Chapter 1

BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

1.1 Purpose of the study

How does an education system organise itself in the absence of explicit government policy? More specifically, how does the spatial and political idea of an education 'district' come into being without the regulatory guidance of official policy? This is the core intellectual puzzle that directs and inspires this study on education districts in South Africa.

Accordingly, the purpose of this study is to explore the common and contested meanings of districts in the South African education system. It aims to illuminate how meanings are assigned to education districts, in practice as well as in theory. The study, further examines the constitutional, legal and policy contexts that inform the niche that districts occupy in the South African education system, as well as stakeholders' understandings of the meaning of districts. In addition, the district office 'in action' is examined by means of a case study of a district in a provincial education department, to explore how districts function in practice in the education system. The thesis of this study is that districts in the South African education system reflect a particular form of decentralisation that confers bounded but contested meanings to districts, which limits but simultaneously unleashes possibilities about what districts can and cannot do. In sum, the research aims to uncover the common and contested meanings of education districts by focusing on the following research questions:

1. How do education stakeholders understand the meaning of 'education districts' in the constitutional, policy and legislative contexts of post-apartheid South Africa?

2. In what ways do provincial governments organise, structure and assign meaning to education districts given the policy vacuum around the specification of district design and organisation in South African education?

3. Why do different meanings of the concept of education district exist? That is, what explains the common as well as the divergent understanding and organisation of education districts in the South African context? How do these different meanings relate to the concept of decentralisation and the peculiar relationship between the provincial and national departments of education?

1.2 Rationale for the study

Although districts are part of the education landscape in South Africa, [1] there is no explicit government policy on education districts. While there are singular references to districts in major policy texts of the national Department of Education (DoE) – such as Whole School Evaluation (DoE, 2001a) and Inclusive Education (DoE, 2001c), there remains a glaring policy vacuum on the purpose of districts and on the role they are expected to play in the education system. The absence of a policy outlining a vision of districts is surprising, given the importance attached in politics and scholarship to districts as a vehicle for promoting wide-scale, systemic transformation in education (Malcolm, 1999; Dalin, 1994; Elmore, 1993b). Other components of the education system, such as schools and provincial departments of education, are established with considerable clarity in national education policy and legislation; yet there is a puzzling silence about the role of local-level education. Moreover, other government departments such as the Department of Health have clearly defined and demarcated the role of districts in social service delivery (RSA, 2004), while the Department of Education has been persistently quiet on district policy. The purpose of the study, therefore, is to explore how districts are understood and organised in the South African education sub-system in the absence of national policy. The study seeks to understand why the structure of education has taken the shape that it has, and how stakeholders understand and play out the role of districts in the education system.

[1] This study uses the term 'districts' as an all-encompassing concept to refer to geographic units that exist at a level between schools and the head offices of the provincial education departments. Hence the concept includes structures such as regions, wards, circuits and area project offices that presently exist in the provincial education departments.

The study explores how a district actually functions: how it determines and prioritises its activities, how it exercises its authority and power in relation to the schools it services, how it relates to the head office of the provincial department of education, and whether it derives its agenda by 'looking up' to the provincial head office or by 'looking down' to the school.

The current literature on districts in South Africa is limited for several reasons. Firstly, the research that has thus far been undertaken on education districts (Prew, 2003; Fleisch, 2002a; De Clerq, 2002a) has not been able to capture the recent changes that have come about as a result of the effects of restructuring in provincial departments (DoE, 2003).[2] Secondly, much of the research on education districts focuses on district-school relationships (Godden & Maurice, 2000; Malcolm, 1999; Chinsamy, 1999; Mphahlele, 1999). The relationship between districts and provincial head offices, particularly from the perspective of decentralisation, has not been explored adequately in either the normative or the empirical literature.

This study contributes to the existing knowledge base on districts in a number of different ways. Firstly, it reveals how education stakeholders understand the role and place of districts in the context of a political transition. Secondly, it illuminates how districts actually function in the current context of education transformation in South Africa. Thirdly, it proposes an explanation for the different meanings ascribed to districts within the framework of existing theories on decentralisation. At a broader level, the study contributes to international scholarship on the meanings attached to administrative and management decentralisation in education. The unique context of this study is the absence of explicit national and provincial policy on education decentralisation in South Africa, and the implications this has for the way in which decentralised management and administration of education is understood in practice. Grant-Lewis and Motala (2004:119), confirm that 'the term 'decentralisation' is rarely used in South African education policy documents'. Many countries, including Asian countries such as India and Pakistan (Govinda, 1997)[3] and Indonesia (Biennen, 1990), and Western countries

[2] A recent Department of Education report notes that a significant number of provincial education departments are still in the process of operationalising their new organograms (DoE, 2003).

[3] In his report on decentralisation of educational management in five South Asian countries (Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka), Govinda (1997:19) observes that 'all the countries, in their recent policy statements on education, have without exception reiterated their commitment to promote decentralisation….'

such as the United Kingdom, Australia and New Zealand (Caldwell & Spinks, 1992), have clear policy commitments to some form of education decentralisation. Hence the official policy vacuum in which education decentralisation is operationalised in South Africa provides a unique contribution to the international debate on decentralisation.

1.3 The contested meaning of districts

What is the *raison d'être* for districts in the education system? The current South African discourse on education districts oscillates confusingly between districts as support centres for schools, and districts as administrative and management arms of provincial departments of education. The primary purpose of districts, therefore, remains contentious: do districts exist primarily as a base for professional services to schools, or are they established to ensure policy and administrative control?

The international literature points to a number of possibilities for the role of districts – that of active support bases for schools or that of aggressive school monitoring agents. The literature suggests that districts could, alternatively, play a facilitating role in service delivery and school support, or be merely passive mediators between schools and provincial head offices (Elmore, 1993b:120; O'Day & Smith, 1993:284). It is of course quite possible for districts to undertake, to varying degrees, all of the roles proposed above. However, these roles are distinctive, and subject to the vagaries of contesting demands as well as competing priorities and practical realities that districts have to contend with on a daily basis. Can one ascribe a singular role and identity to districts, or does the search for the particular lead one into the trap of what Adesina (2003) refers to as 'Aristotelian binary logic'?

Writing in a broader socio-political context, Adesina (2003:1) argues against retreating into a discourse of binary opposites, and instead calls for an affirmation of the 'interpenetration and mutual embeddedness of opposites' through which identity can be understood as being multilayered, contradictory and contextual. This study attempts to understand districts as complex entities that are imbued with common and contested meanings. However, in attempting to unravel the different meanings attached to districts, the study seeks to abstract how the 'opposites' play themselves out in practice, and explore whether there are dominant forces that do indeed ascribe essentialist properties to

districts.

The study also offers a curious twist to how the relationship between policy and practice is understood, given the absence of a formal national policy on districts. Levinson and Sutton (2001:4) argue that 'people make policy through practice' and that it is implementation that gives meaning to policy. Hence the question of how the meanings of districts are constructed in practice is a crucial dimension to this study.

1.4 Why districts?

Since the dawn of a democratic South Africa in 1994, there has been considerable interest in the nature and form of local education in South Africa. Coombe and Godden (1995) undertook a significant initiative in this regard in their research into the local and district governance of education, wherein they explored possibilities for the local governance of education. This initiative was followed by a brief period of silence on districts in the education policy agenda, which perhaps led Roberts (1999:2) to describe districts as the 'orphans' of the education system. A rekindling of interest from the Department of Education emerged in 1998, reflected in its District Development Programme (DDP), which aimed to enhance the role of districts in education service delivery (DoE, 2000). Interest in South African education districts has not been restricted to the Department of Education. Since 1999 to date, a significant number of donor agencies have commissioned studies and engaged in several large-scale projects on district development in South Africa (Fleisch, 2002b). The Department of Education views districts as being crucial for large-scale, systemic transformation of the schooling system; in contrast, donor agencies see districts as platforms from which school improvement programmes can be delivered (DoE, 2000; Fleisch, 2002b).

The growing international interest in districts has been driven by a number of different impulses. (Elmore, 1993b:108) argues, for instance, that (in the context of the United States) districts have a comparative advantage over other levels of the education system since they provide 'an important policy and administrative link between national policy goals and school-level practices'. Building on Elmore's argument, Chetty (DoE, 2000:3) observes that there is an imperative to focus on districts because 'districts are closest to schools in terms of management, and it is simply easier to make an impact on the more

than 27 000 schools in the country by working through districts instead of working directly with schools'. Fleisch (2002b:3), on the other hand, claims that districts are important because 'they are the major, and often the only source of external support received by schools'. Other researchers have highlighted the importance of districts in the context of the sustainability of system-wide education transformation initiatives of government (Fleisch, 2002b; Muller & Roberts, 2000; De Clerq, 2001; Mphahlele, 1999; Malcolm, 1999; Dalin, 1994). Slavin and Fashola (1998:92) also argue that 'if schools are to reform themselves on a large scale, it is essential that they have the proactive support of their districts'.

Hence the focus on districts has been driven by several closely-related, but somewhat different impulses: those driven by the imperative for more efficient administration and management of schools; those driven by school improvement arguments; those emphasising the need to promote sustained, wide-scale and systemic change in schools; and those driven by the need to ensure a strong policy link between schools and the centre. In broad terms, one can conclude that the different emphases attached to the importance of districts in the education system point to two central opposing forces at play – forces that emanate from the centre, and those that emanate from the school. The study explores how these two forces play themselves out in practice, and in the different meanings stakeholders attach to districts as a result of different imperatives acting on districts.

1.5 Research design

1.5.1 Research aim

The intention of this research is to describe and explain the common and contested meanings of education districts in South Africa, through a single case study that illuminates how districts are understood in the practical context of the education system. In addition, the study endeavours to unravel the historical, legal and constitutional meanings assigned to districts in the context of the political transition in South Africa.

1.5.2 Research approach

Given the focus of this study on "meanings", I found the interpretivist paradigm of research to be most appropriate for the task I sought to undertake. Hence the ontology underlying the thesis is based, in the main, on Interpretive Social Science, which is related to hermeneutics, a theory of meaning (Burrel and Morgan, 1992). Interpretive Social Science is based on the belief that social reality is not "out there", waiting to be discovered. Instead, it argues that the social world is largely what people perceive it to be.

Interpretative research thus seeks to understand the meanings people construct about the world and their experiences in it (Merriam, 1998:6). The interpretative framework, therefore, sees human activity and institutions as 'social constructions' – created by people – rather than the product of external forces which mould individuals and institutions in ways that can be predictable (Vulliamy et al., 1990:9). Hence a dominant feature of the interpretative research paradigm is that it foregrounds meanings that people assign to their experiences, rather than privileging formal text. However, a caveat to this approach is that it does not attempt to represent the original 'voice' of those researched or their intentionality, but instead accepts that the researcher constructs her meanings from the research that has been undertaken – that the research is mediated through the investigator's own perceptions (Merriam, 1998:6).

The interpretive paradigm underlining the study is complemented by a qualitative research approach, which I believe best serves to uncover the meanings of stakeholders' experiences. The thesis adopts a dual approach to its qualitative focus: a case study of a district (discussed in detail below), as well as elite interviews. Elite interviews were undertaken with people who had been central to providing policy direction in education, and whose world-views would have inevitably had an impact on policy. They consisted largely of interviews with senior bureaucrats in the national Department of Education.

1.6 Research methodology

1.6.1 The case study

The critical questions posed in the study are explored through a single, qualitative case study that illuminate how provincial departments of education have understood the

meaning of districts in the absence of policy specification. According to Yin (2003:13), 'a case study is an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real life context, especially when the boundaries between the phenomenon and context are not clearly evident'. The case study approach provides an in-depth understanding of how stakeholders, based both within and outside of districts, understand the meaning of districts; it also provides insights into how and why districts function the way they do. In view of Merriam's (1998:29) proposition that 'the end product of a case study is a rich "thick" description of the phenomenon under study', the presentation of findings on the case under study includes a literal descriptive component (see Chapter 5).

The empirical component of this research is a South African case study of an education district in the Gauteng Department of Education GDE).

A purposeful sampling strategy was utilised to identify the province and district for the case study. Patton (cited in Merriam, 1998:61) argues that the logic and power of purposeful sampling lies in selecting an information-rich case from which one can learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the study. Hence some prior knowledge of the case is crucial for applying purposeful sampling as a strategy to select a case (Cohen et al., 2000). From my knowledge of provincial education departments,[4] I believed that the study would be most useful if it was undertaken in the Gauteng Department of Education. The reasons for this are as follows:

- Relatively speaking, the GDE has had longer experience with its new structures and systems than other provincial education departments, who have only more recently undergone major restructuring processes, and who, unlike the GDE, have had little opportunity to 'settle' into their new organograms. Hence the insights emerging from GDE officials and schools were expected to be more 'mature' when compared to other provinces, where insights into fundamental issues could be expected to be clouded by teething problems experienced by officials and schools during the restructuring processes.

