Transformation of the South African schooling system

Exploring the Mutability of School Ethos during South Africa's First Post-apartheid Decade

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List of Acronyms

CEPD	Centre for Education Policy Development
COL	Culture of Learning
COLTS	Culture of Learning, Teaching and Service
DoE	Department of Education
GIS	Geographic Information System

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About the Publication

In 1997, the CEPD and its partner organisations (the Education Policy Units based at the Universities of the Witwatersrand, Natal and Fort Hare) embarked on a major longitudinal study – Education 2000 Plus. The study sought to track and examine the transformation of the schooling system in South Africa, focusing on the policies and programmes of the new government. The study was undertaken over a period of five years, and several intermediate reports emerged as the study progressed.

Towards the end of the study, the team spent a year examining and analysing the data, with a view to sharing the findings of the study with regard to the extent, nature and direction of education transformation in South Africa, specifically in relation to the schooling system.

The papers in this series – *Transformation of the South African Schooling System* – reflect on that process. The papers in this series have undergone a several review processes. Firstly, they were all presented at a national conference that was held in 2004. Following comments that were received at the conference, the papers were revised. The papers were then given to two independent reviewers.

The ten papers in the series have all undergone the review processes discussed above. Each of these papers provides an account of the transformation processes relating to the schooling system. The titles in this series are as follows:

1. Change Agents in the South African Schooling System: Challenges and Prospects, *George Moyo*
2. "Transformation" Revisited, *Enver Motala*
3. Transformation in the School Environment: An Analysis of Photographs from One Rural Secondary School, *Jenni Karlsson*
4. The Impact of Post-1994 Education Policies on the Ethos of Schools, *Jenni Karlsson and Sandile Mbokazi*
5. Prospects and Challenges of Doing Social Justice Research: Experiences from the Education 2000 Plus Study, *Madumetja Kgobe and George Moyo*
6. Policy Change and the Experiences of Learners in Post-apartheid Schooling, *John Pampallis and Princess Tabata*
7. The Fault-lines in South African School Governance: Policy or People?, *Veerle Dieltiens*
8. Districts: Looking for a Place in the Education System, *Hersheela Narsee*
9. Teacher Professionalism and Education Transformation, *Julie Douglas*
10. Selected Macro-indicators of Education Transformation, 1991-2001, *Monica Bot*

Each of these papers reflect the multiple dimensions of the change processes, and the many aspects and features of transformation. Collectively, the papers suggest that important achievements have been made in driving education transformation towards an open, democratically organised quality for all, although major challenges remain.

1. Introduction

In the period immediately after the 1994 elections in South Africa, a new Constitution and education policies were formulated in an attempt to transform the education system. A longitudinal five-year national study to track the effect of those policies on the schooling system was commenced, with the first year of data collection in 1998 and the final year in 2002. The study, known as the Education 2000 Plus Project, was completed in 2004.[1] One of the key considerations of the study was to examine how school ethos was changing under the influence of the new policies.

The concern about school ethos was linked to several features that blighted the school system at the end of the apartheid era. First, the culture of teaching and learning at many township schools was in disarray as a result of years of student resistance against the white authorities that had established numerous race-specific education departments (Hyslop, 1999). A Bantu Education curriculum and Afrikaans as the language of instruction were imposed in township schools, which triggered various forms of civil disobedience, most notably the celebrated June 1976 student uprising in Soweto (Kallaway, 1984; Nkomo, 1990). As symbols of the white apartheid authorities, public schools were pillaged, vandalised and sometimes even burned down, and black youths, impatient for political change, disrupted and boycotted classes and other school routines (Motala and Vally, 2002).

