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ANALYSIS OF ADMINISTRATIVE GOVERNANCE IN EDUCATION:
THE CASE OF MPUMALANGA DEPARTMENT OF
EDUCATION

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ABSTRACT

This study is an analysis of administrative governance in South Africa post 1994, aiming at investigating the effects the change of administrative governance from decentralisation to recentralization had on service delivery and provision of education at provincial, regional and circuit levels of Mpumalanga Department of Education.

This study adopted a qualitative research approach in gathering and analysing data. For data collection, interviews, documentary analysis, literature review were used. During the period 1994-1999, there were many administrative and governance problems that were experienced at district and circuit, levels of education provision. These problems included, lack of resources, poor communication, poor coordination and lack of support and this led to the abolition of districts, introduction of regions and restructuring of circuits.

Research findings have revealed that there has been an improvement of service delivery and education provision since the introduction of regions. Regions have been given more administrative and governance powers by the Head Office than it was during the district era. Regions have devolved and delegated certain powers to circuits and this has improved the administration in many circuits. However, there are also challenges that have been brought by this arrangement such as lack of office space for regional personnel, racial discrimination, insubordination and lack of support by some of the members of Regional Management Team, poor communication, lack of physical resources at circuits and schools and work overload on the part of circuit managers. As a result of these challenges administration at circuit and regional levels still needs to be re-aligned in order to ensure efficiency and delivery of services in education within the province.

This recommends that among others Mpumalanga Department of Education should improve the circuit's structure by introducing extra personnel to offload circuit managers with many responsibilities. Circuits without circuit offices should be supplied with their own buildings. Communication between the four-tiers of education administration should be revisited and more resources should be provided for circuits. Curriculum implementers should be based at the circuits in order to be abreast with the reality of education provision on the ground. However Schools were not targeted for by this study, therefore further investigation at school levels in terms of the effects of the shift from decentralisation to recentralisation have to be undertaken.

Keywords:

Decentralisation, Recentralisation, Restructuring, Service delivery, Districts, Circuits, Policies, Education provision, Resources



DECLARATION

I, Simon Diatleng Sebidi, declare that this dissertation is my own work and has not been previously submitted to the University of Pretoria or any other University in the world by me for a degree on the topic:

**ANALYSIS OF ADMINISTRATIVE GOVERNANCE IN EDUCATION:
THE CASE OF MPUMALANGA DEPARTMENT OF
EDUCATION**

SIGNED:

DATE.....

SIMON DIATLENG SEBIDI

2008

As a supervisor, I have agreed that this dissertation may be submitted

SIGNED.....

DATE.....

Prof. M.T.C. SEHOOLE

2008



DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to my mother Mmalekoba, my deceased father Stephen, my deceased grandmother Elizabeth, my wife Cynthia, my sons Busang and Oagile and my daughter Atlegang.



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ABBREVIATIONS

ABET	:	Adult Basic Education and Training
AD	:	Assistant Director
ANC	:	African National Congress
CCO	:	Chief Communication Officer
CEF	:	Circuit Education Forum
CES	:	Chief Education Specialist
CI	:	Curriculum Implementer
COLTS	:	Culture of Learning, Teaching and Services
CS	:	College-School
DDSP	:	District Development Support Programme
DMT	:	District Management Team
EDC	:	Education Development Center
EMIS	:	Education Management Information Systems
ERS	:	Education Renewal Strategy
FET	:	Further Education and Training
GNU	:	Government of National Unity
HRM	:	Human Resource Management
HRD	:	Human Resource Development
IPP	:	Integrated Planning Process
LTSM	:	Learner and Teacher Support Material
MDE	:	Mpumalanga Department of Education
MEC	:	Member of Executive Council
MYP	:	Master Year Plan
NCS	:	National Curriculum Statement
NEPA	:	National Education Policy Act
NEPI	:	National Education Policy Investigation
NGO	:	Non-governmental Organizations
OBE	:	Outcomes Based Education
PRM	:	Physical Resource Management
RCL	:	Representative Council for Learners
RDP	:	Reconstruction and Development Programme
RMT	:	Regional Management Team
SASA	:	South African Schools Act
SANGOCO	:	South African Non-Governmental Organisation Coalition
SBM	:	School Based Management



SCM	:	Supply Chain Management
SES	:	Senior Education Specialist
SGB	:	School Governing Body
SMI	:	School Management Initiative
SMT	:	School Management Team/ Strategic Management Team
SSB	:	School Sponsoring Body
USAID	:	United States Agency for International Development
WPET	:	White Paper on Education and Training

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CHAPTER 1

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

1.1 INTRODUCTION

The objective of this study is to conduct an analysis of administrative governance in education in the Mpumalanga Department of Education from 1994 to date. It focuses on the administration and governance models used during the period of education restructuring which saw shifts from decentralisation to recentralisation. It also focuses on the circumstances of decentralisation and recentralisation as part of education administration and governance in South Africa at national and provincial spheres of education administration, specifically in the Mpumalanga Department of Education (MDE).

The transformation of administration and governance in education is addressed by identifying different periods in which significant changes occurred in South Africa. The first period is the first five years of democratic governance, characterised by policy development, from 1994 to 1999. The second period, 1999 to 2004, was characterised by accelerated policy implementation (Sayed & Jansen 2001:272). The third period, from 2004 to date, is characterised by recentralisation that is, reclaiming power from the periphery. Certain government policies were reviewed as a result of poor service delivery, which forced the government to recentralise in order to speed up the process of reform.

The transformation of South Africa from the system of apartheid education to a new non-racial system has been a priority for government since it came into power in 1994 (Kallaway 1997:42). At that time, numerous stakeholders, such as the African National Congress (ANC), the trade union movement, the Apartheid State, the business community, non-governmental organisations and the international aid community, put education on the centre stage for discussion. Manganyi in Sayed & Jansen (2001:25-30) asserts that the democratisation of education was unleashed during the Mandela administration and left an important imprint on the country's education and training system. It was through the guidance of the



principles of policy frameworks such as White Paper 1 of (1995) on education and Training and the Interim Constitution, that decentralisation of power to the lower levels of the education administration was achieved.

The founding of the new democratic South Africa brought about a number of changes in terms of its education system. When the new system of education was unveiled, new education policies were implemented, which hinged on the idea of equality and redress of the past imbalances that were created by the system of apartheid education. It was due to this philosophy that the government moved away from the central control of education and inaugurated three tiers of education administration: at the national, provincial and local levels. Kallaway further indicates that the government took the route of implementing the provisions of the Interim Constitution and the White Paper 1, which essentially repeated the compromise of 1910 in transferring the control of education to the provinces, with the exception of higher education (Kallaway 1997:42).

As Peck (2002:26-27) indicates, the process of education reform and restructuring in the new South Africa has been a huge challenge in terms of bringing together the former apartheid education administrations to form one national Department of Education. This assertion is supported by Sehoole (2005:101) who adds that it has been a real challenge for the national sphere of education to bring the old homeland departments under one national minister, especially in terms of the creation of provincial departments. In terms of administration during the restructuring process, the national minister temporarily became the political office-bearer over all the provinces, which meant vesting power at the centre like it was during the apartheid era. As much as it was a challenge when restructuring the national Department of Education, it became more intricate when the provincial Departments of Education were established. This challenge was brought about by the fact that all the former homelands education departments, former provincial education departments and the former Department of Education and Training were devolved to newly established provinces.

The shift that the establishment of the Department of Education experienced is regarded by Sehoole (2005:98-99) as a shift from impenetrable polity as



represented by old institutional structures and cultures, to accessible polity, as represented by the new culture being forged. Sehoole further explains that impenetrable polity refers to the extent of the closure of polity controlling the centralised decision-making process, whereas accessible polity refers to the openness of the new decision-making system. Given the situation within the National Department of Education, powers and authority to administer education in the provinces became the responsibility of the provincial cabinet officials who were also the political heads, referred to as Members of the Executive Council (MEC's). These political heads also became responsible for all aspects of school education within the provincial departments and were expected to set their own priorities and policy implementation programmes within their provinces (Sehoole 2005:101). According to Paqueo & Lammert (2000:1), this shift can be referred to as 'decentralisation' because the process involved re-assigning responsibility and corresponding decision-making authority for specific functions from higher to lower levels of government and organisational units. The decentralised units deal with the way school systems should go about making policy, generating revenue, spending funds, training educators, designing curricula and managing local schools. Such changes imply fundamental shifts in the values that underpin public education, values that concern the relationships of students and parents to schools, the relationships of communities to central government and the very meaning and purpose of public education.

In terms of Section 239 of the Interim Constitution, the provincial departments of education which were created from the apartheid departments, had to inherit all the latter's assets and liabilities (Act No: 200 (1993:168). According to Peck (2002:26-27), the process of transformation required proficiency, but when the newly established administrations were established, a lack of capacity emerged; therefore assistance had to be rendered by the Support Unit which was established by the national Department of Education in terms of audit and need.

Nevertheless there was evidence of disparities within and among provinces in terms of their management infrastructure, their staff capacity, the challenges facing them and the resources available to them. All these challenges suggested that the issue of redress and restitution was to be continued as a matter of national



concern. Assertive policy was required, particularly in the areas of quality assurance, training and professional support, development of operational infrastructure and the strategic allocation of resources in provinces (Coombe & Godden 1996:31).

1.2 STATEMENT OF RESEARCH PROBLEM

This study sets out to investigate the effects that the move from decentralisation to recentralisation in the Mpumalanga Department of Education had on administrative governance in terms of education provision. The Mpumalanga Department of Education abolished district education offices to form regional education offices as new administrative and governance structures and nodes of education provision throughout the Mpumalanga Province. This move may be called 'recentralisation' because powers which had been held by the districts were reclaimed by the provincial administrative governance structure. Because of the abolition of districts, there was a re-configuration of their powers which were devolved to the regional offices and circuit offices by the Head Office.

This study poses the following research question:

- What effects did the change of administrative and governance from decentralisation to recentralisation have on service delivery and the provision of education at regional and circuit levels of the Mpumalanga Department of Education?

Focus is also on addressing the following sub-questions:

- What experiences did circuit and district offices have under the decentralised administrative governance model in terms of education provision and service delivery?
- What experiences are the circuits, regions and the provincial Department of Education having under the recentralised model of education administration?



1.3 FOCUS OF THE STUDY

The focus of this study is on the experiences districts, circuits and the provincial education department officials had under the decentralised administration and governance model in terms of quality education provision in the Mpumalanga Department of Education, which spans the years of administrative and governance operations from 1994 to 1999. The recentralised model of education governance and administration is analysed according to the periods 1999 to 2004, in terms of the partnerships the provincial Department of Education forged with the districts, circuits and other stakeholders to ensure effective administration and governance of education institutions, and the experiences of the administrative personnel at these levels of education provision and delivery. This study therefore sets out to investigate the effects of the move from decentralisation to recentralisation in the Mpumalanga Department of Education in terms of the administration and governance of education.

1.4 ARGUMENT

The Mpumalanga Department of Education originally established districts as working and effective structures for service delivery to support circuits and schools. In 2002 it abolished districts to form regional education administrative structures, which entailed shifting and re-configuring administrative powers and operations. This re-configuration of powers found expression in the recentralisation of some powers that were previously held by the districts, either to the provincial Department of Education or to the regions and circuits. This study argues that these changes, shifts and re-configuration of powers have resulted in better co-ordination of administrative structures and functions, which in turn has led to improved and more efficient service delivery

1.5 RATIONALE

Government policies are subjected to change, particularly when government regimes change. This happened in South Africa in 1994 with the change of government from apartheid to a new democratically elected government. Many



new policies were introduced and many education institutions took on a new shape. Administration in government institutions also changed due to new policies which were intended to regulate the functioning of education departments at national and provincial levels. The intention was to democratise the education system and redress the inequalities that prevailed during the years of the apartheid education system.

In terms of the Mpumalanga Department of Education, this research study focuses on the effects of the administration and governance models adopted, the roles they played in terms of education transformation, service delivery and the provision of quality education at all levels of the provincial Department of Education. Administrative structures that were investigated are the former district offices, in terms of their operations as well as the relationship they had with circuit offices and schools. The rationale behind restructuring the districts to form regional education departments is also discussed, including the effects this move had on physical and human resources and administrative functions, compared to the present administrative functions of the regional education structures. The challenges and improvements that the present established regional structures exhibit in terms of service delivery were also investigated. This study therefore extends the scope of existing studies by analysing the tendencies of governments to shift their administration and governance models of education from decentralisation to recentralisation, and it is intended to make a contribution at that level.

It is critical to establish the rationale behind the shift from decentralisation to recentralisation. It is also significant to evaluate whether this shift has resulted in better conditions of administration and service delivery at regional, circuit and school levels. The central concern of this study is therefore to understand the effects the change of administration and governance from decentralisation to recentralisation has had on service delivery and the provision of education at circuit and regional levels of the Mpumalanga Department of Education.



1.6 DEFINITION OF CONCEPTS

The following concepts are used frequently in this study:

1.6.1 CURRICULUM IMPLEMENTER

A curriculum implementer (CI) is an education specialist who advises educators in terms of certain fields of specialisation in education. This term is used mainly in the Mpumalanga Department of Education, whereas in other provincial education departments such individuals are referred to as 'subject advisors'.

1.6.2 DECENTRALISATION

Various authors have defined decentralisation in different ways. According to Bray and Mukundan (2003:2), the concept of decentralisation is a slippery one to define and it is sometimes compared with the concepts of empowerment and sustainability. A general definition of decentralisation may be the transfer of decision-making authority, responsibility and tasks from higher to lower organisational levels or between organisations. The definition distinguishes powers within the government machinery, from the redistribution of functions between government and non-government organisations. Marishane (1999:2), on the other hand, sees education decentralisation as the devolution of adequate decision-making authority from the central level to a lower or local level. In the case of this study, decentralisation is regarded as the devolution of power and responsibilities from the provincial Department of Education to the education regions, circuits and schools.

1.6.3 DECONCENTRATION

Leung (2004:1) views deconcentration as the shifting of responsibilities from the central to regional or other levels, in such a way that the centre retains control. According to Coombe and Godden (1996:61), deconcentration occurs in a system that has previously been organised along lines of bureaucratic centralism, which means that more authority is assigned to those agents of the state who have



management responsibility for education at regional or local levels. It seeks to 'offload' routine matters from central offices and to achieve better co-ordination among different public services at these levels, with more regional planning.

1.6.4 DELEGATION

Delegation normally implies the transmission of tasks and administrative responsibilities related to specific functions usually defined by central authorities. In terms of delegation, decentralisation does not necessarily mean a shift of powers. Local agents generally are given the role of executing decisions that were previously made at the central level, which is an extension of local autonomy, simply because control is difficult (Karlsen 1999:1). The reasons for delegation are seen by Joubert and Prinsloo (2001:207-208) as creating more effective work performance, and enabling education leaders to utilise the variety of expertise available within the institution to complete the various specialised tasks required. Delegation also serves as an important tool in developing personnel by enhancing confidence and self-esteem and infusing in personnel a sense of satisfaction in being part of an institution or organisation and pursuing its objectives.

1.6.5 DEMOCRATISATION OF EDUCATION

The concept of democratisation of education refers to democratic participation in school affairs, which is an entrenched principle in the South African education system. It encourages the development of partnerships across the spectrum of educational institutions that has characterised the education system for decades (Coombe & Godden 1996:14).

1.6.6 DEVOLUTION

Devolution of power implies the transmission of authority and responsibilities from the central to local bodies. Devolution is the only category of decentralisation in which authority and independence are clearly increased (Karlsen 1999:1). It is only through devolution that authority over financial, administrative and/or pedagogical matters can be transferred on a permanent basis and cannot be withdrawn.



1.6.7 EDUCATION DISTRICT

An education district is defined as a unit of education administration, provision and service delivery, made up of clustered circuits and schools, and formations of educators and other stakeholders, such as school governing bodies, in a given area.

1.6.8 EDUCATION REGION

An education region is a level of education administration and governance between the provincial level and circuit level in the Mpumalanga province and in other provinces in the new South Africa which have opted for this level of education administration.

1.6.9 EQUALITY

According to Farrell (1999:158), equality deals with the actual patterns in which assets or opportunities are distributed among members of a group, whereas Samoff (1999:405) perceives equality as having something to do with 'sameness'. In terms of education administration it involves making sure that some schools are not allocated more funds than others who have the same number of learners, or do not receive more or better textbooks than others. It also involves ensuring that learners are not preferentially promoted because of their race, gender or family background.

1.6.10 EQUITY

According to Farrell (1999:158), equity refers to social justice or fairness. It involves a subjective moral or ethical judgment. In terms of the history of discrimination, it may mean that justice requires providing special encouragement and support for those who were disadvantaged in the past regime (Samoff 1999:405).



1.6.11 OUTCOMES-BASED EDUCATION

Outcomes-based education is education that considers the process of learning as important as the content. Both the process and the content of education are emphasised by spelling out the outcomes to be achieved at the end of the process. In the Revised National Curriculum Statement learning outcomes and assessment standards are designed down from the critical and developmental outcomes (ELRC 2003: H-46).

1.6.12 RECENTRALISATION

Recentralisation may be seen as the opposite of decentralisation, which in turn evolved from centralisation. According to Coombe and Godden (1996:32), recentralisation occurs when the implementation of decentralised policies is in conflict with other existing laws, causing uncertainty as to which level of government or which decision maker in the education sector is responsible for taking action. Leung (2004:1) indicates that when the loss of control is perceived to be as a result of decentralisation the process of regaining the authority devolved is called recentralisation. On the basis of this claim, recentralisation may be defined as reclaiming power and authority by the centre from the lower levels of education administration and governance.

1.6.13 RESTRUCTURING

Restructuring involves the re-organisation and readjustment of functions with the aim of bringing about improvement. It takes into account the redesign of different components of institutional systems in order to produce better outcomes or results (Marishane 1999:5). Restructuring may emerge as a response to general dissatisfaction with the centralisation of administrative governance or management of the organisation or institution in which power lies.



1.6.14 TRANSFORMATION

Transformation may be defined as the demand for change in line with the democratic ideals of a new government (Marishane 1999:4). During the post 1994 period in South Africa, numerous government institutions, including the education department, had to transform in order to conform to the new legislation.

1.7 BREAKDOWN OF CHAPTERS

CHAPTER 1

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

This chapter locates and introduces the study and provides the context for understanding educational reform and restructuring in South Africa after 1994. It gives an overview of how education restructuring was conducted in the new democratic South Africa from 1994 to 1999, at national and provincial levels of education administration. It focuses on the question of why the administration of education had to be restructured, as well as the model(s) used during restructuring. Due to the demands of the semi-federalism that was created in the new South Africa, its education system had to be decentralised. The provincial Department of Education that is investigated by this study is the Mpumalanga Department of Education.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter presents a comparative analysis of how decentralisation is conducted by other countries and how it was conducted in South Africa. It reveals how decentralisation worked internationally and the effects it had in the administration of education. It also explores the reasons for and different aims of decentralisation in different countries. The chapter investigates the way in which decentralisation lessons learned by other countries were applied to the South African situation



during the education administrative and governance restructuring post-1994. Different categories of decentralisation are explored in this chapter, giving a sense of which categories were employed during the first five years of education restructuring in the democratic South Africa (1994 to 1999), which categories were deemed unnecessary, and which ones are still in use. It also focuses on the rationale for decentralisation by advocates of decentralisation, compared with the rationale given for decentralisation of education administration and governance in South Africa.

Chapter two (2) also discusses international and South African claims for recentralisation. Typical examples of other countries that have experienced recentralisation in their education administration and governance, such as Hong Kong, are explored to gain insight into what happened in the Mpumalanga Department of Education. In the latter case, district offices were abolished to form new regional education structures, and the chapter investigates whether this shift can be described as recentralisation. The concept of recentralisation is also considered through the lens of the overall governance of the country, probing the reasons for recentralisation, as well as the tendencies for governments to recentralise. The effects of the recentralisation of administration and governance are explored in terms of the experiences of the countries of the world, as compared with recentralisation experiences in South Africa, specifically in the Mpumalanga Department of Education.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

This chapter explores the methodology used to collect data at different points throughout the research process. It concentrates on the aims and purpose of interviews for this research study, how participants were selected for interviews, how letters of informed consent were distributed to the participants, as well as their profiles. It also addresses the ethical and legal considerations that were observed by the researcher. Research methodologies such as documentary analysis and its aims, the purpose and procedures for the analysis of documents are also



explored. The use of the literature review as a methodology for data collection is discussed in terms of its importance. The chapter presents the procedures that were followed during the analysis and interpretation of data, as well as the data analysis approach that was followed. It addresses the learning experiences of the researcher when conducting this research study, including the challenges faced, the supervision process and the demands of crafting this dissertation.

CHAPTER 4

THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE MPUMALANGA DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION: 1994-1999

This chapter presents the history of the establishment of the current Mpumalanga Department of Education. It explores the course of establishment and brings to the fore different former apartheid departments of education which were merged to form the provincial Department of Education. This chapter focuses on the period 1994 to 1999, the period during which a number of provinces were established in the new democratic South Africa.

It outlines the national policies which were implemented to enable the department to function, as well as the policies which emerged from the newly established provincial Department of Education. This chapter explores the establishment of education districts in 1996 as a way of decentralising powers to the lower levels, in order to improve service delivery. It highlights the challenges of policy implementation and administration in general that were encountered, that eventually led to the abolition of districts and the formation of regional education structures.

The chapter discusses the challenges the department encountered in becoming fully functional, from 1994 to 1999, as well as the restructuring models which were adopted. This chapter explores the re-organisation that occurred in terms of demarcation of circuits, the administrative and governance circumstances, their operations, as well as the challenges they experienced.



CHAPTER 5

RECENTRALISATION AND DECENTRALISATION OF EDUCATION ADMINISTRATION AND GOVERNANCE: THE CASE OF REGIONAL STRUCTURES: 1999-2004

This chapter unpacks the shift from recentralisation to decentralisation that happened in the Mpumalanga Department of Education from 1999 to 2004. In the case of this study this shift took place through the abolition of districts and the formation of regions. This chapter discusses different approaches and views on the part of various provincial and regional education officials in terms of establishing new regional structures.

The focus of this chapter is also on the public policy statements and commitments that were made by the new president in 1999 in terms of improved and accelerated service delivery in provinces. It reflects on when the idea of the abolition of districts and the establishment of regions emerged. It elucidates the basis for the establishment of regions, answering the question as to why regions had to be formed and why districts had to be abolished. It concentrates on the stakeholders who participated in the establishment process and how the establishment process was driven.

CHAPTER 6

FINDINGS AND CONCLUSION

This chapter concludes the study by presenting the findings and the interpretation of the data which was analysed from the interviews, documents and literature review. The findings include those that emerged from data analysed from 1994 to 1999 in terms of the establishment of the Mpumalanga provincial Department of Education, from 1999 to 2004 in terms of the establishment and the administration of the department and its governance functions.



Chapter 6 summarizes the different models of education restructuring that were adopted throughout the process of restructuring the Mpumalanga Department of Education from 1994 to date. The effects of the shift from decentralisation to recentralisation are fully discussed. Based on the findings, recommendations are presented in terms of education administration and governance in the Mpumalanga Department of Education. The chapter closes by identifying Issues for further research by other researchers.

1.8 CONCLUSION

Education restructuring in South Africa has appeared to be an ongoing process from 1994 to date, both at national and provincial levels. This phenomenon found expression in the way education administration and governance structures have been reorganised, with powers being devolved and delegated to lower levels of governance structures. According to Godden and Coombe (1996:7), this approach is a way of creating strong control and delivery-oriented structures, in order to promote and monitor the equity and quality of education provision. The national Department of Education, through its legislative framework, has decentralised powers to the provinces. Provincial departments of education have sovereignty in managing their own education systems. Over the years of its existence, the Mpumalanga Department of Education, like other provincial departments of education, has decentralised powers to its lower spheres of education provision. The process of education restructuring tends to follow two models of education restructuring, namely: decentralisation and recentralisation, each with the aim of promoting effective structures to improve service delivery.



CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 INTRODUCTION

Chapter one provided the background and the context of this study, its purpose and significance. This chapter presents the literature review on the nature and meaning of the problem being investigated.

According to Bell (1993:32), a literature review is an investigation that involves reading what other people have written about one's own area of research interest, gathering information to support or refute one's argument, and writing about one's own findings.

Galiani & Schargrotsky (2001:1), indicate that changes of government, and the concomitant change of government administrators and their approach to administration and governance, invariably result in significant changes in the way a country is run. In particular, decentralisation has taken place for different reasons in various countries of the world. Decentralisation therefore is regarded as a major component of the current institutional innovation throughout the world.

This chapter therefore analyses international experiences of decentralisation and recentralisation, in order to locate the South African rationale and practice of decentralisation and recentralisation. According to Bray (1999:209-210), politically motivated reform aims at strengthening the power of the dominant group in order to build strong branches to the subordinate groups, or to spread power to the subordinate ones. Administratively motivated reform aims at facilitating the operation of a bureaucracy. Frequently the origin of educational reform lies in the wider political or administrative landscape, rather than in the specific requirements of the education sector. Politically motivated decentralisation includes the desire, through reform, to include certain groups in the decision making process of government affairs. Bray (1999:209-210) further describes that in Peru during 1972, decentralisation reform attempted to strengthen the social participation of



indigenous Indians and other disadvantaged groups. In 1989, the Columbian initiative sought to improve and promote unity by involving dissident groups and by incorporating all major segments of the population. Contrary to what happened in Columbia, decentralisation in Mexico reduced the power of the teachers' union by transferring salary negotiations from the central to the state government level.

The unconstructive motive for decentralisation is when a government decides to reduce or trim its responsibilities for education administration because of financial stringency. Realising that it does not have adequate resources for the provision of services, it chooses to evade the problem by decentralising responsibilities to lower tiers or non-governmental bodies. Bray's assertion concurs with DeWit's (1998:1) view that in some countries such as North America, decentralisation was used for disempowering the centre rather than empowering the people. But in many state societies such as France and Japan, decentralisation has long worn a progressive face and aimed to democratise, instead of downsizing the state. According to Dinkić et al. (2001:2), the democratisation of education provides for active participation of all relevant stakeholders in the education process, namely parents, teachers, learners and government officials on different levels.

Whatever the case may be, in many countries proposals for reforming the administration and governance of education have echoed more general calls for the reform of the public sector. The argument hinges on whether the market, the state or the wings of state are better at allocating resources. Less is known about the influence of different patterns of administration and governance on the effectiveness and efficiency of education institutions. The debate has been waged on theoretical grounds that assembled evidence, emerging from the wider driving force towards market-based reform in general (Cummings & McGinn 1997:14-15).

2.2 INTERNATIONAL EXPERIENCES OF DECENTRALISATION

The literature on decentralisation as a government strategy in education administration has revealed that it has appeared on the political agenda for almost three decades and has become a trend (Karlsen 1999:1). According to Galiani & Schargrodsky (2001:1), decentralisation has become a major component of



current institutional innovation throughout the world. Hawkins (1999:2) argues that in general, there are no clear examples of completely decentralised systems, but rather one mixture of centralisation and decentralisation. He regards the process as being fluid in motion, which changes over time. In terms of the background to decentralisation, Brown (1990:32) regards it as resting on two assumptions about the nature of organisations: one is the need for some balance between the level of order and disorder, and the other is the locus of knowledge in the structure. 'Order' refers to the ability of administrative structures to manage themselves, to have knowledge of organisational objectives, for managers to have specific knowledge of their circumstances and to manage other structures under their control.

