Sp3
Prov: Officials	EZ Po1	EZ Po2	EZ Po3
Dist. Official	EZDo1	EZDo2	EZDo3
EAZTeam Members	EZT01	EZT02	EZT03
Principals	EZp1	EZp2	EZp3
Educators	EZed1	EZed 2	EZed 3

Coding interviewees in this way assisted the researcher to place interviewees on the appropriate level and helps the reader identify the level and position of the interviewee.

3.7.5 Data from Documents

Yin (1994) suggests that when documents are produced for reasons other than the research, and while they may be a valuable data source for the researcher, one needs to remember that they were written for a particular purpose and for a targeted audience. However, the documents that were collected provided a valuable source of information, not only additional information about an event but also dates of events that helped in tracking the processes. In both cases, the researcher attempted to access as many documents as possible relating to the intervention strategies. These included conceptual plans, minutes of meetings, administrative documents and project plans, memoranda, review reports, evaluation reports and media reports on the interventions. Documentary data can help to ground the enquiry, especially when personnel in each of the cases changed a great deal (Merriam, 1998). Sources of data, such as conceptual frameworks, implementation plans and evaluation reports from the two case studies were also used to verify and triangulate the data received through interviews.

3.8 DATA ANALYSIS

The management and analysis of data was carefully considered as working through the two cases produced a vast amount of data.

3.8.1 A Case Study Database

All interviews were audio-taped and transcribed. The anonymity of all participants was ensured by the use of codes to label and separate responses. Each interview was transcribed in full as soon as possible after the interview, and I added my observations and details to the transcripts. Later in the research, and for follow-up and other secondary interviews, the interview log as recommended by Merriam (1998) was used as an alternative to transcribing the interview verbatim. Each transcript was coded in order to identify responses and maintain anonymity. All data was stored on disks and hard-copies filed. Field notes and comments were made throughout the process, and all documents collected were placed in appropriate folders or boxes and carefully labelled. I also kept an audit trail by recording date and time of the interview and the name of the interviewee, including repeat interviews.

3.8.2 Analysing the Data

Merriam's (1998) suggestion that data collection and analysis is a simultaneous activity was used in this study. Yin (1994) supports this argument when he claims that analysis and the writing of the case study report cannot begin early enough. The researcher began building the case story from the first interviews. Analysis in this research began with the first documents read and the first interview conducted. Each subsequent interview, and the analysis of documents, began to unravel the issues that emerged. All the data in each case was arranged into the macro, meso and school-level categories. Whilst interviews began at the macro level and then the meso and micro levels the researcher did not analyse these exclusively and had to trace arguments through all three levels. The writing about each level began as soon as information was available and this helped to identify additional interviewees through snowball sampling in order to gain further depth or clarity in the

story that was emerging. The emerging story or case also began to highlight the emerging themes. Through the writing processes, interview information was triangulated by examining documentary evidence, media reports and other evaluation reports of the two cases. The first case study was the EQUIP intervention and the emerging themes were further explored in the EAZ intervention as this reflected the order in which they began.

The emerging insights and hunches against the theoretical framework guided the questions for the next interviews, as did issues raised in each interview or in documents. Thus, the process of analysis was interactive and iterative, and an 'audit trail' was kept of the sources of the groups or chunks of information. This process began to create the wider picture, which revealed the unique phenomena related to implementation of the cases through the system to the schools. During the interview and analysis processes the researcher gained an in-depth picture of events and processes, which was not without challenges as it required going back and forth. Miles and Huberman (1994) suggest that a within-case analysis of each be done before a cross-case analysis. Doing this allowed the researcher to focus on the issues that were relevant to the particular location of each case. A cross-case analysis was used to compare the two cases and examine issues that were common to both approaches of school improvement.

3.8.3 The Cross-Case Analysis

The aim of the cross-case analysis was to explore issues of design and implementation at the macro, meso and micro levels across the two cases and to understand how they were subject to the shifting imperatives of an environment in transition. Exploring the two cases helped understand the contestations and contradictions in the arena of implementation. A cross-case analysis contributed to the theoretical understanding of implementation despite the very different models of interventions. Miles and Huberman (1994) emphasise that aggregating results across cases may be misleading; however, it was more important to explore each case and then compare findings. Yin (1994) suggests an analytic strategy that allows the researcher to develop a descriptive framework for organising the case study. The analytic technique used is 'explanation-building,' described as a technique used to explain a phenomenon by reflecting on theoretically significant propositions. The explanation strategy also helped to determine emerging trends and issues in a shifting

environment. Explanation-building has an iterative nature with the following characteristics significant to this study:

- It allows the researcher to make an initial theoretical statement or initial propositions about policy or social behaviour
- It allows the researcher to compare the findings of the initial case against propositions made and against second or more cases.

(Yin,1994)

Given that understanding the phenomena across organisational structures, such as departments of education and schools, involves a complex network of conditions and effects, the challenge is to understand each network. Miles and Huberman (1994) stress that each case must be understood before the cross-case analysis begins. Once the dynamics within each case were analysed it was possible to see the patterns that were emerging across the two cases.

3.8.4 The Challenge of Going beyond the Text

The research question required the researcher to explore the ways in which issues of power, politics and other socio-historic factors may have influenced the implementation processes. This meant that the researcher could not adopt a technicist approach to the interviews but had to search for meaning beyond the words, without allowing personal views to cloud the judgment. The interview data needed to be examined within the contextual realties of the interviewee. Milner and Glassner (2004) argue that the researcher needs to go beyond a positivist approach, especially when trying to contribute knowledge that would benefit issues of social change. It was therefore necessary to access the meanings people attributed to their experiences within their contextual realities in an objective but real way.

3.8.5 Reliability and Validity

Golafshani (2003) argues that while the use of reliability and validity is common in quantitative research it needs to be re-defined in the qualitative research paradigm. He

concludes that reliability and validity from a qualitative research perspective can be conceptualised as trustworthiness, rigor and quality. He also argues that triangulation in qualitative research is the validity procedure that a qualitative researcher uses to search for convergence of information from multiple sources. Morse,Barret,Mayan,Olsen, and Spiers (2002) argue that an iterative process of verification in qualitative research ensures reliability and validity and thus the rigour of the research. They further suggest that the terms 'validity' and 'reliability' remain relevant to qualitative research. This research used multiple sources of information to establish reliability and truth. The reality conducting research in a multi-dimensional, ever-changing, dynamic environment such as education does not always lend itself to a scientific way of claiming validity as one would in a quantitative study. Thus, in using Merriam's (1998) argument that in qualitative research what is being studied happens through the researcher who constructs the research process. The researcher's abilities to reflect, undertake introspection and self-monitoring are ways in which internal validity can be maintained. I clarified my position to myself and participants throughout the process in order to keep a check on myself and to ensure sufficient checks.

Maxwell (1992) refers to five types of validity, one of which is *Descriptive validity,* that is concerned with the factual accuracy of the account. The characteristics of descriptive concerns refer to events or situations, but what is important according to Maxwell is that comprehension of the events or phenomena is based not on the researcher's perspective but on those of the participants.

In order to ensure validity and reliability a conscious effort was made to triangulate data by doing additional interviews. Member checks were carried out by returning interpretations to key interviewees in the Department for comment.

3.9 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The quality and quantity of documentary evidence in the two case studies differed. EQUIP was managed by funders and all role-players were required to document and report on all processes during the period of the project. There were continuous external evaluations of the project and reports at different stages. The service providers were also compelled to document all interactions with the schools and provide reports on the schools in which they

worked. The EQUIP archives also had all records of the early deliberations and conceptual plans of the project. The EQUIP intervention therefore had archived records and a great collection of documentation that could be sourced from the role-players at different levels. This helped, especially as many of the founding members of the project in both the business partnership and the DoE had moved on.

The EAZ project however was not very well documented. There was no pre-planned evaluation of the project so most of the evaluation reports were made after the first year or later. Departmental systems did not have a clear strategy for reporting or for the format of reporting so the reports and documents from this project varied. However, because it was a more recent project, and many of the role-players were still in the DoE, it was possible to triangulate evidence by interviewing as many people as possible.

3.10 OVERVIEW

This research study was especially significant as it allowed me to distance myself from the environment in which I worked and take an objective and critical view of what was happening in the area of school improvement. As practitioners or officials within a system, decisions are often made and errors repeated because these decisions are often not informed by rigorous research processes. Using the case study approach allowed me to probe below the surface and understand the hidden reasons for implementation problems. The cross-case analysis was especially powerful because the issues that emerged contributed to understanding implementation within a complex emerging South African environment.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE EQUIP CASE STUDY

4.1 THE EQUIP MODEL

In a paper titled *EQUIP Concept Proposal* (Unknown author, 1998), prepared for the National Business Initiative (NBI), the improvement of learning and teaching in schools is stated as a key challenge to educational transformation in South Africa. This paper critiques initiatives of school improvement at the time as being outside the domain of the school and not including the school. The move they advocated was that the school should be the central locus of school improvement, a concept framed within the South African School's Act 84 of 1996, and one that provides the legal framework for parents and communities to take responsibility for schools. Meyer and Main (1999) outlined the philosophical and theoretical underpinnings of the EQUIP model, describing it as a 'holistic approach' to education quality improvement based on social theories which acknowledge the complex, value-laden and political nature of education and the social world. They also identified the three role-players as government, business and education experts, which is the thinking that mobilised business and government to collaboratively support the EQUIP model. School Development Planning is the basis of the EQUIP model, allowing the school to plan its own improvement through capacity building and financial support.

4.1.1 EQUIP: A School-Based Intervention

One of the main features of the EQUIP programme was that stakeholders in the school should determine their own priorities for quality improvement. This was in line with the ideology underpinning policy making during the 1990s in South Africa, which focused on democratic ideals rather than implementation (Young, 2001). Decisions taken during this period could not have been different and incorporated the ideals of representation and stakeholder involvement that characterised the years of struggle. EQUIP, as a school-based reform initiative, was based on this idealism, as well as on 'borrowing' models from other countries in which there was a move to site-based reform initiatives.

The Education Policy and System Change Unit (EDUPOL) was a unit in NBI that would advise on enhancing the business sector's contribution to the development of education in the country. As early as 1993, it initiated research into improving the quality of schooling in South Africa in a *Draft Equip Concept Proposal for submission to the Business Trust* (EDUPOL, n.d.).

Special focus was placed on promoting and building a culture of teaching and learning in schools, the historic context of which, especially in the townships, had resulted in a destruction of legitimacy that left them ungovernable. EQUIP, an acronym for the Education Quality Improvement Programme, emerged from strong recommendations made by the EDUPOL research reports and others, such as the De Lange Report, Education Renewal Strategy, and the National Education Policy (Schollar,1998). There was a perception that education problems in South Africa could not be solved from the top but only by interplay of centralisation and decentralisation, with an emphasis on the school level (Buckland & Hofmeyer, 1993). In translating the research findings and incorporating school improvement literature, the central proposition of EQUIP was to promote the enhancement of school quality through a locally based development plan that would target and be sustained by the stakeholder participants in the school. They would be supported by and receive guidance from the departments of education.

Schollar and Associates (1998) stress the role of people (agency) and contextual factors of the school as key considerations in the EQUIP strategy. The South African Schools Act (1996) (SASA) was the focus of this period, emphasising the collaboration with school governing bodies (SGBs) in order to include parents in the education process. It was envisaged that the model would address the school improvement issues as well as the emerging policy imperatives. The EQUIP programme was thus a bottom-up programme that would involve school management and school governance.

The initial EQUIP concept clearly addressed the political thrust of the time, which was that a school should take responsibility for its own development at local level. Collaboration in the school development plan by school management and school governance was an entry point into the schools, designed to focus on improvement at the local level and was thus directly relevant to the specific context of each school (NBI Annual Report, 1998). The challenge was for school management and school governance, through the process of

school development planning, to address the problems that existed in schools that were not functional. Did they have the capacity and political will and power to address complex problems in schools?

Meyer (1996) identified problems in schools as the following:

- "Unequal allocation of resources
- Racial stratification of schools and departments
- Massive expansion over the last 25 years
- Politicisation of schools
- Severed links between schools and communities
- Corrosion of authority
- Large scale inefficiencies
- A culture of poverty and helplessness."

An additional challenge was the uneven capacity of the meso layer (the districts) responsible for schools with problems. A senior official (EQeI) from within the GDE declared that there was insufficient capacity within the Department and that he had to rely on the NGOs to provide direction. While the designers of EQUIP clearly based their decisions on sound principles and research, the question is begged as to whether the DoE and the schools had the capacity to respond to the initiative, or was the system ready for these new reform initiatives? The assumptions made by EQUIP, as well as other school reform initiatives, such as the 'thousand schools project,' is that the organisational system, and structure of the DoE was ready to implement the goals of EQUIP as a school reform programme. Brahm (2001:6) refers to the uneven capacity and the chronic shortage of personnel within the GDE, however it is important to understand the historical and contextual realities within which the EQUIP model was initiated.

4.1.2 Political Influence

On establishing a new democracy, the education agenda in South Africa focused on two major imperatives. It had to establish a new education system and structure to replace the

past fragmented education departments, and it had to embark on changing or replacing the policies of the old regime. Manganyi (2001) argues that there are complex political, attitudinal, economic and even psychological forces at work in societies in transition, and these drive the need to replace existing beliefs and practices with new ways of conducting business. This prompted the initiation of novel ways of addressing problems and in the newly achieved democracy, reconstruction and development, and addressing the legacy of the apartheid state were major undertakings. High on the agenda of the new government, tackling these imperatives required the government to ensure that a participatory, collaborative culture was established. In an interview, the official responsible for the partnerships unit in the GDE said that the main focus was on establishing partnerships between the DoE and the corporate world, as well as other funding agencies. The government realised the enormity of the task of educational transformation and began to engage the private sector to work with government in reaching its goals:

> *Mandela's Government came in ninety four, they started talking about 'Partnership with the Private Sector.' And they began the debate and discussion that we cannot do it alone … And so business in a sense was challenged to say 'what can you do to help?'*(EQe1)

The private sector was therefore challenged to participate in the transformation of the country. Carrim (1992) argued that it was important to locate educational reforms within the wider processes of transition in South Africa, and identified two important features of relevance to this period, namely the politics of negotiation and the constitution. The process was characterised by representation, participation and inclusion. In line with SASA (Act 84 of 1996), education decentralisation and local level governance structures promoted participation at the local level and constituted a major strategy during the early democracy. Carrim (1992) believed that any education reform initiatives would need to embrace these principles.

4.2 ENVIRONMENT ONE: THE POLITICAL ARENA

The first environment to be examined is the political arena. It is within this arena that responses to political mandates are initiated. The decisions taken in this arena have a profound influence on how the process of implementation unfolds.

4.2.1 Intervention, Initiation and Formation

Early in 1995, when the new Members of the Executive Council (MECs) in provinces were appointed, Mary Metcalf was appointed the first MEC for education in the GDE. As did MECs in the other provinces, she faced the enormous challenge of attempting to analyse the extent of the breakdown in schools, many of which schools were very unstable, especially in areas where the struggle for democracy had caused major disruptions (Chisholm & Vally,1996). There was pressure on politicians to intervene and support these schools, so Metcalfe established a 'Culture of Learning Committee' to investigate what was then popularly referred to as the collapse of a 'culture of teaching and learning' in schools, in the hope that this research would lead to the development of a strategy for intervention. The committee recorded many serious incidents illustrating the extent to which education in many Gauteng schools had been destroyed by the previous deficient Bantu Education system and by the years of struggle in schools and communities against the system. The reality and the challenges in these schools were overwhelming. The report records many aspects of dysfunction in both schools and the community, including: no teaching and learning; sporadic attendance; problems with punctuality; gangsterism; rape; drug abuse; and violence. The report summed up the main problems as:

- "infrastructure, facilities and resources;
- leadership, management and administration, fractured and adversarial relationships between principals, teachers, students and parents;
- socio-economic content" (Chisholm & Vally, 1996).

The problems in these schools were serious, and Metcalfe was faced with complex challenges, notably establishing a provincial education department by dismantling the previous racially aligned one and creating a unified structure and system. The newly established structure needed systems and structures, with immediate focus on establishing legitimacy and replacing the fragmented system of the past. During this interregnum, the DoE had neither space nor capacity to address the urgent needs in those schools that were dysfunctional. The enormity of the problems prompted the MEC to investigate the possibilities of using external partnerships to support a school improvement intervention.

The opportunity to engage external partners was made possible when the NBI was launched in March 1995, with a clear strategy to support the transition agenda of the new government. It recognised the need to support the education department in addressing the challenges of schools that were dysfunctional (Chisholm & Vally, 1996). The MEC then explored possible school improvement strategies through the partnership established with NBI. Peter Buckland, who had been involved in education, then in the NBI, was in an ideal position to develop a partnership that would involve the active participation of NBI in improving the quality of schools. One of the five principles that were fundamental to the establishment of the NBI in 1995 was the following:

> *To initiate systemic change that can be replicated or implemented at scale in close partnership with the relevant government departments*; (NBI Annual Report 1998-1999).

The agenda of NBI supported partnerships that would bring both the public and private sector together to make a contribution to transformation in the country. Transformation in education was of major concern and it was regarded as imperative that the partnership be one that would include more than just a monetary contribution. The business sector had to become an active participant in the process of reformation, and the NBI established EDUPOL to provide both technical and policy development support to the DoE. They drew on work carried out by researchers and contributed to the conceptualisation of EQUIP.

This period in the political context of the country, as seen in the initial design of EQUIP, placed great emphasis on partnership processes with a focus on involving business and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) in the initiation and design of reform initiatives. An overview of the key elements of EQUIP (unknown author, 1998) asserts that developing countries often lack sufficient resources and successful programmes are dependent on the formation of partnerships between the state, NGOs, communities, foreign funds, universities and business.

4.2.2 Locating the EQUIP Strategy

The newly established GDE and the MEC of the province, like all other provincial departments, was under pressure to show visible delivery, especially in addressing schools

that were dysfunctional. The EQUIP programme designed to provide an intervention strategy that would address problems in schools was located in a directorate, whose main focus was reconstruction and development, a broad strategy of the African National Congress (ANC) government designed to address inequities and inequalities of the past. Fleisch (2002) attributes this strategy to the philosophy of collaborative participation of all stakeholders towards achieving the transformation agenda. It was within this directorate that a partnership unit was established. In the absence of any structure committed to school improvement, the partnerships unit was identified to lead the partnership with the NBI. In retrospect, one needs to ask whether the partnerships directorate was the ideal place to locate and initiate a school reform strategy. At a political level there was an urgent need to address schools that were not performing, but bureaucratic structures were not ready to take on these challenges:

> *I think there were a lot of things happening in the Department. They were going through an enormous amount of change. And I think they were struggling to find themselves within this new transformation and the change.* (EQsp3)

These comments by an NGO facilitator give insight into the struggles of a department in its interregnum and how these were viewed by those outside the system. The need to use the capacity of existing non-governmental structures and outside agencies such as business was necessary.

The early interpretation of the partnership with the NBI by the Department led to problems as it become evident that the NBI took the lead in the partnership and the initiation of the programme. The GDE committed itself to jointly funding EQUIP by contributing three million rand over three years to the project. The MEC at this stage was signatory to the EQUIP project, but the details of the design and planning of the reform project were left to the appointed non-governmental agency and much of the monitoring and managing to the business partnership. These early arrangements had major impacts on the implementation of EQUIP as the GDE, as key role-player, was not involved in the design stage.

> *It has been quite a road for us to travel to get them to see that it is still their business, their core business, and ours is really meant to support and assist and add value where it is possible. So my view would be that right at the outset if this … when this partnership was embarked upon it had to be seen as being at least equal*

partners, if not the greater balance of power should be with the Department. (EQ Sp1)

There seems to have been a misinterpretation of the essence of the partnership and the role of the business partners, as indicated by this representative of the business sector in the partnership. The NGO member quoted above was of the opinion that the GDE should have been in charge of the management of EQUIP and its core purpose of school reform. The frustration of leading a programme that is the core business of the GDE and not being able to engage officials in the department to take on their role become evident in later years, when it was time to exit the schools and the local districts were not ready to support or sustain changes in the school. This had serious implications for the implementation process as it filtered through the system and, over the years, the ownership of EQUIP by the GDE was never clearly established.

4.2.3 Technical Factors that Impact on Implementation

A number of technical factors had an impact on implementation of the intervention.

4.2.3.1 System Readiness

The implementation of EQUIP in the province came at a time when the GDE was in the early stages of setting up systems and structures. Analyses of implementation of education policy during the early years of transition confirm that there was limited administrative and managerial experience in education or the public sector as a whole. Jansen and Taylor (2003) argue that in many provinces the role of politicians and senior administrators was still causing confusion. In addition, the envisaged changes were beyond the human and material resources available at the time. These factors contributed to an organisational culture that in these early years reflected a preoccupation with establishing an identity to mark the shift from the apartheid past. The organisational culture in the Department had not been fully established as the GDE was in its early stages of bringing together cultures and systems from a number of very different departments. District offices were operating without a full complement of staff and those who were in offices had a varying range of skills and competence.

The EQUIP project was thus seen as a collaboration between business and the partnerships unit in the RDP directorate. The EQUIP 'bottom-up strategy' further supported the RDP philosophy but the involvement of Departmental officials, especially district offices in the initial design of EQUIP, was limited, except for the design and development of the partnership. While ownership of EQUIP was taken on by the business partnership, they were uncomfortable about leading issues of school improvement that should have been the domain of the GDE.

A senior person in the business partnership expressed her frustration with the way in which the partnership unfolded:

> *And that was the issue of the types of balance of power and responsibility in terms of how the partnership should begin with. The conception of the Partnership was that the Department that was in charge or was the more senior partner of the two. And I kind of feel that it is the way the um… problem has unfolded it has sort of made us more the senior partner….It has been quite a road for us to travel to get them to see that it is still their business, their core business, and ours is really meant to support and assist and add value where it is possible.* (EQ Sp1)

The gap that emerged indicated that, according to the NBI coordinator, the GDE was not ready to own the project. The frustration of the external partners indicates the difficulties in trying to realign the intervention back into the GDE. There have been several reasons for the difficulty of getting the GDE to acknowledge and own EQUIP.

A senior official in the Department argued that at the time of the EQUIP intervention, both policy and systems were not ready to lead this intervention. The districts were overwhelmed with crises in schools and did not have time to assimilate and commit to EQUIP which was conceptualised outside their system, as indicated by the following comment.

> *I think somehow there was a disjuncture with the district… When we had meetings, project meetings, we found that the district was dealing with fire fighting more than anything else.* (EQe2)

This senior official in the GDE also alluded to the lack of systems and policies to support this new concept of improvement through school development planning.

> *And so I don't think that the Department, firstly, was ready. And at that stage anyway I don't think there was any legislation to say that every school must have a Development Plan. That came about later*. (EQe1)

The service provider responsible for implementing the EQUIP during the first phase also realised that, in the early years, the officials of the DoE had enough work just establishing day-to-day administration:

> *I think that the bureaucratic structures were already in place, but not ready for external intervention. They were… they were in place to deal with their normal line functions. They weren't there to deal with any new external programmes.* (EQ Sp 2)

Both the service provider and the departmental official above agreed that the GDE was not ready to take on the EQUIP project at this stage, as it was involved in setting up its own systems and priorities. Fleisch, (2002) refers to the newly established department as struggling to gain legitimacy.

The location of EQUIP outside the system was further entrenched when the GDE did set up a unit to develop leadership and governance in the province, and EQUIP was not placed in it. The DoE identified development of education management in the country as a priority, and in response the GDE set up an Education Leadership and Governance Development unit (EMGD) in the provincial office to deal with the development of leadership and governance in the province:

> *They had their own leadership programme. They had their own governance plan that was taking place at the same time. So I think that um … Equip certainly didn't have the priorities that the broader Department initiatives had at the time* (EQ Sp 2)

This EMGD unit developed its own priorities and plans that did not include EQUIP, with the result that there were competing training programmes targeting 'school development plans' for the training of school management and governance. The official above alluded to the lack of systems within the GDE to align programmes as they emerged. The result was an overlap and competing priorities

Officials in the GDE saw the EQUIP programme as outside their immediate priorities and were willing to relinquish the identified schools to the providers. In establishing their own legitimacy and mandates, the DoE was not ready to include priorities or programmes they

did not directly conceive. The EMGD began its own development and school improvement plans. A senior official in the GDE (EQe1) was of the opinion that both the funding and the planning of EQUIP should have been coordinated within the GDE so that it made a collective holistic impact on the school and the system. There was also a need for greater GDE involvement to ensure accountability and continuity.

However, bottom-up and outside-in conceptions formed the basis of the new organisational strategy, of civil society and thus the Department, even though the systems may not have been ready for this approach. The school-based strategy of EQUIP addressed issues of decentralisation and collective collaboration and was supported by the GDE. However, the lack of clear location and a champion within the GDE resulted in a high turnaround of personnel assigned to EQUIP. A senior person in the NBI partnership indicated the frustration of having to deal with new officials at each meeting. The lack of a dedicated champion of the project in the GDE led to inconsistency and a lack of commitment:

> *And the biggest problem was we didn't always have the right people from the province at meetings. So you'd have people deputizing and quite a high level of change in each meeting. So it was a monthly project meeting initially. But we would have different people coming to meetings from the Department… and they weren't informed … they didn't own the project. So [with] [OMIT] the providers and the (NBI) EQUIP people themselves understood the model and worked with it very well, and they owned it.* (EQ Sp2)

The DoE's lack of readiness and commitment was indicated by the lack of consistency at these early meetings, and during the very early stages of EQUIP it relinquished the initiation of this school improvement programme to the business partnership and service providers. This lack of ownership at a very conceptual level betrayed a major gap in the implementation process as the lack of agency at this level was to result in failures in the communication and later even compliance with the strategy.

4.2.3.2 Organisational Culture, Power and Politics

The bottom-up approach for school improvement adopted by EQUIP at the initiation phase in Gauteng supported the view that the process of school development planning was an expression of the developmental aspirations and priorities of the school, and as such would

enhance student outcomes as well as organisational change. It was also based on the perception that effective and sustainable change is internally driven and cannot be externally imposed, but rather should be externally supported. This approach supported the principles of participation and inclusion at the local level:

> *The model was based on several assumptions. The first assumption was that if you changed governance and management in the schools, it would enhance its teaching and learning. That's the first assumption they made. The second assumption they made was that if you had a partnership that went through the process of whole school development, that then you could change the school around. I think those are the two key assumptions they made.*(EQsp3)

The observation made by the service provider who had to deliver the programmes in the school is a significant indication that decisions were based on the assumption that schools were ready for this model of intervention. The second assumption, she argued, was the misconception that school development planning would lead to significant changes in the functionality of the school. Her frustration was supported in the evaluation report by Schollar (1998), who found that while the EQUIP model did provide significant development of managerial and professional coherence in the targeted schools, there was no significant evidence of impact on teaching and learning. On reflection, one questions whether these assumptions were based on a sound analysis of the contextual realities of these schools.

This model may have worked in many countries and may be a sound school improvement model, but the transition education was undergoing in this country began to highlight many urgent problems that would have indicated that the terrain was not ready for a school-based model of improvement. A facilitator contracted by EQUIP to work with the schools indicated why it was not possible to go into the school and begin work as planned in the EQUIP model. The problems in the schools were great and they had to deal with the existing problems first:

> *Schools had loads, and loads and loads of problems. The school staff, they had no clue, even the parents… Even principals had no idea how to work democratically, how to give over some of the leadership issues to other people. Extremely difficult! These were besides the problems with learners…* (EQsp3)

The issues raised by this facilitator were indicative of the heritage of the many evils of apartheid, including deeply rooted alienation amongst parents, pupils and educators in black communities and against the education system. This led to a breakdown of teaching and learning in many schools, with an additional problem most of these schools also being located in the poorest areas and facing major socio-economic problems. These were extraordinary circumstances and implementation of interventions in these circumstances created increased challenges.

Implementation of EQUIP was further complicated by the complex political powers that had been established during the period of defiance and struggle against apartheid education. It was necessary during the struggle to strongly condemn existing bureaucratic structures and systems and to lead a defiance campaign against authorities trying to uphold the apartheid education system. Unions made up of educator representation in most schools were the 'soldiers' of the defiance campaign, and a strategy taken at the time was to deny any authorities access to schools and to deny school management access to classrooms. All semblances of monitoring were denied. The South African Democratic Teachers Union (SADTU) gained the largest number of members and soon gained much power and control over the education system. They were also instrumental in bringing down apartheid education and were to play a major role in re-establishing education.

However, not anticipated was the difficulty in reversing the defiance mode to one of compliance and commitment? Many educators and learners in the system became used to the laissez faire way in which schools operated. This complex political context would become a major factor in the implementation of policy or reform interventions. An illustration of the power of unions versus the authority and power of the DoE was evident when the first EQUIP evaluation team (Schollar & Associates, 1998)needed to conduct case studies in the pilot schools in Gauteng. The research team obtained written permission from the Acting Director of the district on the 30 April 1998, however, they were informed that this permission did not suffice and that they had to consult the unions. At a subsequent meeting with district officials and SADTU leaders (other invited unions did not attend), SADTU informed the researchers that SADTU would need to consult with their committees and that the research team would need to present details of the research to their education desk. Research only commenced three months later, and the case study report captures the political context in the following statement:

> *It is also hard to ignore the feeling that there is something strange about a situation in which the employee organization, rather than the Education Department, has final say on access to state schools. (Schollar & Associates, 1998)*

The district responded to the situation by saying that they did not want to 'jeopardise their positive relations with SADTU' and accepted SADTUs decisions. Datnow, Hubbard and Mehan (2002) argue that the location of power is a factor that impacts on implementation. The primacy given to the role of power and perspective as important features in a school reform process is corroborated here. In a context of transformation, such as in Gauteng, it is imperative to understand where the real power and authority is located.

The argument is whether this approach was the right one for an education system in transition, and Donaldson (2001) sums up the goals of education since democracy in South Africa as a frustrating contest between 'ideals' and 'implementation capacity.' In this context it is easier to understand the political decisions that accommodate the popular ideals; however this does not imply that the achievements have been insignificant. A critical reflection on assumptions and choices made will unveil significant issues regarding implementation.

4.2.3.3 Communication and Networks

At the early stages of conceptualisation it was unclear what was the role of the GDE was and what authority and impetus would be given to this project at that level. The networks and communication and reporting frameworks of the partnership were clear but the level of actual implementation of these did not seem to comply with the initial plans. The design at the conceptual stage also clearly indicated the role and function of district officials as co-implementers of the project with the service providers and NBI officials. The level of implementation and compliance, according to evaluation reports and interview data, has not been achieved. A major difficulty affecting implementation was that although 'School Development Planning' was conceptualised as policy at the initiation level it was never adequately communicated or developed as policy through the system. A senior official in the GDE in retrospect agrees that this may have been a major flaw in the early stages of the intervention:

> *Districts during the first few years were involved in crisis management and attending all sorts of problems in schools. They had not as yet developed clear strategies or plans themselves, besides the policy regarding school development plans came later and district officials themselves would require a great deal of development to really understand the School Development Planning process* (EQe1)

Another problem was the lack of clear reporting processes both to the DoE and to the business partners. The DoE conducted a national longitudinal evaluation of the project but because the strategy of each province differed greatly this report could not provide an adequate reflection of specific processes and impacts of the project in each province.

4.2.3.4 Resources and Compliance Mechanisms

Nakamura and Smallwood (1980) stress the major role of the allocation of resources in the implementation process, some of the major ones identified for implementation being money, time and the adequacy of and competency of people at the different levels. 'Power' as a resource is also central to the implementation process. The EQUIP model (*Equip concept proposal*, 1998) links financial resources to the school development plan. Schools were given money based on identified resources needed to implement their plans.

The business partnership was also able to 'buy time' and het competent people by engaging skilled service providers. They also had sufficient money to respond to fundamental resource needs of targeted schools. However, power and authority were not available to the business partners or the service providers, these resources remaining within the system. The service providers who had to ensure that the goals of EQUIP were met by the schools soon realised the frustration of not having the power to demand compliance:

> *We have no authority over schools at all. We can't come in there and say, "I will fire you if you don't do your job". They have the power to do that if they need to do that. And even in terms of money we give them, we allow the Department to ensure that the money is spent as it was prescribed. Um… But they do the checking up on schools to see that they have got receipts and stuff like that.* (EQ Sp1)

This response from the external agency in this partnership expresses the difficulty of implementing an intervention without authority or power. These initial reform initiatives, such as the 'Thousand Schools' project and EQUIP, focused on school-by-school capacity-building with very few compliance or sanction mechanisms. This may have been a necessary approach at the time as people had just achieved liberation from a harsh oppression, and a forceful approach may have damaged the newly achieved democracy. However, it did highlight the need for pressure in some schools in order to make any improvements possible.

Challenges to education in this period of transition were complex and difficult and addressing the material needs of schools became a major undertaking. The state had to improve the quality of education but was also faced with severe backlogs in providing basic infrastructure and needs in the country (GDE, 1997. Progress Report, 1995-1997).

