

An Education System's Perspective on Turning Around South Africa's Dysfunctional Schools

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Abstract

The South African education system is grappling with vast numbers of dysfunctional schools. Schools on their own cannot be blamed for all educational ills of a country. Dysfunctional schools are the symptoms of the impaired functioning of the entire education system in which a great variety of societal structures are involved. Thus, this article aimed at developing an education system's perspective on turning around dysfunctional schools. In addition to an extensive review of related literature, a qualitative approach was adopted in which a broad sample of practitioners and experts were targeted. Typical of a qualitative approach, a variety of data sources were explored, including interviews, a qualitative survey and school visits. Based on the literature review and the responses of the experts it was found that the South African education system fails to build and sustain the conditions for school and teacher effectiveness. It was concluded that the education system, consisting of the managerial and administrative structures, the educational institutions, support services and the parties with an interest in education should unite in making schools effective. All hands in the community are needed in order to transform dysfunctional schools into places of dedicated teaching and learning.

Keywords: effective schools; effective teachers; management; support services; societal involvement

1. Introduction

This article is part of a broader longitudinal study on school effectiveness, teacher effectiveness and dysfunctional schools in the South African education context. It is widely accepted that the effectiveness of the classroom teacher is increasingly recognised as the most important factor contributing to school and student success. Notwithstanding wide agreement in this regard, it will be substantiated below that the South African education system is grappling with a largely ineffective teacher corps, so much so that a substantial number of all schools could be regarded as essentially dysfunctional.

Schools are not self-sufficient. They operate as part of a comprehensive system, and they cannot be blamed solely for all educational ills of the country. This paper argues that if dysfunctional schools were to be turned around, the whole education system and all else forming part of that, need to be transformed into a united effort to improve education provision.

Because the effectiveness of the education system as a whole is a critical factor in building and maintaining school and teacher effectiveness, the aim of this paper is to develop an education system's perspective on turning around South Africa's dysfunctional schools.

2. The Research Background

Various sources have indicated that 80% of all South African schools could be regarded as dysfunctional (Taylor, 2006; De Lange, 2008; Deacon in Cohen & Seria, 2010; Afrol News, 2012; The Economist, 2012). This acceptance has been backed by various international and national performance indicators over the last decade or more. In the Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) conducted in 2011 under the auspices of the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA), South African Grade 4 learners achieved well below the international point of reference for performance which is the centre point of 500 on a scale ranging from 0 – 1000. That is despite having written an easier assessment as their international counterparts called *prePirls*. In the same study of 2006, learners from South Africa achieved the lowest scores of the 40 countries which participated with 80% of learners failing to reach the Low International benchmark which is an indication that they had not mastered basic reading skills. Most learners (71%) were able to achieve a rudimentary level of reading and attain the Lowest International Benchmark but

only 6% were able to read at an advanced level (Howie, Van Staden, Tshele, Dowse & Zimmerman, 2012).

In another influential international comparative study by the IEA, the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS), the performance of South African learners is even more disturbing. In the TIMSS of 2011 for Grade 8 learner achievement in mathematics and science, averages of 352 and 332 were attained which are again significantly lower than the benchmark of 500 and among the bottom six participating countries. That is despite the fact that South Africa has administered the assessments at Grade 9 level (Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC), 2011; Mullis, Martin, Foy & Arora, 2012).

In another large-scale cross-national research study of Grade 6 learners that was conducted by the Eastern Africa Consortium for Monitoring Educational Quality (SACMEQ) in 2007, it was found that South African learners underperform in both reading and mathematics. Although a marginal improvement was evident since 2000 when similar assessments were conducted among the 15 participating school systems, the average reading and mathematics performance (495) was below the SACMEQ overall average in reading (512) and mathematics (510) (SACMEQ, 2011).

Although improvement of the quality and levels of educational outcomes in the school system is a top priority of the Department of Basic Education (DBE), also national assessments proof that the quality of basic education is well below what it should be. In the Annual National Assessments (ANA) of 2011 of Grade 3 (literacy and numeracy) and Grade 6 (languages and mathematics) learner achievement, the percentage of learners achieving a partially 'achieved' level varies from 30% to 47%, while only 12% - 31% reached the 'achieved' level of performance. The average percentage scores were 35% and 28% for literacy and numeracy respectively in Grade 3 and 28% and 30% respectively for languages and mathematics in Grade 6 (DBE, 2011(a)).