Other advocates of decentralisation argue that it is a policy that brings decision-making and implementation closer to the people. Brown (1990:15-16) indicates that decentralisation follows two types of paths: horizontal and vertical. He points out that when a school district is horizontally decentralised; it means that decision-making is shared among those at the central office. In such a case, the superintendent does not make all the decisions, but delegates authority to the assistant superintendents, supervisors, coordinators and other specialists. This is the case in North America. However, horizontal decentralisation is reduced when direct control over schools is in the hands of only a few people in the central office, (the superintendent and designated associate superintendents). In North America, most school districts do not follow this kind of power distribution, as the district allocates resources to schools in a particular form (number of educators, amounts of equipment), and schools do not have any latitude to make exchanges across accounts. Another way to decentralise is to distribute decision-making authority vertically (downwards) in an organisation or institution. Vertical decentralisation is increased when schools are given the power to select and deploy many of the resources they need. In terms of vertical decentralisation, schools have that authority when resources are provided to them, for example, in the form of money.

Different writers raise doubts as to whether decentralisation does indeed bring about authentic transfer of power. They point out that it is only a certain class of people who benefit from decentralisation because central government authority for education is never surrendered. According to Brown (1990:33), decentralisation is



only a means to attain goals such as responsiveness, service quality and lower costs. Therefore the effectiveness of decentralisation is based on the performance of administration services provided by the administrative structures that are in place.

As a government initiative, decentralisation has been evident in Western societies, as well as in developing countries and nations such as Latin America, South Asia and Eastern Europe, and among international development agencies (Leung 2004:1). He further indicates that virtually every country in North, Central and South America had some type of educational decentralisation reform underway. It is usually used as a strategy by institutions within the public sector, including education, where there is a prevalent belief that it will bring about desired large-scale educational reform. Christensen (2000:389) argues that the allocation of authority between central and local government varies a great deal from country to country.

According to Bray and Mukundan (2003:4), in many settings the pressure for decentralisation comes from political forces rather than from administrative ones. Among the most dramatic examples of politically motivated reforms are the territorial decentralisation schemes in Russia, Papua New Guinea, the Philippines and Sudan. Regionally based separatist movements in these countries were sufficiently powerful to threaten secessionist groups to retain the national framework. However the secessionist threats lead to different reactions. At points in the history of Ghana and Indonesia, threats of secession have caused national authorities to centralise various controls and to stress the need for national unity within a common framework. However, the Decentralisation Thematic Team (2006:1-2) argues that the decentralisation process could substantially improve efficiency, transparency, accountability and responsiveness of education provision, as compared with centralised systems.

In terms of decentralisation as a tool to improve efficiency, Paqueo & Lammert (2000:5) argue that decentralised systems empower authorities at regional or local levels, resulting in a more efficient system by eliminating overlays of bureaucratic procedures and motivating education officials to be more productive. This



assertion is supported by Hannaway and Carnoy (1993:57-67), who state that a decentralised model of administrative governance is based on the government claim that it should yield considerably more efficiency in the management of an educational system. This claim involves two sets of expectations, namely that decentralisation will mobilise and generate resources that are not available under more centralised conditions, and secondly that it can utilise available resources more efficiently. Bray and Mukundan (2003:4) agree with this argument in that, on a more bureaucratic level, the efficiency argument for decentralisation includes the view that specialist parallel bodies are better able to focus on the needs of clients, and that territorial, decentralised sub-national units are closer to the people and are better able to cater for local diversity. Furthermore, decentralisation is commonly advocated as a way to reduce costs, particularly when the centralised bureaucracies find themselves having to make decisions on even the most minor matters relating to schools in distant locations or areas.

The perception of Dinkić (2001:2-3) on decentralisation is that it is expected to contribute to the realisation of a country's strategic objectives in terms of development in general, and the overall role of education in social and economic development in particular. This view is based on the fact that modern developmental strategies consider education to be an exceptionally important element of thorough development. However, Caldwell (2004:629) argues that for decentralisation to be effectively realised, the locus and mode of decision-making in four domains should be considered. The 'locus' refers to the level on which decisions are made: national, state, regional, municipal, local or school. The 'mode' refers to the ways in which decisions are made: full autonomy at the level concerned, consultation with other bodies at that level, or independently but within a framework set by a higher authority. The four domains are: organisation of instruction, personnel management, planning and structures, and resources.

According to Lauglo (1985), as quoted by Coombe and Godden (1996:17-18), there are different rationales for decentralisation that highlight why organisations, institutions and authorities choose to decentralise, such as:



- To remedy congested decision-making at higher levels, especially to free senior officials from day-to-day management and allow time for policy making, budgetary considerations, planning for the future and monitoring service delivery;
- To promote better co-ordination among local services, so that financial and professional responsibility for the education enterprise is spread as wide as possible, in order to relieve the central administration of unsustainable burdens.

However Lauglo (*ibid.*) cautions that all the structural changes that occur as a result of decentralisation may, for a period, be resented by those mostly directly affected in terms of undermining values, identities and networks with which they have come to develop a strong identification. The reconstruction morale under such circumstances will, in part, depend on whether the change which is introduced offers more resources, and better training and career prospects, than the old order which is replaced.

Similar to Lauglo's (*ibid.*) opinion on the reasons for decentralisation, Hannaway and Carnoy's (1993:62-71) account of the rationale for decentralisation is based on the following perspectives: decentralisation and the redistribution of authority; decentralisation and the culture of learning; the rationale for efficiency; and decentralisation as conflict management. Each of these perspectives is discussed in more detail below.

Hannaway and Carnoy (1993: 62-67) explain that the underlying assumption for decentralisation as the 'redistribution of authority' is that authority in education is effectively exercised when it is put into effect by the state and its agencies, with some significant exceptions and variations. They further make an assertion that, the rationale for 'efficiency' is based on the assumption that decentralised structures of administration and governance should improve efficiency in the management of educational systems by bringing resources to the overall local resource pool available to such a system. Paqueo & Lammert (2000:5) argue that the rationale for increased efficiency is based on eliminating many bureaucratic procedures and motivating officials to be more productive. A variant of the



'efficiency' argument is the 'effectiveness' rationale, which argues that centralised planning policies have led to education that is very expensive, resulting in a decrease in quality, as countries find themselves faced with financial constraints. The effectiveness rationale holds that making local administrative structures more responsive by eliminating centralised decision-making can improve administration and accountability.

Distributing resources through decentralisation in Paqueo & Lammert (2000:5), is still a controversial issue, much as decentralisation is still just a fashionable model, because governments are often happy to assemble resources, but fail to distribute them to grassroots levels. Governments may also fail to relinquish control over resources because of fear of mismanagement. They place themselves in a position where their policies cannot be undermined by recentralising control. According to such an approach, the 'culture of learning' rationale is based on the link between learning and technology, which tends to benefit from a more decentralised, disaggregated idea of learning and educational content. This notion is a means of recognising and accommodating the diversity and importance of different cultural environments in a society, and gearing learning to cultural contexts by using modern systems of technology and communication.

The 'conflict management' rationale views decentralisation as a strategy for coping with highly conflicting situations. From this point of view, the state can diffuse the sources of conflict and provide additional layers of insulation between them and the rest of the system. Karlsen (1999:3) support this view in that it provides a way to manage conflict and to enable what is called 'compensatory legitimisation'.

According to the Decentralisation Thematic Team of the World Bank (2006:1), structural changes such as centralisation, decentralisation and recentralisation have mixed and limited effects on education provision and service delivery. James's (2003:17) assertion is the same for countries such as Germany, where it was thought that decentralisation would lead to a lowering of standards in some regions where individual states were responsible for education and where there were wide disparities in standards. With regard to the situation in Brazil, decentralisation has caused an overall increase in access to education, but little



has been done to reverse persistent regional inequities in terms of access to schooling, per capita expenditure and quality.

The experience in Chile has also revealed that decentralisation itself does not necessarily remove inequalities between localities in terms of varying incomes and quality. Poverty may continue to exist in poorer communities even though decentralisation has been implemented. This situation is what Paqueo & Lammert (2000:5) call the negative consequences of decentralisation in terms of equity in education. Concurring with James (2003:17) as indicated above, they claim that decentralisation may widen the existing performance gap between students in wealthy and poor areas. It can also increase the gap between the rich and the poor by providing better education to students in wealthy areas as opposed to students in poor areas, thus resulting in increased opportunities for educated students. In the view of these authors, the situation can be alleviated if governments focus on narrowing gaps as a goal of decentralisation, which requires the central or provincial government to take compensatory steps, such as providing special grants to low-performing schools.

Leung (2004:1) identifies three types of decentralisation which enable the transfer of decision-making authority, responsibility and tasks from a higher level to lower organisational levels, or between organisations. These decentralisation types or categories are referred to by Bray (1999:208-209) as 'territorial' because they refer to a distribution of control among different geographic tiers of government, such as provinces, districts, circuits and schools. The transfer of power from higher to lower levels is called 'territorial decentralisation'. The categories of territorial decentralisation include three major sub-categories, which are:

- Decentralisation as delegation ;
- Decentralisation as deconcentration ;
- Decentralisation as devolution.

Each of these sub-categories is discussed in more detail in the following sub-sections (see also Section 1.6: Definition of concepts).



2.2.1 DECENTRALISATION AS DELEGATION

Karlsen (1999:1) claim that many researchers have tried to classify and categorise decentralisation. These efforts highlight an important distinction between decentralisation as delegation and other types of decentralisation. According to Karlsen (1999:1), delegation normally implies the dispersal of tasks and administrative responsibilities related to specific functions usually defined by the central authority. The decentralisation of delegated tasks does not mean a shift of power because the local agents are generally given the role of executing decisions that were previously taken at the central level, but it may indicate extended local autonomy, simply because control is difficult.

This perception is the same as Leung's (2004:1) view of decentralisation as delegation, which occurs when central authorities 'lend' authority to lower levels of government, or even to semi-autonomous organisations, with the understanding that authority may be withdrawn. Bray (1999:209) agrees with Leung and views delegation as implying stronger degrees of decision-making power at the local level. Nevertheless, powers in a delegated system basically still rests with the central authority which has chosen to lend such powers to the local authority. The powers can be withdrawn without resort to legislation.

Drawing from the experiences on the delegation of authority in Venezuela, Paqueo & Lammert (2000:10) report that in 1969 the Venezuelan government divided the country into nine regional administrative territories and gave each of them responsibility for each of the central government major portfolios, including education. Theory was to give these regional entities, which shared common social, economic, and cultural characteristics, considerable authority for planning, budgeting, and managing, with the aim of turning them into engines of social and economic development. The system bypassed existing government structures entirely. While conceptually sophisticated, the regionalisation plan ran into operational difficulties, including a lack of continuity in leadership. With each new election throughout the 1970's and 1980's, victorious political parties made repeated changes in personnel and policies, all in the name of showing their commitment to and claiming credit for decentralisation. Partly loyalists would be



promoted from the classroom to senior ministry posts. Programmes developed at great expense in terms of time and money was abruptly terminated before their effectiveness could be evaluated. In 1991 this country made another attempt at educational decentralisation, this time to address the problems of efficiency and corruption by shifting responsibility for schools in particular areas. Local authorities demanded the right to accept responsibility only for schools that were in good physical condition, educational programmes that met minimum quality standards, and teachers who met minimum standards. They also sought guarantees of financial transfers, including those for teachers' pensions. As a result of these demands, the decentralisation plan resulted in a deadlock.

2.2.2 DECENTRALISATION AS DECONCENTRATION

According to Leung (2004:1), deconcentration involves shifting management responsibilities from the central to the regional or other lower levels so that the centre retains control. Decentralisation in this case often takes the form of creating or expanding powers of regional directorates (Paqueo & Lammert 2000:3). This assertion is supported by Bray and Mukundan (2003:3) who describe deconcentration as a process through which a central authority establishes branch offices, staffing them with its own officers. Thus, personnel of the ministry of education may all work in the same central building, or some of them may be posted out to the districts or circuits. The United States Agency for International Development (USAID) argues that deconcentration is the devolution of decision making power, human and financial resources to the regional and district level (USAID 2005:2).

According to Paqueo & Lammert (2000:8), the decentralisation of education in Mexico was carried out in three stages. During the first stage, from 1978 to 1982, the management of the education system was deconcentrated from the Ministry of Education in the form of thirty-one state delegations, one for each of the states of the Republic of Mexico. The delegations were given responsibilities ranging from budgeting and managing schools to the writing of curricula and textbooks. Revenue generation, the drafting of the national core curriculum, and labour policy remained in Mexico City. These initial reforms were carried out through a



concerted effort by senior leaders, and they had immediate and positive effects. Due to this approach of decentralisation as deconcentration, preschool enrolment increased, especially in rural areas, as did primary and secondary school enrolment rates. However, during the second phase, from 1983 to 1988, the government sought to take the additional step of transferring the delegations from central control to the authority of the states. This endeavour failed because of opposition from the teacher's union, which did want to negotiate working conditions and other matters with thirty-one separate governmental entities. Resistance also came from staff members of the central ministry who had their own vested interests in the centralised system and had long-standing cooperative arrangements with teachers.

Paqueo & Lammert (*ibid*) further indicates that, The Mexican government was pre-occupied with economic restructuring and other issues, and proved to be too weak to pursue its objectives. In 1988, a new government came to power and negotiated an agreement with the nation's governors and the national teachers union that permitted the transfer of state authority to proceed. Thus it was only in 1992, fourteen years after the decentralisation process was initiated, that the full extent of the decentralisation plan could be realised.

2.2.3 DECENTRALISATION AS DEVOLUTION

According to Paqueo & Lammert (2000:3), when power is devolved, the transfer of authority over financial, administrative, or pedagogical matters is permanent and cannot be withdrawn. Decision-making authority is divided between the central and regional governments, which are often highly centralised themselves. In the view of these authors, devolution may result in strong central authority and community financed and managed schools. It may also result in a federal form of government in which "general purpose regional or local governments have responsibility for finance and provision of basic education or basic education may be devolved to regional or local governments" (Paqueo & Lammert 2000:3). Decentralisation as devolution therefore implies the transmission of authority and responsibilities by the central body to the local bodies. Bray and Mukundan argue that devolution is the extreme of the three categories of decentralisation, because



powers are formally held at the sub-national levels, and officers at these levels do not need to seek approval from higher levels for their actions. The sub-national officers may choose to inform the centre of their decisions, but the role of the centre is chiefly confined to the collection and exchange of information.

Decentralisation in the sense of genuinely shared regulatory and allocative power among levels of administrative governance does not imply the loss of control for the centre (Hannaway & Carnoy 1993:71). Nevertheless, it is a real challenge for modern states to reconcile the conflicting objectives of centralised and decentralised control over education systems, without a possible loss of power and control. The frequent wavering between centralised and decentralised modes of policy behaviour may be due to the difficult task governments experience in balancing conflicting imperatives of control and legitimacy.

The above assertion is better explained by what happened in Spain After the death of Franco. “During this era, Spain feared that the three important industrial regions would seize the opportunity to break away from the country. In order to neutralise such threats, political leaders decided on a strategy of decentralising government functions, including education. The initial step came with the General Act on Education and Finance Educational Reform of 1970, which reorganised the educational system in ways that increased access for children in rural areas. However, in 1975 a new constitution was ratified bringing democracy to Spain, and accommodating the nation’s inherent diversity by devolving central functions to seventeen regional coffers through block grants that could be used for education and other purposes. It was only in the 1980’s that the Ministry of Education organised a national debate on a series of proposals for reorganising the new regional educational system. Based on the resulting consensus, a school-based management system was established, under which local schools, including government subsidised private schools, would be run by school councils made up of elected parents, teachers and students. Their authority included the right to elect school directors from among candidates in the teaching ranks. The central ministry retained control over the hiring of teachers and the authority to grant degrees. The shift towards decentralisation in Spain appears to have yielded mixed results. In the 1980s, the overall funding for education increased and it was



believed that the overall condition of education had improved. However, many school councils were slow to assert themselves in the management of schools, and talented teachers were reluctant to take on the responsibilities of school directorships, largely because of poor salaries and other resources” (Paqueo & Lammert 2000:10).

Leung (2004:1) notes that whenever a loss of control is experienced as a result of decentralisation, the subsequent measures taken may result in reclaiming the authority that had been devolved to the lower education administrative levels. This process is called recentralisation and is discussed in the next section.

2.3 INTERNATIONAL EXPERIENCES OF RECENTRALISATION

When analysing the recentralisation experiences in other countries of the world, Leung (2004:4) indicates that the School Based Management (SBM) system in Hong Kong represents a typical example of recentralisation ‘dressed up’ in the form of decentralisation. Among the shifts to decentralisation in that country, there were at times moves in the opposite direction. The School Based Management system was initiated in 1992 before the onset of sovereignty in 1997, and was known as the School Management Initiative (SMI). This structure was in essence a managerial restructuring exercise aimed at tightening control of the aided school sector. The system of government aid to schools can be traced from 1873 when the government introduced a grant-in-aid scheme to subsidise mission schools that had been established by missionaries. Over the years, more religious bodies and other voluntary organisations were in control of schools. Even to date, the majority of schools in Hong Kong are operated by such voluntary bodies. With the help of School Sponsoring Bodies (SSB’s), Hong Kong underwent a massive expansion in its education provision in the seventies and early eighties.

During the expansion period, the government of Hong Kong turned its attention to the quality of schooling. It found that the legal, funding and management frameworks that had been operational for aided schools were originally meant for a smaller number of schools, and were therefore inadequate in terms of quality control. They realised that the legal framework which had originated in the early



colonial years with the aim of containing political influence from the mainland, was no longer relevant, given the eminent return of sovereignty to China. The roles and responsibilities of various management committees and parties were not clearly defined in the existing framework, and the funding mechanism for the aided schools was too rigid.

Based on the inadequacies discussed in the previous paragraph, the SMI document (Education and Manpower Branch and Education Department, 1991) makes it clear that the SMI was part of government public sector reform, hence the earlier assertion that it was in essence a managerial restructuring exercise. The government however pushed on with the initiative, and the SMI was renamed 'School Based Management' (SBM), and packaged with the label of 'quality school education'. What was instigated as managerial restructuring was thus packaged as a measure of quality enhancement, and promoted in the name of educational decentralisation. The change-over in terms of returning sovereignty to China, a government which has no bias towards Christianity, provided a golden opportunity for reshuffling power. The SBM move was seen by many as the government's attempt to reclaim education authority and power from the church. Based on these facts, the School Based Management movement, under the label of 'decentralisation', is in reality a recentralisation of authority (regaining schools from the SSBs), or at most a deconcentration, where power was shifted from those who were seen to be less supportive of the government to those sectors in which the government has more control.

Leung (2004:3-5) reports similar experiences in Shanghai, where the Shanghai Municipal Commission of Education was formed in 1995 to take charge of all aspects of education in Shanghai. This commission was directly under the control of both the National Ministry of Education and the municipal government. Education matters under the control of other municipal departments were transferred to the commission. Leung (2004) is of the opinion that these moves could be interpreted as a reaction to decentralisation and a way to curb the loss of control from the centre to the periphery. This is an indication that centralisation is still deemed necessary at provincial and local level in order to implement central policies such as decentralisation.



Drawing from the above discussions, the main challenge facing education departments is how to implement policies to facilitate improved administrative and governance for quality education provision. Authorities need to guard against the reversal of implementation strategies and to avoid some of the dangers, which could worsen both the quality and equity of public education administration.

As in the case of decentralisation, the motives for education recentralisation may be political or administrative. Politically motivated recentralisation reforms aim at re-strengthening the poor state against a dominant group, in a case where the periphery may threaten to overthrow the centre due to having too much power and authority. Administratively motivated recentralisation reforms aim at curbing inadequacies that may occur in a decentralised system due to lack of control, poor service delivery and provision of education, incompetence in terms of execution of duties, inability to implement and interpret policies correctly to improve the lives of citizens, and inconsistency in terms of policy implementation. Such reforms also aim at trimming administrative structures and personnel that may in turn save revenue for the government and re-ensure equitable distribution of quality resources to the periphery or other levels of the system.

This literature review has revealed that recentralisation is evident in many countries of the world that, due to their political complexities, had adopted decentralisation as their models of education administration. The United States Agency for International Development (USAID) (USAID 2005:1-2) states that recentralisation may occur when the capacities of school directors to administer schools, or teachers and others to work collectively to reform education, are weak and need development. Recentralisation may also occur when the support system for newly decentralised authorities may not exist, and sub-national governments may have little or no information about their schools and academic and financial performance relative to the other jurisdictions. Other factors which may indicate the need for recentralisation is when school inspectors or local officers of the education ministry lack the culture and capacity to provide guidance and assistance as opposed to enforcing rules, and when decentralisation is not accompanied by increased flexible funding required for schools to exercise their new responsibilities for self improvement.



2.4 EDUCATION DECENTRALISATION IN THE SOUTH AFRICAN CONTEXT

To decentralise, according to Coombe and Godden (1996:35), means to disperse objectives away from the central point. In current usage, the term 'decentralisation' refers not only to the process, but also to the condition of objectives being located remotely from the centre. It might be useful to adopt decentralisation in order to denote structural conditions, as distinct from process.

Decentralisation does not necessarily refer to one location of distribution. In the case of education we may talk of the national sphere, provincial sphere, regional or district sphere, circuits and schools as locations of power distributions, depending on the kind of power they have to distribute and where the power has to be distributed. Sayed (2002:37) views decentralisation as a model of education administration and governance that creates opportunities for redistribution and sharing, extends power and enhances participation by removing centralised control over education decision making.

The South African perspective on the decentralisation of education administration and governance started in the early 1990s, with serious theoretical and political discourses or debates in relation to educational policies. This period is referred to by Kallaway (1997:86-87) as the time when concern was focused on analysing and contrasting the emergent policy discourses of the apartheid state and the democratic movement, which centered on the African National Congress (ANC). According to Kallaway (1997:63-65), in the process there were three main approaches to the question of the locus of control, or decentralisation, of the education system in South Africa. The first approach maintained that apartheid education was highly centralised; therefore democratisation should involve a concomitant decentralisation of educational control. The second approach was that South African education had historically been a mixture of both centralised and decentralised tendencies. Even when education became more centralised after the advent of apartheid 1948, there were powerful decentralising tendencies, whereby authority was granted to the Bantustans which catered for the various African ethnic groups, and provincial authorities who controlled the education system for whites. The 1983 Constitution and the 1984 National Policy for the



General Education Affairs Act 76, which provided for the administration of education outside the Bantustans in terms of “own and general affairs”, resulted in a multiplicity of education departments (19 in all) by 1994, a situation frequently referred to as intricate, fragmented and disorganised.

The third approach was based on the fact that there was a need for re-organisation and unification of the system on an efficient and equitable basis, which required the decentralisation of educational administration at the national, provincial and local levels. In terms of the first approach, state power was considered to be negative and hostile to democracy and the free play of market forces. In the second approach, the state was seen as a neutral instrument, whereas in the third approach the state was viewed as being tied together with national goals in order to achieve equity and social transformation. The inception of the Government of National Unity (GNU) in 1994 brought about a shift of focus to a critical evaluation of the emergent education policies and practices of the new state, as it attempted to reconstruct the legacy of apartheid education to meet the demands of the new democratic era.

The decentralisation of power and authority to institutions in terms of administration became a major thrust of World Bank policy in the developing country contexts, driven by a belief in the market, a minimal state and a need to expand global hegemony of liberal democracy (Kallaway 1997:86-87). Based on the demands of the South African Constitution to devolve power and authority to the periphery in all spheres of government including education, extensive power over education was decentralised from the centre to the lower levels of education administration. According to Kallaway (1997:68), a policy generating process occurred around education, to shift power from the apartheid state to the legitimate democratic state which was committed to delivering conditions based on universally accepted norms of human rights. A White Paper was published in September 1994 to which hundreds of verbal and written submissions were made.

The final White Paper entitled, ‘Education and Training in a Democratic South Africa (WPET): First Steps to Develop a New System’ was published in February 1995. This policy document describes the process of transformation in education



and training, which was intended to implement a system that served all the people in the new democracy and to meet the goals of the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP). According to Kallaway (1997:87), the White Paper on Education and Training clearly reflects potentially contradictory discourses. A dialogue around the 'redistribution' process, which Kallaway (*ibid*) calls it a 'social democratic discourse', became evident in the fundamental commitment to free and compulsory basic education, and to ensure access to education of equal quality for all citizens. The objective of the education ministry was to provide access to ten years of general education, funded by the state at an acceptable level of quality, to be implemented in the shortest possible time period. The WPET thus proposed developing a programme to expand access, including an expansion of the capacity of the education system, and to actively redress imbalances generated through historical inequalities.

However, the White Paper on Education and Training also reflects the tension between the social democratic redistributive discourses inherited from the Freedom Charter and the People's Education movement, and the 'free market' vision of individuals who advocate private, rather than state responsibility for education. The entire White Paper reflects the commitment of the Government of National Unity to fiscal discipline, making clear that the restructuring, expansion and qualitative improvement of the education system had to take place in a way that ensured financial sustainability and efficient use of limited resources. The main thrust of the WPET signalled a commitment to the expansion of access, a central demand which had been popular in the education struggle since 1976.

Decentralisation in South Africa became visible after 1994, beginning with the formation of nine provincial departments of education. The aim of the National Department of Education, by means of this establishment, was to create ways of sharing education administrative and governance responsibilities with these departments. The other objective of this shift was to bring stakeholders closer to the decision-making process in government affairs. This was necessary because pre-1994, before the inception of the democratic South Africa, the majority of South Africans were locked outside the decision-making arena of government. Through the mechanism of decentralisation, the government attempted to recall



and involve them in the day-to-day running of the education affairs of the country. According to Hartshorne (1999:5), decentralisation in South Africa was perceived as a policy or strategy agreed upon by different spheres of government, in order to ensure equitable distribution of resources and efficiency within the system. He defines education policy as a course of action adopted by government, through legislation, ordinances and regulations, and pursued by means of administration, control, finance and inspection, under the general assumption that it should be beneficial to the country and its citizens.

The South African rationale for efficiency compared well with international perspectives. The decentralisation of powers and responsibilities from the National Department of Education to the periphery was intended to promote efficient education administrative and governance structures in terms of service delivery, and to discontinue the centralised situation that had prevailed during the apartheid era. The other intention of decentralisation was to improve the culture of learning and teaching in schools by establishing education administrative structures that are closer and more accessible to the people, which can provide support, ensure control and render services in order to ensure improved education provision. Furthermore, decentralisation in the South African education system was used to diffuse sources of conflict and provide additional layers of insulation between such sources and the rest of the system. This was done by introducing provincial departments, which in turn introduced regions/districts and circuits, where conflict could be more easily managed. Coombe and Godden (1996:17-18) caution that, although decentralisation is a better way of managing an education system, it is not cheap and should not be adopted lightly. It requires proper and efficient administration, control and monitoring at provincial, district and circuit levels of the system. Decentralisation in the context of education should ideally promote improvement in the quality of education provision. Sayed (2002:36) claims that such an exercise requires monitoring, implementing different policies, and networking such policies with other related policies of other organisations within the same system, in order to ensure success.

Coombe and Godden (1996:42-50) identify political rationales for decentralisation that have an impact on education decentralisation, such as liberalism and



federalism. In terms of liberalism, decentralisation favours strong local government, the application of market forces, strong professions and the private provision of education. It would therefore serve as an ideological umbrella for various areas of interest, among which conflicting claims may arise. In terms of the federalism approach to education decentralisation, education would typically be under the jurisdiction of each member state, without direct federal control. Each state would have the constitutional right to craft its own education system. This could be either in a tightly centralised fashion at the state level, or it may delegate much responsibility to local bodies or levels.