EQUIP supported the state by providing money directly to schools in response to their development plans, targeting some of their resource needs. They also provided the development of human capacity though NGOs and service providers to support the schools in implementation of plans. The following comment indicated that EQUIP schools were getting more attention than other schools and the districts saw the NGO presence in schools as a relief as they could focus on other schools and leave the EQUIP schools to the NGOs:

> *… they were going to those more often schools than even district managers, and the district officials said that that they did not have to go there as EQUIP schools were sorted out. So they in a sense were saying that those schools were fine, and not their problem anymore.* (EQsp1)

The project had human resources with adequate skills for capacity-building and managing schools in both the Catholic Institute for Education (CIE) and later Ukukhula (non-governmental organisation working in schools), who were the chosen service providers in Gauteng, and in the NBI-EQUIP team. The EQUIP partnership provided sufficient funds for the material implementation of the project and schools were allocated a substantial amount for context-specific needs according to school development plans. However, the

funds allocated did not allow for total implementation of the plans and the schools had to supplement what they received with fundraising projects and departmental funding.

The initial plans also allowed for active participation of district officials in the implementation, support and monitoring of the project. The commitment to these resources did not materialise as planned because of the lack of allocation of actual skills, role and function and time to the programme. The allocation of time to the EQUIP project was based on a three-year strategy for individual schools, which may have allowed for adequate input by service providers but not for implementation and institutionalisation of change, especially in those schools that had been subjected to many years of dysfunction.

4.3 ENVIRONMENT TWO: MESO -LEVEL

A number of factors are relevant to the implementation environment at meso-level. The success of a school improvement project is dependent on the entire system. It is therefore imperative to examine the various influences and constraints at the level.

4.3.1 Factors Influencing Implementation

The main agents of implementation at the meso-level were the NGOs and the districts. The interpretation of the brief at this level was dependent on the character of individual agents and the political, social and cultural agenda of those tasked with the implementation of the programme. In Gauteng, the main service providers, the CIE and later Ukukhula, were the NGOs selected to deliver the EQUIP programme. They were allocated schools identified by the GDE, and the design of the programme provided scope for implementation jointly with the relevant district offices. The plans included the development of and transfer of skills to district officials, however the following responses from district officials allocated to manage EQUIP in the districts are an indication of the level of involvement of districts:

> *I only met with them once, and I brought back the minutes. But I was not really that involved.* (EQDo1)

Another official responsible for an EQUIP schools commented:

> *Um, whether it was accepted right from the beginning I don't know. I don't think everybody accepted the programme.* (EQDo2)

Both district officials noted that while EQUIP was recognised it was not really owned by the district. In the implementation cycle this was a major gap. As an interface between the goals of the programme and the implementers at the micro level, the service providers contributed to the 'missing link' between formulation of the strategy or policy and implementation at the local level. In the absence of district involvement, the implementation was delegated to the service providers, who were mandated to deliver on the brief. In this case implementation was regarded as a linear process that was sequential and chronological. It also presupposed that the implementation arena was neutral and objective and that the implementers (in this case the service providers) possessed the technical expertise, obedience and will to carry out the programme as specified. Contracted service providers (NGOs) needed to display their technical expertise and deliver on agreed mandates. They were happy to do what they had to without help from the districts involved:

> *We were more concerned that we had to get the district involved. But to be absolutely frank and honest with you, that was the hardest thing to do. The easiest thing for us to do was to do was to work with the schools. They were much quicker to access. Easier to work with, less resistant to things. The problems actually came when the district got involved' (EQsp3).*

Thus the key implementers in this meso environment had no clear strategy of collaboration. Design of the EQUIP model at the initiation stage focused on the issues that would convince both funders and government that the model was in line with policy and ideals of the time, but there was very little direction regarding the implementation through the system:

> *Our brief was to turn those schools around using the model that EQUIP had developed. It was a broad framework model we had to give it some autonomy, because it was just a model. And the model was based on several assumptions* (EQsp3).

Interpretation was left to individuals, as indicated by this NGO facilitator. The NGOs were on contract to deliver and they interpreted the models as they saw fit.

4.3.2 Providers Co-Construct the Model with Schools

The NGO facilitators very soon realised that the schools were not ready for a bottom-up process as they lacked sufficient stability or capacity. They were not ready for school development planning as they were plagued with other more urgent issues. The following quotations by service providers highlights key issues that needed to be addressed before they could even begin with the school development process:

> *...with dysfunctional schools, we needed to get stability. To get the kids coming to school. They used to come in at nine a.m. and leave by eleven a.m. so we needed to get the basic rhythms of the school working. Then we needed to ensure that teachers came to school, there was high absenteeism among teachers.* (EQSp2)

> *There were problems in all of these schools. Also I think it was really in the beginning of transformation and all of the schools basically had some sort of problem or the other. In all schools you encountered problems. You can call most of them dysfunctional.* (EQ Sp3)

While the mandate was to assist schools to develop their school development plans, thus giving them access to the funding allocation, the service providers realised the need to establish stability in schools before this could happen. As indicated in the second quotation, these schools were facing transformation of education in the new democracy and many could not cope with the new requirements as they were dysfunctional as a result of the past. The following comments made by the NGO facilitator indicates the difficulty faced in implementing the EQUIP model. She refers to the 'assumptions' made by the model:

> *The first assumption was that if you changed governance and management in the schools, it would enhance its teaching and learning. That's the first assumption they made. The second assumption they made was that if you that went through the process of whole school development, that then you could change the school around. I think those are the two key assumptions they made.* (EQ Sp3)

This facilitator stressed that neither of the two 'assumptions' in the model could even begin if there was no stability or basic compliance in schools. Early in the interview she also indicated that they were happy to proceed without the district officials but later acknowledged that the 'agency' of the district was important for compliance in schools.

> *But also there was a third assumption. (Sorry I missed that). The third assumption was that if we worked with the district, then we would capacitate the district…* (EQ Sp3)

She also acknowledged that this part of the plan was the most difficult to implement as service providers struggled to form links with district offices. It was clear that the model was making assumptions that would be difficult to access in practice. The service provider realised the problems with the model but also knew that, as a contracted service provider, she would need to make it work. She did not believe that the assumptions made were correct or that the model would necessarily result in the outcomes envisaged, however, by creatively addressing the immediate needs of the school, she, like many of the other service providers, gained entry and even some commitment from schools.

The evaluation report by Schollar and Associates (1998) confirms that the assumption that improved management and governance would result in improved teaching and learning was not necessarily confirmed. There was an improvement in the functionality of management and governance but this did not translate into school improvement. Nor did school development planning or the partnerships and additional funding translate into the school improvement and change that was envisaged. Schollar and Associates (2000), in the second EQUIP report, indicated that the process of implementing the School Development Plan was hierarchical and the mechanical process of developing a mission, vision and a School Development Plan would not have the intended effect if it did not become 'internalised' by all participants in the school. So, in many schools it remained on an office wall or in a file, and when the EQUIP funding ended it became something of the past.

Despite these assumptions the service provider was being paid to implement the model in the allocated schools:

> *So often we went ahead with the schools, because you had to deliver against these particular outcomes as a service provider. (EQ Sp3)*

In this case the service provider would need to act as an agent of change in the school. In analyzing the context and issues they would need to make the necessary changes to the model in order to achieve the outcomes. As indicated above, they would need to deal with problems confronting the school:

> *…. there were too many issues about emotions and feelings and relationships that were all wrong….They didn't know how to work as a team. They had never done those things before. They had never come together to discuss problems and issues and to resolve them within the school staff.* (EQ Sp3)

It would be very difficult to begin with the school development plans without addressing the serious tensions that existed in schools. The micro-politics at the school level was very complex and the staff in many schools were divided as they struggled to move out of a period of resistance and contradiction to one that required a commitment to common goals.

The main problem was making schools functional, and this was a major challenge for the service providers, who had to begin with where the schools were. They had to assist the schools overcome the conflict and tensions and help bring about some stability. They began working with the management and governance of schools but soon realised that even at this level there were major problems. Many governing body personnel were not very literate and even the school managers lacked skills. In order to deliver on the brief the provider had to analyse both the development needs and the conflict and tension in these schools, and deal with them as a strategy to get the schools ready for the actual intervention:

> *When we went into the schools we found that schools don't have the fundamental skills to begin to plan. And these fundamentals we are talking about are: conducting a meeting, chairing a meeting, or dealing with difficult people.* (EQ Sp1)

The service providers began to work with each school to support and prepare it for the school development process. This included development workshops, conflict resolution and encouraging a positive culture and attitude in these schools. Thus, together with the schools, the service provider began to construct and customise the intervention. Conditions in the schools determined the design of the intervention. In the case of the EQUIP schools the adaptation of the intervention was guided by their socio-historic context. Because of the lack of capacity in the schools, the adaptation and implementation was led by the service provider, which may have resulted in a consequent lack of ownership. The service provider remained an external agent, driven by the need to establish conditions that would allow him or her to deliver on the brief:

> *We had a very set purpose. We came for that purpose. We delivered. We were very professional; when we said we were going to do something we did it. We were always on time. And we listened.* (EQsp3)

Many schools welcomed the service providers as they were stuck and unable to move forward. The service providers provided the support that schools needed and were consistent and reliable, however, they remained an external agency and their influence on implementation was limited to and shaped by the response of the school's stakeholders.

4.3.3 An Externally Driven Intervention and District Readiness

The early design of the EQUIP programme acknowledged the role of the district in the implementation of school improvement interventions. The designers also acknowledged that districts would need to be developed parallel to the schools as was stated in the EQUIP strategy:

> *Assisting the district officials, through training, capacity building and other resources, to be able to give appropriate support to schools.'*(Schollar & Associates, September 2000)

This objective of the EQUIP programme was the most difficult to achieve, as establishment of the EQUIP programme outside the structures of the Department and at a time when its structures especially district offices were in the early stages of establishment, resulted in the initiative effectively remaining outside the organisation. All three EQUIP evaluation reports (Schollar, 1998, 2000, 2002) refer to a lack of district involvement in the EQUIP programme.

Districts in Gauteng were in the early phases of reconstruction during the first year of EQUIP, and the new district offices faced many challenges. They had to appoint personnel, set up structures and develop systems. Establishing an organisational culture and understanding the role and purpose of the district office was going to take time. As most of the personnel came either from the schools or former departments, establishing a common identity was going to be difficult. In addition to these early issues of establishment, district offices had to respond to a flurry of demands from the provincial offices and daily crises in schools. In many instances new policy demands clashed with existing practices and

pressures in schools. The district was caught in the middle. This overload, confusion and a sense of helplessness was expressed by a district official:

> *Too many changes, too many overlapping of activities I think that needs to go without saying really. That's a fact. That's a given, … And as I say um, Head Office unfortunately, there is very little consistency left, very little consistency. Um, and unrealistic timeframes.*(EQDo1)

District offices were positioned to link both provincial departments and the DoE to schools. The problem in the South African context was that districts did not necessarily acquire the power and authority or legal status to serve as centres of support and pressure for schools. Legislation around education did not mention the structure or role of the district office and the result was uncertainty and disparities about the position and role of district offices. A period of transition and an emerging new department had its own challenges and in many cases district offices operated in an ad-hoc manner to daily demands (Roberts, n.d.). This facilitator realised the problems in districts and the need for them to forge ahead despite the lack of support from districts:

> *I think there were a lot of things happening in the Department. They were going through an enormous amount of change. And I think they were struggling to find themselves within this new transformation and the change.* (EQsp3)

The lack of relevant skills in the districts also became an obstacle to implementation, with many officials appointed into the new district offices having had little or no experience in the area to which they were appointed, as many of these positions may not have existed in the past. This view from the service provider may not be accurate but the comments capture the difficulties districts faced:

> *And there were also many political appointments and political jostling. That is my view, or my impression of what was happening there. They were not quite settled. They were really struggling. Also I think that it was one of those skills deficits. You had people that didn't know what was required.* (EQsp3)

District offices were definitely not ready to take on school improvement initiatives such as EQUIP. They acknowledged it and were willing to relinquish the selected schools to it but they did not have the capacity, time or the space to dedicate to the programme. The concept of ‘School Development Plans’ was new and in many instances district officials

had neither planning nor managing skills themselves. Although the EQUIP model allowed for district development and a co-facilitation of the intervention with district officials this became very difficult to organise, as expressed by this facilitator:

> *You understand because the districts were bombarded with too many things from Province, and they were really struggling. And also I think a lot of the appointments of the district officials were not always based on expertise. So they were like a boiling pot there. And just to absorb something new like EQUIP was difficult and where to locate it was also difficult. So often we went ahead with the schools, because you had to deliver against these particular outcomes as a service provider. So you couldn't wait for the district to be with you. And so in a way there was this disjuncture.* (EQsp3)

Districts were not ready so providers had to deliver on their brief and went ahead without the districts. This decision, however, returned to haunt the management and sustainability of the intervention within the system. As an intervention that had a three-year lifespan, the need to engage all agents in the system during the implementation phase was vital. The service providers had to hand the schools back to districts for on-going monitoring and support, but this was often very difficult:

> *Because we've had to chip away you know, that is how I feel, since I have come in. I've felt that we have had to chip away at getting districts to accept the programme. To see this as something which should be part of their core business or as something that can add value.* (EQ Sp1)

Clear lines of accountability, and communication were not developed in the initial design stages. The business partners understood their role to be one of support in a programme that would eventually be adopted by the GDE with a focus on sustaining and continuing the programme. In a partnership the business partners did not commit to a programme indefinitely or have their own agendas for entering the programme. Like politicians, they required the visibility then needed to move on to new priorities.

This pointed to the argument by Linder and Peters (1990), that in many interventions the focus is on the periphery rather than the centre of the delivery system. The policy or intervention is determined by situation, without plans for support or accountability in the system. The exclusion of district offices in the initial design allowed districts to absolve

themselves from the EQUIP schools. The frustration caused in districts is expressed by this district official who tried to understand the EQUIP project. She understood the role that she needed to play but struggled with her commitments to many other schools:

> *We had a lot of problems; we inherited schools that were already on programmes like EQUIP. I began a relationship with EQUIP but it was minimal. One Institutional Development and Support officer (IDSO) had about twenty schools and with the problems and conflicts it was difficult to engage with all the programmes. I wanted our schools to benefit from EQUIP I then decided to make contact with EQUIP. I took over the EQUIP schools. What was not okay was when they hire an outside service provider to go into schools they don't get commitment. Principals need to be pushed so service providers need to go into schools via us. For schools to toe the line we need to be part of the process.* (EQDo3)

The tension between her workload and the realisation that the 'outside service provider' needed to work with her in order to gain compliance was evident. It raised the debate around how to engage with systems in transition so that initiatives were not left on the 'outside,' despite the state of readiness of the system. One of the key objectives of EQUIP was that models that worked in the EQUIP schools needed to be taken to other schools through the district officials. Again, this did not happen as intended. The best practices of the EQUIP schools were not being spread to other schools and the EQUIP schools sometimes lost contact with districts as district officials did not see the need to keep contact with them.

4.4 ENVIRONMENT THREE: MICRO LEVEL

As early as 1995, the MEC for education in Gauteng, Metcalf, and a research team in the Education and Policy Unit (EPU), investigated the breakdown in schools. Many schools in the province were in a state of collapse and the MEC needed empirical evidence of the critical issues in them. The team was commissioned to report on the culture of teaching and learning in Gauteng. This Gauteng Committee on the Culture of Learning and Teaching (CCOLT) identified the following issues as contributing to the collapse in schooling: school infrastructure; leadership and management; relationships between principals,

teachers, learners and parents; and the socio-economic context of schools (Chisholm, & Vally,1996). These problems were confirmed by an NGO working in a school:

> *Teachers were de-motivated because we had no basic equipment in the school. No chalk boards and windows. Also most of the teachers were politicized, they belonged to unions and during union times they were pulled out of the class.* (EQe3)

Issues ranging from basic infrastructural needs to complex social, political and ethical issues were highlighted in the final report. Organisational breakdown in processes and systems characterised most of the dysfunctional schools. Christie (1998) found that the lack of routine, discipline or boundaries to regulate the functioning of the school contributed to the dysfunction. Maja, (1995) in his case study of a secondary school in Soweto, records similar issues of breakdown in the school. These reports illuminate the contextual realities of schools like Funda Secondary and Jabula Secondary. The resistance and alienation described by the principal of Funda is explained by the CCOLT as an entrenchment of the social identities of communities involved in years of conflict. In order to understand these schools and communities there is a need to examine the historical, structural, political and cultural factors. Attitudes needed to change and people to be emancipated from their own social conditioning. The CCOLT sums up the situation in a comment made by one of the participating teachers: "*What we need is therapy*" (Chisholm, & Vally, 1996). Many of the schools selected for the EQUIP intervention were in crisis, as described by the CCOLT report and similar studies.

4.4.1 Criteria for Selection of Schools

One of the responses to the above crisis was the EQUIP intervention. The GDE identified District N2 as the district in which EQUIP would be piloted and schools in the Mamelodi township were invited to participate in the project. The project later included schools in other townships in Gauteng.Sherry, Maliavuso, and Dawjee, (1997) conducted a situational analysis in the pilot schools and in the following years districts began to recommend schools in need in the other districts and townships. The main indicators used to identify schools were:

- "poor retention rates

- collapsing infrastructure
- high numbers of repeaters, some of them for the second and third time
- poor outcomes, poor matriculation results in particular
- low levels of parental and pupil motivation in many schools
- low levels of parental and community support in many areas
- low levels of alignment around school development in many school communities." (Schollar, & Associates, 1998:3)

The EQUIP model aimed to address these and other problems in schools through school-based intervention using 'School Development Planning.' All schools had to submit initial plans and were then granted funding in tranches to assist the schools in implementing their plans. In Gauteng the funding pledged by the NBI was further supplemented by funds from the GDE. This model also assumed that schools would eventually be able to access their own funds to support their development plans. Funda Secondary was selected for research study as one of the schools that had made significant changes as a result of the intervention, while Jabula Secondary was chosen as a school in a similar context that did not respond very well to the intervention. This selection was based on the matriculation results in these schools as well as reports from the EQUIP coordinators. In order to examine school-based responses to this intervention it was important to examine the role of local level factors relevant to these two schools.

4.4.1.1 Funda Secondary and Local Level Politics

Funda secondary was located in Soweto, and like many schools there had been ravaged by years of struggle. While the school was a brick building it had been vandalised by both the school community and the external community, as schools were seen as bastions of apartheid. The socio-economic environment of the school was one of poverty, crime and violence, and described by the principal as completely dysfunctional:

> *When I got to the school, on the first day and the first week there was nothing. There was no time-book, no systems, nothing.* (EQp2)

The principal was appointed to the school in the year 2000 and faced great challenges as he uprooted the acting principal who had controlled the territory:

> *I want to be honest there was no control and before me there was a person acting. He was very autocratic and was appointed by his colleagues. Unfortunately I got the post and not him. He and a few others refused to accept my appointment.* (EQp2)

The tension around the appointment of principals in the township schools illustrated the extent of local level political force and power amassed at this level during the many years of unrest and struggle against symbols of oppression. During the years of struggle, principals were seen as 'symbols of oppression' as they implemented an education system against which the learners fought. The appointment of principals following the change in government became a contested terrain. Educators and learners defied principals who were not 'their' choice. Unions such as SADTU contested appointments of principals not supported by the union, while Student organisations such as the Council of South African Students (COSAS) struggled to end their role and even called for principals to be democratically elected (Maja, 1994). The tensions were so severe that at times it became life-threatening. The newly appointed principal of Funda Secondary was one of the first Indian principals to be appointed in a school in the heart of Soweto, a predominantly black' township. He faced several threats and was advised to leave rather than risk his life:

> *They* [other members of the school management team] *would tell me leave that person, let the Department handle him, you have a wife and children.*(EQp2)

The situation in this school depicted what happened in schools in which new leaders were appointed in an attempt to challenge the status quo. However, very little change could be achieved unless the persons who had the power to cause tensions were removed. The principal soon realised that the only way he could begin to take control of the school was to remove those who opposed him. He also realised that while EQUIP, as an externally driven intervention, did not have the authority to help him with the political challenges, it did have the resources to help him diffuse some of the tension.

The role played by this principal illustrates the agency of a principal to use any opportunity to achieve his or her goals. He soon found a way to remove some of the educators who had been his main obstacles. As access to schools outside the townships increased, the number

of learners in the township schools decreased, as did the number of educators required at the school. Through this process of rationalisation, teachers who were in excess were then transferred to other schools. The principal of Funda Secondary seized this opportunity to remove his opponents:

> *EQUIP couldn't help me with that and in fact even the Department failed…'* (EQp2)

In many schools in the townships, principals used this process to remove persons who were obstructing change in their schools:

> *What helped me was the rationalization process. It so happened that the person who was very destructive and did not want change was eligible by rationalization to move out of the school. Another person who was also very aggressive and opposed to change also left with rationalization…*(EQp2)

In Funda Secondary, as in many township schools, the reality was that even one person could wield enough power to hold hostage an entire school. These persons gained power by becoming leaders of the struggle and after that continued to undermine any attempt to bring about normal functioning in the school. These tensions and complexities in the school were not conducive to an intervention, such as EQUIP, that required collaboration. The principal was clear that he needed to 'sort out' these problems before EQUIP could begin.

Funda Secondary still faced many other challenges and was featured on an SABC documentary 'special assignment'[4] as one of the schools where learners came and left as they pleased, where teachers did not go to classes and where books were kept in boxes as teachers refused to take responsibility for them. In order to understand why the school was in such a state of dysfunction it is important to examine its historical and political status. Schools, during the many years of political struggle, had stopped functioning. There was no order or routine and both educators and learners took advantage of the situation. The new principal began to assess the situation and identify the causes of the breakdown in the school, summing up the situation as follows:

[4]A documentary that featured the school as an example of the breakdown in township schools.

> *The other thing I found, teachers had to be told about their duties and responsibilities. Simple things like coming to school on time and going to their classrooms. What was helpful was the policy documents from the Department like Circular one hundred and six - but, then again there were some teachers who totally refused to make the paradigm shift. They would come to school at their own time and leave school when they wanted without consulting the principal. At that stage we had no fence. I had to apply disciplinary measures.* (EQp2)

The DoE also recognised the problems and attempted to regulate behaviour of educators through circulars such as Circular 106, which spelled out the rules and regulations of both educators and learners. As indicated by the principal, even an official instruction from the GDE did not bring about compliance. Any intervention strategy needed to take into account that the schools were a representation of the breakdown in society as a result of decades of apartheid rule. This school, like many others in the township, did not have any culture of teaching and learning, with educators and students, during the years of struggle, having lost all sense of purpose and commitment. In the absence of an organisational culture, the principal had little power to bring about compliance.

The learners of Funda Secondary presented the principal with more serious problems, as they reflected the loss of social values and ethos of a society that had been subjected to decades of instability, poverty and many social evils. In analysing the micro-political ethos in Funda secondary it was easy to see how the school was almost a microcosm of the turmoil in the township. Violence, instability and a lack of purpose was prevalent within and without the school community:

> *There was no way we could change the attitude of learners. Just to give you an example, in two thousand and one we had a learner who was twenty five years old, who was in grade ten. Prior to democracy he was involved in the struggle and even in violence. He became like the 'don' and teachers and learners both feared him. I had to take on this challenge, he would not attend classes but expected to pass at the end of the year.'* (EQp2)

The principal, in the case of this learner who was holding the school hostage, realised the need to obtain intervention at the highest political level. He presented the case of this learner to the MEC for Education.

> *The MEC sent a chauffeur-driven car to pick him up and took him to a technical college where they promised him an education there.* (EQp2)

That it was necessary to appeal to the MEC for Education to intervene is an indication of power bases at the local level. This incident reflected that the newly established education authorities had not as yet established power or legitimacy in the system, hence the reliance on political power to intervene in extreme cases. The reality of the breakdown in schools could not be underestimated. Over-aged learners who had lost their youth in the struggle for democracy and an equal education system had lost direction of purpose and struggled to maintain the power and control they acquired during the struggle. These conditions plagued the townships and schools were no exception. Funda Secondary was in a state of collapse, located in an area where crime and violence prevailed. It was continuously being vandalised by both the external and internal community, a location for many kinds of evil:

> *I came to school on a Monday morning and the caretaker ran to me in terror. I followed him to a classroom to find a dead body in the classroom.* (EQp2)

This culture of 'doom and gloom' will compromise the implementation of any initiative unless acknowledged and addressed. It was clear from the principal's description of the school that teaching and learning was largely absent and the school culture was one of resistance and defiance.

4.4.2 The Agency of the Funda Principal and the Equip Intervention

The severity of the breakdown in this school made it eligible for the EQUIP intervention, however, the role of the principal in identifying and dealing with the most severe problems allowed for EQUIP facilitators to collaborate with him. The principal of Funda Secondary played an important role as agency of change in this school and was able to adapt and adopt the EQUIP strategy to address his aims. Like most schools identified in the EQUIP intervention, the immediate concerns of the principal were infrastructural needs. Normal schooling could not take place in classrooms that had broken windows and broken doors. EQUIP offered each school a sum of money to implement school development plans. Schools such as Funda Secondary prioritised infrastructure and equipment needs in their plans:

> *Then EQUIP came – for the first year and a half equip helped in terms of financial resources. About twenty five thousand rands in total. Ten thousand rands was used for infrastructure. We didn't have doors and windows so in winter it was almost impossible to work. On a cloudy day there was no electricity and rooms were dark. We put in window panes and doors to make classrooms more comfortable.* (EQp2*)*

The principal identified the key areas and acted swiftly, purchasing textbooks and some teacher development in the initial goals of EQUIP:

> *Then the second ten thousand we used to try and locate and buy important resources like text-books. So we managed to buy some text books. The next ten thousand was used to send three of our educators to Mohlapo College to get hands on training on the use of the computer.* (EQp2)

The first EQUIP report by Schollar and Associates (1998) confirmed that security, infrastructure, equipment and finally learning materials were prioritised by schools in their School Development Plans. The principal involved the school management team and the SGB in the decisions taken, and this allowed for ownership of the intervention. The principal also realised that these visible and symbolic signs of improvement would set the stage for involving staff and learners in the more serious issues of school improvement.

The next challenge that faced the principal was the need to set up systems and structures and to do this he realised the need to involve all stakeholders. EQUIP held workshops and meetings with all stakeholders, and the principals, through the advice of EQUIP facilitators, allowed a process of mediation and problem-solving to take place:

> *When we went to the first EQUIP meeting everybody was asked how the school was functioning and many stood up and pointed fingers at the principal, they also complained that management was top-down. Lucky the EQUIP facilitator advised me to allow them to say whatever they wanted and then at the end of the day use what they said. So when it came to developing the school development plan, we formed many task teams. A finance task team etc., a discipline task team. Teachers took ownership and reported to the principal.* (EQp2)

The principal was open to the process of collaborative decision-making and shared management, which allowed the rest of the staff to take ownership of the initial plans. This attitude from the principal was an important element for the process of change to take

place. As an agent of the implementation of the intervention he allowed the EQUIP facilitator to lead the process and was prepared to relinquish some of his autocratic powers and leadership style. Allowing various committees to take on key functions such as finance and discipline ensured buy-in and commitment and a break from management practices of the past. This new practice and ethos was expressed by a teacher in the school:

> *…. there are committees that deal with defiant teachers. We have systems in place, for example there is an HOD and the HOD monitors and assists the educator. There is improvement in the way the school operates. (EQe3)*

The principal of Funda Secondary manipulated the EQUIP programme to address his needs and help him gain legitimacy and control in the school. However, it may have been what the school needed. A district official responsible for the school confirmed the role of agency played by the principal:

> *…in Funda things were very difficult. I was very scared when I began in this school. They did the whole EQUIP programme. Funda principal bought into the programme. I knew where the school was coming from. The principal was sharp but he was also pushy, he was good with administration.* (EQDo3)

The district official added that what was taken on by the school was decided by the principal, describing him as 'sharp' and 'pushy' and 'manipulative':

> *He can manipulate even us. I made sure that they attended all the EQUIP development programmes. But Funda principal chooses what meetings he wants to attend. He has not attended the last three meetings we held.* (EQDo3)

The entry of the programme into the school and the design and route it took was carefully crafted by the principal.

Major writers on implementation at the school level (McLaughlin, 1991, Datnow, Hubbard & Mehan, 2002) emphasise the role of the principal, as one who holds the key to opening or closing the school to an intervention strategy. The principals' actions send signals that may indicate whether or not an intervention should be legitimated. In Funda Secondary the principal was willing to relinquish control to the service provider, who could find solutions for the problems at the school and establish his or her own legitimacy.

4.4.2.1 Adaptation and Adoption, Intended and Unintended Outcomes

The principal, teachers and learners at Funda Secondary responded to the EQUIP intervention in order to achieve stability and a degree of functionality. The service provider began the actual school development process almost a year later as the school had to be stabilised first, and assisted the school management to create a conducive environment before they began with the actual goals of the EQUIP programme.

> *…the first year we were involved in stabilizing the school. EQUIP has played a great role. EQUIP did not have authority but we developed a very healthy relationship with the service providers. We did conflict resolution and other workshops … We even got support from the community. It helped even to get teachers to teach.* (EQe3)

The service provider and the school needed to identify and prioritise issues that ranged from infrastructure and security needs to teaching and learning, and through a range of workshops was able to create systems and structures in the school. A factor that allowed implementation at this school was the principal's extreme attempts to ensure that persons causing tensions in the school be removed. Once this was done, reports from the service providers indicate an atmosphere that was more conducive and open to an intervention strategy:

- *"members listen well to each other*
- *when conflict and disagreement occurs it centre around ideas and methods not people and personalities"*[5]

In the context of this school, as in many township schools, this unintended outcome of participation amongst staff is a fundamental condition to the implementation of policies and reforms. The school had a school development team and each member headed sub-committees. For the first time the school was involved in a shared management process.

[5]Ukukhula Report on Funda Secondary14 July 2004.

The learners were also responding more positively to teaching and learning in the school as the ethos of the school changed:

> *The school is also much better and we now get support from the* [Representative Council of Learners] *RCLs. So teachers and learners are more committed to learning.* (EQe3)
>
> *Today I have a fully functional RCL. They come in early in the morning, they are outside at strategic points monitoring late-coming. With their help almost ninety nine percent of our learners are now punctual.* (EQp2)

This positive role played by learners was a major achievement as many schools struggled to establish order and compliance amongst learners.

4.4.3 Implementation at Funda Secondary School

Towards a theory of implementation and school improvement, Funda Secondary defied many existing perceptions. This school fitted into 'type 1' of Hopkins (1998) categorisation of schools, in an extreme state of dysfunction with major socio-economic and political problems. By the Hopkins theory it would require a high level of pressure and external intervention. It received very little if any support from the district office or the external community. However, despite these challenges, the determination and agency of the principal and the ability to embrace the support from the EQUIP programme allowed change to take place, and the change was more than symbolic as it not only reflected an improvement in the matriculation results but also in the culture and attitude of management, staff, learners and the external community. It may not have achieved all the goals of the EQUIP programmes, but it was definitely not stagnant. The school had to deal with complex internal and external political and social problems in order to open up the environment to an intervention strategy. In contrast, the next school in this case-study, Jabula High did not respond to the EQUIP intervention with the same degree of commitment.

4.4.4 Jabula High and Local Level Politics

Jabula High is a few streets way from Funda Secondary and had experienced the same political, social and cultural turmoil experienced by almost all schools in the area. It was plagued by non-delivery and poor results for many years, and defiance by teachers and learners resulted in a culture of non-commitment, with the school being declared dysfunctional.

However, the story at Jabula High is very different from that of Funda Secondary. The current principal became principal when his predecessor became ill, was acting principal in 1999 and became principal in 2000. He acknowledged that the school had experienced years of dysfunction:

> *In most Soweto schools in those early days, many schools were destabilised because of the struggle and it took many schools a long time to restore order*. (EQp4)

This principal, like the principal in Funda Secondary, realised that he would not be able to initiate any changes or reforms in the school if he did not deal with the political issues and persons in the school making it ungovernable. The principal very quickly identified the educators and learners who had been leaders of the struggle and who were trying to maintain their leadership positions by defying any form of authority or change. Like the principal in Funda Secondary, he used the rationalisation process of declaring staff in access to get rid of those teachers who were causing problems:

> *There were teachers who were defiant. What helped me in those early days was when we had to declare teachers in access. There were certain troublesome teachers and I decided to take them out. That helped…* (EQp4)

The internal politics of schools in the days following the new democracy in South African were significant. The principal realised that a few defiant teachers amongst the staff would have made his control of the school very difficult. The internal political context of schools must be understood in order to understand issues of implementation at the local level. As in Funda Secondary and many other township schools, learners as well as educators made schools ungovernable.

Jabula High also had learners who were leaders in the student organisations, such as COSAS, who had acquired a great deal of control and power during the struggle and were able to instil fear in both learners and teachers. The principals in this case used his power and the powers of the SGB to eliminate these students from the school:

> *In those years some learners were members of COSAS, they were strong and they were disruptive I had a leader in my school. He was the chairperson of COSAS. We had to strategise, myself and the chairperson of the governing body. We took a decision, we put our heads on the block, and we told this student and the other leaders that the following year they will not be admitted to Jabula High, and we told the admissions committee not to admit them. In this way those who remained became afraid to be active. They realized that they could also be excluded from the school. It became easier for the teachers because there wasn't much disruption in the school. They were free to communicate with the learners, they were no longer scared.* (EQp4)

The principal of Jabula High, like the principal of Funda, removed both those educators and learners who had gained power and control over the school during the period of the political struggle. He knew that it was the only way he could gain legitimate authority and power in the school. In his approach, the principal understood the 'problem' to be the person/s and not the system. He gained control of the educators by the example set when he recommended 'troublemakers' in access.