- The subject of districts has, for some years, been high on the agenda of the GDE, and

[4] I recently undertook a countrywide snap-study of districts on behalf of the national Department of Education. The DoE (2003) report on districts points to recent restructuring initiatives in most of the provincial departments of education.

that district roles, powers and functions have been the subject of intense debate and discussion in the GDE.[5] One could predict, therefore, a rich engagement with provincial and district officials on district issues, which would enhance the quality of this study.

- The recent initiative by the GDE to shift certain administrative functions from districts to the Gauteng Shared Services Centre provides for an interesting 'twist' to the meaning of districts and their role in the delivery of administrative services to schools. Whether districts are still perceived to be units of administrative support to schools is a question that the new administrative model of the GDE poses for this study. Insights into the new model of administration adopted by the GDE is useful, not only for this case study, but for a broader understanding of decentralisation issues in education.

The selection of the *district* of study was informed by the following criteria:

- the willingness of the district to participate in this study;
- diversity in the types of schools that the district services;[6]
- diversity in the composition of staff of the district office, with respect to race, gender and years of experience;
- further information from the GDE and other researchers about the district in terms of the historical engagement that officials in the district had with debates about the place of districts in the system (a district that demonstrated an active interest in, and reflected upon its place in the education system was expected to provide a richer insight into the study than one which had not); and
- ease of access to the district in terms of its geographic location that had minimal time and financial implications.

From information provided by other researchers and a GDE official,[7] as well as my own professional experiences (see below), the Tshwane South District appeared to be a

[5] Two years ago I was involved in a project to develop job descriptions for GDE district officials.
[6] By types of schools, I refer to a number of different categories: public or private; township or informal settlement; former department under which the school fell (that is, HOD, HOR, DET or HOA schools), and schools with either Section 20 or Section 21 status in terms of the South African Schools Act (SASA).
[7] I had telephonic conversations with Francine de Clerq and Samiera Zafar, both of whom have engaged in intensive research for the GDE. The GDE official, Marcia Harker, is a Chief Director in the provincial office, responsible for overseeing districts.

potentially rich source of information in terms of the diversity of schools it services, as well as the diversity of its staff members. In addition, the district office is known to have demonstrated an active interest in broader issues related to the place of districts in the education system.

The 'case', namely the Tshwane South District of the GDE (also referred to as D4), comprises about 224 public and independent schools. The Tshwane South District includes the townships of Mamelodi, Atteridgeville and Laudium, as well as several former "White" suburbs in the Pretoria area. Hence the district services schools that are diverse with respect to historical racial categories that were characteristic of the apartheid era. In addition, the district office is staffed with officials that reflect diversity with respect to gender, race and years of experience in education.

It is understood of course, that the findings from the case study will not be generalisable. Vulliamy et al. (1990:12) observe that case studies are mainly interested in providing a deeper understanding of the characteristics of the totality of the case. In this instance, it was undertaken in the hope that the ensuing generation of ideas might illuminate the processes of districts elsewhere, but not with the intention that any specific finding should be generalised. Although case studies cannot be generalised statistically to other similar contexts, Schofield (2002:178) contends that the replacement of the notion of generalisablity with that of 'fittingness' makes it possible to analyse the extent to which a particular situation matches other similar situations. She argues further that a logical consequence of this approach is an emphasis on the supply of a substantial amount of information about the entity being studied. Hence, 'thick descriptions' of people, settings and events allows for comparisons with other contexts.

1.6.2 Data collection methods

1.6.2.1 Overview

The methods of data collection in the study correspond closely to the three research questions that have been posed. The linkage between the broad research questions and the data collection methods are demonstrated in the overview in Table 1.1.

Table 1.1 Linkage between research questions and data collection methods

Research focus	Data collection method	Data sources
Stakeholder understandings of the meanings of districts	Individual and focus-group interviews	Interviewed principals, teachers, district-level officials, provincial-level officials, officials from teacher unions, and present and former officials of the DoE.
The practical assignment of meaning to districts	Individual and focus group interviews	Interviewed district and provincially based officials of the GDE, schoolteachers and principals.
	Documentation review	Analysed relevant DoE reports and policy texts, GDE organograms, GDE reports and policy documents related to districts.
	Non-participant observation	Observed the district office infrastructure and the office 'in action'. Attended key district meetings as a non-participant observer. Observed interactions between district officials and school staff during visits by district officials to schools.
The reasons for common and contested meanings of districts	Literature and documentation review; interviews	Reviewed the South African Constitution, relevant DoE policy texts and reports, as well as national and international literature. Correlated this material with interview data.

1.6.2.2 Individual and focus group interviews

In line with the interpretative paradigm of this study, in-depth interviews were conducted, based on questions that were open-ended and semi-structured. Each interview lasted for a maximum of two hours. The interview questions focused on the following issues:

- stakeholder understandings of the legal, policy and constitutional context of South African districts;
- the establishment of districts (the motives for establishing districts, the impulse for decentralisation,[8] the philosophical underpinnings for decentralisation – that is, whether districts were established as part of a development agenda, or as part of a

[8] Biennen *et al.* (1990) suggest that it is useful to begin an investigation on decentralisation by posing questions about the starting points of decentralisation. This will deepen one's understanding of the motives and consequences of decentralisation.

management agenda or both,[9] territorial considerations in determining the boundary of districts[10]);

- the role of districts in the education system (particularly in relation to policy implementation, school support, school supervision and administrative services to schools);
- the relationship between districts and schools;
- the relationship between districts and the provincial head office (for example, district perceptions of pressures from provincial head office, how districts derive their agendas, and the distribution of functions between districts and provincial head offices[11]);
- the source of solutions to problems experienced by schools;
- the resources and capacity of districts; and
- the activities and programmes of districts.

The interview questions were phrased in a non-threatening manner, so that participants felt comfortable about answering them. After introducing myself and providing the background to the study, I began my questions by asking for biographical information regarding the interviewees' involvement in the district and in education generally, and posing questions regarding the nature of their work. I then proceeded to ask interviewees about their experiences of districts. For example, to a teacher, 'How have district officials influenced the way in which you go about your duties?' A principal was asked, 'On what kinds of issues do you most often interact with district officials?' I used probes to encourage deeper responses, with questions such as, 'How often? With which officials? Do you think there is a need for greater or less interaction with district officials? On what kinds of matters? In what way does your interaction with district officials support you as a school principal?'

Individual face-to-face interviews were undertaken with the following stakeholders:

---

[9] Biennen *et al.* (1990) note that official decentralisation policy in Nepal draws on both development and management theories as a basis for reform.

[10] The question of how small and how local a decentralised unit should be is addressed by Govinda (1997:9), who suggests that factors such as the politico-administrative arrangement of the country, the geographical expanse of the country, socio-cultural factors and the size of the educational enterprise (for example, the number of institutions to be managed) should be taken into account when determining the size and geographical locality of the decentralised unit.

[11] Govinda (1997:11) asserts that 'any decentralisation measure has to tackle the question of implicit hierarchy encompassing various management functions and decide the level at which different functions are to be performed'.

- nine teachers selected from the different types of schools that were identified for this study;
- nine school principals selected from the different types of schools that were identified for this study;
- the District Director;
- the deputy director in the district responsible for administrative services;
- the district-based chief education specialist responsible for institutional development and support (IDS);
- the district-based chief education specialist responsible for curriculum development and support (CDS);
- the provincially-based official of the GDE responsible for Tshwane South District;
- the provincially-based manager in the GDE responsible for the area of curriculum development and support;
- the Head of the Office of Standards for Education and Development (OFSTED) Unit based at the GDE head office;
- the district official responsible for the administration of examinations in schools; and
- national stakeholders that included key officials from the three nationally recognised teachers unions,[12] associations of school governing bodies[13], current and former officials of the DoE who had been involved in matters pertaining to the local level of the education system, and legal experts.

Focus group interviews were held with the following:

- one focus group interview with two teachers;
- focus group interviews with Institutional Development and Support officials (IDS) officials based at the district office; and
- focus group interviews with Curriculum Development and Support (CDS) officials based at the district office.

In addition, I conducted telephonic interviews with several district officials as well as the

[12] These are: The South African Democratic Teachers Union (SADTU); the National Association of Professional Teacher Organisations in South Africa (NAPTOSA) and the Suid-Afrikaanse Onderwysers Unie (SAOU).
[13] These are: National Association of School Governing Bodies (NASGB) and Federation of School Governing Body Associations (FEDSAS).

Chief Executive Officer of the Education Labour Relations Council, to obtain clarity on outstanding matters.

Interviews with approximately 25 different sources were planned for this study. My initial list of interviewees was, however, not exhaustive. Drawing on Patton's ideas (cited in Merriam, 1998), I utilised the 'snowball' method of sampling to identify key individuals or groups suggested by the interviewees, who could contribute to this study. In effect, this study ended after completion of close to 50 interviews (see Annexure 1).

The selection of teachers and principals for interviews was based on the identification of school types. The key filter applied in the selection of schools within the Tshwane South District was that of inheritance, namely the former (pre-1994) education department under which the school had been administered. This selection criterion is not uncommon in many empirical studies undertaken in the country, as schools, in addition to reflecting racial designations associated with the pre-1994 era, often reflect particular characteristics in line with their apartheid inheritance.[14] For example, former White schools (House of Assembly) have a far superior infrastructure, are better resourced and employ more highly qualified teachers than former Black schools (Department of Education and Training [DET]).[15] In addition, the quality of education is perceived by many to be higher in former White schools than in former Black schools. This perception is strengthened by the recent investigation of the Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC) into educator workloads in South Africa, which found that teachers in former White schools spend more time on actual teaching than those in former Black schools (ELRC, 2005b). The selection of schools in accordance with their pre-1994 categories, therefore, provides access to a relatively inclusive and diverse range of teachers and principals required for this study.

Ten such schools were identified:

- four schools from the former Department of Education and Training (DET);
- two schools from the former House of Assembly (HOA);

[14] Major studies that I have been involved in, such as the Education 2000 Plus Project of the CEPD (1999-2003), and the investigation into Educator Workloads by the HSRC (2005), have utilised such historical categories in their sampling of schools.

[15] A draft report on Post-Provisioning Norms (ELRC, 2005) concludes that former White schools employ more highly qualified teachers (excluding SGB-funded posts) than former Black schools (ELRC, 2005).

- two schools from the former House of Delegates (HOD), and
- two schools from the former House of Representatives (HOR).

These schools were further divided into primary and secondary school categories to ensure that teachers from different grades and phases would participate in the study. The latter was undertaken to ensure that the study reflected a wide range of teacher experiences of the district office.

It is perhaps worth drawing attention to the fact that the schools selected in this study do not by any means reflect a representative sample of the district. Given the qualitative nature of this study, the sampling process merely attempted to identify principals and teachers that would predictably demonstrate a diverse range of characteristics and experiences.

The initial plan for the study envisaged 24 individual teacher interviews, from ten different schools. There were to be four focus group interviews with six teachers in each group. In addition, the study had planned for two focus group interviews, each with five principals from the ten selected schools. However, the data collection plan did not work as predicted, despite various attempts. Much of the problem lay in expecting teachers and principals to meet at a central venue. I have learned, much to my disappointment, and after several failed meetings, that this is an almost impossible undertaking! I succeeded in holding only one focus group interview with teachers, this with only two teachers present. I subsequently amended my data collection plan, and decided to interview teachers and principals individually, at the schools in which they were based. I visited each of the ten identified schools in the district, and managed to interview nine principals and nine teachers. Of the latter, two teachers were interviewed at the time when the 'successful' focus group interview meeting was held.

Appendix 1 outlines the list of interviews and observation activities that were conducted for this study. As indicated, a total of 40 individual face-to-face interviews, seven focus group interviews, two telephonic interviews and three formal non-participant observation activities were undertaken for the purposes of gathering data

1.6.2.3 Non-participant observation

On-site observations were made of the infrastructure, physical space and physical resources of the district office. The observations made of the district office under study reflect to some extent the 'meanings' that the GDE assigns to districts.

In addition, I sought permission to observe various types of meetings after some level of trust had been established between myself and district officials. A key aspect of this study was to observe how district officials interacted with schools and among themselves. Whether district officials were supportative or bureaucratic in their approach to schools[16] and whether district officials displayed an integrated and team approach to their work were some aspects that this study explored. I undertook school visits as a non-participant observer with two categories of district officials: Institutional Development and Support officials (IDSOs) and CDS officials. The selection of school visits were based on a number of criteria that included: the purpose of the visit, whether the district official was comfortable with my presence, and whether the nature of the visit was expected to provide insight into the relationship between schools and districts. In addition, I had hoped to be involved in school visits that involved a diverse range of issues such as curriculum, governance, labour, procurement, resources and so on. By the end of the study, I had accompanied a group of CDS officials on a curriculum-related school visit, and had visited three schools with an IDSO.