In a media briefing the Minister of Basic Education, Angie Motshekga, succinctly summarised the crisis in South African education in the following way: "Many of our schools are dysfunctional. South African learners exit the foundation phase without basic literacy and numeracy skills required to succeed later on" (News 24, 2010). Further evidence of a dysfunctional system is debated below.

3. Research Problem

Poor teaching results more from poorly functioning systems than from individual shortcomings (Futernick, 2010). Thus, the above state of affairs must be attributed to a large extent to the South African education system which fails to create the conditions for effective schools and teachers and, therefore, acceptable learner achievement and educational outputs. Because the individual teacher is only a 'cog' in the large educational operation and as a single entity cannot be blamed for the collapse of the schooling system, the problem investigated is the development of an education system's perspective on creating and sustaining the conditions for school and teacher effectiveness.

4. Research Methods

For the purpose of this study an extensive review of the literature related to school effectiveness, dysfunctional organisations and the South African education system was conducted. The research was further based on a longitudinal study in which, typical of qualitative research, a variety of data sources have been explored over an extended period of time. Grounded theory may be defined as an approach of qualitative inquiry open to many methods of data collection that permits a theory to develop from the data (from the ground up) without preconceived or inflexible ideas. In grounded theory, collection, coding and analysis of data go hand in hand throughout the whole research project. Informal interviews were conducted with a great variety of educational role players and experts in the education system such as policy makers, functionaries attached to various education departments, school principals, teacher educators and teachers. From expressing their opinions, beliefs and feelings on the side by the participants, and from guiding and listening on the part of the researcher, the participants' contributions shaped the direction of the research findings. Further to the interviews, a qualitative survey with broad questions related to the research focus was designed and implemented to complement the informal interviews and give a purposive sample of educational experts and practitioners from a variety of educational contexts the opportunity to consider their answers carefully and provide duly considered responses. Structured data obtained in the latter way were analysed, seeking confirmation for views and perspectives expressed in the informal interviews. Further to this measure to assure validity, participants were constantly consulted with regard to the correct interpretation and trustworthy capturing of their views. The researcher also had the opportunity to visit a great variety of schools in urban as well as rural settings and observe the lessons of novice as well as experienced teachers. Although this type of investigation cannot harm participants in any way, all ethical criteria were adhered to by working towards trusting relations, assuring all participants of complete confidentiality and voluntary informed consent. Due

approval was requested and granted before all school visits and classroom visitations could take place.

Although no lengthy debate about the theories with regard to matters such as school effectiveness and teacher effectiveness could be provided, it is essential for the purpose of this paper that some concepts be defined.

5. The Conceptual Framework

5.1 The education system

This paper aims at developing an education system's perspective on dysfunctional schools and how the conditions could be created and sustained for school and teacher effectiveness. In line with Stone's (1981) theory and others who have taken his comprehensive structural analysis of the education system further (cf Van Schalwyk, 1991; Pretorius & Lemmer, 2004; Burger, 2006; Pretorius, 2013), the education system in its true nature can be defined as an interwoven structure. It is qualified in all its aspects by being educational and finds its possibilities and limitations within the planned and organised education of the learner. It is an integral part of the cultural sphere of a country and is totally involved with the societal context concerned. The education system is intertwined with a variety of social structures such as the state, but also with families, organised teacher groups, business and industry, churches, science, etc. As far as their function in the interwoven structure with schools is concerned these non-educational structures are also qualified by their involvement being essentially in the interest of education and their role in the system must be determined solely by pedagogic considerations.

As an interwoven structure the education system consists of four categories of structures namely, the managerial and administrative structures, the educational institutions, support services and those parties with an interest in education. Within this coherence the educational institutions occupy the most central position (Van Schalwyk, 1991). In conclusion, the schools and their teachers are at the heart of the education system. However, schools are not self-sufficient – they need the contribution of the mentioned social structures and components to provide education successfully. If the education system fails, the schools and their teachers will fail – if the teachers and schools fail, the education system fails.