According to Sehoole (2005:101), the South African decentralisation process adopted a federalism approach or rationale. The federal approach was signalled in the Interim Constitution, whereby the provision and control of education became a provincial responsibility, headed by a provincial cabinet official, referred to as a Member of the Executive Council (MEC). Therefore, through the decentralisation process, the new democratic South African state had to fulfil functions such as ensuring the redistribution of justice, promoting conditions for capital accumulation and greater responsiveness, and participating in forging unity and nationhood (Sayed 2002:38-39).

Coombe and Godden (1996:58-59) identify three sub-categories of decentralisation that were used in the South African decentralisation process post-1994, namely decentralisation as delegation, decentralisation as deconcentration and decentralisation as devolution. Each of these interpretations is discussed below in terms of the South African context.

In the South African context, *deconcentration* as a category of decentralisation forced the government to change regulations and legislative frameworks, which was done through the introduction of policies such as the South African Schools Act (SASA) (Act No 84 of 1996). However the authority remained with the state, with lines of accountability extending only upwards to the central government. This arrangement occurred within the existing subdivisions of the state civil service, without re-arranging the divisions of responsibility among them or giving regions or districts more responsibility. Each subdivision remained accountable in the same



chain of responsibility as before. The objective of this shift, as Coombe and Godden (1996:57) indicate, was to go beyond improved efficiency within education branches. It was also part of the strategy to improve provincial, local and regional co-ordination among previously separated public services, and to strengthen service planning.

In the case of provinces, all the levels and types of education administration operating in the regions/districts were brought together under the office of a regional director, rather than being separately accountable to different branches in the same ministry. It was hoped that the result would be more responsive and speedier decisions at the level just above the schools, if the intermediate officials developed the competence required to discharge their increased responsibilities. It was also believed that there would be gains of better provincial and local co-ordination among services brought under the same administrative umbrella. In terms of the desire to plan and co-ordinate various public services, it was believed that it would provide momentum for collecting more regional/district information about the demand for education, the patterns of student recruitment, the flows between different levels of schooling, and the labour market. It was hoped that this arrangement would stimulate the development of better management information systems for the purpose of provincial, regional/district and circuit planning.

According to Samoff (1999:421-422), in South Africa decentralisation as *devolution* was essential in maintaining and expanding political power or control from the opposite perspective for challenging and reforming the political system. Decentralisation as devolution was seen as permitting expanded access to decision-making arenas. It was hoped that previously excluded groups would develop a stake in the political system and thus a base for working within and maintaining it, therefore being less likely to seek to overthrow or destroy it. Samoff (1999) further indicates that transmitting decision-making authority to local officials supposedly moves authority to those likely to be better informed and more sensitive to the local setting. Further advantages of devolution are that it reduces bureaucratic delays; it improves the capacity of local administrators; it facilitates the effective integration of isolated rural areas into local, regional and national development programmes; it increases efficiency by relieving the central



government of unnecessary tasks and reducing the scale inherent in the centralisation of decision making; it fosters greater co-ordination between central and local agencies; it permits administration that is more flexible, more creative and more innovative; and it enables more effective control, monitoring and evaluation.

According to Donaldson (1993:42), decentralisation of control needs to be balanced by rigorous planning, regulation and scrutiny from the centre. In terms of the *delegation* category of decentralisation, powers and responsibilities that were devolved to the provinces by the National Department of Education were in turn delegated to the regions/districts which in turn devolved these delegated powers to the circuits.

2.5 CONTESTATION OVER DECENTRALISATION

According to Kallaway (1997:65), South Africa's negotiated transition occurred at a unique historical moment. Agreements and settlements were built around educational change, which shared features of the older, dismantled settlements and of new international trends and the specifics of the country's transition to democracy. However the balance of power of the negotiated settlement dictated the terms of the constitutional provision for education. They further indicate that while policy debates between proponents of the National Education Policy Investigation (NEPI) and the Education Renewal Strategy (ERS) prior to 1994 centered on the desirability of centralisation or decentralisation of educational governance, the new Constitution of South Africa dictated the devolution of power to a large degree from the centre to the nine provinces. In terms of the new Constitution, higher education became the responsibility of the National Ministry of Education, which was also responsible for establishing national policy frameworks or 'norms and standards' for education in general. Provinces were given powers to legislate on all aspects of basic schooling and education, including teacher education, subject to this national framework.

However, according to Kallaway (1997:88), tensions between centralising and decentralising occurred in the interpretation of the Constitution, as political forces



attempted to obstruct the passage through parliament of the National Education Policy Bill. This Bill provided for the development and determination of a national policy for education, the establishment of consultative structures for its formulation, as well as the democratic transformation of the system of education provision and support. It emphasised the need for education to serve the fundamental rights, needs and interests of all the people in South Africa. The Bill also provided for the establishment of a Council of Education Ministers which included every provincial Member of Executive Council (MEC) responsible for education, and functions to promote coherent National Education Policy, shared information and co-ordinated decision-making between the National Ministry and the provinces.

According to Coombe & Godden (1996:17-18), the Hunter Committee (Review Committee on School Organisation, Governance and Funding, August 1995) and the Minister's draft White Paper which followed it (in November 1995) proposed that education decision-making should be entrenched at grassroots level. This proposal apparently committed South Africa to a decentralised course in education, which made way for the emergence of administrative structures in provinces. The motive for decentralising power and authority in the South African education system emerged as a result of the need to deal with the magnitude of the educational enterprise, the diversity of patrons for education, problems of communication and the financial burden on the central government. Decentralisation policies resulted from political polarisation, whereby there was a high degree of consensus among concerned groups and stakeholders about the ends and means of education.

As already indicated, provincial education departments followed the trend of the decentralisation policies adopted by the National Department of Education. Education administration and governance became the responsibility of provincial cabinet officials who were also political heads referred to as Members of Executive Council (MEC's). These political heads became responsible for all aspects of school education within their provincial departments and were required to set their own priorities and policy implementation programmes within their provinces (Sehoole 2005:101).



Coombe and Godden (1996:16) indicate that through the leadership of the Members of Executive Councils in the different provinces, a number of educational structures emerged over time in response to changing internal and external stimuli: the need to overcome legal obstacles; the need for redress; the need to overcome fear of change; the need to improve quality; and changing definitions of quality. The organisation and management of the education system was therefore seen as being an evolutionary process, allowing for various functions to be allocated in different ways, at different times, to different levels of the education administration.

Basically the organisation charts of most of the new provincial governments provided for the 'district' as a management or administrative unit. Some provinces consigned the 'region' (a unit between the province and the district) to a purely administrative role. While some provinces envisaged considerable management autonomy at the district level, the decentralisation of powers to the lower structures in the Mpumalanga Department of Education during the period 1994 to 1999, brought confusion in the administration and governance of education in the province. This was because of a lack of accountability, responsiveness and efficiency in terms of education provision and service delivery by the officials concerned. Furthermore, the departmental officials did not know exactly what their roles were in terms of powers devolved and delegated to their departments.

2.6 RECENTRALISATION IN THE SOUTH AFRICAN CONTEXT

South African decentralisation exhibited signal elements of recentralisation, owing to the extent of co-ordination and central control which has probably been most important, not so much in terms of social reform, but rather in the strict enforcement of fiscal discipline and consequent curbs on public expenditure, particularly with respect to the provinces. According to Lodge (2002:252), recentralisation in the South Africa education system was noticeable from the period 1999 to 2004, and to date. Premiers of the provinces had been appointed by the provincial legislature in terms of section 128(1) Act 108 of 1996 (Constitution of the Republic of South Africa). The national government realised that too much power had been concentrated in the provincial governments, so the



president of the country transferred certain powers from the provinces back to the central government, including the appointment of premiers of provinces. This was contrary to the earlier arrangements and practices, whereby premiers were appointed by the provinces. During this time, the Mbeki government administration reviewed certain policies and government programmes which did not achieve the intentions of the government. Some of these were recentralised and became the responsibility of the central government to implement and manage.

Recentralisation, according to Coombe and Godden (1996:32), occurs when the National Department of Education perceives the provincial administrators as functioning loosely, their efforts being characterised by lack of clear understanding of what is happening inside and outside the bureaucracy. It also occurs as a result of lack of direction by the education administrative structures under the control of the provincial education departments, “woolliness of thought” and little regard for basic issues like operational procedures. Therefore the centre may reclaim power and authority as the custodian of implementation. Recentralisation may also occur as a government strategy to re-organise and tidy problematic administrative structures and to implement better structures to effectively carry the educational provision and delivery mandate of the higher office. Recentralisation also occurs when the implementation of decentralisation policies is in conflict with other existing laws, causing uncertainty in terms of which level of government or which decision-maker in education is responsible for which functions.

Coombe and Godden (1996:37) believe that recentralisation may be caused by the complexity of the national education system in South Africa, the magnitude of the educational enterprise, the heterogeneity of the clientele for education, problems of communication between decentralised education administrative structures and the centre, as well as financial mismanagement. Contrary to this view, this study demonstrates that in the case of the Mpumalanga Department of Education, decentralisation led to effective administration and governance of the education system as a result of the administrative capacities it possessed, which in turn led to the provision of quality education throughout the province. The study also demonstrates that the province engaged in other forms of reform or restructuring in which recentralisation played a pivotal role.



2.7 CONCLUSION

Decentralisation should not be viewed as a solution to problems of educational administration and governance. It cannot be expected that redress, equity and quality of education can be enhanced if the government adopts decentralisation as its model of education administration. According to Leung (2004:12), decentralisation is a complex notion that needs to be understood in terms of the context and culture of the place in which it is implemented. The western notion of decentralisation cannot be transported and transplanted to countries which do not share the same culture. It is essential that each country should adopt a decentralisation model of education administration to suit the demands of the environment and the people exposed to such a situation.

In the context of South Africa, according to Samoff (1999:426), education was at the centre of the anti-apartheid struggle. Its task was social transformation. As the new government assumed power, responding to both general and specific pressures, it moved from mobilisation, to planning, to implementation. As elsewhere in Africa, its principal concerns were expanded access, desegregation and the redress of inequality. In the context of constitutionally required fundamental decentralisation, education discourses focused less on learning and liberation, more on schooling and examinations, and more generally on education as preparation for the world of work. However, if after the advent of decentralisation, the subordinate structures fail to co-ordinate education administration, this may result in the centre reclaiming power and authority. This process is called recentralisation.

Lessons from the literature on recentralisation are that it doesn't occur only because the lower levels of education administration are unable to co-ordinate education. It can also be the result of poor interpretation of decentralisation policies which result in poor service delivery, as well as administration inefficiency by lower levels. It is also a strategy used by government to re-organise administration structures and to re-distribute resources equally from the centre to the periphery, in order to improve quality in terms of delivery of services. It is evident that restructuring doesn't only happen after decentralisation –



recentralisation can be another way of restructuring. Some of the advocates of decentralisation regard recentralisation as a negative move indicating that decentralisation failed. This may be partially true in that what had been dispersed to local levels is reclaimed by the centre. However, in terms of the literature reviewed, recentralisation may also be a good course of action. The centre may reclaim power and authority in order to redistribute them to the periphery with a refined and fresh directive to eliminate and evade misappropriation and inequalities in terms of distribution of resources and poor service delivery.

Using the different perspectives of decentralisation and recentralisation explored in this chapter, this study examined such experiences in the Mpumalanga Department of Education in order to establish the basis for these moves and the effects thereof.



CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

3.1 INTRODUCTION

According to Cohen (2000:44-45), methodology refers to the range of approaches used in educational research to gather data to be used as a basis for inference and interpretation, for explanation and prediction. Traditionally the word refers to those techniques associated with the positivistic model, in order to elicit responses to predetermined questions, such as recording measurements, describing phenomena, and performing experiments. In the view of Cohen (2000), the aim of methodology is to help us to understand, in the broadest possible terms, not only the products of scientific inquiry but the process itself. Design, according to Chabalala (2005:42), means the plan and structure of the investigation used to obtain evidence in order to answer the research question. It describes the procedures for conducting the study including when, from whom and under what conditions the data will be obtained. Research design therefore indicates how the research is set up: what will happen to the participants and what techniques of data collection are used.

3.2. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

This study is an analysis of administrative and governance in the Mpumalanga Department of Education. It explores this organisation in order to obtain explanations of the education administration and governance activities and the social actions it performs. Given the nature of research, whereby careful reading and interpretation of textual material can be supported by interview evidence, participants reflected on their experiences of education administration and governance at various education levels, through the shift from decentralisation to recentralisation. The study aims to investigate the effects such shifts had on education provision and how it influenced the way education institutions function at different levels of the Mpumalanga Department of Education.



3.2 DATA COLLECTION

This study used qualitative research methodology for data collection and data analysis. Qualitative research, according to Merriam (1998:6), is an effort to understand situations in their uniqueness as part of a particular context. The interactions do not necessarily attempt to predict what may happen in future, but to understand the nature of that setting, what it means for participants to be in that setting, what their lives are like, what is going on for them, what their meanings are, what the world looks like in that particular setting, and to be able to communicate that faithfully to others who are interested in that setting. On the basis of the research methodology adopted, the research methods I used for data collection included interviews, review of literature, documentary analysis and personal experience as a teacher and a manager in the Mpumalanga Department of Education. Each of these methods is described in more detail in the sections that follow.

3.4 INTERVIEWS

According to De Vos (2002:300), interviews are regarded as a primary source of data collection. Cohen (2000:267) argues that “the interview is not simply concerned with collecting data about life: it is part of life itself, its human embeddedness is inescapable”. Cannell and Kahn (1968), cited by Cohen (2000:269) define research interviews as “a two-person conversation initiated by the interviewer for the specific purpose of obtaining research-relevant information, and focused by him [*sic*] on content specified by research objectives of systematic description, prediction or explanation”. An interview involves gathering data by means of direct verbal interaction between the interviewer and participants. In this study, I used interviews as a tool to complement data collected through documentary analysis in order to ensure validity.

3.4.1 AIMS AND PUROPSE OF INTERVIEWS

According to Cohen (2000:268), the aim of using interviews when conducting research is to:



- Gather information having direct bearing on the research objectives by providing access to what is “inside a person’s head”, making it possible to measure the knowledge or information a person has, the person’s values and preferences, as well his beliefs and attitudes;
- Test hypotheses or suggest new ones; or as an explanatory device to help identify variables and relationships;
- Follow up unexpected results, or to validate other methods, or to go deeper into the motivations of participants and their reasons for responding as they do.

Apart from the above purposes of using interviews when conducting research, McMillan and Schumacher (1989:242) state that interviews are advantageous for the following reasons:

- They have a high response rate, particularly if few participants are involved;
- Both verbal and non-verbal behaviour can be observed because of the face-to-face nature of the communication between the interviewer and the informants;
- The informants’ responses can be probed in order to achieve more accurate details.

By means of the interviews I conducted, I obtained information from relevant and well-informed sources on the restructuring of the administrative governance in the Mpumalanga Department of Education. The data from the interviews allowed me to validate and compare information gathered through the literature review and documentary analysis of the public documents from the Department of Education and to extend the information collected through personal experience.

3.4.2 INTERVIEW PROCEDURES

After my proposal was reviewed and approved by the Research Committee I was given permission to do fieldwork. Doing fieldwork involved, among other things, visiting the sites that had been identified for conducting interviews and for locating participants to be involved in the interviews, crafting questions for interviews, formulating letters of informed consent and letters for permission to conduct the research. Before the interviews were held, I visited the Nkangala Regional



Education Department at KwaMhlanga and submitted a letter requesting permission to conduct the research. I explained what the letter was about and what ethical issues might flow from the request. The letter was accompanied by proof of registration signed by the registrar of the university, as well as the certificate of approved for the topic to be researched. Appointments were secured with regional, former district, circuit and provincial officials. Some officials had retired from active service and appointments were secured with them by telephone.

Letters of informed consent and permission to conduct research were sent to the participants via fax. The questions which were used for the interviews were categorised in terms of the administrative responsibilities of the participants. Among other things, this included their experiences pertaining to how circuits, districts and the provincial Department of Education functioned before the restructuring of the districts, as well as their experiences in terms of how these structures functioned after the restructuring of the districts. Interviews also focused on the powers which were reclaimed by the Head Office from the districts and decentralised them to the regions, and the circuits. The interviewer also probed the rationale behind this exercise, as well as the procedures and processes followed, and the people who were involved with the restructuring.

3.4.3 SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEWS

According to Macmillan and Schumacher (1989:41), semi-structured interviews involve direct interaction between the researcher and the participants. A semi-structured interview is an oral, in-person administration of a standard set of questions that are prepared in advance. Semi-structured questions are phrased to allow unique responses by each subject. Regardless the type of question, the responses are coded, tabulated and summarised numerically. Semi-structured interviews differ from traditional structured interviews, in that the researcher may have some initial guiding questions or core concepts, but there is no formally structured questionnaire.



Furthermore, in a semi-structured interview, the interviewer has the latitude to move the conversation to cover issues of interest that may surface. The interviewer may probe supplementary questions, which are not included in the schedule, so as to explore general views in a detailed fashion. Based on the argument presented by Cohen in Conco (2004:64), a semi-structured interview schedule is aimed at exploring new issues and probing further. However, since each interview tends to be unique, it is sometimes difficult to analyse semi-structured interview data, especially when synthesizing across participants.

In this study, semi-structured interviews were used to gather information from the participants. I adopted this method based on the assumption that such interviews are built upon open-ended questions which allow the participants to respond in whatever way they choose. This exercise is useful for investigating topics in an insightful way. Even though the interviewer has little control over semi-structured interviews, they are perceived to be a means of obtaining directives as to what a participant knows or has little knowledge about (Conco 2004:65).

3.4.4 SELECTION OF PARTICIPANTS

Interviews were organised with various officials within different departments of the Mpumalanga Department of Education at circuit, regional and provincial levels. Some of the participants were former district managers and former or retired circuit managers who were once actively involved with the administration of education in the Mpumalanga Department of Education. These included representatives who worked in the former decentralised administrative and governance model of circuits, districts and the provincial education department. The sample also included circuit managers who were involved in circuit administration, district managers who were involved in district administration, provincial officials who took part in task teams for restructuring the Mpumalanga Department of Education from 1994 to 1999, as well as those who were involved in the task teams when districts were restructured or abolished to form new regional education administrative and governance structures.



Interviews were also held with the representatives of the present, or recentralised, model of administration. These included key officials of the Nkangala Regional Education Department, from departments such as the curriculum section (which is the core business of the Department of Education), the cooperate services, circuit co-ordination, systems and planning, as well as the circuit managers who became part of circuit administration from 2001 to date. The process used for selecting participants involved the following criteria, according to Chabalala (2005:46):

- Enculturation;
- Current involvement.

‘Enculturation’ means the official has been engaged in what they are doing or have been doing for a long period of time and could therefore supply the researcher with relevant and rich information on the topic under investigation. ‘Current involvement’ meant that the officials were either circuit, regional or provincial officials at the time when the study was undertaken.

3.4.5 HOW SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEWS WERE USED

The participants were interviewed about the restructuring of districts in the Mpumalanga Department of Education. The process involved clarifying certain questions, when required. Specific questions were probed more deeply, to ensure clarity in terms of the responses made by the participants. During the proceedings, the participants were given latitude to clear up any uncertainties by asking clarity-seeking questions. This practice was to enable participants to provide rich data. A tape recorder was used during the entire process of the interviews and all responses from the participants were transcribed. Notes were taken of the proceedings in the researcher’s journal, as backup information. Most of the interviewees did not want to be named in this research study, but preferred to be referred to as ‘officials’ at different levels in the department of education. When some of the questions were asked during the interviews, the respondents’ gestures and voices revealed how they felt about the way things happened during the restructuring process.



For this research project, the key questions asked were about their experiences in terms of administration and governance under the decentralised model in education, and what made the system work or not work. The questions took into account the period from 1994 to 1999 when new policies were unveiled, when new education administrative structures were put in place, and when newly established administrative and governance education personnel were appointed to redress the inequalities that were created by the former apartheid education system. Their experiences in terms of policy implementation under the decentralised education administration model, the challenges they encountered, as well as the achievements they experienced, came under focus. The questions also included the period from 1999 to 2004, which was the second term of office of the new government of the democratic South Africa, which focused on accelerated policy implementation. The questions further included the participants' experiences in terms of administration and governance under the recentralised administration and governance model in education.

Interviews were also used as a 'conversational encounter' which is called the "ventionist approach" (Wood 2000:72). Through the use of interviews, I generated the interpretive context in such a way that connections between the interviewees' accounts, practices and variations in functional context became clear. This was done through follow-up questions that invited comparisons, or the identification of limits via extreme case formulations, and standard follow-up probes such as pauses, or a request to talk a little more about the questions under discussion. Conversational analysis was conducted, following the assumption that language can be used as a tool for social action, because people change things within institutions through the power of language. According to Wetherell (2001:49-50), "conversational analysis does not only study interaction, but is also used to investigate talk which takes place in a workplace setting in which participants orient themselves to the relevance of a limited set of work-related discursive tasks".



3.5 ETHICAL ISSUES

According to Cohen (2000:56), ethics are defined as “a matter of principled sensitivity to the rights of others. Being ethical limits the choices we can make in the pursuit of truth. Ethics say that while truth is good, respect for human dignity is better, even if, in the extreme case, the respect of human nature leaves one ignorant of human nature.”

In this study, ethics are generally considered to deal with beliefs about what is right or wrong, proper or improper, good or bad. Since educational research deals with human beings, it is necessary to understand the ethical and legal responsibilities of conducting research. Often researchers face situations in which the potential costs of using questionable methods must be balanced with the benefits of conducting the study. The costs which may potentially result from the research process include, among other things, possible injury or psychological difficulties such as anxiety, shame, loss of self-esteem and affront to human dignity, or they may involve a legal infringement of human rights. Such costs must be weighed against potential benefits, such as gains for the research participants like increased self-understanding, satisfaction in helping, and knowledge of research methods, as well as more obvious benefits in terms of contribution to theory and knowledge of human behaviour.

It became my responsibility as a researcher to weigh these considerations and make the best possible professional judgment. To attain this, it was necessary for me to be fully aware of the ethical and legal principles that should be addressed with the participants. It therefore became essential for me, when conducting this research project, to adhere to the set of ethical principles or issues as identified by, and in accordance with the standard set by Cohen (2000:245-246).

Ethical issues which were discussed and explained to the participants prior the interviews process were, among others:

- The right to withdraw from the interview at any stage;



- The guarantee of confidentiality, anonymity and non-traceability of their responses in the research report;
- The degree of sensitivity and threats of questions, which may lead to over and under-reporting;
- The freedom to react if they considered an item offensive, intrusive, misleading, biased, misguided, irritating, inconsiderate or impertinent.

Making use of letters of informed consent implied that the participants had the right to choose whether or not to participate in this research project. Letters of informed consent were submitted to the participants in order to provide them with an explanation of the research study, an opportunity to terminate their participation at any time with no penalty, and full disclosure of any risk associated with the study. Consent was obtained by asking the participants to sign a form that indicates understanding of the research project and gives their consent to participate. Before the interviews were conducted, I audited the interview procedure to ensure that the terminology used was acceptable and that the questions would be comprehensible to all the participants.

According to Cohen (2000:279), it is important to brief the respondents about the nature of the interview, to explain the manner in which responses will be recorded and to get the participants' consent if the interview is to be tape recorded. I always remembered that I was a data collection instrument and tried not to let my own biases, opinions or curiosity affect my behaviour. It was also important for me not to deviate from my format and interview schedule, although many schedules permit some flexibility in the choice of questions. I made sure to monitor the time of the interviews and abided by it. I attempted to make the participants feel at ease by establishing an appropriate atmosphere, such that they felt secure enough to talk freely. Telephones and cell phones of both the interviewer and the interviewees were switched off. Interfering with the participant while on the platform was guarded against, and the participants were given an adequate amount of time to respond to the interview questions.

The interviews with regional education department officials and some of the circuit managers were performed in the privacy of their offices. Some of the circuit



managers interviewed at their homes during the night and weekends due to their tight daily work schedules as well as the commitments that I had as a teacher and a manager during office hours. The same happened when interviewing district managers who were no longer working for the Mpumalanga Department of Education, as well as the provincial officials. In terms of the provincial officials, another hurdle that was experienced was the long distance travelling to Nelspruit, which was financially costly. Not all the targeted provincial officials were interviewed as intended, as most of them could not be reached due to their tight work schedules. However those that I managed to interview, resided in the western region of Mpumalanga and arrangements were made to conduct interviews with them at their homes. I relied on the interview information which was collected from the officials who were involved in the district restructuring task teams, some of whom are presently regional officials and some have relocated to other provinces.

3.6 DOCUMENTARY ANALYSIS

Documents are records of past and present events. They are written or printed materials that may be official or unofficial, public or private, published or unpublished, prepared intentionally to preserve a historical record, or prepared to serve an immediate practical purpose. Documents may be newsletters, diaries, receipts, maps, autobiographies, journals, newspapers, court records, official minutes, proclamations, regulations and laws. Therefore, documents in general, may be seen as the written impressions left by human beings on physical objects (Bell 1993:68).

According to Cohen (2000:147), documents have the attraction of being available, often at low cost, and being factual. However, on the other hand, they may be unrepresentative; they may be selective, lack objectivity, be of unknown validity, and may possibly be deliberately deceptive. Whilst they may frequently have face validity, be simple and direct, and be gained by non-interventional means reducing the problems of reactivity, they may also be very heavily inferential, difficult to interpret, and may contain elements whose relevance is questionable.



Documentary analysis is the examination, careful reading or in-depth reading of public documents which are in the form of text, be it national directives, official provincial documents, or legislation. According to Wetherell (2001:51), the method of documentary analysis or interpretation forms the basis for temporally updated, shared understanding of actions and events among participants. In the process, linkages are assembled between events and their physical and social background, using a variegated array of presumptions and inferential procedures. I conducted a documentary analysis to gather information on general policy intentions and directives.

Documentary analysis was conducted throughout the entire fieldwork exercise, in order to scrutinise provincial education policies, district, regional and circuit documentation. I also used this procedure during the initial stage of the study to provide the background for the design and to adjust the interview instruments. It was important during the document analysis that I considered both internal and external criticism. In examining a document, the aim was to discover whether it was both genuine (i.e. not forged) and authentic (i.e. it is what it purports to be and truthfully reports on its subject) (Bell 1993:70). It is possible that a researcher or an observer could write a review of report he has never read. For that matter, his review would be genuine due to the mere fact that he wrote it, but it would not be authentic. The guiding principle in terms of document analysis was that everything should be questioned.

3.6.1 AIMS AND PURPOSE OF THE DOCUMENTARY ANALYSIS

In conducting the documentary analysis, I aimed to unveil administrative and governance policy practices that the Mpumalanga Education Department was, or is, confronted with, especially at circuit, district and regional level, compared to what I discovered through the interviews conducted with the participants. I also intended to discover from the documents “witting evidence as well as unwitting evidence”. According to Bell (1993:69), “witting” evidence is the information which the original author of the document wanted to impart, whereas “unwitting” evidence is everything else that can be learned from the document. For example, if the Minister of Education makes a speech announcing a proposed educational



reform, the “witting” evidence would be everything that is stated in the speech about the proposed change. The “unwitting” evidence, on the other hand, would be the underlying assumptions unintentionally revealed by the Minister in the language he uses, and from the fact that a particular approach was chosen by the government to publicise the reform. All documents provide “unwitting” evidence; therefore, it is the obligation of the researcher to carefully assess their precise significance.