1.6.2.4 Document analysis

An understanding of how provincial governments assign meanings to districts, and an explanation for the common and contested meanings of districts required an analysis of various documents that would confirm or refute what stakeholders articulated in their interviews, as well as provide a broader context in which the empirical findings of the study could be analysed. The study demanded that different categories of documents be examined, for example:

- *legal* documents such as the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (RSA), and relevant provincial and national Acts and Regulations that make reference to districts;

[16] Malcolm's (1999) models of districts suggest different ways in which districts can relate to schools.

- *policy* documents (national and provincial policy texts that were relevant to the subject of districts);
- provincial *organograms* (that outline the official structures and staff provisioning norms of the GDE); and
- relevant planning documents (strategic plans of the GDE and key GDE reports).

The documents were analysed according to pre-coded categories that were generated from the literature review. However, new themes emerging from the documents were included on an ongoing basis.

1.6.2.5 Approach to the collection of data

While interviews with stakeholders that were based outside of the district were conducted only once, those with key district-based officials took place in two waves. The first wave of interviews focused on questions related to the 'meanings' of districts, while the second wave focused on how the district actually functioned and interrogated issues that required further clarity.

I visited the district office frequently during the course of the study. During these visits, interviews were conducted, on-site observation was undertaken and meetings observed. The district office visits were arranged so that they corresponded to the beginning of the school year (when a number of issues such as admissions and textbooks are often of public interest), in the second term (when a fair level of 'normal' activity could be expected in the district office), and in the third term when there is a general focus on examination activities.

1.6.2.6 Personal journal

A personal journal was employed as a tool to encourage reflexivity in my research. My experiences, reflections and thoughts about districts and the research process were recorded in the journal. Additional questions, probes and improved ways of phrasing questions were also part of my personal records. In addition, the journal was used to record casual observations of the district office and casual conversations held with participants.

1.6.3 Data analysis

Analysis of the data was consistent with a qualitative case study methodology, in that it was inductive and iterative. Three key steps were followed in analysing the data: the development of thematic constructs, the indexing of thematic data, and the piecing together of the whole picture (Miles & Huberman, 2002:315). The first stage of data analysis was undertaken by constructing categories, themes and concepts that cut across the different information sources. Pre-coded categories and *a priori* issues derived from the theoretical framework, as well as from codes emerging from ongoing fieldwork, were developed for this stage of data analysis. The second stage of data analysis involved the indexing of interview transcripts in accordance with a descriptive textual system based directly on index headings. Finally, the perceptions, accounts and experiences of stakeholders were reviewed, compared and contrasted. Explanations for the data were sought by examining the literature on the subject as well as documentation sources. The perspectives of different stakeholders were compared and contrasted according to the different interests they represented.

One of the analytical challenges confronting the study was how best to understand the 'meaning of districts' in a context involving a range of stakeholders whose perspectives reflected a range of 'multiple realities'. I found Prawda's (1992) conception of *discrepancy analysis* a useful tool to interrogate the voices of stakeholders. According to Prawda, discrepancies between what an organisation believes and what it actually does are very common and have been the subject of intensive studies of late. Prawda (1992:6) uses three sets of observations to demonstrate discrepancies within organisations. Firstly, the objectives, goals and targets espoused by the policy makers are not always those actually pursued. The second point concerns the differences between what the organisation does, believes it does, is believed by others to do, and is supposed to do. Thirdly, the approach examines the discrepancy between the formal structure versus the actual structure of the organisation. Therefore, I utilised the tool of *discrepancy analysis* to analyse the functioning of districts by comparing different sources of information with a view to constructing an understanding of reality that reflects its complexity.

1.6.4 Validation strategy

The trustworthiness of reported observations and interpretations of interviews strove for

maximum validity through the following mechanisms:

- *Triangulation* – Multiple sources of data (eg. teachers, principals, district officials and national stakeholders), and multiple methods (document analysis, interviews and on-site observation) were used to search for convergence to form themes and categories for the study.
- *Member checks* – The data (which was tape-recorded and transcribed) was taken back to the interviewees so that they could confirm the accuracy of the information.
- *Repeated observation* – Repeated observation of the district office and gathering data over a period of time increased the validity of the findings. Cresswell and Miller (2000) suggest that being in the field over time solidifies evidence because researchers can confirm their data over time, and compare interview data with observational data.
- *Thick description* – The case study attempted to provide a detailed and vivid description of the district setting, the participants and the themes of the study, as well as direct quotations from stakeholders about their perceptions. The vicarious experience offered by the case study enables readers to make decisions about the applicability of the findings to other similar contexts.

1.7 Limitations of the study

Like all studies of this nature, this research undertaking is not free of limitations. Recognition of these limitations is particularly crucial for the way in which the findings of the study are interpreted and reported. The following limitations need to be considered when reading this thesis:

- This research is based on a single case study of a district in Gauteng, a province that is well-resourced and better placed to provide effective services to schools (given its comparatively small geographic size), relative to other provinces in the country. Hence while the conclusions reached by this study do have broader relevance, the specific findings on Tshwane South District cannot be generalised to the country as a whole. Notwithstanding this, the insights offered by Tshwane South District can be appropriated by other districts for what Merriam (1998) refers to as *fittingness,* into their own contexts.

- The perceptions of teachers and principals in this study cannot be generalised to the broader population of schools in the district, as a statistical sample of teachers and principals was not be used. However, the deep insight provided by the interviews permits the study to make *analytical generalisations* (Yin, 2003) about how school-based educators construct meanings of districts.

- My presence in meetings would have undoubtedly influenced how district officials behaved and interacted with schools as well as each other (the Hawthorne effect), thus negatively affecting the validity of some of the data.

- The shift of administrative functions from districts in the GDE to the Gauteng Shared Services Centre (GSSC) is a recent phenomenon. Hence stakeholder perceptions of the new system and the concomitant role of districts may be clouded by adjustment problems.

1.8 Ethical considerations

The Faculty of Education's Ethics Statement was used as a basis for discussion of a research protocol with the GDE. Hence a commitment was made for the GDE to receive a report of the research findings, and for GDE respondents to provide feedback on the study.

1.9 Conceptual framework

The thesis draws on Malcolm's three models of districts (1999:10)[17], as its conceptual framework for understanding and analysing the meanings of districts.

The three forms of districts, namely the bureaucratic, market-led and community models provide a valuable metaphoric frame within which the relationship between districts and schools can be understood.

[17] Malcolm drew on Sergiovanni in describing his three district models

In the bureaucratic model, Malcolm (1999:10) sees districts as having a largely controlling role – 'passing down policies from Head Office, distributing resources and conducting inspections and audits'. In this model, the district has a hierarchical relationship to schools. In the market forces approach, the district has a limited role, mainly that of co-ordination and as a provider of information services, and it is not in a hierarchical relationship with schools. The community model of districts suggests something in between the bureaucratic and market models. In this instance, the district is not in a hierarchical relationship with schools, but is in an organic relation with them. In the community model, the district is responsible for both support and accountability, as well as co-ordination and information flow (Malcolm 1999).

The three district models embody possible ways in which stakeholders perceive the meanings of districts, as well as represent different ways in which districts could function in the education system. The study draws on Malcolm's (1999) conceptualisations of districts with a view to exploring whether there is a dominant model that characterises education districts, or whether districts reflect a mixture of the features described in Malcom's (1999) three models, or whether districts can be conceptualised outside of the three models proposed by Malcolm. The characterisation of districts is important for the study as it serves to gauge the meaning/s ascribed to education districts in South Africa. However, the study does not attempt to 'fit' districts into Malcolm's three models. Instead, the study is sensitive to the multiple meanings attached to districts, while simultaneously examining whether there are dominant currents in the way in which districts are understood in theory and in practice in the education system.

One of the limitations of Malcolm's models is that they are derived from a single dimension – that is, the dimension of district-school relationships. Because districts occupy a place between schools and provincial head-office structures, the meanings of districts cannot be fully understood if the *specific* relationship between districts and the provincial head-office is ignored. As pointed out in the decentralisation literature (see Chapter 3), districts exist because higher levels of authority find it prudent to shift certain elements of administrative and management responsibility to a lower level in the system - hence the vital need to obtain an insight into district-provincial relationships.

Consequently, the district models discussed above, though valuable, are limited in their application to the study. The study therefore draws on additional frameworks such as those on decentralisation and school improvement (as examined in the literature review in the next chapter), to unravel a holistic perspective on districts.

1.10 Overview of thesis

This thesis comprises eight chapters, three of which (Chapters 5, 6 and 7) relate directly to the case study under investigation, namely Tshwane South District. Chapter 2 provides a critical review of the literature on the subject, and serves as a foundation for the empirical component of the study.

Chapters 3 and 4 focus on the historical, legal and constitutional issues surrounding local education in South Africa. Much of the information for these chapters is derived from my reading of the Constitution (RSA, 1993, 1996) and various government legislation and regulations. In addition, stakeholder interpretations of relevant legal and constitutional frameworks are interrogated and analysed. Chapter 3 traces the origins of districts in South Africa, and explains how the term 'districts' came to be employed to describe the local level of the education system. Chapter 4 describes the various configurations of local education design that make up the South African education landscape, and explains why there is no policy on education districts in South Africa.

Chapter 5 focuses on selected aspects of Tshwane South District - what Godden and Maurice (DoE, 2000) refer to as the 'key pillars of district performance'. These include areas such as the powers of districts, their legal status and capacity, and clarity about their roles and functions. In addition, this chapter provides a 'thick' description of the Tshwane South District Office, with the hope of providing the reader with a vicarious experience of the district office.

Chapter 6 details the programmes and activities of Tshwane District South with a view to obtaining rich insights into what district officials actually do and how they go about doing their work. This chapter also details the nature of district-school interactive spaces, and provides insights into the system of clusters adopted by the Gauteng Department of Education.

Chapter 7 addresses the research question on how stakeholders understand the meaning of education districts in the context of the multiple roles of districts in the South African education system. It draws attention to the metaphors used by stakeholders in describing how they understand the role of districts, and describes in depth how stakeholders perceive the relationship between districts and schools on the one hand, and districts and provincial head offices on the other.

Given the rather complex place of districts in the education system, this study is undertaken from the perspective of a variety of different paradigms. These offer different portholes and lenses through which, I believe, districts can be best understood.

The following chapter critically reviews the existing literature on a range of theories and frameworks, including decentralisation discourses, the implications of public organisation theory on districts, the role of the state, and the impact of school improvement, school effectiveness and school change theories on the role of districts in the education system.

Chapter 2

LITERATURE REVIEW: VIEWING DISTRICTS THROUGH MULTIPLE PORTHOLES

2.1 Introduction

A subject as expansive as that of education districts is best viewed from a multidimensional perspective. As decentralised units of government, districts mirror the debates associated with the phenomenon of decentralisation; as organisational units, they harbour many of the tensions inherent in public organisations; as service centres for schools, districts are central to the dynamics of school change and improvement; and in serving as crucial links between schools and government, districts are often considered as representing the voice of the state. Hence this literature review interrogates the knowledge base on districts through a series of different portholes with a view to obtaining a holistic, multifaceted picture of education districts. Hence it draws on several paradigms and theoretical frameworks that provide windows into the different facets of the subject. In this vein, the paradigms of school improvement, school change and school effectiveness, the discourses of decentralisation, and the frameworks offered by organisational theory are some of the portholes through which the literature has been explored.

A number of authors have expressed concern about the dearth of research on education districts. Malcolm (1999:5) cautions about expecting too much of the existing international literature about districts given its paucity, and Chinsamy (1999:3) observes that while there is an abundance of international literature on schools, a limited body of research exists about sub-level systems of education. In her search for literature on the features of effective districts, Roberts (2001:9) points out that while much has been written about school effectiveness and improvement, relatively little research has been

undertaken on district effectiveness. Fleisch (2002b:9), however, notes that while the body of international literature on district improvement is not extensive, it is increasing due to the growing recognition of the important role of districts in bringing about education improvement.

Observations about the paucity of literature on education sub-systems are not restricted to South African writers on the subject. In their international investigation into school supervision and support services, Carron and De Grauwe (1997:vii) and Wilcox (2000) lament that until recently, researchers have been neglectful and indifferent to matters of professional supervision and support services for teachers, although these have existed in almost every country for a long time. Writing from the perspective of the American context, Lusi (1997:2) notes that there has been little empirical study of what government Departments of Education do, and of the contexts in which they operate.

Despite the observation made by Lusi (1997), much of the existing international literature on local education emerges from the contexts of developed countries, where districts have a different meaning to that in South Africa. In the United States of America (USA) and the United Kingdom (UK), for example, districts represent a separate level of governance in the education system, as compared to the South African context (Chinsamy, 1999), where education districts are seen as administrative arms of provincial departments of education (DoE, 2003a). The observation that much of the literature on education districts derives largely from the United States and the United Kingdom is not surprising given that districts in these countries carry much more responsibility for education functions compared to other levels in the system in other countries (DBSA, 1993:108). According to a ten-country comparative study conducted by the Development Bank of Southern Africa (DBSA, 1993), the district level of the USA and UK education systems bear responsibility for 33% and 25% of total education functions respectively, compared to countries such as Mexico where districts carry only 13% of education functions, Malaysia where districts carry 10% of total education functions, and Nigeria and Senegal where there is no district level of governance or administration in the education system (DBSA, 1993: 108). Thus, there is a close association between the weight of functions carried by districts, and the level of research on districts.

