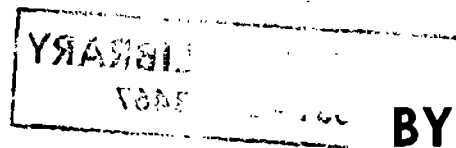# THE SCHOOL AS A LEARNING ORGANISATION:

EDUCATORS' PERCEPTIONS AT A HIGH SCHOOL IN THE CENTRAL DURBAN AREA.

BY

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SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF EDUCATION (EDUCATION MANAGEMENT) IN THE SCHOOL OF EDUCATION UNIVERSITY OF KWAZULUNATAL DURBAN

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ABSTRACT

1994 heralded in a new dispensation for South Africa. The change from an apartheid system to one of democracy brought with it much hope and excitement for the future.

In terms of education there was need to transform the system so as to enable it to prepare the nation to embrace this democracy. So from 1994 the national dept of education has refocused the vision and direction of the South African Education system through policies, initiatives and innovations (Thurlow; 2003). However, 10 years later and education is still struggling to come to terms with and cope with our changing society. In respect of these changes in our education, the task team on education management development for schools suggests that schools move to becoming learning organisations.

This study focuses on Bechet, a high school in the Durban Central Region of the Kwa Zulu Natal department of Education. This school is a co educational urban school (previously under the control of the House of Representatives). It is a school in South Africa which has a past shaped by our countries past. They too have been exposed to these recent innovations in education
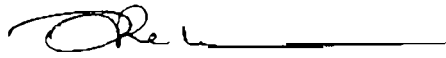
In this study an attempt was made to ascertain the principal's perception as well as the perceptions of the educators of their school in respect of it being considered a learning organisation. It then proceeds to compare the two perceptions, to hopefully identify areas of strength as well as challenges to improve the school.

The research revealed that the school does display some of the characteristics of learning organisations. However a discrepancy was identified between the perceptions of the staff and those of the principal with regard to how effective the school was in embracing the

changes. In this regard the characteristic of leadership spewed out the greatest discrepancy as the principal believed himself to be a good leader with an open door policy, whilst the staff's perception was that of him not being available. They perceived the leadership style to be autocratic.

DECLARATION

I declare that this is my own work and where other sources have been consulted these have been acknowledged through references.

D.S.REHMAN

DECEMBER 2004

SUPERVISOR'S STATEMENT

This mini dissertation is submitted with /without my approval.

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PROFESSOR M. THURLOW

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- ❖ Almighty God through whom all things are possible.
- ❖ My Supervisor, Prof. Mike Thurlow for his expertise and guidance through the process.
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- ❖ My parents and family whose never-ending support has allowed me to pursue this endeavour.
- ❖ The principal and staff of Bechet High School for willingly assisting in this research.
- ❖ My friends who constantly supported me when I felt like giving up.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background and Purpose of Study

Ten years of democracy has heralded much in terms of societal change. This change has created much uncertainty, confusion, anxiety and excitement in many spheres of our lives. Education being an important part of our life has not gone untouched. It has been affected and to some extent is seen as the vehicle to help manage this transition in our society. Since 1994 the national dept of education has refocused the vision and direction of the South African Education system through policies, initiatives and innovations (Thurlow; 2003). These innovations read as follows, outcomes based education (OBE), Revised National Curriculum Statement (RNCS), Integrated Quality management system (IQMS), Development Appraisal system (DAS), Whole School Evaluation (WSE), School Governing Bodies (SGB), among others. The changing landscape in South African society requires that these innovations be implemented. These innovations in education attempt to shift the focus towards involving all stakeholders in the education process.

However, at school level not much has changed. It appears as if schools and education are still suffering from what can be termed "learned helplessness", as they are faced with the change from an apartheid education system to a democratic, inclusive education system

This appears to have prompted a need to review schools as learning organisations.

Thurlow(2003) suggests that for schools to move forward and successfully cope with innovations that have been constantly bombarding them in this new dispensation requires that they (schools)

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assume responsibility as agents of their own change. In respect of these changes in our education, the task team on education management development for schools suggests that schools move to becoming learning organisations.

According to Moloi,(2002:X) *"a learning organisation maximises learning opportunities by nurturing and tapping the collective wisdom of the entire workforce – principal, educators and non-teaching staff through its strategic direction and shared values."* When focusing on characteristics of learning organizations it became apparent that there was a need to look at Bechet in this light..

Has Bechet embraced innovations? Is it coping with the change? Is there a shared vision by all stakeholders in this school? Is this school via its educators continually learning, so as to improve the quality of teaching and learning? When looking at leadership at this school is it enabling the school to move forward or is it an obstacle to transforming the school? How does collaborative practice feature as part of this schools daily life? With this in mind I would like to focus on these issues and ascertain to what extent Bechet can consider itself a true learning organisation in respect of the changes and innovations in education?

1.2 Theoretical location of Study:

In schools change has meant the introduction of many innovations. How the school is able to deal with these innovations can to a large extent determine how effective the school is or is becoming. In an attempt to address the question of whether the school can be considered a learning organisation, requires a point of reference. We would like to look at the theoretical framework of what constitutes a learning organisation.

Peter Senge describes a learning organisation as, "one *that is continually expanding its capacity to create its future.*" (Yeung et al,1999:10)

Southworth(1994:52)refers to, " *the learning school [as] a developing school,*" where, "*the quality of everyone's learning is important.*"

According to Moloi(2002:X), "*a learning organisation maximises learning opportunities by nurturing and tapping the collective wisdom of the entire workforce – principal, educators and non-teaching staff through its strategic direction and shared values.*"

Using these as a working point we can then suggest that a learning organisation is an organisation that learns, promotes learning in all its people and is as a result continuously transforming itself.

Having established to some extent what constitutes a learning organisation we need to ascertain what literature regards as the key characteristics of a learning organisation. Southworth (1994:53) focuses on 5 interrelated characteristics in his learning school:

> Children's learning – here the focus is on pupils learning; Teacher's learning – individual teachers are encouraged to be continuing learners themselves; Staff learning – staff are encouraged to collaborate by learning with and from each other; Organisational learning – school learns its way forward – the school is a learning system; Leadership learning – head teacher is the leading learner.

Senge views his five disciplines as necessary to build a learning organisation. They are:

> **Personal mastery** - deepening of personal vision – encourages educators to develop themselves personally and professionally;
> **Mental models** - generalisations of how we understand the world – here he looks at turning the mirror inward; **Team learning** -

teams not individuals are the fundamental learning units in modern organisations. They collaborate to work and develop knowledge effectively in small groups; **Shared vision** - capacity to hold a shared picture of future we seek – create a collective dream to guide future actions; **Systems thinking** - interrelationships that shape behaviour of systems – create the big picture perspective.(Senge,P, 1990: 7-10)and(Moloi,K, 2002: **6)**

Yeung et al (1999:11) in looking at this issue of learning organisations present their model based on their view of, *"an organisations fundamental capability represents its capacity to generate and generalise ideas with impact (change) across multiple organisational boundaries (learning) through specific management initiatives and practices (capability)."* What emerges from this is what they term the three building blocks: 1.Generation – generate ideas, acquiring, discovering, inventing and sourcing ideas; 2.Generalisation – sharing ideas across boundaries within organizations; 3.Identification of learning disability – identify problems in steps1 and 2 that lead to failures in these areas.

The characteristics, which come through, quite clearly are the need for a shared vision. The ability of the organisation to be responsive to, both external and internal, change and innovation. It must have a dynamic culture to enable it to embrace changes as they occur and not become stagnant. They must adopt a collaborative culture thereby involving the entire workforce in building the organisation. Educators must continually be learning. Leadership is fundamental to organisations learning

Is there a need for shared vision in SA schools? Do all stakeholders have the same projected future for the school? This vision has to be visual

and verbalized. As our society has changed so too has the nature and compositions of our schools changed. This dynamic situation requires that new visions be drafted for our education. Moloi (2002 : 7)says, " *A shared and strategic vision is needed to provide a clear sense of direction in our schools, given the changing, challenging environment within which they operate.*" Senge(1993:209) asserts that, "*[shared] Vision establishes the overarching goal.*" This ties in directly with the idea of collaboration.

Collaborative culture is an important characteristic of learning organisations. This is suggestive of need to have a harmonious working relationship between management and staff (all stakeholders).
There is a need for trust to ensure a harmonious working relationship between management and staff.

The manager's handling of the interpersonal relationships is crucial, because if handled incorrectly the result could be low staff morale and demotivation. Thus we see that leadership is important. Moloi (2002:22)says,' *School leadership is at the centre of any effort to transform a school into a learning organisation. Good leadership practices contribute significantly to the outcomes which may be achieved when educators aspire to create a learning organisation.*"

It thus becomes important for the change process to be managed to enable the people in the school to embrace this change so as to enhance the effectiveness of the school.
 Moloi (2002) states that it is the continuous development and growth in a learning organisation that enable individuals in the organisation to easily adapt to the many changes that take place in their internal and external environments.