Second, decades of exploitative labour practices and poverty, especially among working-class and peasant communities, had yielded a disintegrating family life with an attendant breakdown in traditional authority and culture, and a turning to substance abuse, crime and violence (Desai, 2001). Third, schools that were less disrupted by the 1976 uprising and social foment were driven by patriarchal, authoritarian and restrictive discipline regimes that included prefect systems, codes of conduct, uniforms and gender inequalities (Morrell and Moletsane, 2002). When the segregation laws were relaxed in 1990 and learner enrolments at Indian, coloured and white schools became more racially heterogeneous, these schools tended to ignore the racialised identities of the newcomers; those learners had to adjust themselves and become assimilated into the disciplinarian and dominant culture of the (previously racially homogeneous) school (Pampallis, 2000).

Thus, very different conditions and cultures characterised South Africa's 27 000 government schools at the start of the democratic era, and even at schools where the culture of teaching and learning remained intact the ethos was not consistent with the principles of the new South Africa, which affirmed democracy, equality and inclusion.

These climates were destructively working their way through the well-being of schools, making school ethos an urgent focus for post-1994 education authorities. The Department of Education (DoE, 1997) instituted a national Culture of Learning (COL) Campaign for the rehabilitation of schools, later replaced by the Culture of Learning, Teaching and Service (COLTS) Campaign and established structures for democratic governance in every government school (Republic of South Africa, 1996).

Looking at how the post-1994 policies were working to change these climates for an ethos that made learning more effective and schools more effective places of learning is a worthwhile

[1] The Education 2000 Plus Project was undertaken by a partnership of five non-governmental organisations in South Africa, under the leadership of the Centre for Education Policy Development in Johannesburg, and funded through the Royal Netherlands Embassy in Pretoria. The Project is widely recognised as the largest and most important national research project undertaken to explore and track longitudinally the transformation of the schooling system in South Africa during the first decade of its democracy.

investigation. Knowing how ethos manifests and evolves in schools is important for understanding school improvement strategies that go beyond bureaucratic and technicist tactics.

In this article we attempt to define the notion of school ethos, describe in detail the ethos at two of the ten schools examined in this respect, and discuss the implications of our findings about the transformation of school ethos. We do this by considering two analytical frames to describe the ethos in the schools that participated in the Education 2000 Plus Project. Through two selected schools we explore how school ethos changed between 1998 and 2002. Although much change has occurred in South Africa since 1994, the potential for school ethos to change dramatically for the better had not been realised on a wide scale. The reasons for this are not clear and suggest further investigation.

2. Defining ethos

The term "ethos" originates from classical Greek, and its use and meaning has changed over time. Originally the term referred to the character and habits of a person (Mautner, 1996), but contemporary use of the term across disciplines has changed to focus on a shared and dominant character or attitude of a group of people or a community (Reading, 1977). A similar term, organisational culture, is more commonly used in the business world, whereas ethos is most often referenced to institutions such as schools (Smith, 2003).

In a school context, the ethos is the atmosphere, climate or disposition created through the expression of a shared culture and values as members of the school community interact on daily basis (Kirkpatrick, 1994). Thus, ethos is not inherent, intrinsic or inborn; it is socially constructed and is determined within the community that constitutes the school. We understand ethos, then, to be an amalgam of school culture and practices, values and philosophy, which infuse directly into learners' learning and can be perceived by the diverse stakeholders in the school community.

From the outset of the Education 2000 Plus Project, "school ethos" was not theoretically located but was broadly interpreted in field instruments as being linked to the social "environment" of the school and social "problems" that threaten the safety of learners. A litany of debilitating social conditions was cited, such as substance abuse, gangsters, racial and sexual violence, and HIV and AIDS. In this respect ethos at South African schools was constructed as operating within a hostile and negative context. This very bleak starting point for the Education 2000 Plus Project is a tacit acknowledgement of the fractured and dysfunctional school and social system inherited from the apartheid era, as mentioned in the Introduction. However, the study also linked school ethos to social agency in that it was referenced positively to strategies that promote a culture of learning and teaching and the responses of social actors to incidents occurring within the school.