5.2 Effective schools

School Effectiveness Research (SER) has gone through various developmental stages during which the research emphases with regard to schools and the difference they make have evolved into different strands (Townsend, 2001). Similarly, what constitutes an effective school has been the subject of much debate as views often differ amongst researchers, policymakers, practitioners and stakeholders depending on the framework their perceptions are based. There is widespread agreement lately in this field that an effective school is one in which students progress further than might be expected from consideration of its intake. Thus, effective schools add extra value to their students' outcomes in comparison with other schools serving similar intakes (Sammons, 2006). Although none of the afore-mentioned could be debated in a paper of this kind, it needs to be stated that numerous efforts were made, on the basis of solid research, to identify the characteristics of effective schools and the related processes involved. In the initial stages of SER, a five-factor model of school effectiveness (strong principal leadership, pervasive instructional focus, orderly school climate, high expectations and consistent measurement of learner performance) was very influential (cf Edmonds in Wyatt, 1996). However, since the early 1980s, researchers made substantial progress in synthesising nine complex process areas which are critical to consider in developing effective schools. They are the following:

- The processes of effective leadership, such as being firm and purposeful, involving others, exhibiting instructional leadership, and frequent personal monitoring
- The processes of effective teaching, such as unity of purpose, consistency of practice and collegiality and collaboration
- Developing and maintaining a comprehensive focus on learning by concentrating on academics and maximising school learning time
- Producing a positive school culture by creating a shared vision and an orderly environment, and by emphasising positive reinforcement
- Creating high and appropriate expectations - for students and staff alike
- Emphasising student responsibilities and rights
- Monitoring progress at all levels – the school level, the classroom level, the student level

- Developing staff skills with site-based actions which are integrated with ongoing professional development
- Involving parents in productive and appropriate ways by buffering negative influences and encouraging productive interactions with parents (cf Teddlie & Reynolds in Sammons, DeLaMatre & Mujtaba, 2002; Teddlie & Stringfield, 2007)

Although not a comprehensive definition, it can be summarised from SER literature that there are no quick fixes in determining what school effectiveness constitutes, and also how the conditions to develop and maintain it should be created. There is growing awareness of the complexity of studying school effectiveness as schools might be differentially effective for certain kinds of students and in different subject areas (Sammons, 2006). School effectiveness is situationally specific (Wendel, 2000). Furthermore, as will be indicated below, the research focus in recent years has shifted from schools to classrooms (Townsend, 2001) because it is believed that teachers play a critical role in overall school effectiveness.

5.3 *Effective teachers*

There is an extensive body of research showing that teacher quality is the most important school based factor influencing student achievement (Rice, 2003; Burger, 2006). According to Wendel (2000), the single largest factor affecting academic growth of students is differences of individual classroom teachers. Muijs and Reynolds (2002(b)) reported that classroom factors were the main predictors of student progress over time and twice as high as school level variance in achievement in mathematics. From her research on education reform efforts of recent years, Darling-Hammond (2010(a); 2010(b)) emphasised the recurrent finding that teachers are the fulcrum that determines whether any school initiative tips towards success or failure. Therefore, every aspect of school reform depends on highly skilled teachers. It has also been found that teacher effects appeared to be cumulative and additive (Muijs & Reynolds, 2002(a)), and that the latent effects of teachers, positive or negative, can be measured for at least three years after students have left the classroom (Wendel, 2000). Thus, it might be too late to wait until secondary school level to correct the deficiencies of improper primary education.

Although teacher effectiveness is an elusive concept and context specific, many influential researchers have identified the characteristics, personal traits and behaviours of effective teachers with a great deal of commonalities in their findings. For example, Darling-Hammond (2010(a)) highlighted research which had found that more effective teachers generally possess the following qualities:

- Strong general intelligence and verbal ability that help them organize and explain ideas and observe and think diagnostically
- Strong content knowledge in the fields they teach
- Knowledge of how to teach others in that field, in particular how to develop higher order thinking skills
- An understanding of learners and their learning and development, of how to assess learning and support students with learning differences or difficulties as well as those learning the language of instruction
- Adaptive expertise that will allow them to make judgments about what is likely to work in a given context in response to students' needs

In an extensive research Muijs and Reynolds (2002(a)) work towards a more comprehensive definition. According to them teacher effectiveness research has led to the identification of a range of behaviours that are positively related to student achievement in basic skills. A consistent finding is that effective teachers emphasize academic instruction as their main classroom goal; they have an academic orientation and create a business-like, task-orientated environment. They spend classroom time on academic activities rather than socializing. They are good classroom and behaviour managers and clearly instruct students on proper behaviour procedures.