In respect of these changes in our education, the task team on education management development for schools suggest that schools move to becoming learning organisations. Their report describes learning organisations in the following terms:

Learning organisations treat change as an ongoing feature of their existence. They make change part of their organisational ethos and support individuals and collective learning as part of their mission. The learning organisation develops the capacity to learn, reflect, and the capacity to innovate. it uses these competencies to mobilise and use resources efficiently and to achieve the larger task of managing the changing environment inside and outside the school so as to improve the quality of teaching and learning. (Dept of Education, 1996:31)

1.3 **Context of the study**

This study focuses on a high school in the Durban Central Region of the Kwa Zulu Natal department of Education. This school is a co educational urban school (previously under the control of the House of Representatives). It has a learner population of approximately 1300 of which the racial mix is approximately 60% Coloured with a fair percentage of African, a few Indian and two White students. The staff consists of a principal, two deputy principals, 5 heads of Department, and 25 level 1 educators, of whom all are qualified. Their qualifications range from 3-year education diplomas to post graduate degrees. Of the educators surveyed only five have less than ten years teaching experience. The researcher is a member of staff at this school.

In this study an attempt will be made to ascertain the principal's perception as well as the perceptions of the educators of their school in respect of it being considered a learning organisation.

1.4   Focus of the study

This study will attempt to highlight what is meant by the notion of a learning organisation. It will then proceed to look at the principal's perceptions of the school as a learning organisation, and the educators' perceptions of their school as a learning organisation. It will then lead to a comparison of the two perceptions, which will hopefully identify areas of strength as well as challenges to improve the school. The research will focus on the following research questions:

1. What is meant by the notion of a Learning Organisation and why is this notion significant in the S.A. context?
2. From the principal's perspective, to what extent does the school exhibit characteristics of a learning organisation?
3. From the perspectives of members of the educator staff, to what extent does the school exhibit the characteristics of a learning organisation?
4. In the light of these perceptions, to what extent might the school be regarded as a learning organisation?
5. What might need to be done in order for the school to become more truly a learning organisation, if anything?

1.5 Research Methods:

The research intends to look at the characteristics as identified by literature as indicative of a learning organisation viz. continuous learning, shared vision, collaborative culture, dynamic culture and leadership. This will entail a case study of a high school. The whole educator population will be involved in the research and so there will be no need for sampling.

Data collection will be via a questionnaire and a semi structured interview.

The questionnaire will comprise both closed and open-ended questions and will be geared to ascertaining educators perceptions based on the aforementioned characteristics.

Each teacher will be asked to complete the questionnaire.

The second part of the study will be in the form of a semi-structured interview. This will be given to the principal. The interview will focus on providing greater insight into questions presented in the questionnaire.

Research Questions:

Question One: This question will be addressed by reference to the Literature review on Learning Organisations, looking at the impact of change in South Africa on educational institutions.

Question Two: This question will be addressed by means of a semi structured Interview with the principal.

Question three: This question will be addressed using a questionnaire. This will be given to all educators in the school. It will encompass a range of question types including open ended questions.

Question Four: This will be addressed by looking at the findings of both the interview and the questionnaire.

Question Five: Here we will use the findings of the research in conjunction with the literature review to attempt to provide a solution.

1.6   Limitations of the study

Many teachers felt intimidated by dealing with such a topic. The study is limited to the school in which it was conducted. It is based on the perceptions of educators at that school and the findings can in no way be generalised to all learning organisations. The re commendations will

therefore be more for the school itself than for learning organisations in general.

1.7 Outline of the study

Chapter one outlines the background of the study, its rationale, research questions and methodology.

Chapter two reviews the literature on the notion of learning organisations and its significance in the S.A. context.

Chapter three discusses the research methodology used in the study.

Chapter four is concerned with the research findings and the analysis of these findings.

Chapter five looks at recommendations derived from the analysis to make the school more truly a learning organisation.

1.8 Conclusion

This chapter gives a brief overview of the study being conducted. It looks at the background to the area of study providing the theoretical framework for the study. It proceeds to the context and focus of the study highlighting the research questions and limitations of the study.

The next chapter deals with a review of available literature relevant to this study.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

Change is the only certainty, which creates so much uncertainty. Since 1994 the national dept of education has refocused the vision and direction of the South African Education system through policies, initiatives and innovations (Thurlow; 2003). He further suggests that for schools to move forward and successfully cope with innovations that have been constantly bombarding them in this new dispensation requires that they (schools) assume responsibility as agents of their own change. In respect of these changes in our education, the task team on education management development for schools suggest that schools move to becoming learning organisations.

The aim of this study is to investigate the perceptions of both the principal and educators as to what extent their school can be considered a learning organisation. This chapter will review literature on learning organisations with a view to identifying the characteristics common to learning organisations.

The chapter begins with defining learning organisations. It then proceeds to highlight the common characteristics of learning organisations. It then proceeds to look at how change has prompted a need to look at learning organisations as a way to embrace and cope with a changing landscape in South Africa.

2.2 What Is A Learning Organisation?

Peter Senge describes a learning organisation as, "one that is continually expanding its capacity to create its future." (Yeung et al, 1999:10)

Wick sees it as, " *an organisation that continually improves by readily creating and redefining the capabilities needed for success.*" (Yeung et al, 1999:10)

Southworth (1994:52) refers to, " *the learning school [as] a developing school,*" where, "*the quality of everyone's learning is important.*" Sammons et al in Bush,T & Middlewood,D(1997:32) see learning organisations as, " *effective schools, ...with teachers and senior managers continuing to be learners, keeping up to date with their subjects and advances in understanding about effective practice.*".

According to Moloi(2002:X), "*a learning organisation maximises learning opportunities by nurturing and tapping the collective wisdom of the entire workforce – principal, educators and non-teaching staff through its strategic direction and shared values.*"

Using these definitions as a working point we can then suggest that a learning organisation is an organisation that learns, promotes learning in all its people and is as a result continuously transforming itself.

Having established to some extent what constitutes a learning organisation we need to ascertain what literature regards as the key characteristics of a learning organisation.

2.3 Characteristics Of A Learning Organisation

When looking at the characteristics of a learning organisation one may get caught up in specifics of a single learning organisation. However, it must be remembered that no two learning organisations are the same, hence a need to seek out common characteristics of these organisations.

Southworth (1994:53) focuses on 5 interrelated characteristics in his learning school:

Children's learning – here the focus is on pupils learning.

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Teacher's learning – individual teachers are encouraged to be continuing learners themselves.

Staff learning – staff are encouraged to collaborate by learning with and from each other.

Organisational learning – school learns its way forward – school is a learning system.

Leadership learning – head teacher is the leading learner.

Senge views these five disciplines as necessary to build a learning organisation. They are:

Personal mastery – deepening of personal vision – encourages educators to develop themselves personally and professionally.

Mental models – generalisations of how we understand the world – here he looks at reflecting on these and possibly overturning them – turning the mirror inward.

Team learning – teams not individuals are the fundamental learning units in modern organisations. They collaborate to work and develop knowledge effectively in small groups.

Shared vision – the capacity to hold a shared picture of a future we seek – create a collective dream to guide future actions.

Systems thinking – interrelationships that shape behaviour of systems – create the big picture perspective (Senge,1990: 7)and(Moloi, 2002: 6)

Yeung et al (1999:11) in looking at this issue of learning organisations present their model based on their view of, "*an organisations fundamental capability represents its capacity to generate and generalise ideas with impact (change) across multiple organisational boundaries (learning) through specific management initiatives and practices(capability)*." What emerges from this is what they term the three building blocks:

1   Generation – generate ideas, acquiring, discovering inventing and sourcing ideas

2   Generalisation – sharing ideas across boundaries within organisations.

3   Identification of learning disability – identify problems in steps 1 and 2 that lead to failures in these areas.

The characteristics, which come through, quite clearly are: The need for a shared vision. The ability of the organisation to be responsive to, both external and internal, change and innovation. It must have a dynamic culture to enable it to embrace changes as they occur and not become stagnant. They must adopt a collaborative culture thereby involving the entire workforce in building the organisation. Educators must continually be learning. Leadership is fundamental to organisations learning.

2.3.1 Shared Vision

Is there a need for shared vision in SA schools? In terms of the overall educational goals there is a shared vision, however, in terms of institutional goals the same needs to apply. Do all stakeholders have the same projected future for the school? This vision has to be visual and verbalised so that anyone who is just coming into the organisation may find it easier to ascertain where the school is headed. As our society has changed so too has the nature and compositions of our schools changed. This dynamic situation requires that new visions be drafted for our education as those, which were formulated in the previous dispensation, are no longer appropriate or valid.

Stakeholders need a vision and a mission statement with which they can identify. Moloi (2002: 7) says, " *A shared and strategic vision is needed to provide a clear sense of direction in our schools, given the*

changing, challenging environment within which they operate." When people have a say and share in the vision and direction of an organisation then the chances of that organisation succeeding are much greater as alluded to by Greene when he says, " it is when teachers are together as persons. According to norms and principles they have freely chosen, that interest becomes intensified and commitments are made ... coming together to determine what is possible, teachers may discover a determination to transcend." (Greene, 1991: 13)

Davidoff(1997:134)says, "staff need to feel valued and acknowledged for their efforts and contributions to the school." Therefore it is important to notice the effort of your staff and show appreciation for this effort. Management can help prevent teachers losing their enthusiasm and can enhance commitment and motivation by including teachers in decision making and developing of the school's vision and mission. Davidoff(1997;34)further states that "support for excellence, commitment, motivation and ongoing staff development comes from an enabling school environment." The staff feels needed and valued if they participate in shaping the vision of the school.