> *So even those who remained if they tried to incite trouble they were scared I told them that the same could happen to them.* (EQp4)

It may have been necessary to remove those teachers who had taken control of the school and the means used by the principal may have been the only option available. However, the principal used this process to establish his power and control over the staff and the school. He then claimed that the school was functional as he had control. He adopted a very autocratic control and refused to acknowledge any problems with the school, claiming that since he had taken over it was running well.

However, even after his appointment, the school was not producing acceptable results and was identified for the EQUIP intervention. The school principal was closed to any external intrusion into his school and the EQUIP service provider struggled to gain entry.

4.4.4.1 The Agency of Jabula Principal and the Equip Intervention

The service provider faced the resistance of the principal from the first day she entered the school. He was cagey and accepted that the school needed help with funds, but insisted that it was functioning well. He would not allow a meeting with the whole staff. The first visit for an interview with the principal was met with some resistance. He allowed a tape–recording of the interview with him but would not allow an interview with the focus group of staff members if he could not remain in the room. The fact that he was so defensive made it necessary to return to the school. This time the principal became even more defensive and refused to allow the interview to be taped, so I still could not establish exactly what was being done through EQUIP. He said that I should come back because his deputy principal was in charge of the EQUIP funds and only he could tell me what the money was used for. I suspected he might have been worried that he could not give me an account of how the EQUIP money was being used. A third attempt to gain information was made by visiting the school again, and fortunately on this day the principal was not at school. In this way access to some staff members was obtained, and the deputy principal was indeed able to confirm what the EQUIP funds were used for:

> *….in 2000 we with the SGB identified the problems. We had problems with the toilets and the drainage. Windows were broken, the field was bad. So we identified the areas where we needed help most. We had a committee working on these problems.* (EQe3) [6]

The educators in the focus group were reluctant to speak at first, but when they became more comfortable with me they began talking, identifying the main problem in the school as management: "*We had management problems*."

The district official in charge of the school confirmed that the principal was autocratic and would not allow just anyone access to the school. The EQUIP service providers faced the same kind of resistance from the principal, and the district official responsible for the school confirmed this view of the principal's attitude:

---

[6] The deputy principal was part of the focus group interview. He was able to tell me more about EQUIP than the principal, who had been very evasive.

> *This principal does not involve anyone… He also told the service provider that he had no right to tell him what to do. He is a problem; at his school he has problems with his staff because he is not transparent. He hardly meets his SMT. His staff are not happy. It is all about the manager. If you ask him anything he will say he forgot. It happened long ago. Jabula High is unfortunate because even the previous principal was weak.*(EQDo3)

The principal had control of the school and even the district official, who had legitimate authority in the system, was not able to obtain compliance from him. Coupled with a disregard for authority, this was further indicated by a claim that, if asked about anything, he simply said he forgot. It was the same response that was made when asked about the school's involvement in the EQUIP programme:

> *My memory is not very good. It happened a long time ago.* (EQp2)

He did however confirm that he welcomed the money that was brought into the school by EQUIP. His involvement or engagement with the EQUIP intervention remains vague as he did not engage with the aims or processes. Unlike the principal of Funda Secondary he could not give an account of how the intervention had supported him or the school.

> *But the money was used correctly by the school in order to help the school to develop…It was the work of the governing body and the teachers who are involved to decide what to do with the money. I know what happened it was not misused it was used correctly.* (EQp4)

His conception of the EQUIP intervention was that it had to do with money. He repeated that the money was *'used correctly'* as if this was all he needed to be accountable for. Unlike the principal of Funda Secondary he could not explain what the money had been used for, nor how it was used to respond to the needs of the school.

The teachers acknowledged that conditions in the school were not conducive to learning and that the school had problems. The principal of Jabula High, however, was adamant that everything was fine at his school. As an agent of change, and a gatekeeper of the school, he successfully blocked the intervention. The service provider expressed her frustrations working with this school:

> *…the principal does not abide by dates and he did not attend workshops held for the school management. He will not even sit in the same room as the others for tea.* (EQsp4)

The teachers, who were reluctant to speak, when probed expressed some of the problems and indirectly their fears:

> *… we had communication problems. There were problems. It came out at a workshop held by EQUIP. because most of the time the principal used to take decisions without the management. We tried to sort out some of the problems but we still have that where principals think their word is final.* (EQe5)

Workshops and other attempts by the service providers of EQUIP did not make a significant impact on the school because of the attitude of the principal. The district office recognised the problems and targeted the school for special attention. As a result of further decline in the matriculation results the school was later identified as an EAZ school, which caused further tensions and the principal became more defiant, blaming contradictory and conflicting demands for the problems, and using this situation to further block any changes:

> *… it should happen but if we do not have time, we can do nothing. We get instructions from the EAZ team, we are called to meetings by EQUIP and we are told what to do by the Department. There are too many instructions. The Department has many meetings we have to attend for example I need to attend a Grade Eleven meeting this afternoon. It becomes heavy. The management plan we drafted with our SMT does not work. Too many officials tell us what to do with the aim of helping us but that becomes a problem*. (EQp4)

A failure to integrate intervention strategies resulted in conflict and confusion and the school ignoring all instructions. The principal of Jabula High, as the gatekeeper, used the confusion and blamed the interventions for the problems in his school. He accepted all the material resources offered by the intervention and aspects of it that supported his position and power, but he chose which meetings to attend and what to respond to. There was little evidence of shared leadership or of his sharing any information with the rest of the staff. Many of the educators in the focus group interview had not heard of EQUIP.

4.4.4.2 The Role of Agency, Structure and Culture in Jabula High

The principal of Jabula High was able to establish himself as sole gatekeeper and authority because of the prevailing structure and culture of schools in this context. Datnow, Hubbard and Mehan (2002:62) show that agency, culture and structure operate together in the reform efforts in a school. In the case of Jabula High it was important to understand why the principal was allowed sole power. The answer lies in the historical structure and culture of schools in the townships. Jabula High was a school emerging from years of turmoil, conflicting ideologies and power groups, as seen in those educators and learners ousted by the principal. The principal, unlike that of Funda Secondary, was a member of the community and could easily establish his control in the school. McLennan, (2000), in a paper on the historical structure and culture of schools in the townships, has argued that they were characterised by hierarchical management and authoritarian management styles and culture. The principal of Jabula High filled the profile of an authoritarian principal and believed that his school was functional despite underlying tensions.

The role of agency played by the principal of a school is critical to implementation. The first step in the role of agency is to acknowledge that there are problems, then to analyse them and work with other stakeholders on an intervention strategy to lead and direct the changes. The principal of Jabula High was adamant that the school had problems neither in the past nor present. Ball (1989:224) has argued that many theories of management reflect the interests and needs of the person in control and if this is the case the person in control has absolute power. In this instance, the person also has the 'tendency to slip imperceptibly from analysis to prescription,' resulting in an inability to distinguish from what 'is' to what 'ought to be.' The principal of Jabula High was unable to take on the role of agency of change as he was stuck in this paradigm of management.

The facilitators of EQUIP were unable to gain significant entry into the school as they could not get past the principal or gain support from him. The breakdown in the strategy from the macro level to this local context implied that the NBI partners and EQUIP facilitators at the local level struggled to gain support and co-operation from the officials in the DoE. EQUIP had no way of demanding accountability from principals like the one of Jabula High.

4.5 OVERVIEW

An overview of the situation on the three levels is discussed in this section.

4.5.1 Macro-level Anomalies

At the macro level, the MEC for education undertook an intensive research project through the CCOLT team to investigate reasons for the breakdown in schools. The NBI EQUIP team also undertook research at a national level, and the findings of both teams indicated the complexity and seriousness of conditions in schools and school communities. However, the design team of EQUIP chose a school-based strategy for school improvement and the decisions taken at this macro level resulted in some anomalies:

- School development planning, as a bottom-up intervention, assumed that management and governance at school level would be able to identify problems and lead change in schools. However, the school districts and schools were not ready to prioritise 'school development planning', as both districts and schools were dealing with the complex realities of a changing environment.
- The model assumed a linear system; however, tracing the intervention from the macro initiation stage through meso-level contradictions and micro level impacts, it is clear that interpretation at various levels may have even contradicted the original goals.
- The contextual realities in schools were not considered, thus leaving implementation to interpretation at the local level and in the case of EQUIP to the NBI service providers.
- Both SGBs and school management were struggling to gain legitimacy at the local level and the lack of relevant skills exacerbated the problems of governance and management. They were not ready to take on responsibility of school improvement.
- Lack of alignment at the macro level resulted in the GDE providing parallel training of school governance and management, which caused confusion in the schools.
- The EQUIP model initially did not include any educator development. Neither school made any reference to the improvement of teaching and learning.

These anomalies may not have been realised by the designers of EQUIP as they responded to the need to construct an intervention strategy that would address the political imperatives. McLaughlin (1991), in research into the 'Rand Change Agent Study,' refers to the 'Black Box' of traditions and beliefs at the local level that can result in outcomes that may vary in relation to the diverse contexts from school to school. Thus, despite the design and expected outcomes at the macro level, decisions and agency at the local level determine the outcomes of the intervention.

4.5.2 Meso-Level Implications

Fleisch (2002) refers to the environment at the district level as too unstable and turbulent to embrace the EQUIP intervention strategy. Districts were preoccupied with establishing their own legitimacy and dealing with crisis and conflict in schools, the consequence of which was that districts relinquished the EQUIP programme and the EQUIP schools to the service providers. Senior district managers acknowledged the work of service providers in districts but could not give details of the project. One district official's response as to why he had not been more involved with the programme was the following:

> *Too many changes, too many overlapping of activities. I think that needs to go without saying really. That's a fact.* (EQDo4)

While districts relinquished the EQUIP intervention, the service providers had to deliver as contracted. The case of the two schools, Funda Secondary and Jabula High, confirm the diverse context of the schools and the level of access and success in the schools was dependent on the gate-keeping of the principal. In Funda Secondary, service providers worked with the principal to address priority issues and gained access to the school. In Jabula High, the service providers struggled to gain entry and made very little progress. The service providers lacked legitimate authority and power and therefore could not apply pressure to gain compliance. Entry into both schools depended on the agency of the principal of the school. As an outside-in intervention, with no support from the system, the service providers struggled with issues of accountability and sustainability of attainments made in schools.

4.5.3 Micro Level Complexities and the Agency of the Principal

In order to verify the findings in the two schools in this case study, a further four EQUIP schools were visited. These were identified in consultation with the district officials responsible for the EQUIP project. The shape of the intervention and access of the intervention in all four additional schools, as in the two case study schools, depended on the agency of the principal. All four were in similar contexts as the case study schools, thus verifying the findings. Implementation at the school level depended on several local factors:

- The historical context of the schools gave rise to complex political, socio-economic problems that could not be solved by a school organisation model.
- The role of agency played by the principal determined the access. Funda Secondary, as well as the other schools that responded positively to EQUIP, used the intervention to address issues of immediate concern before embarking on the process of school development planning. Incentive funds received through EQUIP were used for infrastructure needs and equipment. In these schools, as a result of the EQUIP intervention, was more collaboration and were more positive relationships between governing body and school management.
- In Jabula High, as well as the other schools where EQUIP access was blocked by the principals; there was limited visible evidence of any change. These schools were characterised by autocratic principals who did not share the goals of the project with their staff. In one school the principal, like the one of Jabula High, was vague about the EQUIP programme and, of interest, on visiting the school the principal's office was the only room in the office block that had new and very expensive furniture and flooring. It was later discovered from the educator focus group interviewed that the only visible signs of improvement as a result of the EQUIP intervention had been the principal's office decor.
- None of the schools displayed any evidence of 'school development planning' being a sustained collaborative activity. All principals claimed to have school development plans but could not show evidence of implementation or collaborative planning.

The EQUIP case study as an outside-in, bottom up intervention, points to factors that have either impeded or accelerated implementation on all three levels; the macro, the meso and the mirco. While these factors relate to the argument that education transformation requires 'new capacities' for change within each of the three levels and across their relationships. The historical, political and socio-economic realties in these schools determined the complexities of the needs. In schools where local level politics were complex, beside the purchase of equipment and infra-structure needs, the intervention was effectively blocked.

The case studies and the Schollar report (1998) have confirmed the argument that initially EQUIP schools prioritise security and basic equipment. Thus, the early development plans became a wish list of needs, which once again points to the actual state of schools and the needs in schools versus intervention strategies that are born in a political arena not in touch with the realities in the schools.

EQUIP took on a life outside the systems and structures of the DoE at both the meso and micro levels. Although the reasons for this as described above may have been inevitable at the time, it became almost impossible to bring the intervention back into the system. The consequence is that the partners outside the GDE needed to drive and implement the intervention on their own. At the school level they were able to achieve some of their goals if they were allowed entry into the school, as was the case in Funda Secondary. However, where entry was blocked, as in Jabula High, implementation was very difficult.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE EAZ CASE STUDY

5.1 INTRODUCTION

As with EQUIP, the EAZ strategy was also born out of a need to address political imperatives of the time. By the second term of office of the government, policy, implementation and visible indicators of change became a major challenge. Many of the new policies did not reach the implementation stage and state departments such as the DoE were under pressure to show transformation at the level of schools. At this time the public were losing confidence in the education system as the number of dysfunctional schools and lack of accountability increased.

Thus far, all approaches to school reform had been 'soft' approaches, providing resources and capacity building, but with very little impact on the school organisation or teaching and learning. The second term of office of the government needed to address the demand for delivery and accountability in all areas of government, including education. The new National Minister of Education, Kader Asmal (1999), launched a new policy of reform in education. The 'Tirisano' policy statement highlighted all aspects of non-delivery and dysfunction in schools and education systems, and laid the ground for the DoE to focus on accountability and delivery. Asmal (1999) described education and training as having major weaknesses and carrying 'deadly baggage' from the past. He said that large parts of the system were seriously dysfunctional and he sanctioned the need to take drastic steps to improve conditions in schools. He argued that some schools may require extraordinary steps to normalise the situation (Asmal, 2000).

This was the call taken up by the newly appointed MEC of Education in Gauteng, who initiated the 'Education Action Zone' (EAZ) programme. The MEC had a clear mandate to increase visibility of actions and accelerate delivery, especially in schools, and this formed the basis of his initial plans. He had to tackle specific problems of discipline with teachers and learners and needed to change public perception and restore confidence in public schools, especially those that had been declared dysfunctional.

This second term of office required visible signs of delivery of the state agenda, and the Gauteng MEC for Education made a clear distinction between the mandates of the first term of office of the ANC and the second:

> *But she* [the previous provincial minister of education] *had a particular mandate from the ANC, we must change the policy, and my mandate was we must hit the ground we must start making a difference.* (EZe1)

In the first term his predecessor needed to focus on the establishment of policies for the new government, but the second phase required visible signs of delivery and change. The MEC of Education, in this statement, targets two issues that were visible indicators of schools' performance:

> *We are not going to debate the issue of whether matric*[7] *is viable or not, we know in terms of our reform strategy matric will change. But the mandate now is to go and get the best percentage. The second one was there were lots of problems with regard to discipline – You had to go in there and be visible in the way you deal with discipline. There is a perception that teachers in public schools are lazy and always absent they don't account etc. So my mandate was quite clear. It was not to re-write policy and do a lot of policy work. While policy is dynamic in public process I would rely on others ... Now the next period was accelerated delivery. Go and dothis make sure we achieve this; make sure this happens.* (EZe1)

The first visible indication of success in education was the matriculation results, by which the success of the schools and education departments were being measured. The second was the visible signs of schools that were not functional, and this included discipline of both educators and learners. In his approach, the MEC alluded to the use of force and pressure to bring about 'delivery.' The reform strategy required at a political level needed to address the political mandate of the time. The imperatives were clear: quick, swift and highly visible action was needed to bring about a semblance of compliance and functionality in otherwise dysfunctional schools. The lead in this initiative was taken by the national Minister himself, in his swoop on public schools early in the school year. The

[7] Matriculation examination

MEC of Education in Gauteng needed to embark on high-level intervention targeting the identified problems in schools.

5.2 ENVIRONMENT ONE: MACRO-LEVEL

A number of issues are associated with Environment One. The conceptual design and the envisaged strategy begin in this environment. Therefore, the course and the destiny of the improvement strategy is determined by deliberations and decisions made in environment one.

5.2.1 Intervention, Initiation and Formation

The MEC was caught between two paradigms, one that promoted collaboration and democratic local level action and the other that was emerging. Coupled with these was a need to apply pressure and demand accountability and delivery at the local level. He explored the first paradigm by deliberating on the EAZ policy as conceptualised in England and announced in June 1998. The English model was based on partnerships between local communities and private and voluntary alliances, and was meant to engage and 'empower' local communities to take ownership of their own school improvement initiatives (Dickson & Power, 2001).This model attracted the attention of the MEC as he realised that, in addition to the dysfunctional conditions in schools, many of these schools were located in very poor socio-economic environments and a partnership in collaboration might provide added resources to the identified schools. He recognised the need to uplift not just the school but also the community and the environment of the school, but the challenges were complex:

> *... you can't have an intervention just at a school because various conditions impact on how a school functions and we know that a large concentration of challenges in education are in poor communities.* (EZe1)

He therefore saw merit in the English EAZ model being used to address social injustices. Like his predecessor, he also recognised the democratic potential of establishing multi-agency participation in managing and leading school reforms at the local level. The ideal would have been the creation of multi-agency forums in the identified zones to design, manage, fund and implement school reforms that would involve community structures,

parents, business and schools. There was clear evidence of commitment to this concept in early meetings held with the Council of Churches, various religious organisations and business. He introduced the EAZ concept and terminology which would translate into a locally structured EAZ reform design.

The MEC was convinced that the English EAZ model, based on a partnership of all stakeholders at the local level of the school, would be an ideal intervention in poorly performing schools in the Gauteng context. Power and Gewirtz, (2001) described the EAZ (policy) in England as targeted to address three forms of social injustice, economic, cultural and associational. The MEC wished to target all three forms, plaguing schools in dysfunctional contexts. The EAZ policy required the drawing together of diverse constituencies to develop and implement local plans for school improvement and the MEC began to mobilise all relevant constituencies to contribute to school reform at a local level. Easen (2000) described the EAZ approach in England as an example of the growing recognition that deep-rooted problems with both economic and social dimensions required a multi-agency approach based upon community collaboration. This was despite this approach having been questioned by critics who argued that the establishment of the EAZ model in England was a political strategy in which the state was no longer the sole provider of solutions. It was intended to enable and empower people and communities in the development and delivery of policies, and favoured a growing trend of bringing together the private and public sectors by opening up to partnerships (Jones & Bird, 2000). In the South African context, a similar trend of drawing public sector and communities into the delivery of policy and in addressing issues of social was the aim of the state. The South African Schools Act. (SASA, Act 84 of 1996) supported a local level community-based involvement by establishing school-based governance structures.

The principles of school-based governance in the SASA allowed local level structures a significant role in policy development and implementation at school level. The Tirisano principles, in its third priority, also ascribed to partnerships of stakeholders for the delivery of education. The MEC thus had the relevant policies that allowed him to consider an EAZ model as initiated in England. This strategy could play a significant role in legitimating local management and accountability in collective planning for school improvement. His early visions of an EAZ model in Gauteng were based on this multi-agency approach, and he explored the possibility of drawing various stakeholders into a discussion on reforms in

schools. He had several meetings with business partners and leaders of religious organisations to discuss possible strategies of collaboration:

> *I conducted a whole lot of interviews with people I would call education activists- parents learners, educators, business and religious leaders and then I spent almost a whole day with trade unionists in the province* (EZe1)

The MEC met with all possible stakeholders and spent several days meeting unionists as he paved the way for collaboration and support for his intended plans. The MEC envisaged a school improvement strategy that imitated the English model and embraced the democratic potential of drawing together business sector and other stakeholders to initiate reforms and demand accountability at the local level of the school. This model was designed to give the private sector and business the opportunity of making more than a financial contribution to education (Dickson, Halpin, Power, Telford & Whitty, 2001).

Hallgarten and Watling, (2001) in their exploration of the impact of private sector involvement in EAZ zones in England, pointed to limited if not low levels of private sector participation because of various factors. It was evident that the private sector was not ready or did not have the time and commitment for this kind of spontaneous support of schools. The question was whether the South African educational context, including the relevant stakeholders and corporate partners, were ready for this new wave of collective accountability for school improvement. The MEC knew that the English EAZ model would serve many of the key ideals underpinning the democratic principles of the state, however his final decision was informed by immediate pressures for visible change.

5.2.2. Pressure and Accountability versus Collaboration

As the pressure for visible signs of intervention increased, the MEC agonised over the need to bring about quick compliance in schools that were not functioning adequately. He needed to decide between a model that would resemble the English EAZ model and bring together a number of stakeholders, both private and public, to support school reform. This model would be ideal but would require time and, as with previous soft approaches, might not bring about the desired results. An alternate approach would be an extreme model that identified a ‘crack’ unit to analyse problems in schools and bring about compliance and

functionality. In order to achieve visible and quick compliance, the MEC slipped to the latter, with focus on improving the matriculation results:

> *I had to look at what the ANC focus is around education. And I went through an analysis of the policy making process since nineteen ninety four. But what was more important was to go out there and interact with people who knew [in] [OMIT] the terrain.*(EZe1)

His interaction with people on the ground and the national imperatives made him realise the need to bring about quick, visible changes in schools that were under-performing. He began a process of analysis of the key problems in the education arena of the province by talking to various stakeholders, and so became more aware of the need for the intervention to address issues of local level non compliance. He justified his move away from the collaborative approach of the initial EAZ model as he claimed that one of the critical things was to learn from various models and create what he referred to as:

> … *an indigenous model to fit our circumstances.*(EZe1)

The MEC swayed between a localised collaborative intervention strategy that allowed accountability to be decentralised and an intervention that would be swift and highly visible, placing top-down pressure on schools to deliver.

He was also under pressure to address the two immediate imperatives of the national ministry of education. The first was the Tirisano mandate of the national minister, which called for a multi-agency approach but emphasised 'zero tolerance' of schools that were dysfunctional because of non-compliance or a lack of discipline, delivery and accountability. The second imperative was to improve the matriculation results. The schools that achieved below twenty percent were targeted as needing urgent intervention. It was clear that the strategy would involve pushing up the matriculation pass rates in these schools and this imperative meant addressing issues of delivery and accountability.

The need to address these two imperatives forced the MEC's early thinking away from the EAZ strategy, as it was conceptualised in UK England. He was not very clear about the new design and acknowledged the need for the new design to address the two imperatives above. He examined previous intervention strategies, such as the Culture of Learning and Teaching campaign (COLT) and the EQUIP strategy. He needed to establish what had worked or had not worked in the previous attempts at reform:

> *Well when one looks at the COLTS campaign, one of the weaknesses, I think it was almost like saying I will give schools all the resources, we will give all the support and then we expect it to work That is why I am saying the other leg which was very important was creating conditions for policies to work but at the same time also making sure that it works. So that is why we said in terms of the Education Action Zones there will be unannounced visits into schools.*(EZe1)

He realised that the soft approaches of the past had not brought about the desired changes and the statement that this strategy would involve 'unannounced visits' was a clear departure from past strategies. It also challenged the status quo created by the new democracy in schools. 'Unannounced visits' would resemble those of perpetrators of the apartheid system and this approach would cause major contestations. The MEC, however, realised that if the 'soft approaches' were not working, then the pressure and the demand for accountability would be required. One of the initial members of the EAZ team remembered the MECs first instructions as "Go in there. Stabilise the schools".

So, in the conceptualisation of an EAZ model in Gauteng, pressure and the demand for accountability underpinned the design. This shifted the model from a localised multi-agency approach towards a high-pressured top-down one. The political mandate that needed to be addressed locally was to achieve stability and functionality in education departments and schools swiftly.

5.2.3 EAZ Becomes a Top-Down, High–Pressured Intervention

At this stage the MEC supported an approach that would be centrally controlled with a strong presence of authority and power. As he moved away from a collaborative approach to school reform he began to talk about the appointment of a special task team of selected personnel to undertake the improvement strategy in the EAZ schools. The local model would therefore be a top-down model based on pressure and accountability, but one that supported collaborative structures. The MEC took his cue from the national Minister of Education, who in his briefing to parliament in February 2000 said:

> We have already embarked on an offensive to get our schools on track by visiting them on the first day of schooling. This offensive has yielded positive results already ... The MECs are continuing the campaign to get schools working, and have

> from time to time been dealing with dysfunctional schools, in some cases taking strong measures to get schools right …(Kader Asmal:2000)

The Minister, in this briefing clearly, opened the way for a top-down, high-pressured approach to school improvement, and to an approach that would break with traditional approaches, by his words '*extraordinary measures.'* This approach supported the view, expressed by Christie (1998), that the unobtrusive measures of the past would not work in schools where there had been a total breakdown. She recommended a group of facilitators to work with all stakeholders in the schools so that they could reassert teaching and learning. However, she warned against merely 'rescuing' schools but recommended that the intervention be more substantial. The MEC decided on a strategy that would place pressure on schools and demand immediate compliance and order.

The MEC still faced the dilemma of introducing a top-down approach in a climate that had come to accept a more collaborative, bottom-up strategy. There was no clarity on how the collaborative, multi-agency approach would work with the top-down model. The MEC, however, continued to promote both approaches, albeit he began to articulate an approach that would require pressure to bring about compliance and functionality in schools:

> *But you see in bigger townships and informal settlements you cannot be soft. You need to be a bit hard. Where teachers come in drunk to school or are not turning up or coming at nine and leaving at eleven*.(EZe1)

The MEC articulated these mandates to the provincial senior management for further conceptualisation and implementation. The bureaucratic leaders needed to make sense of the vision of the MEC and they did this by analyzing their own capacity and resources.

5.2.4 Bureaucratic Interpretation of the Political Brief

Brodkin (as quoted in Palumbo & Calista, 1990), argues that where policy directives contain competing objectives or are vague, then the bureaucrats responsible for interpreting the policy do so according to their discretion. Clear from the MEC's directives for the implementation of EAZ were three main objectives: firstly, that the targeted schools had to comply with the norms of a functional school; secondly, that the matriculation results in

these schools be improved; and thirdly, that these schools develop an ethos of teaching and learning through a more collaborative, multi-agency process with a range of stakeholders.

This conceptual design had to be interpreted and an implementation process set up by the bureaucratic structures in the GDE. It was clear that there were contradictory objectives and the bureaucracy needed to make strategic decisions. The first issue that concerned the bureaucracy was the stringent time frames. The directives were received during the latter part of 1999 and systems structures and processes needed to be set up for implementation on the first day of school in the following year. There was a great deal of pressure in the GDE to accomplish this target. In designing an implementation strategy there was a need to focus on the gap between the policy intent and the bureaucratic action, which implied that the bureaucracy had to design an implementation strategy for local level delivery in response to the policy directives. Some of the key issues that had to be considered by the DoE would be the multiplicity of implementation obstacles, such as the complexity of the organisation structures and systems, incentives for local level compliance, inadequate bureaucratic resources, inadequate upper level control over local level discretion and the pressure of the timeframes (Brodkin, as quoted in Palumbo & Calista, 1990). The pressure on the GDE was clearly indicated by this senior official responsible for initiating the strategy:

> *Well look I just felt that I think the MEC had come up with the idea in October or November nineteen ninety nine and we basically just had a few months to put something together. What I thought I'd do was just to outline what the problems were with the various interventions we had and what was the best way to put this one together.* (EZ Po1)

Early implementation plans were not clear as many decisions were made at a series of meetings. An initial team of GDE officials met and attempted to interpret the political directives and develop a strategy. Conceptual issues were dealt with at this meeting of key officials from the provincial office. The meeting chaired by the deputy director general recorded the following decision:

> The concept of Education Action Zones is one aimed at identifying under-performing schools and devising action plans to turn them into functional or well performing schools. … To all intents and purposes, these schools will be removed

from the mainstream and be subjected to special measures… (Swartz, undated conceptual document).

These statements outlined the interpretation of the brief by the bureaucratic system which guided the implementation of the intervention. It was clear that the two main objectives were: to achieve functionality in the dysfunctional schools and improve learner performance. The other decision made by this team was that these schools would be removed and subjected to measures by a special team to be named 'the EAZ team.' The next step was to establish this special team, and in addressing its composition it also became clear that the team, unlike the English model, would not be made up a multi-agency, site-based one. The reasons given by this meeting for this deviation from the English model was recorded as follows:

> *Conditions in South African education and in Gauteng in particular are not conducive to adopting either the UK* [sic] *or French model of EAZ. Firstly, while there may be a high level of community interest in the upliftment of quality and standards at many of our schools, most of our school communities appear to be completely unready or uncommitted to take such a major task unless direct leadership is provided by the state. Secondly, none of our dysfunctional schools are able, or willing, to take on such a major venture, as is indicated by the less-than-successful COLTS and other programmes.* (Swartz, undated conceptual document)

The argument led by these decisions indicated that the bureaucratic structures did not support a multi-agency localised school improvement strategy. They opted for a state-controlled, top-down intervention. There was agreement that school communities were not ready to take on the responsibility for school reform, and both bureaucratic and political leaders realised that 'soft' approaches were not working:

> *In fact we intended it to be hard-lined because these schools had been performing poorly for three or more years and had done very little to improve themselves. The other strategies so far were soft ones providing resources, training etc but they did not stress accountability, so I think the levels of frustration had been building up in the communities as nothing seemed to be done. It made sense at this point to go in hard and give very little choice. I think the conditions were right at the time.* (EZ Po1)

There was an acknowledgement that many interventions thus far had produced little visible change in schools or results produced by the school. A conscious effort to avoid the problems encountered by previous efforts resulted in the call for a strategy with a dedicated team of officials to be allocated to the identified dysfunctional schools. There was a sense that communities that had been frustrated by years of non-delivery in schools would accept a high-pressured approach, so the 'time was right.'

In a strategic framework document and business plan, the first co-ordinator of the EAZ strategy stated its mission as:

> *The GDE is committed to turning around dysfunctional schools, especially those public secondary schools including their feeder schools in the nine declared Education Action Zones within the GDE and Tirisano framework.*(Fax to District Directors from Charles Nwaila, n.d.).

This mission statement set the stage for a top-down intervention into the nine identified zones. The next challenge that faced the senior officials of the GDE was the location of this intervention. The question was whether it should be set up within the existing systems and structures of the DoE, or whether it should be taken out of the system and given extraordinary powers.

5.2.5 The EAZ Strategy

The final decision taken was that the EAZ team would be located outside the structures of the GDE. Nine education Action Zones were declared, each with a team made up of a project manager and a team of facilitators. The whole project was managed by a senior official in the GDE who reported to the offices of the MEC and the superintendent general of the GDE. The main aims of the project were summarised as follows:

- Ensuring functional management and governance
- Improving attendance of both learners and educators
- Improving punctuality
- Ensuring effective teaching and learning

- Providing additional support for learners preparing for the matriculation examinations.
- Involving all stakeholders including parents
- Improving school culture, work ethics and commitment. (Fax to District Directors from Charles Nwaila, n.d.).

The EAZ team was given the mandate to go into schools and achieve these aims, and the EAZ intervention was placed under the greater Tirisano mandate. The nine Education Action Zones were identified according to geographic location and the number of schools and officials per zone decided upon. Each zone had a leader who would coordinate a team, and the zones were determined by the schools in the area that were not producing the desired results. Secondary schools were those producing less than twenty percent pass rate in the matriculation examinations, mostly in areas of very poor socio-economic conditions.

5.2.6 Structure and Location of the EAZ Team

The structure and location of an intervention strategy is vital to implementation at the various levels. The EAZ team was located in the provincial head office and each team was allocated a number of schools in a zone, so the EAZ team would operate outside existing systems and structures. This location of the EAZ team gave it extraordinary powers, which was a significant departure from the organisational ethos of the newly established principles of democracy that underpinned the DoE. The EAZ team was also given the resources and authority to take swift action in schools:

> *… the team was put together and they were given resources, they were given access to cell phones, cars and they were given the authority, although this was not properly delegated they were given the authority to go into schools to, well it was a kind of shock treatment in many ways to take decisions on the spot as to what to do about the situation and condition in the schools …* (EZT01)

The authority to enter schools without notice and apply pressure was almost revolutionary for the new democracy, though it was not an isolated approach as similar strategies involving high pressure and accountability had been being used in other sectors. The EAZ

team was compared to a task force known as 'the Scorpions,' set up to eradicate crime but later disbanded.