5.4 *Dysfunctional schools*

On the basis of extensive research on the aspect of dysfunctionality in education Pretorius (2012) concluded that schools are places for teaching and learning. A school becomes dysfunctional when it, due to abnormal or impaired functioning, does not accomplish the true purpose of teaching and learning for which it was instituted. Dysfunctional schools are characterised by unstable management conditions, inappropriate or lack of leadership, lack of vision, an unhealthy school climate and culture and low staff and learner morale. Various communication barriers cripple general performance and the functioning of the school. Staff members have lost confidence and trust in the school leadership. They tend to violate educational norms, policies, or internal values with respect to minimum quality and quantity of work. Absenteeism,

unauthorised extended break and lunch times, excessive socialisation, intrusion of personal problems into the school, not following standard operating procedures and guidelines and low time on task are the order of the day. There is a lack of high expectations, academic cohesiveness and rigour. Due to inappropriate monitoring and lack of instructional leadership, classroom instruction is generally unstructured and intellectually un-challenging with improper curriculum coverage. Among learners, poor discipline and understanding of rules are apparent. Learners generally underperform in tests. Many learners leave school early and significant numbers finish compulsory education without having acquired the necessary skills to enter the labour market. They are, in the words of Kovacs (in Wendel, 2000) "marginalised, unemployed, or work in low-income jobs".

On the basis of the above investigation with regard to essential concepts it can be concluded that schools and their leadership teams do not operate in isolation. The functioning of the entire system on national and other levels and the way all interested societal structures are involved, affect school practices and outcomes. Thus, dysfunctional schools are the symptoms of the impaired functioning and decisions of the entire education system in which four different interwoven categories of stakeholders each fulfils an essential role.

The ensuing section provides the findings of the literature review and the qualitative investigation and a discussion of how the education system should create and sustain the conditions for school and teacher effectiveness in order to turn around dysfunctional schools.

6. Discussion and Findings

In qualitative research a decision needs to be made, firstly, about whether the findings will be presented on their own without supporting discussion or, secondly, whether they will be linked with the work of other researchers (Burnard, 2004). The latter approach is adopted here, and discussions are based on the findings of both the literature review and the empirical investigation

6.1 *The starting point: highly skilled teachers*

Notwithstanding general agreement among researchers and policy makers that teachers are the most important school-related factor affecting learner achievement (Rice, 2003), this research found that the South African education system grapples with "a largely dispirited, demoralised, under-performing, but angry teacher corps" (Bloch, 2009). The largely ineffective teacher corps is arguably the fundamental problem of the dysfunctional school system (National Education Evaluation & Development Unit (NEEDU), 2013). Teachers are tired of reforms (NEEDU, 2009). "The majority of teachers lack the required subject knowledge, are not teaching what they are trained to teach and too often lack the commitment to teach for six-and-a-half hours every day" (Motshekga in News 24, 2010).

Research by the South African Human Rights Commission (SAHRC) (2006) has found that teachers in rural areas lack passion and a culture of learning and teaching, they are not in the classroom enough, many are unqualified or under-qualified, not trained to implement the curriculum and they are disconnected from the communities in which they teach. It is reported that teachers in black state schools work an average of 3,5 hours a day, compared to 6,5 hours in the former white state schools known as "Model C" schools (The Economist 2012). Research by UNICEF on behalf of the DBE has found that on any given day between 10% and 12% of teachers are absent for one or other reason. The consequence is that the curriculum is often not covered in full (Reddy, Prinsloo, Netshitangani, Moletsane, Juan & Janse van Rensburg, 2010).

Thus, the key to improving public education is placing highly skilled and effective teachers in all classrooms (cf Aguerrebere, 2011; Cogshall, 2007; Darling-Hammond, 2010(a); Reynolds & Teddlie, 2001; Wong & Wong, 2009). Berry (2009) states that effective teachers with the right policy supports are the ideal agents of meaningful and sustainable change even in the most challenged circumstances.

In line with the findings of the above research work reported, many respondents agree that the starting point for turning around a dysfunctional school to an effective school is with the teacher. A respondent with experience in various senior management positions of an education department stated:

What happens in the classroom is at the core of education and ultimately determines the outcomes of education, the attainment of educational goals and the quality of education in each school and the system as the whole.