Shukla (1999:250) says, " Learning organisations visibly and formally communicate their commitment to learning to their viewers. More than their vision and mission statements, this commitment is evident in processes initiated by them". Senge(1993:209) further asserts that, " you cannot have a learning organisation without a shared vision. Without a pull toward some goal, which people truly want to achieve, the forces in support of status quo can be overwhelming. Vision establishes the overarching goal." This ties in directly with the idea of collaboration, which is regarded as one of the key features of an effective organisation.

2.3.2 Collaborative culture

Collaborative culture is an important characteristic of learning organisations. This is suggestive of a need to have a harmonious working relationship between management and staff (all stakeholders).

According to Lumby(1997), "*all staff must be involved in collaborative learning.*" In South African schools this is not the case as many educators feel that their classroom is their domain and are unwilling to allow anyone into that inner sanctum. There is also a definite chasm between management and staffs as voiced by many educators and this has done little to foster a collaborative culture. The feeling is that if ideas come from below they are dismissed and that only those generated by management have any chance of being implemented. Shipman in Southworth(1994: 56) alludes to this when he says, "*Schools are typical of traditional organisations in having top down information flow, whereas they actually need to circulate info.*"

Southworth's(1994:55) view is that, "*schools cannot be improved without people working together... Undoubtedly where staff have the capacity to collaborate professionally their opportunities to learn from one another both informally and formally increases.*" This then suggests that at many schools true collaboration is not being fostered, as there is a definite them and us perception amongst management and staff. Teachers feel they are not valued and have not been empowered to lead in making the school a better place. There is a need for trust to ensure a harmonious working relationship between management and staff. Research suggests that schools must find ways to cultivate trusting relationships and help teachers feel valued as colleagues and educational leaders. Such valuing is evident in the opportunities and recognition teachers receive for making key curriculum decisions,

authoring school improvement plans, taking ownership of professional development activities and assuming leadership in the educational community.

West Burnham(1997) states that one of the main features of collegiality is teamwork as it harnesses the talents of all team members. The concept of teamwork based on collaboration, empowerment and inclusivity offers the opportunity for more effective management in a changing society

"Organisations are essentially about people working together and yet so often they fail to capitalise on the full potential of this... a team can achieve much more than the sum of its individual members". (Woodcock, 1989:8) In essence teamwork is about sharing. Sharing of skills and expertise, sharing of knowledge, sharing of time and energy, and sharing of workload. Through this, cohesion of the team is enhanced which allows for maximum use of resources, realisation of both individual and group potential, and reduction of stress and anxiety. Hayes(2002:4) aptly sums up the benefits of teamwork to an organisation when he says,"

> *In an organisation, which has got its team working practises right, people work more efficiently, experience less stress and contribute more to their work. They stay with the [organisation] longer and don't take as much time off sick. They contribute new ideas and try to improve the way that they do their work."*

O'Neill in (Bush, 1997:79) says, *"Effective teams are those which have an inclusive process, deep commitment and collective expertise"*
Here managers can use the teamwork approach to alleviate some of the extra burden placed on teachers. Here teachers work together,

collaborating on effective methods of reducing the effects of the increased load. .Middlewood (1998:10) refers to this when he says, *"Teams are an appropriate management response to the increased workload created by educational legislation."* A secondary benefit of this interaction is that teachers improve their own skills and abilities as they learn from other team members.

Teamwork improves communication between people and it also allows them to express their abilities and talents through the team. Through interaction with the team a member can improve their ability in certain areas as a result of benefiting from the expertise of other members.

Teamwork allows for the empowerment of its members. They can be given the responsibility to get on with the job they are required to do with out any unnecessary interference or having to continually refer to higher levels. According to Hayes *(2002:107),"* *The concept of empowerment lies at the heart of team working."* He further states," *...the people who are actually doing the work are able to take responsibility for it and make relevant decisions needed to carry out their work effectively".* We can thus see in the move to a more democratic and collaborative approach to managing, teamwork has a definite place.

The manager's handling of the interpersonal relationships is crucial because if it is the people who do the work and carry the load who do not share in the benefits on offer then the result could be low staff morale and demotivation. Davidoff (1997) addresses this when he says that even the best teachers become demotivated and disillusioned in conditions, which do not promote a culture of learning. The manager

needs to create a climate suitable for the enhancement of the quality, commitment and performance of the employee so that the school may benefit.

2.3.3 Leadership

Moloi (2002:22)says,' *School leadership is at the centre of any effort to transform a school into a learning organisation. Good leadership practices contribute significantly to the outcomes which may be achieved when educators aspire to create a learning organisation."* Good leadership practices are vital in making the transition towards becoming a learning organisation

Both leadership and management are important for the school to function properly. According to Durnford et al(2000:2)," *leadership is the ability to move the school forward, whilst management is concerned with the procedures necessary to keep the school running."* The real challenge then for schools is as Gerber et al(1998:283) puts it is," *to combine strong leadership and strong management and use one to balance the other."* In this way the school can address both complexity and change. The problem we find in most schools is that principals are still stuck in management mode because in the old education set-up that is what leadership of the school required of them. However, in the new move towards self-managing schools this mode is no longer adequate. It becomes imperative that educational leaders be able to manage because they have to concern themselves with issues such as allocations, budget, resources and organization of the workforce. Durnford et al (2000:16) make reference to this when they say," *[Principals in management mode] have plans and they might even have timetables for achieving their plans, but they do not have the vision that will enable their schools to fly."*

Leaders must inspire, motivate and influence others to voluntarily engage in suggested activities. This brings forth the notion of vision, which is imperative for the development of an organization. A child without a dream is not a child; as such a leader without a vision cannot successfully lead. This vision has often been referred to as desired future state. For a leader it involves looking at where your organization is and where you would like it to be. Those who have experienced leadership will have realized that it is the leader's ability to motivate and lead his people that inspires them to perform well and give of their best. These people will have no problem in identifying the best boss they ever had without having to think to long about it. It is this kind of influence which sets leaders apart from others. Foreman in Thurlow (2003c: 198) refers to the importance of vision in leadership when he says:

> "Contemporary orthodoxy demands that leaders shall possess personal visions of a brighter future for themselves and their organizations, and will be able to communicate and demonstrate them with vigour, persuasiveness and conviction.... Vision is the distinguishing feature of the leadership role."

Coleman(1994:65) also makes reference to this when she says," - Outstanding leaders have a vision for their organizations. - Vision must be communicated in a way which secures commitment among members of the organization." Mandela epitomises this as he has inspired a nation previously fragmented to work together for the prosperity of the nation. This vision of a united South Africa based on reconciliation and harmony and his clear articulation of this vision is what sets him apart from ordinary men, making him a great leader. Durnford et al(2000:172) allude to this when they say," Leadership is concerned with the long term," and "vision is articulated and set by the leader."

So as a leader it is quite clear that it is not an individual thing but rather involves others at every point and turn in your leadership role. How you relate to these others is very important in determining the success factor of your organization. People make things happen. They give life to the vision, they affirm you and trust you as leader, and they give purpose to the mission of the school. Therefore in education in South Africa today, it is important for leaders to invest in relationships as this is invariably an investment in the achievement of goals.(Durnford et al ,2000)

The effectiveness of this relationship hinges on all parties sharing the same vision for the organisation. Communication is a key component of this interaction. Where Leaders and staff are pulling against each other the impact on the school is negative. "[The] group will pursue organisational goals under the most adverse working conditions if its leader meets the most important needs of the group. On the other hand, the group will thwart the achievement of organisational goals if its leader does not treat the members decently."(Gerber, 1998: 310) Southworth (1994:56) states that, "Heads act as models for teacher and staff development, they talk openly about their growth and undertake further professional development. They demonstrate the importance of learning."

2.3.4 Professional Development

Another area, which has made the transition toward becoming learning organisations difficult for many South African schools, is the issue of suitably equipped teachers. Many schools operate with unqualified, under qualified or stagnant teachers. This can pose a real problem because teachers who do not continue to learn will have difficulty in dealing with the changes that occur in schools and education. Moloi .(2002:1)says, "there is a growing consensus that

successful schools have educators who are committed to personal and professional development" Southworth (1994:34) states that, *" Teachers as professionals need to keep abreast of new developments in the curriculum, extend their expertise and acquire new competencies."* Moloi (2002:2) further states that, *" in an ever changing environment new learning capabilities will enable educators to respond creatively to both internal and external changes."*

Can our schools move forward if they contain much dead wood? Many of the educators who have not embraced the change in South Africa have shown resistance to the innovations in education. For those who are struggling, schools need to put in place mechanisms to help them overcome their barriers. Those who do not wish to change then need to move out and make way for new people with the will to make our schools work. Moloi (2002:24) says that, *"individual educators must be encouraged to be continuous learners themselves in collaboration with others.* Thus it can be seen that professional development for educators is essential to keep pace with the change occurring in education.