The EAZ team as it was set up did not in any way resemble the structure or location of the EAZ teams as set up in England. Rather, the EAZ teams as identified by the GDE were made up of teams of officials either from districts or schools. In choosing officials for these teams the key objective was the need to apply pressure on schools and to demand compliance and functionality. Thus, the main criterion for selection was the persons' ability to display authority and control:

> *I think I started by being an EAZ project manager myself, we just guessed that we will be looking at the functionality of the school, the type of management in the school and other factors that would make the school to function so we decided to appoint people we knew had the authority or who had the expertise …* (EZ Po1)

Required from the EAZ team were people who could challenge the status quo in schools and who were not afraid to face the opposition or resistance from both unions and from entering and challenging the schools themselves. Although these characteristics may have been a requirement to bring about basic functionality in the schools it was very soon discovered that force without the follow-up support was also a problem. None of the team members interviewed could recall any criteria for their appointment, accept that they were either good managers or very forceful and able to command compliance:

> *The criteria for appointing the team weren't* [sic] *very clear. What we did was appointed people who knew the situation and the conditions, people who could assert the necessary authority because you must keep in mind that school leadership was quite weak at this time. People were afraid of dealing with unions and so on. So you needed strong people who wouldn't be afraid to go into school. Those were some of the criteria. But they weren't really structured criteria. I think interviews were held to set up a team but quite honestly there weren't really any criteria.* (EZ Po1)

The stringent timeframes also resulted in the EAZ team being selected very hurriedly and without clear criteria for selection. Not all persons were credible or had the relevant expertise, and problems soon arose, as observed by a principal:

> *I think a number of the people brought in were not competent enough in terms of dealing with schools.* (EZp2)

In the absence of competence to support and develop schools, some EAZ officials, used their position in power to become aggressive and were soon referred to as 'bullies.'

In the location of the EAZ team and in the authority and power allocated to it, pressure and 'zero tolerance' underpinned the strategy. The MEC and senior management within the bureaucracy considered that many previous school improvement interventions had not worked within the current system and thus located them outside the system. This was a very controversial decision that would be highly contested and challenging. Brodkin (as quoted in Palumbo & Calista, 1990), argued that in trying to understand how politics influences implementation it is essential to consider the contested characteristics of the policy and the weaknesses or obstacles in the institutions charged with resolving them. Locating the EAZ strategy outside the bureaucratic structure was a decision that would evoke many perceptions about the ability and power of the bureaucracy. Locating the EAZ structure outside the normal structure did cause serious tensions in the system, but it also began to challenge operations within it. The MEC acknowledged that the location of the EAZ outside the system was an immediate political response and while it enjoyed political power it would eventually need to be relocated within the system for continuity and sustainability. Strategically, the EAZ intervention was granted high political impetus from the office of the MEC; however there was also a realisation that this could not be a long-term strategy as the political position changes with each election. Despite this realisation, in the following statement he implied that it was strategic for him to lead the project:

> *I think honestly you see from a strategic point of view when we create something as policy you lead from the front but then it's very, very important because we come and go but the civil service remains longer than the politician who comes and goes It is important to infuse that into the Department. Remember we again had to look at the model as to how to sustain this, and how do we develop capacity, how do we make sure we can give the support on an ongoing basis, also how do we make sure that districts get more and more into the picture. Because at the end of the day the civil servants must make sure that this thing happens.* (EAZ Po1)

Almost a year into the EAZ project, increasing pressure from the bureaucracy made the MEC rethink the location of the EAZ intervention. The MEC also realised that sustainability would depend on the structures and systems within the GDE. However, the question to consider is whether the EAZ intervention would have been able to take on the high-pressure, 'zero tolerance' approach if it did not have the direct 'power' from the political location. The following statement by a senior official alluded to the initial location of the EAZ intervention giving it its 'teeth':

> *I think is has the power and pressure, because being in the system means following protocol and this takes time. The response is not quick. But answering straight to the MEC, he took immediate decisions. Action, immediately…* (EZDo4)

The EAZ team was given the space to cut through bureaucratic red-tape, and so was able to increase the reaction time to issues in schools. The initial location of the EAZ strategy outside the system definitely gave it added impetus, even though it caused tensions in the system. Both the power derived from the political office of the MEC and the ability to bypass bureaucratic processes gave the EAZ strategy its initial impetus and legitimacy.

The location and authority given to the EAZ intervention did raise problems within the organisation. Fleisch, (2002) noted that the GDE, like many other public structures, was based on the organisational culture of collective leadership and thus collective decision-making, which made it difficult to sell an idea that was not born through the collective process. The result was a lack of support by many in the system. A senior district official who had not been consulted expressed her anger:

> *… we were not even involved in the selection of the teams, we were totally excluded…* **(**EZDo1)

Another senior official referred to the EAZ intervention as a political strategy that ignored bureaucratic processes.

> *That laid credence to the perception that it was a political strategy and not a line function. Ya, I guess also the way that the teams acted apparently led to situation were other structures began to distance themselves.* (EZ Po1)

This resentment in the Department resulted in many officials who should have been agents of the intervention distancing them from the implementation. Another argument for the

negative response from officials in the GDE may have been that they realised they lacked the relevant authority or power to demand compliance from schools that had been in their districts.

5.3 ENVIRONMENT TWO: MESO-LEVEL

A number of factors impacted on the response the EAZ strategy received in environment two. This meso-level environment was responsible for the schools that had been declared EAZ schools.

5.3.1 The Construction of Power and Authority: The EAZ Teams

The EAZ team was located at the provincial head office and this team had power and authority to apply pressure on schools. A senior manager of a district argued that the power that the EAZ team had was similar to that given to the then highest crime fighting unit in the country:

> *... when it started it was referred to as the Scorpions…* (EZDO1)

In understanding where this authority and power was coming from it became clear that the location of the team at the head-office and the close involvement of the MEC was the source of power and authority, as was clear from this remark by a senior manager:

> *Yaah, they had the power from the MEC…* (EZDo1)

The power assigned to the agency of implementation, in this case the EAZ team, was closely aligned to the political power and the central power of the bureaucracy.

A school principal who was interviewed said he accepted the authority of the Education Zone officials because the mandate came from the MEC.

The EAZ team was allowed power and authority over and above officials in the system. They were allowed to fast track certain processes, such as labour action against deviant principals and educators, and were given the power to respond to the needs of the selected schools without having to go through the normal, at most times very lengthy, bureaucratic processes. They were given the authority to make unannounced visits to schools, although, this was later contested by the teachers' unions:

> *The MEC would say; 'Just go in there and stabilize the schools. I don't care what it takes.'* (EZP2)

The EAZ team was given the resources, the power and authority to enter schools to assess situations and to make quick decisions on how to restore order. 'Shock treatment' indicates the authority to put pressure on and make immediate demands of the school to restore functionality. The MEC also understood that soft approaches would not work in townships that needed to be 'ignited' into action.

> *That is why I say we needed a two pronged approach. If you look at EQUIP it was a lot of training a lot of support with passion but it did not ignite the school. In many cases it did not work although it did work in school in Mamalodi but in this school they had a mentor who spent a great deal of time in the school and has been part of all of the processes in the school. But you see in bigger townships and informal settlements you cannot just be soft. You need to be a bit hard. Where teachers come in drunk to school or are not turning up or are coming in at nine and leaving at eleven. Now I realized we needed to be hard but also provide support*. (EAZP01)

The MEC was aware of previous intervention strategies such as EQUIP that failed to make fundamental changes in many schools. He was also aware of the social breakdown and the lack of accountability that plagued many township schools. This high pressure approach was also welcomed by communities plagued with failure. The schools were stuck and the pressure and authority helped move them out of a stagnant situation. There was very little room for resistance when the intervention was supported by the community structures:

> *As I said, people in EAZ teams used a strong-handed attitude to deal with matters…* (EZDo2)

The conditions and continuous failure in schools allowed for the strategy to be accepted by the community, and they welcomed the visible signs of functionality and stability in these schools. This co-operation from schools and community was also the result of a high political presence and high visibility of the MEC early in the implementation of the EAZ intervention. However, this new force of power was unleashed on a system that was beginning to enjoy democracy. Those who had dedicated most of their lives to eradicating force and coercion reacted in different ways to the force of the EAZ team. The acceptance

of this kind of extreme power and authority also had major implications on the existing systems and structures. There was an assertion that the EAZ strategy was not accepted by many people in the GDE, even at more senior levels:

> *I think one of the clear obvious mistakes was that while preparing for the implementation of the strategy the tight time frames, the focus was on putting a team together and getting them ready to go into schools. Too little time allocated to discussing the strategy with other structures in head office and districts so that from the start they probably felt excluded from the processes.* (EZe2)

While the stringent timeframes were blamed for the lack of collaboration, many decisions were taken without much collective negotiations, which led to further alienation of the strategy by senior persons in the organisation. This approach also challenged the organisational culture of collective leadership and thus collective decision-making. In a newly established organisation based on democratic principles it became difficult to sell an idea that was not born through the collective process. The lack of support by many in the system soon surfaced.

Fleisch (2002) argued that collective leadership and accountability as a management practice, in the DoE, did not necessarily lead to individual accountability. This meant that it was very difficult to hold anyone accountable for the poor performance of schools. The EAZ strategy began to show up the cracks in the system, and the top-down approach did not allow for much collaboration. Many people in the Department were not ready for this high pressure approach and there was a demand for individual accountability, as confirmed in the following comment:

> *Ya I guess also the way that the teams acted apparently led to a situation where other structures began to distance themselves and let's face it I think there were too many people in the Department who were not ready for the hard-line approach.* (EZ Po1)

The design and initiation of the EAZ strategy responded to the political imperatives of the period and the cultural ethos of the organisation determined its route. In this case it can be argued that the EAZ strategy challenged some of the fundamental organisational principles of collaborative decision-making that became synonymous with the new democratic organisational systems, thus alienating many people in the system. A further investigation

of implementation at the meso and micro levels will elucidate how these early decisions determined the role of agency, power and politics at the various levels.

The paradoxes of the EAZ strategy were that they challenged the democratic principles of consultation, ignored all relevant stakeholders in the system, used pressure and demanded accountability, fast tracked bureaucratic processes, and challenged the entire system, yet it succeeded in gaining the attention of both schools and the DoE:

> *It simply means that this time we were able to build public confidence through more short term victories and visibility than there was before.* (EZe1)

There was no doubt that, as a political initiative, the EAZ looked for highly symbolic symbols of change, such as the MEC himself uncovering severe transgressions at many schools. While the district offices may have been aware of the transgressions they did not have the same power or authority to challenge these schools. So, very reluctantly, districts realised that despite their exclusion, the EAZ was necessary to set the stage for them to apply pressure and demand accountability. The debates around the inclusion or exclusion of districts raise issues regarding the status of districts within the system.

5.3.2 Communication and Networks

The special task force or EAZ team swooped into schools without notice. In a fragile democracy, strong dialogue and communication with all stakeholders and communities was a definite prerequisite. Historical memories of 'inspectors' as perpetrators of the apartheid system would be reawakened by unannounced visits of schools. Forceful processes resembled the old regime and the MEC had to ensure that communities in which these schools were located were bought into the programme and understood the need for accountability and pressure in schools.

Many of the targeted schools were located in troubled communities with conflict and dissent. Political engagements and collaboration were necessary to prepare the path for the controversial EAZ strategy that would allow a group of officials to enter schools and demand accountability and compliance. Networks and communication at a political level with local community structures prepared the grounds for the high-pressured, sometimes unannounced entry to these schools.

> *Ya, that was the strategy. In some areas he* [The MEC, Gauteng] *needed to promote us as the EAZ team to show the community and the areas that this is a political initiative, it is not a line function one. So I remember he accompanied us into Tembisa when I was still the area manager of Tembisa. He came early in the morning – at seven o'clock and we stood there at the school until the school started.* (EZ Po1)

Initiating this top-down strategy initially required a strong political presence, however, conditions in schools and the history of continuous failure allowed for the strategy to be accepted by the community. This acceptance was reinforced by the early visible signs of functionality and stability in these schools as a result of the intervention.

Communication with education unions was also a part of the initial processes of planning for this intervention. A major shift in the political climate was the common stand by both communities and unions against non-delivery. A district manager agreed that unions were ready to accept the high-pressured intervention

> *… I think the unions now are also tired of this culture of non delivery, so they supported the district and they actually identified schools that are dysfunctional and reported these to the district there was a total shift from the unions side so they really wanted what is good for learners, so there's a big shift* (EZDo1)

All unions soon accepted the strategy as they began to appreciate the support it provided, except SADTU, the major teacher union.

Establishing communication structures and networks within the GDE were not strong. Each zone had a coordinator and a zone team but the communication and the networks between teams were problematic. The reporting system to the central structures was not clearly indicated, resulting in direct communication to the political office further alienating bureaucratic structures. These were some of the initial design issues that would later impact on implementation

The role and involvement of district and other directorates in the GDE in the initiation stage was unclear. There seemed to be very little involvement with structures in districts during the early stages of the EAZ programme, which lead to tensions, to be addressed later in the programme.

5.3.3 Resources

The Education Action Zone programme was allocated a specific budget with the flexibility to bypass bureaucratic processes in its use. The budget was used to provide resources such as transport, telephones and computers to the EAZ, teams and a substantial amount was used for development of both the EAZ teams and stakeholders in the selected schools. The budget was also used to provide incentives to schools in the form of equipment and facilities for both staff and learners. A portion was used to promote and introduce sport and cultural activities in schools where these were absent. The resources were also used as incentives to respond to needs in the school that would not have been addressed in the normal budget, as districts needed to prioritise needs of the school.

> *… because remember if you are an intervention programme you are also creating a budget to support and fund that programme. Now with the districts they did not have that type of resources they needed to fix toilets or they needed to do paving and other more urgent things and everything took time. But the EAZ could provide rapid response, we cut a lot of red tape to make things happen. If you go to a school and the roof is about to collapse and the windows need repairs these were done immediately.* (EZe1)

The rapid response of the EAZ team to the needs of the school would further alienate the districts and the schools, as they were receiving immediate responses to requests that had been made to districts over a long time. The human resources allocated to the project were also sufficient in numbers; however the skills varied and ranged from very weak to strong.

The most important resources allocated to the EAZ team were power and authority over and above officials in the system. They were given the power to respond to the needs of the selected schools without having to go through the normal, at most times very lengthy, bureaucratic processes. They were given the authority to make unannounced visits into schools. Time was one of the resources that was not sufficient in the developmental stages of the programme, and even less at the implementation phase. The result was that a great deal of the planning and decisions on processes and procedure were made in the field. This was done in many instances, in the words of an official, by ‘trial and error.’

5.3.4 Compliance Mechanisms

The design of the EAZ programme allowed for pressure and support to be used to achieve accountability and compliance in schools. The MEC himself used a great deal of pressure by swooping into schools and demanding compliance to the policies of the school:

> *... the MEC marched from class to class admonishing students who were not in uniform*
>
> *the MEC had the misfortune of discovering a bottle of brandy on one student*
>
> *the MEC labelled the schools as the 'worst performing school' and threatened to close it down'* (*The Teacher/Mail and Guardian,* February 2001).

The visible presence of the MEC and the support of community structures gave the EAZ teams authority and power to demand compliance and bring about functionality and stability in all targeted schools from day one of the school year. Their initial goals were very clear; they targeted compliance, especially regarding issues such as teacher and learner attendance and late-coming, all schools having a functional timetable, no learners or teachers allowed to leave the school premises during a working day, and other organisational issues.

The EAZ team was able to take swift labour action against persistent defaulters, sending out a clear message that if there was no compliance, very decisive action would be taken. It was during this initial stage that the EAZ team gained a great deal of both positive and negative media coverage. They dragged both learners and educators from bars and shebeens during school hours, and uncovered illegal and fraudulent practices in schools. Three teachers in a school in Katlehong (a township in Gauteng) were suspended for issuing learners who had failed with fake reports. These teachers had been involved in issuing fraudulent reports for some time and were exposed by the EAZ officials. (Gauteng Communication and Information System for the GDE, 20 January 2001). Fear of being exposed soon moved schools to ensure a semblance of order and compliance.

The EAZ initiative did receive a semblance of compliance that many other initiatives did not, but this could not be sustained because districts had been excluded. The role of districts and the need for them to eventually take back the schools after the three-year period and provide continued support were not considered in the early stages.

5.3.5 Inclusion or Exclusion of Districts

Districts had direct jurisdiction over schools, and most school improvement and implementation literature identified districts as crucial to successful implementation. However, districts were excluded from the initial plans of the EAZ strategy. In opening up the 'Black Box' of implementation, it is important to examine the role of agency, power and politics that will determine what lies behind decisions made. The initial decision that senior managers had to make was whether district offices would have sufficient power and authority to enforce an intervention aimed at applying pressure and demanding accountability with 'zero-tolerance' of non-compliance. There was a growing concern that districts did not have sufficient resources or power to manage the intervention strategy. This was identified by both the political leaders and the bureaucratic leaders:

> *The concern around districts was twofold; one was that the districts may not be properly capacitated in terms of human resources as well as skills to take on the strategy. Secondly, resources will still have to be controlled from a central point because this intervention required additional resources. It required quick interventions, quick decisions, for example disciplinary cases regarding teachers and principals required quick action. Districts would not have the mechanisms to implement. So I think with those shortcomings in the district the obvious decision then was that it would have to be managed centrally. Part of the other problem we had was that districts were not equally capacitated or equally strong. The broad strategy itself would be watered down. In any case you would still require a central monitoring process to ensure that the strategy was running well. So with those arguments I felt it would be best to manage it from a central point.* (EZe2)

The argument raised by this senior official was that districts were over-burdened and they did not have a full staffing capacity. Many district officials also lacked the necessary skills to give schools in trouble the kind of focused attention possible through the EAZ strategy. They also suggested that districts did not have the 'mechanisms' to take swift action, which implies that although districts were closest to schools and best placed to lead the intervention, they did have the necessary power and authority to lead a high pressured strategy. No matter what reasons were provided, these decisions began to raise questions

about existing systems, power and politics within the organisation. This remark by the MEC is also indicative of the lack of confidence in the district offices:

> *Now there is perception that I think the perception is that confidence in the districts is not that high. A lot of people gain their perception or opinion not necessarily in terms of service but in terms of visibility …* (EZ Po1)

Therefore, although districts were geographically located close to schools with the potential to support, monitor and serve as agents of change, this cannot be achieved without the relevant power and authority. Issues of confidence, competence, power and authority of district offices was raised by research reports on districts (*What the research says, paper* presented at district conference, Mpumalanga, 7-9 June 1999). Questions regarding the structure and purpose of districts within the organisational system needed to be explored in order to examine whether they had the relevant power and authority.

5.3.6 The EAZ Strategy versus Districts

In examining the EAZ strategy, it was important to examine the multiplicity of factors at the implementation level so as to understand how an initiative such as a school improvement intervention was given concrete meaning by the various actors through their actions. The study of implementation processes needs to focus on links and interchanges among layers in the organisation (Scheirer & Griffith, 1990). It was important to understand the interchange between the initiation process and the implementation process at the meso-level and even more imperative was the need to understand the interface between the meso-level implementers and micro-level activities. It was also important to remember that the implementation process is not a linear process from initiation to practice.

At an initial meeting regarding the location of the EAZ strategy, the Deputy Director General of the GDE deliberated between two possible scenarios, the first of which was that the districts become the implementing agency of the intervention and that head office should not be seen as the ‘strong arm’ of the Department. The second scenario supported the appointment of a central EAZ team managed from the provincial head office with a provincial manager, project managers and a team of specialists in each of the key target areas (Swartz, n.d). This second option led to the appointment of a provincial EAZ team.

The entire process was carried out without the knowledge or involvement of districts, and the organisational relationship between the EAZ team and the district offices received little attention during the initial period of implementation of the intervention. The lack of capacity and resources was given as the main reason for the decision to exclude districts, but this needs to be explored further. In the words of Jansen (2001:48), "there is much more going on in policy development and implementation than resources and capacity," and non-implementation of reforms cannot always be blamed on a lack of resources and capacity.

When examining the fidelity between policy and practice it is sometimes necessary to understand the role of politicians to achieve legitimacy rather than to change practice. The statement that districts did not have the mechanisms for swift action implied that the practice in districts was either too slow or that districts did not have the legitimate power to respond to schools. The following comment by a district director indicated the frustration of districts:

> *I'm powerless I . . . I can't even take my deputies to a workshop, I must first get permission.* (EZDo1)

The role and status of districts needed serious interrogation if it became necessary to mandate an external team to undertake tasks that should have been within the mandate of districts. Another district director made it clear that with additional resources and power she would have been able to undertake her own school improvement intervention:

> *For me to make things happen in the poorly performing schools I would have really liked to have a pool of human resources and physical resources to do our work…*
>
> *… districts are not legislated anywhere so we have no power…(EZDo2)*

The additional resources given to the EAZ team as articulated by an EAZ team official highlights the frustrations and tensions caused by the intervention:

> *Things happened faster you know, with us having a political mandate. For instance, if we found an educator to be transgressing seriously, we charge that person you know. That charge would be speeded up and that kind of thing. Whereas if it had gone through the district it wouldn't mean much. When we call for the additional delivery of the LTSM* [learning and teaching support material], *it would*

happen much sooner than what the district would be able to do. Like you know, those kind of things.(EZo1)

The decision to place the EAZ team outside the organisational system, whether made intentionally or unintentionally, needed to be understood against the backdrop of the political and organisational imperatives of the time. Jansen (2001) referred to this period after 1994 as a 'flurry of policy' being replaced by a 'flurry of implementation talk,' implying that implementation was going to be the political imperative of this period. The EAZ strategy in response to political imperatives advocated the use of pressure to ensure compliance and implementation. That the districts did not have the capacity to demand compliance from schools in their jurisdiction questions the very existence of districts. While it was understood that districts were established during the early years of democracy, based on an open collaborative political culture and climate, at some point they should have gained sufficient legitimacy and authority to command compliance.

In interrogating further reasons for the establishment of an EAZ team, it can be argued that there were factors in the existing organisational climate that did not allow for the high-pressured approach of the EAZ, or simply that districts did not have the necessary power or legitimacy to approach schools in this way. However, this perception was denied by a senior manager:

There was a perception that the EAZ team had more power and was considered to be a politically established structure. But I don't think it was that, the districts at the time were basically overloaded. In the normal line function they were already overloaded…(EAZ02)

It could not be denied that districts were facing resource shortages and an overload, and they may not have been able to give these dysfunctional schools the concentrated targeted and focused attention that the EAZ teams were able to give them. The EAZ strategy was not only initiated as a political imperative but it was also driven from the political offices.

5.3.7 Local Level Politics and Climate

An interesting argument presented by a senior EAZ official about the exclusion of districts was that one of the reasons for not placing the EAZ strategy in districts was that the work

required the ability to work with local political groups and communities. He suggested that most of the district officials did not have a strong political background or knowledge or sufficient political status:

> *Now a lot of it has to do with we how we could work with political groups within communities. And I think that's part of the problem that we recently had. Most of them* [in districts] *did not have any political background.* (EZp2)

The argument presented here suggested that the climate at the local level was highly politicised, as entry to schools and support for them had to be negotiated at local political structures. This may have been one of the results of a recently acquired democracy that was still suspicious of state structures. It was going to take much longer for structures such as the district office to acquire legitimacy from both the schools and the community. The exclusion of the district offices from the EAZ strategy may have been a strategic political decision. Driving the initiative from the office of the MEC and the head of department gave it the political thrust and status that very few would question.

The EAZ team, with the authority from the MEC's political office, was positioned to take on a high-pressured intervention in schools. The political climate was ready and even unions could not deny that the initiative was achieving very quick visible results. The provincial secretary of the teacher unions, SADTU, quoted by Grey and Kuzwayo (2001) stated that:

> *… he had a gripe with the Education Action Zones (EAZs), a strategy the Gauteng Department of Education (GDE) devised to target underperforming schools and bring in outside support to turn them around. Ngwenya's criticism was that "the theory and philosophy are worth embracing, but what has happened is that they've unleashed a crack unit to bully schools". His view was echoed by Mike Myburgh from another union NAPTOSA, who adds, "What we needed is a cooperative, not a bullying, approach.*

There was a caution from the unions that the newly established democratic principles of the country needed to be protected and unions needed to protect the system from lapsing into the harsh control of the past. The response that this intervention was bringing about stability in schools could not be denied, and this may have been a reason unions were not

as vociferous in the protests as they had been in the past. Schools had been dysfunctional for too long and soft approaches were not working.

5.3.8 The District Response

The 'implementation' literature clearly pointed to districts as the key role-players in the implementation process, especially in school-improvement initiatives. The school improvement literature argues that sustainability, institutionalisation and support are key to any school improvement strategy, and the districts played an important role in creating the environment for schools to achieve these goals. In reviewing 'The Rand Change Agent Study,' McLaughlin (1991) stressed the importance of district and site leadership commitment to the reform project. She argues that special projects or reforms that focus on single issues or inputs ignore the systemic interconnected conditions that influence practice in the school, and that reforms need to maintain a system orientation so that interventions may be sustained and on-going. In analysing the EAZ strategy one needs to examine whether system needed an uncharacteristic strategy that complied with neither accepted norms of implementation nor of school improvement.

Districts resented the lack of inclusion, and the EAZ strategy began without support from districts:

> *I think the district should have been told that this programme was coming, we should have had a voice right from the beginning, we should been included in the conceptualization.* (EZDo1)

> *Well it's centralised control, makes it extremely difficult for us. There's no awareness about the differences in district.* (EZDo2)

The above comments from senior managers of districts displayed the anger of districts at being excluded. They began to question the authority and power that they lacked as districts. Issues about the status of districts raised concerns, especially if they were to be regarded as the conduit between provincial departments of education and schools. Districts were not established within any legislative framework, but were extensions of the provincial office with delegated powers and functions:

> *… the districts are decentralized and not empowered and then we are expected to be running, supporting, managing Section Twenty One schools. These schools have a degree of autonomy that districts do not have as we are not Section Twenty One*. (EZDo1)

Schools that acquire Section 21 status, according to SASA, have the legal authority and power to make decisions, but districts do not enjoy the same legal status. The argument raised by this senior manager has major implications for the system as the apparent decentralised status given to districts can be reversed at any time, as is apparent in the exclusion of districts from the EAZ strategy. Districts for the first time began to examine the system and their role. That the source of power and authority came from the political office was beginning to impact on the bureaucracy and the way in which they operated. The EAZ team with its authority and power was beginning to gain credibility in the schools, and was able to respond to issues in schools. However, an EAZ provincial coordinator interpreted this as a lack of delivery and support from districts to schools:

> *To the eyes of the schools EAZ had taken over their operations completely. Because the schools openly said they would prefer to be run by the EAZ because the districts had not done anything for them for a number of years.* (EAZp1)

Tension in the system, as in this case a perceived tension between the districts and the EAZ team, was quickly picked up at all levels and caused serious erosions on the legitimacy of the system:

> *There was no relationship there, the EAZ didn't know what the district was doing and the district didn't know what the EAZ was doing. Somewhere along we got the idea that somebody is fighting for position or recognition*. (EZp1)

This remark made by a school principal is an indication that tensions between the EAZ team and the district office may have caused greater complications and undermined the sustainability of the intervention.

However, not all districts saw the EAZ intervention as a threat. One of the district senior managers had this to say about the EAZ approach:

To the district, as much as it was imposed and we were not involved, we were not even involved in the selections of the teams we were totally excluded but then we need to be realistic to say did it achieve its outcomes…

… when it started it was referred to as 'Scorpions', some call it 'skop skiet and donor' but it was a good programme and also when you look at the fruits of the EAZ you can see that it really worked because it really turned some of the schools that were poorly performing they are now functioning.(EZDo1)

While this senior manager expressed her anger at the exclusion of districts from the process, she recognised that it worked in schools that had been a problem for many years. It also set the platform for her to take on a similar approach and use pressure on schools to demand compliance. The EAZ strategy was beginning to define a change in the culture of the organisation, which, demanded accountability and performance. Districts took their cue and began to set up teams that would go into schools that were dysfunctional and help them to become functional by using both pressure and support.

5.4 ENVIRONMENT THREE: EAZ MICRO-LEVEL

Environment Three was the environment where it was necessary to determine whether the intervention succeeded or not. It was also necessary to examine how various local conditions influenced the outcomes in schools.

5.4.1 Implementation, Intervention Impact, and Evaluation

Both schools in this case study had been in the EAZ intervention for three years. South Secondary was a school that showed quick visible changes as a result of the intervention, whereas Lama Secondary did not respond very well to the intervention. An investigation into these two schools began to reveal some implementation issues at the local level, even to high-pressured intervention strategies.

5.4.2 Criteria for selection of schools

Early EAZ management Plans (Unknown author, 2000) identified the following criteria for the selection of the EAZ schools:

- ‘Schools that produced results between (0–20%) over a period of three to four years
- Schools that showed no noticeable improvement over the past four years
- Schools that have been subjected to capacity building and still show no improvement
- Schools that have had the same principal and school management team for the past five years and were showing no improvement despite previous interventions.
- Schools that have consistently under-achieved in high risk subjects: Mathematics, Physical Science, Biology, Accounting, Economics and English’

The first brief as interpreted by initiators at the bureaucratic level to the EAZ team was to go into the identified schools, analyse the situation and ensure that these schools began to comply with basic conditions of functionality within the first week of the new year. The key issues were therefore timetables, punctuality, absenteeism and compliance with a normal school day. The main issues were lack of management and organisation, poor management of resources, and conflict. The EAZ teams needed to take decisive action to bring about order and compliance in schools.

These EAZ officials were sent into the schools almost immediately after they were appointed, so there was little time for training or adopting a common approach or strategy. The EAZ team had to go into the schools and think quickly so as to bring about stability and functionality. The result was that each team began to interpret the directives and develop strategies according to the skills and strengths in the team and in response to the situation in their schools. The individual interpretation may have been justified as teams were able to interact with the differing contexts. However, there may still have been a need for some common guidelines in order to achieve the main goals of the programme.

As stated above, many of these schools were situated in very poor socio-economic areas, and their organisational culture reflected the society in which they existed. There was a great deal of apathy and despondency as both learners and teachers found themselves in a rut which they had long given up hope of escaping.

5.4.3 Lama High School: School Context Shapes Implementation

This school is situated in Meadowlands in Soweto, a township school surrounded by poverty. In the year 2000 the staff were visited by EAZ officials to be informed that the school was one of the EAZ identified schools. The principal accepted the decision as their matriculation exams results for the past three years had been below twenty percent. The school's socio-economic context determined the societal issues that plagued it. There were major social problems such as crime, unemployment and many related social problems. An article in *Teacher* (1997) described the difficulties that existed in township schools:

> The culture of learning is not good. We are still recovering from the lawlessness that was institutionalised in the eighties.

Lama, like many township schools was recovering from the major political upheavals in the townships during the struggle for democracy. The immediate environment of the school determined a poor social and cultural context.

> *…it is a very poor area. If you go to parents meetings there are many grannies there – the parents are elsewhere. HVI-Aids is all round. There are also many orphans…*(EZp1*)*

In a school like Lama, the reform strategy needed to consider the school in the context of all internal and external factors that contributed to the breakdown in functionality. The principal of this school articulated a lack of a culture of teaching and learning:

> *There are tensions in the school. Some of the people on the staff were not cooperating…* (EZp1)

In referring to the indiscipline of learners and educators he accepted that there had been no previous attempts to deal with the poor results. The MEC understood the context of these schools. Lama Secondary lacked management systems or sound operational principles.

5.4.3.1 Local level politics

The principal acknowledged that many of the staff members lacked capacity and will, and he was unable to demand basic functionality in the school. Like many schools in Soweto, his was in the forefront of the campaign that defied the old regime and education system in the country. Educators and learners defied authority and the principal who represented the state was placed in this category. However, almost six years into the new democracy the principal had not been able to change the culture of the school, as it remained in a historical context that has been plagued by conflict and strife. Both learners and educators lacked a culture of commitment to learning.

As a result of its historical context, and its role in the struggle, many teachers and pupils of Lama Secondary were active in the struggle against apartheid. The district official responsible for the school described the problems:

> I*t comes from a very difficult time. Some of the strongest union people and SASCO* [Soweto students congress] *people were in that school. When COSAS was banned – SASCO was formed and two of the student leaders came from Lama. They were office bearers for SASCO – one girl and one boy. This made it difficult for the principal. But he wasn't the principal then. Sema - the principal of Lenz public was the principal then. I don't know why he left and the current principal took over. He was part of the struggle before he became a principal; I suspect he was playing a critical role in the struggle.* (EZD03)

It was imperative for any attempt at intervention to gain a thorough understanding of both the political and the historical context of the school. The fact that the educators belonged to the union and were leaders in it meant that the school would have been one of those very active in the struggle against the education system of apartheid. They would have a strong resistance to any form of authority of the past.

There was also an implication in the above statement by the district official that the current principal was favoured by the union and gained the position because of his involvement in the struggle. The implications of such a situation would be a difficultly for the principal to demand compliance and break the culture of defiance forged by years of struggle against

the system. He was one of the 'comrades'[8]. The resistance against the system was so strong that some of the defiant teachers who remained resistant opted to resign rather than succumb to compliance.

> *Some of the people on the staff who were not co operating have actually resigned. There are two or three people who were big in union roles have actually resigned.* (EZD03)

This principal, who owed his position to the struggle, could not establish any kind of authority in the school as a 'comrade,' but rather was prevented from taking action against educators:

> *In staff meetings any suggestions made by the principal were rejected.*(EZD03)

So as the main agent of change the principal was effectively paralysed by the political situation in the school.