David Hargreaves (1995) has developed two conceptual frames that are useful for describing school ethos. His first frame presents four ways in which schools might balance social control instruments and social cohesion expressions within the institution, as follows:

- A *formal ethos* is when the tone is custodial and coercive and fosters traditional values. Schools in this category have highly developed social control instruments and muted social cohesion expressions.
- A *welfarist ethos* is when the atmosphere is carefree, with friendly educator-learner relations and the philosophy is child-centred and democratic. Schools with such an ethos mute their social control instruments but encourage social cohesion expression.
- A *hothouse ethos* places optimal emphasis on social control as well as social cohesion. Hargreaves (1995:28) contends that this yields a "frenetic ethos" in which educators and learners are under pressure to participate fully in all activities, and they experience anxiety if they fail to achieve instrumental goals. There is a loss of individuality, but social control is not coercive; instead it is exerted through challenge and emotional blackmail.

- A *survivalist ethos* is when a school is "at risk" because both the instruments of social control and expressions of social cohesion are weak. Relationships are poor or close to breakdown, teachers feel unsupported, learners feel alienated, and life is lived a day at a time. Delinquency, truancy and staff absenteeism is rife in such a school. Hargreaves (1995:28) asserts that in such a school "the ethos is one of insecurity, hopelessness and low morale".

Hargreaves recognises that these four types are extreme and the ethos at real schools is likely to be between them, with elements of one or other of the types varying from time to time. Nevertheless, he points to their usefulness in that they take into consideration cultural and contextual influences and avoid the simplistic linearity of league tables where school ethos is constructed along a continuum from good to bad.

In his second frame Hargreaves develops a complex matrix of types of ethos that operate as institutional cultures within five domains – leadership, management, daily routines, service relations and development. What is useful about this second frame is that it acknowledges multi-layered institutional life and provides for different types of ethos to manifest simultaneously in different domains of school life, and for different stakeholders simultaneously to have different perceptions of school ethos.

The potential mutability of school ethos under the influence of powerful agency of stakeholders makes for a politics of ethos (Samuel, 2004). Thus, ethos is in constant flux and can be constructed and performed in various arenas.

Logically, this theorisation of ethos implies that the ethos of an institution is experienced differently by different people, and therefore read and understood differently. All members of a particular school community – educators, learners, parents, and so on – differently shape and differently experience the prevailing ethos at their school. Within a group, individuals might have different perspectives, accounts and interpretations of the ethos at one school. We therefore conclude that at any one particular moment, a school's ethos does not manifest uniformly for all members of the school community and thus cannot be interpreted by researchers as a single experience and meaning. In short, we understand ethos to be constituted in time and space, with the meaning contingent on the subject position. Ethos is a complex socially constructed concept that must be understood as being broader than the environment for learning and that includes institutional structure and cultural dimensions. It also means that the ethos of an institution cannot be reified or isolated from its social context, but exists in relation to it.

3. Methodology

Although the Education 2000 Plus Project examined transformation of the national schooling system through a triangulation of three methodological approaches – qualitative data analysis of secondary macro-indicator survey data, critical reviews of policy texts, and interpretive school case studies – the data used in this article on school ethos draws primarily from the institutional case studies. The scope of study concerned changes in school ethos within each school case between 1998 and 2002, these being the first and last years of data collection, and requiring a single case comparative analysis rather than a multiple or cross-case analysis. Although it was anticipated that school ethos would have transformed (changed positively) in response to the policies, we sought to describe and understand the nature of that change and its manifestations within each school.

By a positive school ethos we mean that members of a school community are nurtured to *become better people*. By this we mean a school ethos that enables:

- people of different classes, cultures, languages and health conditions to feel accepted and tolerated within the institution;
- legitimate access to property and places of the institution;
- legitimacy and fairness in the rule of order and discipline in the school environment so that everyone feels safe and secure; and
- legitimate structures to thrive with people participating in shared decision making, freely developing and learning, and making informed career choices.