Lumby in Bush et al(1997:33) states that, *"schools will not develop unless their staff groups develop, and staff development meant, for us, teachers learning. In short a learning school is a developing school."* She further states *(32)* that, *"effective schools are learning organisations, with teachers and senior managers continuing to be learners, keeping up to date with their subjects and with the advances in understanding about effective practice."*

Fullan(1991:133) uses Rosenhaltz's theory to highlight the characteristics necessary for learning enriched schools:

Teacher learning

Teacher Commitment

Shared School Goals

Teacher Certainty

Teacher collaboration

Student Learning
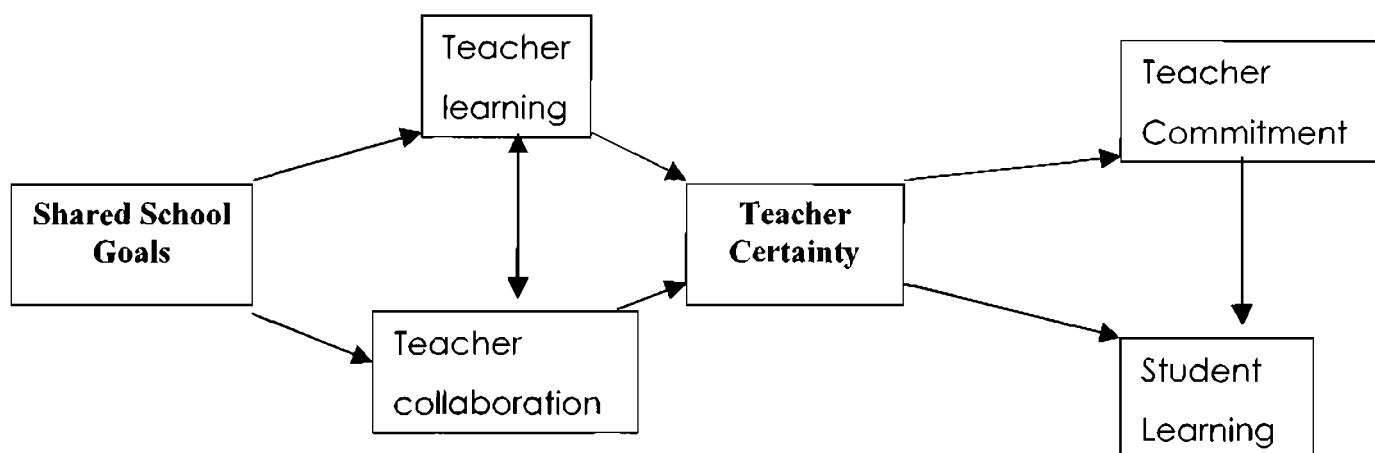
Southworth(1994:57) sums up the need for continuous professional development to ensure a learning environment when he says," *Everyone in the school is a learner. Learning is not overlooked or left out of the schools management and development. In the learning school the quality of everyone's learning is important.*

The next question which warrants asking then is, why this interest in the need for learning organisations? The idea of a learning organisation being one that must continually learn implies that change is key factor.

2.4 Change And The Learning Organisation

The rationale for the notion of schools becoming learning organisation in a South African context can be clearly discerned from the preamble of the South African Schools Act No.84 of 1996 which states, "*the achievement of democracy in S.A. has consigned to history the past system of education which was based on racial inequality and segregation ... this country requires a new national system for schools which will redress past injustices, ...advance the democratic transformation of society...*"(ELRC, 2003:b3)

The ideology of apartheid ensured separation of races in all spheres of life and education appeared to be a major contributor to enable the status quo to be retained for so long. This past system was characterised by a non-participative, secretive ethos that was neither accountable nor democratic. (Maclennan& Thurlow, 2003) This is born out in the fact that prior to democracy South Africa had more than 17 different education departments operating at the same time with differing aims and goals.

Schools in South Africa were subject to authoritarian or autocratic leadership in the form of the respective education departments and their nominated appointments in the school. They held all the power and decision-making. Many South African teachers who were employed in the 80's and early 90's are familiar with this leadership style as it was along these lines that our schools were run. There was no inclusion factor in any decision-making concerning the school. Even today some schools operate like this as their leaders are resistant to change and are comfortable in doing things the way they have always been done.

There was a definite hierarchical structure in place with all decisions coming from the top. According to Tsukudu and Taylor (1995) many head teachers of black schools do not enjoy credibility amongst their pupils, staff, and parents because they are seen as representatives of a system, which many despised. They were appointed for political reasons and helped to maintain the status quo between racial groups rather than question or disturb it. This then means that old education leadership and management styles need to make way for new consultative and democratic approaches to leadership. In schools, it is the principal who is the 'leader'. Many were employed prior to 1994 and their role as leader then differs greatly to what is expected of them

now. In most cases the style of leadership was autocratic based on bureaucratic management principles. Where this is the case very little concern is given to significant others in the school. There is no extension of ownership to the stakeholders. Here collaboration is generally not a feature. In general the various systems of the apartheid era have been managed in ways, which exclude major stakeholders. Maclennan & Thurlow(2003:14) make reference to this when they say, " *Relationships between communities and schools, parents and teachers, learners and principals and principals and officials have been polarised by years of apartheid and struggle.*" However, today the change in system has necessitated a change in leadership style to one, which would be more collegial and democratic. Durnford et al (2000) refer to this when they say that a leader never achieves success alone. Effective leaders unlock potential and creativity through challenge, empowerment and encouragement.

"No matter how leadership is defined, theorized and developed it is vital to performance in an organization." (Riches, 1997: 24) If this be the case then it is vital that South Africa schools transform and get the appropriate leadership to improve their performance. A transformational leadership approach appears to be more suited to the South African context as it,*"facilitates and encourages the active participation of people, ..., it motivates to unite them in a common purpose, a vision of a different school new and better in the future,"*(Owens, 2001 :247), which is in line with our new constitution which guides the Schools Act governing education.

Since 1994 the national dept of education has refocused the vision and direction of the South African Education system through policies, initiatives and innovations (Thurlow; 2003). Whilst at the school level not much has changed it appears as if schools and education are still

suffering from what can be termed "learned helplessness" as they are faced with the change from an apartheid education system to a democratic, inclusive education system. This learned helplessness creates resistance to change.

Rudduck(1991: 26) refers to this inability of schools to keep pace with change when he says;

> While change in society has become commonplace, the schools remain much as they always were... despite huge efforts the education establishment at all levels has shown a remarkable inability to implement and maintain [change] through more effective ways of teaching"

Maclennan & Thurlow(2003:2) also refer to this when they say, "While the vision for the transformed education system has been set out in policy frameworks, the system is still shaped by the ethos, systems and procedures inherited from the apartheid past."

Thurlow(2003b: 190) suggests that, " Schools more than ever have to confront such issues as radically changed curricula, new conceptions of and arrangements for teaching and learning in multicultural context and pressure for greater democratisation in school governance."

This appears to have prompted a need to review schools as learning organisations. Revens in Lumby(1997:31) refers to this when he says, " the rate of learning in an organisation must equal or be greater than the rate of change." Lumby(1997) further states that it is the accelerated speed of change, which has led to the renewed emphasis on the centrality of learning. South African schools are many and varied as they have their origins in one of many different education departments. However, what is common to all is that all are or should be in the process of change. It is just different levels at which

they might find themselves. The uncertainty, which accompanies change, can lead to much resistance to that change.

It thus becomes important for the change process to be managed to enable the people in the school to embrace this change so as to enhance the effectiveness of the school. Moloi (2002:X) says, " *educators have to realise that they cannot thrive without adapting their attitudes and practices to the ever-changing demands of a shifting landscape.*" She further alludes that it is the continuous development and growth in a learning organisation that enable individuals in the organisation to easily adapt to the many changes that take place in their internal and external environments.

Lucas(1999:47) encapsulates this need for schools to become learning organisations in order to engage and manage the ever-changing world around us when he says:

> *In order to capitalise on and exploit changes in the world around us, we need to be passionate about learning, about teaching, about growth, about our role in the future, about being flexible and adaptable about our future, and about abandoning what we have already learned when it loses validity or no longer works for us.*"

Thurlow(2003) suggests that for schools to move forward and successfully cope with innovations that have been constantly bombarding them in this new dispensation requires that they (schools) assume responsibility as agents of their own change. " *In short there is a strong imperative for schools to become empowered.*"(Lumby,1997:49) Hargreaves(1991) refers to these empowered schools as, *schools, which respond to the challenge of change by recreating its own vision, by redefining management to support change and by releasing the*

energy and confidence to put ideas into practice. In respect of these changes in our education, the task team on education management development for schools suggest that schools move to becoming learning organisations. Their report describes learning organisations in the following terms:

> Learning organisations treat change as an ongoing feature of their existence. They make change part of their organisational ethos and support individuals and collective learning as part of their mission. The learning organisation develops the capacity to learn, reflect, and the capacity to innovate. It uses these competencies to mobilise and use resources efficiently and to achieve the larger task of managing the changing environment inside and outside the school so as to improve the quality of teaching and learning. (Dept of Education, 1996:31)

2.5 Conclusion

Leadership, shared vision, commitment, communication, collaboration personal and professional development are all features necessary for the development of a learning organisation. However, what is clear is that these in many ways are closely intertwined and that the absence of one has definite implications for the effectiveness of the others.