Any literature review, by definition, involves the selection, abstraction, interpretation and

synthesis of available information. The result is, therefore, invariably informed by the researcher's own world views, experiences and theoretical frameworks, as well as by an understanding of how the review will be used in the context of a specific study, at a particular point in time. Thus I feel obliged to position myself within this research study. I have, until recently, been a researcher at the Centre for Education Policy Development (CEPD), a non-governmental organisation, in Johannesburg, and was seconded to the Department of Education to work on a project related to district development. In the context of my work at the Department of Education, I am keen to explore further the constitutional, legal and policy debates that informed my work on the district project.

2.2 Viewing districts through the window of decentralisation

2.2.1 Perspectives on decentralisation

Education districts world-wide reflect some form of spatial decentralisation of education services from the centre. Hence their very existence derives from either deliberate or 'accidental' attempts at decentralisation. Therefore a key dimension of this literature review is the niche that districts occupy in the education system. Central to the review of the decentralisation literature is the search for an understanding of the place that districts occupy in the education system, in the context of existing models of decentralisation. The arguments for and against decentralisation are examined with a view to interrogating whether and how the redistribution of authority at the meso level of the education system can enhance the quality of education services to schools.

The literature on education decentralisation is voluminous. However, despite the extensive research undertaken on the topic, debates on the concept, nature, rationale and effects of decentralisation continue to rage. Although different perspectives and emphases mark much of the decentralisation debate, the education decentralisation literature of the past few decades generally examines similar themes:

- the *concept* of decentralisation (of which there is still surprisingly little consensus);
- the *rationale* for decentralisation (Tyack [1993] observes cynically, that arguments for greater centralisation in one period of reform turn out to be the same arguments

for greater decentralisation in the next period);

- the *effects* of decentralisation policies (numerous individual and multiple country case studies spanning all continents are reflected in the vast corpus of the decentralisation literature); and
- the ideal conditions for the effective *implementation* of decentralisation (this area has been focused upon by authors such as Cheema and Rondinelli [1983] and Prawda [1992]).

Much of the education decentralisation literature of the 1970s and 1980s is rooted in the administrative development paradigm of multinational agencies such as the World Bank, and is underpinned by a largely fiscal and administrative efficiency discourse (Rhoten, 2001). In contrast, the discourse of the decentralisation literature of the 1990s is more about the redistribution of political and social power. Rhoten (2001:7) has characterised these two periods of decentralisation as the first and second waves of education decentralisation, as they reflect distinct origins, rationales and effects. Samoff (1990:515), on the other hand, likens these two trends in the decentralisation literature not so much in chronological terms but in terms of what he coins 'liberal interventionist and radical populism' perspectives.[18] Both Rhoten's (2001) and Samoff's (1990) characterisation of the trends in decentralisation approaches provide useful frameworks for understanding the literature on decentralisation as they assist in identifying shifts in the discourse on decentralisation. A further distinguishing feature of the decentralisation literature of the 1970s and 1980s compared to that of the 1990s is provided by Hannaway and Carnoy (1983:xii) who conclude that the earlier period of decentralisation was characterised by what they term 'system level' decentralisation – that is, decentralising decision making from national to local jurisdictions – while that of the 1990s focuses on organisation-level decentralisation (decentralising decision making from central authorities to schools) and market decentralisation (decentralised decision making to parents).

The liberal interventionist perspective of the decentralisation literature includes attempts to examine ways in which decentralisation policies can be made to work more effectively (Cheema & Rondinelli, 1983; Prawda, 1992), and searches for ways in which decentralisation experiences can be transferred across different contexts. However, there

[18] The liberal interventionist orientation explicated by Samoff (1990) refers to external advice provided to international agencies and to Third World governments to promote broad development goals, while 'radical populism' centralises citizen participation and empowerment as key goals of decentralisation.

is an increasing volume of literature that is suspicious about motives for decentralisation, is more cynical about the stated benefits and effects of decentralisation, and therefore adopts post-modern approaches to the application of decentralisation policies (Reimers & McGinn, 1997; Bollen, 1996; Ball, 1994; Weiler, 1993; Elmore, 1993b). Post-modern thinking rejects the concept of universal blueprints of decentralisation that work 'best', and claim that decentralisation policies should be contextually specific, tentative and modified in the course of implementation. Hence a number of authors (Elmore, 1993b; Samoff, 1995; Sayed, 1995; Reimers & McGinn, 1997; Karlsson, 1994) suggest that it is too simplistic to engage with the debate on education decentralisation from an either/or paradigm, and that the debate should instead be informed by questions about which powers and functions should be distributed to which levels of the system, for what purpose, and the potential beneficiaries of such policy, in a given context.

In the South African context, the more recent literature on decentralisation has focused on *school-level* decentralisation (Pampallis, 2002; Patel, 2002; Karlsson, McPherson & Pampallis, 2001; Squelch, 1999), as opposed to *system-level* decentralisation. The literature on system-level decentralisation (which refers to national, provincial and local levels of education) in South Africa emerged in the period immediately prior to and following the dramatic political change in the country from an apartheid to a post-apartheid system of government (NEPI, 1992; Sayed, 1995; Coombe & Godden, 1996); it focused on examining policy implications of decentralisation for the post-apartheid education system.

Very little research in the country has been undertaken about the way in which decentralisation actually manifests itself at the district level of the education system, particularly after the recent restructuring processes that have been initiated by provincial departments of education. Therefore, this study on education districts will contribute to an understanding of the nature and form of decentralisation manifest in South African local education.

2.2.2 International trends in decentralisation

There is some indication in the literature that decentralisation is currently enjoying a renaissance, and that centralisation is now often considered to be the antithesis of progress (Huque, 1986:79; Mangelsdorf, 1988:68; Rhoten, 2001). In mapping the global

origins of recent trends towards education decentralisation, Rhoten (2001) demonstrates how international agencies such as the World Bank and USAID have actively promoted, legitimated and even stipulated decentralisation policies in many developing countries. However, the trend towards decentralisation is not as clear as is pointed out by the authors referred to above. A number of other scholars claim that both centralising and decentralising tendencies are at work in many countries. There appear to be seemingly contradictory pressures for centralisation (increasing government control over policy and direction) on the one hand, and decentralisation (more responsibility for implementation and resource management at school level) on the other. Standardised testing and performance indicators are in vogue, while at the same time, school-based decision making in different forms has become popular (Taylor *et al.*, 2002:469; Hopkins & Lagerweij, 1996:62; Cohen & Spillane, 1993:36). The report of the National Education Policy Initiative (NEPI, 1992:33) observes, however, that developed countries are moving towards greater centralisation whereas developing countries seem to be favouring greater decentralisation.

In the context of this study, the contending pressures for decentralisation on the one hand and centralisation on the other imply that districts, too, experience opposing forces of push and pull. An understanding of the broader concepts of decentralisation contributes to an understanding of how education districts in South Africa mould into existing concepts of decentralisation. Chapter 8 concludes that districts struggle do resolve the tensions of centralisation and decentralisation by attempting to respond to both the needs of schools and to those of the head offices of provincial education departments.

2.2.3 The concept of decentralisation

The only agreement in the literature about the concept of decentralisation is that that there is little agreement on what decentralisation really means (Fullan & Watson, 2000; Mwafrica, 1999; Sayed, 1995; Samoff, 1990; Lauglo & McLean, 1985; Conyers, 1984; Cheema & Rondinelli, 1983). According to Conyers (1984:187), everyone knows roughly what decentralisation means but defining it precisely presents problems because it can be used in a number of different ways and in significantly different contexts. Samoff (1990:515) despairs that the use of the term ‘decentralisation has produced a distorted and discordant discourse that has rendered effective dialogue on the subject nearly impossible’.

Despite the 'cacophony' (Samoff, 1990) on the concept of decentralisation, various attempts have been made by a number of authors over the past few decades to harmonise conceptions of decentralisation.

Lauglo and McLean (1985) restrict the notion of decentralisation to government, and propose that decentralisation usually means a transfer of *control* from national to local bodies within a public, governmental system (Lauglo & McLean, 1985:3). Cheema and Rondinelli (1983), on the other hand, provide a wider scope for the concept of decentralisation, both in terms of the type of agencies in which decentralisation occurs as well as the nature of decision making to which such decentralised agencies have access. They define decentralisation as 'the transfer of planning, decision-making, or administrative *authority* from the central government to its local units, semi-autonomous and parastatal organisations, local governments or non-government organisations' (Cheema & Rondenelli, 1983:18). Although Lauglo and McLean (1985) and Cheema and Rondenelli (1983) place different emphases on the meaning of decentralisation, the basic conception common to both definitions is that decentralisation is the transfer of some form of decision making from the centre to local levels or to particular groups.

If Lauglo and McLean's (1985) definition of decentralisation is taken to its logical conclusion, it implies that if there is no transfer of control from one level of government organisation to another, then there is no real decentralisation. Indeed, a number of authors have contested whether decentralisation has really taken place in various systems despite rhetoric to the contrary. Chau (1985:97) and Huque (1986), for example, argue that if there is no change in the distribution of power between the centre and the region, pseudo-decentralisation rather than true decentralisation has occurred. Winkler (1993:102) believes that administrative decentralisation is not decentralisation at all because it does not result in transfer of control from one level to another. Samoff (1990:528) confirms that what some authors view as partial decentralisation of authority, or as administrative decentralisation, others view as not being real decentralisation.

However, by sifting through the morass of differing conceptions of decentralisation, Samoff (1990) uncovers a useful lens through which one could conceptualise decentralisation. Samoff proposes a distinction between what he calls 'administrative

decentralisation' and 'political decentralisation'.[19] He uses the lens of *purpose* to distinguish between these two forms of decentralisation, and draws on their respective discourses to illuminate their distinctive features. He argues that the language of administrative decentralisation is one of 'service delivery, efficiency, and behavioural incentives and rewards', while that of political decentralisation is one of 'effective participation, empowerment and collective action'. According to Samoff, therefore, the primary purpose of administrative decentralisation is not political in the context of participation and empowerment, but instead emphasises organisational arrangements and strategies for improving policy implementation, while political decentralisation is about promoting citizen participation through the transfer of decision-making authority to previously under-represented or marginal groups (Samoff, 1990:516). However, an immediate concern with Samoff's administrative-political dichotomy is its potential effect of 'depoliticising' administrative decentralisation. Does Samoff imply that administrative decentralisation is apolitical? A further reading of Samoff suggests that this is not the case – in fact, far from it. He clarifies his argument by suggesting that 'to focus on administrative decentralisation is to assert a particular political orientation, because not to ask who rules, or who benefits, is surely as political as posing those questions' (Samoff, 1990:524). At the same time, Samoff (1990:528) admits that 'administrative reforms that do not involve or enable the transformation of power relations are possible and possibly useful'.

Herein lies the confounding basis of Samoff's administrative-political dichotomy – while accepting the 'political' in the 'administrative', Samoff's separation between administrative and political purposes of decentralisation can only imply that he uses the administrative-political dichotomy of decentralisation as a tool for managing the debate on decentralisation in terms of the *purpose* of decentralisation.

I find Samoff's (1990) typology of decentralisation useful for this study as it helps to question whether the form of decentralisation currently present in the South African education sub-system has been driven by administrative and management requirements, or whether sub-system units have been established to enhance participation and

[19] Fiske (1996:10) also distinguishes between political and administrative decentralisation. He argues that 'political decentralisation involves the assignment of decision-making powers to citizens or their representatives', while administrative decentralisation is a 'management strategy, where political power remains at the top of the organisation, but responsibility and authority for planning, management, finance and other activities is assigned to lower levels of government'.

empowerment. Despite my adoption of Samoff's (1990) typology of decentralisation, I take heed of Govinda's (1997) statement that 'irrespective of the proclaimed rationale for decentralisation, all decentralisation measures involve far-reaching decisions on power-sharing and inevitably carry political overtones'. However, in his analysis of Sri Lankan education decentralisation policy, Govinda (1997) also recognises the possibility that political decentralisation can be delinked from administrative decentralisation. He observes that

> Sri Lanka adopted a pragmatic view for decentralising educational management by, at least partially, delinking the educational management sector from the ongoing efforts to decentralise the public administration system through political reform (Govinda, 1997:19).

The conceptual delinking of administrative (Samoff, 1990) and management decentralisation (Govinda, 1997) from political decentralisation offers a constructive frame of reference for this study as it delineates the paradigms within which education districts in South Africa can be investigated.