This is a richer formulation of the significance of a positive ethos than conceiving of it as merely enabling better teaching and learning or better citizenship. These narrower notions of a positive school ethos place less emphasis on human rights and communitarian values, and stress managerial values such as efficiency and effectiveness and nationalistic concerns such citizen-state relations.

4. Sample of school cases

In the design of the Education 2000 Plus Project, the school case studies were limited to government schools since these were targets for the state's transformative education policies. The number of schools fluctuated over the years of the project's duration, with 27 schools being studied at its zenith, selected on the basis of criteria that provided:

- a range spread across South Africa's nine provinces;
- diverse administrative histories representing the various apartheid education authorities;
- a range of geospatial and economic settings; and
- a pedagogic specialisation in primary or secondary schooling.

Our analysis focused on ten case studies only, and these are briefly described according to the sampling criteria of the Education 2000 Plus study (CEPD 2000). The ten schools were selected for our comparative analysis of school ethos because complete data sets existed for these schools from 1998 until 2002.

5. Findings from the micro-level data

5.1 Overview

A comparative analysis of the selected schools led us to find that there was an overall shift in school ethos between 1998 and 2002, but that the shift was not sufficient to alter the ethos dramatically. By this we mean that a school that might have been characterised as having a *hothouse* ethos in 1998, still manifested that ethos in 2002. Below we substantiate this finding by providing two detailed case study examples. The first is Karabo Secondary with a *survivalist* ethos, and the second is Isidingo (not the real names of the schools) Primary with a *hothouse* ethos.

5.2 Example of a debilitating ethos: Karabo Secondary

Karabo Secondary demonstrates the cycle of an ongoing debilitating ethos in a rural, disadvantaged school context.

On a geographic information system (GIS) mapping of poverty for the densely populated province of KwaZulu-Natal, located on the east coast of South Africa, this school falls on the boundary between geographic communities that are described as being “best off” and “better off”. This locale is the rural outskirts of the vast eThekwini uni-city, which has Durban, Africa’s busiest harbour city, at its hub. This implies that the school is relatively advantaged in its potential access to financial resources – more than most rural schools in the province.

In 1998, the first year of data collection, Karabo Secondary had no on-site water supply, no electricity, unhygienic and inadequate toilets and no telephone connection. Though the unfenced school gardens were neatly tended, classrooms and administration offices were easy prey to vandals and thieves. Windows, cupboards and doors were broken, old and pitted chalkboards were practically useless and the shell of what had once been a library was strewn with charred books.

One of the female teachers had been appointed in an acting capacity to head the school that year, but she had not won the confidence of the staff and their morale was low. Teachers were disgruntled about the management team’s lack of consultation and were disillusioned about staff meetings as a forum for intervention. They alleged that the male chairperson of the governing body and the management team had developed the annual budget without consulting other members of the governing body, though educator representatives admitted they did not attend governing body meetings regularly. Educators’ low morale also manifested in the standardised Grade 12 school-leaving examination results, which most learners failed.

In 2002 (the last year of data collection) many of these dismal conditions were still prevalent at Karabo Secondary, even though some things had changed. The governing body had painted the school during the intervening years, the Department of Education had permanently appointed a different female principal, and the government’s allocation towards the annual budget had increased in alignment with the *National Norms and Standards for School Funding* (Department of Education, 1998), which functioned as a redistributive mechanism to prioritise needy schools serving poor communities.

The appalling workplace conditions at Karabo Secondary continued to demoralise staff, and relations between the management team, staff and parents remained poor. Teachers, the parent community and learners all lacked pride in the school, and this played out in learner absenteeism, teachers leaving school early each day, thefts, vandalism, substance abuse, and poor Grade 12 examination results.

There were reports of ongoing violence and conflict among the community living around Karabo Secondary, and this disrupted schooling for many learners as their families fled their homesteads to hide overnight in bushes and sugarcane fields. Although the school is located in a province and district with a high prevalence of HIV infection and AIDS, strategic responses to proactively promote healthy lifestyles and safe-sex practices were not in evidence.