In this chapter we have looked at what constitutes a learning organisation. We have looked more closely at what literature regards as characteristics essential for your organisation to be considered a learning organisation.

In the next chapter we will look at the research methods that will be employed in an attempt to establish to what extent this school can be considered a learning organisation.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

The research was aimed at looking at the characteristics as identified by literature as indicative of a learning organisation viz. continuous learning, shared vision, collaborative culture and leadership. It entails a case study investigating staff perceptions of a high school in the Durban Central area as a learning organisation. It is these perceptions, which form the basis of the research.

This chapter will also look at research design and methodology.

3.2 Research Design

This research took the form of a case study of a particular high school in the Durban area. There was no need for a sampling strategy as the whole educator population were involved in the research. This was made up of 35 educators and the principal.

3.2.1 Research questions

1. What is meant by the notion of a Learning Organisation and why is this notion significant in the S.A. context?

2. From the principal's perspective, to what extent does the school ``exhibit characteristics of a learning organisation?

3. From the perspectives of members of the educator staff, to what extent does the school exhibit the characteristics of a learning organisation?

4. In the light of these perceptions, to what extent might the school be regarded as a learning organisation?

5. What might need to be done in order for the school to become more truly a learning organisation, if anything?

Question One: This question will be addressed by reference to Literature review on Learning Organisations, looking at the impact of change in South Africa on educational institutions.

Question Two: This question will be addressed by means of a semi structured Interview.

Question three: This question will be addressed using a questionnaire. This will be given to all educators in the school. It will encompass a range of question types including open-ended questions.

Question Four: This will be addressed by looking at the findings of both the interview and the questionnaire.

Question Five: Here we will use the findings of the research in conjunction with the literature review to attempt to provide a solution.

3.3 Data Collection Instruments

Data collection is via a questionnaire and semi structured interview. These two together allow for both quantitative and qualitative analysis.

3.3.1 Questionnaire

A questionnaire was chosen because it could be conducted over large numbers in a short space of time. It also made the data collected easily quantifiable and suitable for analysis. It also allows for greater accuracy, validity and reliability of results. The questionnaire will be given to 35 educators.

The questionnaire will be confidential thus allowing for free expression of the respondent. The questionnaire is designed to explore the general perceptions of educators with regard to characteristics of learning organisations as identified by literature review. It contains both open and closed questions. The closed questions are easier and quicker to answer and quantification is straight forward.(Oppenheim, 1992) whilst open questions go deeper into the topic helping to capture greater authenticity and honesty of the respondent.(Cohen, Mannion & Morrison, 2000).

Section A of the questionnaire is concerned with the background of the respondent. It looks at years of experience, years at the present school and at the post level of the respondent. The objective of these questions was to ascertain the levels of experience and to ensure that there was response from educators as well as those in management positions.

Section B addresses the characteristics of a learning organisation as identified in the literature Question 1 looks at shared vision, Question 2 at collaboration, Question 3 at professional development, Question 4 at dynamic culture and Question 5 leadership. In each of these areas the questions start with attitude evaluation. They then proceed to closed question specific to perceptions of organisation and finally conclude with an open question to hopefully add some insight to the responses.

Questions 1.1 and 1.2 required educators to state whether they were familiar with vision and mission of the school and whether all staff shared this vision and mission. Educators were required to provide a yes or no response. 1.3 was based on decision-making and educators were required to tick the appropriate block. This was to ascertain to what degree educators felt included and valued as stakeholders in the school. Place was provided for educators to elaborate on their response if they wished to.

Question 2.1 Looked at how educators felt about working together and required a yes or no response. 2.2 and 2.3 attempt to establish how educators view this collaboration at their school. The aim of these questions is to see to what degree educators are working together and whether it is forced or as a result of them seeing the value in it.

The objective of 2.4 is to establish the working relationship between management and staff. The educators were required to tick from the range provided. They were also allowed to elaborate on their selection, as this issue of harmonious working relationship between management and staff is crucial to schools being effective. 2.5 looks at effective communication channels as it is this which can foster or hamper a positive collaborative culture in the school. Educators were required to list points in support of their response.

Question 3.1 looks at the attitude of educators towards the idea of professional development. 3.2 and 3.3 are geared towards determining how many educators are involved in professional development and to what extent this has impacted on their development in terms of their teaching.

Question 4.1 is aimed at determining to what extent recent educational innovations have been implemented in the school. Whilst 4.2 is directed at identifying the degree to which schools are changing in response to the changes in society.

Question 5.1 is to determine an attitude with regard to the importance of leadership for a learning organisation. It requires a yes/no response. The focus of 5.1 was to determine whether educators regarded the leadership as being the example for the rest of the school. Educators were required to tick the appropriate box and were allocated space to elaborate on their selection. In 5.3, 5.4and 5.5 the focus is on the role of the leaders in promoting the characteristics of a learning organisation in the school. The aim of these questions is to see if the leadership are geared towards moving the school towards being a true learning organisation.

In question 6 the educators were required to comment on what they feel should or could be done to improve the school. The main objective was to identify areas of strength and those, which required attention so as to improve working conditions, and create an atmosphere conducive to effective teaching and learning and thus move the school forward.

The questionnaire was piloted at a school. The pilot identified that the questionnaire required some refinement. Some of the questions were vague in that the educators were not sure whether the question referred to their subject or to school matters. The issue of phrasing of questions was highlighted as to what constituted leadership in the school. Some questions required space to allow for elaboration.

3.3.2 The Interview

A semi-structured interview was conducted with the principal. The basis of the interview was the perceptions of the principal of the school as a learning organisation. It was closely aligned to the questions presented in the questionnaire. An interview was chosen, as it will provide greater detail and insight into the specified topic. Cohen and Mannion(1995) concur when they say that the interview allows for greater depth than is the case with other methods of data collection. The principal was chosen because he is in a position, which is somewhat different to that of educators. Hopefully the interview would show the difference or similarity in perspectives. The interview also requires time and it would not have been feasible to conduct it with educators as they are occupied for most of the day with their duties in the classroom.

In question 1 the principal is required to share his views on his vision. The aim here is to ascertain to what extent these are shared by the rest of the stakeholders.

Question 2 looks at the issue of decision-making and refers to the principal's perception of inclusion of educators on this issue. This will also hopefully help to identify to some extent the leadership style of the principal.

In questions 3,4 and 5 the emphasis is on collaboration and teamwork. The aim here is to see to what extent this school and all its players work towards a common purpose. The idea is that if the leader is geared towards collaboration then it is easier to filter this working principle throughout the organisation

Question 6and 7 deal with the principal's attitude toward professional development. The main objective of this question was to determine whether he believes in the ongoing development of his educators and to what extent he could be instrumental in effecting such professional development in his people.

Question 8 looks at his perception of the role he plays at school. The focus here is on the role he plays as the leader. The aim here is determine what type of leader he appears to be. This in relations to educators' perceptions of his role could help to give a clearer picture of whether his perceptions of his role did match the practise of his role.
In this question the principal was required to comment on what he feels should or could be done to improve the school. The main objective was to identify areas of strength and those, which required attention so as to improve working conditions, and create an atmosphere conducive to effective teaching and learning and thus move the school forward.

3.4 Data Analysis

Data from the semi-structured interview accessed via content analysis procedures. For the questionnaires analysis was through frequency counts. This was enhanced by comment from elaboration provided by respondents to questions asked.

The limitations of this investigation were that:

Of the 35 educators only 31 were issued questionnaires, as two were on leave, one was writing exams and one was on departmental moderation and exam selection duty. Of the 31 issued 27 were collected. 4 questionnaires remain outstanding as all attempts to retrieve them proved unsuccessful.

Some educators answered questions inconsistently and this is evident by the non-response to certain questions. However, this was not sufficient to detract from the validity of the overall study.

3.5 Conclusion

This chapter provides a discussion of the research methods used in the study. Attention was given to research questions. The research instruments were also explored looking at both the questionnaire and the semi-structured interview. The questionnaire was handed to all educators on staff whilst the interview was conducted with the principal.

In the next chapter the researcher will analyse the data emerging from the questionnaires and interview collected from the respondents

CHAPTER 4

PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

4.1 Introduction

This chapter looks at the research process in respect of the presentation and discussion of the findings of the respondents via the questionnaire and interview. The questionnaire will be reviewed first with the questions in sequence as they appear on the questionnaire. This will be followed by the interview.

4.2 Questionnaire

Questionnaires were given to 31 educators of which 27 responded positively to the questionnaires.

ANALYSIS

Question 1: No. of years teaching experience?

Respondents were required to fill in appropriate no. of years

Response in years

0-5	6-10	11-20	21-25	26-30	31-35	36-40	41-45	46-50	No response
3	2	13	4	3			1		1

Question 2: No. of years at this school?

0-5	6-10	11-20	21-25	26-30	31-35	36-40	41-45	46-50	No response
11	2	9	3	1					1

Question 3: Indicate post level?

Respondents were required to fill in appropriate level in the space provided. The following respondents participated.

2 deputy principals

4 heads of department

21 level one educators

Section B – this section looks at characteristics of a Learning organisation as identified in the literature

Question 1

1.1   Are you familiar with the

a) vision and,   b) mission statements of the school?