The typology of decentralisation outlined by Samoff is similar to that proposed by Rhoten (2001:2) and Lauglo and McLean (1985). Rhoten conceptualises decentralisation as an organisational (administrative and fiscal) and a political (participation and empowerment) policy, while Lauglo and McLean talk to the administrative, political and ideological categories of decentralisation. Thus both Rhoten (2001) and Lauglo and McLean (1985) draw on administrative and political categories used by Samoff to conceptualise decentralisation. Winkler (1993), on the other hand, contends that administrative decentralisation is not really decentralisation at all because it is not accompanied with the assignment of extensive decision-making powers, which are usually associated with decentralisation. Winkler adds, however, that the popular meaning of decentralisation is very much country specific. She points out that in some Latin American countries, for example, decentralisation means the delegation of powers to the regional offices of the ministry, while in other countries it refers to the constitutional transfer of such power from regional to local governments (Winkler, 1993:102).

In view of the above, a key question for this study is whether districts in the South African education system do indeed reflect a system of decentralisation at all, and, if they do, to examine the forms in which such decentralisation actually occurs. Chapters 6 and 7 reveal that education districts in South Africa exhibit a form of administrative

decentralisation, the features of which are discussed in further detail below.

2.2.4 Organisational forms of decentralisation

The decentralisation literature is replete with categories used to describe the various ways in which decentralisation is manifested organisationally. The most common labels used by authors include the notions of devolution, delegation and deconcentration. However, the most comprehensive description of organisational forms of decentralisation emerges from Rondinelli *et al.* (1989:72), who conclude that there are five major organisational forms of decentralisation – privatisation, deregulation, devolution, delegation and deconcentration.

According to Rondinelli *et al.* (1989:72), *privatisation* and *deregulation* represent organisational forms of decentralisation that permit governments to divest themselves of responsibilities for functions either by transferring them to voluntary organisations or by allowing them to be performed by private businesses.

Devolution, on the other hand, reflects decentralisation *within* government structures, and according to most authors (Lauglo& McLean, 1985; Chau, 1985; Mangelsdorf, 1988; Naidoo, 2002) represents the most extreme form of decentralisation within government. Devolution generally implies a shift in programmatic responsibility from the central to local government, and requires that local government be given autonomy and independence, and be clearly perceived as a separate level over which central authorities exercise little or no direct control (Rondinelli *et al*. 1989:74). Through devolution, central government creates units of government that are outside of its control, and have the status and power to secure resources to perform their functions. In devolution, permanent authority is transferred over financial, administrative or pedagogical matters, and cannot be revoked at the whim of central officials (Fiske, 1996:10). Mwafrica (1999:2) adds that devolution refers to a form of political decentralisation where a local government has an established local assembly with members that are usually elected.

Delegation implies a lower level of decentralisation than devolution. According to Rondinelli *et al*. (1989), it refers to the transfer of authority from central government to either lower levels of government and/or external agencies, but which, according to Fiske (1996:10), can be withdrawn. Litvack (1998) notes that while organisations (both within

or outside of government) that have delegated authority have a great deal of discretion in decision making; although they are not wholly controlled by the centre, they are ultimately accountable to it.

Deconcentration is generally accepted as the least extensive form of decentralisation within government (Naidoo, 2002; Lauglo & McLean, 1985; Lyons, 1985), and in its weakest form merely involves the shifting of workloads from the centre to staff located in offices outside of the centre (Rondinelli *et al.*, 1989:76). Lauglo (1995:58) emphasises the spatial nature of deconcentration by suggesting that 'deconcentration means greater geographical decentralisation of state authority, transferring to local officials more authority to take initiatives, to budget, and to recruit and deploy staff'. However, Lyons (1985:86) notes that deconcentration means that the centre retains the main elements of strategic control of the system while the scope of planning, decision making and control at the local level of the system is enlarged. Litvack (1998), on the other hand, contends that deconcentration does not involve any transfer of *authority* to lower levels of government, but instead involves the dispersion of *responsibilities* for certain services from the centre to branch offices. Mwafrica (1999:3) agrees with Litvack, and observes that deconcentration refers to administrative decentralisation where officials appointed by the centre are posted to the field to act as central government representatives. These officials vary in the extent to which they freely exercise discretion in the performance of their duties.

Deconcentration as an organisational form of decentralisation is an important aspect of this study as it provides a platform for understanding how education districts in South Africa relate to their provincial head offices. Chapter 8 concludes that the rationale behind the establishment of education districts in South Africa lies with the imperative for provincial head offices to disperse their responsibilities to lower levels of geographic field units.

Cheema and Rondenelli (1983:18) point to two forms of decentralised local administration that can be found in most developing countries: integrated and un-integrated administration. Integrated local administration is a form of deconcentration in which field staff work under the supervision of the head of that jurisdiction, who is appointed by and responsible to the central government. Un-integrated local

administration is an arrangement in which field staff operate independently of each other. Each officer operates in accordance with guidelines prepared by supervisors at the centre, and local co-ordination takes place informally. The distinction between these two forms of deconcentration is useful for this study, as it points to potentially different arrangements that may exist between provincial departments of education and districts. The study investigates the degree to which districts adopt an *integrated* approach to their tasks, and whether accountability lines of district officials extend upwards to higher levels of district officials or to provincial-level officials, or indeed to both. Chapters 6 and 7 conclude that while education districts in South Africa exhibit a form of integrated deconcentration, accountability lines often become blurred as a result of the desire for programme control by provincial head office staff over district staff.

Lauglo (1995) offers an alternative organisational form of decentralisation –*management by objectives* – that provides a useful way of understanding the relationship between districts and provincial head offices. Management by objectives is seen as a form of decentralisation of authority because it proposes to give those at 'lower levels' in an organisation more flexibility to deploy resources, decide on the means to achieve objectives and resolve conflicts. Lauglo (1995) notes that the technique of management by objectives, which was originally adopted by business and industrial companies but is currently in vogue in the public sector, gives explicit attention to binding employees to the organisation's goals. Management by objectives, therefore, stresses strong specification of tasks by goals, rather than rules and regulations as is commonly found in bureaucratic organisations.

Lauglo (1995) also distinguishes between the management-by-objectives approach and the human-relations approach commonly used in organisations. The human-relations approach gives special emphasis to the personal needs of employees and informal networks while the management-by-objectives approach builds strong collective bonding to the organisations' overall goals. One of the important features of the management-by-objectives approach in organisations is the use of performance indicators. These are part of management information systems that are used to monitor the extent to which objectives are reached, and serve as measures of external accountability. However, Lauglo (1995) cautions that the effective application of the management-by-objectives approach depends on how concretely objectives are identified, how realistic the

timeframes are for meeting the objectives, and the need for shared planning to determine how the goals can be realised. Hence strong capacity to plan and to mobilise involvement in planning is key to the success of the management-by-objectives approach.

Lauglo's typology of different approaches adopted by organisations to improve efficiency and effectiveness (bureaucratic, management by objectives and human relations) provides a useful tool for examining how district officials fit into the provincial department of education as a whole.

The different organisational forms of decentralisation that have been mapped out by Rondinelli *et al.* (1989) and Lauglo (1995) have different implications for the organisational structure, form and the degree of power or authority to be transferred. But even if these forms of decentralisation differ in their characteristics, they are often not mutually exclusive, and in reality governments generally use a mixture of different forms of decentralised planning, decision- making and administration.

2.2.5 Rationales for decentralisation

Rationales for decentralisation have been the focus of attention of numerous decentralisation experts over the past few decades. For example, Lauglo and McLean (1985) claim that decentralisation commonly occurs for administrative, political and ideological reasons; Weiler (1993) concludes that advocates of decentralisation usually advance political, efficiency and culture-of-learning arguments for decentralisation. The literature also points to some of the disadvantages of centralisation, which include a tendency to focus on macro issues, a lack of direct political accountability, a perception of entitlement by beneficiaries, the possible deskilling of teachers, the stifling of creativity and the emergence of *de facto* local control due to management and communication problems (NEPI, 1992:33).

Cheema and Rondinelli (1983) list 14 arguments that have been advanced for decentralising development planning and administration in Third World countries. These correspond closely to the categories adopted by Prawda (1992:3) and Winkler (1993:104), both of whom attribute the popularity of decentralisation to four main reasons: finance, efficiency, effectiveness and redistribution of political power.

The *finance* argument calls for shifting part of the burden of education to sub-national units of government, to community and voluntary organisations, to the private sector and to parents.

The *efficiency* argument addresses the issue of how educational resources are used. It argues that allowing local units of government, which are geographically and culturally closer to local needs, to decide where and how to allocate resources will alleviate the problems of wastage, suitable budgetary allocation and mismanagement (Prawda, 1992: 8). The need to overcome bottlenecks that stem from over-centralisation has been argued as a key reason for decentralisation policies in Nepal (Biennen *et al.,* 1990). However, studies undertaken in a number of countries that have embarked on decentralisation initiatives suggest that the relationship between the effects of decentralisation and the efficiency intentions of decentralisation are often incongruent. For example, in her research into the supply systems of rural health programmes in Ecuador, Mangelsdorf (1988:85) concludes that 'the hypothesised link between decentralisation and an increased output of public goods is far from clear'; that while decentralisation led to increased delivery of some public services, it did not do so in all cases.

The *effectiveness* rationale is driven by two key perspectives: that of improved administration and accountability since decentralisation makes the system more responsive to the local community (Winkler, 1993:104), and that of improved 'cultures of learning' since decentralisation can provide greater sensitivity to local cultures, traditions and languages, as well as empower teachers to have greater control over curriculum decisions (Weiler, 1993:65). Prawda (1992:8) adds that decentralisation is effective because it also promotes local innovations.

According to Winkler (1993:105) and Prawda (1992:9), the r*edistribution of political power* rationale to decentralise is commonly undertaken to empower groups in society that support the policies of central governments, or to weaken groups that pose obstructions to these policies. Weiler (1993:69) adds that decentralisation can be seen as an instrument of conflict management, because it can easily isolate and contain sources of conflict, and also fragment reform movements.

In examining the rationale for decentralisation from an education management

perspective, Govinda (1997:12) notes the following six factors identified by Caldwell (cited in Govinda, 1997:12) that have driven decentralised education management in developed countries, some of which also appear in developing nations:

- the complexity of managing large educational systems from a single centre and the acceptance of decentralisation as a practical means of improving efficiency in the system;
- findings from studies of school effectiveness and school improvement have been used as justifications for decentralisation;
- increasing recognition of the need to recognise the professional autonomy of teachers;
- a new view of equity which places emphasis on ensuring that students have access to the particular rather than an aggregated mix of resources in order to meet their needs and interests (this is in contrast to the widely held view of equity which emphasises the special needs of disadvantaged groups of society in a collective fashion and relies on central intervention as the means of achieving equity);
- the popular demand by parents for freedom to choose schools; and
- new forms of management and organisation that place emphasis on management by objectives or performance-based approaches to service delivery that are concerned with the achievement of goals or outcomes rather than the means by which these can be achieved.

Although several of the reasons for decentralisation suggested above (for example, school choice and professional autonomy) refer more directly to decentralisation at the school level rather than to lower levels of administration within the government system, Caldwell's conclusions about the rationale for education decentralisation in developed countries appear to resonate well with the South African context. Hence several of the categories provided by Caldwell are interrogated in this study when exploring stakeholder perceptions of the rationale for the existence of districts.

Despite the many arguments that have been advanced to promote decentralisation policies, many educationists and development authors remain unconvinced about their benefits. Hurst (1985:80), for example, argues that there is little reason to believe that the benefits and advantages so widely associated with decentralised administration are likely

to accrue. He notes that changing a system from centralisation to decentralisation may or may not bring about these advantages, that it may leave matters no better than before, or make them significantly worse because weaknesses are as prevalent in decentralised local administrations as in centralised ones. Hurst (1985) argues further that empirical evidence does not support the proposition that decentralised organisations are more innovative than centralised ones, and contends that decentralisation does not necessarily entail a system which is more participative, effective or efficient.

Research into school-level decentralisation, undertaken by Reiners and McGinn (1997) and by Elmore (1993a), concludes that transferring functions to decentralised levels other than the school does not necessarily improve (or decrease) the quality of services provided, in part because it does not automatically lead to changes in the organisation of the school, and therefore does not lead to changes in teaching process. Elmore (1993a) asserts that research on centralisation and decentralisation in American education demonstrates a complete disconnection between structural reform and the learning achieved by students. He argues that while decentralising reforms seem, at least on the surface, to provide very plausible answers to the ills of public education (inefficient and unresponsive bureaucracy), repeated cycles of centralising and decentralising reforms in education have had little discernible effect on the efficiency, accountability or effectiveness of public schools (Elmore, 1993a:34).