At leadership level, the ethos of school management was characterised by formality and authoritarianism. Staff complained that management processes were not inclusive and transparent, and that the principal failed to delegate responsibility beyond the school management team and communicate adequately with them. They asserted that only minor issues were planned at staff meetings and that the principal informed staff of decisions *post facto*.

At the level of relations between staff and management, the ethos was fraught by discontent and discord. Each group apportioned blame to the other for the ongoing difficulties at the school. While staff complained that there were no structures for dealing with their grievances, management contended that staff were inert, passively unco-operative, and maintained a hostile silence in meetings. There were also reports that educators had directly contested the principal’s authority in the matter of staff appointment. A district officer stated that unlawful corporal punishment was still practiced by management and teachers of Karabo Secondary and while this

points to the deficit of professional ethos among employees, it would certainly contribute to a negative ethos in the daily routine of relations with learners.

Within the routines of the school, the ethos was cosmetically bureaucratic. While attendance registers and codes of conduct were seen and spoken about, the procedures and codes did not appear to be followed. Comparison of the observations in 1998 and 2002 found that staff punctuality and attendance was poor and had deteriorated over the years. The 2002 case study report states that "some educators went to classes, taught, then went to the office, demanded the register and simply told the principal that they had somewhere to go to" and "learners were seen loitering … because there were no educators". Observation of the routine school assembly also found evidence of a cosmetic ethos in following the hollow form of everyday school life regardless of the poor quality and shallow content of that educational experience. The school day started and the assembly took place although few learners were present and punctual.

The combined effect of the dominant ethos in the leadership, management and daily routine domains inhibited any initiative and enthusiastic participation. Evidence of this stagnation was found in the school's governance structures. After one educator was transferred away from the school, educators neglected to hold elections for a new educator representative. They admitted that this was because they had "lost interest … [and were] taking advantage of the weak management and communication breakdown in the school". Further evidence came from learner representatives to the governing body, who revealed that "their suggestions and inputs were never taken seriously and that they were always regarded as 'just children'". Apart from painting the school and making minor repairs, the governing body had taken no initiative to improve the school buildings in the period 1998-2002. Books strewn on the floor of the vandalised library remained as undisturbed in 2002 as they had been in 1998.

In the domain of community-school relations, the ethos of Karabo Secondary was also beset by problems. Learner enrolment was in decline from 465 in 1998 to 301 in 2002, and Grade 12 school-leaving examination results in 2001 were still dismally low with only 30% of learners gaining a pass. There were reports of learners dropping out of classes, but no statistics were available to assess the extent to which this was taking place. Learners claimed that community members wandered onto school grounds and interrupted their lessons by calling out derogatory slogans that denigrated teachers' roles in the post-1994 outcomes-based curriculum. The principal blamed learners' poor academic performance and attendance on conditions in their homes where under-educated and/or illiterate parents and caregivers did not have the capability to assist learners with their homework. Learners and educators also referred to the disruptive impact of wider societal problems that included rivalries and vendettas among local community groups fighting over scarce resources and access to power. Similarly, the valuable resource of the photocopier was stored at the principal's home for fear of vandalism and theft, even though this was an inconvenience in the running of the school. Though learners' poor performance and the drop out rate at Karabo Secondary cannot be attributed to such community-linked disruptive influences, the accounts point to the negative contextual climate affecting the ethos within the school.

There is potential for district officers to intervene to break the continuity of a sustained negative ethos at such schools. In the case of Karabo Secondary, this had not occurred. The district officer assigned to the school asserted that he rarely paid visits to the school, about ten kilometres from his office, since the district lacked government vehicles for this purpose. Alternative options (such as the use of a private vehicle, taxi, bicycle or horse, which have been noted in other African countries) do not appear to have been considered. Unfortunately, researchers noted that "there had never been visits from facilitators and subject advisors", so that school managers and teachers were not well guided and advised about implementing post-1994 education reforms. In the case of some policies, they had been bypassed altogether. Thus, the lack of support from these district-level personnel with support responsibilities helped to perpetuate the negative ethos at Karabo Secondary instead of intervening to facilitate an improvement in the culture of teaching, learning and service.