Responses were :

a)   **6 : Yes**   **22%**   b) **7 : Yes**   **26 %**

19: No   **70 %**   **19: No**   **70%**

2 : No response 8 %   **1 : No response 4 %**

The No response in terms of both familiarity with the vision and mission of the school suggests that the school has not made its vision and mission statement known to its educators and as such they find it difficult to identify with.

1.2   Should management and staff share the vision and goals of the school?

There was a 96% positive response to this question regarding the attitude of educators towards shared vision and goals. Only one person did not respond. This is in keeping with Senge's(1990) view that you cannot have a learning organisation without a shared vision, as it will result in a lack of direction and people working at cross purposes.

1.3   Do you feel a part of the decision making at this school?

Respondents were provided with 4 options from which to choose.

Option 1   **All of the time**   **-1**   **4%**

Option2	**Most of the time**	- 5	18%
Option3	**Seldom**	-15	56%
Option4	**Never**	- 6	22%

The majority of respondents selected seldom or never suggesting they did not feel a part of the decision making at school. The general consensus was that decision-making is not participative/collaborative. The principal makes all the decisions and these are handed down to the educators with no input from them on issues, which affect them. There was a feeling that attempts at inclusion were contrived as decisions taken at staff briefings were very often overturned by the principal without consultation.

<u>Question 2</u>

2.1 <u>Should educators be part of a functional workgroup or team at school?</u>

Respondents were required to tick yes or no. 100% responded yes which indicated that they did regard teams and teamwork as important for effective schools.

2.2 <u>How would you describe this teamwork at school?</u>

The respondents were provided with four options, excellent, good, fair and poor and were asked to elaborate on their choice.

Responses were:

excellent 0   good- 9(33%)   fair-10(37%) poor-8(30%)

Most of the people who felt that teamwork was good identified this as that occurring in smaller groups (subject groups).

However, as a staff and a school the general feeling is that it is

lacking. It was felt that a work group should meet regularly in order to plan, strategise and build team spirit but this does not happen. This lack of collaboration at all levels requires attention if the school hopes to achieve maximum output from its people. This is highlighted by Southworth (1994:55) when he says,

"schools cannot be improved without people working together."

2.3   Do you feel that staff readily shares their advice and expertise with colleagues?

The respondents were provided with four options, Always, Often, Sometimes, Never.

Responses were:

Always 2(8%)   **Often** 8(30%)   **Sometimes** 17(62%)   **Never** 0

This indicates that members of staff are more often than not willing to help colleagues, which suggests a measure of collaboration. Southworth (1994:54) states,' *teachers have always learned from one another although sometimes learning is ad hoc."*

2.4   Do you consider there to be a harmonious working relationship between management and staff?

The respondents were provided with four options, Always, Often, Sometimes, and Never.

Responses were:

Always 0   **Often** 5(19%)   **Sometimes** 17(62%)   **Never** 5 (19%)

The majority of respondents felt that there was no real harmonious working relationship between management and staff because the principal and H.O.D's were not in regular contact with staff. Staff felt that they were always last to know about decisions made for them. Most teachers are unaware of what is going on at management level and governing body

level. A pertinent comment was that even the pupils know what decisions are taken and what is happening in the school before the teachers. The fact that there are no major areas of conflict may create the impression of a harmonious working relationship. Moloi(2002:7) makes reference to the need for a harmonious working relationship amongst members when she says, " *a learning organisation draws its strength and vitality from adaptable, committed and interdependent team players at all levels of the school.*"

2.5 <u>Are the communication channels (at all levels) effective enough to enable this school to be an effective school? List points in support of response</u>

There were **5 positive responses, 19 respondents said no whilst 3 recorded some of the time.**

Management to staff the channels were sorely lacking. There are no staff meetings only staff briefings at which the principal is never present. Those who recorded positive responses indicated that there is a communication structure - **teacher** ➞ **H.O.D.** ➞ **Deputy** ➞ **Principal.** However, this often appears to be only one way. There has been mention of selective channels where certain people have access. The feeling was that it suits management to have communication breakdown as it enables them to retain the status quo - keep people in the dark.

<u>Question 3</u>

3.1 <u>Should teachers be involved in continuous learning?</u>

All respondents felt that teachers should be involved in continuous learning.

3.2　Are you or have you been involved in any form of professional development in this year? (Study, upgrade, workshop- job related or otherwise). If so give details.

Of the **respondents 15 indicated that they were involved in some form of professional development whilst 12 indicated that they were not.** The main areas of development recorded were via workshops - job related, study, private development and conferences. According to Moloi(2002:1), " *there is a growing consensus that successful schools have educators who are committed to personal and professional development.*"

3.3　Has this professional dev. had any impact on your personal development in your job? Give details

Responses to this question revealed that 14 respondents felt they had benefited, 5 did not, whilst 8 did not complete a response. This suggests that as the question is linked to the previous question and that many were not involved in professional development then this question was not applicable to them.

The areas of benefit included: greater confidence, new strategies, improved knowledge and understanding of concepts, more effective planning, realise shortcomings, broadened horizons and built capacity.

Question 4

4.1　Has the school implemented recent educational innovations?

In this question there were four areas, which required a yes/no response.

The responses were:

IQMS(Integrated Quality Management Systems):   yes – 9   no – 17   no response – 1

RNCS(Revised National Curriculum Statement):   yes – 0   no – 15   no response – 12

WSE(Whole School Evaluation): yes – 0   no – 19   no response – 8

OBE(Outcomes Based Education):   yes – 26   no – 1   no response – 0

The spread of the responses indicates that the majority of responses agree that OBE has been implemented. However, in respect of IQMS fewer people have indicated implementation. In regard to RNCS and WSE the majority of respondents reported no implementation with a high proportion of non-responses evident. This high level of non-responses could be suggestive of many respondents not being familiar with these innovations.

4.2   <u>Has the school in any way attempted to embrace the many changes which are occurring in education. Provide detail</u>

The positives recorded were the implementation of OBE, explanation of IQMS, new books purchased in certain areas, establishing of a new computer centre. However it was felt that the school was not proactive in response to change. Racial representation of staff needs to be addressed. Curriculum change to meet the needs of a changing pupil population needs to be implemented. According to Shukla(1999:253), " *to develop learning orientated practices and strategies it is necessary to become open to the idea of continuous change and transformation.*"

<u>Question5</u>

5.1   <u>Do you consider good leadership as being essential for the transition to becoming a learning organisation?</u>

All the respondents agreed that leadership was important.

5.2 <u>Do you consider the leadership (school management team) at your school to be the leading learners? Elaborate.</u>

With regard to this question the responses were:

YES – 6(22%)　　　　No – 14(52%)　　No　　Response　　– 3(15%)　　　3 respondents indicated that some members of management were. (11%)

The majority of respondents felt that the leadership style was autocratic. The feeling is that we have a management team but no leaders because they do not learn from their mistakes. There is no development. The school management team(SMT) work in isolation to the rest of the staff. Absence of a management plan suggests that the (SMT) are not effectively running the school.

5.3 <u>Does the principal attempt to promote a collaborative culture amongst staff?</u>

The respondents were offered four options from which to choose viz. Always; Often; Sometimes; Never. The responses were:

Always – 0　; Often – 3(11%)　; Sometimes – 14 (52%) ; Never – 10 (37%)

The principal is most often not a part of staff interaction – he excludes himself. The majority of respondents felt that the principal does not encourage and steer the collaborative process. He communicates via memos with no consultation. He only allows people to know what he feels he wants them to know. Some respondents stated that he does encourage educators to be part of groups. However not much effort made to assist in this collaboration – lip service.

5.4 <u>Has your Organisation (school) in any way assisted you in terms of your professional development? Provide detail.</u>

Respondents were required to answer yes or no. There were **10 positive responses (37%) whilst 17 people said no (63%).** This suggests that the school has not put in place a standard policy for educators regarding professional development but rather deals with it on an individual basis. Those who responded no felt that no opportunities were offered to them for professional development and that the principal was selective in determining who received these opportunities. The others felt that the principal encouraged professional development through offering of learnerships and assistance with studies.

5.5   <u>Do you feel that the learners are achieving maximum benefit from the inputs of management and staff at this school?</u>
Respondents were required to tick yes or no. **8 people responded yes(30%), 17 responded negatively(62%) whilst 2 people did not respond(8%).**

The majority of respondents felt that stressed teachers cannot give of their best. Learners are stifled through lack of resources, poor communication and demotivated teachers. They felt that educators need to be part of decision making as ownership enhances accountability. There is a lack of real leadership.

6.   <u>What do you feel can be done at this school to make it a better school. (a true learning organisation)? List points in support of response.</u>
   ❖   Regular staff meetings.
   ❖   Adopt an inclusive approach to decision making and managing.
   ❖   Encourage teamwork and foster interpersonal relationships.
   ❖   Identify areas of concern amongst educators and provide development in these.