Elmore's (1993a) argument is strengthened by Bowe and Ball (1992:64), who, in drawing on their experience of the policy of local school management in the United Kingdom, assert that decentralisation is not concerned with matters of pedagogy, theories of learning or questions about assessment, but instead focuses on the relationship between the state and institutional management which seeks to 'privilege market mechanisms over and above a State co-ordinated and managed system'. They argue that, far from releasing people from the burdens of bureaucracy, decentralisation increases administrative load and often distracts educators from the task of educating students.

Decentralisation policies have also been criticised for entrenching inequalities in education systems, particularly in developing countries. (NEPI, 1992:33).

Questions about whether decentralisation leads to greater empowerment and participation

by 'the people' have been raised by a number of authors, since it has been observed that often decentralisation does not transfer authority or devolve power to the people, but instead shifts the locus of power away from a powerful elite at the central level to an equally powerful elite at the local level (NEPI, 1992:33; Broadfoot, 1985:105). Bowe and Ball (1992:72) argue that while self-determination appears to provide schools with new freedoms, it also opens them up to blame for their 'failures', and leaves them with the dilemmas and contradictions inherent in government policy.

Questions surrounding the merits of decentralising the curriculum have also been raised in the literature. Smith and O'Day (1991:4) contend that by letting content expectations devolve to the school, policy makers avoid difficult decisions about what should constitute a core body of content to be learned by all students, resulting in the teaching of low-level skills and knowledge with which teachers are familiar. Weiler (1993:65) presents the dilemma of curriculum decentralisation by noting that while it recognises the importance of culturally specific learning environments, the demands of modern labour markets and communication systems seem to require more generalised and uniform competencies, skills and certifications at national and international levels.

The arguments for and against decentralisation have both merits and demerits, and there appears to be no absolute value in either centralised or localised systems. According to Samoff (1990:521), both are important and both must coexist. However, the extent of decentralisation that is desirable can be determined only in concrete situations. Elmore (1993a: 35) observes that 'if the historical debate tells us anything, it is that the central policy question should not be whether to centralise or decentralise, but rather what should be loosely controlled from any given level of government, and what should be tightly controlled'. Thus for Elmore the key issue is the purpose, extent and nature of influence any given level of government should exert over another level.

In the South African context, the literature has paid scant attention to the *purpose and rationale* for the establishment of districts in the context of the broader decentralisation debate. While the South African literature offers *education rationales* for the importance of districts (such as systemic reform and school improvement), little has been discussed about decentralisation rationales for the establishment of districts. Chapter 8 analyses how the rationale for establishing districts from a decentralisation paradigm explains the

character of local education in South Africa.

2.2.6 Implementing decentralisation

Much research has been undertaken to isolate those factors that enhance or impede the success of decentralisation efforts. Prawda (1992:16) introduces the concept of 'decentralisation implementation', which is concerned with the degree to which conditions exist for decentralisation to take place effectively. He (1992) concludes that successful decentralisation requires:

- full political commitment from leaders of all levels of the political system, teacher unions, and so on;
- a model addressing the issue of which functions and responsibilities could be more efficiently and effectively delivered at the central level and at other levels, and explicitly defining the degree of accountability of the different participants;
- an implementation strategy and timetable;
- clear operational manuals and procedures;
- continuous training for the improvement of skills levels;
- relevant performance indicators that are continuously monitored; and
- adequate financial, human and physical resources to sustain the process.

Prawda (1992:56) notes that worldwide evidence points to the paramount importance of the above conditions, as no system can last for long if decentralised units of government are incapable of absorbing new responsibilities and implementing them effectively.

Bjork (2003), however, introduces a new perspective on why decentralisation policies often do not work. In his study of teacher responses to the devolution of curriculum decision making to schools, Bjork (2003) found that Indonesian teachers have experienced great difficulty in responding to the new Local Content Curriculum (LCC) Programme introduced by the Indonesian Ministry of National Education. Bjork (2003:211) attributes this problem to the clash between the philosophical underpinnings of decentralisation and the culture of acceptance to which teachers have historically been conditioned, and to the underestimation by policy makers of the degree of change required to 'convert a cadre of obedient civil servants into a collection of autonomous, independent-minded educators'. Bjork adds that teachers in Indonesia resisted

opportunities to increase their autonomy because the values and behaviours of teachers were informed by a civil service system that rewarded loyalty and obedience rather than creativity and innovation. Hence he warns that implementation strategies such as training workshops, increased school-centre interactions and incentive schemes are, on their own, inadequate to bring about changes desired by decentralisation policies – that ideological, cultural and behavioural changes are necessary for decentralisation initiatives to be effective.

The categories for the effective implementation of decentralisation policies provided by Prawda (1992) and Bjork (2003) are drawn upon in this study to establish whether the conditions in which education districts operate in South Africa are geared towards facilitating decentralisation in practice.

2.2.7 Implications of the decentralisation literature for this study

This brief overview of the decentralisation literature has demonstrated how complex and greatly contested the issues surrounding decentralisation are. Notwithstanding its complexity, the decentralisation discourse provides the study with a window through which it has been able to view the niche that districts occupy in the education system.

Firstly, the literature has revealed that education districts in South Africa fit somewhere between the continuum of very low levels of decentralisation and highly devolved forms of decentralisation. Secondly, it has demonstrated that the implementation of decentralisation initiatives needs to be accompanied by significant inputs such as the training of officials in decentralised structures, adequate material resources, clarity on the distribution of roles, powers and functions, and clear operational manuals and procedures. In particular, decisions about which particular functions can be devolved to the lower levels of the system need careful consideration to avoid fragmentation, ineffectiveness and, I would add in the case of South Africa, greater inequity.

Above all else, however, the question on the imperative, the *impulse*, for decentralisation needs dissection. Is the imperative for decentralisation driven by a desire to promote democracy? Is it to enhance responsiveness to different school contexts? Is the intention of decentralisation to devolve responsibility and accountability without really devolving

powers in key decision-making areas? Is the impulse of decentralisation driven largely by economic considerations? Or is decentralisation driven by an ideological impulse which promotes market forces and consumer choice? As Biennen *et al.* (1990) ask, which problems are addressed by decentralisation? Chapters 3 and 4 of this study explore why districts were established in the South African education system, and how they came into being.

Inherent in decentralisation systems are questions about the distribution of powers and functions between different levels in a system. Hence the kinds of functions and the extent to which these are decentralised by the centre to lower levels in a system have been the focus of attention of several major studies (Winkler, 1993; DBSA, 1993). The next section of this chapter examines how countries have opted to operationalise their education decentralisation strategies through choices they have made in the decentralisation of functions.

2.3 Comparing district-level functions with those at other levels of the system

This section of the literature review provides an international perspective on how educational functions are distributed between different levels of the education system. By examining the functions of districts, relative to other levels in the education system in South Africa, the study provides a useful comparative perspective on the role of districts.

In a comparative study of education systems in ten countries, the DBSA (1993) found that policy formulation, planning and implementation are largely centralised functions (between 80% and 90%), but that district-level policy implementation is 50%, as compared to regional and local levels of policy implementation that are 30% and 40% respectively. Other functions such as school organisation, budgets, the determination of qualifications and standards, the determination of subjects and curriculum content, textbook development, language policy, accreditation, examinations, evaluation of educational programmes and research were found by the study to be highly centralised functions, with some elements of responsibility decentralised to regional, district and local levels of the education system. The study found that management of schools is more of a district activity, and that functions such as in-service teacher training and evaluation

of educational programmes are borne by districts to a lesser degree (DBSA, 1993:iii). Although the international picture provided by the DBSA of the distribution of responsibility for various educational functions in education systems hides the specific realities of individual countries, it does highlight a number of key issues. Firstly, at an international level, districts are not the exclusive levels of decentralisation in education systems – other levels of decentralisation such as regions and local levels co-exist with districts. Secondly, districts are involved more with policy implementation and school management issues than with other functions of the education system. Thirdly, the distribution of functions between various levels of the education system is a highly complex matter since responsibility for the same function can be distributed to all levels of the system, but to different degrees and in different ways.

Winkler's (1993:102) study is of a different nature, as it focuses on fiscal decentralisation. It provides a typology of centralised-decentralised models to analyse education systems in four countries, namely, Australia, the USA, Brazil and Chile. Winkler (1993:106) characterises, what he refers to as 'the principle government activities found in public education', as being centralised, mixed or decentralised. In this regard he selects the following components of education for his investigation: a) curriculum and teaching methods, b) examination and supervision, c) teacher recruitment and compensation, d) financing of recurrent expenditure, e) school construction, and d) financial and management audits. His study affirms that countries vary considerably in how they distribute functions across different levels. For example, the financing of school capital expenditures is the responsibility of central government in Chile and Australia, while local governments have principle responsibility for financing capital expenditure in schools in the USA. Similarly, teacher recruitment and remuneration is the responsibility of local governments in the USA and Chile, subject to national standards and regulations, while in Australia, state governments are responsible for teacher remuneration and there is local involvement in teacher recruitment (Winkler, 1993:119). Winkler's study confirms that it is difficult to characterise an education system as being either centralised or decentralised, since the degree of devolution differs across the different components of education.

In South Africa, little research has been undertaken on the distribution of roles, powers and functions between provincial head offices and districts. This study does so, by

examining the actual activities of district officials as well as stakeholder understandings of the functional relationship between districts and provincial head offices (see Chapters 6 and 7).

The following sections interrogate how the literature characterises and identifies the role of districts. It does this by drawing on organisational theory, perspectives on the role of the state, and frameworks offered by school change, school effectiveness and school improvement discourses.

2.4 The role of districts

2.4.1 Viewing districts through the window of organisational theory

Simkins' (2000) characterisation of the nature of public organisations offers an illuminating insight into the tensions that beset public organisations such as districts. He points out that organisations in the public sector operate simultaneously in a number of 'domains', each of which has a rather different set of legitimising norms. These domains are the 'policy domain' of representative government, the 'management domain' of hierarchical authority, and the 'service domain' of professional support for clients. Simkins (2000:320) argues that 'the natural condition of such organisations is a state of tension as each domain struggles to maintain its own integrity and reinforce its own standards within the organisation'.

The three domains of policy, management and service that Simkins attributes to public organisations fits in surprisingly well with the roles of districts that have been identified in the literature. Fleisch (2002b), the African National Congress (ANC, 1994) and Elmore (1993b) include all three of Simkins' domains in their proposed roles for districts, but add that districts have a central role to play in supporting schools. Fleisch (2002b:10), for example, outlines four key roles for districts:

- providing administrative services to schools;
- driving policy implementation in schools;
- providing support services to schools; and

- holding schools accountable.

However, Fleisch (2002b) does not interrogate these roles in terms of the inherent tensions that exist within them. The roles of policy implementation, professional and administrative support to schools, and accountability do not necessarily fall within the same bandwidth. They have different objectives and more often than not lead to different outcomes. How districts, in practice, navigate the tensions inherent in these roles, and how these roles are perceived by stakeholders, is a matter that this study interrogates in Chapters 5, 6 and 7.

Meanwhile, though, this chapter continues to explore districts through various portholes. The next section examines how ideas about the role of the state can inform thinking on the role of districts. It does so on the understanding that districts are part of, or extensions of, organs of state,[20] and considers it constructive to scrutinise the role of districts through perspectives on the role of the state.

2.4.2 Viewing districts through the role of the state

The dominant international discourse on state theory revolves around the 'hollowing out' or 'rolling back' of the state (Oldfied, 2001:34). Countries in Central and Eastern Europe, for example, are moving towards a lesser degree of state planning and control, hence their education authorities are changing from being controlling structures to co-ordinating bodies (Carron & De Grauwe, 1997). The changing role of the state in these countries has repercussions for officers in the different levels of the system, in particular for the inspectorate, 'whose main function was precisely to exert control and monitor the respect of centrally imposed decisions' (Carron & De Grauwe, 1997:7). In the case of South Africa, the ideas embodied in the discourse of the 'hollowed out' state set the stage for a radical downsizing of the post-apartheid state, resulting in financial cutbacks and the devolution of social services such as education.

Oldfield (2001:33) argues that the agenda of the post-apartheid state has shifted from one of 'prioritising reconstruction and redistribution through state intervention, to one of *facilitating* the delivery of social services beyond the ambit of state responsibility'. If

[20] Section 239 (a) of the Constitution (RSA, 1996) includes in its definition of 'organs of state' any department of state or administration in the national, provincial or local sphere of government.

Oldfield's argument on the role of the state is extended to that of districts, then it would appear that districts need to play a facilitation role rather than an interventionist role in relation to schools. The idea of districts as facilitating units suggests a limited role for districts, mainly that of co-ordination, and as providers of information. In terms of Malcolm's (1999) typography of district models, this represents a market model of districts (see section on conceptual framework in Chapter 1).