3.6.2 ACCESSING DOCUMENTS FOR ANALYSIS

In order for me to access documents, participants were informed before the interviews that certain documents that would be required from their sections for scrutiny in relation to the topic under research. Even though that was the case, at some stages, it became difficult for me to obtain some of the documents I needed. Some of the participants promised to make them available in due course, or that I should come and collect them at a later stage. Some participants promised to consult with the provincial Department of Education to access the documents, as they claimed that the documents were at the provincial archives. Ultimately most of the documents that I assembled were from the Nkangala Regional Education Office, the Government Printers in Pretoria, the National Department of Education and through the internet. The documents in connection with the African National Congress (ANC) were requested from the ANC constituency office located at the Marapyane Khutsong shopping centre.

3.6.3 PROCEDURES FOR DOCUMENTARY ANALYSIS

Public documents collected from the participants were analysed prior to and after the interviews were conducted, to compare the text with what actually transpired during the interviews. Documents for analysis were categorised in terms of levels of information, e.g. those that addressed circuit and district administration and governance in terms of their restructuring from 1994 to 1999; those documents that dealt with the restructuring of circuits and districts post 1999 to date; as well as those that dealt with the establishment of regions. Circuit documents that were analysed included the circuit’s organogram/structure, management plans,



operational plans and reports. The information analysed included the way circuits were constituted on paper compared to the practical situation, the roles of circuit managers, the powers that were delegated to the circuits, and the problems circuits encountered due to these delegated powers.

Documents from the former districts were analysed in terms of their administrative functions, the powers which were delegated to the districts, how they used those powers, and how those powers were delegated from the district to the circuits and schools. The document analysis also focused on the challenges that the districts had in implementing some of the policies, as well as the general organisation of districts and co-ordination with other stakeholders.

Regional documents that were analysed concentrated on how the region is administratively structured and the way these structures are co-ordinated. This was done through the analysis of the new regional organogram or structure. Public speeches made by Education Departmental officials were read, with reference to known stories from interviewees about the history in terms of how administration and governance in education has changed over the years. Newsletters and narratives on personal experiences and departmental narratives about the state of administration and governance in the Mpumalanga Department of Education were used to surface important information with regard to the topic under investigation.

Analysis was also conducted in terms of the administrative responsibilities of different sections of the regional structures, their challenges, their achievements in terms of education administration and provision of services in the region, and their working relationships with the circuits and schools. Provincial documents on the restructuring of education were also analysed, to investigate how different levels of education were restructured and to locate the reason behind each restructuring phase. Document analysis focused on the administrative problems encountered, the challenges met, as well as the procedures that made the system function as it is to date.



3.7 LITERATURE REVIEW

3.7.1 AIMS AND PURPOSE OF THE LITERATURE REVIEW

According to De Vos (2002:65) literature review discloses what other researchers have already found concerning the same research topic. He states further that conducting a literature review presents a substantially better insight into the dimensions and complexity of the problem, equips the researcher with justification for subsequent steps, and yields a realisation of the importance of the undertaking.

In this study the literature review was conducted for various reasons. Flick (2006:59) indicates that reviewing literature in the area of a particular research should help the researcher to answer the following questions:

- What is already known about the issue in particular or in general?
- Which theories are used and discussed in this area of study?
- What concepts are used or disputed?
- What are theoretical or methodological debates or controversies in this field?
- What questions are still open?
- What has not been studied yet?

3.7.2 PROCEDURE FOR THE LITERATURE REVIEW

A wide ranging review of international and national literature was conducted, including policy and public documents focusing on decentralisation and recentralisation as government administrative models. This was done in order to refine the methodology that informs this study, to develop a focus for identifying issues to be explored and approaches to be used, and to develop applicable research tools. The literature review also sought to provide significantly better insight into the complexities of decentralisation and recentralisation at all levels of education administration.



The international and national literature review revealed that decentralisation is not new in the field of education research, and has been used by governments to achieve various administrative and governance agenda. The role and prominence of decentralisation as an administrative tool is evident in western societies. The reasons for administrative decentralisation in different countries were unveiled, forming the basis for arguments for decentralisation in South African education, as well as its provincial departments of education. Decentralisation can be seen to be an overall model for power distribution and also hints within itself at certain elements of centralisation, depending on where the power lies.

The literature review also revealed that in the process of decentralisation, it is possible that governments may resort to recentralisation, due to lack of control or fear of power loss. This argument is central in arguing the state of education administration and governance affairs in the Mpumalanga Department of Education from 2002 to date, in trying to investigate what really led the Department of Education to recentralise, and in analysing what effects recentralisation had on education provision and service delivery.

3.8 THE RESEARCHER AS A SOURCE OF INFORMATION

I was first appointed as an educator in the former Bophuthatswana government in the late 1980s. During the dawn of the democratic South Africa, the area in which I was teaching was incorporated into the Eastern Transvaal, which later became Mpumalanga. I witnessed the change of government and the challenges that came with it. Later I became a manager in a school during the new dispensation. I also played a vital role as a member of the district Culture of Learning, Teaching and Services (COLTS) team during the districts era, whereby on many occasions I was invited to attend the District Management Team (DMT) meetings.

The education administration and governance aspects that are addressed by this study occurred within the years of my service for the Mpumalanga Department of Education as a teacher and a manager. This experience has been used, where relevant, as a basis for understanding the views and perspectives from the literature reviewed and the information gathered from the interviews. I was careful



not to privilege this experience over data received from original sources. I attempted to keep a strategic distance from the data, was open to new information encountered, and was open to be persuaded by it.

3.9 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

I am a manager in one of the high schools in the Mpumalanga Department of Education. I therefore acknowledge that I might have been biased in the interpretation of the findings. When collecting data, I was limited to nine participants as a source of information. Some of the documents that participants referred me to were hard to locate and therefore I basically depended on the discussions with participants who had the authority to support the claims that were made.

Some of the regional and provincial officials targeted by this study could not be interviewed, because they kept on postponing the appointments until they decided not to participate in the interviews. Regular absenteeism of some of the officials made it difficult for me to secure appointments with them and as such, I decided to exclude them from my interview plan.

3.10 ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION OF DATA

Data analysis involves organising, accounting for, and explaining the data; in short, noting patterns, themes, categories and regularities. “Typically in qualitative research, data analysis commences during the data collection process” (Cohen 2000:147). Among other things, the aim is to move from description to explanation and theory generation. “This may proceed by comparing different groups simultaneously and over time, matching the responses in interviews to observed behaviour, analysis of deviant and negative cases, and assembling and providing sufficient data that keeps separate raw data from analysis.” Creswell (2003:190) expands the process of data analysis by stating that it requires preparation of the data for analysis, moving deeper into understanding it and representing it, and making an interpretation of the larger meaning of it. Much of the qualitative data for



this study was in the form of words; thus transcripts from the interviews had to be read and understood in order to become familiar with their meaning.

3.11 DATA ANALYSIS SPIRAL

Leedy and Ormrod (2005:151) describe data analysis as a spiral which is based on Creswell's perception that, no matter how you proceed, data analysis for a qualitative study is a complex and time consuming undertaking. The researcher has to go through a great deal of information, some of which will be useful and some of which will not. Furthermore, the data obtained are multifaceted and may reflect several different meanings simultaneously. In a qualitative study, the interpretation of data is inevitably influenced by the researcher's biases and values to some extent, reflecting the issue of the researcher as an instrument of research.

When analysing the data for this study I, adopted the spiral approach for data analysis presented by Leedy and Ormrod (see Fig. 3.1) and followed the steps of data analysis as proposed by Creswell (1998) (in Leedy & Ormrod 2005:150), which included the following:

- Organising the data; this involves breaking large units into smaller one, filing and creating a computer database when using a computer coding system.
- Perusing the data; this involves an overall "sense" of the data and jotting down preliminary interpretations.
- Classification; this involves grouping data into categories or themes and finding meanings in the data.
- Synthesis; this involves offering hypothesis or propositions and constructing tables, diagrams and hierarchies.

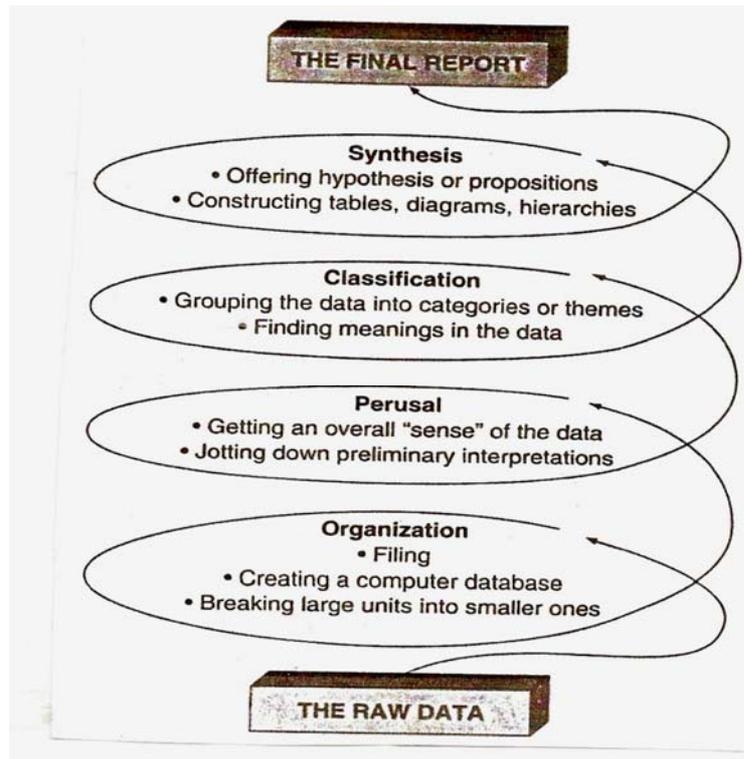


Figure 3.1 The data analysis spiral based on Creswell (1998) in Leedy & Ormrod (2005:150)

• ORGANISING THE DATA

According to this step in the data analysis spiral, I organised the data as follows. The data that I collected through tape recorded interviews was transcribed. According to Schiffrin, Tannen and Hamilton (2003:322), transcripts are the captured flow of discourse events in written and spatial medium which includes who said what, to whom, in what manner and under what circumstances. The transcripts were grouped in terms of the levels of the participants in the education administration and governance in the province, as follows:

- the former circuit managers from 1994 to 1999;
- the former district managers from 1996 to 1999;
- the present circuit managers from 1999 to date;
- the regional officials from 2002 to date; and
- the provincial officials from 1999 to date.



Documents relating to the data collected through the interviews were also arranged accordingly. The large body of text was then broken down into smaller units, which were in the form of individual words in preparation for analysis.

- **PERUSING THE DATA**

Data perusal in this study involved listening and reading to gain an overall picture of what the data revealed. Careful listening and reading became the most important parts of data perusal; therefore I perused the entire set of data that was recorded during the interviews and the document analysis. This was done several times to get a sense of what it contains as a whole. This procedure concurs with the view of data analysis of Wetherell (2001:38-39), that analysis must be open-ended, circular or interactive. It should involve going over data again and again, whether listening to recordings or reading transcripts or documents, noting features of interest but not settling on them.

The procedure that I followed was to peruse the organised data according to the levels of administration and governance as indicated above. During the process I jotted down notes, and wrote notes in the margins, which suggested possible categories or interpretations, which is called coding. According to Wetherell (2001:38-39) coding is the process of sorting and categorising data to identify patterns and it is done by underlining and marking up sections of data. According to Hardy and Bryman (2004:615), the principal task of coding is to make the task of analysis straightforward by sifting relevant material from large bodies of recordings and transcripts. This process of assembling large pieces of, or groups of data, and putting them together to make a coherent whole, allows the researcher to move towards the intention of description, to explanation and theory generation (Cohen 2000:148). Data perusal also involved matching the field notes, contrasting, aggregating, comparing and ordering the notes made.

- **CLASSIFICATION OF DATA**

At this stage I identified general categories or themes of data and classified them accordingly. This involved grouping the data into categories or themes, clusters,



patterns and coherent sets, to form a domain. It was at this stage that I reviewed the codes I had used to see how they naturally fell into clusters. According to Hardy and Bryman (2004:615-616), coding becomes a cyclical process. I experienced this in the sense that the extent of data often took me back to the original records in order to understand the phenomenon better and to reveal new examples. Often initially unrelated topics that seemed unique were subsequently grouped. For this reason, coding became inclusive rather than exclusive.

- **SYNTHESIS OF DATA**

At this stage I followed the guideline as proposed by Leedy and Ormrod (2005:151) by describing the relationships among categories. Related data from the interview, documentary analysis and literature review was packaged into an organisational scheme such as tables, diagrams and hierarchies. This procedure helped me to offer hypothesis or propositions of the study under investigation for the readers.

3.12 VALIDATION OF THE STUDY

The objective of addressing validity in this research study was to make sure that the research assumptions are internally and externally consistent, are supported by the data and are not contrary to existing knowledge. According to Vithal and Jansen (2002:32), validity is an attempt to 'check out' whether the meaning and interpretation of an event is sound, or whether a particular measure is an accurate reflection of what the researcher intends to find out. Bisschoff and Koebe (2005:157) state that this aspect of research is sometimes called "trustworthiness".

In order to produce a high quality data analysis that is credible, accurate and true, I adopted the validity strategies as explained by Hardy and Bryman (2004:617):

- Participants' orientations;
- Coherence.



▪ PARTICIPANTS' ORIENTATIONS

According to Hardy and Bryman (2004:617), one principle of the validation of research work is that analytical claims should be supported by detailed evidence that the participants in an interaction are familiar with what is claimed. In the case of this study the data collected through the interview was validated by documentary evidence that was referred to by the participants, and the literature review.

▪ COHERENCE

The accumulation of empirical findings and analytic studies allows new studies to be compared for their coherence. The exercise of constructing facts builds on the insights about accountability from earlier studies and its success provides further confirmation of the validity of those studies. To ensure coherence in this study, I used the data collected by means of the literature review to compare how the existing knowledge fits in with, or is related to the data collected through the interviews with different categories of participants.

3.13 PROFILE INFORMATION OF PARTICIPANTS

I collected data from nine participants at different levels of education administration and governance in the Mpumalanga Department of Education. These participants were former and present circuit managers, former district managers, present regional officials and key provincial education personnel. All the participants had experience of the administration and governance during the former circuits and districts era, and the present circuit, regional and provincial administration era. The profile of each participant is given below.

PARTICIPANT A

This participant had been a circuit manager for 10 years, from 1997 to 2006. He had managed the circuit in the rural area of the former Bophuthatswana



government, which was later incorporated into the Mpumalanga Department of Education.

PARTICIPANT B

This participant had been a circuit manager for 10 years, from 1997 to 2007. He had managed the circuit in the rural area of the former Kwa-Ndebele government, which was later incorporated into the Mpumalanga Department of Education.

PARTICIPANT C

This participant had been a circuit manager for six years, from 2001 to 2007. He had managed the circuit in the rural area of the former central government, which was later incorporated into the Mpumalanga Department of Education.

PARTICIPANT D

This participant was one of the task team members who established the new Department of Education in Mpumalanga in 1993. He was based at Head Office and co-ordinated all the districts. He was also a member of the task team that dealt with the restructuring of districts in the Mpumalanga Department of Education. He later became a district manager and after the districts were abolished, he was appointed as one of the key officials in the new regional structure. He served the Mpumalanga Department of Education for 12 years.

PARTICIPANT E

This participant joined the Department of Education in 1987 as a teacher in a school. After five years he was promoted to be a principal. In 1996 he was appointed as a district manager. From 2002 to 2007 he was a key official and influential personnel member in the Mpumalanga Provincial Department of Education.



PARTICIPANT F

This participant worked as a school principal for a long time before the new dispensation. In 1994, she was seconded to the Provincial Department of Education in the curriculum component as the provincial co-ordinator for the curriculum. From 2003 to 2007, she was a head of the curriculum component at regional level.

PARTICIPANT G

This participant joined the Department of Education in 1981 under the central government and was attached to the Moutse circuit office, which later became an area office under the former Northern Transvaal region. He worked there until the new dispensation. He was then transferred to a sub-structure between the districts level and the Head Office, before the regional system was introduced. He was responsible for the Persal Administration System during the districts era. The Persal Administration System deals with the appointment and payment of educators. Presently this participant is a key administration official for the Persal Administration System at the regional office.

PARTICIPANT H

Before this participant joined the administration and governance of the region, he was a secretary for the Bargaining Council from 2000 to 2004. He was appointed as a key official in the administration of the region in 2004. He had been rendering his services at the regional office for almost four years, that is, from 2004 to 2007.

PATICIPANT I

Before this participant joined the administration and governance of the region, he was head of the curriculum component at the provincial department for four years. She was then transferred to become the regional head in the Further Education and Training (FET) curriculum sub-division.



3.14 MY EXPERIENCE WHEN CONDUCTING THIS RESEARCH

Conducting a research project of this magnitude had been a learning curve. The experiences that I had during the fieldwork brought about a sense of the difficulties involved in conducting research while being a part time student and a manager of a school. From time to time I had meetings with my supervisor, which was valuable and informative. I also had to attend the research support programme on a regular basis, organised by the Department of Education Management, Law and Policy at the university. The knowledge that I gained from this programme helped me in approaching interviews, sharpening my research questions and developing a focus for my study. When I was doing field work, I learned that, as a researcher one has to be patient with the participants in order to draw from them data which is credible.

3.15 CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the use of a combination of research methods for data collection in this study has revealed that a single research method cannot be sufficient in assisting one to make sound progress in accomplishing the objectives of a research study. The use of interviews helped particularly when I was trying to make sense out of the documents which I were analysing. Furthermore, the interviews brought to light more data that was not contained in the documents, in terms of the problems faced by administrators due to the restructuring process and the changed education administration models. Dialogues with participants during the interviews helped me to get an in-depth understanding of what was happening and what is happening in the institution under study. Conversations with participants helped me to clear the mist in terms of the terminology used, which could not have been understood under normal circumstances of analysing dry information or data from the text within documents.

The documentary analysis helped me to compare the assertions that were made during the interviews, with what is documented. The literature review, as a data collection tool, helped me to locate the topic under investigation in terms of international perspectives on decentralisation and recentralisation, and to compare



how these two models of education restructuring match with South African perspectives and experiences.



CHAPTER 4

ESTABLISHMENT OF THE MPUMALANGA DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION: 1994-1999

4.1 INTRODUCTION

During the period 1994 to 1999 nine new provinces came into being in the new democratic South Africa. The Mpumalanga Department of Education was established as one of the nine provincial education departments in terms of the Interim Constitution. According to Coombe and Godden (1996:7), provincial departments of education followed the decentralisation route wishing to create strong control and delivery-oriented structures, in order to promote and monitor equity of education provision. In the case of the Mpumalanga Department of Education, decentralisation was also founded on the principles of Act No. 8 of 1995 Chapter 2(7) namely that:

- There shall be democratic and decentralised governance of schools and school education providing for the appropriate involvement of elected representatives of the main stakeholders in school education.
- The structure of democratic governance of school education shall be constituted with due regard to the racial and gender demographics of the province.
- Education policy shall aim at:
 - i. achieving cost efficient and effective use of educational resources eliminating wastage, inefficiency, mal-administration and corruption;
 - ii. improving the quality and availability of educational opportunities and resources to the people of the province.

4.2 EXPERIENCES OF ESTABLISHMENT: 1994-1999

According to Sehoole (2005:55), the establishment of the Mpumalanga Department of Education involved the integration of different departments of education inherited from the former apartheid education system, namely the



Department of Education and Culture (House of Assembly for whites, House of Delegates for Indians and House of Representatives for coloureds), the Department of Education and Training for Africans, part of the Bophuthatswana Department of Education in the case of 'independent' African homelands, and Kwa-Ndebele and Kan-Gwane which were known as self-governing territories (Sehoole 2005:7). The other departments came from Gazankulu and KwaZulu-Natal in places around Ermelo.

The period 1994 to 1999 is regarded as the Mandela administration era and is renowned for having put structures and new policies in place. Decentralisation was a means of improving the quality of education and making available opportunities and resources to the people of the province (School Education Act (Mpumalanga) (Act No. 8, 1995).

According to Coombe and Godden (1996:58-59), when any system is restructured by implementing decentralisation, regulations and structures have to be changed, and authority and responsibilities have to be devolved and shared among the various spheres of education administration and governance. The underlying principle for the Mpumalanga Department of Education to decentralise concurs with Lauglo's version of rationales for decentralisation (cited by Coombe and Godden 1996:17-18).

The Mpumalanga Department of Education established a task team to manage the restructuring exercise. The task team established Strategic Management Teams (SMTs) which were demarcated in terms of their responsibilities. Some were responsible for setting up administration, some were responsible for the restructuring of circuit offices, some dealt with the provincial organogram and some were given the responsibility of crafting new policies for the provincial government.

One provincial official highlighted that from 1994, the policy of the Mpumalanga Department of Education was to involve people in crafting the policies and the organogram of different administrative structures for the new provincial education department. It was during this period that various provincial education policies and



legislation were promulgated, such as the Mpumalanga School Education Act, (Act No 8 of 1995), which became a key policy document in terms of administration and governance of education in the province; the Mpumalanga School Amendment Act; and the Mpumalanga Sports Commission Bill. The task team responsible for drawing up an organogram for the provincial education department recommended a four-tier administrative structure, namely provincial, district, circuit and school levels. Powers were decentralised in order for the Mpumalanga Department of Education to realise improved service delivery by means of these structures.

According to Sayed (2002:37), the general view of educational decentralisation is to redistribute, share, and extend power, and enhance participation by removing centralised control over educational decision making. However, one provincial official indicated that many challenges surfaced during the formation of the Mpumalanga Department of Education. These included the deployment and the utilisation of the officials who came from former apartheid departments of education. According to one provincial official, there was much duplication of posts and all the people wanted to be absorbed in the system with the same posts they had occupied during the apartheid bureaucracy. The first main challenge was to identify the best officials and appoint them in vacant posts in order to establish the best department of education.

The second challenge, according to the same official, was to manage the tension created for those who did not meet the criterion of the sifting process, and to find ways of absorbing them in the system. The third challenge was to create a truly non-racial composition of officials employed in the new department. The aim was to integrate all the former departments in such a way that traces of the past apartheid structures would be eradicated. With the former self-governing territories Kan-Gwane and Kwa-Ndebele having been totally absorbed into the new province, there was always a risk that the smaller entities from the former self governing territories of Bophuthatswana and Gazankulu would be marginalised. The same respondent further highlighted that the intention of the provincial Department of Education was to become a new department which did not necessarily have the tendencies and the character of either the former Kwa-Ndebele or Kan-Gwane Department of Education. These two departments are always given as examples



because they were entirely incorporated into the Mpumalanga Department of Education. Bophuthatswana and Gazankulu contributed small parts which were more easily absorbed. So the tension has always been the struggle to establish a new department with new values and practices, completely different from those of its constituent parts.

The Mpumalanga Department of Education, with skeletal administrative personnel and structures already in place, took charge and continued to implement policies which were initiated during the Mandela era. This included drawing from the Constitution of South Africa (Act 108 of 1996), the South African Schools Act (Act 84 of 1996) (SASA), and the National Education Policy Act 27 of 1996 (NEPA), which were the national and provincial directives in terms of education administration and governance, in order to inform their practice. The Constitution of South Africa laid the foundation for the emergence of policies which aimed at redressing past inequalities through the decentralised administration approach. According to Coombe and Godden (1996:32-33), the priorities for action are the following: begin to decentralise from the Head Office down to the school level in order to secure more information on needs and resources; concentrate on processes rather than on structures; develop capacity building strategies for teachers and managers; involve community leaders and clusters of schools in managing school improvement plans; and implement new funding formulae initiated nationally to start to redress identified inequalities within the system.

The Constitution of 1996 further defines the basic values and principles governing public administration, which must be adhered to, in order to ensure the regulation of public administration. The aim was to devolve power and authority to the grassroots level in order to democratise and redress societal imbalances and to ensure quality and service delivery through effective and efficient administration. The South African Schools Act provided a framework for restructuring the governance and funding of schools. It was through these legislative frameworks that organisations in the Mpumalanga Department of Education were restructured and given directives as to how the business of education should be administered. Section 8 (1-7) of the National Education Policy Act ensured that the monitoring and evaluation of education occurred through the Minister of Education and



provincial political heads. However, the introduction of these policies was based on the assumption that the government had the power, authority and resources to implement them (Hartshorne 1999:5).

4.3 DISTRICTS IN THE MPUMALANGA DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION: 1996-1999

Districts under the Mpumalanga Department of Education were established in 1996 after the circuits had been established. However this study discusses these levels of education administration and governance in terms of their hierarchy, that is; the provincial Department of Education, districts and circuits.

According to one district manager, districts in the Mpumalanga Department of Education were established in 1996 based on the principle and understanding that the provincial department needed to have a very lean Head Office and decentralised education structures. The principle underpinning the creation of decentralised structures was the desire to be accessible to clients and improve service delivery. This assertion is supported by Coombe and Godden (1996:7), namely that the emergence of districts and other lower levels of education governance in the democratic South Africa was the result of the colloquium on local/district levels in education which was held in Vereeniging, South Africa, in June 1995. This event was organised with the intention of creating workable education administration at local levels. It also sought ways to encourage fresh creativity, professional initiative, and proactive leadership at local levels. The aim of the colloquium was also to manage disparities through the decentralisation of powers.

According to Brown (1990:34), one reason for decentralisation is to disperse specialised knowledge in the peripheral units in order to attain organisational objectives. Since the executive education administrations in the nine provinces were still new, the provincial departments of education wished to create strong control and delivery-oriented structures at the provincial level in order to promote and monitor equity and quality of education provision and delivery. According to Paqueo & Lammert (2000:1), the rationale for decentralisation through the



formation of districts was to increase efficiency. This move by the Mpumalanga provincial Department of Education was intended to promote efficiency by eliminating former bureaucratic procedures and motivating officials to be more service delivery oriented. This was made possible by delegating decision-making through the redistribution of authority to other spheres of the provincial Education Department.

According to Hannaway and Carnoy (1993:62-71), the rationale that was applied is called the 'redistribution of authority'. According to these authors, the redistribution of authority rationale is effectively exercised when it is put into effect by the central government and its agencies such as circuits, districts and regions, with some significant variations. Interviews with one former district manager revealed that districts were identified as a one-stop service to facilitate effective administration at circuit and school levels, and to connect them to the main frame at provincial offices. However, the emergence and demarcation of districts as education administrative structures in the Mpumalanga province was accompanied by various challenges.

According to one former district manager, the first attempt at demarcating districts came with heated arguments because various members of the task teams who were involved with the restructuring advocated that districts should be demarcated in line with municipal boundaries, whereas others preferred to ignore municipal boundaries. The task teams ultimately opted to have districts established or demarcated in terms of municipal boundaries.