- ❖ Improve physical environment of the school.
- ❖ Development of an up to date resource centre.
- ❖ Put in place a management plan.
- ❖ Draft a vision and mission statement collaboratively and make it visible to all.
- ❖ Provide in-house training and development via workshops and seminars.
- ❖ Develop the curriculum to meet the changing face of the pupil population.
- ❖ Motivation of staff.
- ❖ Two-way communication channel to be re-established.
- ❖ Improve interest among teachers and learners via incentives and acknowledgements.
- ❖ All educators to be afforded the opportunity for professional development

4.3 <u>Summary</u>

Most respondents' felt that decision-making in the school was not participative as a result of the leadership style of the principal. This they felt impacted on most areas mentioned in this study. This leadership style appeared to be autocratic and as such allowed for very little collaboration between management and staff. They cited the ineffective communication channels as being a major obstacle to school improvement. Very few felt a sense of ownership. There was an even split in terms of professional development although all saw the need for it. As a learning organisation based on the characteristics presented most respondents felt the school had the necessary infrastructure but was falling short in terms of effective implementation. There was a need for inclusion of all stakeholders to improve the school.

4.4 Interview

An interview was conducted with the principal.

INTERVIEW

1. <u>Do you feel that the staff shares the same vision and goal, for the school, as you?</u>

   He highlighted his vision and goals as being: Quality education, community development – jobs, a transformed working class South African school with a commitment to a system of values, ethics and morals. However he felt that the staff did not share his vision and goals directly.

2. <u>Do you believe that teachers want to participate in the management of the school?</u>

   He felt that the teachers did want to participate in the management of the school but that they as the management had not given teachers sufficient opportunities for this participation.

3. <u>What is your view of collaboration as a working principle in your school?</u>

   He felt that collaboration as a working principle was vital and should include: educators and School management team (SMT); learners and Representative Council of Learners (RCL); parents and School Governing Body (SGB).

4. <u>Do you consider there to be a harmonious working relationship between management and staff?</u>

He responded yes, as he felt it was a part of the culture of the school and that those coming in were absorbed into a working ethos.

5. <u>Are the communication channels effective enough (at all levels) to enable the school to be more effective?</u>

His response was no and that communication channels needed to be improved. There was a need to improve and implement line function in the schools communication channels.

6. <u>Are you in favour of educators being involved in continuous professional development?</u>

His response was yes. He felt that the transformation of the curriculum and the education system makes this an imperative e.g. OBE, FET. He said that the face of the classroom has changed, in some instances, quite drastically, thus retraining is a necessity.

7. <u>What can you do in your role as leader to promote this need for professional development?</u>

Encourage educators to update qualifications/skills by;

INSET, Professional studies

Seminars - at school, workshops - at school in this way using existing capacity, participation in cell groups and subject committees.

Retraining at school to meet need for teachers in rare /new subjects due to curriculum change and transformation.

8. <u>As leader of the school , what do you consider as being your role in making this school a true learning organisation.</u>

In respect of the educators:

He felt the need to emphasise their crucial role in school /community development. Encourage staff development. To encourage their involvement in the holistic development of learner. Create positive learning environment. Improve the Post provisioning norm (PPN) through School Governing Body(SGB) posts.

In respect of the Learners:

Curriculum reform. Motivation and goal setting. Learner participation in RCL, development of leadership. Discipline and culture of learning. Rights and responsibilities. Extra curricular participation.

With regard to the School:

Development of the infrastructure – buildings – establishing a library. Improving of staff room and the setting up of a laboratory and specialist rooms. Improve the safety and security. Enhance the administrative capacity.

In respect of Parents and Community;

Implement Adult Basic Education and Training(ABET). Computer Literacy, Entrepreneurship. Parent development – pregnancy, aids. Fundraising

4.5 Summary

The principal sees the school as having the necessary characteristics to become a learning organisation. He felt that teachers wanted to be part of decision making but that he had not offered them enough opportunity for this. He agreed that collaboration was important and felt that there was a harmonious working relationship between management and staff. He acknowledged the need for teachers to be involved in continuous professional development and felt that the school was proactive in dealing with change and transformation.

4.6 Conclusion

This chapter looked at the analysis of the findings obtained from the questionnaires as well as the interview. The next chapter will focus on the summary of the findings as well as recommendations to improve the school.

CHAPTER 5

SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Introduction

This chapter focuses on the summary of the findings of both the educators' questionnaires and the principal's interview. It will also include a summary of the research questions. Arising from these will be recommendations, which can be implemented to make the school more truly a learning organisation.

5.2 Summary Of Findings

In this research we attempted to see to what extent this school can be regarded as a learning organisation, via the perceptions of the educators and principal, in respect of the characteristics as identified by the literature review. This was done by administering a questionnaire to the educators, as well as a semi-structured interview with the principal.

The first research question focused on the notion of learning organisation and its significance in the South African context. This was addressed in the literature review where it was highlighted that learning organisations are suggestive of organisations, which are dynamic and continually learning through all its stakeholders. The literature also highlighted some of the characteristics, which were key to a learning organisation being exactly that. These characteristics were identified as shared vision. The ability of the organisation to be responsive to, both external and internal, change and innovation. . It must have a dynamic culture to enable it to embrace changes as they occur and not become stagnant. They must adopt a collaborative culture thereby involving the entire workforce in building the organisation. Educators must continually be learning. Leadership is fundamental to organisations learning.

The idea that a learning organisation is continually learning implies that change is a key factor. This is what motivated the need for move to learning organisations in South African education. In respect of these changes in our education, the task team on education management development for schools suggest that schools move to becoming learning organisations.

Question 2 addressed the principal's perspective as to what extent the school exhibits the characteristics of a learning organisation. An interview with the principal revealed his perceptions. He appeared to be fully aware of what was required in terms of the characteristics for the school to become more truly a learning organisation. He appeared to be in full agreement with the need for these characteristics to be implemented. However, he did indicate that in some areas he had fallen short in terms of implementation. This was clearly evident when he suggested that he had not provided enough opportunity for educators to be involved in the decision making process. He also agreed that not very many of the educators shared his vision and mission for the school, as he had not communicated this to them.

He did believe that he had the support of his staff and that he was approachable. In terms of collaboration he was of the opinion that it was important and that there was a harmonious working relationship between management and staff, as he had an open door policy. He was strongly in favour of professional development and encouraged all in his school to pursue this, as it was important in these changing times. There was a need to stay abreast of the times. He felt that the school already displayed to some extent the characteristics of learning organisation and with a little bit of effort these could be improved to make the school even better. This is in keeping with his vision of a

transformed working class South African school with a commitment to a system of values, ethics and morals.

Question 3 of the research questions examined the perceptions of educators in respect of the school as a learning organisation. These perceptions were gathered through the use of a questionnaire, which include both item check and elaboration response questions.

The evidence of the findings suggests that many of the characteristics of learning organisations were not clearly visible as there were only levels of functionality in action. The general consensus was that decision-making is not participative or collaborative. Many of the responses suggest that leadership was at the core of the problem of stifling these characteristics. Their view is that the style of leadership is autocratic and that this impacted on all the other aspects and characteristics required for a better more effective school.

In terms of collaboration and harmonious working relationship the perception was that between staff and staff there did exist a measure of collaboration, however, between management and staff there was a chasm. Here there appears to be a major difference in the perceptions of the principal and the staff as regards his role in promoting collaborative culture. Where he felt he had an open door policy, the staff felt he was inaccessible as he was never present when required. The absence of staff meetings and presence of the principal at staff briefings indicated this.

The area, which was highlight as being crucial, was that of effective communication channels. There was a majority response indicating that the lack of effective communication channels lay at the heart of the problem facing this school in its move towards becoming a true learning organisation. Here the principal was in agreement that the

communication channels were not effective enough and indicated that there was a dire need to address this..

In the area of professional development there appears to be a level of consensus between perceptions of both the principal and the educators. They all seem to regard it as being essential in a learning organisation. However, the difference occurs on provision of opportunity by the organisation for educators to engage in professional development. There is a split with many feeling that the school through the principal has made opportunity available for professional development whilst a slight majority declare that there is no such opportunity provided.

In response to the schools handling innovation and change the perceptions of educators and principal appear to be at variance with each other. In respect of educational innovation and policy there was consensus that only O.B.E had been successfully implemented, whilst there has been a flirtation with I.Q.M.S. In respect of W.S.E and R.N.C.S not many of the educators were even aware of these. Practical changes involved the development of computer centre, change in the demographics of pupil population and the inclusion of refugees in the school population. However, there was concern on the part of educators at the lack of change in respect of the curriculum. Here the feeling was that changing population was forced to change to the existing curriculum instead of the curriculum changing to meet the needs of a changing population. The issue of lack of racial representivity on staff was also highlighted.

In response to learners achieving maximum benefit from the management and staff, there was resounding agreement in perceptions of both principal and educators. In essence pupils were

not receiving maximum benefit. This was attributed to ineffective communication channels between management and staff. The majority of staff felt that stressed and demotivated teachers could not give of their best. There was a need to extend ownership of the teaching and learning process to all through inclusive decision making thereby increasing accountability.

In response to question 4 of the research questions it has surfaced that the characteristics identified by literature are in evidence in some areas in this school. There is a measure of collaboration albeit to a point restricted to subject level. The levels of teamwork vary and appear to be at its best on occasion. However it does not appear to be an ongoing feature of the schools operating plan.