The students were also very active in the struggle and while they played an important role in resisting and fighting against apartheid education they, like the educators, could not change from a struggle mode to one of students in a learning environment. They were disruptive and would not abide by the basic rules of the school. They had been used to coming and going as they pleased. There was a high rate of absenteeism and truancy from lessons. The leadership of the school found it very difficult to change the school as the student leaders were so powerful. They were defiant and influenced all learners:

> *… and two of the student leaders came from Lama, they were office bearers for COSAS one girl and one boy. This made it difficult for the principal.*(EZD03)

It was only with the passing of time and these students exiting the school that the new student leaders changed their attitude to authority and the purpose of schooling.

However, the EAZ with its authority in the political office of the MEC, and even former activists, could not deliberately show resistance to this initiative. As stated above, the political climate was ready for an approach that would use pressure to demand compliance. The principal was caught in a position in which he was forced to abide by the objectives of the EAZ intervention and deal with former comrades he knew were not willing to change.

---

[8] Term used to describe fellow activists.

> *The EAZ put pressure on us. The teachers were not ready to accept top- down approach. You must remember we came from the defiance campaign.* (EZp1)

Thus, while the principal struggled to bring about compliance he acknowledged the pressure of the EAZ intervention. The EAZ team adopted a 'zero tolerance' approach to non-compliance. While the political context of the struggle had set a precedent for negotiation and consensus-seeking on anything in the public domain, the EAZ approach was a clear departure from the collaborative approach. For the implementation of this intervention or any future policy this was a breakthrough.

The principal was also under pressure from other sources, such as local political organisations, union leaders and the school community, to change the school:

> *The ANC and SADTU and the parents were not happy. They said that we needed to improve so there was pressure from them as well.*(EZp1)

This statement by the principal clearly indicates that the local political climate was ready for a high pressured approach. In the past, the union (SADTU) and the local political leaders (ANC) would have opposed the high-pressured approach in the schools. There may be two reasons these organisations were also demanding compliance from the school. The first was the implications of a school in their jurisdiction being labelled as an EAZ school would not look good for them. The second reason was that the poor results of the school were no longer acceptable to political parties or the community. The demand for service delivery from the public sector placed pressure on the school to comply. There was a fear that non-compliance would result in the loss of jobs, which the principal acknowledged led to limited compliance, even though educators were not happy with the demands.

On the other hand, community structures surrounding the school resented the labelling of a school in their precinct and placed pressure on the school to comply with the demands of the intervention. The school was stuck and required an intervention that would move them out of this situation. The principal was under severe pressure to bring about changes.

5.4.3.2 The EAZ Intervention in Lama Secondary

This school management team and the governing body were taken to a workshop by the EAZ team to be told about the improvements they had to implement in the school. They

were given a list of priorities, which the management and governance were told to say how they planned to address. There was very little co-constructing of the intervention, even though the school had very little to offer, and neither the EAZ team nor school explored the underlying causes of dysfunction. The EAZ team instructed the school to bring about changes and compliance with accepted norms:

> *The SMT Educators and the SGB were taken to a workshop. We were briefed about the strategy. They told us that the school needed to turn around and that they were focusing on the SMT, educators and the SGB. The EAZ approach was hard. 'You implement what we are saying.' There were no negotiations*. (EZp1)

The school management was overwhelmed by the demands being made by the EAZ strategy, especially in the absence of support to comply with the demands. According to the principal of the school, the political climate of the school was one that was still in the '*defiance campaign*' of the past struggle. His staff wanted all decisions negotiated with them, including decisions relating to the basic functionality of the school and compliance with basic requirements of functionality. As the pressure from the EAZ team increased, the principal had to ensure that some changes were made. For the first time the school was monitored, almost on a weekly basis. Both the principal and the staff interpreted the EAZ priority as improving the matriculation results and getting a semblance of functionality in the school. In the first year of the intervention there was a marked improvement in the matriculation results, although the number of candidates entered for the examination had dropped from previous years. The learners also received additional support from the GDE's secondary school improvement strategy (SSIP). This may have been a contributory factor to improved results in year one.

The attendance and punctuality of both educators and learners improved. While this study does not analyse the factors that resulted in an increase in the matriculation results, on the face of it the school is seen to have responded to the EAZ strategy.

5.4.3.3 Lama Secondary's Response to the EAZ Initiative

In line with Hopkins's categorisation of schools, this was clearly a Type I, 'failing school' that needed a high level of external intervention, pressure and support (Hopkins, Ainscow & West, 1996). The EAZ approach was one of high pressure but there was no investigation

of the real problems in the school. The school responded to the intervention as best it could, despite the constraints. The degree of sustainability and fidelity that had been achieved requires further investigation. The principal claimed success because of the gradual improvement in the matriculation results:

> There is greater c*ommitment from the SGB. The SMT systems are now in place. They have department meetings… Before two thousand our matric results were below twenty percent, in two thousand it was thirty one percent, in two thousand and one it was sixty one percent, and in two thousand and two it was fifty two percent.* (EZp1)

Despite plans to develop the whole school and community, the school prioritised and focused on the matriculation exams as an indicator of success. These results did increase as indicated by the principal, however, he acknowledged that the increase may have been attributable to the two further interventions from the GDE; a matriculation revision programme (RMIP) with external tutors providing tuition to the learners, and the Secondary School Improvement Programme (SSIP) which was a similar programme targeting learners in Grades Ten and Eleven.[9] The increase in the matriculation results may have been as a result of these external development programmes, which did not necessarily translate into improved delivery by the staff of the school.

While the principal claimed improvement through the matriculation results and functionality, there was little evidence of other areas of improvement. The educators did not show the same enthusiasm as there was serious tension amongst them. The EAZ intervention further divided the staff into those teachers who committed to change and those who were still not doing what they were required to. The principal as agent of change had insufficient power and authority to make fundamental changes.

5.4.3.4 The Principal as Change Agent or Gatekeeper

The principal realised that he had very little authority to demand compliance from many of the teachers on the staff, as he indicated in the following comment:

[9] The GDE provided schools with materials and external tutors to improve the matric results. This support targeted the learners but did not include capacity-building for the educators.

> *There was no checking on teachers. As long as we got paid at the end of the month even if nothing happened* (EZp1)

In this difficult context the principal separated himself from the rest of the school, and blamed the staff, students and parents for everything that was wrong. The EAZ team demanded compliance from the principal, who clearly lacked the capacity to act as an agent of change. He argued that he could demand compliance where even the district officials had failed.

> *The district office was understaffed and they did not see us often. Also many officials in the district office came from the same defiance campaign so they could not go into the classes and tell educators what to do. They were more collaborative but were not demanding accountability….* (EZp1)

The principal was aware of the underlying political tensions, even in the district office, and even district officials could not challenge previous comrades in the struggle. They used a more collaborative strategy which did not involve control or accountability. The principal began to depend on the presence of the EAZ team who visited his school weekly to demand compliance. He did very little himself, but needed this external pressure to break the status quo so that changes could be made:

> *Implementation was difficult. Educators would say they are not available to come to school on Saturdays or holidays. Learners were not committed and did not always attend the extra classes.*(EZp1)

Implementation was difficult for the management of the school, the culture of which needed to change as both educators and learners were reluctant to commit to compliance during school hours, much less to extra time for lessons. The principal would clearly have been unable to enforce even these minor tasks without the presence and pressure of the EAZ team. They had to threaten to take action against non-compliance.

Interviews with educators reflected the underlying tensions that remained in the schools. The staff was divided, with some teachers having more power than the principal:

> *I can't say much. Some of us do our work others are not worried even of the EAZ …* (Eze1)

The focus group interview was very difficult as educators were reluctant to talk, although there were many accusations of poor management at the school.

In referring to the EAZ team as 'the Scorpions,' the learners and educators began only very slowly to comply with the demands made by the strategy:

> *The EAZ came with the idea of service delivery. They said it was like fixing a car. If the part is broken, it must be replaced. So, if we did not deliver, educators would be removed and replaced. We began to fear the consequences and we began to work on the demands …* (EZe1)

There was for the first time the real fear that non-compliance would result in loss of jobs and the principal used this threat to gain some compliance from the educators.

This school, however, like many others in the townships, was crippled by a culture of conflict, insecurity, and uncertainty. The staff and the management team were divided, with some members of staff having been defiant and for years refusing to work with the principal. He began to depend on the EAZ team and did very little to take control of the school. The semblance of functionality was therefore very superficial.

The focus group interview revealed the very negative views the educators had of the principal. Educators and the district official responsible for the school blamed the principal's poor communication and leadership for the continued breakdown.

> *Yes – because he keeps everything to himself.* (EZD03)

Interviews with some of the educators made it clear that they had little information about the EAZ strategy, except that they would be dismissed if they did not do as they were told. This was confirmed by the district official's interaction with the staff. The principal clearly did not have the capacity to lead and manage his staff, and seemed to be the cause of much tension and dissatisfaction:

> *I think also the principal has his own management deficiencies which is one of the things I am trying to deal with, without starting a war. He has got delegation problems. He tries to handle everything alone. This was raised when I made an appointment to meet the staff for a self-assessment session and unfortunately or fortunately the principal was unable to attend. So the staff raised these issues. So I said to them this is my view of the school. I had recorded a lot of things about the*

school. First you tell me what problems you have; can you list them. Then all of them began talking. I could pick up that they had problems with the principal. They indicated the non-involvement of the staff in running the school. (EZD03)

The district official highlighted the serious tensions amongst the staff, in particular discontent with the way in which the principal managed the school.

Improvement in the matriculation results, camouflaged other problems in the school, about which nobody appeared concerned. The principal reaped the rewards of responding successfully to the EAZ intervention, and even got a trip to France and a business partnership to renovate the school. The principal as the main agent of implementation made claims of success, but the district official working in the school and the educators were not confident about these changes.

There has been some movement but not enough to a point where I can say they are at a point where they can maintain the results. (EZD03)

The principal relegated his role to the EAZ team, and did not have the capacity to lead change in the school:

At first I was not happy. I did not understand what they were trying to do. After the first year they became more collaborative and they explained why they were so forceful and then I understood and I was glad the EAZ was in our school. (EZp1)

Whether the changes would be sustained was not a certainty as lack of capacity and on-going support was essential for schools in this context. The principal was very excited about the progress made by the school over the previous three years of the EAZ intervention, but according to the IDSO the only improvement was in the matriculation results. There were still serious problems in the general functioning of the school.

5.4.3.5 The District Response to the EAZ Intervention in Lama Secondary

The district official (IDSO)[10] in charge of Lama Secondary was not convinced that the school had improved sufficiently, claiming that issues such as poor attendance and punctuality were still a problem with both educators and learners:

[10]Institutional Development and Support Officer (IDSO).

The problems are still rife in that school. Late-coming etcetera, the matric results are better but otherwise the school still has many problems. (EZD03)

The district official had not been included or consulted about any of the initiatives in the school. He knew that the EAZ team had many workshops with the principal and the staff, yet there was very little evidence of implementation as the principal and the staff remained divided. His encounter with the EAZ team was by chance when they met at the school, but he was not informed about what the EAZ team was doing, even though he was responsible for the school.

It does happen that often when I go to the school I see a 'G' [11]*car and meet an EAZ person unawares. You meet them – they have their own agenda that you are not a part of, they just expect you to monitor so I don't know their agenda …* (EZD03)

This lack of clarity and collaboration between the IDSO and the EAZ team may have caused more tensions than improvement in the school. The IDSO did not appreciate that he was excluded from decisions taken regarding the school.

I think it would have been better if the EAZ were with me from the beginning.

Unfortunately we were not involved, even when major decisions were made like taking the principal to France we were just told, that kind of thing. (EZD03)

The IDSO as the interface between the DoE and the school was the main agent in an implementation design. He also had a more in-depth knowledge and understanding of the school, and was not happy about the principal's trip to France or the renovations to the school. He argued that the school was not very old and was in a better condition than many other schools in the area, saying that other schools such as those in 'containers' may have benefited from new buildings. He had read about the renovations but had not been consulted in any way.

We just read about the tenders in the paper. A tender was out for the school to be renovated…

Yes – I needed to see that they had a maintenance plan, so that the school does not become run down again. Because this school was not old compared to other

[11]Government car.

schools in the area that were built in the DET[12] times and those schools in containers. In the end I have to make sure that the school has a maintenance plan. This school is only about ten years old. It is a modern school so the decisions about the renovation, we had no say, we just see it going on. (EZD03)

The EAZ team in its quest to show visible signs of improvement ignored the fundamental structures and systems responsible for delivery both within the school and in the district office. In this school there was clear evidence of even greater tensions that may have been caused by an intervention that ignored local level contexts. The exclusion of the district responsible for the school may have caused more tension that could outweigh the limited success of the increased matriculation results.

5.5 THE STORY OF SOUTH SECONDARY

It was important to understand how different contextual realities in schools respond to interventions, as the composition of the school and the local climate and ideologies determine the extent to which an intervention model is adapted or adopted. Datnow, Hubbard and Mehan, (2002) argue that the reform intervention is a 'co-constructed' process between the developers and the local agents that make up a school. South secondary had, until the EAZ intervention, functioned with little interference from local authorities or the community. It had been fairly functional and did not warrant any particular intervention strategies, however, as the context of the school changed the matriculation results dropped and it became a focus of attention.

This school was located in the previous 'Indian Education Department,' where schools were relatively stable and operated in compliance with the system. This school is situated in a middle-income suburb, but a major change in the context of the school came as children from the immediate surroundings moved to better-resourced schools in the more affluent suburbs and the survival of the school depended on learners who were bussed in from nearby townships and informal settlements. The school was not completely

[12] Department of Education and Training – this department was responsible for 'black' education in the former regime.

dysfunctional as it had systems in place and few staff problems. It was identified as an EAZ school because the matriculation results had plummeted to fifteen percent in the previous year. This school, unlike Lama Secondary, was not plagued by uprisings linked to the struggle against apartheid and was faced with different issues of transformation.

5.5.1 Local Level Politics

Thatthe majority of the learners in this school come from areas far removed from the school's immediate surroundings determined the political and social context of this school. The community in the area did not have an interest in it as the children from the area did not attend, and the parents of the children in the school lived at a distance from the school and were from poor socio-economic backgrounds. They did not make much contribution to the school nor did place any pressure on it, although the principal suggested that the drop in matriculation results was due to the lack of commitment by both learners and parents.

> O*ne of the reasons was the lack of commitment from parents and the lack of commitment from the children themselves.* (EZ,p2)

Datnow, Hubard and Mehan (2002:54) argue that social construction of students' ability shapes perception and response to a reform initiative. In this school the perception as argued by the principal was that the students coming in from other areas had a low ability and low commitment, and he blamed the poor results on these factors. This perception was contradictory to the first year results after the intervention showing a remarkable recovery.

It can be argued that the principal and staff were not coping with the major change in the student population. Since they did not understand the social, cultural and economic context of the newcomers to the school they needed an intervention like the EAZ to force transformation. The principal became very defensive as he did not appreciate being classified as an EAZ school, with none of the other schools in this area so labelled. He accepted the intervention as it was a mandate from the minister of education in the province. This school also had a political record of compliance with the system and with authority, and so accepted this high-pressured top-down intervention with little resistance.

> *At the meeting in Soweto and we were addressed by the MEC and he wanted us to start the programme the next day. We would comply …* (EZp2)

He accepted the mandate from the minister's office then began a process of negotiating the adaptation of the strategy to suit the context of his school. This school welcomed the pressure of the EAZ team as the principal criticised the lack of authority and pressure in the district office. An example used by the principal was that, when he locked the gates to punish learners who were coming to school late, the district ordered him to open them in keeping with the rights of learners to attend the school. He felt that they did not support him in putting pressure on learners to comply with school rules whereas the EAZ team supported his efforts to bring about compliance with both learners and educators:

> *You see the difference is that the EAZ would come in and say let's get these children in and talk to them, shout at them or whatever it is. The district would say the Constitution says you must open the gate. The district wouldn't come in and help solve the problem….* (EZp2)

The educators also had a negative social construction of the learners in the school, blaming the new learners for the decline in results:

> *Before that we had very good results and then we had an influx of children from Orange Farm and Palm Springs[13], a whole lot of children who did not speak the language properly and we had problems*. (EZe2)

There was a perception that because the children came from second language contexts and former DET schools they would be unable to learn, perhaps a valid problem in the changing social and political context of the schools. This was the main challenge to the school, and the educators were reluctant to accept that any intervention would assist them in dealing with the changing context and needs of the new students. They were thus very negative about the EAZ initiative.

Another problem identified was the tension in the management team as the principal struggled to establish a new one after many of the older members took the retrenchment package rather than deal with the changes in the school. The offer of retrenchment packages by the DoE resulted in an exodus of many senior, experienced teachers. The principal struggled to establish a new management team that could lead the staff through major transformation in the school, and welcomed the team-building exercises and

[13] Informal settlements

workshops held by the EAZ officials. He also acknowledged his own weakness in building a sound rapport with his staff, it being the first time they had been taken away to workshops where they were given a voice. He acknowledged that it worked and that he had been a very autocratic principal and alienated staff. The EAZ workshops made him realise that he needed to work more collaboratively with them.

Team-building became a routine event in the school as the principal regularly had breakfast or dinner meetings with his staff. The interview with the focus group of educators clearly indicated that they welcomed the new staff culture as introduced by the EAZ approach. Educators said that it was the first time they had been treated as professionals and the fact that they were taken out and had suppers together provided the motivation they needed to restore commitment to initiatives that had been planned by the school. They expressed the need to sustain the professional interaction and talked about external motivation.

5.5.2 The Principal as the Local Change Agent

The principal who was identified as the agent of implementation at the school level resented his school being an EAZ school, and continually emphasised that all systems were in place in his school.

> *I think I need to make this clear as well. I think we had all policies and all documents in place. Of the eight schools we were clustered with, we had everything in place…* (EAZ,p2)

In implementing an intervention where the main agent, who is the principal, did not accept that the school needed an intervention was a major obstacle. The principal, however, acknowledged that there was a decline in the matriculation results and immediately defended himself by giving reasons for the decline in results. The drop in the matriculation results was attributed to senior educators having taken the early retirement package and the school having a large intake of learners from outside the area. He was not happy with the EAZ approach as it made assumptions about the school without engaging him or his staff.

> *I think that when the EAZ came in they didn't actually ask for reasons but they had come here with their own intentions and plans in the beginning, not knowing exactly where to start off, they did not know my school…* (EAZp2)

The principal said that the EAZ team had not quite understood where his school was and had the same plans for all schools. This led to a long process of negotiations with the EAZ team before they realised that this particular school was not at the same point as many of the other schools.

> *It took at least three or four months before they actually knew what they looking for. From there on we had a chance to explain some of the reasons behind the drop in results.* (EAZp2)

These first few months involved a co-construction of the intervention, and the principal soon realised that he had a lot to offer both the EAZ team and the other schools in the cluster. This principal became a resource to the EAZ team as many did not have the relevant expertise and used documents from this school to demonstrate good practice to other schools. The ability of local agency in co-constructing an intervention to meet the local context and needs is more powerful in a situation in which the agent, in this case the principal, is strong and functional.

> *To be fair to them as well, at one stage, one of the problems here as well was the lack of textbooks and we suddenly received six hundred thousand rand worth of textbooks that were laying somewhere and was then relayed to the school. It was in Pretoria somewhere.* (EAZp2)

This principal used the intervention to get what he wanted and to manipulate problems in the system. He understood the power of the EAZ team and in his negotiation with the EAZ strategy he began to identify the areas in which he required support. He provided extra support for the matriculation students and was able to do this without external support because most of his educators had the necessary capacity and expertise.

> *Basically we worked on what they had wanted us to do the extra classes and stuff like that, which we did. We made it two hours every day additional and then the Saturday for four hours and school holidays we spent here.* (EAZ,p2)

The principal was able to enforce the extra hours of teaching in his school as he did not have to deal with the politics of unions or other barriers faced by other schools. The teachers complied with the extra hours even though some may have been reluctant, and noted that a weakness of the EAZ team was that they were not equipped to give educators direct support in the classroom. He also acknowledged that his staff had the relevant skills, so with the support of the EAZ team they managed to bring about commitment from learners and parents to extra lessons, to help learners who came into the school with gaps in their knowledge. The result was a dramatic improvement in results that was not accompanied by a drop in the numbers of students.

5.5.3 Local Level Interpretation of Cracks in the System

The principal of South Secondary very quickly identified the divisions between the EAZ team and the district office:

> *There was no relationship there, the EAZ didn't know what the district was doing and the district didn't know what the EAZ was doing. Somewhere along we got the idea that somebody is fighting for position or recognition.* (EAZ,p2)

The lack of clarity and collaboration in the planning of the intervention filters down to the local level and has an impact on the implementation of the intervention at the local level. The principal did not hesitate to use the EAZ to respond to problems in his school that the district was not attending to:

> W*e had two teachers who were giving us problems for five years. The Department, the district had done nothing about it, but then the EAZ stepped in and within two weeks those teachers were gone from here. In that aspect they put their foot down when it came to discipline as far as teachers were concerned. They have supported me a number of times as well in cases of late coming where we lock them out, they had spoken to the children.* (EAZ,p2)

The principal used the power and authority of the EAZ to address problems in his school, such as that of deviant teachers, whom the EAZ team removed from his school within two weeks. This was an indication that the EAZ team was able to enforce labour and other processes, which were service delivery functions of the district.

He also indicated that he had received conflicting instructions from the EAZ team and from the district office:

> *It didn't only happen with that, it happened with the common exams as well where there was rivalry, whether we should write the district exams or whether we had to write the EAZ exams.* (EAZ,p1)

The EAZ had their own exams and the district wanted schools to write their common exam. The principal seemed more inclined to go with the EAZ strategy as he said that they supported him more assertively with discipline and control of learners and educators.

When asked whether he believed that the EAZ team had more power than the district, his response was that it had the power but lacked the will. This awareness of the tension in the system and the lack of clarity in the design of the intervention were clearly manipulated at the local level of the school as the school used the situation to address their own needs.

In this school the use of pressure by the EAZ team was a major contributory factor to compliance with the intervention. In dealing with learners and educators the EAZ team demanded compliance, which the principal welcomed, and it yielded quick results. The district approach, according to the principal, did not help solve problems in the school.

5.5.4 The School Response to the EAZ Strategy

The EAZ team had no fixed school improvement plan or strategy, other than a list of items that they wanted to see in the school, so they entered the school by demanding policy documents and records. Although teams were taken away on two-day management workshops, it was unclear whether these were held in response to conditions in schools or whether they formed part of predetermined suppositions about the state of the school. The school at first resisted as they believed that they were functional in terms of systems and operations, of which it had many in place. The principal also indicated that there was very little support for the teachers in the classroom and this was a problem with the EAZ intervention.

In analyzing the principal's position and his role in the implementation of the EAZ intervention it was clear that while he had difficulties in accepting that his school had been 'labelled' an EAZ school, he soon overcame this as he welcomed the pressure, support and

authority the team brought into the school. The EAZ team did not contribute very much to curriculum delivery or capacity-building, but they did help the principal restore discipline. In the final analysis, the principal acknowledged that this had had a direct bearing on the results of the school. In this case it was clear that implementation of an intervention would take place where it is given the support of the principal. The principal realised that his school was struggling with the changed context of the school and used the EAZ intervention to establish a positive culture and deal with the new realities. The EAZ team did this through motivational talks with staff and pressure on both staff and learners, and they addressed problems such as late-coming and attendance. They were able to take managers out and create a collaborative working relationship, where there had been conflict previously.

In this school we see a very clear interplay between the structure, culture and ideologies of the school and the reform initiative. The actions of the agents in the school shaped the reform initiative.

5.5.5. The District Response to the South Secondary

The IDSO acknowledged that this school responded well to the EAZ initiative because there were sound systems and management in place. The school was functional:

> *I started working in this school in two thousand and three, there has been great improvement. The interventions in that school have worked with both management and educators. Mr.X, the principal, is managing the school. It is definitely working. From my first meeting with the 'School management Team' I realized that they are working together, even the heads of department are working well.* (EZDo4)

This comment affirmed that a school must be functional and committed for it to engage with and respond to an intervention strategy. This school had sound management and committed educators and although they may have been despondent before the intervention, it was not difficult to get a positive response from the staff.

A major problem that existed in many schools, especially those in the townships, was the lack of sound relationships and collegiality amongst management and staff. There may be many reasons for the lack of commitment and the high rate of conflict in these schools as

they struggled to understand the requirements of a new education system. South Secondary was not plagued with deep-seated political and social problems and was therefore able to respond to an intervention. The IDSO confirmed that a major impediment to implementation in other schools was the lack of harmony and commitment amongst the staff:

> *With other schools the major problem is conflict among educators, and the management and staff, the causes of the conflict are mainly personal. There are also gender and problems of position and power…You see the conflict and other problems are major. Also the management in these schools are weak. That makes educators not to be committed.*(EZDo4)

He also emphasised that commitment from educators and sound management were essential for any intervention to work, and these were present at South Secondary:

> *You see it is the commitment of the educators. They did not give up. At first they were despondent and with some motivation and support they delivered… I would say that in South Secondary it works because there is no major conflict with educators. Even though the principal is very strict, even though some educators think he is too strict, he stands by his words, he does what he says he will do and he is fair. So they co operate and they take interventions seriously*. (EZDo4)

The role of the principal as agent of change and an entrenched culture of compliance were factors that made change easier in this school, therefore it is imperative to understand the complexities at the local level of implementation. There is a need to open the 'Black Box' at the local level and know that schools have a culture. In this school the stability and commitment to learning was not seriously disrupted because it was not directly affected by the uprisings and disruptions that faced many township schools. The major cause of slippage in the school was as a result of changes in the student population. When learners from other race groups, cultures and communities entered the school, the fairly complacent staff could not deal with the new challenges. However, they did respond to the support provided and made the necessary adjustments:

> *The influx, from outside started around two thousand. It was then that those educators started adapting to the background of the new learners and how to adapt their methodology to really impart knowledge to those learners. By two thousand*

and three they were much better. But I could sense the misunderstanding. In two thousand and three I remember I used to get a lot of phone calls from parents complaining about the principal. They used to say he was rude and there were other complaints. As I intervened I realized that it was the change that was coming slowly. The principal did not understand the background of the parents and learners. They were not yet together. So I was able to realize there was a gap. Because when I listened to the principal's side of the story and the parents' side of the story both were right and wanted the same thing, they just needed to merge and bring about a common understanding. That took time. (EZDo4)

The district official confirms that neither the principal nor the staff were prepared for the new community of learners and parents entering the school. However, the culture and agency of the principal and staff in this school were receptive to the support provided by the intervention, even though they were initially overwhelmed by the new demands made by students whose backgrounds were diverse and foreign. The students were also overwhelmed by the demands of this new school and responded by becoming defensive and difficult:

The learners have problems because they come from different backgrounds and many of them have big gaps in their learning. They find themselves in a different world and they become defensive and these results in misunderstanding. (EZDo4)

While the EAZ team entered the schools and addressed the immediate problems, mainly those identified by the principal, the IDSO understood the deeper reasons for the problems, a major one being the need for the school to adjust to learners and parents of diverse backgrounds and cultures. The IDSO was of the opinion that the EAZ team should have worked with the district in order to make the achievements of the intervention sustainable and for a better understanding of the school in its context:

… my view is that the EAZ intervention was very good but it needs to work closely with the district, especially when you identify the school then you need to sit with the IDSO and say these are the reasons. We want to help the school together.(EZDo4)

A major impediment to implementation was the lack of involvement of the district office, which was positioned to ensure sustainability and institutionalisation of interventions.

5.6 OVERVIEW

5.6.1 Macro level Political Justification for the EAZ

The introduction of the Education Action Zones based on the idea of a collaborative partnership of stakeholders taking on the responsibility of school improvement in the zone was the beginning of this EAZ thinking. However, as in many of the school improvement initiatives in the country, the final approach to school improvement responded to the political mandate based on the growing need to show quick visible indicators of improvement in public schools. The EAZ approach in response became a high pressure, top-down approach, justified by the need to bring a semblance of order and compliance to dysfunctional schools. The result was quick visible wins and an improvement in the percentage of passes in many of the targeted schools. The political location and controversial implementation of the EAZ strategy jolted the bureaucracy and within twelve months of the strategy the EAZ intervention was forced back into the system.

Despite its quick gains, the way in which the intervention unfolded exacerbated the tension between the political office and the bureaucratic leadership. The differentiated yet complementary role between the political heads and bureaucratic heads was never clearly defined. The EAZ experience also raised questions about technical expertise and the organisational culture of the entire system. The debates around accountability and capacity were evoked at all levels of the system, and the contradictions and contestations raised by the EAZ initiative shook the idealism of the democratic culture of the organisation. While nobody contested the achievements of the EAZ strategy, implementation issues did raise concerns.

5.6.2 The Meso-Level

The exclusion of districts from the EAZ strategy in schools within their jurisdictions raises questions regarding the political and organisational position of districts. While many reasons were given for the exclusion of districts, none of them were sufficiently compelling to justify their exclusion. By bypassing the districts, EAZ officials undermined

the role of the district, and the additional powers and resources allocated to the EAZ team further alienated the schools from their district offices. On the other hand, the high pressure, 'zero-tolerance' approach of the EAZ strategy opened up the way for districts to embrace similar approaches. The question of district capacity and legitimacy is also an issue for further debate.

5.6.3 Implementation at the School Level

The differing ways in which these two schools responded to the same intervention indicates the role of the local level agency in the implementation of interventions. Fidelity to the intervention was shaped by the social, political and historic context of the schools, which also responded to the interventions in relation to the degree of functionality that existed in them.

South Secondary may be categorised as a Type II school, according to Hopkins's categories, and they responded to the intervention as a moderately effective school that needed an intervention to pull it out of a problem situation. There was less fidelity to the intervention as the school used what it needed. The lack of precise plans of the EAZ strategy worked to the benefit of this school as it allowed flexibility in the implementation.

Lama was a school in the township that had been in the heart of socio-political upheavals in the country. It was stuck in the interregnum and did not have the capacity or the will to move from the old to the new. Ironically, this school probably demonstrated more fidelity to the intervention as it had very little in place and did not have the capacity to question or mediate the plans of the intervention. It therefore attempted to abide by what it could.

Brahm, Carnac, Mukwevho and Gultig (2003), in their study on the Education Action Zones, allude to a number of themes that bear resonance with the findings from this case study. They found that the matric results in many EAZ schools had improved, but they also found that the number of students entered for the exams had dropped. This selective exclusion of students from the matriculation examination may have happened as schools feared reprisal for poor results. They also found that the EAZ intervention was unevenly implemented and school responses were determined by the existing culture within the institutions. Fear of sanctions also played a significant role in the way in which they responded to the EAZ strategy, but changes were not sustained. In Lama secondary there

was a reduction in the number of matriculants and the principal ensured an appearance of improvement, even though the teachers alluded to underlying tensions that still existed.

5.6.4 Local Level Agency and Gate-Keeping

South Secondary demonstrated the ability of the school's context and capacity to co-construct an intervention strategy. The principal as the agent was able to analyse the weaknesses and strengths of the EAZ intervention and used these to the benefit of his school. The principal of Lama, however, needed to be rescued from a political and historical context and did not play a significant role in co-constructing the intervention, but rather accepted the intervention as a way of releasing himself from the responsibility of improving the school. He personally benefited from the improved results in the school and seemed to be the sole custodian of the intervention.

5.6.5 Socio-Historic Context of Schools

The two schools reflect the different ways in which the changes in South Africa have impacted on schools at the local level. South Secondary had to deal with issues of transformation and needed support to cope with the changes. Lama, on the other hand, had more deep-rooted social and political tensions and may need some other strategies to achieve the intended goals. Therefore, no matter where the intervention originates, the school culture in its societal, localised and personal dimension shapes its response and determines the processes that take place in schools, and can limit or promote goals advocated by policymakers.

5.6.6 Pressure

The use of pressure was clearly necessary in both schools and was accepted because a window for it had been created in the historic and political context of South Africa's transformation. The increased demand for accountability and service delivery during this second period of the new government allowed for interventions from the top with high political presence and pressure.

CHAPTER SIX

CROSS-CASE ANALYSIS

6.1 INTRODUCTION

A cross-case analytic framework employs a methodology that allows for examining, identifying, and highlighting similarities and differences across case studies that share a comparable profile within a focus area. By analysing within and across the case studies it was possible to explore factors at the various levels and across both cases that may impact on the implementation of school improvement initiatives. The cross-case analysis explored difficulties of implementation across two very different cases located in different periods of state transformation, and revealed that both reform initiatives ran into problems despite their ostensible value. A comparison of cases with similar goals provided insights into how social, political and structural contexts determine the shape and direction of implementation.

The cross-case analysis has been organised into three sections, organised as macro, meso and micro issues. In studying these two cases, trends and difficulties emerge at the different levels in an organisation, as the study seeks to understand the complexities of initiating and implementing school reform in a complex organization structure such as a department of education, especially one undergoing transition. The two selected cases have illustrated two different types of school reform initiatives in Gauteng; EQUIP as a bottom-up, outside-in model, and EAZ as a top-down model. These two initiatives, in the early phases of democracy in South Africa, used different models of school reform.