The formation of districts in the Mpumalanga Department of Education involved the clustering of circuits in terms of their proximity. The process resulted in the establishment of ten (10) districts: Eerstehoek, Ermelo, Groblersdal, Hazyview, KwaMhlanga, Malelane, Moretele, Nelspruit, Standerton and Witbank. Each of the ten (10) districts was further divided into circuits. According to the data obtained from the Education Management and Information System (EMIS) of the provincial Department of Education, presented in the report of the Department of Education (a) (1999/200:237-240), the demographics of the districts were as follows:



Table 4.1 Education districts in the Mpumalanga Province

Districts	Circuits	Schools	Educators	Learners
Eerstehoek	5	156	2 249	87 568
Ermelo	7	278	2 499	92 191
Groblersdal	5	172	2 627	93 452
Hazyview	5	239	2 790	99 536
KwaMhlanga	6	154	2 935	92 098
Malelane	5	166	2 498	99 754
Moretele	5	200	2 107	65 033
Nelspruit	6	194	2 554	89 664
Standerton	10	300	3 160	104 727
Witbank	6	333	2 989	101 158

Source: Department of Education (a) (1999/2000)

Middleburg was chosen as the education headquarters, because of its centrality and convenience as a Head Office location. To enable the districts to function, the then MEC for education in Mpumalanga, Mr. D. D. Mabusa, proposed the appointment of the first consignment of district managers. The mandate for appointing the district managers became the responsibility of the then chief director. With little or no consultation, he decided to make appointments from the members of the task teams who were engaged in the restructuring of the education system in the province. Some of the appointees were uncomfortable with this decision, which resulted in them not accepting the appointments because they were neither consulted nor interviewed for the job. This situation was viewed by many as a 'handshake' which could result in appointees agreeing with anything that the new bureaucracy might dictate.

This former district manager further indicated that the establishment of districts was based on the requirement of the National Department of Education that the decentralisation of the administration and governance of education by provincial authorities had to devolve responsibilities to districts. Equally the districts had to devolve responsibilities to circuits and schools for them to acquire self-managing status (Department of Education (b) 2003:286). District managers were charged with the administrative responsibilities of making sure that districts, circuits and



schools become more effective through systematic improvement, focused particularly on planning, communication and service delivery.

According to Hannaway and Carnoy (1993:62-67) this rationale for decentralisation is called the 'rationale for efficiency'. In their view, the rationale for efficiency is based on the assumption that decentralised structures of administration and governance should yield efficiency in the management of the educational system, by bringing untapped local and private resources into the overall resource pool available to education. They further indicate that this is still a controversial issue, much as decentralisation and community participation are just currently fashionable models. This is because governments are pleased to accept the resources and the grassroots initiatives which coincide with their own concepts, but they are rarely willing to relinquish control and place themselves in a position where their policies can be undermined.

Following the decentralised model of education administration adopted by the Mpumalanga Department of Education, the district administration established District Management Teams (DMT's). The District Management Teams became the strategic bodies which were responsible for making sure that education provision in the districts worked according to the mandate of the provincial education department, and that circuits networked and functioned in conjunction with schools, communities and other stakeholders. Circuit managers were also part of the District Teams and from time to time the districts involved them when strategising as to how the districts should function. According to Act No 85 of 1995, the district managers were to report quarterly in writing to the district council on the state of education in the district.

Department of Education (b) (2003:284) indicates that a key element in this process was the Integrated Planning Process (IPP) predicated on the need for the districts to undergo a change of role from being a control centre to being a service centre. The provincial Department of Education delegated powers to make the districts functional in terms of service provision. Powers which were delegated to the districts were more extensive than those that were delegated to circuits, but were not enough for districts to function as they were supposed to. On paper,



districts were supposed to have all the functions and personnel that the Head Office had. This former district manager indicated that the intention was good but the implementation was not, because of poor support and monitoring, as well as interference by the Head Office in the implementation of policies at lower levels; hence the whole exercise became more theoretical than practical.

The other factor that aggravated the situation was the fact that the Head Office officials did not understand their roles properly. Instead of focusing on policy development, policy monitoring and strategic developments, they were more intent on implementing policies themselves. Such a situation is explained by Karlsen (1999:11), in that the critical requirements for decentralisation efforts are central control and supervision; otherwise if not properly controlled, units will be absorbed into centralised or semi-centralised structures of educational administration and governance.

From 1996 to 1999 there was only one administrator at Head Office (the district co-ordinator) who was charged with the responsibility of co-ordinating district services, working with the chief director and one typist. The district co-ordinator reported to the chief director in terms of the operation of the districts. Due to understaffing, the co-ordination of districts became very poor at both the provincial and district levels. Districts did not have officials to co-ordinate district activities directly with the Head Office; hence support and proper management became weak and minimal, and this hampered service delivery at the lower levels. Districts also did not have enough personnel at district level to co-ordinate the districts with the circuits and community based structures.

Although the districts grouped themselves to form a district council, this structure did not work as envisaged, due to the lack of resources and work overload that districts were experiencing. The documentary analysis showed that posts which had been allocated to districts, as indicated in the documents, were not filled. Most districts continued to operate with skeletal administrative and governance personnel from 1996 to 1999. The situation was revealed by the Department of Education (a) (1999/200:242) as follows:



Table 4.2 Number of personnel per district

DISTRICT	DISTRICT OFFICIALS	APPROVED POSTS	FILLED POSTS	VACANT POSTS
Eerstehoek	Cs-educators Administration	23	8	15
		49	9	40
		72	17	55
Ermelo	Cs-educators Administration	34		
		127		
		161	51	110
Groblersdal	Cs-educators Administration	28	15	13
		91	44	47
		119	59	69
Hazyview	Cs-educators Administration			
KwaMhlanga	Cs-educators Administration		16	
			64	
		110	80	60% vacant
Malelane	Cs-educators Administration	33		
		44		
		77		
Moretele	Cs-educators Administration		9	
			15	
		136	24	112
Nelspruit	Cs-educators Administration		15	107
			17	67
		127	32	174
Standerton	Cs-educators Administration	24	11	13
		92	11	81
		144	22	94
Witbank	Cs-educators Administration	33	19	14
		122	36	86
		155	55	100

Source: Department of Education (a) (1999/2000)

The situation of vacant district posts, as presented in the above table, weakened the administration of the districts; hence service delivery became very poor. This situation also affected the districts negatively in terms of monitoring service delivery at circuit and school levels. According to the United States Agency for International Development (USAID 2005:1), weak management and administration, insufficient funding and weak system support make it difficult to realise the positive potential of decentralisation. In terms of co-ordination at grassroots' levels, although there were discrepancies such as poor interpretation of policies, and limited personnel, districts did their best to build relationships with circuits, schools and community based structures. Education *Indabas* were held with stakeholders to discuss the education challenges they were faced with. According to Coombe and Godden (1996:18), decentralisation in this case



became a good tool to co-ordinate local services and to spread the professional responsibility for the education enterprise.

Department of Education (b) (2003:291) indicates that despite the emphasis on service provision, each district needed to examine and strengthen its own administrative capacity to ensure that it had the following systems in place: well-documented internal policies and procedures; a system of internal staff development; a well-developed system for dealing with labour relations; a fully functioning district Education Management Information System as a basis for planning; a system for procurement; and a system for financial administration and budget control. According to the Department of Education (b) (2003:226) there was a relationship between the functions and roles districts had to fulfil, and the policy and legislation that had already been adopted such as:

- The South African Schools Act (Act 84 of 1996), which was concerned with the decentralisation of education administration and school governing body support;
- The policy on Curriculum 2005 of 1996 and the policy on Assessment of 1997, which were concerned with the newly introduced curriculum;
- The Employment of Educators Act (Act 76 of 1998), which was concerned with labour issues;
- The policy on the Developmental Appraisal System of 1998, which dealt with educator appraisal and staff development;
- The Regulation on Post Provisioning Act of 1999, the policy on Advertising and Filling of Educator Posts of 1998 and the Regulations for Educators of 1999, which dealt with human resource management;
- The National Policy on HIV/AIDS of 1999, which dealt with HIV/AIDS in terms of district management.

Despite the availability of these policies and legislative frameworks, districts in the Mpumalanga Department of Education experienced great challenges in terms of limited delegated powers, responsibilities and functions. There was a perceived centralisation of certain functions and powers at the Head Office, such that the districts had to refer everything to the Head Office on many occasions. Therefore,



districts were sometimes viewed by stakeholders simply as bigger 'post offices'. This assertion is supported by Jansen who argues that "it is clear that the scores of district offices in every province, originally conceived as drivers of development and capacity building in schools, are with few exceptions, nothing more than post office facilities delivering messages between schools and provinces. The depth and quality of expertise to manage from the district office is simply non-existent" (Jansen 2007:24).

As outlined by one district manager, the role of the districts was supposed to include: overseeing the implementation of policies; ensuring that circuits and schools were well co-ordinated, ensuring the effective functioning of circuits, promoting community liaison services; promoting efficient school governance; and handling labour relations. Districts were also charged with the responsibility of making sure that human and physical resources were available in schools. One district manager emphatically indicated that although that was what the districts were supposed to achieve on paper, little was done to change the administration in the districts and circuits of the province.

The main challenge, similar to the challenge which was faced when the provincial department was formed, was absorbing and integrating personnel from former apartheid departments of education, and forming education units that should work together to transform education at the lower levels of education provision and service delivery. This challenge was exacerbated by the fact that the district structure and the staff establishment that was approved by the Public Service Commission, was largely influenced by the fact that the Department had to absorb personnel from various defunct departments (Department of Education (a) 1999/2000:225).

The situation was fluid in the sense that new policies were subjected to change from time to time, for example, the South African Schools Act (SASA) (Act 84 of 1996) was being introduced and was changing the shape of the administration and governance of education in schools. Education administrators had to commit themselves to move away from the old education practices to the new democratic practices ordered by the new policies. However, this was done by looking at the



past while building the future. The aim was to keep the system operating efficiently, while at the same time developing and implementing strategies for redressing gross inequities in the system (Coombe & Godden 1996:20).

However, officials from different backgrounds in the apartheid education system were unsettled by the fact that they were familiar with the history of the implementation of apartheid policies, which had to be done away with. There was a period of phasing out old policies, while continuing to apply them, in order to prevent a void in the implementation process. This transition of phasing policies in and out brought its own tensions, whereby newly introduced policies were not implemented as they were supposed to be; hence they ran the risk of becoming symbolic. This occurred due to poor interpretation of policies and, to some extent, resistance in terms of their implementation.

According to the Department of Education (a) (1999/2000:246), resistance to the implementation of policies was due to bringing together seven different organisational structures, seven different organisational cultures, and seven different sets of personnel with different work ethics and outlook. This brought about a tendency among departmental employees to resist change and this challenge was reflected at both district and Head Office levels. The outcomes of this behaviour were communication breakdowns, conflict and complaints of sabotage in the education departments of the province. As already mentioned, another challenge that was faced by the districts was understaffing and lack of capacity by the personnel who had been appointed. Centralisation by the Head Office also became a challenge whereby even minor things such as accessing boxes of chalk, had to be done via the Head Office. This exercise is referred by Shaku, the former district manager of Groblersdal as quoted from the National & Provincial District Development report mentioned above as 'bureaucratisation'.

One district manager indicated that districts generally had problems in terms of poor school buildings. In some cases the problem was exacerbated when certain schools were damaged by storms and it took time for district managers to get them repaired because of financial constraints. Districts were not able to repair school buildings or to control their own budgets – they always had to wait for approval



from the Head Office. District managers recalled the poor financial planning exercises, which they described as follows. They were given the latitude to draw up their own budgets which were submitted to the Head Office. The proposed budgets were incorporated in the Head Office budget and became the budget for the entire provincial Department of Education. They further claimed that the procedure that the Head Office followed to allocate finances to the districts was simply to divide the proposed totals by ten (10), irrespective of how big or advanced one district may have been compared to another.

In actual fact, the funding for districts was supposed to be differentiated, because a district like Witbank was formerly advantaged and was much better resourced, compared to the rural disadvantaged districts. This situation was the same in terms of infrastructure and physical resources. The Head Office would divide everything by ten and distribute resources equally to the districts. This situation resulted in the districts from the former advantaged areas performing better than those in the rural disadvantaged areas. Paqueo & Lammert (2000:5) regard this as a negative consequence of decentralisation on equity in education, because it tended to widen the performance gap between students in wealthy and poor areas.

Financial constraints hampered the administration of the districts to the extent that many circuits continued without having the necessary resources to ensure effective service delivery. This concurs with James's (2003:17) assertion that decentralisation does not by itself remove inequalities between localities, varying incomes and quality, but poorer communities continue to exist.

In terms of Physical Resources Management (PRM), one district manager indicated that the Head Office handled all the school budgets, and districts were unable to give clear explanations to schools in cases where their budget priorities were not correctly processed. There was a central committee which controlled the district budgets, which meant that if a district wanted to purchase a minor thing costing a small amount of money, a district official had to drive more than 600 km to Head Office to submit a claim. This paralysed the provincial department financially and also hampered service delivery. The interview with district



managers clearly indicated that although the Head Office allocated physical resources to districts, these were not enough to help them accomplish their mission of service delivery. An example of a problem with resources, such as state vehicles, was that when they broke down, the Head Office took a long time to repair them. As a result, the delivery of text books and furniture to schools was hampered to the extent that many schools operated for some time without text books.

Due to the poor transport system, workshops which districts scheduled with stakeholders were postponed from time to time, and sometimes were not conducted at all. This problem was created by the fact that some of the vehicles allocated to districts were old and unroadworthy, which became a hindrance for district officials to perform their day-to-day responsibilities. Due to the lack of transport, communication at different levels of the provincial Department of Education was hampered. Circulars from the Head Office were reaching circuits very late, which meant that certain demands by the Head Office were delayed and at some stages were totally not conformed to.

The Department of Education (a) (1999/2000:243), revealed the physical resources in districts of the Mpumalanga Department of Education to be as follows:



Table 4.3 Physical resources at district and circuit offices

District	Telephone	Fax	Photocopier	Computer	Printer	Cars	Resource centre
Eerstehoek	2	1	2	6 in district 5 in circuits	1 in district 2 in circuits	4 sedans 1 van 1 truck	1
Ermelo	9 lines in district 5 lines in circuits	2 in district 5 in circuits	4	4	2	2 sedan 2 LDR 1 truck	-
Groblersdal	district and 5 in circuits	1 in district 2 in circuits	district and all five circuits	-	-	3 old sedan 1 LDV 1 old truck	--
Hazyview	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
KwaMhlanga	2 and 70 lines	2	2 not functioning	-	15	11	1
Malelane	3 in district 3 in circuits	2 in district 2 in circuits	3 in district	5 in district 5 in circuits	2 in district 5 in circuits	2 in district 5 in circuits	1
Moretele	4 in district 7 in circuits	1 in district, 3 functioning and 3 not functioning in circuits	1 not functioning and 5 not functioning in circuits	4 in district and 1 at the educator centre	2 in district and 1 at the educator centre	4 subsidy cars at district and 5 at circuit. Pool=3 sedan, 1 van and 1 truck	1
Nelspruit	26	1	-	7	7	12	1
Standerton	6 lines	1	2	2	2	6	1
Witbank	district 17 lines circuits 3 lines	1 in district 1 in circuits	1 in district 2 in circuits	8 in district	6 in district	-	1

Source: Department of Education (a) (1999/2000)

The information reflected in this table indicates that within districts there was a poor communication infrastructure, whereby certain districts operated with two telephone lines and no telephones at all throughout their circuits and some not working. Because of their own limited photocopiers, districts could not produce enough support material for certain circuits and schools which had no photocopiers. In terms of distribution of resources, it was claimed that sharing of



resources to districts was done according to the number of learners. However according to the research report that was conducted by National Center for Curriculum Research and Development, it was realised that largest district such as Standerton which had a great number of learners did not have most resources. Therefore it became difficult to determine factors that were used to allocate resources (Department of Education (a) 1999/2000:242). According to the research that was conducted, number of vehicles in Witbank district could not be established.

While this situation prevailed, district managers fought for more delegation of powers, such as being able to control and spent their own budgets. Ultimately there were limited powers which were delegated to the districts, even though some were later recentralised without valid explanations to the district managers. This state of affairs concurs with Leung (2004:1) who points out that when powers are delegated to the lower levels by the provincial authorities or semi-autonomous organisations, it is done with the understanding that authority can be withdrawn. Bray (1999:209) agrees with Leung that in a delegated system powers still basically rest with the central authority which has chosen to 'lend' them to the local levels; therefore powers can be withdrawn without resorting to legislation. Although that was the case, some responsibilities remained with the district managers, namely: ensuring that policies were implemented, co-ordinating the districts and circuit offices to function efficiently and effectively; promoting community liaison services; promoting school governance; ensuring that schools conducted legitimate and credible examinations; ensuring that schools receive curriculum support; and promoting labour relations.

According to the Department of Education (a) (1999/2000:247), the district managers continued to experience poor levels of education that prevailed in rural districts and this affected the capacity of school governing bodies (SGB's). According to the South African Schools Act (SASA) 19(b), it was the responsibility of the district, as a higher office of education administration and governance, to ensure that the capacity of governing bodies was enhanced. This became a challenge because many of the school governing body members who were elected by schools were not the biological parents of the learners, but grannies or



other care givers, who had no understanding of how governance functions. Since only a few workshops could be held with the SGB's due to the lack of resources, their capacity could not be changed. This was realised during the District Management Team meetings where the contributions of the SGB's towards education development turned out to be minimal.

Although districts were intended to be strong, administrative one-stop delivery nodes, with an emphasis on the decentralisation of authority under a lean Head Office structure, in reality they were clouded by problems. Districts had to ensure that education continued, despite all the challenges. In terms of Human Resources Management (HRM), districts were trying to implement a structure which was fluid and frequently changing. This made it difficult for district managers to realise which structure was operative, since there were no clear job descriptions and roles and responsibilities were not clearly defined by the Head Office.

There were serious shortages of curriculum implementers at the district level. Each district was allocated one curriculum implementer who was supposed to render curriculum services to all the circuits. Apart from that, circuit managers and curriculum implementers were not clear about their functions, because they were poorly capacitated to perform and to carry out their responsibilities. The transformation project of Curriculum 2005 was seriously hindered due to the absence of professional advisory staff, which in turn was due to the issue of unfilled posts at both district and circuit levels. Cases of misconduct were not pursued because of lack of capacity in the districts. Channels of co-ordination to keep district and circuit officials abreast with provincial departmental activities and decisions were not visible. Department of Education (1999/2000:47-48) indicates that, in terms of decision making, districts were not maximally involved, and seldom participated in the planning stages of new departmental initiatives and policies.

According to one district manager, districts received directives from multiple line functions from the Head Office, which they were expected to implement, irrespective of the local and environmental challenges they were facing. Workshops were organised without proper consultation with the districts, which



caused confusion between the districts, circuits and schools. There was a lack of continuity in capacity development, whereby sub-ordinates attended workshops before their supervisors could receive training. District offices often received conflicting demands and directives from the Head Office directorates, which resulted in unnecessary duplication of activities. Administrative processes were not always collectively understood and the absence of norms and standards aggravated the situation. One district manager highlighted the fact that it was difficult to function as districts because of the withdrawal of delegated authority by the Head Office. Districts were unable to make and process staff appointments. This became a heavy drawback for the districts, because they were unable to address human resource shortages where there was an urgent need.

The unavailability of the Master Year Plan (MYP) from the provincial Department of Education to guide all departments as to how they should provide services hampered the running of all the spheres of education provision. According to Brown (1990:34), it was through the Master Year Plan that the provincial mandates to districts and schools should realise unity and direction. Without such a plan, the activities of the department became haphazard and uncoordinated. District offices did not exercise full internal discipline, because those who were empowered to take action were either reluctant or unwilling to do so. There were embarrassing delays or non-payment for services, which resulted in service providers terminating their services to district offices and schools. The financial policy stated that any official who used a departmental telephone for personal reasons had to pay the cost, in order to reduce the high telephone bills incurred by the Provincial Department of Education. However, district staff bluntly refused to pay for private calls, a precedent which was apparently set by the staff at the Head Office.

Community involvement in terms of mediating policies and ensuring that they were implemented in an appropriate way in the context in which they were supposed to be working was very poor, which affected the capacity of school governing bodies to carry out their functions. Department of Education (a) (1999/2000:231) highlights the fact that it was the responsibility of districts officials to explain policies not just to educators, but to parents and the broader community. Since



this did not happen, the establishment of partnerships between community structures, districts, circuits and schools became a nightmare. During this period many districts were still in their administrative infancy while they were facing this complex and challenging conditions. Within the districts there were different administrative departments to co-ordinate education as a unit, such as logistic services, labour services, communications, finance services and the administration section, all under the supervision of the district manager. It was expected of all these departments to make it possible for education in the districts and circuits to shape up or transform through the implementation of appropriate policies, irrespective of the lack of resources.

According to one district manager, even though there were district structures like District Management Teams (DMT's) to administer the administration and governance business of the districts and give support to circuits and schools, the problem of poor service delivery at circuit and school levels remained. This was because the powers which were given to the districts by Head Office were limited, dictating that districts should only make recommendations but not to be engaged in the actual implementation of decisions.

Based on the administration and governance problems that clouded education districts, the Mpumalanga Department of Education saw it fit that districts should be restructured. This was an effort to improve service delivery and eliminate the flaws which were crippling the efficiency of the entire Department of Education. The situation regarding the restructuring of districts and acting positions was unacceptable and therefore the provincial department had to consider various strategies to ensure the successful rebuilding of districts and circuits. The same author indicates further that in a situation with few administrative officials at circuit and district levels, schools suffer in the end because they do not get the support they need (Department of Education (a) 1999/2000:230-234).

As part of the exercise of restructuring the districts in 1999, the provincial department proposed that they should work with three districts as pilot districts, because it felt that spreading the limited funds very thinly among all ten districts would not really make a difference (*ibid*). If the three districts benefited from this



initiative, then it would be possible for the programme to be extended to other districts in 2001, taking cognisance of the lessons learned from the three year piloting period. All the districts were invited to a conference in order to learn from the activities that took place in the three pilot districts. He further suggested that with greater budgetary decentralisation, districts would be seen more and more as cost centres.

According to the interview with district managers, the exercise of district abolition or restructuring did not go well with some districts and was accepted with mixed feelings. One district manager described the situation as unfortunate, because the initial plans of how districts were supposed to function as documented were not implemented. According to him, the plan to convert districts into effective service delivery centres could have been achieved by devolving more powers to districts and filling all the district posts which had lain vacant for many years. However another district manager, basing his arguments on his past experiences of how poorly the districts used to function, saw the intention of district abolition as being positive. He thought that the abolition of districts and introduction of new structures would bring improved and added powers that would make the system more manageable.

In their understanding of the situation, both district managers agreed that the aim of district abolition or restructuring was to reduce the number of districts in order to have a system of education and administration that would speed up service delivery. This would also reduce monthly rentals for buildings in which most of the districts housed their operations. In a nutshell, one of the district managers indicated that the district structures were closer to circuits and schools, but services were far away from the people. This was because of poor empowerment and capacitation of the districts and their dependence on the Head Office.

Thus the idea of district abolition was in line with the original motivation for decentralisation, namely that there was a need to improve outcomes and reduce costs in order to advance efficiency. This assertion agrees Brown's (1990:69) view that educational efficiency is concerned with the reduction of costs and improvement of performance. He defines efficiency as maximal consumer



satisfaction at minimum costs. Similarly, the view of Bray and Mukundan (2003:4) is that decentralisation is commonly advocated as a way to reduce costs, particularly when the centralised bureaucracies find themselves having to make decisions on even the most minor matters relating to schools in distant locations.

According to the Department of Education (a) (1999/2000:255), government expenditure in terms of accommodation for the districts was as follows:

Table 4.4 Expenditure in terms of district accommodation

District	Accommodation	Expenditure in terms of monthly rental
Eerstehoek	Teacher centre building	-
Ermelo	Privately owned building	R16347.60
Groblersdal		
Hazyview	Privately owned building	R54925.00
KwaMhlanga	Government owned building	-
Malelane		
Moretele	Former BNDC building	R4160.00
Nelspruit	Privately owned building	R41216.50
Standerton	Privately owned building	R30780.00
Witbank	Privately owned building	R31399.67

Source: Department of Education (a) (1999/2000)

Based on the financial circumstances of the Mpumalanga Department of Education, the idea of district abolition was motivated by the intention to reduce costs and increase efficiency. The concept efficiency is linked to the idea of productivity. Inputs are required to produce outputs and therefore efficiency speaks to the relationship of outputs to inputs. This view of efficiency suggests that if the districts and circuits are efficient, then accountable administrative processes will provide answers for the cost of details devoted to improving the quality of teaching and learning (Brown 1990:226).



4.4 EDUCATION CIRCUITS IN MPUMALANGA: 1994-1999

In 1994 after the demarcation of South Africa into provinces, the newly formed Department of Education in the Mpumalanga Province adopted circuits which were within its boundaries from the former apartheid regime. These circuit offices were not re-organised in any way, but were given the task of implementing newly formulated policies. The provincial Department of Education devolved education administrative and governance responsibilities to the circuits by means of the 'devolution of powers' category of decentralisation. According to Samoff (1999: 421-422) decentralisation as devolution implies the transmission of authority and responsibilities by the provincial Department of Education to the local spheres. According to one circuit manager, the aim of the devolution of powers was to take education decision-making closer to the people, and to try to redress the past education imbalances created by apartheid education, by means of effective service delivery. This assertion concurs with Samoff's (1999:421-422) view that decentralisation as devolution permits expanded access to decision making arenas. Previously excluded stakeholders develop a stake in the education system and develop a base for working within and to improve it.

One circuit manager reported that the powers which were devolved to the circuits involved supporting schools with their day-to-day administrative and governance responsibilities, and acting as a mouthpiece between the schools and the provincial Department of Education. These powers included organising workshops for educators, principals and school governing bodies (SGB's); making recommendations to the provincial Department of Education for building new schools and renovating schools; recommending the appointment of new educators and administrative staff; supplying the provincial Department of Education with school statistics; delivering circulars to schools; recommending the supply of furniture to schools; and helping and supporting schools with the interpretation and implementation of policies. Through the devolution of these powers, the Mpumalanga Department of Education thought that service delivery would improve in schools and the entire Department.



According to Samoff (1999:422) when an education system has adopted decentralisation as a model, the following advantages may be expected: reduction of bureaucratic delays; improvement of capacity for local administrators; effective integration of isolated rural areas into national and provincial programmes; increased efficiency; relieving the Provincial Department of Education of unnecessary tasks; reducing the scale inherent in centralised decision making at the provincial department; greater co-ordination between the provincial and local agencies; administration that is more flexible, more creative and more innovative; and more effective monitoring and evaluation.

Although it was believed that decentralisation would bring about advantages, circuit managers indicated that they found themselves executing all the administrative and governance duties, with limited powers and resources. According to one circuit manager, this made their administrative situation very difficult. At some stages, circuit managers had no powers in terms of implementation, but could only make recommendations to the provincial Department of Education. The Department of Education would then approve and implement their recommendations. One circuit manager indicated that in actuality, circuits were like post offices between the provincial Department of Education and the schools, because nothing could happen without obtaining permission from the Head Office. One circuit manager indicated that the bureaucratic red tape caused delays in terms of the implementation of certain departmental programmes. It was also mentioned that circuit managers were never given any blueprint by the provincial Department of Education in terms of how they should administer circuits. Most of them depended solely on their experience and the policy documents they were given by the Head Office.

According to the data from the interviews, during the early years of the democratic South Africa, from 1994 to 1999, circuits in the Mpumalanga Department of Education were faced with great constraints in terms of physical and human resources. Human resource constraints were in terms of lack of personnel in general and in particular, lack of properly skilled personnel to steer the circuit's education provision and delivery to the next level of efficiency. Physical resource constraints were in terms of buildings for circuit offices and schools. According to



the circuit managers, the number of circuit personnel was not enough to render services for the approximately 48 schools under the supervision and administration of a single circuit.