The characteristic, which is greatly lacking is that of a shared vision. Here the staff and principal have not together worked on the vision and mission of the school. Therefore we find a situation where members of the same orchestra may be playing from different music sheets. The result.....! In terms of decision-making there is no inclusive practice evident by the lack of staff meetings. Decision-making rests in the hands of the principal.

Professional development is evident with many educators involved via workshops, seminars and further study. The problem is that all of the educators are not involved in this, which suggests an imbalance in terms of progressive up to date educational ability of staff.

The school has embraced change in terms of admission policy, advancing of technical ability via the setting up of a computer centre and implementation of Outcomes Based Education. However, in terms of physical change not much has been done to alleviate the problem of overcrowded classrooms, provision of sufficient educator support

materials and textbooks. Not much curriculum development and change has occurred. This school is in some ways on the right path to becoming a true learning organisation, however, some work is needed in the areas where they have proved to be falling short.

Pedlar et al in Moloi(2002: 14) sums it up when they say, " *The Learning Organisation is a dream, but it is a dream that can be realised.* "

Question 5 looks at ways in which the school can become more truly a learning organisation. This question will be addressed more fully in the recommendations, which arise from the findings of both the questionnaire and the interview.

5.3 **Recommendations**

In order for this school to become more truly a learning organisation the following recommendations have been suggested.

The vision and mission statements should be drafted collaboratively and then made visible to all. The goals and objectives of the school need to be established collaboratively and these can become the foundation for school improvement. An inclusive approach to decision making needs to be adopted and this can be assisted by the insistence of regular staff meetings. This will be of benefit in the need to implement a management plan in to which all the stakeholders have had input. The reestablishment of effective two-way communication channels is imperative for any progress to be made.

The management team of the school need to review their management style and people skills. This may necessitate them going on management courses and workshops. This is imperative if the communication channels are to be improved

There is a need to encourage teamwork and foster interpersonal relationships. This can be greatly enhanced by acknowledging and

affirming your team members. Ownership of the school needs to be extended to all stakeholders. Giving responsibility for certain functions of the school to the stakeholders can do this. Delegation of responsibility for the team to the team will help to improve relationships and accountability.

Encourage staff development through the implementation of workshops, seminars, and professional development courses. These should be compulsory, in terms of your area of specialisation, for all educators. These should be both in house and external. All teachers should undergo in service training programmes and the school needs to put in place some plan to improve the professional capacity of all its teachers via professional development. Quality training and support needs to be provided by well-trained education officials in respect of the recent education policy innovations.

There is a need for curricular reform in terms of changing the subjects on offer to meet needs of a changing pupil population and a changing society. Make full use of computer centre by offering computer studies as an examination subject. The large no of Zulu speaking learners begs the inclusion of Zulu as an optional language. The market trends of business and tourism require people skilled in these areas, which warrant the introduction of economics and travel and tourism as subjects. However, the implementation of the Further education and training phase (FET) in 2006 may help force the school to make the necessary curriculum changes.

Development of the infrastructure is required with the classrooms being able to accommodate the class size. Establishing of a library, laboratory and specialist rooms will go a long way to improving the quality of teaching and learning. The post-provisioning norm needs to

be addressed via the employment of governing body teachers. This will help offset the burdens placed on educators hopefully making them more effective in their core function which is teaching and learning

Practical short-term implementations:
- ❖ Five-minute staff briefing every morning to set tone for the day and prevent mixed communication lines.
- ❖ Weekly subject meetings to improve planning in the department.
- ❖ Regular staff meetings and these to be minuted and these distributed timeously.
- ❖ A suggestion box to highlight issues, which need to be addressed.
- ❖ Principal and deputies to enhance their visibility through a daily "walkabout".
- ❖ A large visible (day/month/year) planner to be erected in the staff room or office area. This will ensure that every member of staff is aware of what is happening in the school in terms of events, functions meetings and courses.

5.4   Conclusion

Essentially learning organisations should be about teaching and learning. As stated by Southworth(1994:52) , " a learning school is a developing school where the quality of everyone's learning is important."

Leadership, shared vision, commitment, communication, collaboration personal and professional development and having a dynamic culture are all features necessary for the development of a learning organisation. So in order to improve the learning in you school these characteristics should be fostered and nurtured so as to move the school in the right direction towards becoming a learning organisation which is capable of embracing change in a changing society like ours.

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September 2004

The Educators
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Dear Educators

RESEARCH – EDUCATORS PERCEPTIONS OF BECHET HIGH SCHOOL AS A

LEARNING ORGANISATION

I am conducting research to establish to what extent Bechet high school can be considered to be a learning organisation given the changes, which have occurred in our country and our education.

The research is being done for an M Ed dissertation entitled, " **The School as a Learning Organisation. Educators perceptions at a high school in the central Durban area.**" This is being done through the School of Education of the University of Kwa Zulu Natal.

The questionnaire has been made short and straightforward. I realise that answering this will mean sacrificing your time on my behalf. I believe that ultimately this will be of benefit to all those who work and learn at Bechet High school and so your contribution will be of great value.

I wish to assure you that all responses will be confidential and that no individual will be identifiable in the report.

I look forward to your co-operation.

Yours Faithfully

D S Rehman

QUESTIONAIRE

PREAMBLE

A Learning organisation has been termed as an organisation that is continuously learning. This involves all stakeholders in the organisation. This learning occurs on more than one level – individual learning; team learning; organisational learning.

The characteristics of the school as a learning organisation are the need for a shared vision. The ability of the organisation to be responsive to, both external and internal, change and innovation. It must have a dynamic culture to enable it to embrace changes as they occur and not become stagnant They must adopt a collaborative culture thereby involving the entire workforce in building the organisation.. Educators must continually be learning. Leadership is fundamental to organisations learning.

The questions mostly require a tick off response, however, space has been provided for you to expand on your answer.

Section A – General Information

1.   No. of years teaching experience.   ☐

2.   No. of years at this school.   ☐

3. Indicate post level.

1	2	3	4

Section B – this section looks at characteristics of a Learning organisation as identified in the literature

1.   SHARED VISION

1.1   Are you familiar with the

        b) Vision and,

        c) Mission statements of the school?

Yes	No
Yes	No

1.2   Should management and staff share the vision and goals of the

        school?

Yes	No

1.3   Do you feel a part of the decision making at this school?

All of the time	Most of the time	Seldom	Never

Please elaborate on your answer

2.   COLLABORATIVE CULTURE

2.1   Should educators be part of a functional workgroup or team at school?

Yes	No

2.2   How would you describe this teamwork at school?

Excellent	Good	Fair	Poor

Elaborate.

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

2.3   Do you feel that staff readily shares their advice and expertise

with colleagues?

Always	Often	Sometimes	Never

2.4   Do you consider there to be a harmonious working relationship

between management and staff?

Always	Often	Sometimes	Never

Please elaborate on your answer

2.5   Are the communication channels (at all levels) effective enough to
        enable this school to be an effective school? List points in support of
        response.

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

3.   PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

3.1   Should teachers be involved in continuous learning?

Yes	No

.

3.2   Are you or have you been involved in any form of professional

development in this year? (Study, upgrade, workshop- job related or

otherwise). If so give details.

_____

_____ _____

_____ _____ _____

_____ _____ _____

_____

3.4   Has this professional dev. had any impact on your personal

Yes	No

development in your job? Give

details._____

_____ _____

_____

_____ _____

_____ _____

_____

4   Dynamic Culture

4.1   Has the school implemented recent educational innovations :

IQMS

Yes	No
Yes	No

RNCS

Yes	No
Yes	No

WSE   OBE

4.2   Has the school in any way attempted to embrace the many

changes which are occurring in education . Provide

detail._____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

5.   LEADERSHIP

5.1   Do you consider good leadership as being essential for the

transition to becoming a learning organisation?

Yes	No

5.2   Do you consider the leadership (school management team) at

your school to be the leading learners? Elaborate.

Yes	No

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

5.3   Does the principal attempt to promote a collaborative culture

amongst staff?

Always	Often	Sometimes	Never

Please elaborate on your answer.

5.4   Has your Organisation (school) in any way assisted you in terms of

your professional development? Provide detail.

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

5.5   Do you feel that the learners are achieving maximum benefit

from the inputs of management and staff at this school?

Elaborate.

Yes	No

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

6. What do you feel can be done at this school to make it a better

school. (a true learning organisation)? List points in support of response

  ❖ _____

    _____

    _____

  ❖ _____

    _____

    _____

  ❖ _____

    _____

    _____

  ❖ _____

    _____

    _____

  ❖ _____

    _____

    _____

  ❖ _____

    _____

    _____

  ❖ _____

    _____

Thank You for your time and cooperation. If there is anything else you

would like to add please feel free to use the blank side of the last page.

INTERVIEW

1. Do you feel that the staff shares the same vision and goal, for the school, as you?

2. Do you believe that teachers want to participate in the management of the school?

3. What is your view of collaboration as a working principle in your school?

4. Do you consider there to be a harmonious working relationship between management and staff?

5. Are the communication channels effective enough (at all levels) to enable the school to be more effective?

6. Are you in favour of educators being involved in continuous professional development?

7. What can you do in your role as leader to promote this need for professional development?

8. As leader of the school, what do you consider as being your role in making this school a true learning organisation.