In the cross-case analysis the same framework used to analyse the case studies is employed, with the political, technical and cultural factors at the macro (initiation stage); meso (district level) and micro (school level) to be examined. The literature review, data from interviews and other sources, the individual case analysis and other evaluation studies were used in discussing the emerging trends.

6.2 ISSUES OF IMPLEMENTATION AT THE MACRO LEVEL

In analysing the two cases, it was important to understand the underlying political imperatives that underpinned initiatives at the conceptual stage.

6.2.1 School Improvement Interventions Led by Political Imperatives

Firstly, the EQUIP and later the EAZ school reform interventions were a response to the State's agenda of education reform during the first two periods of the new democracy. The mandate to the provincial MECs in both case studies was to address the dysfunctional state of many schools in the province. The similarity of problems in schools and the urgency of government to restore them to a semblance of functionality were indications of the difficulty and the complexity of the problems in schooling. The need for school improvement or school reform remained a high priority in both phases. The disturbing analysis was that the problems identified were similar in both phases. Chisholm and Vally (1996) identified factors that plagued dysfunctional schools, such as instability; poor teaching and learning; crime and violence; lack of resources; and the lack of adequate systems and structures. The 'Call to Action' made by Asmal (1999) referred to similar factors, most of which were remnants of the political, economic and social history of the country. It was therefore easy to understand why issues of social justice dominated both periods of government. The persistent question was whether initiators of the reform strategies understood the struggles not of the past but of the emerging democracy. The argument being made here was explained by Freire (1972) as the central question in an emerging democracy, "How can the oppressed as divided unauthentic beings, participate in developing the pedagogy of their liberation?"

The question raised here could be asked of all role-players at different levels in the system. The turmoil and upheavals in the country, as a result of the struggle for freedom, would have residual effects long into the new democracy, but whether these were actually understood and addressed in creating new systems or strategies for change remains in question. In examining the two cases there were clear political imperatives that dominated each of the periods, and these seem to have informed the initiation and design of the school improvement programmes. What was not clear was whether these designs considered the unstable implementation environment.

The first phase of democracy was dominated by the need to establish a single education structure from politically and ideologically divided structures of the past. Against this backdrop, political leaders such as the MEC in Gauteng also had the urgent task of rescuing schools that were in serious trouble. This was the context that gave rise to the EQUIP programme. The second phase of government, similar to the first, also had major political mandates. The public and constituencies wanted to see visible signs of policy implementation and change, and with Asmal (1999) the provincial MEC crafted a response. The five-year lifespan of the reign of each MEC required a response that would ensure as many visible gains as possible. In both interventions there was little evidence or reference to the underlying contradictions and contestations that were emerging at different levels of the education system. The aim of this study was to theorise the implementation of education reform and so reveal the political, structural and cultural contradictions and contestations of an education system in transition.

Young (2001) argues that the urgency and speed of political transformation in South Africa contributed to the contestation of idealism and contextual realities in ways that may not be seen in more stable societies. There was urgency to break down all aspects of the apartheid past and to replace these with the ideals of people who struggled for democracy. The first period of the new democracy was a scramble for change and symbols that would demonstrate a break from the apartheid past. Jansen (2001) argues that the first period saw an over-investment in symbolism, which resulted in lack of consideration for implementation. The EQUIP model was based on school development planning through local level collaboration. Hargreaves and Hopkins (1994:34) argue that this approach is consistent with a politically motivated democratic form of devolution, and it responds to the political ideals of the first phase of democracy. The second period, from 2000, brought about a race for delivery and policy implementation. The EAZ intervention for school improvement in Gauteng tested democratic ideals by adopting a top-down high pressure approach.

These two case studies targeting school improvement were analysed against a background of upheaval and change in the political, social and educational arena in Gauteng. While issues of social justice and redress remained key targets in both case studies, school improvement remained a major hurdle. The greatest challenge for politicians in the emerging democracy was the need to address the expectations of a constituency that

wanted to see both ideological and material changes in the country. The MECs in both EQUIP and EAZ initiated the reforms in response to the political agenda that set imperatives for them. As politicians with a limited lifespan they also needed to capture quick political gains, and illustrate visible changes to appease their constituency. The EQUIP and EAZ initiatives were therefore designed to ensure political leaders would gain maximum credit.

6.2.2 Conceptual Complexity at the Macro-Level

Both case studies highlighted the need to respond to the complex problems in dysfunctional schools within a limited period. The problems were diverse, ranging from social injustice to lack of capacity, resources and a culture of learning. The EQUIP case study from the macro level to the school level highlights the complexities that arose as a result of an externally driven intervention that lacked ownership within the bureaucratic system.

In contrast, initial thinking and research for the EAZ model was based on the English conception of collaborative community-based improvement, but the final design was based on a decision to adopt a high pressure top-down approach that left the bureaucracy with little time or detail to interpret the model. Despite these technical differences in the initial design phase, both interventions ignored the interplay between the various levels of the system and were susceptible to lack of fidelity and commitment due to a lack of consideration of implementation at the design stage.

Both EQUIP and the EAZ strategies were initiated in the political office of the GDE, and there were two questions that needed to be answered here:

i) Why were both interventions located in the political office?
ii) What were the implications for implementation by the bureaucratic system?

6.2.3 The Location and Champion of Interventions Matter

The above questions acknowledge that the location of the intervention is important as it can determine the route it will take. In a transitional and unstable climate, the initiator of an intervention must have relevant authority and power to make decisions. Taylor et al.

(1997), Chisholm, (2004) and Ball (1990) argue that the complexities, ideologies and politics dominating the period determine where power and authority are located. It can be argued that several factors determined the need to drive initiation of the school reform strategy from the political office rather than the bureaucratic office. The political pressure to respond to the mandates of the term of office led to decisions that would seem best at the time. In EQUIP, the bureaucratic system was not ready for the model of intervention; however, the political climate advocated partnerships with the business world. The MEC seized the opportunity of locating the initiative outside the system, with the clear intention of bringing it back in as soon as the structures were ready. However, the bureaucracies were in their infancy and as they were struggling to establish legitimacy they were not ready to take on major projects.

The EAZ intervention was also initiated and implemented outside the bureaucratic system. Even though the officials in the EAZ team were employed by the GDE, the initiative was driven from the political office. While the argument for locating the EQUIP strategy outside the GDE may be convincing, the arguments for 'side-lining' the Department systems and structures in the EAZ initiative were not as convincing. The centralisation of the EAZ strategy and the subtle control from the MEC's offices raised serious questions about transformation and the status of the bureaucratic system. Jansen, (2001) has raised two critical issues, whether the new government and by implication its structures have gained relevant legitimacy, and whether the transformation process was a symbolic discourse that did not address issues of practice. The demand for accountability and the increasing pressure for delivery, especially from the public sector, began to test the government's capacity. Lack of capacity, lack of readiness and the need to grant the interventions additional resources were reasons given for locating both EAZ and EQUIP outside the system.

The state of readiness and lack of resources and capacity as reasons for both initiatives being located in the political office raised questions of perspective and power of the bureaucratic structure. That decisions made at this level responded to political imperatives was not uncommon. Barber (1998:743) was of the opinion that central government had dictated the education reform agenda in England for the previous two decades and that it was not uncommon for reform initiatives to be generated from the political office. In both cases it was clear that the location determined the power, authority and perspective of the

interventions. However, the location of the interventions in the political office may have led to the contradictions and contestations that emerged at the implementation stage.

6.2.4 Contradictions and Contestations at the Macro Level

Nakaumura and Smallwood (1980) argue that conceptual complexities, and political coalition–building limit how well problems are understood and how compromises can limit the processes of implementation. Jansen (2000a, as quoted in Kraak & Young, 2001:4) argues that it would be fruitless to focus on details of implementation because policymaking in South Africa during the first ten years of democracy concentrated on achieving policy symbolism and had no serious intentions of changing practice. The initiation of EQUIP and the EAZ interventions raise questions about whether complexities of political ideals may have contradicted actual contextual realities. The result in both cases was a struggle to gain ownership and clarity through the system

Contradiction and contestation emerged in the implementation when the bureaucratic and political leaders, as indicated in the case studies, did not locate EQUIP or EAZ within its structures and both interventions remained on the outside. The authoritative political power drove the interventions; however, both lacked ownership within the bureaucratic structures. The EQUIP intervention did not have the relevant power or authority to demand compliance or to ensure sustainability and the system may not have been ready for an incentive-driven, bottom-up strategy.

The EAZ model, on the other hand, envisioned the implementation process as ‘sequential and chronological.’ They also presupposed that the implementation arena was ‘neutral and objective.’ According to Nakamura and Smallwood (1980:9), this classical implementation model fits the description of early implementation studies that viewed systems and structures as hierarchical, with a clear division of labour between policymakers and policy implementers. This assumption, as early research indicated, was problematic in any dynamic organizational context such as education, and was even more challenging in an education context undergoing rapid and constant change. After the first year of tension between the EAZ politically driven team and bureaucratic forces at all levels of the system, the EAZ teams were relocated within the newly established Office of Standards in the GDE (Report EAZ Workshop: Aloeridge, 2000).

In both case studies it can be argued that if the interventions had not been driven from the political office they may not have been acknowledged at all. Power and authority were clearly located in the political office. In the case of EQUIP the argument raised was that the political office had the legitimate power and authority as opposed to the emerging bureaucratic office. However, by the second political period it seemed as if the authority and power remained within the political office, especially in initiating a high pressure, top-down initiative such as EAZ. The lack of clarity between the political and bureaucratic offices and the lack of readiness within the systems and structures also resulted in contradictions and a lack of ownership in both case studies. Both cases began to point to cracks in implementation as a result of inadequate involvement of all levels during the initiation phase and as a result of the political, bureaucratic divide.

6.2.5 The Political/Bureaucratic Divide

The unclear demarcation between the political head and the bureaucratic head responsible for operations led to implementation problems in both case studies, with the exception that the former was accountable to its constituency and to the agenda of the ruling party and the bureaucracy. The problem of gaining support and collaboration from the bureaucratic structures surfaced in both cases. The location of EQUIP outside the system resulted in a lack of ownership within the bureaucratic structure, as was evident when the GDE established structures such as the 'Education Management Development Unit' (EMDU), which began processes parallel to EQUIP but did not embrace EQUIP or acknowledge work done through it. The newly established EMD unit in the GDE focused on the development of management and governance, in particular on school development planning in schools, but did not take on the EQUIP initiative or its model. There was no clear reason why the EQUIP model was not adopted, nor was there any opposition to EQUIP. The only explanation was that the newly established departments and units were struggling to deliver on mandates either from the national office or from provincial imperatives, and they did not have the time or capacity to engage with EQUIP, as was evident in the case study. A similar finding was made with the EAZ intervention which, even though it was located in MEC's office and operated outside the bureaucratic structures, gave rise to tensions and problems with ownership within the system.

Jansen (1990) argued that the distinction between political and bureaucratic functions is not always absolute, especially when both politicians and senior bureaucrats see their role as political. Thus, in attempting to understand how the EQUIP and EAZ initiatives in two different phases of political imperatives are interpreted through the system, it was important to understand the prevalent discourse of the time. In both case studies, the complexity of taking an initiative from a political level to an implementation level emerged as a barrier to the reform initiatives.

While many of the factors causing a breakdown between the political ideals and the bureaucratic interpretation of EQUIP can be attributed to Jansen's argument that this was a period limited to symbolism rather than the details of implementation, the overwhelmed new bureaucracy was content to allow the business partnership the reigns over the EQUIP project. Ironically, the EAZ struggled with the similar issues, although it was not located outside the GDE, it began from the office of the MEC and resulted in a great degree of bureaucratic alienation. The arguments for an external team with power from the political office raised questions about the authority and power within the bureaucracy. Both case studies raised issues about overload and capacity of the system to deliver the intervention projects. If issues of capacity, readiness and authority were compared in the two case studies, serious questions about the development and capacity of the bureaucratic systems over the two phases of education transformation may be raised.

6.2.6 Technical Constraints

Nakamura and Smallwood (1980) assert that the initiation phase sets the stage for implementation. Actors at this stage are responsible for establishing clarity, identification of the project goals, the problem areas, the priority of the problem and the target persons to benefit. It is at this design stage that key actors in the implementation process and resources for implementation are identified and indicators set for the measuring of benefits. Potential constraints that would impact on the implementation occur as early as when the initial decisions are taken. Technical limitations occur when the initiator has inadequate information, has limited technical knowledge or a lack of clarity of the solutions, or ignores the complexity of the bureaucratic system that must implement the intervention. These factors at the initiation stage have a direct influence on what takes place during the

implementation stage. In both EQUIP and the EAZ there was a clear lack of clarity, communication or clearly defined goals. There were also decisions that did not fit and these impacted on and constrained implementation.

In the design of the two interventions it was necessary to probe beyond what was actually conceived. Attached as an appendix in the report by Chisholm and Vally (1996:65-67) was the MEC's memorandum to the Head of the GDE, giving a very clear directive in which social infrastructure and capacity of management and compliance were highlighted as urgent issues to be addressed. Communication with all people within the system was also flagged as an urgent need, as she suggested that people felt 'abandoned.' The critical question was whether the bureaucracy had the capacity to undertake the directive of the MEC. Jansen (2001) argued that the first phase of policy development was led by idealism and symbolism and the state of readiness of the bureaucracy was not considered. Thus, EQUIP responded to the political need to demonstrate the commitment to democratic principles of decentralization and the devolution of authority and self-management of schools to 'governing bodies,' and management at the local level. The lack of readiness at the local level and the lack of skills emerged in the attempts at implementation.

By the second election, and the second term of government, the state of schools once again surfaced as a challenge for the new leaders as schools had not improved very much. The 'Tirisano' (1999) paper raised similar problems to those in the research reports of the earlier period. The second phase of government, however, began with a determination to bring about implementation and delivery. In comparing the two approaches to school improvement it was clear that a high pressure approach such as the EAZ could not have been considered during the first phase of democracy, but by the second phase it was more acceptable, because it was located within the political imperative of accountability and there was a growing demand for service delivery from the public sector. The vacillation by the second MEC between a collaborative approach and a high pressure, top-down approach was indicative of the state's need to move away from the first phase of policy and 'softer collaborative approaches' to making a demand for visible compliance and delivery. As with the EQUIP design there was a need to explore whether the EAZ approach targeted the critical problems in schools.

Fleisch et al. (2001), in their report on the visible gains achieved by the EAZ schools, showed that schools were shaken into compliance and a visible indicator was substantial improvement in the matriculation results in many of the schools over the first three years. However, they also showed that in many schools the improvement was not sustained. It can be argued that the main goals of the 'militant' EAZ design was meant to bring about swift visible compliance, however, very little consideration was given to sustainability and institutionalization of gains. Serious implementation problems were created by the lack of clarity of the design and dubious capacity of the EAZ team, which ultimately led to its demise. Hubbard, Mehan and Stein, (2006), in their analysis of 'The Bersin and Alvarado' reform strategy in San Diego, argued that even a well-designed centrally controlled strategy was threatened and overthrown by technical, cultural and political constraints at various levels of the system. Hence, despite the quick gains of the EAZ strategy, as with the EQUIP strategy; the design did not address issues of implementation at the meso or micro levels. The lack of sufficient capacity, power, systems and political will, and contradictions and contestations at various levels of the bureaucracy, impacted on the outcomes and long-term sustainability in both cases.

The EQUIP model presupposed that schools possessed the 'obedience' and 'will' to carry out the goals of the programme, provided they were given support and technical training by the service providers. In the EAZ strategy the presuppositions made were that pressure and force would result in obedience and change. In these models it was easy to 'blame' non-achievement on the structures at the meso and micro levels. Designers of EQUIP and the EAZ model excluded major role-players at various levels of the GDE during the early phases of both initiatives. Both cases aligned with political imperatives but it was clear that neither the readiness of the GDE at an organisational level at the initiation phase, nor the organizational complexities of the education system at its various levels received much consideration. The initiators of the EAZ strategy in the second phase of the GDE's existence were still identifying issues of lack of capacity, and raised questions about whether a department in transition would reach a stage of readiness or whether organizations such as the GDE remained in a constant state of fluidity.

Another important consideration for implementation is the location of 'power and authority' within the bureaucratic system versus 'power and authority' in the political office. Both EQUIP and the EAZ initiatives have strong political commitment but the same

passion and power to bring about compliance did not seem to exist in the bureaucratic processes of implementation. Another hindrance to implementation in both cases was the lack of clarity between the political office and the bureaucratic office at the provincial level.

In a country in transition, the most noble intentions and reform attempts based on sound democratic principles can often be difficult to implement as the system struggles with the legacies of unequal power, resources and capacity. Implementation will only happen if the initiative is seen to have the legitimate power and authority. The perceived power and authority between the political office and the bureaucratic offices did not seem to be equal. The complexities at the macro level resulted in conceptual problems in both cases. The complexities at this level range from differing ideological, political, technical and cultural perspectives. Each political head responded to high-level mandates without sufficient consideration of issues of implementation within a highly complex terrain. Most importantly, neither considered the role of districts as strategically placed at the meso-level to act as a conduit or to maintain sustainability of the reform initiatives.

6.3 THE MESO-LEVEL

The education system in South Africa has been designed in a tiered structure with national, provincial offices and local level institutions. The Gauteng province, as in all other provinces, has a meso-level structure (in Gauteng they are called ‘districts’) that interface between schools and the provincial office. At this interface, the district office should be the main supporters, monitors and implementers of policy and any initiatives at school level. However, the struggle to establish an organizational system and culture was exacerbated by the shifting terrain, a struggle for identity both by districts and individuals and the uneven capacity commitment to delivery and resources from one context to the other.

6.3.1 District Dilemma

The dilemma of the role and function of districts surfaced as early as 1998, when the DoE allocated through its Education Policy Reserve Fund (EPRF) a major project that focused

on ‘District Development.’ Mphahlele (1999:28-32) highlighted the lack of coherence, coordination, communication, resources, capacity and power and authority as some of the problems afflicting districts. While the key constraints afflicting districts were identified, the real question that needed to be asked was ‘what was the real purpose of districts?’By 1999, with the focus of the state turning to implementation and service delivery, this question was raised. District development was placed on the agenda of the DoE when a national conference on district development was followed by conferences in each of the nine provinces. Rensburg (Conference, 1999), then deputy director general, raised questions about districts, saying that the conferences should identify the role of districts and why they needed to exist, and ask whether they were merely points of administration or nodes of change. However, his remark that districts needed to move out of a ‘victim’ mode to an empowerment mode, again raised the concern of whether the transformation process had adequately addressed the political, cultural and social contradictions that trapped people in the past. The critical question, therefore, was whether there was the political will to decentralise power and authority and give districts sufficient empowerment to lead change in schools and become accountable. Mohlala (2010) referred to Minister Motshekga’s announcement of a plan to bolster district offices and the problems identified were similar to those referred to ten years earlier, raising once again the role and function of districts in the education system.

The location of districts within the systemic structure of education placed them nearest the schools, however, the location and function seems to have been a problem almost from the time districts were established. Districts were excluded from many important school improvement initiatives, a key factor in both the EQUIP intervention and the EAZ intervention. While many reasons were given for these decisions it was necessary to probe the underlying reasons for the exclusion of districts. Nakamura and Smallwood (1980:47-65) refer to ‘actors’ in the policy environment, as intermediaries with the delegated responsibility of carrying out decisions made in Environment One. Fullan (2003) argues that districts are placed in the middle of the three levels and are therefore helped or hampered by both the school and the state and that they have an important role to play in the implementation of reform. These arguments place districts firmly in the implementation arena, and the implications of the exclusion of districts from the case study initiatives are explored below.

6.3.2 District Exclusion: Implications for Implementation

In the EQUIP intervention, districts were not deliberately excluded but they were not ready to take on a school improvement intervention. The external service providers became the intermediaries responsible for implementation of the EQUIP intervention, and the case study report raised many difficulties that surfaced through this outside-in approach. The need for district involvement for sustainability and accountability became a major obstacle. Schollar and Associates (1998), in their evaluation of the EQUIP project, argued that the districts should have been responsible for implementation and monitoring as part of their routine function. They claimed it was necessary to have district participation to ensure integration and sustainability. All three Schollar Reports (1999, 2000, 2002) on the evaluation of EQUIP raised the lack of departmental involvement, especially district involvement in the EQUIP process. The non-involvement of districts, whether by design as in the EAZ strategy, or by default as in EQUIP, may also have resulted in confusion and alienation of districts at school level.

Although there were continued arguments that districts were best placed to lead school improvement, the EAZ intervention was led by a central team located outside the system, totally bypassing districts. Both the EAZ and EQUIP use intermediaries or level two implementers outside the district structures. The EAZ team was given the authority and power to make quick decisions and take immediate action in schools that were in the jurisdiction of district offices. The EAZ team was given additional resources, such as mechanisms to deal with disciplinary and labour issues swiftly; they also had other resources such as the time and power to enter schools. Unlike the EQUIP project, in which districts were happy to relinquish the intervention to the external providers, senior district managers began to question and resent the EAZ approach that undermined their authority in schools. They argued that projects not located within organizational structures and cultures would not be sustained. The decision to have a central team with extraordinary resources and power may have been the immediate solution, but there did not seem to be any considerations regarding longevity or sustainability.

Multiple factors and forces interacting at all levels impact on the sustainability and longevity of reform initiatives. Despite the disparate conditions in districts, Roberts (n.d.)

argues that school-by-school reform initiatives, such as EQUIP and EAZ, yielded very few long-term results and that incorporating improvement initiatives within the district structures has greater potential to support, monitor and sustain the interventions.

In both cases, alienation of the districts had long-term consequences. Datnow, Hubbard and Mehan (2002) argue that educational reform should be a co-constructed process and implementation across the different levels should be viewed as a set of interrelated conditions and consequences. It was evident in the EAZ case that a degree of co-construction happened between the EAZ team and the school, and in EQUIP between the external EQUIP facilitators and the school. The consequence in both cases was an alienation of the district office. In the case of the education departments, Roberts (n.d.) argues that districts, because of their proximity to schools, have a key role to play in policy implementation, leading change and improvement and ensuring compliance and accountability.

6.3.3 Districts are Critical

The argument for the lack of district involvement in EQUIP was attributed to the districts being in the initial phase of establishment and struggling to establish an identity and credibility. However, almost five years later, when the EAZ strategy was initiated, districts were still not sufficiently equipped to be included in the strategy. Nakamura and Smallwood (1980:33) argue that the first level initiators of a strategy can increase or reduce potential pitfalls in the implementation process, yet in both EQUIP and the EAZ intervention there were few, if any, plans for districts as intermediaries of the interventions. Datnow, Hubbard and Mehan, (2002:41) argue that, if the approach to improvement interventions is located within a technical or rational perspective, then implementation would forge a causal chain with 'two classes' of actors, namely the initiators and the implementers. If both arguments hold then districts as intermediaries have a vital role to play in the implementation process, yet they were excluded in both case studies.

Fullan, (2003) argues that the context of the education departments may be viewed as complex arenas and if the implementation process is viewed as circular then it is important to acknowledge the complexities and include all persons and structures responsible for implementation in the process. Districts, especially Gauteng, went through changes as they

struggled to create a structure and system that needed to respond to both provincial office demands and pressures and school needs. Fullan (2003) uses the chaos theory, or complexity theory, to explain why large social systems such as the GDE and its several tiers may never reach a state of stability. In a changing and emerging environment, such as in the GDE, as in the rest of South Africa, it is essential to acknowledge that the complexity and unpredictability of the environment will remain for a long time. Intervention strategies, therefore, need to embrace the instability rather than alienate important structures such as districts.

The exclusion of districts from the processes of both cases, whether by design or not, suggests cracks in the organisation. At the political and organisational levels, there was a need to explore the meaning attached to decentralisation. The question raised here is, if districts were not ready and did not have the capacity or resources to lead school improvement, then what was the purpose of districts? Politically, districts do not seem to have the relevant power and authority; technically they do not have sufficient material or human resources; and culturally they lack a common organisational vision and coherence to lead on imperatives, whether state-initiated or the needs of schools. Both cases studies show how problems at the school level were identified, but they do not analyse problems within the system that impact on implementation. If co-construction, (Datnow, Hubbard & Mehan, 2002), ownership and trust are building blocks for implementation then the importance of districts as agents of change should not be underestimated. If districts are to be held responsible for schools in their precincts there may be a need to examine their political, cultural and technical competence.

6.4 THE MICRO-LEVEL

The level or degree of implementation of school improvement interventions is dependent on local level contextual realities. Datnow, Hubbard and Mehan (2002:39-45) argue that implementation occurs differently across local areas, schools and classrooms, and that reform is often studied as a rational and technical process. However, the study of implementation of EQUIP and EAZ at the level of the school highlighted the complexity of implementing school improvement within the contextual difficulties of schools dealing with transitional changes in the country. While the macro and meso-level issues impact on

implementation at the school level, the complex historical, political technical and cultural realities at the school level must be understood as the terrain in which the projected change must occur.

6.4.1 The School Context

In this context, a major problem with current discourse on school improvement and school reform internationally is that insufficient attention is given to factors that destabilise the basic functionality of schools in a developing context. Chisholm and Vally (1996)argue that the absence of a culture of teaching and learning in many township schools can be attributed to historical and structural 'conditions, attitudes and practices.' This implies that schools must be examined within their historical, social and cultural contexts. In both case studies, similar issues raised in at least three of the four schools were: a lack of infrastructure in some schools; a lack of basic resources such as desks and books; a lack of human resources as well as human capacity; fractured relationships; political power struggles between the various groups; very poor socio-economic contexts; and very little attention being paid to teaching and learning. It can be argued that both EQUIP and the EAZ interventions should have focused on restoring functionality and stability first. There may have been a disjuncture in the design of the interventions and the contextual realties on the ground.

While one cannot generalise from the two schools studied in each of the case studies, common trends and issues began to emerge. There is need for a theoretical perspective that locates school improvement within specific contextual realties that are politically and socially complex and contradictory.

6.4.2 Power and Politics in Schools

The two EQUIP schools, Funda Secondary and Jabula Secondary, and one EAZ school, Lama Secondary, were sites of political power struggles in the years leading to democracy. The second EAZ, South Secondary, was located in a township and sector of the population where the impact of political struggles in the school was minimal. The highly politicised local climate remained long after the advent of democracy, and the argument made here is that, in addition to several factors that impinge on implementation at the local level, the

location of power and politics has created serious sites of contradiction and contestation at the local level. These are amplified in a context such as South Africa as a result of power derived from many sources at local level. During the many years of struggle against apartheid rule, local-level structures have emerged as powerful political bases.

Both case studies illustrated the role of educators and principals who were joined in what became the largest and most powerful union, SADTU. Learners opposing an inferior education were joined in several regional structures united under the umbrella body of COSAS, while communities were also organised in various structures such as religious and other groupings, with workers organising under COSATU. These organisations played a key role in the struggle for democracy; however, they also created pockets of power at the local level that impacted on the post-struggle period. The two EQUIP schools and the one EAZ school demonstrated the role of power and politics at the local level. Funda Secondary and Jabula Secondary in EQUIP, and Lama Secondary in the EAZ intervention, were located in the townships where local politics created complex and difficult contexts as anti-apartheid struggles were replaced by power struggles. The principals of these schools had to deal with unionised educators who were more powerful than they were, and with learners who led defiance campaigns during the struggle. As these gained power the principals struggled to keep under control. The dynamics of power located at the student level or at the level of educators are significant, as these groupings of power can determine the agenda of school reform.

In both case studies, schools in similar contexts such as Funda Secondary, Jabula Secondary and Lama Secondary raised issues of divisions between management and educators as a serious obstacle to implementation of EQUIP and EAZ. Divisions in the schools were mainly the result of a struggle for power and authority. The positional power of the principals in all three schools was weakened by a dispersion of power located amongst individuals on the staff who were not ready to accept leaders outside their own groupings.

While a generalisation cannot be made from the three schools, it can be argued that schools in townships that were embroiled in the struggle will bear political complexities and

difficulties for a long time. Interventions, whether they bottom-up or top-down, need to take cognisance of the power and politics at the school level and the implications of implementation. Freire's (1972) analysis is helpful in an attempt to understand the continued struggle for control and power, even though freedom has been obtained. Freire talks about 'the fear of freedom' that the oppressed may be inflicted with. They confuse freedom with the maintenance of the status quo. True freedom must be pursued and it requires action and responsibility.

The South Secondary scenario is a little different as it was situated in a former Indian township and had not been embroiled in the political struggle. The EAZ intervention in this school helped to bring together two different political, social and cultural contexts. Parents and learners from informal settlements and townships brought with them politics and social problems as they struggled to understand the culture of the school with its 'zero tolerance' of any deviations from the school rules. The lack of power struggles within the school enabled quick positive responses to the EAZ intervention, as educators were not politicised but were more compliant.

The immediate surroundings of the school were not involved in the previous struggles and disruptions power thus remained in the hands of the authorities and not dispersed in pockets in the school. This helped in the more rapid achievement of stability. Ball (1994) argues that political and social transformation may create pockets of contradiction and contestation, and this was clearly evident in the power and resistance to change amongst staff members in at least three of the four schools in the case studies.

6.4.3 Technical Factors Impact on Implementation

The literature suggests that schools may be at different levels of readiness, with Slavin's (1998) analogy of 'seeds, brick and sand' to categorise schools' ability to respond to reform. He describes 'sand' schools as those in turmoil or transition that need extraordinary interventions to bring about change. A 'brick' is one that is more stable, especially in its human relationships and therefore more open to change, while 'seed' schools are those that have the ideal conditions for accepting and nurturing change. The importance of this kind of categorization is the need to match the reform with the state of readiness of the school. Both case studies have shown that where schools were not ready

they either ignored aspects of the reform strategy or used the strategy to address problems peculiar to their contexts. Each of the four schools in the two case studies were either 'seed' schools or the more challenging 'sand' schools.

6.4.4 Schools' Organisational Systems and Structures

Literature on implementation of school improvement interventions focus on the people in the school and tend not to examine their systems, structure or culture adequately. Datnow, Hubbard and Mehan (2002) analyse how context shapes implementation. While the focus is on people in organisations and their ability to adopt, adapt or become agents of change, it became necessary to examine whether the organisational systems, structures and culture were open or closed to any form of change.

In the South African context there has been much debate about the absence of a culture of teaching and learning in schools, with the blame laid on both the learners and educators, but little is said about school systems and structures. Christie (1998) explored the organizational dimensions of school failure when she referred to schools as '(dis)organisations.' Her analysis of the breakdown of the country's schools began to highlight organisational issues such as routine, rituals, time, space and boundaries, which allow them to function normally. These organisational realties either allow or impede the implementation processes at the level of the school.

Both the EQUIP and the EAZ case studies highlighted the lack of systems and structures in schools. Funda secondary, Jabula Secondary and Lama Secondary lacked basic structures and systems that would be assumed to be present in the organisation of schools. They were struggling with basics such as punctuality, both educator and learner discipline and a commitment to teaching and learning. Educators in the EQUIP schools either resented change or were blocked from participating in the process by the principal. In Lama Secondary there was a level of compliance, even if it was superficial. The lack of systems and structures in both Funda Secondary and Jabula Secondary was identified as a serious impediment to school improvement.

Maja (1994), in a case study of a school in Soweto, refers to the lack of administration systems such as one to monitor and control the issuing of textbooks to students, resulting in their simply not returning books at the end of the school year. An EQUIP service provider (EQsp2) said that what was needed before any intervention began was "*getting the basic rhythms of the school working*." Both case studies show that the lack of basic administrative systems and structure in schools during the period of the initiation of the EQUIP implementation, and later the EAZ strategy, hampered implementation. Lack of basic systems such as time management, financial management or the retention of text-books, and the absence of a timetable, indicated the need to design interventions that would address these fundamental, basic problems.

An interesting contrast was South Secondary, which had all basic organisational systems and structures but was rendered dysfunctional when the changed student population, coming from mainly dysfunctional contexts, could not adjust to a school that demanded compliance. However, as seen in the case study, with a small amount of pressure and negotiation the school responded to change.

The argument raised is that neither EQUIP type of bottom-up intervention nor the EAZ top-down strategy could work in a context in which fundamental organisational systems and structures are not ready. The EQUIP strategy expected schools to address their organisational and systems problems through development planning. The EAZ strategy, on the other hand, targeted issues of '(dis)organisation' in its demands for compliance and accountability, applying authority and pressure on schools to conform.

That both case studies highlight the lack of systems and structures troubling schools is an indication that organisational systems and structures must be considered as major prerequisites in the implementation of any reform initiative.

6.4.5 School Culture Shapes Implementation

School culture in the context of a great deal of instability, local level power struggles and severe socio-economic problems must be considered as a major factor when analysing implementation. The first five years of reforms raised an awareness of the breakdown of education in many schools across the country. The two case studies depicted a technical response to schools affected by socio-cultural problems. Christie (1998) referred to school culture as a 'lived experience' that should be interpreted within a psychoanalytical framework. She also argued that we should not be referring to the breakdown of a culture of learning but the development of a culture of teaching and learning. This implied that, where schools did not have a vision of functionality or normality, one could not talk about an absence of a culture but about ways of developing normality and functionality.