On the other hand, if South Africa is characterised as being an *evaluative* state, as has been asserted by Sayed and Soudien (2003:6), then by extension, districts would be expected to play a more aggressive monitoring role *vis-à-vis* schools. In this instance, an inspectoral role for districts, as is the case in many countries in Europe, Asia and Africa (Carron & De Grauwe, 1997), will not be incongruent with the notion of an evaluative state. From a 'bottom-up' perspective, an interrogation of the facilitating and/or monitoring roles of districts in terms of their relationship to schools contributes to a broader understanding of the role of the state in South African society.

2.4.3 Viewing districts through the school window

The place that districts occupy in the education system cannot be abstracted from an understanding of the legal, ideological and organisational position occupied by schools. The level of autonomy enjoyed by schools, the extent of central control of schools and the nature of school accountability to higher levels of the system are key determinants to understanding how districts relate to schools. Malcolm (1999) argues that the relationship between the district and the school depends on how one conceives the organisational model of schools and its relative autonomy to the system as a whole.

Over the past few decades there has been a trend in a number of countries to increase decision-making authority at the school level of the education system. Caldwell and Spinks, (1992:14) claim that the considerable evidence of self-management in education is now 'on a scale that warrants its classification as a mega trend'. Malcolm (1999:8) notes that the concept of 'self-managing' schools is dominant in countries such as the United Kingdom, Australia, New Zealand and the United States. He observes that 'in a self-managing school, the government provides basic funds for school operations, and sets guidelines for financial and educational management' (Malcolm, 1998:8); self-managing schools also set their own priorities and are encouraged to raise additional

funds through their communities and/or partnerships with external groups.

According to Caldwell and Spinks (1992:14), two arguments have been offered for promoting the idea of self-managing schools. One is concerned with responsiveness to local conditions, the other with priorities for resource allocation, particularly in times of economic restraint. Caldwell and Spinks, however, do not speak to other possible drivers of self-management, such as the need for increased participation, which has been an argument used in much of the decentralisation literature, nor do they interrogate the ways in which school self-management is circumscribed by control measures that create an 'illusion of self-management' but which in reality is about indirect control by government (Malcolm, 1999:9).

In South Africa, the post-apartheid restructuring efforts since 1994 saw a radical shift in the organisation, management, governance and financing of schools. The change in the policy and legal environment in which schools now operate arrived with the promulgation of the South African Schools Act (SASA) in 1996 (RSA, 1996c). Karlsson *et al.* (2001:174) observe that 'it is clear that the legal and policy environment in which schools operate has fundamentally changed'. SASA allows for schools to have far greater control over their financial matters than in the past, and schools have been given the power to determine school-level policy in a number of areas including admission, language and religion (Roberts, 2001:28).

Pampallis (2003:10) claims that, despite certain restrictions, SASA represents a major decentralisation of power to the school level because it provides school governing bodies (SGBs) with important powers that most schools in this country never had before. However, Sayed and Soudien (2003:4) claim that the 'relationship between the educational state and its sites is inscribed in ambiguity', because of the way in which authority is devolved from central government to the provinces and to the individual school. They argue that in the post-apartheid state control is indirect and 'after the fact', because 'political agendas are frequently contested around interpretations of law, which act as constraining, as opposed to controlling mechanisms' (Sayed & Soudien, 2003:4). This claim is made on the evidence of the increasing number of important legal challenges to the powers of the Minister of Education, and its effect of shifting the battle between the state and schools to the legal domain. Hence Sayed and Soudien (2003:6)

conclude that the institutional site of schooling sits 'at the nexus between juridical regulation and self-management'.

Besides the analysis provided by Sayed and Soudien (2003), the literature provides little interrogation of where schools currently 'sit' in the education system. Nor is there clear policy from government about a vision of schools that accords them self-managing status. The literature appears to suggest that the new model of schools in the South African education system is not one of self-managing schools, as is the case in countries such as the United States, Britain, New Zealand and Australia. Nor are schools under the total and direct control of the state. Instead, South Africa has a unique school model – a model that straddles self-managing schools and state-controlled schools, a model that has features of both centralisation and decentralisation, and one which, while providing much freedom to schools, appears to maintain a strong evaluative and regulatory role for the state. This study examines whether districts, as field agents of the state, do in fact have a strong evaluative and regulatory role vis-à-vis schools, and in doing so contributes towards an understanding of where schools 'sit' in the education system.

2.4.4 Viewing districts through the window of systemic reform

A significant number of researchers (Fleisch, 2002b; Muller & Roberts, 2000; Chetty, 2000; Chinsamy, 2000; Mphahlele, 1999; Godden & Coombe, 1996; Dalin, 1994; Fuhrman, 1993; Elmore, 1993b) argue that districts are crucial for sustainable, system-wide education reform. The interest in system-wide reform is rooted in two factors, namely, the historical failure of other forms of reform initiatives internationally, and the particular context of South African education which is informed by a post-apartheid transformation agenda. The history of education reform internationally is replete with efforts that have lurched from teacher-in-service training, to management development, and more recently to school improvement and whole school development approaches. Mphahlele (1999) and Muller and Roberts (2000:17) note that in the last 30 years, school-focused change models that have been implemented in a number of countries did not bring about the envisaged systemic change in education as they were not sustainable and did not promote multiplier effects. Hence 'more recently districts are increasingly being targeted as nodes of systemic reform and delivery against a context of failing school improvement strategies' (Mphahlele, 1999:7). Dalin *et al.* (1994:xii) reach a similar conclusion from their study undertaken in Bangladesh, Ethiopia and Columbia, namely,

that one of the essential ingredients of successful education change is the 'need for a coherent linkage system between central, district and school levels via information, assistance, pressure and rewards'.

However, Barber (cited in Malcolm, 1991:5) is cautious about over-emphasising the role of districts in bringing about change in schools. He suggests that education change depends on what happens inside schools, and that systems and support agencies 'can only provide frameworks that increase the chances of school success and reduce the chances of failure'. Malcolm (1999:19) contends however that international research is clear in its finding that both outside-in, and inside-out strategies are essential for change. The outside-in approach relies on external support for change, and is based on the assumption that schools and teachers have neither the time nor the expertise to lead change from inside. The inside-out approach reflects a school-driven approach to change and is based on the assumption that school staff have the motivation, knowledge, time and capacity to drive change.

Elmore (1993b), like Barber also expresses concern about the limited role of districts in influencing classroom practice. He observes that 'about 80% of district interaction with schools focuses on matters such as budgets, personnel, pupil behaviour, facilities and parents complaints' (Elmore, 1993b:115). In noting that there is little evidence that district offices are staffed and organised in ways that promote attention to teaching and learning, Elmore advocates that government policy should focus attention and resources on improving the capacity of districts to support schools in teaching and learning.

This study examines whether districts are indeed playing a role in bringing about school change and improvement, how they are going about doing so, and how school stakeholders experience the efforts of districts in institutionalising change and school support. Elmore's (1993b) account of the nature of the interaction between districts and schools, provides a particularly useful focus to the way in which this study explores how district officials balance administrative and management activities with teaching and learning support activities.

2.4.5 Viewing districts through the contest between support and accountability

Much of the literature points to the need for balance between the support and accountability roles of districts to bring about school improvement (JET, 2002; Jansen, 2002b; Fullan & Watson, 2000; Dalin *et al.,* 1994; O'Day & Smith, 1993). Fullan and Watson (2000:459) assert that balancing support and accountability intervention 'is obviously a tough call', but note that the external environment has to become sophisticated enough to play these two seemingly conflicting roles.

In South Africa, the recognition that both support and accountability are necessary to improve school performance was highlighted at a national conference convened by the Department of Education and JET Education Services in 2002 (JET, 2002). At the conference, Jansen (2002b:51) provided what he called 'a heuristic two-by-two representation' of the relationship between support and accountability. According to Jansen, deep change takes place in the context of high support and high accountability, while stagnation occurs when there is both low support and low accountability. In a similar vein, wastage occurs when there is high support and low accountability, and only surface learning takes place when there is high accountability and low support. Jansen concludes that the current context of schooling is characterised by surface learning in schools because accountability is high, and that although great strides had been made to improve the support provided to schools, such support remained low and ineffective (Jansen, 2002b:52). Hence, according to Jansen, school change can occur most effectively in the context of an external environment that provides high support, as well as high accountability.

However, Jansen's (2002b) representation of the relationship between support and accountability remains steeped in the modernist tradition, as it proposes a singular form of intervention for all schools in all contexts. A more post-modern approach to how accountability and support can be drawn upon to improve schools is couched in Hopkins' typology of the 'growth state of schools' (cited in Muller & Roberts, 2000:10). According to Hopkins, the nature of interventionist strategies for school improvement is dependent upon the condition of the school itself, and not upon a universal formula. Hopkins typifies schools in three categories – failing schools, moderately effective schools and generally effective schools – and recommends intervention strategies appropriate to each school

typology. He proposes, for example, that failing schools require high levels of external support, and that external pressure should be withdrawn for a specified period in order to allow such schools to put their development plans in place (Hopkins, cited in Muller and Roberts 2000) In the case of moderately effective schools, Hopkins proposes that external support needs to be gradually decreased, and directed at building instructional capacity in schools. For the generally effective school, he proposes a transfer of reliance from external support to school-based support networks (Hopkins, cited in Muller and Roberts, 2000:10).

One may argue that Hopkins' typology of schools and proposed interventionist strategies are themselves couched in the language of modernism, as they are also not flexible enough to accommodate all contexts. Because of the legacy of the apartheid past, the South African education system is very heterogeneous in terms of resources, ethos and culture. The transformation agenda of the state may require that other categories (such as equity and redress) be used to typify schools, and for different intervention strategies that are dependent on its policy priorities to be applied to different types of schools. Hence the pressure versus support role of districts is much more complex than has been articulated in the literature and requires greater interrogation, as is undertaken in Chapter 8 of the study.

O'Day and Smith (1993) offer a different perspective to how the relationship between support and accountability may be viewed. They distinguish between two types of accountability: soft accountability and strong accountability. They view soft accountability as 'system-generated improvement efforts that involve proactive steps taken by districts to achieve standards in all schools' (O'Day & Smith, 1993:283). Soft accountability involves specific activities focused directly on ensuring that all schools have the resources and technical assistance to meet school standards. On the other hand, the assumption of strong accountability strategies is that rewards and punishments will motivate both students and educators to higher levels of performance (O'Day & Smith, 1993:286). O'Day and Smith appear to have got around part of the problem of dichotomising support and accountability by embedding notions of 'support' into 'accountability'; however, they do this within the paradigm of accountability. It does not really solve the dilemma of how the *intention* of the two seemingly opposing requirements of support and accountability can be negotiated. This study therefore

includes, as one of its key tasks, an investigation into how district officials find their way, both in practice and in rhetoric, in actualising the support/accountability dichotomy.

2.5 Identifying challenges facing districts

A study on education districts is incomplete without attempting to understand how the literature views the challenges faced by districts in the South African education system. According to De Clerq (2001:11), 'it is widely acknowledged that district performance has thus far been poor'. Fleisch (2002b) attributes this to the fact that many district offices lack the capacity and systems to provide the kinds of services that are required of them. De Clerq (2001) and Roberts (2001) both identify external and internal factors as contributing to this state of affairs. The external factors include aspects such as the lack of district authority over procurement, provisioning, budgetary functions, school personnel appointments and disciplinary powers. A number of researchers (Roberts, 2001; Mphahlele, 1999; Chinsamy, 2000) have pointed to the absence of clear legislation that defines the role and powers of districts as a key limiting factor for making districts function effectively. De Clerq (2001) adds that the lack of coherence, continuity and realism at the level of the provincial head office has impacted negatively on the performance of districts. Internal factors such as the lack of material, physical, financial and human resources have also undermined the ability of districts to support schools. Roberts (2001:7) adds that an outdated organisational culture and ethos within districts has contributed to the inability of districts to provide effective support to schools. A recent Department of Education (2003a:17) report on the current status of districts points to severe staff shortages, long distances between schools and district offices in some provinces, the absence of clear and appropriate delegation from the provincial head office to the district office, the limited capacity of district staff in terms of skills and knowledge, and the absence of an effective model of the district-school interface as factors that impede the effective functioning of districts.

Malcolm (1999:1) points to a different challenge facing districts. He asserts that the new emphasis on learner-centered education demands markedly new approaches to teaching and school management, and hence demands new approaches to school support and district management. He suggests that

> while the traditional skill of the teacher remain, the new curriculum calls for an

> extended view of professionalism, that of teachers as researchers, reflective practitioners, intellectuals, political actors and curriculum designers. For the district, this implies an intense commitment to teacher development and support, as well as new approaches to effective teacher development (Malcolm 1999).

Hence districts face the challenge of providing professional support to teachers, while simultaneously charting their own learning curve.

The literature demonstrates that districts face major organisational and resource challenges that are unlikely to be removed easily. However, there is little analysis in the literature about why these challenges persist in the system. Whether the roots of the problems referred to above are symptomatic of deeper structural weaknesses in the system, or whether they simply lie within the domain of resource constraints and organisational fragility, is a matter explored in Chapter 8 of the study.