The circuit structure was tabled by one circuit manager as follows:

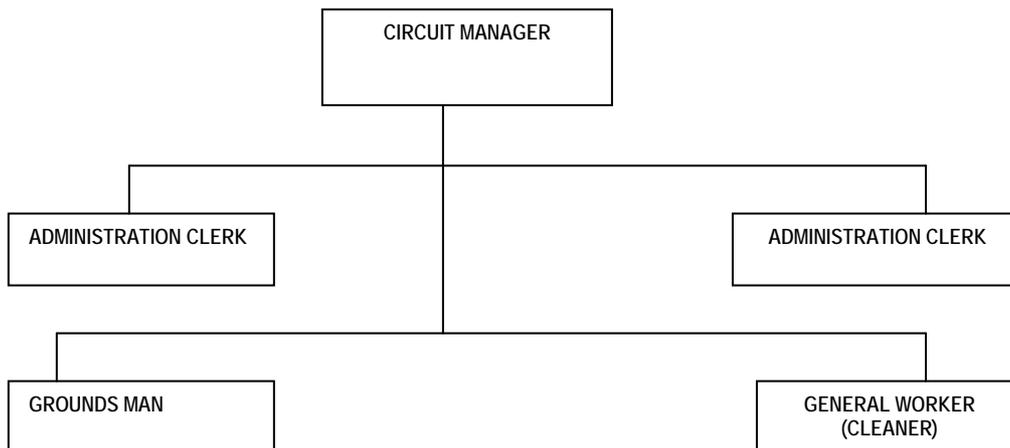


Figure 4.1 Old Circuit Structure (Organogram)
Source: Nokaneng Circuit Office: 1998

When unpacking this structure, the respondent continued to say that although the structure looked like this on paper, it was in fact different. In his circuit he continued for some years without the second clerk, general worker and grounds man, until he borrowed one clerk from the neighbouring circuit. The other challenge was that the clerks which he was working with were not capacitated in terms of computer skills and therefore regular mistakes occurred in the information submitted to the Head Office.

There was the further challenge of physical resources. The interview with one circuit manager revealed that in 1994 after the formation of provincial Department of Education, most circuits did not have buildings of their own. Examples of such circuits were the Marapyane circuit from the former Bophuthatswana Department of Education which covered an enormous geographical area from Lefiso to Pankop; the Moutse West circuit office from the former Central Government; and the Libangeni circuit office from the former Kwa-Ndebele government. The Marapyane circuit occupied space in the buildings of one of the primary schools in



Mmamethlake; the Moutse West circuit occupied space in the buildings of one of the high schools in Moutse, and the Libangeni circuit was housed in the building of the then Kwa-Manala Tribal Office. Although the Libangeni circuit was regarded as having its own premises and buildings, it was only because the buildings were donated to them.

Most of the circuits did not have facilities such as furniture, computers and even to some extent, running water and electricity. One circuit manager indicated that they were left to their own devices during the early years of the establishment of the Mpumalanga Department of Education and they lacked capacity and expertise. The department introduced them to the stakeholders and, without the necessary resources, left them alone to sort out the situation. Some of the circuits were not allocated transport to be able to move circuit personnel around in order to conduct workshops for stakeholders. Madsen (1994:87) argues that although education systems adopt decentralisation in order to improve efficiency and quality and to increase innovation, services cannot be rendered without the translation of legislation into administrative action. Such action includes developing regulations, interpreting and administering guidelines for newly established programmes and determining what resources are available and necessary to assist with implementation.

Apart from physical and human resource problems that circuits were faced with, there were problems in terms of implementation of policies, co-ordination, communication and support. According to the interviews with circuit managers, it was during this era that the implementation of Outcomes Based Education (OBE) became a nightmare for most circuits. This was because circuit managers and educators knew little about this new approach to teaching and learning. It became difficult for educators to implement an approach they never understood, and it was difficult to monitor the progress of Outcomes Based Education in schools. Furthermore there were no curriculum implementers (CI's) to deliver curriculum advisory services to circuit managers and educators. Notwithstanding these challenges of implementation, the provincial Department of Education continued to put pressure on circuit managers to ensure that OBE was implemented. In turn, circuits put pressure on educators. Due to this pressure to implement OBE, many



circuits' lost valuable educators, and many schools became under-staffed. The policy implementation situation during 1994-1999 is explained by Jansen in Sayed & Jansen (2001:272) as "symbolic". This means that the government at that time did not intend to implement new policies, but to introduce them in order to signal change and to display rapid departure from the apartheid education system. The symbolic nature of these policies was deceptive, due to the fact that the government never had implementation plans. Jansen further outlines that this period did not focus on policy implementation, but rather on the establishment of organisations, institutions and governance, which was reflected in many policy papers, legislation and norms and standards which were developed and announced.

Circuit managers indicated that based on the inadequacies in terms of human resources and delays by the provincial Department of Education to fill key posts at the districts, circuit's experienced co-ordination problems. There were not enough personnel at Head Office and no plan to co-ordinate the circuits' activities with the provincial Department of Education. This became a fundamental cause for failure of many departmental programmes that aimed at improving the education administration situation and development in the circuits. Poor co-ordination resulted in protocol not being followed by circuits and provincial officials. For example, one would find the Member of Executive Council (MEC) for Education visiting schools in circuits without having properly informed the circuits.

The situation as it prevailed shows that circuits were horizontally decentralised. According to Brown (1990:15), horizontal decentralisation implies that decision-making was only shared among the officials at the level of the provincial Department of Education. This study has revealed that communication between the tiers of the Mpumalanga Department of Education was not effective. According to one circuit manager, the communication breakdown was also evident in terms of the correspondence that was sent by the Head Office to the circuits. There were delays in the correspondence from Head Office, or at times it was not received by circuits, which caused the whole department to malfunction. The absence of communication and limited communication media in some circuits were also a hindrance. Some circuits did not have even a single telephone line. To



communicate with the Head Office, circuits depended solely on the information disseminated through departmental circulars, which from time to time arrived late. This inconvenienced circuits when they were required to make submissions on the same day.

One circuit manager indicated that the support that the circuits received from the Head Office was unacceptable in that service delivery became slow, poor and at times inconspicuous. The circuits' claim of poor support is highlighted by Paqueo & Lammert (2000:6) as a problem. They state that in a decentralised system, when devolving responsibilities to lower levels, strong support should be given from higher structures and the system at large; hence the support must be built around the real needs for administrative development. For the provincial Department of Education this implies that a system of reform and a division of labour are needed to effectively support the lower levels.

From 1994 to 1995 circuits did not have support in terms of labour problems; hence labour issues were handled by the circuit managers, who did not have the necessary expertise. This resulted in many cases being referred to the Head Office for intervention. The relationship between the circuits and the provincial Department of Education at this stage was very poor and circuits felt that they were being neglected. One circuit manager indicated that after the establishment of districts in 1996, the circuits were inherited by the districts without a change in terms of personnel and infrastructure.

Little transpired in terms of the provision of quality services, besides supporting the circuits to signal the implementation of the new policies and to make sure that schools were transformed in line with the South African Schools Act (SASA). Circuits were incorporated into different districts in terms of their proximity. Circuits which covered an enormous geographic area, and had a significant number of schools under their control, were re-organised. An example of such a circuit was the Marapyane circuit in the western region of Mpumalanga. During the apartheid era, the then Moretele two (2), had only one circuit office, Marapyane, which covered an area from Pankop to Lefiso with a huge number of schools under the control of one circuit manager. After the Mpumalanga Department of Education



formed districts, the Marapyane circuit was reorganised to form two circuits namely the Mmamethlake and Nokaneng circuits.

One circuit manager indicated that in 1996 circuits were incorporated into the newly formed districts as part of the restructuring process of the Mpumalanga Department of Education. The incorporation of circuits into the districts was clouded with arguments and dissatisfaction which were racially grounded. Some of the circuits were not pleased to be incorporated into certain districts. As an example, the circuits from the former Kwa-Ndebele and the Central Government were against of being clustered with circuits from the former Bophuthatswana Department of Education. They claimed that the district was located too far away from their circuits. In reality this was a question of having to establish new working relationships when they felt that it would be better to be incorporated into a district whose people share their culture and language. Irrespective of these complexities, circuits in the Mpumalanga Department of Education were re-arranged and demarcated in terms of the number of circuits and schools per districts, as well as their proximity, as shown in Table 4.5:

Table 4.5 Education circuits per districts and schools per circuits

Education District	Number of Circuits	Number of schools per circuit
Eerstehoek	Badplaas	42
	Carolina	25
	Dundonald	33
	Mashishila	41
	Mpulusi	39
		180
Ermelo	Amsterdam	41
	Breyten	46
	Ermelo 1	37
	Ermelo 2	47
	Piet Retief	44
	Volkstrust	50
	Wakkerstroom	38
		303
Groblersdal	Groblersdal 2	40
	Moutse central	30
	Moutse East	32
	Siyabuswa	56
	Weltevrede	51
		209
Hazyview	Insikazi	39
	Lydenburg	73
	Sabie	46
	White Hazy	45
	White River	36
		239



KwaMhlanga	KwaGafontein East	34
	KwaGafontein West	31
	KwaMlanga N/E	24
	KwaMlanga S/W	31
	Tweefontein North	37
	Tweefontein South	35
		192
Malelane	Khulangwane	40
	Lubombo	45
	Malelane	38
	Nkomazi East	43
	Nkomazi West	43
	209	
Moretele	Libangeni	31
	Marapyane	46
	Mmametlhake	36
	Moutse West	27
	Nokaneng	48
	188	
Nelspruit	Barberton	36
	Mngwenya	27
	Nelspruit	49
	Nkululeko	29
	Sikhulile	47
	WatervalBoven	39
	227	
Standerton	Balfour	52
	Bethal	49
	Delmas	38
	Highveld Ridge East	38
	Standerton	34
	StanEast	26
	StanWest	39
	276	
Witbank	Middleburg 1	35
	Middleburg 2	31
	Middleburg 3	43
	Witbank 1	43
	Witbank 2	38
	52	
	242	

Source: Department of education (a) (1999/2000)

The statistics in table 4.1 obtained from the EMIS section of the Mpumalanga Department of Education differs from those in table 4.5. The source which I used did not determine the reasons for these discrepancies.

According to one circuit manager, after the abolition of districts in 1999, from the year 2000 circuit offices were put under the control of regional offices. With the powers delegated to them, and realising the conditions under which the circuits had been functioning, regions restructured them in terms of administrative functions. 'Delegation of powers' means a dispersal of tasks and administrative responsibilities related to specific functions usually defined by the central authorities (Karlsen 1999:1). The restructuring of circuit offices was propelled by



the District Development Programme (DDP) which was implemented throughout provinces where districts were functioning with circuits in an unproductive way (Department of Education (a) 1999:232). The restructuring of circuits was led by regional officials who were introduced into the new regional structures and were called ‘circuit co-ordinators’. These officials became responsible for ensuring the effective functioning of circuits and that circuits were working as a collective for the provision of education and service delivery to schools.

During the restructuring process, circuits that were sharing building structures, as well as those which were operating in school buildings were relocated to unused government buildings. The previous circuit structures were re-examined and improvements were made. The posts of chief administrative clerk, general worker/cleaner, grounds man and driver were added to the organisational structure. The revised structure of the circuits was as follows:

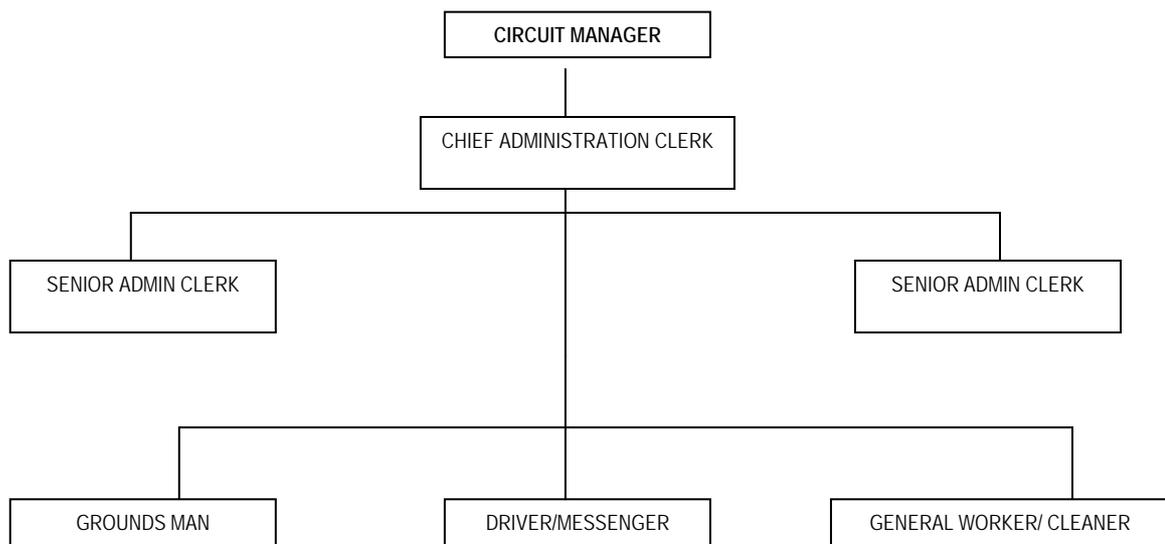


Figure 4.2: New circuit structure (Organogram)

Source: KwaMhlanga West Circuit Office (2007)

It was stated that although this circuit structure is in use, there are still certain circuits that do not have messengers or a driver and therefore they have to use either a grounds man or chief administration clerk to run the errands of a driver. Circuit offices were allocated government owned vehicles to run the transportation errands of their circuits. One circuit manager suggested that the structure should



again be revisited. He proposed the introduction of new posts at circuit level, namely deputy circuit manager, labour relations officer; school governance officer, health and wellness officer, and that curriculum implementers should be based at circuit level. This exercise would relieve circuit managers of many responsibilities they are currently faced with.

During this era the roles of circuits were improved in terms of the administrative powers which were delegated to them. They were delegated powers to run their own budgets, to appoint post level one (1) educators at schools, to appoint administrative clerks and to recommend the appointment of school principals. All these powers had been centralised during the district era.

According to Paqueo & Lammert (2000:5), an examination of the World Bank project supporting decentralisation identified a variety of issues that affect the performance of decentralisation reforms and among these was the question of resources. In the case of the Mpumalanga Department of Education, one circuit manager indicated that from 1999 to date, physical and human resources were, and still are challenges in most circuit offices. This is because many circuits are still not operating in their own buildings. The furniture in some circuit offices is very old and some of the circuits still do not have telephones, which contributes to poor service delivery. However it was acknowledged that since the abolition of districts, some improvement of resources has materialised in the form of photocopying machines, faxes, computers, printers as well as modems for internet access. However it was suggested that the Mpumalanga Department of Education should review the use of internet modems because modems are from time to time disabled, which paralyses information dissemination. In terms of physical resources, one circuit manager indicated that circuits should encourage the regional office to speed up the process of building new schools. Since 1999 circuits have identified schools that need new buildings, but so far only a limited number of schools have been attended to.

One circuit manager highlighted in the interview that circuits in the Mpumalanga Department are presently better co-ordinated than they were in the past. It was learned that from 1994 to 1999, circuit administration and governance was



conducted by one person. Districts were helping, although they were at the stage of trying to find stability themselves. However post 1999, in the middle of 2002 after the districts had been abolished and during the transition to the new arrangement of regional offices, circuit co-ordination emerged. At first, circuit managers did not understand the new co-ordination arrangement, because their understanding was that matters should be co-ordinated by Head Office, as before. After the emergence of circuit co-ordination, circuits have gelled and are now operating as a unit. Circuits have their own administrative arrangements and are supporting each other within co-ordination clusters, which have been clustered from the former districts. In that sense, not only the circuit co-ordinator is responsible for ensuring that things unfold as envisaged, but the responsibility rests with all the circuit managers to manage processes the way they have been planned in their circuits. The circuit co-ordination is decentralised and extended powers have been decentralised to the circuits.

At the regional level, officials responsible for circuit co-ordination have been employed in order to make sure that circuits are kept abreast of developments, and to help circuits with their day-to-day administration and governance. It is clear that circuits have been encouraged to plan their work more than before. The Operational Plan of the Kwa-Mhlanga West circuit office (2007:1-45) provides an extensive indication of how the circuits intend to conduct their administrative activities from January to December, their responsibilities, their target group, and time frames, all of which are clearly outlined. The circuit-regional relationships make it easy for circuits to acquire administrative documents, to liaise with regions for speedy processing of educator appointments, and to team up with them when the need arises in order to speed up service delivery. Circuits are also assisted by regional officials in organising and making available personnel and funding for workshops organised for educators at circuit level.

Due to the new regional education structures, powers which were initially held by the districts and reclaimed by the Head Office after the abolition of the districts, were reorganised, decentralised and devolved to the circuits. According to one circuit manager, these powers included conducting and approving the election of school governing bodies, and making recommendations for heads of departments,



principals and deputy principals in schools. Additionally, circuits were delegated powers to appoint post level one (1) educators, to appoint support staff at school level and to control and manage their own budgets. According to the respondents, these were good moves by the Department of Education. However circuit managers still feel that the powers delegated are not enough, due to the different kinds of problems circuits are facing. For example, it was suggested that circuits should be empowered to have access to the Persal system and be electronically connected to the regional Persal system. This will enable them to communicate directly with the regions, without driving long distances to clear up minor issues. For a start it was proposed that circuits should be delegated the power to make enquiries without implementing anything on the system.

Furthermore it was proposed that circuit personnel should be strengthened by basing curriculum implementers at the circuits. The department should introduce two more Senior Education Specialist (SES) posts for officials who would specifically concentrate at certain areas such as governance and labour, in order to relieve the pressure on circuit managers. In terms of examinations, it was proposed that the examination section should deal directly with schools. It should deliver computer discs for schools to directly register learners on the computer. In turn, it should collect the registration discs for verification, rather than transporting a lot of paper work that sometimes gets lost on the way to the delivery point.

Although the new regional arrangement has attempted to combat the long existing communication problems, circuits are still finding it difficult to deal with information that is delivered late by the regions, which severely hampers administration. In some instances, schools resort to supplying incorrect information, just for the sake of submitting it, because of pressure from the region. One circuit manager described the structure of information dissemination as 'koshiok', which means there are many people at the region who supply information to circuits, and fewer people at the circuits who have to deal with the information and disseminate it to the schools, where in turn there are many people.

Transport allocation to circuits has improved in the sense that each circuit has been allocated one car to speed up minor deliveries to schools. Irrespective of this



improvement, circuits still receive information late from the regions, and regions in turn claim that they receive it late from the Head Office. This is a major problem because information often does not reach schools on time. It was suggested by one circuit manager that, in order to combat this problem, the department should contract a courier service company throughout the province to deal with mail delivery for the department. This would solve the problem of accountability in terms of mail delivery, because if no one is accountable, every one in the department passes the blame to another and the problem remains.

Circuit managers no longer have transport inconveniences when attending meetings, workshops and visiting schools because they have been allocated state subsidised cars to run the errands of the circuits. However it was found that some circuit managers have not visited some of the schools, or called a single meeting with all the educators in their circuits since the beginning of the year. The blame was put on regular meetings and workshops they attend in the province, that keep them away for a long time. To avoid such claims, it was suggested that circuit managers should start to do their work projection plans on a weekly basis. Such projection plans should indicate how they will support schools in their circuits and this should be followed by a written report on a monthly basis in terms of their engagements.

4.5 CONCLUSION

The establishment of Provincial Departments of Education was dictated by the National Department of Education in 1994. This endeavour decentralised powers from the national sphere to the lower spheres of education administration and governance. According to the Mpumalanga Department of Education, decentralisation was intended to redress past education imbalances, by means of improved and effective service delivery. In 1994 the Mpumalanga province established a four-tier Department of Education consisting of the Head Office, districts, circuits and schools. The establishment was very complex in that a number of former apartheid departments were brought together. Different personnel from different former departments of education, with different backgrounds and cultures were required to work as one department. The new



Mpumalanga Department of Education developed values different from those that the people had held in their former apartheid department.

During the period 1994 to 1999, many administrative and governance problems were experienced at district and circuit levels of the Mpumalanga Department of Education. As indicated, these problems included lack of physical and human resources, poor communication, poor co-ordination, as well as poor support by the Provincial Department of Education. Districts and circuits were unable to address problems that were emerging from schools because of their limited powers and problems with referrals to the Head Office to find solutions. The Head Office would take a long time before they could render solutions to problems, which hampered progress in schools.

During the period 1994 to 1999, one may say that circuits were neglected by the provincial Department of Education because during this time service delivery, administration and governance at districts and circuits were very poor. Considering the administrative and governance problems that hampered education districts and circuits, the Mpumalanga Department of Education decided that districts should be restructured. This was an effort to improve their service delivery and to combat flaws which were crippling the efficiency of the Department of Education.

Paqueo & Lammert (2000:1) describe the rationale adopted by the Mpumalanga Department of Education as a rationale for increased efficiency or effectiveness. It was an endeavour to lead officials towards improved efficiency by eliminating many bureaucratic procedures and motivating them to be more productive. Such results can be achieved by moving decision making to other spheres of government (Paqueo & Lammert 2000:2).

Reflecting on all the challenges that districts and circuits experienced during the period from 1994 to 1999, it becomes evident that these structures did not work like a well oiled line of function, due to the bureaucratic 'red tape' that hampered their ability to deliver services effectively.



CHAPTER 5

RECENTRALISATION AND DECENTRALISATION OF EDUCATION ADMINISTRATION AND GOVERNANCE IN MPUMALANGA: THE CASE OF REGIONAL STRUCTURES: 1999-2004

5.1 INTRODUCTION

An education region is a level of education administration and governance between the provincial level and circuit level in the Mpumalanga province and other provinces in the new democratic South Africa, which opted for the regional level of education administration and governance.

Interviews with one provincial official revealed that the establishment of regions in the Mpumalanga Department of Education was based on two approaches in terms of reforming the education administration. The first one was the 'political' approach, which was assumed by this provincial official to be known by a few people who were ANC members and officials in the Mpumalanga Department of Education. The second one was the 'pure academic or administrative' approach, which was known to many officials in the Mpumalanga Department of Education. Politically motivated reforms aim at strengthening the power of the ruling party by building strong educational structures and decentralising those powers to the local structures or the local spheres (Bray 1999:209-210).

Pertaining to the reform in the Mpumalanga Department of Education, one provincial official alleged that the establishment of regions was a political decision, based on a proposal by the Mafikeng ANC National Conference that was held in 1997. This conference dictated that provinces needed to align their structures in accordance with the new demarcations of government boundaries at provincial and district levels. What it meant was that provinces were no longer going to have districts as nodes of education and service delivery, but regions. This did not refer only to the Department of Education, but also to other departments such as health, agriculture and so on. The municipal boundaries also dictated that districts were to



be reduced and other provinces, including Mpumalanga, would have three instead of ten districts. The word “districts” is used in this case to refer to the present regions because the word “regions” is an adopted word from the political demarcation of districts according to regions. This was explained by one provincial official that officially in the documents of Provincial Department of education, these units of education administration are called districts. These developments are in line with the claim by Bray and Mukundan (2003:4), in that in many decentralisation settings in different countries, decentralisation comes from political forces, rather than from administrative ones. Nevertheless, the intention pointed strongly at improving service delivery in the lower levels of education provision. In terms of administrative reform, Bray (1999:209-210) argues that the administrative or pure academic approach to reform aims at facilitating the operation of the bureaucracy. However he also acknowledges that basically the origin of education reform lies in wider political or administrative changes, rather than the specifics of the education sector.

According to one former district official, and following the ‘pure academic or administrative’ approach, the establishment of regions was based on the fact that districts were finding it difficult to provide services to circuits due to the administrative and governance challenges they were experiencing. As a result, the provincial Department of Education wanted to enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of the system. It was also an endeavour to have a lean Head Office and to strengthen the districts so that delivery could begin to move faster than before. Notwithstanding the alleged good intentions of the provincial Department of Education in establishing the districts, problems were experienced at district, circuit and school levels in terms of service delivery, monitoring of education activities and implementation of policies.

The other pressing issues that forced the department to establish regions were duplication of posts at district and provincial levels; high buildings rentals that consumed massive amounts of money; and fear that the department was losing power at the grassroots level due to improper administration and governance of education institutions. The decentralisation rationale that was followed was the ‘conflict management rationale’.



According to Hannaway and Carnoy (1993:66-67), the conflict management rationale sees decentralisation as a strategy for coping with highly conflicting situations. From the conflict management point of view, it allows a government to diffuse the source of conflict and provide layers of insulation between them and the rest of the system. The layers of insulation would be the introduction of other spheres of education administration and governance within the system. Karlsen (1999:11) support this view in that this rationale is a way to manage conflicting roles and responsibilities and give what is called 'compensatory legitimisation'. Following this rationale, the Mpumalanga Department of Education wanted to devolve more powers to the regions in order to avoid the situation of centralisation of powers that prevailed during the district era.

Another objective of the department was to improve the culture of teaching and learning in schools by decentralising other powers to the circuits, thus creating a structure that would support, control and render services to all stakeholders. In order to ensure an improved culture of teaching and learning, a new curriculum was introduced which incorporated learning technology. According to Hannaway and Carnoy (1993:62-67) the 'culture of teaching and learning rationale' is based on the link between learning and technology, which tends to benefit from a more decentralised, disaggregated idea of learning and educational content. It is also a means of recognising and accommodating the diversity and importance of different cultural environments in one society, gearing it to the specifics of cultural contexts of dealing with modern systems of technology and communication in national and international universities.

Drawing from the interview with one of the district officials, it became evident that through its restructuring process, the Mpumalanga Department of Education recentralised powers from the lower level (districts) of education provision and delivery, to the higher level (Head Office). According to Coombe and Godden (1996:32), recentralisation occurs when the implementation of existing policies is in conflict with other existing laws, causing uncertainty as to which level of government or which decision maker in the education sector is responsible for what. The same authors further highlight that it occurs as a result of lack of direction by the education administrative structures under the control of the



Provincial Department of education, and little regard for basic issues like operational procedures.

5.2 BASIS FOR THE ESTABLISHMENT OF REGIONS

The period 1999 to 2004 is regarded as the 'President Mbeki administration era', which is renowned for accelerated policy implementation. It was during this time that the African National Congress (ANC), in its annual report of the year of mass mobilisation for the renewal of the democratic mandate, indicated that its Manifesto recognised the importance of education and training within the broader human resource development strategy. Following the 1999 elections, the Minister of Education conducted a wide-ranging consultative process with stakeholders in the sector, in order to accelerate change in education provision and service delivery (ANC 1999:65-66).

In accordance with the request by districts to be delegated more administrative and governance powers in order to realise the intention of decentralisation, the policy on the existence and future of districts was reviewed. Through the review process, it was found that there was too much centrality of certain administration and governance functions at the Head Office, which contributed to the delay of service provision at district levels. It was also found that lower spheres of education provision and service delivery had limited delegated powers to perform their education responsibilities. Delegated powers imply stronger degrees of decision making powers at the local level, which can be withdrawn by the centre without resort to legislation Bray (1999:209). It was also realised that ways and means had to be established to combat the lack of support, lack of human and physical resources, and poor co-ordination of services, financial constrains and poor methods of communication.