In both case studies, schools referred to major socio-economic problems that were impacting on them. Many schools, particularly those in the townships and informal settlements, have experienced many years of non-achievement, poverty and instability, resulting in conflict, de-motivation and a sense of failure. With the exception of South Secondary, the case study schools experienced very difficult and challenging socio-economic problems. A history of low achievement, disillusionment and a general apathy to life was interpreted as a lack of the culture of teaching and learning. The question raised here is whether schools in these contexts had the innate will and capacity to respond to interventions.

Schools that have a stable culture, such as South Secondary, used the pressure to restore compliance and the culture of teaching and learning that had been prevalent in the past. The problems at Lama secondary were not solved as easily, even with the high pressured approach of the EAZ team. The matriculation results improved slightly but the school was still troubled by problems of conflict and tension, and a culture of negativity prevailed. The IDSO of Lama Secondary indicated that maybe even pressure is not enough for a school that is 'stuck.'

In both EQUIP and EAZ, the interventions had made some gains but had not addressed the real goals of the intervention. The contextual realties of schools in difficult contexts resist

improvement initiatives or make superficial changes. A school that is torn apart by strife, conflict and tension may need more than pressure to respond to an intervention and may be unable to respond to a bottom-up strategy. It can be argued that the contextual realties in a school will determine how it responds to an intervention.

6.4.6 The Principal as Gatekeeper or Change Agent

Both case studies have highlighted the role of the principal as gatekeeper of the school. The principal, whether weak or strong, can effectively prevent or allow an intervention beyond the office doors. In both EQUIP and EAZ there were examples of how the principal used the interventions to bring about the changes they desired. Principals as agents of change read the context and manipulated the resources of the intervention to achieve their own goals, which may not necessarily have been to the benefit of the school. The role of gatekeeper and agency was also displayed in all schools in both case studies.

In South Secondary the principal used the power and authority of the EAZ team to gain compliance from both the educators and learners. However, he remained the gatekeeper and the intervention did not go beyond what he wanted from it. The focus group interview with the educators revealed that they had little knowledge about the EAZ intervention or its goals. In both South Secondary and Funda Secondary, the principals manipulated the interventions to achieve their goals, which did result in limited improvement in the school.

Both Jabula Secondary and Lama Secondary principals did not allow the interventions beyond their office doors. Interviews with the focus group of educators in both schools revealed that they knew very little about the implementation of the intervention. In both cases studies, the principal at the school level controlled entry to the school. A major finding was that the more insecure the principal the more closed he was to any negotiations or exposure of either himself or his school. Ball (1989:235-238) links the micro-politics in a school to ‘individual careers, ideological commitments’, and organisational cultures. The power of the constraining elements that people face daily is significant. Ball (1989:238) argues that the basic transformation of a school includes the cultural meanings attached within and outside the school and the battles over control and dominance. Both the case studies, whether bottom-up or top-down, revealed the power of the principal as gatekeeper.

Implementation and change literature assume that the principal is the main agent of change, the question is whether the principal actually wants to change the school. The principal's agenda can determine what is implemented in a school and how.

6.4.7 Accountability and Compliance

The EQUIP programme as a bottom-up and outside-in intervention, struggled with compliance and accountability. While the service providers addressed their brief and engaged with the schools, it soon became clear that they were unable to sustain development or demand compliance and accountability. A major concern for the EQUIP programme leaders was the need to show visible signs of improvement both to the funders and the GDE. They struggled with this problem as they only had three years in a school and no plan for continuity or support.

The service providers who realised that they would be unable to demand accountability began to use consistent support and real commitment to get some of the schools to comply. The providers, through persistence and by providing strong support, were able to gain some positive compliance and change in schools, but where schools resisted change there was nothing they could do to demand compliance. Fleisch (2002) confirmed that school-by-school, outside-in attempts at improvement do not gain the desired effects in schools themselves or improve education systems. In the case of EQUIP and earlier interventions, the reason may be that the school systems were not ready for an external, bottom-up strategy, and there was no pressure to comply with or bring about change.

The EAZ intervention did not have the same problems with compliance and accountability, even though the EAZ strategy was a radical shift from all previous school improvement strategies. It was a top-down strategy that would threaten the autonomy and collaborative culture of the newly established democratic organisational structure of the school. This top-down, high pressure approach and demand for compliance would have resulted in mass resistance if employed five years earlier as all pressure was associated with the apartheid past. It was accepted in second stage of democracy as poor conditions in schools prompted the state's call for politically swift and visible action. There was a call for delivery and

accountability and communities were unhappy with the condition of schools. The climate was ready for the EAZ approach.

The need for hard-line pressure and demanding accountability was welcomed by communities plagued by failure. The schools were in trouble and the pressure and authority helped move them out of a stagnant situation. There was very little room for resistance when the community welcomed the intervention.

Even the district offices welcomed the compliance achieved by the EAZ team. It can be argued that in schools where there had been a breakdown it may have been necessary to use pressure to break the status quo. The EAZ strategy was acknowledged for the quick turnaround in schools as they began to comply with policies.

Both case studies pointed to a need to take into account the dynamics of the political, social and historical contexts of organisations in transition. While the EQUIP programme could not command the same compliance and accountability from schools, it was a relevant strategy during the fragile state of transition from the harsh legacy of state domination and control. However, the EAZ strategy responded to the need for visible functionality in the schools in order to restore community perception of schools.

Both case studies suggest the need for a deeper understanding of the realities of the state at a particular point in its evolution. Jansen and Taylor (2003), in analysing three reform initiatives in South African education, argue that planning for reform in the next decade will need to include:

- integrated systemic thinking
- an attention to key mechanisms of implementation – management systems
- systematic monitoring to assess whether the goals are being met or frustrated by unintended consequences.

The two case studies highlight the need to consider both compliance and accountability as major considerations in developing improvement strategies.

6.4.8 Development and Support Versus Pressure

EQUIP provided schools with support in organisational development and infrastructural needs. The EAZ intervention, for the first time since the new democracy, went into schools with force to demand delivery and compliance. Neither case study revealed a sufficient balance between pressure and support, but rather both were very weak on support that mattered most, i.e., the improvement of teaching and learning.

In the specific context of these schools, implementation depended on knowledge and information. Elmore asks, as quoted in Fullan (2003:56):

> '*Is it ethical to hold individuals – in this case educators – accountable for doing things they don't know how to do and can't be expected to do without considerable knowledge and skill*…?'

One possible answer is that it is not the school itself that is accountable but the sponsoring organisation - the school system that is accountable. Elmore makes the point that the demand for accountability must be coupled with support and development. When the target is the lowest performing schools then both support and pressure are necessary.

6.5 OVERVIEW

The critical question raised here is whether these schools have the capacity to deal with the new state of democracy and freedom. Fleisch and Christie (2004) affirm that active and accountable principals with legitimacy are linked to functional schools, and that in the South African context, legitimacy and authority of leadership at the school level may be a precondition for improvement. Given that after almost seventeen years of democracy, principals of schools are still struggling to establish their authority and legitimacy, the situation needs to be addressed. Emerging from this study is that, in designing school improvement strategies in the South African context, the ability to accept 'freedom' for both oppressors and oppressed has not been sufficiently problematised. Nor has the struggle to convert to freedom, linked to accountability and responsibility, been successful for many throughout the system.

CHAPTER SEVEN
CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

7.1 INTRODUCTION

The two case studies unveiled implementation crises throughout the system, with political, cultural and technical issues at all three levels either hindering or promoting implementation. At the macro level of initiation, design gaps and lack of clarity of goals raised major implementation questions. At the meso-level, the exclusion of the districts, whether intentional or not, raised questions about the role and function of districts and whether lack of confidence in their capacity was an acceptable reason for exclusion of districts. At the micro level of the school, challenges of local level politics, social, cultural, technical and organisational realities were the major factors that either blocked implementation or resulted in adaptation or manipulation of the interventions.

Implementation was further hampered by the adoption of a technical or rational approach to it. Contradictions and contestations at the various levels in both case studies point to the need to review communication and collaborative linkage through the system and to adopt a more collaborative circular approach as each level impacts on the other

Turnover in leadership and other personnel also affected the commitment to both initiatives. EQUIP was the brainchild of the first MEC in the province and EAZ of the second. Each MEC had a five-year term of office, which is not enough time to initiate, plan and implement a school improvement strategy.

7.2 THE COMPLEXITIES OF GETTING THINGS DONE

The first question this study aimed to examine is the link between designing a school improvement intervention and the challenges posed by implementation of the strategy. Both case studies unravelled a disjuncture between school improvement and implementation at the macro, meso and micro levels of the GDE.

7.2.1 Key issues at the macro level

Both case studies showed that the initiation and design addressed macro level concerns but very little attention was given to micro level realities, albeit these were known. In both case studies the origination and initiation of the school improvement intervention, in the political office, gave the strategies the impetus associated with the 'power' and 'authority' associated with the political office. However, in both cases, implementation through the bureaucratic structures at the macro, meso and local levels was fraught with difficulties. The difficulties of getting things done may be attributed to several factors, ranging from human capacity and will, political and power contestations at the various levels, to unclear goals and communication.

The divide between politics and bureaucracy revealed in this study pointed to a need to examine the pitfalls in implementing a school improvement intervention or any policy in which there is lack of clarity between the two. Lack of clarity regarding the role and constituency of policymakers and the role and constituency of the bureaucratic offices permeated the system to the local level of the school. This was seen in both the EQUIP and the EAZ interventions. The struggle for power and control in an emerging context also resulted in sites of contestation. At the macro level, tension was created when perceptions of control seemed to be located in the political office, especially with the EAZ intervention. The perceived power of the political offices undermined the bureaucracy at all levels of the system.

7.2.2 Key issues at the meso-level

In both case studies, the role of districts was absent at the initiation stage and at best was vague at the latter stages of the interventions. The district's non-involvement in EQUIP was more complex than just being excluded from the programmes. The problem of establishing an organisational identity and responding to schools in crisis was more than they could cope with. By the second phase of government, districts were still in 'identity crises' and excluded during the initial stages of implementation of the EAZ intervention. Both case studies raised several questions concerning the status, role and function of districts. They exist as entities within the structure of the provincial department, but while they are accountable for schools both case studies revealed that they did not always have a

clear mandate to implement or the authority to demand accountability from schools. They were subject to a flurry of policy and reform demands from both provincial and national imperatives.

The diversity of contextual realities in schools placed severe challenges on the district office. Both case studies revealed that districts cannot be mandated in a bureaucratic linear management model. Complexities at the district level include resistance, competing priorities, capacity and will. District officials therefore chose how and to what level they responded to initiatives, depending on their capacity, time and clarity. However, literature as well as both case studies revealed the importance of including districts at all stages of the school improvement intervention, from design to implementation. De Clercq (2001:10) argues that districts are best placed to lead school change and that district offices with the relevant authority, power and capacity may be the key to ensuring sustainability and fidelity of interventions.

7.2.3 Key issues at the micro level

The final success indicators of a school improvement intervention are located in what gets done at the school site. Both case studies revealed that schools are sites of complex historical, political, cultural and economic challenges that influence the 'Black Box' of implementation in schools. Local level politics, and social and economic conditions in schools, create an environment of tension and conflict. The cross-case analysis affirmed that the tensions created by affiliates to political parties, unions and student organisations become major obstacles to implementation as they created contestation and power politics that consume schools. Further contradictions emerged from principals who guarded entry to schools. The agency of principals determined what and how things got done in schools. Implementation at the level of the school in both case studies was fragmented and adapted to meet the agenda of the principal. Weak organisational and administrative systems in schools made them vulnerable to uncertainty and many kinds of problem, ranging from educator and learner discipline problems to inefficiency and conflict.

Schools in both case studies revealed an environment of constant change and uncertainty, with wide differences in capacity at the various levels. The EQUIP intervention placed the

burden of school improvement on schools as a bottom-up strategy. The high pressure, top-down EAZ strategy also placed the burden of accountability and improvement on schools. Both approaches presumed that schools had the will, the capacity and the culture to drive change, but this did not correlate with the actual levels of dysfunction that existed in many of them. There was no coherence in how these interventions would address the long list of problems identified in dysfunctional schools

7.3 UNDERSTANDING THE SHIFTING TERRAIN

The second question raised by this study is whether attempting to get things done in an emerging democracy posed obstacles. South Africa since 1994 has experienced a period of major changes as the country needed to transform very quickly from an extreme ideology of apartheid to one of democracy. Changes to democratic principles had to be almost immediate as no signs of apartheid would be tolerated in the new democracy. Education had been used to maintain and support the principles of apartheid, and at all levels was central to the years of struggle against apartheid. Restructuring in the new democracy also needed to incorporate the principles of transformation, and complexity in the education arena was also subjected to the socio-economic and other upheavals facing the country. It is in this context that the two case studies were examined. The emerging education department was an arena of contradictions and contestations.

In this study a critical issue that emerged was the need to problematise the struggle to become 'free citizens.' It was necessary to explore the tools or support that individuals require to participate in a developing democracy. An understanding of the intensity of the struggle in a developing world is necessary, especially when examining why implementation does or does not happen. Freedom does not happen once liberation is obtained. Freire (1972) refers to the "fear of freedom" which afflicts the oppressed, and argues that those who have suffered years of oppression will need to eject the internalised image of the world of oppression and replace it by individual autonomy and responsibility. Freire claims that it is thorough 'praxis' (action and reflection) that people liberate themselves, arguing that "critical and liberating dialogue, which presupposes action, must be carried on with the oppressed at whatever the stage of their liberation" (Freire, 1972).

The argument raised here is that the conflict and resistance displayed in districts, and even in the case study schools, may lie in the struggle created in transforming education from the old to the new. An assumption was made that, by changing systems and structures and developing new policies, people would be ready for their new roles. The ability to change from an oppressive system to the new one envisioned requires more than political and technical decisions. A better understanding of these realities at different levels of the system can contribute to improved implementation through the system.

7.4 THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS STUDY

Examining two intervention strategies confirmed that the implementation environment is riddled with actors and arenas that contribute to contradictions and contestations at various levels and the fluidity between levels increases the potential for adoption, adaptation or breakdown of the intervention. It did not matter that EQUIP was a bottom-up, outside-in strategy, or that the EAZ was a top-down strategy, power politics and agency of actors at the various levels resulted in intentional or unintentional consequences.

Both implementation literature, and that on school improvement, concur that the implementation terrain in education as found in this study is a difficult and complex environment. The historical context of South African education increased the complexities of the terrain. Most existing literature on school improvement focuses on contexts that may be challenging but are not as complex as reconstructing an education culture and system while dismantling the divisive apartheid-era system. Therefore, the study of the EAZ and EQUIP school improvement initiatives makes a unique contribution to existing literature as it extends the dialogue on implementation to include the complexities of implementation in an emerging education context. This study further contributes to the study of school improvement by linking the conceptual frameworks of implementation to the study of school improvement initiatives. The focus of the two case studies, on and between the macro, meso and micro levels of the GDE, linked conceptual theories of implementation with school improvement to contribute to an increased understanding of implementation within the constraining realities of an emerging terrain. This study, while limited to two

cases, foregrounds the need to engage with the political, cultural and technical realities that exist within and between the macro, meso and micro levels of the system.

An even greater imperative emerging from this study is the need to understand these realities within the context of the serious historical legacies of uncertainty, lack of capacity and will, lack of systemic integration and a lack of commitment to deep-level transformation and change through the various levels of the system. Therefore it is important to embed a school improvement initiative within the iterative process of implementation. The process must allow for cyclical rather than a hierarchical model of implementation; however, designers of the school improvement strategy must have clear goals with clear direction and delegated authority for achieving the goals. Implementers at all levels must be given the relevant technical and administrative skills and tools to achieve the goals. The EAZ strategy also raised the need for pressure and mandates as a necessary approach to gain first level change in difficult contexts.

7.5 TOWARDS AN ADAPTED MODEL OF SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

This study supports Datnow, Hubbard and Mehan's (2002) arguments that context shapes implementation and that the change process at the school level is dependent on agency at the state, district and school level. However, it also argues that school improvement in the emerging South African context must respond to the contested nature of transforming societies and the serious lack of cohesion and capacity at all levels of the system. In order to respond to this difficult terrain, it argues that implementation within a cyclical model must be an integral part of the design of a school improvement intervention. There must be a clear understanding of the political, cultural and technical nuances in each of the three environments. Implementation is dependent on actors in these arenas and the contextual realties in these arenas shape the level of agency played by the people in each of these environments. The linkages between these environments also determine the fidelity, compliance and communication of the message of the intervention as actors within each have different levels of power and authority and influence on the change process.

Figure 7.1 (below) depicts this model of school improvement that foregrounds implementation:

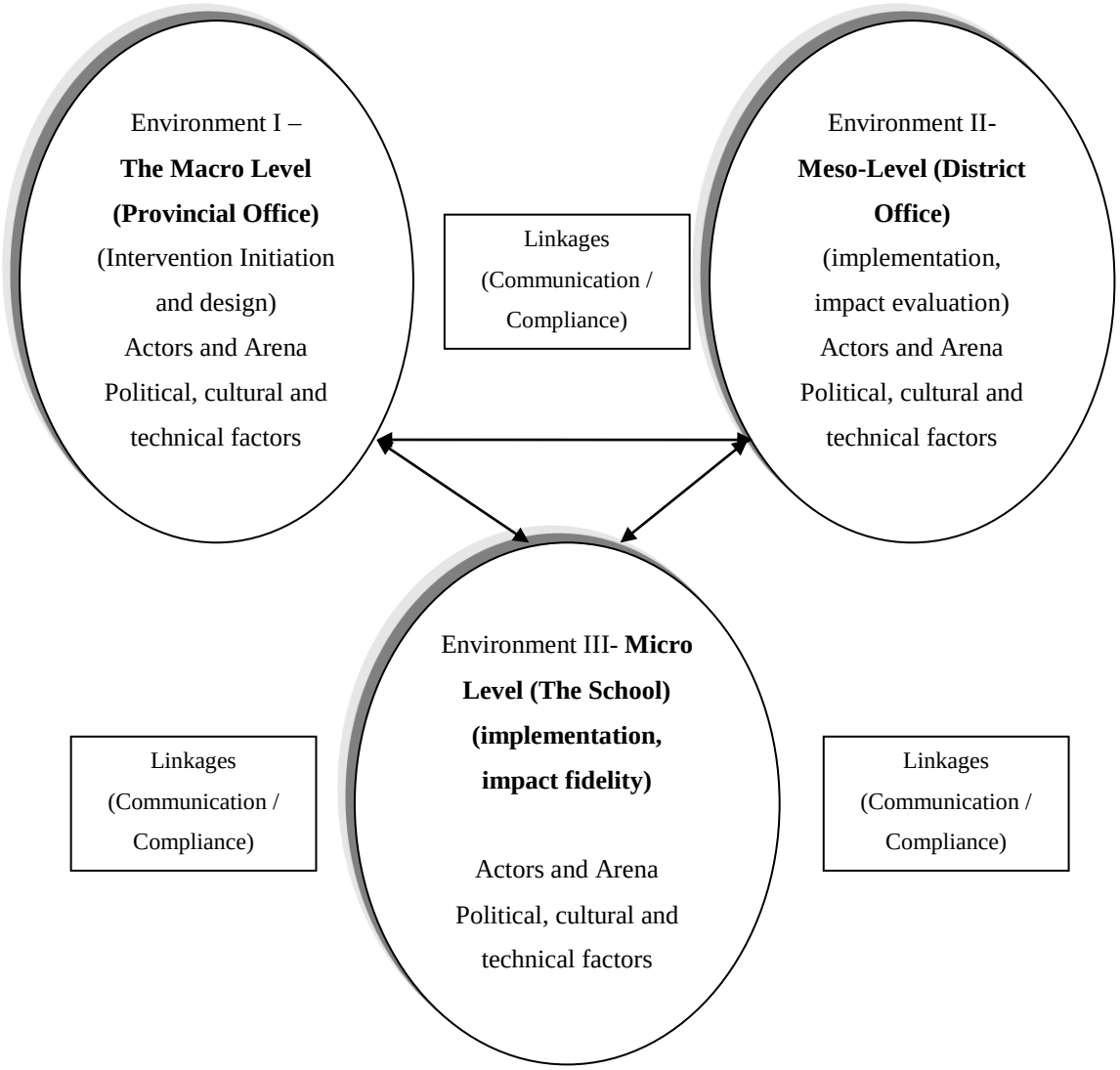


Figure 7.1.*A School Improvement Intervention Model that integrates implementation* (as adapted from Nakamura & Smallwood, 1980:27)

The three circles represent each of the environmental levels within the education department. Each depicts the contextual factors within each of the environments. The key to this model is understanding each environment, and considering all the contextual factors

within each of them, when planning implementation. The arrows linking the three circles reinforce the need to plan for the linkage, communication and issues of compliance connecting the three levels. The connections between the circles also depict the iterative and cyclic nature of implementation. This model depicts how a school improvement intervention is dependent on the planning and design of implementation within and between each of the three levels of the system.

7.6 RECOMMENDATIONS

The findings in this study may not be generalised but do point to the complexities of implementation in an unstable developing context. They suggest that, in using the model in figure 7.1, the following key considerations must inform the design and implementation of a school improvement intervention. The following recommendations are grounded in the findings of this study:

- Dealing with post-apartheid freedom must be problematised:
    - Power struggles, whether by union members, learners or staff, need to be addressed in the implementation of a school improvement intervention in order to allow the intervention to penetrate the school
    - Despite claims of consultation at various levels, there is need to develop a culture and vision of common goals beyond a paper exercise
    - Ideals of democracy must be linked to accountability and a drive for quality at all levels.
- Political or bureaucratic designs of school improvement must address the school-by-school contextual needs rather than aim at politically motivated ‘quick wins’
- International models do not necessarily speak to contextual realities
- School improvement initiatives must be located within the system to ensure sustainability
- Capacity at all levels of the system must be addressed.
- Schools that lack basic systems and structures cannot be expected to devise their own improvement plans

- The authority and power to embrace pressure and support must be located within the system
- Districts must be developed and be given sufficient authority to implement school improvement
- The historical legacy of complex social, political and cultural issues must be planned for the implementation process.

7.7 CONCLUSION

Central to the discourse pertaining to this study was the emerging South African terrain. The two case studies set in the first two periods of educational transition in South Africa raised two fundamental concerns: i) the ability to understand school improvement in the context of the radical political changes in the country, and ii) the ability to understand the implementation of changes that are complex and that challenge the political, cultural and technical arrangements at the macro, meso and micro levels of the GDE. Of critical concern in both case studies was the notion that the education arena would produce pre-determined results in spite of the major upheavals in the country and in education itself. In a country in transition it is imperative to locate initiatives within the complexity of shifting structural, political and cultural institutional contexts.

REFERENCES

Asmal, K. (1999). *Call to Action! Mobilising citizens to build a South African education and training system for the 21st Century*.Department of Education. (unpublished).

Asmal, K. (1999). Call to Action: Mobilising citizens to build a South African Education and Training System for the 21st Century. Statement by Professor Kader Asmal, Minister of Education, 27 July 1999.

Asmal, K. (2000). Parliamentary press briefing by Professor Kader Asmal MP. Minister of Education, 10 February 2000.

Atweh, B., Kemmis, S. & Weeks, P. (1998).*Action Research in Practice.Partnershipsfor Social Justice in Education*. London and New York: Routledge.

Ball, S. J. (1990). *Politics and policy making in education: Explorations in policy sociology.* London & New York: Routledge.

Ball, S. J. (1994). *Education reform.A critical and post-structural approach*. Great Britain: Open University Press.

Barber, M. (1998). *National strategies for educational reform: Lessons learnt from the British experience since 1998*. International Handbook of Educational Change.p.743-768

Basson, R., Nsibande, N. & Morgan, B. (2001).*The Turning schools around project. A descriptive evaluation*. University of Witwatersrand: School of Education.

Bennett, N. Crawford, M. & Riches, C. (1992).*Managing change in education – individual and organizational perspectives*, London:Paul Chapman.

Berger, J. (January 2000). Bulletin: *The National association of secondary school principals*. USA: NASSP Bulletin, Vol 84 No.612.

Brodkin, E.Z. (1990). *Implementation as policy politics* in Palumbo, D. J. and Calista, D. J. (eds.) Implementation and the policy process-Opening up the Black Box. USA: Greenwood Press.

Buckland, P. (n.d.). General Education: Some implementation considerations – A Submission to IPET (Draft).

Buckland, P. & Hofmeyer, J. (1993).*Education Governance in South Africa*. Johannesburg: EDUPOL.

Burke. J. P. (1990). *Policy implementation and the responsible exercise of discretion.*in Palumbo, D. J. and Calista, D. J. (eds) Implementation and the policy process - Opening up the Black Box. USA: Greenwood Press.

Calhoun, E. & Joyce, B. (1998). '*INSIDE-OUT AND OUTSIDE-IN': Learning from past and present school improvement paradigms*. International Handbook of Educational Eds. A. Hargreaves, A. Lieberman, M. Fullan and D. Hopkins. Vol 5.(2) pp.1216-1242. Great Britain:Kluver Academic Publishers.

Carnoy, M. & Levin, H. M. (1985).*Schooling and work in the democratic state*. California: Stanford University Press.

Carrim, N. (1992). *Proceedings of a conference on effective schools in South Africa.*University of the Witwatersrand.

Carrim, N. & Shalem, Y. (1999).School effectiveness in South Africa.*International Journal of Qualitative studies in Education*, 12(1), 59-83.

Carter, D. S. G. & O'Niel, M. H. (1995).*International perspectives on educational reform and policy implementation.* Great Britain: The Falmer Press.

Catholic Institute of Education (1999). EQUIP Project Team Combined Report.

Chapman, C. & Allen, T. (2006). Htpp:// imp.sagepub.com. Collaborative reform for schools in difficulty. Improving Schools 9 (3) Sage.(accessed June 2010)

Chisholm, L. (ed) (2004). *Changing Class: Education and social change in post-apartheid South Africa*. South Africa: HSRC Press.

Chisholm, L. & Vally, S. (1996).*Report of the committee for a Culture of Teaching and Learning. Johannesburg,* SA: University of Witwatersrand, Education Policy Unit.

Christie, P. (1998). Schools as (dis)organizations: the 'breakdown of the culture of learning and teaching' in South African schools. *Cambridge Journal of Education*, 28(3) 283-300).

Christie, P. & Potterton, M. (1997).*School development in South Africa: a research project to investigate strategic interventions for quality improvement in South African Schools.* Johannesburg: Education department University of Witwatersrand.

Clarke P, Harris A & Reynolds D (2004) *'Challenging the challenged: developing an improvement programme for schools facing extremely challenging circumstances'.* Paper presented at AERA, San Diego, April 2004.

Coleman, J., Campbell, E., Hobson, C., McPartland, J., Mood, A.,Weinfall, F., & York, R. (1966) *Equality of educational opportunity*. Washington. D.C.

Concept Proposal (1998).An Education Quality Improvement Programme-EQUIP: NBI.

Creswell, J. W. (1998). *Qualitative inquiry and research design. Choosing among five traditions.* London: Sage.

Cross, M. (1992). *Resistance and transformation.Education, culture and reconstruction in South Africa.*Johannesburg: Skotaville.

Cuttance, P. (1998).*Quality assurance reviews as a catalyst for school improvement in Australia.*International Handbook of Educational Change. (Eds.) A. Hargreaves, A. Lieberman, M. Fullan and D. Hopkins. 5.(2), 1135-1163. Great Britain: Kluver Academic Publishers.

Dalin, P. (1998). *Developing the twenty first century: A challenge to reformers.*International Handbook of Educational Change (Eds.) A. Hargreaves, A. Lieberman, M. Fullan and D. Hopkins.5.(2), 1059-1074. Great Britain:Kluver Academic Publishers.

Datnow, A. & Castellano, M. (2000). Teachers' response to 'Success for all': *How beliefs,* experiences and adaptations shape implementation. *American Educational Research Journal.* . Vol 37,No3, pp775-799

Datnow, A., Hubbard, L. & Conchas G, Q. (2001).How context mediates policy: The implementation of single gender public schooling in California. *Teachers College Record*. 103(2), 184-206. Columbia University.

Datnow, A., Hubbard, L. & Mehan, H. (2002).*Extending educational reform: From one school to many.* London and New York: Routledge Falmer.

De Clercq, F. (2001).*School development work in South African education: the strategic challenges of districts*. Toronto: ICSEI Conference.

Dempster, N., Kruchov, C. & Distant, G. (1994). *School Development Planning: An International perspective.* In Hargreaves, D. and Hopkins, D. (eds.) Development planning foe school improvement. London: Cassel.

Dickson, M., Halpin, D., Power, S., Telford, D. & Whitty, G. (2001). Education Action Zones and democratic participation.*School Leadership and Management,* 21(2), 169-181.

Dickson, M. & Power, S. (2001). *Education Action Zones: a new way of governing education*. School Leadership & Management, 21 (2), 137-141.

Department of Education.(2000-2004) *Corporate Plan*.

Donaldson, A. (2001). *Reconstructing education: reflections on post-apartheid planning, systems and structure* in Sayed, Y. & Jansen, J. Implementing education policies: The South African experience. Cape Town: UCT Press.

Easen.P. (2000). Education Action Zones: partnerships is no panacea for progress. Westminister Studies in Education.23(1), EBSCO Publishing.

Ednir, M., Ceccon, C., & Van Velzen, B. (2006). Htpp://imp.sagepub.com. High pressure school reform in Brazil: the case of 'the difficult schools' in Improving Schools. 9(3), 214-224. Sage.(accessedJune 2011)

EDUPOL (n.d.). Draft Equip Concept Proposal for submission to the Business Trust.

EDUPOL (1995). Education Quality Improvement Programme: An overview of the key elements of the EQUIP programme. Presented to the KwaZulu Natal Education Department.

Elmore, R. F. (1979-80). Backward Mapping: Implementation research and policy decisions. *Political Science Quarterly*. 94(4),

Elmore, R. F. & McLaughlin.M.W. (1988) *Steady Work: Policy practice and the reform of American education* ,R -3574. NIE/Rc.

Evans (1996).*The human side of change* California: Jossy-Bass.

Ferman, B.(1990). *When failure is success: implementation and Madisonian government.* in Palumbo, D. J. and Calista, D. J.(eds.) Implementation and the policy process - Opening up the Black Box.USA: Greenwood Press.

Fleisch, B.D . (2002). *Managing Educational Change. The state and school reform in South Africa.* Cape Town: Heinemann.

Fleisch, B. & Christie, P. (2004).Structural Change, leadership and school effectiveness /improvement perspectives from South Africa. In Discourse: studies in the cultural politics of education. 25(1).

Fleisch, B., Carnac, L. R.; Mukwevho, T. G. & Gultig.J. (2003).*Education Action Zones Study- Final Report* (unpublished).

Freire, P. (1972). Pedagogy of the Oppressed (translated by Myra Bergman Ramos) Harmondsworth: Penguin.

Fuhrman, S., Clune, W. & Elmore, R. F (1991).*Research on Education Reform: lessons on the implementation of policy* Odden A. R. (eds.) Education Policy Implementation. USA: State University of New York Press.

Fullan, G. F. (1992). *Successful School Improvement*. Buckingham: Open University Press.

Fullan, M. (1993).*Changing forces: Probing the depths of educational reform*. USA: The Falmer Press.

Fullan, M. & Stiegelbauer.S. (1991).*The new meaning of educational change*. England: Cassell.

Fullan, M. (2003). Change Forces with a vengeance. London and New York: Routledge Falmer.

Fullan, M. (2001).*The new meaning of educational change*.Third Edition. London: Routledge Falmer.

Fullan, M. & Hargraeves, A, (1992).*What's worth fighting for? Working together for your school*. Canada: OPSTF.p107

Fullan, M. Turnaround Htpp://www.findarticles.com Fullan, M. Turnaround Leadership (accessed June 2011)

Fuller, B., & Clarke, P. (1994). Raising School Effects while ignoring culture? Local conditions and the influence of classroom tools, rules and pedagogy.*Review of Education Research.* 64(1),

Gauteng Department of Education 1997. Progress Report 1995-1997.

Gauteng Department of Education: Circular 106 of 1999

Giddens,A. Htpp://en.wikipewdia.org/wiki/Anthony_Giddens.

Golafshani, N. (2003) *Understanding Reliability and Validity in Qualitative Research.*The Qualitative Report Vol. 8 No.4. 597-607. Http://www.nova.edu/ss/QR/QR8-4 golafshani.pdf. (accessed 13August 2012)

Grey, J. & Jethro, K. (1998). The Teacher :*Mail and Guardian* February 2001 report.

Hallgarten, J. & Watling, R. (2001).Buying Power: the role of the private sector in education action zones.*School Leadership and Management*, 21(2), 143-157.

Hannaway, J. & Crowson, R. (1989).*The politics of reformingschool administration.* UK: The Falmer Press.

Harber, C. (1999). *School effectiveness and school improvement in the context of developing countries*.Education Practice .PP3-9.

Harber, C. (1999). *School effectiveness and school improvement in the context of developing countries.in the Holistic visions for school development and school improvement, paper delivered at*conference held in Gauteng on the 25th and 26th February 1999.