Consequently respondents emphasise that the recent reform agendas should be evaluated critically because the fundamental task of the teacher, that is to teach effectively and to ensure that learners actually learn during each period in the classroom, is hardly mentioned (or taken for granted):

Many reform efforts emphasise the teachers' obligations towards the community, the promotion of human rights,

democracy, gender and social equality, relations with parents and the lifelong learning and self-development of the teacher.

These all are laudable ideas, but without consistent, good teaching and learning in the classroom, everything would be in vain.

Improvement strategies must concentrate on the fundamental issues and problems of classroom teaching and management, as it is practiced in schools in virtually all countries.

Thus, each and every action in education reform, the organisation of the education system, management and administration, leadership, educational support and teacher education and development must be geared towards one critical focal point, namely, to make the teacher in the classroom a more effective teacher.

6.2 *Transforming teacher education*

Teacher education forms a fundamental part of the operations and success of any education system. However, it was found that teacher education has much to improve on. On the basis of extensive research, Pretorius (2010) found that a barrage of criticism could be levelled at teacher training. The underlying assumption was that schools of education were failing to prepare teachers well. In particular the teacher education curriculum and overall ethos were accused of being too theoretical. There was a lack of focus, it was said, on the basic skills of teaching, and too little knowledge of the core subjects of the school curriculum. Too much emphasis was placed on the traditional disciplines of sociology, psychology, history and philosophy. Some shortcomings that point to a need for reforms of schools of education are: inadequate and unsupervised school-based experiences provided for trainees; poor quality of students in teacher education programmes; lack of experience of the university faculty in schools; lack of curricular connection and communication across schools of education in preparing new teachers; and the low status of initial teacher education in schools of education. Teacher education faculties are described as idealistic, detached from school realities, and unconcerned with the public's priorities for schools.

A recent Higher Education Quality Committee review echoed the above findings in the following way: "The quality of a substantial proportion of teacher education programmes is questionable, with few meeting minimum standards in the areas of programme organisation, design, coordination and work-based learning" (Department of Higher Education and Training, 2010).

Therefore, one of the respondents is convinced about the following:

Teacher training institutions should ask themselves the question whether they adequately train teachers with regard to the basic skills and knowledge in terms of classroom management, teaching strategies and assessment. If not, it may be time to reconsider the key aspects of teacher training.

Furthermore, the intention with teacher education is clear from the reform initiatives, namely to provide the numbers of teachers required with the status of being qualified at the expense of achieving quality in the programmes invented and adhering to strict criteria for the selection of candidates suitable for training. A respondent working regularly with teachers in schools highlighted this danger as follows:

It is shocking how little teachers know of the subjects they teach and the methods to bring over key concepts to learners. There is a huge discrepancy between what teachers ought to know and what they are trained for.

Another participant feeling strongly about values in education noted:

Obviously, higher emphasis should be placed on strength of character in the selection of candidates for teacher training courses and in awarding bursaries and scholarships for teacher training. Candidates who already have a record of criminality, substance abuse, dishonesty, laziness, etc. should not be allowed into teacher training courses, much less into a classroom as a teacher.

6.3 *Managing education effectively*

It is obvious that a comprehensive structure such as the education system of a country must be well-managed. For that purpose a great variety of managerial and administrative structures are instituted on national, provincial, district and local levels. The national department of education, provincial departments, district offices, school governing bodies and school management teams all fall within this category. On each level there are further sub-divisions and departments, some with general managerial functions and others with specific managerial functions with regard to specialised tasks related to the delivery of education. The task of the managerial and administrative structures is to manage education provision successfully so that the schools could fulfil the core task of the education system effectively.

Although quality schooling is dependent on a well-managed education system, overwhelming evidence of poor

leadership and inappropriate and mismanagement by the national department of education, provincial departments, district offices, school governing bodies (SGBs) and school management teams has been reported. Leadership and efficient management of school operations have collapsed for those schools serving pre-dominantly poor communities. Many managers in critical positions are reported to be incompetent and incapacitated (Jansen, 2005; SAHRC, 2006; NEEDU, 2009; Van Wyk, 2009; Mohlala, 2010; O'Connell, 2010).