5.3 Example of an affirming ethos: Isidingo Primary

Evidence from Isidingo Primary, an urban working-class school in which the ethos can be described generally as affirming, showed that there had been little change in ethos between 1998 and 2002.

On the sprawling periphery of Johannesburg, South Africa's largest metropolis, Isidingo Primary is situated in Soweto, a working-class township zoned during the apartheid era to be exclusively for black residents. Although there are high levels of poverty, unemployment and crime in the community surrounding the school, on a national GIS mapping of the poverty index Isidingo falls on the boundary of urban areas categorised as "best" and "better off". Therefore, like Karabo Secondary, Isidingo Primary is relatively advantaged in its potential to access resources.

Isidingo is described as having an affirming ethos because institutional control and social cohesion were effectively and efficiently practiced. This was the case in 1998 and remained so in 2002. The high instrumental control occurred in the ways in which the school community took measures to protect and maintain its property, as well as in regulating a formal culture of learning and teaching. The constant promotion of values such as tolerance, respect for human rights and staff development was symptomatic of the highly expressive social cohesion in the school. In general, a consultative collegial ethos was evident in the leadership and management domains, although members of the school community had diverse perspectives on this.

Some members of the school leadership and staff asserted that the principal tended to be consultative and directive rather than allowing inclusive participation. Parents and learners had a different view. They endorsed and commended the leadership style of the principal to which they attributed most of the school's successes and achievements. They saw the principal as resourceful and someone who had mobilised financial and material resources to support the school's programme.

In the domain of management and staff relations, there was a positive climate of professionalism, collegial support, and strategies for effective teaching and learning. There were regular curriculum planning meetings held and staff development opportunities enhanced morale and promoted positive attitudes towards the implementation of new policies. Two examples in 2002 are evidence of this. First, educators who had attended development workshops convened by the education authority conducted internal workshops so that their colleagues could also benefit from their professional development. Second, educators known to be experts in their subject fields and from schools characterised as centres of excellence were invited regularly to share their expertise and ideas with Isidingo staff. Through such meetings and workshops, Isidingo teachers reflected that they were better prepared than in the past and therefore they were more confident professionals. The orderly school library shelves pointed to a well-organised and maintained system to support teaching and learning, and teachers were observed using the library.

In the domain of daily routines there was a collaborative ethos among school managers, educators and parents in 1998 and this continued to be the case in 2002. Parents were encouraged to be actively involved in the maintenance of school property; many voluntarily cleaned premises, undertook maintenance such as painting, and tended flower and food gardens. Although the school was situated in a township notorious for crime, the school was free from vandalism and crime. The governing body had invested in several preventative measures in 2002. An electrified fence had been installed around the computer room, and the services of a private security firm had been contracted. Thus any visitors to Isidingo in 2002 would have found a welcoming school mural at the entrance to the school building, neat gardens, swept corridors and a fenced yard. These investments in building an affirming ethos had been recognised in a competition for the cleanest school in Soweto, and the school had won the substantial cash prize of about US$1000.

The general affirming ethos in the school encouraged and created space for innovations and development that would improve teaching and learning. Thus an innovative Value Citizenship Programme had been introduced between 1998 and 2002. Through this Programme all members of the school community were encouraged to value and respect one another and to know their rights and responsibilities. As a result there was noticeable commitment from teachers and learners to develop or grow as engaged members of society, and a culture of tolerance had been established. Parents were more involved in solving problems related to a culturally and linguistically mixed context.