In 1999 the Conference for District Development was held in Mpumalanga, where submissions in terms of district administration and governance were tabled. The idea of establishing regions was not the focal point in the restructuring of the Mpumalanga Department of Education during this conference. Instead the focus was on the need to rebuild or improve the functioning of districts and circuits, since



the department recognised that districts were working under difficult circumstances with limited human and physical resources. Generally, there was a feeling that districts should not be abolished; instead their numbers could be reduced from ten to five or six (Department of education (a) 1999/2000:230). Nevertheless, through a series of discussions that were held with stakeholders, the idea of the abolition of districts re-surfaced and was taken further.

According to Sukati in the Report of the National & Provincial District Development Conferences, Department of Education (a) (1999/2000:256), who was the former director of transformation in Mpumalanga, the decision to abolish districts came about for the following reasons:

- The National government and the public in general contended that public service organisations needed to be rationalised because they were bloated, inefficient and not sufficiently responsive to needs.
- There was a growing perception, endorsed by a study conducted by Jansen (1997), that the Mpumalanga Department of Education was ineffective.
- The Provincial Government decided to freeze vacant posts in favour of rationalisation and 'right sizing' or 'downsizing' strategies.
- The Provincial Government ordered the Mpumalanga Department of Education to adopt a belt-tightening, medium term expenditure framework to counter overspending. Overspending was the result of expenditure on salaries, which consumed 91 percent of the education budget. However districts had only a minimal staff complement.
- There was an overload of existing policy initiatives that concentrated on districts as administrative and governance structures for implementation. This impacted heavily on the capacity of the Mpumalanga Department of Education.
- The South African Schools Act (SASA), the Further Education and Training (FET) Act and the new Public Service regulations had an impact on personnel provisioning and restructuring, as will the nationalisation of teacher training colleges.
- The re-location of the Head Office from Middleburg to Nelspruit was set to happen early in 2000.



Sukati in the Report of the Department of Education (a) (1999/2000:256) (*ibid*) further indicated that, having considered all these significant conditions, the Mpumalanga Department of Education decided to reduce the number of district offices from ten to six. The scenario which was proposed and preferred was to engage in the merger of districts in terms of proximity, as follows:

- Witbank and Standerton were to merge, with Witbank or Middleburg as the central point.
- KwaMhlanga, Groblersdal and Moretele were to merge, with KwaMhlanga as the central point.
- Ermelo and Eerstehoek were to merge, with Ermelo as the central point.
- Nelspruit, Malelane and Hazyview were to merge, with White River as the central point.

Based on this restructuring scenario, it was also the intention of the department to reduce the number of circuit offices from 55 to 45 (Department of Education (a) 1999/2000:256) (*ibid*). The objective was to supply circuit offices with the correct staff complement and to equip them properly to be more efficient and service delivery oriented. It was also the intention of the department, in terms of the over expenditure it experienced in renting buildings to house district and Head Office officials, to cut costs and locate all the circuits and districts in government-owned buildings. Following the above mentioned proposals, the Mpumalanga Department of Education established a task team to investigate the issue of district restructuring. The task team was made up of representatives from the provincial Department of Education, district managers, teacher organisations, school principals' representatives, political parties and non-governmental organisation coalition representatives.

According to one district manager, a number of scenarios pertaining to how the districts should be restructured were discussed and tabled by the task team. The discussions of the task team in terms of the restructuring process were accompanied by research that was conducted involving the University of Pretoria, as to how the new structures should be shaped. A simplistic view that was immediately taken was that, if the department opted for a five districts scenario



from ten districts, it would reduce costs by almost 50%, because instead of having personnel in approximately 120 posts in each of ten districts, it would reduce this to 120 posts in each of five districts. According to one district official, the major problem with the five districts scenario would be increased travelling costs, because bigger geographical areas would have to be covered. According to the calculations done by the task team in terms of salaries, the most workable scenario turned out to be the six districts scenario, and that became their final recommendation to the Member of the Executive Council (MEC).

Despite what the task team considered and recommended in terms of the advantages and disadvantages in their report for the restructuring of districts, the MEC opted for the three *regions* scenario, which was in line with municipal boundaries. According to one official who was involved in the task team, this decision was taken because of the influence on the Member of Executive Council (MEC) from consultative meetings with the African National Congress (ANC). The initial arrangement was that the provincial department should consult with stakeholders down to the level of the worker, but what happened was that only the provincial structures, district officials, unions and circuit managers were consulted about the proposed new arrangements. Three regions in the Mpumalanga Department of Education were therefore adopted, and were to be functional as follows:

- the Ehlanzeni Regional Office;
- the Gert Sibande Regional Office;
- the Nkangala Regional Office.

These three regions were then re-organised from the initial proposed merger of districts as follows:

- Ehlanzeni Region: Nelspruit, Malelane and Hazyview merged, with White River as the central point.
- Gert Sibande Region: Ermelo, Eerstehoek and Standerton merged, with Ermelo as the central point.



drawn from the former districts. The powers which were initially held at the districts were recentralised to the Head Office where they were re-configured. In turn, the Head Office decentralised and delegated certain powers to the regions. Thus regions became a locus of service delivery and policy implementation supporting circuits and schools.

The role of the Head Office was to concentrate on policy development and strategic management of the education system throughout the province. This practice is in line with the reason for recentralisation as indicated by Coombe and Godden (1996:37), namely that recentralisation occurs due to the complexity of the education system, the magnitude of the education enterprise, the heterogeneity of the clientele for education, problems of communication between decentralised education administration structures and the centre, as well as financial mismanagement. The process of re-structuring the education system in the Mpumalanga Department of Education may be regarded as the deconcentration category of decentralisation. This is because when deconcentration is applied, greater geographical decentralisation of the government authority is delegated and transferred to regional or local levels, giving local levels more authority for new activities, to budget, and to recruit and deploy staff (Coombe & Godden 1996: 58-59).

Among other things, the regions were given responsibilities to control the PERSAL system and to execute payment of educators in the region; to control the curriculum within the region; to be responsible for all the schools in the region; to ensure that all the policies of the government were being implemented and followed, to take care of the labour force within the region, and to establish and manage relationships with other structures outside education, such as traditional leaders and other community-based structures. They were also required to recommend to the provincial department the need for capital projects such as building schools, purchasing furniture, purchasing learner support material, and making sure that all the purchased goods reached schools on time. In supporting regions to improve their organisation in terms administrative and governance functions, a number of *indabas* were held in 2004 involving stakeholders across organisational and provincial departments. The aim was to debate issues



pertaining to the functioning of the regions in terms of effective teaching and learning, stakeholder involvement in education, school governance, parental involvement in education, and safety and security in schools. In the case of the Nkangala region, a number of *indabas* were held with stakeholders in order to partner with them, and seek their views in terms of the problems in the education system (Education Indaba Book 1, 2004:4-11). The aim of this indaba, apart from strengthening relationships with stakeholders, was to involve them in the decision making process and the improvement of education provision in the province.

In terms of personnel for administering the regions, one regional official indicated that the regional offices in the Mpumalanga Department of Education were not founded from totally new administrative and governance personnel. Most of the personnel were absorbed from the former districts in all sections of their operations. This absorption process created some tension at senior levels, since some officials had to lose their usual positions in order to avoid duplication of responsibilities. Some jobs were contested in terms of officials who could not be accommodated at the same level of responsibility to which they were accustomed during the districts era. Some officials were absorbed at the regional level, who had experiential and academic capacity, but lacked management and leadership skills. To avoid compromising the efficiency of the system, these officials had to be re-skilled, retrained and re-educated in order to improve their professional acumen. Those who could not be absorbed into the regional system, were given choices to be absorbed at either the circuit or school level, and this also created problems.

Irrespective of the challenges that were faced, ultimately the regional administrative and governance structures were established as follows:

- Regional Chief Director – responsible for the overall management of the regional office;
- Chief Education Specialist for circuit co-ordination – responsible for co-ordinating circuits and circuit-related matters;



- Director for co-operate services – responsible for Human Resource Services, Financial services, Salary Services, Supply Chain Management, Asset Management, Labour Relations, and Health and Wellness.
- Chief Education Specialist for Systems and Planning – responsible for the establishment of schools, Human Resource Development, School Governing Bodies, training educators in non-curriculum matters, and statistics on Education Management and Information.
- Chief Education Specialist for Curriculum – responsible for all curriculum-related matters, for the Education Development Centres (EDC's) to which curriculum implementers are attached and from which all curriculum programmes are managed.

According to one official, the description of the regional structure as outlined above became operational from 2002 until the first half of 2007. The same official indicated further that after the districts were abolished, all the powers which were initially devolved to the districts were recentralised to the Head Office. This move concurs with Leung's (2004:1) view of recentralisation, that when a loss of control is perceived as a result of decentralisation, the process of regaining the authority devolved is called recentralisation. Thus recentralisation may be defined as the reclaiming of power and authority by the national or provincial Department of Education from the lower levels of education administration and governance. In terms of the explanation offered by this official, recentralisation did not happen on a permanent basis. It was an endeavour by the provincial Department of Education to revisit, reorganise, improve and fill the gaps in terms of certain powers, so that when they were again decentralised to the regions, positive effects on service delivery could be realised.

Another regional official indicated that, apart from the powers that were reclaimed from the districts and delegated to the regions. Regions were delegated powers to co-ordinate the circuits through the introduction of the regional official called the 'circuit co-ordinator', who was tasked with controlling and administering curriculum services, the Persal and financial systems for payments of educators and support staff, Human Resource services, Supply Chain Management, Asset Management, and Health and Wellness services. The intention of the devolution of these powers



was to turn the Head Office into an office that was more concerned with policy formulation than it was before.

Paqueo & Lammert (2000:2) assert that in terms of decentralisation, provincial officials or leaders have to deal with two conflicting objectives, namely maintaining control over policies, while maintaining the legitimacy of the rules. Due to the extent of powers that were devolved to the regions, service delivery improved immensely in the education system of the province. Learner and Teacher Support Materials (LTSM's) were delivered to schools on time. Payments of educators were processed and transacted at the regional offices. Newly employed educators no longer had to wait for three months before receiving their first salary payment, as had happened during the district era. The delivery of physical resources, such as new school buildings, was accelerated in some circuits, and through the support of curriculum implementers, the implementation of the OBE curriculum is underway. This progression is supported by Astiz's (2004:138) view that decentralisation is adopted by governments to improve efficiency of education services, to democratise, to maintain stability and to respond to the interests of all stakeholders.

Besides the newly established regional structures and more powers devolved to the regions, one regional official highlighted that challenges were still experienced. Among other issues, the relocation of personnel from the old to the new structure became a huge challenge and this cost the department financially. As already mentioned, another challenge was the question of absorbing all the personnel from the former districts into the regional structure, because some of them were no longer suitable in terms of the new job descriptions. There was also a shortage of skills in terms of modern technology, some of which were unobtainable, even if the posts were advertised.

The same official also indicated that working relationships had been a problem ever since the inception of the regions in 2002. There was a lack of support from the supervisors and other senior personnel at the Head Office. This is regarded by Astiz (2004:40) as being a disadvantage of decentralisation, in that the central government tends to off-load responsibilities to local spheres of government



without providing adequate support. The core of the matter was that regions were still new and there were power struggles based on ethnicity. In the case of the Nkangala region, it was realised that if you were a Northern Sotho and occupied a key position in the department, Ndebele speaking people would not accept you and your authority. According to one regional official, this caused tension, with cliques being formed in the region, which influenced appointments, irrespective of competence. This condition crippled the administration and governance of the region.

It is clear that the support that regions receive from the provincial Department of Education has improved, including the provision of policies and policy updates. The provincial department also partners with them to visit circuits and provide support where it is needed. The same official further explained that it is the duty of the provincial Department of Education to visit regions and circuits. It is not sufficient for departmental officials to go out only at the level of the regions and think that they have played their part.

In partnership with the provincial Department of Education, the regions engage in outreach programmes from time to time, holding meetings and visiting circuits throughout the province. One official indicated that some of the key regional officials, together with the MEC and his entourage, and members of different departments recently visited the Thembisile Municipality. This practice is supported by Coombe and Godden (1996:20), namely that in a decentralised education system, education structures do not stand alone. The delivery of flexible local education provision depends on relations with other social sub-sectors, including health and welfare.

The other major challenge indicated by one regional official is the problem of accommodation. According to him, this problem has prevailed ever since the establishment of the Mpumalanga Department of Education. He indicated that there is not enough office space at the regional offices, and obtaining accommodation in proper buildings is a significant challenge. To address this problem of accommodation shortage, the Nkangala region is referred to here as an example. Some of the most important functions at the Nkangala region were



housed in different buildings five kilometers (5) apart from each other. The Curriculum, the Nutrition and Life Skills and the Human Resource Development sections were accommodated at the Kwa-Mhlanga Technikhon. This arrangement makes the officials uncomfortable, because it causes inconvenience in terms of managing their sections efficiently. The worst part is that this alternative accommodation is still not enough to accommodate all the curriculum implementers. As a result, some of the curriculum implementers have been accommodated in different Education Development Centres (EDC's) in Middleburg, Moretele and Siyabuswa. According to one regional official, this creates serious managerial and administration problems for this section of the regional office, because when doing monitoring, officials have to travel long distances of up to 90 or 100km.

Although transport problems have been alleviated at regional levels by supplying certain officials with state subsidised cars, several challenges are still evident. According to one regional official, the problem with transport is that the Education Development Centres have been allocated government vehicles to be used by the curriculum implementers who do not have state subsidised cars. It was reported that in most cases these vehicles are not roadworthy, which negatively affects support to circuits by curriculum implementers. In terms of co-ordination, it was indicated by the regional official administering curriculum section that, regions are well co-ordinated; hence all the departments within the regions are working as well oiled machines and are able to render services to circuits and schools.

According to one regional official, the new regional offices tried to improve the long existing communication problems that prevailed ever since the inception of the Mpumalanga Department of Education. Modern technological devices for communication, such as computers with internet access, have been supplied to the regions. All the regions now have telephones. Communication between the regions and the provincial department was found to be good. This is because most of the departments which are located at the provincial Department of Education have satellite connections to the regional level. Therefore communication happens directly with the directorates or sub-directorates at the regions. The only problem that one regional official indicated was that communication between the two



spheres of education provision and delivery is not well co-ordinated. According to him this is demonstrated by clashes that occur from time to time in terms of their programmes. It was highlighted that the provincial Department of Education often organises meetings with the regional officials telephonically, without having informed their immediate heads. According to him this interferes with the regional programme, since it happens that one official is expected to attend three meetings in three different venues at the same time.

Nevertheless, it was indicated that communication within the regional departments is moving in the right direction. Within the regions, communication is conducted through the directorates and sub-directorates, who from time to time meet with divisional heads to discuss problems within their departments. Directorates meet fortnightly with the Regional Directors to investigate different problematic areas identified, present reports and interrogate them together, in order to assist each other. The problem that surfaced was communication protocol, in that contact between the Regional Directors and divisional heads is not always possible, which frustrated some of the officials when they had pressing issues to discuss. Furthermore, communication between Regional Directors and people on the ground is too weak. The Regional Directors only hold general meetings with all the regional staff once in a while. Another contributory factor is that Regional Directors are often away from their offices; therefore matters are often stalled for some period of time. This fact reveals the centralism in terms of management by regional directors, who fail to delegate at times.

One regional official indicated that there is also a problem of communication protocol between the regions and the provincial Department of Education. He further indicated that in 2006 the regional structure was revised based on the fact that there was still centralisation of certain administrative functions at the Head Office. It was also revealed that some of the regional officials were over-loaded with responsibilities and therefore new posts had to be created. The new regional structure that was proposed in March 2007 was approved to be used during the second half of the year 2007. The approved new regional structure was sketched in the document called the “New Regional Structure as approved” 540000-591000 (2007:2-38), which is interpreted diagrammatically below:

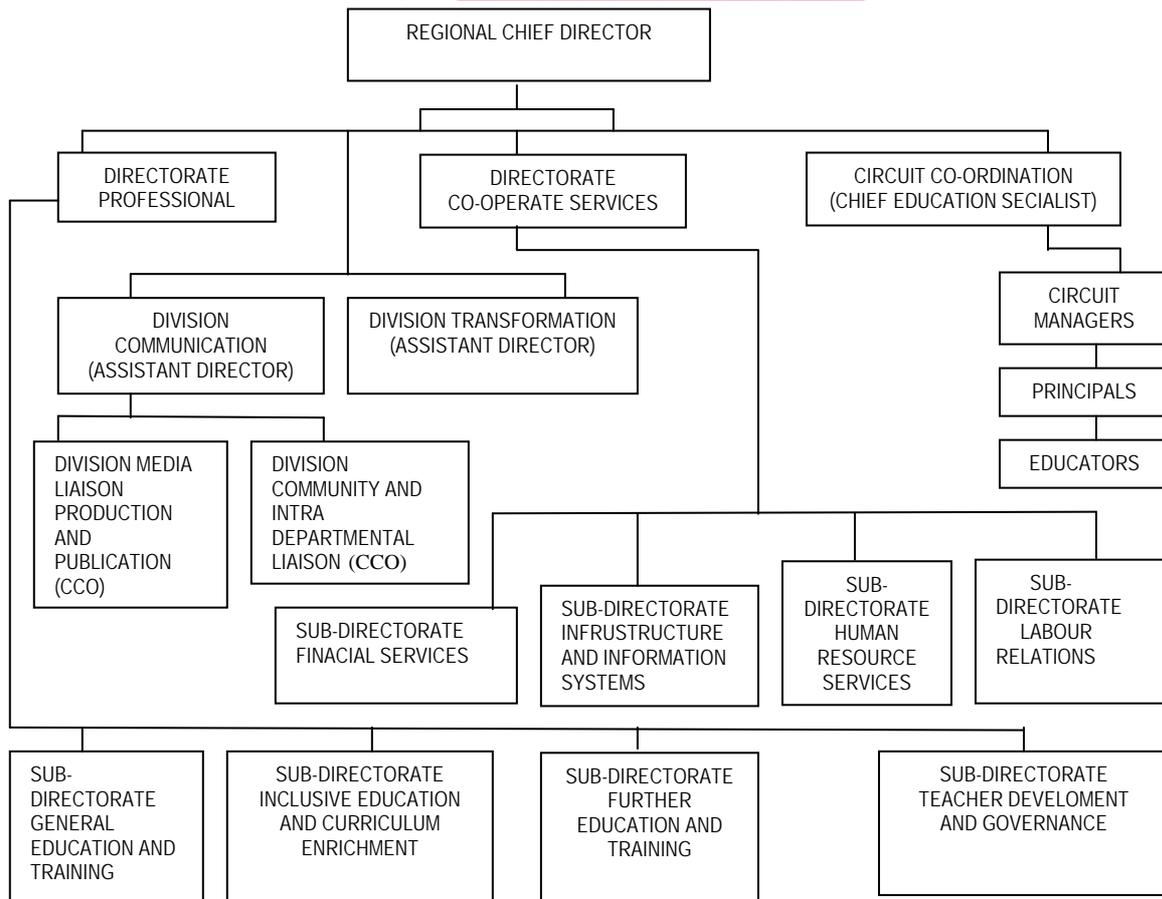


Figure 5.2 Revised structure for Mpumalanga education regions

Source: the Mpumalanga Department of Education: Revised Regional Office Structure as Approved: 2007

According to my interpretation of this structure, it is clear that visible changes have been effected, as compared to the old structure outlined during the interviews. This confirms the inference that human resource shortages in terms of administration and governance at the regions have been addressed. As a result of these improvements, services that were previously not delivered or centralised at the Head Office due to such shortages, will be taken care of and be delivered to the levels were they are most needed.

5.3 THE EFFECTS OF THE SHIFT FROM RECENTRALISATION TO DECENTRALISATION

During the early years of the establishment of the Mpumalanga Department of Education from 1994 to 1999, the model for education administration and governance which was adopted was decentralisation. This model is in accordance



with Galiani & Schargrodsky's (2001:1) assertion that many organisations throughout the world see decentralisation as a major component of organisational innovation. According to one provincial official in this study, decentralisation was adopted as a means to bring order to administrative and governance structures, to bring decision making closer to the people through delegated powers, and to improve service delivery. In terms of administrative and governance structures, Brown (1990:32) indicates that 'order' refers to the ability of administrative structures to manage themselves, to have knowledge of organisational objectives, and to manage other structures under their control.

Unfortunately, from 1994 to 1999 decentralisation in the districts of the Mpumalanga Department of Education was not realised as it had been envisaged. According to one district manager this was because of a lack of administrative and governance competence and capacity by the Head Office in driving the decentralisation process. This incompetence resulted in circuits and districts having inadequate personnel to render the services, a lack of physical resources, poor communication between the four tiers of the education administration, poor co-ordination and implementation of departmental policies, poor human relations at different levels, and ultimately poor service delivery. Department of Education (a) (1999/2000:232) acknowledges that during this period, the fact that the District Development Programme (DDP) was running in all provinces was recognition that the districts had been neglected. The situation was exacerbated by the inability of the Head Office to capacitate officials at different levels of the education administration. This resulted in district officials being uncertain of their functions and appearing to be motivated by personal interests rather the desire to deliver services (Department of Education (a) 1999/2000:249).

In 1999 districts were abolished because of the administrative and governance flaws of decentralisation that occurred during 1994 to 1999. In 2002, the Mpumalanga Department of Education introduced regions as the locus of service delivery between the Head Office and the local spheres of education administration and governance. The restructuring model that was adopted was recentralisation. According to Leung (2004:1), recentralisation occurs when a loss



of control is perceived as a result of decentralisation. This process enables the regaining of authority previously devolved. Based on this approach, recentralisation is defined as the reclaiming of power and authority from the periphery by the central government.

The process of recentralisation that occurred in the Mpumalanga Department of Education is comparable with the experiences of recentralisation in other countries. Recentralisation occurs when the capacities of administrators, be it at regional, district, circuit or school levels, to work collectively to reform education are weak and need development. It also occurs when the system of support for newly decentralised authorities may be inadequate, whereby provincial governments may have little or no information about their schools and their academic and financial performance relative to other jurisdictions. Other contributing factors are when local offices of the Ministry of Education lack the culture and capacity to provide guidance and assistance, as opposed to enforcing rules, and when decentralisation is not accompanied by an increase in flexible funding required for administration structures to exercise their new responsibilities for self improvement (USAID 2005:1-2). All these global experiences of recentralisation resonate with that in the Mpumalanga Department of Education. One provincial official in this study indicated that the department recentralised powers from the districts because of lack of capacity in the districts to guide the circuits and schools in terms of policy implementation, the inability of the districts to deliver services to the lower levels of education administration in order to reform education, as well as poor performance that the districts exhibited as decentralised authorities.

In the Mpumalanga Department of Education shifts occurred when districts were abolished, the powers they held were recentralised to the provincial Department of Education, re-configured and then decentralised to the newly formed regional administrative structures. Due to these recentralised, re-configured and decentralised powers, administration and governance at regional level was improved to some extent. However, the introduction of regions brought changes in the entire administration of education throughout the province. According to one regional official, the shift from decentralisation to recentralisation impacted the



education administration of the province both negatively and positively. The negative impact was in terms of human resources. Many officials from the former districts lost the positions that they had held during the districts arrangement, which became a challenge that the provincial Department of Education had to deal with. Many officials did not get settled satisfactorily in their jobs which resulted in poor performance and some leaving the department to join other departments in other provinces. The same respondent indicated further that there were power struggles between the newly appointed regional officials. Such power struggles brought about insubordination, mistrust and conflicts that hampered the performance of regions during the first year after their inception.

In terms of positive impact, this study has established that with the introduction of regions, the Head Office has been shaped into an effective structure that supports the regions and the circuits. According to one regional official, from 2002 to date the regional arrangement has resulted in a working system of education, although there are still areas of displeasure. The positive effects were demonstrated in the policy and budget speech that was presented by the MEC for Education in Mpumalanga in 2004. In terms of the budget, he indicated that in order to improve efficiency and service delivery in the system, the department allocated R2 million to Winter Schools in all regions, targeting grade 12 learners. For youth skills development in Further Education and Training (FET) colleges, an amount of R92 million was allocated to ensure that youth have the skills to create employment for themselves (Policy and Budget Speeches Book 2 2004:4-7).

Recentralisation has also changed administration and governance at the circuit level. Through recentralisation, the regions have revised the circuit structure by allocating them extra posts to ensure efficiency. This is in accordance with what was planned in the five year strategic and performance plans for the Mpumalanga Department of Education (2005/2006-2009/210:9), namely that administration of education seeks to ensure efficiency and effectiveness of the system through monitoring, evaluation and review of the implementation processes and management systems. More powers were devolved to the regions by the provincial Department of Education, and in turn the regions delegated certain powers to the circuits. It is through recentralisation that the co-ordination of



regional activities has improved, communications facilities have been supplied to circuits by the regions, and the transport system has been improved. One regional official indicated that through the introduction of regions, the department has paid more attention to service delivery in circuits, thus supporting policy implementation. In trying to improve the administrative and operational situation in circuits, the regions have encouraged curriculum implementers to adopt schools in different circuits in order to help circuit managers with the monitoring of teaching and learning in schools.

According to one regional official, regions have engaged fully in ensuring that circuits support the implementation of the National Curriculum Statement (NCS) in schools. Curriculum implementers are conducting workshops throughout the circuits of Mpumalanga to ensure that educators know what they should teach. Their efforts and the success of their endeavours were reflected in the grade 12 results of 2006, according to the MEC for Education in Mpumalanga. The class of 2006 succeeded in obtaining a 65.3% pass rate, compared to a 58.6% pass rate in 2005 (an improvement of 6.7%) (Mpumalanga Department of Education, Newsletter 2007:4). One provincial education official also claimed that the pass rates for the province have improved since the establishment of regions in 2002, as demonstrated in Table 5.1:

Table 5.1: Overall pass percentages for Mpumalanga from 2002 to 2006

2002	2003	2004	2005	2006
56%	58%	61,8%	58.6%	65.3%

Source: Mpumalanga Department of Education, Newsletter. Volume 1/2007

Irrespective of this achievement, one official in the curriculum section indicated that curriculum implementers are still working under a very stressful situation due to a continued lack of resources. They lack facilities and resources such as overhead projectors to conduct workshops and for those who do not have subsidised cars, moving around in circuits to conduct workshops become very difficult. This official suggested that the Head Office should supply the regions with portable overhead projectors and accelerate the process of allocating government



subsidised cars to the curriculum implementers. This would contribute extensively to improving the work situation for curriculum implementers.

One regional official repeated that it was through the recentralisation of powers by the Head Office from the districts, re-configuration and re-decentralisation of these powers to the regions, that the regions were able to improve service delivery to circuits. Regions have established warehouses in each sub-region for housing stationary and textbooks and to act as depots in allocating books to different circuits. This arrangement has reduced the problems of late delivery of stationery to schools. Sub-regions have been formed by clustering circuits in terms of their proximity, following the cluster pattern which had been adopted during the former districts era. The same official indicated further that since regions in the Mpumalanga Department of Education have identified most schools as no fee schools (Act 84/1996), many parents have been relieved of the burden of school fee payments.

With the help of circuits, regions identified certain schools that should gain Section 21 status. Section 21 status means that funds for administering schools in different circuits are deposited into their accounts according to their enrolments and such money is then budgeted according to the guidelines provided by the department. A limited number of other schools, called Section 20 schools, are required to make requisitions for funds from the department in terms of their needs, by means of the paper-based budget and the department in turn supplies what they have requested.