Hargreaves, A. & Hopkins, D. (1994).*Development planning for school improvement,*Cassel; London.

Hargreaves, A. & Reynolds, D. (1989).*Education policies: Controversies and Critiques,* Great Britain: The Falmer Press.

Henning, E., Van Rensburg, W. & Smit, B. (2004).*Finding your way in qualitative research*. Pretoria: Van Schaik.

Hoepfl, M. C. (1997). Choosing qualitative research: A primer for technology education researchers.*Journal of Technical Education*. 1(1),

Hopkins, D. Ainscow, M & West, M. (1996).*Improving the quality of education for all.*London: David Fullton Publishers.

Hopkins, D. (1998). *Tensions in and prospects for school improvement.*International Handbook of Educational Change (eds.) A. Hargreaves, A. Lieberman, M. Fullan and D. Hopkins.Vol 5.(2) pp.1035-1059. Great Britain:Kluver Academic Publishers.

Hopkins,D & lagerweij (1996) *The School Improvement base*.in Reynolds,D.,

Bollen,R., Creemers, B., Hopkins, D., Stoll,L.& Lagerweij (1996) Making good schools: LinkingSchool Effectiveness and School Improvement. London and New York: Routledge.

Howie,S. (1997).*Mathematics and Science Performance in the Middle* School Years in South Africa: *A summary Report on the performance of South African Students in the Third International Mathematics and Science Study. Pretoria: Human Sciences Research Council.*

Hubbard, L., Mehan, H. & Stein, M.K. (2006).*Reform as learning: School Reform,organizational culture and community politics in San Diego*. New York, London: Routledge.

Ipocafrica. Htpp://www.ipocafrica.org/media/scorpionsmar05.htm:Civil Society Organisations call to support rather than interfere with the Scorpions. (accessed July 2011)

Jansen, J. (2001). Explaining non-change in education reform after apartheid: political symbolism and the problem of policy implementation in Sayed, Y. & Jansen,J. Implementing Esucation Policies: the South African Experience. Cape Town: UCT Press.

Jansen, J.D. (2001). *Rethinking Education policy making in South Africa: symbols of change, signals of conflict* in Kraak, A. & Young, M. (2001). Education in Retrospect: Policy and implementation since 1990. Pretoria: HSRC.

Jansen, J & Taylor, N. (2003).*Educational Change in South Africa 1994-2003: Case Studies in Large Scale Education Reform*. Education Reform and Management Publication Series. 11(1) October 2003. Country Studies.

Jones, K. & Bird, K. (2000) 'Partnership' as strategy: Public-private relations in education action zones. *British Educational Research Journal.*26(4), 491.

Kallaway, P. (1984). *Apartheid and education.The education of black South Africans.* Johannesburg: Ravan Press.

Knapp, M. S., Stearns, M. S., Turnbull, B. J., David, J. L. & Peterson. S. M. (1991). *Cumulative Effective of federal education policies at the local level* in Odden A. R. (eds.) Education Policy Implementation. USA: State University of New York Press.

Lander, R. & Ekholm, M. (1998).*School Evaluation and improvement: A Scandinavian view.*International Handbook of Educational Change (Eds.) A. Hargreaves, A. Lieberman, M. Fullan and D. Hopkins. 5(2), 1119-1135. Great Britain: Kluver Academic Publishers.

Larson, J. S. (1980). *Why Government Programs Fail: Improving Policy Implementation.* USA: Praeger Publishers.

Le Compte, M. D., Millroy, W. L. & Preissle, J. (1992). *The handbook of Qualitative research in education.*New York: Academic Press.

Levin, H. (1998). *Accelerated schools: A decade of evolution*. International Handbook of Educational Change (Eds.) A. Hargreaves, A. Lieberman, M. Fullan and D. Hopkins. 5(2), 807-831. Great Britain:Kluver Academic Publishers.

Linder, S. H. & Peters, B. G. (1990).*Research Perspectives on the design of public policy: implementation, formulation and design* in Palumbo, D.J. and Calista, D. J. (eds.) Implementation and the policy process-Opening up the Black Box.USA: Greenwood Press.

Locke, M. (1974).*Power and politics in the school system: a guidebook.* London and Boston: Routledge and Kegan Paul.

Louis, K. S. (1998). *Reconnecting knowledge utilization and school improvement two steps forward, one step back*. International Handbook of Educational Change Eds. A.Hargreaves, A.Lieberman, M.Fullan and D. Hopkins.Vol 5.(2) pp.1074-1079..Great Britain:Kluver Academic Publishers.

Maja, B. I. (1994). *The Breakdown of the culture of learning: A case study*. EDUPOL: The Urban Foundation (unpublished).

Maja, B. I. (1995) *The future trapped in the past. A case study of a Soweto secondary school*. EDUPOL (unpublished).

Management Plans to deal with schools which are consistently under-performing within the EAZ dated 25/01/00.

Manganyi, N.C. (2001). Public policy and the transformation of education in South Africa in Sayed, Y. & Jansen, J. (eds.). Implementing Education Policies.The South African experience. Cape Town: UCT Press.

Marshall, B. & Rossman, G. B. (1995).*Designing qualitative research*. London: SAGE.

Maykut, P. & Morehouse, R. (1994).*Beginning Qualitative Research.A philosophic and Practical guide*. London: The Falmer Press.

Mc Culloch, G. (1998). *Curriculum reform, educational change, and school improvement.International Handbook of Educational Change* Eds. A. Hargreaves, A. Lieberman, M.Fullan and D. Hopkins. 5(2), 1203-1216. Great Britain:Kluver Academic Publishers.

McDonnell, L. M. (1991) *Ideas and values in implementation analysis: the case of teacher policy*in Odden, A.R. (ed.) *Education Policy Implementation.* New York: State University of New York Press.

McDonnell, L. M. & Elmore, R. F. (1991).*Getting the job done: Alternative policy instruments* in Odden A. R. (eds.) Education Policy Implementation. USA: State University of New York Press.

McLaughlin, M. W. (1991). *The rand change agent study. Ten years* later *in* Odden, A. R. (ed.) *Education Policy Implementation.* New York: State University of New York Press.

McLaughlin, M. W. (1991). *Learning from experience* inOden,A.R. (ed.) *Education Policy Implementation.* New York: State University of New York Press.

McLennan, A. (2000). *The challenge of tirisano*. Port Elizabeth: SAELPA and EMASA International Conference.

McNiff, J., Lomax, P & Whitehead J, (1996).*You and your action research project.* London & New York: Hyde Publications. 153p.

Merriam, S. B. (1998). Case study research in education: A qualitative approach. 1st ed. San Francisco: Josey-Bass.

Merriam, S.B. (1998). *Qualitative research case study applications in education: revised and expanded from Case study research in education*. San Francisco: Jossey-bass.

Miles M. B. & Huberman A. M. (1990).*An expanded sourcebook.Qualitative data analysis.* London: Sage.

Meyer, S. (1996). The Quality of Schooling. NBI EDUPOL (Unpublished).

Meyer, S., & Main, G. (1999). EQUIP Overview.

Milner, J. & Glassner, B. (2004).*The "inside" and the "outside": finding realties in interviews* in Silverman, D. Qualitative research: theory, method and practice. 2nd ed. London: Sage.

Morse, J. Barret, M., Mayan, M., Olsen, K. & Spiers,J. (2002) *Verification for Establishing Reliability and Validity in Qualitative Research.International Journal of Qualitative Methods.Vol1No.2. Http://www.creativecommons.org/licences/by/2.0*

Motala, E. & Singh, M. (2001).*Introduction* in Motala, E. & Pampallis, J. (2001). Education and Equity: The impact of state policies on South African education. Sandown: Heinemann.

Motala, E. & Pampallis, P. (2002).*The State, Education and Equity in Post – Apartheid South Africa.The Impact of State policies*. Great Britain: Ashgate.

Mothibeli, T. Http://www.int.iol.co.za/general /news/Mothibeli,T. Fake School -report scam smashed. 20 January 2000.(accessed July2010)

Mphahlele, L. (1999). *District Development: What the research says* (Part1) report presented at the district conference in Mpumalanga on 7-9 June 1999.

Mphahlele, L. & Sokopo, Z. (1999). Education Districts Profile in the Gauteng Province. Draft report presented at Provincial Conference on District Development on 21 -23 September 1999.

Mphahlele,L. (2000). '*GDE's action plan to improve schools is not working'* the principal of Flavius Mareka Secondary School in Attridgeville: in *Pretoria News*, 16 May 2000- P7.

Muller, J., & Roberts, J., (2000).*The sound and fury of international school reform: A critical review.* Report prepared for JET.

Murphy,J.T. (1991) Title 1 ESEA: *The politics of implementing Federal Reform.* Education Policy Implementation . New York: State University of New York Press.

Myers, K. (1996). School improvement in practice. Schools make a difference. UK: The Falmer Press.

Naidu, D., Naidu,V., Grobbler, B. (2006). An Impact study of EQUIP in Gauteng commissioned by NBI (Unpublished).

Nakamura, R.T. (1990). *The Japan external trade organization and import promotion: a case study in the implementation of symbolic policy goals* in Palumbo, D.J. and Calista, DJ.(eds.). Implementation and the policy process-Opening up the Black Box.USA: Greenwood Press.

Nakamura, R. T. & Smallwood, F. (1980).*The politics of policy implementation*. New York: St Martin's Press.

NBI Annual Report 1998-1999.Unpublished

Nasson,B& Samuel,J (199) *Education from poverty to liberty. Cape Town: David Philip Publishers*

Ngoma- Maema,W.Y. *School Culture- A barrier to school change?*at the Holistic visions for school development and school improvement conference held in Gauteng on the 25th and 26th February 1999.

Nicolaou, K. (2001) *The link between macroecnomic policies, education policies and the education budget* in Motala, E. & Pampallis, J. (2001). Education and equity: The impact of state policies on South African education. Sandown: Heinemann.

Nwaila, C. Fax to Deputy District Directors from. Re: Management plan to deal with schools which are consistently under-performing within the EAZ. Unpublished.

Odden, A.R. (1991). *Education policy Implementation*, State University of New York Press: USA.

Odden, A. R. (1991). *New patterns of education policy implementation and challenges for the 1990s* in Odden, A.R. (ed. *Education Policy Implementation.* New York: State University of New York Press.

Odden, A. R. (1991). *New patterns of education policy implementation and challenges for the 1990s* in Odden A. R. (eds.) Education Policy Implementation. USA: State University of New York Press.

Palumbo, D. J. & Calista, D. J. (1990). *Implementation and the Policy Process: Opening up the Black Box.* USA: Greenwood Press.

Power, S. & Gewirtz, S. (2001). Reading education action zones.*Journal of Education Policy* Vol.16. No. 1 39-51

Preedy, M., Galtter, R. & Wise, C. (2003).*Strategic leadership and educational improvement.*Great Britain:Open University Press.

Rensburg, I. (2001). *Reflections from the inside: Key policy making assumptions and how they have shaped policy making and implementation in South Africa*, 1994-2000 in Kraak, A. & Young, M. (2001). Education in Retrospect: Policy and implementation since 1990. Pretoria: HSRC.

Report: Education Action Zone Workshop Aloeridge 19-21 October 2000: Review and Future.

Report of the national and provincial district development conferences, 1999/2000: organized by the Department of Education: Policy Reserve Fund Programme and provincial departments of education ed. by Education Policy Unit: university of Natal.

Republic of South Africa (RSA) .1996d. South African Schools Act. Act 84 of 1996.Research Report (1997) done by ‘Laduma Film Factory’ for the ‘Culture of Learning Drama series’ commissioned by the South African Broadcasting cooperation.

Reynolds, D. (1998). '*World Class' School improvement: An analysis of the implications of recent international school effectiveness and school improvement research for improvement practice.*International Handbook of Educational Change (eds.) A. Hargreaves, A. Lieberman, M. Fullan and D. Hopkins. 5(2), 1275-1286. Great Britain: Kluver Academic Publishers.

Reynolds, D., Bollen, R., Creemers, B., Hopkins, D., Stoll, L. & Lagerwei,J (1996). Making good schools: Linking School Effectiveness and School Improvement. London and New York: Routledge.

Reynolds, D & Cuttance, P. (1992).*School Effectiveness.Research, policy and school improvement.* Buckingham: Open University Press.

Reynolds R, Hopkins D & Stoll L (1993) '*Linking School Effectiveness Knowledge and School Improvement Practice: Towards a Synergy' in School Effectiveness and School Improvement,* Vol. 4, No. 1, pp. 37-58

Riley, R. W. (1998) .*Turning around low performing schools: A guide for state and local leaders.*US.Department of Education.

Roberts, J.A. (2001). Approaches to improving school management in South Africa Statement on the fraudulent performance Reports for learners Issued by: GCIS (Gauteng Communication and Information System for the GDE)

Scheerens, J. (2000) *Improving school effectiveness in Fundamentals of Education Planning s*eries; No.68 UNESCO: International Institute for Educational Planning.

Schollar, E. & Associates (1998). Evaluation of the pilot EQUIP project of the NBI: First Report. Unpublished.

Schollar, E & Associates. (1998). *A case study of four schools participating in the EQUIP project of the National Business Initiative.*

Schollar, E. and Associates (2000). The Evaluation of the pilot EQUIP project of the National Business Initiative: second Report.(Unpublished).

Schollar, E. (2002). *Final report of the evaluation of the pilot EQUIP project*. Unpublished.

Sherry, M., Maliavuso, M., Dawjee, J.(1997). CIE- *EQUIP Team Report on the Situational Analysis Conducted for the Nine EQUIP schools in Mamelodi*. (Unpublished).

Taylor, N., Muller, J., & Vinjevold, P. (2003).*Getting schools working: Research and systemic school reform in South Africa*. Cape town: Maskew Miller Longman.

Taylor, S., Rivi, F., Lingard, B. and Menry, M. (1997).*Educational Policy and the politics of change.*London and New York: Routledge Falmer.

Tickly, L. & Mabogoane, T. (1997).*Marketisation as a strategy for desegregation andredress: The case of historically white schools in South Africa.*International Review of Education. 43(2-3), 159-178.

Salter, B. & Tapper, T (1981).*Education, Politcs and the State: The theory and practice of educational change.* U.K.: St. Edmundsbury Press.

Sayed, S. & Jansen, J. (2001).Implementing Education Policies. The South African experience Cape Town: University of Cape Town Press.

Scheerens, J. (1998). *The school effectiveness knowledge base as a guide for school improvement*.International Handbook of Educational Change Eds.A.Hargreaves, A.Lieberman, M.Fullan and D. Hopkins. 5(2), 1094-1119. Great Britain:Kluver Academic Publishers.

Scheerens, J. (2000). *Improving school effectiveness in Fundamentals of Education Planning* series; No.68 UNESCO: International Institute for Educational Planning.

Schien,E.H. (1992). *Organisational Culture and leadership*. San Francisco: Jossey - Bass

Scheirer, M .A. & Griffith, J. (1990).*Studying micro-implementation empirically: lessons and dilemmas up the Black Box.*in Palumbo, D.J. and Calista,D.J.(eds.) Implementation and the policy process-Opening up the Black Box.USA: Greenwood Press.

Seidman, I. E. (1991).*Interviewing as qualitative research.A guide for researchers in education and social sciences.* London: The College Press.

Senge, P. (1994). *The fifth discipline: The art and practice of the learning organization*. New York: Doubleday Dell.

Slavin, R. (1998). *Sands,bricks,and seeds: School change strategies and readiness for reform*. International Handbook of Educational Change Eds. A.Hargreaves, A.Lieberman, M.Fullan and D. Hopkins.5.(2), 1299-1314. Great Britain: Kluver Academic Publishers.

Slavin, E. R. & Fashoda, O. S. (1998).*Show me the evidence! Proven and promising programmes for America's schools*. London: Sage.

Stake, E. R., (1995).*The art of case study research.* USA: Sage.167p.

Stoll, L. & Fink, D. (1996).*Changing our schools.Linking school effectiveness and school improvement.*Buckingham: Open University Press.

Stoll, L. & Myers, K.(1998). *No quick fixes. Perspectives on schools in difficulty.* London: The Palmer Press.

Straus, A., & Corbin (1990).*Basics of qualitative research.Grounded theory, procedures and techniques.* London: Sage.

Stringfield, S., Millsap, M.A. & Herman, R. (1998).*Using 'promising programmes' to improve educational processes and student outcomes*.International Handbook of Educational Change (Eds.) A.Hargreaves, A.Lieberman, M.Fullan and D. Hopkins. 5(2), 1314-1339. Great Britain:Kluver Academic Publishers.

Swartz, R. (n.d.) Education Action Zones and the monitoring of standards in education: issues in the implementation of the proposed programmes.

Taylor, N. (2003). *International Handbook of School of School Effectiveness and Improvement*. Dordrecht: Springer.

Taylor, W.P. Htpp://www.findarticles.com Taylor, W.P. Politics, school improvement and social justice: A Triadic Model of Teacher Leadership (accessed June 2011)

Trowler, P. (1995). *Investigating Education and Training.*London: Collins.

Tye, K. A. & Novotney, J. M. (1975).*Schools in transition*: University Press.

Ukukhula Report on Funda Secondary 14 July 2004.

Uta.edu. Htpp://www.uta.edu/English/lab/illuminations/ html. Critical Theory and the Crisis of Social Theory.(accessed August 2011)

Walford, G. (1994). *Researching the powerful in education*. London: UCL Press.

Wallace, M. (1998).*Innovations in planning for school improvement: problems and potential.*International Handbook of Educational Change Eds.A.Hargreaves, A.Lieberman, M.Fullan and D. Hopkins.Vol 5 (2) pp.1181-1203. Great Britain:Kluver Academy.

Webster, M. Http://www.Meraim Webster dictionary (accessed 12 August 201)

Weiner, B.J. (2009) *A Theory of organisational readiness for change.*www/http/implementationscience.com/article/10.1186/1748/5908/4/7 (accessed 14 August 2012)

Winter, S. (1990). *Integrating Implementation research.*In Palumbo, D.J. and Calista, D.J. (eds.). Implementation and the policy process-Opening up the Black Box.USA: Greenwood Press.

Wrigley, T. (2006). Htpp://imp.sagepub.com Schools and poverty: questioning the effectiveness and improvement paradigms: in Improving Schools 9(3). Sage. (accessed July2011)

Wohlstetter, P. (1991) Accountability Mechanisms for State Education Reforms: Some Organisational Alternatives. Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis. March20, vol13;31-48 London: Sage.

Yanow, D. (1990). *Tackling the implementation problem: epistemological issues in implementation research* in Palumbo, D. J. and Calista, D. J.(eds.). Implementation and the policy process-Opening up the Black Box.USA: Greenwood Press.

Yin, R. K. (1993).*Applications of Case Study Research.* USA: Sage.

Yin, R. K. (1994).*Case Study Research: Design and methods*. 2nd ed. USA: Sage,

Young, M. (2001), *Educational reform in South Africa (1990-2000): An international perspective*. In Kraak,A. & Young,M. Education in retrospect.Policy implementation since 1990. Pretoria: HSRC,

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: Request for an Interview

School of Education University of Witwatersrand

The Doctoral Consortium in Education Policy: A Spencer Fellowship.

Student: Anusha Naidu

Supervisor: Brahm Fleisch

Topic: Implementation – The 'Black Box' of School Improvement

Request for an Interview

Dear Colleague

Please find attached a synopsis of my research as well as a memo to participants describing the interview process. As indicated in the synopsis I wish to research implementation of a reform initiative from the initiation level to the school. I therefore request at least 30 to 45 minutes of your valuable time in order to conduct an interview with you as a key actor involved in the intervention strategy.

I have no doubt that your contribution to the research will contribute to this complex and age old problem of school reform and school improvement.

Thank for your support.

Anusha Naidu

Phone :

Work: 8302200

APPENDIX B: To participants in this study

The purpose of the research is to under-take a study of interventions that have targeted under-achieving schools in Gauteng. It is envisaged that a multi-level study of interventions will contribute to literature and policy development on intervention strategies in under- achieving schools, especially in the South African context.

The study will focus on an analysis of intervention strategies that look at both the macro and micro dimensions of implementation influencing school reform. This study does not intend to evaluate interventions but rather to research and interrogate the mediation of interventions at various levels.

Interviews will be conducted to understand the mediation process at various levels. During the interview you will be asked various questions about your experience with and during the interventions. As the interview proceeds you may be asked questions of clarity or further understanding. The main aspect of the interview is about your views and experiences during the implementation of the intervention.

Each interview will be audio-taped and later transcribed. You have the choice of declining to have the interview taped. In order to ensure anonymity every participant will be assigned a code that will be used during the interview and the transcription. The information obtained in the interview will be kept in a safe place. All information will be collated into the report in such a way that individuals, schools or districts cannot be identified. Participants can at any time refuse to answer a question. Participants are also free to ask questions related to this study.

Your participation will be appreciated.

Thank you

Anusha Naidu

Doctoral Candidate, School of Education

Spencer Fellowship

University of Witwatersrand

APPENDIX C: Semi-structured interview schedule target: Elite interview

Framing the problem

As MEC/HOD/DDG, you announced the school intervention strategy.(EAZ//EQUIP)

- How did you identify the problems in the dysfunctional schools?
- What were the political mandates you needed to address?
- How where the dysfunctional schools identified?

The conceptual ideas

- What were the reasons for the EAZ//EQUIP approach?
- What informed the model EAZ//EQUIP

Formulation of the strategy

- Who were your partners in the conceptualization of this strategy?
- How do you think the fact that it was initiated by you impacted on the way in which it was received?
- How did your direct involvement in the first year give impetus to the intervention?
- Why did you choose to use a strategy outside of existing structures of the Department even though some of the functions of the EAZ/EQUIP team were mandates of Districts?
- Did you receive support from the various stakeholders- union, parents department officials for this approach?
- Was there any opposition to this approach?
- How were you able to persuade unions to accept the intervention?
- What were some of the indicators set for the measuring of benefits?
- How did institutional constraints (Departmental Bureaucratic) shape your proposal?

- You made yourself very visible in the first year of the programme. How did your involvement on the ground give credibility to the project?
- Do you think the EAZ/EQUIP teams were able to sustain the impetus in the second and third year when the programme lost its political thrust?

Operational issues

- Who did you identify as key actors in the implementation of this strategy?
- Do you think the implementation team had a clear understanding of the goals and objectives envisaged by you?
- Was there clear communication and cooperation from units in Head Office and from the districts? How were these addressed?

- (EAZ) Review reports indicate that EAZ teams differed in how and what needed to be done in schools. Why do you think this was so?
- (EAZ)The strategy included hard- line disciplinary measures –including pressure and support – Why was this necessary?
- Is it because your initial goal of stabilising schools had been achieved?
- Has the design of the intervention remained the way it was initiated by you?
- (EQUIP) A major problem was the lack of 'a culture' of learning in schools- Do you think this intervention had an impact in restoring that culture
- How did the capacity at different levels of the department impact on the implementation of the EAZ/ EQUIP strategy?
- There are always tensions in the translation from political mandates or policies to bureaucratic structures and operations. In your term of office you may have experienced these especially in the area of policy implementation? What advice would you give in order to close gaps and allow for smoother flows?
- Do you think the successes of the EAZ/EQUIP intervention will be sustained beyond the intervention

APPENDIX D: Semi- structured interview guideline: EAZ Provincial Team

What is your position in the department?

How were you involved in the design of the intervention?

What strategy did you put in place for the implementation of the programme?

Do you think this approach was the best one for the identified schools?

Did you have enough time, money and personnel to plan and design management of the implementation process?

How was the intervention team members selected?

Reports indicate that each team interpreted and implemented the project differently. Why was this so? What were the implications?

To what extent did the interpersonal relationships between policy makers and implementers influence the implementation process?

How were the teams trained?

Did they receive clear implementation plans?

Were the measure used by the teams 'special measures'? How did they differ from the role and function of the districts?

What communication and reporting mechanisms did you use?

How successful were these???

- EAZ – Directly accountable to MEC
- Communication systems with Districts –Participation with Districts DMT;
- Participation with relevant units : Head Office CTDU, SSIP,Exams,EMGD,HRD, Pre-tertiary and Labour Relations
- Engagement with all stakeholders in the school
- Partnerships with– Religious Sector and Business

One of your review reports indicates problems in the department – especially the labour process. How did this impact on your implementation?

How did you work with the district? A review report indicates that there was tension between the EAZ team and district officials –Why do you think this was so? How was the problem addressed??

Another problem raised as in an extract from a newspaper article was lack of adequate capacity of team members? Do you believe this was true?

Article: GDE's action plan to improve schools is not working' by Mr Mphahlele the principal of Flavius Mareka Secondary School in Atteridgeville: in the Pretoria News dated 16 May 2000- Pg 7

He accuses the EAZ team of not adequately analyzing individual school issues. He accuses the team of undermining the principal and the staff of making decisions for them and using force and aggression to make them comply. He accuses the EAZ team of not identifying problems in the system and simply blaming the school. The system does not apply labour action promptly thus encouraging discipline problems amongst educators.

Not enough support from the districts, his main grievance was the lack of consultation with the principal and staff on the reform process involving a great deal on money- result no buy in from the school.

How do you respond to each of these accusations??

How did the plans allow for complex individual differences and needs of the schools?

What about the support from the MEC – Was the project in fact driven from that level?

How were the districts involved in the design and implementation plans?

You had Zone Managers -what were their roles?

What were your expected outcomes at the school level?

What incentives or rewards were given to schools?

At some stage a review report also spoke about poor direction from the Provincial Office Why was this so? How was this problem addressed?

What were the potential conflict areas?

What would you say where the positive results of the EAZ intervention? What would you say were the main reasons for these?

Do you think schools that improved would be able to sustain their achievements after the intervention?

Mutual Adaptation, Co-optation, Non-implementation; To what extent would you say these occurred at the school site?

What were the most drastic steps taken in your approach to these schools?

What are your plans to ensure that those schools maintain the changes?

Were best practices shared amongst team members?

Did the GDE have an enabling environment for the operation of this project? How was this addressed in the second and third year of the programme?

How did input from the schools influence changes in the design of the programme?

What were your indicators/ benchmarks in your implementation plans?

How do you intend evaluating the EAZ implementation?

Is the EAZ intervention going to have another three -year cycle?

APPENDIX E: Semi -structured interview guideline: EQUIP business partners

Why was the Equip Intervention initiated?

What was your role in the initiation?

What were the political mandates at the time for school improvement?

How was the MEC of the time involved in the initiation?

What informed the school- based approach of the EQUIP intervention?

Who initiated the partnerships?

Why was equip externally driven?

How did the policies of the time dictate the design of the EQUIP strategy especially in Gauteng? - The School Development planning Approach?

Why do you think this approach seemed to receive very little support from the Department? (Refer to Eric Schollar Report)

After the initial design stage what was the involvement of the MEC in the implementation of the project?

Why was there a greater emphasis on partnership projects for school improvement?

A decision taken early in the programme was that the EQUIP would be a GDE project with the partnership assisting to promote GDE policies: How did this relationship unfold?

While the EQUIP design provided resources for the implementation of School Development plans, were there any compliance mechanisms?

Did EQUIP have a located programme driver in the department besides the partnerships involvement?

Why did the EQUIP project not have a GDE provincial co-ordinator

What is the role of the funder in the management of the project?

What was the role of the Department of education in the design and implementation of the project?

What kind of communication networks existed between external implementers of EQUIP and the districts and department as implementers of the programme?

The use of incentives such as the funding of SDPs – How effective has this been in achieving sustained school improvement?

What were some of the implementation issues you feel could have made sure it had better impact?

Are you satisfied with the implementation process since the inception of the initiative to date?

APPENDIX F: Semi-structured interview schedule- EQUIP Service-providers

A decision taken early in the programme was that the EQUIP would be a GDE project with the partnership assisting to promote GDE policies: How did this relationship unfold

How was the MEC of the time involved in the initiation?

What did you understand the goals of the EQUIP project to be?

What was your role in working towards implementing the EQUIP project?

Were you consulted about the design and strategy of the EQUIP programme?

During the first year did the GDE have an enabling environment for the operation of this project?

How was this addressed in the second and third year of the programme?

Was the EQUIP project given adequate space in the districts plans?- explain?

Were there systems in place to assist you take your mandate from the initiation to the school?

What was your relationship with the GDE- Provincial Office; District offices?

Mutual Adaptation, Co-optation, Non- implementation in schools! To what extent would you say these occurred at the school site?

Did the school -based approach using school development planning work in achieving school improvements in your schools?

Did you think the EQUIP approach was a relevant school improvement strategy?

How did you ensure compliance with the programme? Did the district have people with adequate capacity to support this site- based programme

While the EQUIP design provided resources for the implementation of School Development plans, were there any compliance mechanisms?

Did you receive support from districts to make schools accountable and enforce compliance in the schools?

Did the work in these EQUIP schools influence the district strategy to school improvement.

How did the policies of the time dictate the design of the EQUIP strategy especially in Gauteng? - The School Development planning Approach?

After the initial design stage what was the involvement of the MEC in the implementation of the project?

What is the role of the funder in the management of the project?

What was the role of the Department of education in the design and implementation of the project?

What kind of communication network exists between external implementers of EQUIP and the districts and department as implementers of the programme?

How effective has the use of incentives been in achieving sustained school improvement?

What were some of the implementation issues you feel could have ensured better impact?

How did the cultural/ political/social context of the school impact on the work you were doing?

How have changing political imperatives influenced these changes of the EQUIP strategy?

Do you think successes achieved will be sustained beyond the intervention?

Are you satisfied with the implementation process since the inception of the initiative to date?

A major problem seems to be in the implementation especially the role and function of District Officials : Why do you think this came about.?

Would you say the SDPs approach in the EQUIP strategy is working? To what degree are schools implementing the SDPs and to what extent is this implementation contributing to school improvement?

APPENDIX G: Semi-structured interview schedule: EQUIP/EAZ

District Officials

How were you as senior official of the district/province introduced to the programme?

Was the role of the district clear?

What kind of collaboration did your district have with the designers of the intervention?

What kind of link was there with the provincial office?

Did you have the resources to support an initiative such as EQUIP/EAZ?

Do you think bottom –up strategies such as EQUIP is what was needed for dysfunctional schools?

OR Do you think the high- pressured, top-down approach of the EAZ is what was needed for dysfunctional schools?

What would you say were the visible benefits of the EQUIP/EAZ project not just for schools but for the district as a whole?

Do you think districts have the resources to support intervention strategies such as EQUIP and EAZ??

What are some of the greatest difficulties faced by districts in their interface with schools on the one hand and provincial and political imperatives on the other?

What do you think should be the role of Districts in the intervention into dysfunctional schools?? Do the daily demands on Districts allow you the space to dedicate to special interventions??

When you have to implement interventions or policies that come from province or national what are some of the greatest difficulties you face?

APPENDIX H: Semi-structured interview schedule for schools (EQUIP/EAZ)

The Principal/other available staff members and Focus Groups

How was the EAZ/EQUIP programme introduced to you?

Who told you about the intervention?

Why do you think your school was chosen for the EAZ/EQUIP intervention?

How were you involved in the intervention plans for your school?- Did you understand what the programme was going to do in your school?

Did you understand what the outcomes of this programme where?

How was this programme different to what the districts officials were doing in your school?

How did you convince your staff to accept the interventions?

Do you think all stakeholders in your school were committed to bringing about changes?

How did the intervention help you in improving: your school?

How did teachers respond to the intervention – Why?

What would you have needed to convince them?

Do you think the improvements during the intervention will remain even when the support is removed?

How has the intervention supported your role as principal?

Were there improvement in results in your schools as result of the intervention?

Why do you think the intervention did/did not assist in improving the results in your school?

Did the EAZ/ Equip intervention add to the demands made by the district office?

What support did you receive from district officials to support the changes introduced by the interventions?

Do you think you and other stakeholders in the school should have had a say in how the problems in the school should be solved?

What visible signs can you identify as an improvement in the culture of your school? What would you say would have made the intervention more effective?

Do you think the EAZ/EQUIP team applied too much/not enough pressure on you and your school?

Did they provide support to help you achieve the goals?

Does your school have a School Development plan and Budget? How were these developed?

Does your school have a time- table? Do all teachers and learners adhere to the times?

Do you work with both parents and educators in promoting the schools?

What special steps were taken through the assistance of the intervention to improve teaching and learning in your school?

How did the interventions help you address educators and learners who did not comply with the new conditions?

How did the intervention help you to manage your resources- physical, material and human?

How did the intervention help you address the contextual realities of your school? Poverty etc..

What would you say were some things that you achieved that were not part of the EAZ/EQUIP plan?

What were the most difficult things to achieve?

The Educators: Focus Group interview

Why do you think your institution was selected for the EAZ/EQUIP intervention?

How was the intervention negotiated with you?

Do you think the intervention was appropriate to the problems in your institution?

Did you get support from the management of your institution?

Did you get support from District officials?

What are some of the changes you made as a result of the intervention?

How did the intervention benefit teaching and learning in the institution?

How did learners benefit from the intervention?

Do you think any of the changes made will last after the intervention has left?

What are some of the issues that obstructed or supported the intervention?

What are your feelings about interventions?

How do you feel about all the changes you are expected to make?

Has the culture of the school changed?

How did these changes occur?