The positive ethos gave rise to a cycle of greater efforts among Isidingo's educators to be exemplary professionals offering quality teaching. Thus, the school had joined a network of similarly affirming schools that were all characterised as being "centres of excellence". The well-grounded culture of teaching and learning at Isidingo was evident in 1998 and 2002 in punctuality, with very little absenteeism and late coming among teachers and learners. Educators were focused on their learners receiving a quality education in order to achieve good passes in each grade. Learners were also well behaved and self-disciplined. The sustained cycle of the affirming ethos over the years had attracted more learners to the school; enrolment had increased from 426 (Grades 1-4) in 1998 to 759 (Grades 1-7) in 2002.

5.4 Analysis of case studies

To sum up, these accounts of the ethos at Karabo Primary and Isidingo Secondary schools in 1998 and 2002 are examples that demonstrate the general continuity in ethos at the ten selected schools from the *Education 2000 Plus Project.* On the whole, schools that had an encouraging and enterprising climate in 1998 continued to manifest and iterate that positive ethos, and schools that were blighted by an ineffectual, reactive and discordant ethos in 1998 were still constrained by that general climate in 2002. It is the schools with this latter entrenched negative ethos that are most in need of the transformative policy influence.

In trying to understand and interpret this finding – that ethos was relatively stable between 1998 and 2002 – we scrutinised our data in terms of the social class of the community that the school was serving.

One explanation that we considered was that there is congruence between social class and ethos (Smith, 2003). This proposition that social class is reflected in school ethos – possibly a proposition developed solely in relation to schools in developed countries – is only *partially* confirmed in this data set in which schools plagued by dysfunctionality served both working-class and peasant communities. However, schools thriving with an affirming ethos cut across the economic divide of social class and spatial divide of urban/rural. This finding suggests that in the South African context, social class is not the only determinant of ethos. In addition to the link between resources, material conditions and ethos demonstrated in the case studies, the exercise of agency among various stakeholders and role players within a school community appeared to be a significant contributory factor.

This was evident at Isidingo Primary, located in Soweto where poverty, unemployment and crime are high. Despite this social context, there was a vibrantly positive ethos. The principal and management team had been successful in securing donor funds for the fencing and development of the school and to provide facilities such as a library. The teachers and parent constituencies were enthusiastically collaborating to ensure that teaching and learning was sustained and effective, and that the school was a safe, non-threatening and non-discriminatory place in which to be. Their agency was evidence of a shared understanding about the value of learning and the role of a school in that process, and that the development of morale for success required working collaboratively as a team.

At Karabo Secondary, however, the poor use of agency among various role players and stakeholders contributed to sustaining the debilitating ethos. This was seen in the principal's weak use of her agency as a leader, her narrow bureaucratic use of governing bodies and staff meetings and the concomitant non-involvement or inertia of those structures, educators' non-use of their professional agency within the governing body and staff meetings and their contentious appeals to district officers to intervene or override the principal's authority in matters of staff appointments, and the district officer's and subject advisors' negligent (lack of) support to the school. The cumulative effect prevented Karabo Secondary from developing a positive and participative teaching and learning experience for learners and a happy workplace for employees.

In this section we considered examples from two schools with markedly different manifestations of ethos and found that there was no significant shift in the ethos of schools during the period of the study. This finding must be disconcerting to any education policy maker and influential leader in South Africa since it implies that post-1994 education policies have not had a significant effect on school ethos, which is an aspect of institutional life that exerts influence over relations between various school stakeholders including the community and learners, and in the quality of teaching and learning within the institution.

6. Conclusion

Although we are disconcerted by our finding that South Africa's government schools have not all begun to transform and manifest an affirming ethos that encourages quality teaching and learning, we are confident that this finding is valid and coherent with anecdotal evidence. Our findings are based on an empirical study that spans a five-year period of data collection at a selection of 27 purposely-stratified schools across South Africa. The implication of our finding is that there is no essential causal link between policy and school ethos, or between social class and school ethos. Although we found that social class and local context are not predictors of ethos at schools, their influences must not be ignored. This confirms our claim that school ethos is a complex, multi-layered and constructed politics constituted through the agency of the various stakeholders and role players as they respond to social conditions and incidents.

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