The problems started at the national level where experimentation with a series of curricular approaches made teachers tired of reforms. The completely new approaches, as acknowledged by the Department of Basic Education (DBE), "was never researched or properly trialed, and there was inadequate preparation and consideration of whether teachers, pupils and the system in general were prepared for such a fundamental change over such a short space of time" (DBE, 2009). The national curriculum had to be revised completely with the second major revision, the new Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statements (CAPS), being implemented from 2012 onwards (DBE, 2011(b)). As indicated above, the problems are also evident at the other levels of the educational operation.

Although there could be many factors leading to the impaired functioning of dysfunctional schools, the above state of affairs highlight a critical problem across the broad organisational structure of the South African education system.

Vast numbers of managers were never suited for managerial positions or never adequately and appropriately trained.

The respondents are therefore unanimous in their views that any turnaround strategy, in addition to starting with the requirement of highly skilled teachers, should first and foremost focus on a more effective management of the system as a whole.

A school principal who had substantial successes in turning around a school in a disadvantaged rural area explained:

It is all about management. This school of mine was a bad school with bad results in the matric examinations. With hard work by the school management and dedicated support of the teaching staff we could improve the situation to have a much better pass rate.

Turning around a failing school is possible, even in the most disadvantaged circumstances, if the manager unites staff, learners and the whole community to be successful.

On the question how educational management could be improved, an educational expert recommended some drastic measures:

In the business world failing or ineffective companies have to be turned around towards success, and the first step is always to replace the CEO or manager. The same applies to dysfunctional schools – it cannot be reformed under the same discredited manager.

Although it is not possible to fire all ineffective managers, it is of importance that massive upgrading should be planned in developing appropriate management capacity on all levels of the education system.

6.4 Transforming the education institutions to be places of serious teaching and learning

As has been indicated above, within the interwoven structure of the education system, the schools and other educational institutions occupy the most central position. When schools, due to abnormal or impaired functioning, do not accomplish the true purpose of teaching and learning for which it was instituted, the whole education system of the country is at risk. In addition to the above views regarding effective management, respondents highlighted numerous perspectives on how failing schools could be improved.

Schools are places for teaching and learning, and that is what should happen there. They must be no-nonsense places where everyone knows what we are here for. The whole ethos must enunciate a serious academic atmosphere.

This must be true of each and every classroom also:

The good teacher creates a classroom environment that is neat, tidy and orderly and ensures that it is maintained that way every day. On entering the classroom, learners should feel that they are in a place conducive to serious learning and hard work. This is not possible where desks and chairs are in disarray, the floor is covered with papers or dirt, and worse of all, the teacher's desk and wall displays are untidy.

In spite of the modern views about discipline which has become obsolete, various participants are convinced that schools cannot be effective if proper order and a disciplined atmosphere are not maintained.

In the harsh reality of the real classroom situation no effective learning and teaching can take place in the absence of order and discipline.

The participants feel strongly about a serious academic atmosphere in schools and that the living example of the teacher is the primary vehicle for inculcating the desired values, norms and healthy habits in our children.

The teachers' proper conduct, integrity, reliability, neatness, punctuality, hard work, fairness – all of these rub off on children and positively influence them for the rest of their lives.

Teachers come late; they are often absent; it seems as though they don't really care. This is not conducive to creating the right atmosphere in the school.

One of the respondents referred to a World Bank research project in Africa which considered the key factors that determine the quality of education. From consideration of all factors, including physical facilities, availability of teaching and learning materials, the curriculum and qualification levels of teachers, the final conclusion was drawn that the most critical factor was time on task.

It is the school principal's responsibility to exercise control over staff so that they arrive in time at school and use time for teaching and learning ultimately. Without the necessary control measures, no school can be successful.

However, the respondents highlighted numerous ills of education as they experience it at school level and which is contrary to what is expected above:

Many school principals do not have the capacity to manage and the will to stand up against the unions. They are figure heads and powerless – they are often taken to the unions. They are afraid.

School principals don't have the leadership skills to develop a vision and motivate staff members to unite in achieving the school's vision.

Teachers feel neglected by the district office and the department. They don't have adequate resources.

The staff members have given up. There is no discipline. The learners come and go as they like. There is no support from the parents.

6.5 *Creating an effective system of support services*

Support services play a vital role in the success of an education system. They could be defined as the organised help from outside the schools to enrich and support the education process (Van Schalkwyk, 1991). A great variety of such services and structures are found in education systems of the world. They are normally divided in two broad categories, namely support services for teachers and those services aimed at the needs of learners. Curriculum services, examination services, subject advisory services, educator development services, research services and IT support are a few examples of services rendered to teachers. Ortho-pedagogic services, transport services, medical and dental services, accommodation and school libraries could be regarded as services aimed at the needs of learners.