With the help of the Mpumalanga Department of Education, regions have drawn extra funds from sponsors to allocate to schools which are showing an extra effort in producing better grade 12 results, especially in science related subjects. Such schools are called Dinaledi Schools. According to one regional official, ever since the introduction of this project, regions have joined hands with Head Office officials to present workshops to science educators from time to time, to promote the quality of science education in schools.



Due to ongoing criminal activities occurring in schools, regions in the Mpumalanga Department of Education have partnered with the Department of Correctional Services to put strategies in place to fight crime in educational institutions. Personnel from Correctional Services have adopted schools to monitor. According to one regional official, these personnel visit schools on a weekly basis to address learners on disciplinary issues and to conduct searches for deadly weapons and drugs. The same official indicated further that ever since the introduction of regions there has been an improved working relationship between the School Governing Bodies (SGB's) and the regions. This improved relationship came about as a result of the introduction of divisions at the regions that deal with School Governing Body matters. These divisions deploy personnel to different circuits to hold workshops with School Governing Body (SGB) members in order to improve their operation. Recently most SGB members have been schooled in their responsibilities and therefore understand their roles as SGB members better than before.

5.4 Conclusion

The establishment of regions in the Mpumalanga Department of Education came about as a result of problems and flaws in administration and governance in terms of service delivery during the districts era. Therefore one can claim that regions in the Mpumalanga Department of Education came into being as a catalyst and a mechanism to realign the system of education in order to realise proficiency in service delivery. The idea of this recentralisation mechanism emerged during the second term of office of the post apartheid government of the democratic South Africa, from 1999 to 2004, the time during which the new president made a call for accelerated service delivery throughout the country.

The new regional structures were intended to be accessible in terms of support to circuits. Although officials within the Mpumalanga Department of Education may have held different opinions and approaches in respect of the establishment of regions, they acknowledged the same need. Both political and academic approaches that emerged during the process aimed at having education structures



that would be effective in terms of service delivery and provide better support to the lower spheres of education governance.

The establishment of regions was not a totally consultative process involving all the stakeholders, as one former district manager indicated. Nevertheless, the Mpumalanga Department of Education continued to implement the process. After the establishment of the regions more powers were devolved to them than what districts had enjoyed during the district era. According to the interviews with the former district managers, circuit managers and regional officials, one can say that the introduction of regional education structures, as part of a greater recentralisation decentralisation of the education system, has improved education administration and governance in the Mpumalanga Department of Education. Besides these achievements, it is acknowledged by the Mpumalanga Department of Education that there are still administrative and governance flaws within the system that need to be addressed. Examples of areas for improvement are communication between the Head Office and the regions, the transport system within the Department of Education, as well as physical structures for regions and circuits.



CHAPTER 6

FINDINGS AND CONCLUSION

6.1 INTRODUCTION

The objective of this chapter is to conclude this study by presenting the research findings. It also provides answers to the central question of this study, which is to understand the effects of the shift of administration and governance from decentralisation to recentralisation and recentralisation to decentralisation. This study is also intended to establish the effects these shifts had on service delivery and the provision of education at provincial, regional, district and circuit levels of the Mpumalanga Department of Education.

6.2 FINDINGS

This study found out that from 1994 decentralisation was used as a tool for the restructuring of education in the Mpumalanga Department of Education. This assertion was made by officials who took part in the task team for restructuring all the spheres of the Mpumalanga Department of Education. The restructuring process started during the dawn of the new democratic South Africa in 1994 to 1995. To establish the new department, a number of consultative meetings were held with different stakeholders from former apartheid departments of education, which were inherited by the new department. This process took place in order to investigate how the new department should be structured.

Following decentralisation as a global trend and a major component of institutional innovation throughout the world (Galiani & Schargrotsky 2001:1), it was ultimately agreed by stakeholders to form three spheres of education administration and governance in the province and to decentralise powers to these lower levels. The education administration and governance levels which were agreed upon were the provincial, circuit and local levels. The decentralisation pattern followed by the Mpumalanga Department of Education was territorial. According to Bray and Mukundan (2003:3), territorial decentralisation refers to a distribution of control



and powers among the different geographic tiers of government such as districts, circuits and schools.

The decentralisation model of education administration and governance adopted by the Mpumalanga Department of Education gave birth to new policies. According to one provincial official, these policies were aimed at establishing one Department of Education with new values completely different from those of the inherited former departments of education. The major policy which guided the administration of the Mpumalanga Department of Education was the School Education Act (Mpumalanga), Act No. 8 of 1995. This act, together with the Interim Constitution Act No. 200 of 1993, set a base for the administration and governance of education of the province.

The categories of territorial decentralisation which were adopted were deconcentration, delegation and devolution. According to Coombe and Godden (1996:58-59), when an organisation changes its regulations and legislative frameworks due to decentralisation, is said to have adopted decentralisation as deconcentration. Through deconcentration, the provincial department of education established branch offices such as districts and circuits and staffed them with their officials. In this way, the department's objective was to go beyond efficiency using deconcentration as part of the strategy to improve local and district co-ordination among previously separated public services, and to strengthen provincial planning (Coombe & Godden 1996:58-57). The powers which had been centralised at the provincial level were then devolved to the districts and circuits.

Devolution means that powers are held at sub-provincial levels and that officers do not need to seek approval from the provincial department of education for their actions or decisions (Bray & Mukundan 2003:3). According to one district manager, the manner in which devolution occurred implied that the districts would have powers at their level of education administration, as was indicated on paper. However it was soon realised that the powers had been merely delegated. Delegated powers refer to a stronger degree of decision making at the local level, but power still basically rests with the central authority which has decided to 'lend'



such powers to the local authority. Delegated powers can be withdrawn without resorting to legislation.

According to one provincial official, to enable the system to be fully functional, the provincial Department of Education had to decentralise powers to the lower levels of education administration. Although circuits were established before the districts, districts came into effect(s) after the Head Office realised that there were problems and challenges at circuit level in terms of the provision of education and service delivery. The Department formulated the strategy of establishing another administrative and governance structure (districts), in which more powers were decentralised and which acted as a locus of service delivery between the Head Office and the circuits. This approach concurs with Dinkić (2001:2-3) that the motivation of governments in decentralising more powers to the lower structures, is to yield considerable efficiency in the administration and management of an education system. This desire involves expectations to contribute to the realisation of the strategic objectives of the country and the role of education in overall social and economic development, based on the fact that modern developmental strategies consider education as an exceptionally important element throughout the development of human life.

According to district managers, the Mpumalanga Department of Education established ten districts throughout the Mpumalanga Province in 1996. To establish these districts, circuits were clustered together in terms of their locality, but this brought about a challenge in terms of physical and human resources. According to document analysis, it emerged that certain districts had many circuits and schools under their administration, yet had limited human and physical resources. According to Paqueo & Lammert (2000:5), examination of the World Bank Project supporting decentralisation identified a variety of issues that affect the performance of decentralisation reforms, and among them is the question of resources.

Based on interviews with district managers in the Mpumalanga Department of Education it was found that districts shared resources equally. This was done irrespective of the geographical area they covered, which created problems in



terms of service delivery. In terms of allocations, the problem created was that small districts and districts from the former advantaged areas were benefiting more than those from former disadvantaged areas in terms of service delivery. Thus the disadvantaged districts continued to work under difficult conditions of insufficient resources.

The situation of decentralisation in the Mpumalanga Department of Education concurs with James's (2003:17) views of the decentralisation experience in Chile. Experiences in Chile revealed that decentralisation does not by itself remove inequalities between localities of varying incomes and quality, but poverty may continue to exist in poorer communities after decentralisation. Interviews in this study revealed that in spite of what the provincial Department of Education intended by introducing districts in terms of improving service delivery and efficiency of education provision, districts had a lot of administrative and governance problems that impeded them from realising this objective. Districts, like circuits, continued to experience problems of communication, transport, human resources, physical resources, lack of capacity, relationships at different levels, and support. One district manager indicated that a major problem that contributed to the poor administration and governance at district levels was the high expenditure incurred by the provincial Department of Education. This expenditure was in terms of hiring administrative and governance buildings for the operation of the districts. In the long run this depleted the funds of the department and it found itself ultimately being unable to fill the vacant posts which were allocated to the districts. This in turn impacted negatively on education provision and service delivery at the lower levels.

It was found that in 1994 during the establishment of the Mpumalanga Department of Education, it delegated decentralised powers to the circuits. These powers were not revised, but remained the same as the powers the circuits had wielded during the apartheid education system. However the circuits were paralysed in terms of their administration and governance functions. Circuits did not have powers to implement departmental programmes but only to recommend what the department should implement. Circuits operated with limited physical and human resources, which meant that they were unable to support schools in terms of policy



implementation, supply of human resources, capital and physical resources. The working relationship between circuits and the provincial Department of Education was very poor. Support in terms of curriculum management, administration and governance to circuits was lacking. According to Paqueo and Lammert (2000:6), in a decentralised system, when devolving responsibilities to lower levels, strong support should be demonstrated from higher structures and the system at large. Such support should be built around the real need for development in terms of administrative and governance structures.

It was during 1994 and 1995, the first years after the inception of the Mpumalanga Department of Education, that many circuit managers used their personal experience to execute their administrative and governance responsibilities in their circuits. The malfunctioning of circuits became evident in the way administration and governance in schools was conducted. According to the circuit managers, in the Mpumalanga Department of Education during 1994 and 1995, decentralisation caused confusion because there was no control, accountability, responsiveness or efficiency in terms of education provision and delivery of services throughout the province. This was as a result of poor knowledge of administration and governance that departmental officials had in terms of what their roles were.

According to Donaldson (1993:42), for decentralisation to be successful, control needs to be balanced by accurate planning, regulation and scrutiny from the centre. These recommendations are contrary to what happened in the Mpumalanga Department of Education during 1994 to 1995. The intention of empowering the lower levels of administration and governance through the decentralisation of powers, created a void which caused problems and poor service delivery. This study has shown that it is evident that during the early years after the inception of the Mpumalanga Department of Education, decentralisation did not work as was intended. According to the Decentralisation Thematic Team of the World Bank (2006:1-2), the failure of the implementation of decentralisation lies in poor political commitment and leadership.

Realising that decentralisation had created problems of disparities, poor performance, poor monitoring, poor co-ordination and poor service delivery at



district and circuit levels, the provincial Department of Education took a resolution to ameliorate the situation. According to one provincial official, the resolution was to abolish districts, and to establish new regional administrative and governance structures that would have more powers. This case of the Mpumalanga Department of Education matches what happened in countries such as Colombia, Mexico, Nigeria and Zimbabwe, where the policy of education decentralisation swung back to centralisation after it became clear that there were inefficiencies in handling administration and governance at the levels to which they had been devolved (Bray & Mukundan 2003:10). According to Leung (2004: 4), when the policy of education decentralisation shifts to the opposite direction, from decentralisation back to centralisation, the process is called recentralisation.

According to interviews with the district managers the provincial Department of Education proposed in 1999 to abolish the districts and establish regions for education administration and governance. This happened after consultative meetings were held to evaluate the performance of districts. The major meeting that led to the decision to abolish the districts was the National and Provincial Conference on districts development, which was held in 1999. It was at this conference that numerous challenges pertaining to education administration and governance challenges in the Mpumalanga Department of Education were outlined.

According to the Department of Education (a) (1999/2000:247), districts did not have clear job descriptions and roles and responsibilities were not clearly defined. There was a shortage of curriculum implementers at district level and circuit managers were not clear about their functions. There was a lack of any effective channel of co-ordination and communication to keep districts and circuits up-to-date on departmental activities, and decisions were often lacking. Districts were not involved in decision making and seldom participated in the planning stages of new departmental initiatives and policies. The department did not encourage creative initiatives at district level and thus a sense of ownership was not developed. There was a lack of continuity in terms of capacity development and subordinates were sometimes trained before their supervisors. Districts received conflicting demands from the Head Office directorates that resulted in



unnecessary duplication of activities. Administrative processes were not always collectively understood and the absence of norms and standards aggravated the situation. The delegation of duties was difficult in understaffed offices and the withdrawal of delegated authority to take certain decisions and make certain appointments was a heavy blow to the districts.

Based on the deficiencies of administration and governance at district and circuit levels as discussed above, the Mpumalanga Department of Education decided to reverse decentralisation reforms by abolishing districts and establishing regions. This model of reform is called recentralisation because districts were totally dismantled and the powers which they held were recentralised to the provincial Department of Education.

From 1999 to 2004, recentralisation in the Mpumalanga Department of Education took another dimension in the sense that, after the abolition of districts, the powers which were reclaimed by Head Office were re-organised, reconfigured and re-decentralised to the newly formed regional structures. Even in the case of establishing the regions deconcentration occurred, because the department had to change existing legislative frameworks. Among others the structure of the provincial department had to change since districts no longer existed. The structures were reorganised into four tiers: Head Office, regional offices, circuits and schools. The functions of these tiers of education also had to change due to the new authority and responsibilities which were decentralised from the Head office, devolved and delegated to the regions and the circuits.

According to Bray (1999: 209-210), similar to the case of decentralisation, the motive for education recentralisation may be political or administrative. Recentralisation in the Mpumalanga Department of Education revealed signs of both these motives. According to one provincial education official, political recentralisation in the Mpumalanga Department of Education was driven by political discourses that were conducted during the ANC Conference that was held in 1997 in Mafikeng. It was proposed at this conference that provinces should align their education administration structures with municipal boundaries in order to accelerate service delivery. In response to this call, the Mpumalanga



Department of Education abolished districts and formed three regions which were in line with municipal boundaries. Apart from this scenario, the administrative motive was that districts were failing dismally to improve the system of education in the province through improved service delivery. A structure with more powers was needed to turn the situation around; hence the abolition of districts and the formation of regions which had more powers and authority than the districts previously had.

According to Hawkins (1999:16), when restructuring occurs as a result of recentralisation, the whole system of education has to be restructured in terms of powers in the different tiers. Human resources, physical resources and general administration of the system have to be restructured and devolved to where they are most needed. In the case of the Mpumalanga Department of Education, human resources from the former districts had to be absorbed into either the newly formed regional structures, or other structures such as circuits and schools. For administrative reasons, buildings that were used by the districts were abandoned. New buildings for the regions were located in terms of centrality and convenience for the circuits under their administration. Government vehicles which were owned by the former districts were rationalised and shared among the three districts and additional transport was supplied. Capital resources were also decentralised to the regions by the Head Office, with improvements.

This study found that the establishment of the regions brought about different challenges, the major one being the problem of a power struggle. This problem emerged because certain officials from the former districts, who were absorbed into the regional arrangement, were not placed in posts equivalent to those that they previously occupied. According to one regional official, this situation created cliques that at times sabotaged the image of the regional administrations. Another problem that was identified by this study was insubordination between regional officials, which was based on racial and cultural differences. If you were white and occupying a higher post, black people would disregard you as their leader. If you were Northern Sotho, Ndebele people would show signs of insubordination. Regional officials, especially from the curriculum section, hinted that the section



still experiences problems of physical resources like buildings and transport, which affect their performance as a department.

Irrespective of these challenges, this study found that from 2004 to date, the establishment of regions that resulted from the recentralisation and decentralisation shifts, changed the nature of administration and governance of education in the province. Due to the devolution of more powers to the regions, service delivery to other levels of education administration has improved. Support by both regional and provincial education officials has improved. Circuits are well co-ordinated and are able to function as a unified force. The support from Head Office and the regions is visible in the circuits. The provincial Department of Education is also functioning better because of the decentralisation of certain functions to the regions. Transport problems for circuits have been minimised, and for circuit managers such problems have been totally eradicated, because they are now supplied with government subsidised cars. Although communication is still a problem, measures have been taken to reduce the challenges by supplying circuits with necessary facilities, such as computers with internet access and telephones where there are telephone lines.

To summarise, one can claim that since the establishment of the regions, the following achievements have been realised:

- There is improved support among the four spheres of education administration and governance in the province.
- Circuits have been empowered with human resources.
- The Persal system had been decentralised to the regions.
- The provincial Department of Education has revised the circuit structure.
- Transport and communication problems have been minimised.
- Service delivery has improved.



6.3 RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of this study I recommend that the provincial Department of Education and the Department of Public Works should make an effort to supply buildings for regions and circuits. The Nkangala region is an example of a region that is experiencing problems in terms of office space. The urgent solution to this problem may contribute to the improvement of the administrative functions of the regions, whereby all the sections of a region are administered within the same premises. This could also save regions costs, since officials have to travel many kilometres away from the regions from time to time, to monitor the progress of curriculum implementers.

The Head Office should further decentralise and devolve powers to the regional offices so that regions can deal directly with schools in terms of supplies and shortages. The regional offices should establish libraries in order to house public documents for the department, and to avoid the misplacement of valuable documents. For curriculum implementers to be effective when executing their duties, the department should supply them with movable overhead projectors that can be used when conducting workshops. The waiting period for subsidised cars for curriculum implementers should be shortened. This will provide them with transport that will allow them to get to work immediately after they have been appointed.

6.4 ISSUES FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

Firstly, based on the challenges regions are experiencing in terms of working relationships, a comprehensive study into the underlying cause of poor working ethics would be useful. Secondly, since schools were not targeted by this research study, further investigation into Mpumalanga schools in terms of the effects of the shift from decentralisation to recentralisation is recommended.



6.5 CONCLUSION

This study investigated the effects that the shift from decentralisation to recentralisation had on administration and governance in the Mpumalanga Department of Education. Based on the findings of this study it has become evident that decentralisation alone cannot improve service delivery in a system. Although that may be true, Bray and Mukundan (2003:11-12) agree that decentralisation can present a solution to some problems in some circumstances, but it can also create problems. The same authors claim that decentralisation can increase links and control between different levels of education administration, reduce delays in the decision making process, and help to improve efficiency in an education system. However it can also create problems such as disparities, which is one of the reasons why in some countries decentralisation reforms have been reversed.

The above mentioned assertions are evident in the case of the Mpumalanga Department of Education. This study has shown that a combination of decentralisation and recentralisation can yield better results in improving service delivery in a particular system. This occurred when the Mpumalanga Department of Education abolished districts to form regions, recentralised powers which had been held by the districts, reconfigured them and re-decentralised them to the regions. This study has also shown that recentralisation does not only mean the reclaiming of powers by the centre, but it can also refer to the reclaiming of powers by the centre in order to revise, reconfigure and improve them for their redistribution to the periphery. Recentralisation does not necessarily occur only where there is power abuse by lower levels of administration and governance, or when the centre fears the loss of power. It can be adopted as a model of education administration and governance and used to improve a situation which is not operative.

Decentralisation, as the restructuring model adopted by the Mpumalanga Department of Education, was designed under the premise that restructuring would result in the uniform functioning of education and administration structures in terms of the implementation of policies. From the findings presented in this



study it has become apparent that, even when powers have been decentralised to the lower levels of education administration and governance, if proper monitoring and enough resources are not supplied in the system, then decentralisation will not translate into the outcomes envisaged. This will lead ultimately to recentralisation.

Although this study was designed around, and targeted the Mpumalanga Department of Education, its results have significance for scholars worldwide, particularly those interested in decentralisation and recentralisation policies, their dynamics, their implementation in an education system and their outcomes in institutional environments.



APPENDICES

APPENDIX A:

P. O. BOX 235
Skilpadfontein
0431
04 February 2007

The Regional Director
Nkangala Regional Office
Private Bag X4021
KwaMhlanga
1027

Sir

RE: REQUEST TO CONDUCT A RESEARCH PROJECT IN NKANGALA REGIONAL EDUCATION OFFICE

RESEARCH PROJECT

ANALYSIS OF ADMINISTRATIVE GOVERNANCE IN EDUCATION:
THE CASE OF THE MPUMALANGA DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

I am humbly requesting your permission to come and conduct a research project at your institution on the research topic mentioned above. I am presently an HOD attached to Ramoshidi Technical and Commercial High school at Nokaneng Circuit of Nkangala region. I am a third year Masters student at the University of Pretoria in the Department of Education Management, Law and Policy.

My project involves accessing certain administration and governance documents for analysis, as well as certain administration and governance personnel in different departments for interviews, among others, the former and present circuit managers, and the former district heads. This exercise will last for one week if possible and is intended to be conducted during the Easter school holidays. During the interviews I will use a tape recorder, which will help me to organise my data after the completion of the interviews process. Ethical issues such as the right to withdraw, confidentiality, anonymity and non-traceability in the research will be adhered to. The identified participants will receive letters of notification for participation including time frames and they will be briefed about the fundamentals of the research project prior the commencement of the interviews. Interviews with



individuals will last between 40 and 60 minutes. The same research project will be conducted with different provincial administrative personnel and the letter bearing the same contents will be delivered to the office of the MEC for approval. After the completion of the research project, a research report on the findings will be made available to the regional head for scrutiny.

The research in my opinion will help the entire provincial education department in terms of administrative governance in different educational structures and organs in place.

I hope that my request will meet your favourable response.

Yours truly

S.D. Sebidi

Signed.....



APPENDIX B: LETTER OF INFORMED CONSENT

Enquiries: S.D. SEBIDI

18 March 2007

Cell no: 0822205715

LETTER OF INFORMED CONSENT

TITLE OF THE RESEARCH PROJECT

**ANALYSIS OF ADMINISTRATIVE GOVERNANCE IN EDUCATION:
THE CASE OF THE MPUMALANGA DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION**

Dear Participant

You are invited to participate in a research project aimed at:

Investigating the administration and governance at different levels of education provision in the Mpumalanga Department of Education. Among other things, administration and governance at provincial, regional and subordinate circuits will be the focus of my study.

The administration and governance periods are categorised as follows:

- 1994-1999: The period during which different policies for administrative governance at national and provincial levels were developed and put in place.
- 1999-2004: The period during which policies developed, were implemented, administrative governance structures and policies were reviewed to ensure efficiency in the business of education provision.
- 2004 to date: The period characterised by reclaiming of powers from the periphery by the centre.

Focus will also be on the strategies the provincial department of education followed to ensure the effective functioning of the administration and governance of education. The following issues will be investigated: the administrative governance models that were adopted to eradicate the imbalances which occurred in the education system, as well as the provision of education at all levels of the provincial department of education; the background of the administration and governance structures that existed before and after the restructuring of education;



their administrative functions, how they are co-ordinated compared to the previous structures; who was responsible for what and how this benefited the administration of education in the region and how information was filtered down to the periphery. I will also investigate the challenges, the achievements and failures of both the former and the present administrative governance structures, in terms of provision of quality education as well as the tendency of governments to manipulate policies in opposite directions.

Note that your participation in this research is voluntary and is not intended to intimidate anybody. Under no circumstances will the identity of interviewees be known to any parties or organisations that may be involved in the research process or which have power over the participants. You will also have the right to withdraw at any stage or not take part in the interviews if you feel items to be offensive, intrusive, misleading, biased or inconsiderate. You are therefore, if accepting this invitation, assured that no information will be revealed that will allow your identity to be established against your will. I promise to abide by the ethical principles indicated supra.

If you are willing to take part in this study, I humbly request you to sign as a declaration of your consent that you have understood all what has been indicated above and that your participation in this research project is indeed voluntary.

Participant's signature.....

Date.....

Researcher's signature.....

Date.....

Yours Sincerely

S.D. Sebidi



PARTICIPANTS' ROLE IN THE RESEARCH PROCESS

Note that, as participants you will be expected to participate in semi-structured interviews whereby you will answer questions relating to administrative governance pertaining to the Nkangala regional education department and/or the provincial education department. You will also be expected to be at the top and best of your voices as I will be using a tape recorder to record all the deliberations during the interviews.

As participants, you will also be asked to supply documents backing your assertions where possible, after or during the interview proceedings. You will be able to voice any inconvenience caused by the interviews in the line of the degree and sensitivity and threats of questions, which may lead to over and under reporting.

OUTCOMES OF THE RESEARCH

For the Mpumalanga Department of Education this research will help policy developers to re-adjust provincial, regional and circuits policies where adjustments are due. It will also reveal gaps within the education administration and governance of the province and hopefully relevant steps to rectify or improve the situation will be pursued.

This research will also give a general picture of how the administration of education is performing in terms of education provision and service delivery. It will reveal the efficacies and the inefficacies of the models of education administration adopted had over a certain period of time, and also give the sense of a model that can be used to achieve better conditions and outcomes in the province. The findings will give participants an opportunity to critique the research and therefore open new avenues for research in the same line to further improve the administration at circuit, regional and provincial levels of education provision.



APPENDIX C: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR FORMER CIRCUIT MANAGERS

1. What was your role as a circuit manager?

2. How did you go about executing your roles as a circuit?

3. What informed the way you work as a circuit?

4. What informed the way you worked?

5. What kind of relationship did the circuit have with district and Provincial Department of Education?

6. What kind of powers did you have as a circuit from 1997 to 1999?

7. How were the physical and human resources during that period?

8. What kind of challenges did you experience as a circuit?

THANK YOU FOR YOUR CO-OPERATION



APPENDIX D: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR PRESENT CIRCUIT MANAGERS

1. What is your role as a circuit manager?

2. How do you go about executing your roles as a circuit?

3. What is the sense of how you work as a circuit?

4. What informs you the way you work?

5. What kind of relationship do you have with the region and the province?

6. What changes were brought about the restructuring of districts?

7. To your knowledge, what brought about this change?

8. Talk through the districts structure before they were abolished, their functions, where the powers lay, and who was responsible for what?

9. Do you think circuits are functioning better now than before?

10. What is your sense of information dissemination?

11. Are there challenges that you are experiencing with this new arrangement?

THANK YOU FOR YOUR CO-OPERATION



APPENDIX E: INTERVIEWS WITH FORMER DISTRICT MANAGERS

1. Can you take me through the establishment of former education districts?

2. What was the rationale behind the establishment of such administration structures?

3. What was your role as a district manager?

4. How did you go about executing your roles as a district?

5. What challenges did you experience as a district?

6. What informed the way you worked?

7. What changes were brought by with this arrangement?

8. What kind of relationship did you have with circuits and province?

9. What was the rationale behind the restructuring/abolition of districts?

10. How were regions established?

11. Do you think regions are well managed?

THANK YOU FOR YOUR CO-OPERATION



APPENDIX F: INTERVIEWS WITH REGIONAL OFFICIALS

1. Can you give me the background on the establishment of regions?

2. What were the challenges that you came across during the establishment of regions?

3. What is your role as a regional education official?

4. What is the sense of how you work as a regional education department?

5. What informs the way regional education department's work?

6. What relationship do you have with schools, circuits and province?

7. Which powers were devolved by the province to the regions and by regions to circuits?

8. What kind of support does the region receive from the province?

9. What is your sense of information dissemination between the province, region and circuits?

10. How is the region co-ordinated in terms of powers and functions?

THANK YOU FOR YOUR CO-OPERATION



APPENDIX G: INTERVIEWS WITH PROVINCIAL OFFICIALS

1. How did you go about the restructuring of education in this province since 1994?

2. What kind of challenges did you experience during the restructuring process?

3. What brought about the abolition of education districts in this province?

4. In your sense what effects did the removal of districts have on education provision?

5. What was the rationale of the establishment of regional education departments?

6. Were there powers which were devolved from the province to the regions?

7. Are there any improvements that have been brought by this new arrangement?

8. Administratively, how do you support other spheres of education in the province?

9. How are you administering your department and which structures are involved?

10. Are regional offices functioning as envisaged or are there still challenges?

11. Given another chance would you opt to maintain or remove districts?

THANK YOU FOR YOUR CO-OPERATION



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