In an article of this kind it is impossible to provide an in-depth discussion of the findings with regard to respondents' experiences of the support provided by the education system. However, based on the responses by the participants, it could be stated that teachers in many instances feel neglected, that they are on their own and there is a critical need for resources such as libraries, laboratories, additional information to enrich teaching and learning, proper transport, learner accommodation, feeding schemes and more.

The following recommendation was made by a respondent, namely that teams of experts should be appointed to assist the failing schools in turning around the situation because it has worked elsewhere in Africa:

Send a team of experienced officials (must include successful principals or ex-principals) to evaluate every aspect of the school's operations, and to recommend short, medium and long-term corrective measures.

Such teams must be regularly available and schools must be able to reckon on their on-going support.

Schools need on-going support – once-off training sessions are inadequate and a waste of time and money. The same with once in a while visits by departmental officials.

6.6 *Getting all structures with an interest in education to unite*

Schools are critically dependent for their success on the supportive role that the parties with an interest in education should play in the education system. However, it was found that education is bound to a lack of deep commitment on the part of all role-players (O'Connell, 2010). For a variety of societal reasons, such as poverty and the breakdown of family structures, parents in many instances cannot fulfil their normal supportive role in their children's education. Thus, great concern has been expressed over the lack of community and parental involvement in the governance of schools and the ineffectiveness of the governance structures (SAHRC, 2006). The vast majority (70% - 80%) of SGBs are dysfunctional due to members lacking insight, skill or will to carry out their responsibilities. Poor training by provincial departments, lack of resources, high levels of adult illiteracy and a lack of awareness of the roles of SGBS are reasons provided for the dysfunctional performance (John, 2012).

The lack of a sense of urgency with respect to the country's crisis in education is also evident in organised

business refraining from speaking out often enough and passionately about the crisis and getting involved with education in structured ways (Spicer in South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC), 2011). Furthermore, great concern has been expressed about the corrupting influence of the organised teaching profession as an interested party in the education system. School management teams are often under enormous pressure and intimidation by their unions when they try to enforce normal school discipline and effective operations (Motsosi, 2011).

Constructive parent involvement with school activities, daily care by parents, supervision of homework and discipline with regard to school attendance are essential contributors to school success. A school principal who had substantial success in turning around a dysfunctional school stated:

I managed to get the whole community on board. Parents helped me to raise additional funds for equipment, clean up the school grounds and repair things that were broken. More-over, they disciplined their children to take learning seriously. Without motivated parents I would not have managed.

In addition to the parent community there are other sectors of society also being part of the education system whose contribution is indispensable. For example, business and industry can do a lot to enhance school efforts to be successful, including funding of activities, providing their expertise in all kinds of activities and informing learners of career possibilities. Each and every sector of the community is necessary to get a dysfunctional school on track again.

7. Conclusions

From an education system's perspective as corroborated above, it is clear that schools on their own cannot be blamed for all the ills of education in South Africa. Thus, the education system as a whole must be accountable. The above responses are virtually all examples of outcries of neglect by one or other structure within the education system. In this paper the education system has been defined as an interwoven structure comprising of the managerial and administrative structures, the schools and other educational institutions, the support services and the parties with an interest in education. The key shortcomings of all four categories have been highlighted above.

8. Recommendations

If the many dysfunctional schools were to be turned around to provide education effectively, the core guidelines as identified above should be followed. The key to improving public education is placing highly skilled and effective teachers in all classrooms and all reform efforts and each and every action in education must be geared towards one critical focal point, namely, to make the teacher in the classroom more effective. To that effect, teacher education needs to be investigated and critical questions should be asked with regard to content and quality. Furthermore, the overwhelming evidence of poor leadership and inappropriate and mismanagement by managerial and administrative structures ask for massive upgrading of the knowledge and skills of managers on all levels of the education operation. In addition, schools and the whole internal functioning, management and culture thereof should be transformed to be places of serious teaching and learning and a due academic atmosphere. Thereby, the system of educational support services should be investigated in terms of adequacy and on-going sustainability. Lastly, all societal structures interested in education have critical supportive roles to fulfil and must be on board if dysfunctional schools were to be changed to effective institutions.

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