2.6 Searching for a district identity

Some researchers have demonstrated a propensity to 'label' districts, and thus confer a form of identity to them. Perhaps this is not surprising since the search for an identity helps people to anchor their understanding of issues through the adoption of easily understandable typologies. Two such district identities have been articulated in the literature: districts as *management units,* and districts as *administrative and support units.*

According to Buckland and De Wee (1996:80), the organisation charts (organograms) of most provincial departments of education provide for the district as a management unit. The term implies that districts carry a management responsibility, which includes that of seeking accountability from schools through the mandates they bring from the head of the education department. Mphahlele (1999), while recognising that districts are at a higher level in the hierarchy than schools, emphasises that districts are administrative and support units. He notes that 'an education district in the South African context could be described as an administrative and support unit which is hierarchically closest to schools' (Mphahlele, 1999:23). Although both Buckland and De Wee (1996) and Mphahlele (1999) accept that districts are in a hierarchical relationship to schools, they place different emphases on the way districts relate to schools. While Mphahlele spotlights a support role for districts, Buckland and De Wee accentuate a supervisory role for

districts.

Interesting, though, is the emphasis placed on the management role of districts by the African National Congress, which at the time was a government in waiting, and which today represents the government of the day. In its *Framework for Education and Training* (ANC, 1994), the ANC refers to a local tier of management which would function by delegation from the provincial governments and which would be under the supervision of the provincial education authorities. The *Framework for Education and Training* proposes that a local tier of management could be made responsible for the 'management and administration of all pre-higher education levels of the education system' (ANC, 1994). The proposal put forward by the ANC on the role of the local level of education clearly leans towards a discourse that tends towards the management and administrative mandates of districts, as opposed to the emerging discourse in the literature of policy and support roles of districts.

The identity conferred upon districts is crucial to this study as it foregrounds the dominant nature of districts. Hence whether stakeholders view districts as administrative units or support units or management units reflect the dominant character that stakeholders ascribe to districts. Whether it is useful to label districts remains a question for this study, given the contested meanings attached to districts and the embeddedness of multiple identities of districts suggested in the literature thus far.

2.7 Conclusion

By examining districts through a variety of portholes, with the discourse on decentralisation providing a central point of focus, this literature review has attempted to obtain both a broad and an in-depth understanding of the existing knowledge base of districts. The decentralisation literature, for instance, provides insights into how the niche that districts occupy in the South African education system can be understood. In addition, it draws attention to the importance of identifying the impulses that drive the establishment of districts in South Africa. Beyond this, in illuminating the distinction between political and administration decentralisation, the decentralisation literature provides a constructive framework within which to characterise education districts in South Africa. To date, little research on districts has been undertaken from the

decentralisation perspective, in South Africa.

In comparing how countries distribute education functions between different levels in a system, the literature reveals the range of choices (theoretically) available in selecting which functions should ideally be allocated to districts, and which goals are achieved in making these choices. For example, greater decentralisation of functions to districts could enhance inequity, and would be ineffective in situations where resource capacity is low. On the other hand, the system could increase its levels of efficiency if decision making on key issues was decentralised to districts. Chapter 5 demonstrates that districts have limited capacity to absorb greater functions and powers within their current resourcing frameworks. It also concludes that there is little interest on the part of district officials for significantly greater autonomy in decision-making.

In its examination of the tensions between the policy, management and service domains that beset public organisations, the literature predicts similar tensions that should be explored in South African education districts. The current South African literature on districts does not adequately explore the tensions inherent in the role of districts, hence the study undertakes this task by examining how districts in practice attempt to steer their way through these tensions.

The school change, school improvement and school effectiveness discourses examined in the literature provide additional windows through which districts are viewed. For example, the new system of school governance in the country facilitates a tangible level of school autonomy, which has important implications for the social relationships between schools and districts, a matter explored in greater detail in Chapter 7. Moreover, the debate in the literature about the apparent dichotomy between support and pressure interventions in improving and changing schools compels this study to interrogate how districts employ these measures in practice (see Chapters 5 and 6), and how these are perceived by stakeholders (see Chapter 7).

Finally, the literature questions whether a single identity can be conferred upon districts. Whether districts can be considered as management units or administrative units or school support units, or whether the search for a singular identity leads one into the trap of ‘Aristotelian binary logic’ (Adesina, 2003:1), is a matter that is considered in Chapter

8 of this study.

The next chapter traces the origins of education districts in South Africa with a view to unravelling how districts came into being in the South African education system.

Chapter 3

THE ORIGINS AND MEANINGS OF DISTRICTS IN SOUTH AFRICAN EDUCATION DISCOURSE: A HISTORICAL ANALYSIS

3.1 Introduction

This chapter traces the historical trajectory of education districts in South Africa. It explores the nature of local education inherited from the apartheid era, and reviews how districts came into being in South Africa after 1994.

In investigating how the concept of districts became dominant in South African education discourse after 1994, this chapter explores the nature of the debates that had emerged prior to the establishment of post-apartheid education. By examining why there is currently no official policy on districts (despite the present government's preoccupation with policy!),[21] it reveals how the post-apartheid government shed its original vision for a distinct layer of governance at the local level of the system, for a system that mirrored (at least structurally) that of the apartheid era.

The recent historical trajectory of the development of the South African education sub-system is punctuated by the dramatic political moment, which witnessed the ushering in of a non-racial and democratic system in 1994. Hence this chapter defines 1994 as a central point of departure for tracing developments in the South African education sub-system.

Before I continue, though, it is important to define two key concepts that are frequently

[21] See the National Education Policy Act (RSA, 1996). The Act empowers the Department of Education to develop national policy over a wide range of education functions. To date, the DoE has developed a many new policies aimed at transforming the education sector in the country.

referred to in this chapter. The notions of *governance* and of *administration* are of particular relevance, as they are often applied in descriptions of districts. For the purposes of this thesis, I have adopted the definition of governance suggested by Buckland and Hofmeyr (1993:1) who propose:

> By governance we understand not simply the system of administration and control, but the whole process by which policies are formulated, adopted, implemented and monitored. Governance is an issue not only at the national level, but also at every level of the system. Because it is centrally concerned with the distribution of power, it is often summed up with the question: who decides?

Hence governance has to do with questions about who should make the decisions, and with how, when and where such decisions should be made. It is closely associated with structures and processes that influence decisions concerning public life. The concept of *governance* is often confused with that of *government.* Over the years, however, the idea of governance has gained wider meaning, and therefore represents a broader notion than government, whose principle elements include the legislature, executive and judiciary (Buckland & Hofmeyer, 1993). In this regard, a government is an organisation that has the power to make and enforce laws for a certain territory, while governance deals with the processes and systems by means of which a society operates. Good governance implies that these mechanisms are organised in a way that allows for the rights and interests of stakeholders to be respected by the Executive in a spirit of democracy.

Administration (for the purposes of this thesis) refers to the bureaucratic arm of government: the structures, processes and people deployed by government to carry out the tasks it has laid out for itself. Hence reference to the notion of a district as an administrative unit suggests the absence of an elected decision-making body at the district level, while the idea of districts as governance units implies the existence of an elected constituency to whom districts would be accountable.

3.2 A portrait of the past

Pampallis (2002) observes that prior to the establishment of South Africa's first democratic government in 1994, the governance of the education system was characterised by a peculiar and complex combination of centralisation and decentralisation, based largely on a racial and ethnic motif. Apartheid education, with its rigid ideology of separateness, led to structural complexity and fragmentation as

education was delivered through separate departments classified according to race and ethnicity. The apartheid system consisted of 19 separate departments of education based on four racial groups[22] the four so-called independent homelands (also known as the TBVC[23] states), the six non-independent homelands[24] (or self-governing territories), and the central Department of National Education (DNE). The DNE was responsible for setting and monitoring national norms and standards across the system.

While the apartheid system consisted of myriad education departments based on race, ethnicity and provincial boundaries, it mirrored no parallel governance structures at the lower levels of the system. Buckland and Hofmeyr (1992:19), for example, observe that since 1910 the education system has always had a poor record of district-level governance. They point to numerous education commissions that identified this problem, and note that many of these commissions had advocated levels of governance closer to the needs and realities of local communities.[25] However, successive governments, including the National Party government, did not act on proposals of these Commissions for the introduction of local-level governance of education.

In its appraisal of the apartheid education system, the NEPI report (1992:13) concludes that 'while there is a proliferation of governance structures … at the higher levels of the system, there are virtually no district-level structures of education governance'. Buckland and de Wee (1996:80) reason that this was not the case since 'the issue of local or district control of education was subsumed under the rhetoric of own education' because 'during the apartheid years the focus of official policy shifted to arguments for and against racially-specific educational provision' and overlooked issues related to vertical decentralisation. However, this was not to say that racially-based education departments did not sub-divide themselves into smaller units for purposes of administrative control.

---

[22] Education for each racial group was administered by separate education departments located in the House of Assembly (White), House of Representatives (Coloured), House of Delegates (Indian) and Department of Education and Training (Black). The House of Assembly in turn was made up of four separate education departments based in each of the four provinces that existed in the country at the time.

[23] The TBVC states were: Transkei, Bophutatswana, Venda and Ciskei

[24] The six non-independent homelands were: KwaZulu, KwaNdebele, Lebowa, Gazankulu, QwaQwa and KaNgwane.

[25] Although the National Party government appeared to have paid little attention to the issue of local education, this was not always so in South African education history. Buckland and De Wee (1996:79) point to the many commissions that were established prior to 1948, which recommended decentralisation of education to local or district level. In the Transvaal, these included the Jagger Commission in 1917, the Malherbe Commission in 1920, and the Nicol Commission in 1939.

Buckland and Hofmeyr (1993:17) observe, for example, that 'weaker forms of decentralisation such as deconcentration can be found within the DET, where additional administrative centres were established in each of its seven regions'. However, there were no local or district governance structures with any significant level of power or any accountability to a local constituency. Instead the 19 education departments of the apartheid era had sub-divided themselves into a variety of different formations reflected in area offices, regions and circuits (Interview, Davies, 2003. Behr (1988:67) points out that the Education Affairs Act of 1988 provided for the establishment of regional offices, which served as extensions of the central Head office.

According to Behr (1988:69), regional offices generally carried administrative functions pertaining to the 'proper functioning of schools'. Circuit offices that were staffed by circuit inspectors and education advisors generally served the regional offices. The flow chart of the Department of Education and Training (Behr, 1988:70) confirms its adoption of the idea of regional and circuit offices, while that of education departments in the purportedly self-governing states illustrates the existence of inspection circuits.[26] Hence, the apartheid education sub-system was characterised by numerous units such as regions and circuits that served to keep the administrative machinery of the apartheid system running.

Thus, since 1910, South African education, has had no experience of a system of local education governance. Even under apartheid, the commonality of the 19 education departments was that their sub-divisions were constituted as administration units, not as governance units. Hence any aspirations to create a local system of education governance post-1994 would have undoubtedly required immense political will, and a major overhauling of existing vertical governance relations.

The challenge confronting the post-apartheid government in 1994 was the task of creating a single education system from vastly different entities – entities which at the time were hardly comparable to one another. The new post-apartheid government inherited an education system with sub-structures that were vastly divergent in terms of their organisation, culture of practice and nomenclature (Krige, 1998). The NEPI (1992:11) report also concludes that the civil service of the apartheid system 'is difficult to

[26] Behr (1988) points out though that variations existed in the sub-structures of education departments in the supposed self-governing.

characterise, as organisational styles and cultures tend to vary from department to department and between different types of bureaucratic corps'. Davies[27] and Boshoff[28] (Interviews, 2004), in reflecting on the colossal education administration inherited from the apartheid era, observe that the differences in administrative systems and sub-systems were massive. (Not that the post-1994 provincial sub-systems are uniform by any means, as the next chapter will demonstrate!). Professor Davies (interview, 2004) points out, for example, that while the House of Representatives had a huge infrastructure in the Western Cape, it had nothing elsewhere in the country. On the other hand, the Department of Education and Training was a relatively small department, which had overarching responsibility over self-governing territories and urban settlements spread across the country.

The inspectors of the apartheid era were notorious for their antagonistic and fear-inducing relationship with most schools in the country, particularly with respect to the DET schools (Hartshorne, 1992; Jansen, 2001). Much of this is related to the excessive control that inspectors exercised over schools. A teacher from a former DET schools recalls that

> we used to shake when inspectors came to schools. They would come into classes and disrupt lessons, and were very tough on us (Interview, teacher 4, 2004).

Even a former Model C school principal expressed negative sentiments about the inspectorate system of the apartheid era. He claims that

> in the past, inspectors terrorised teachers and principals. They tried to run schools directly, and told principals when to brush their teeth (Interview, principal 4, 2004).

The IDS co-ordinator (Interview, 2004) in the district office alleges that

> before 1994, inspectors visited schools on faultfinding missions, and not to support schools, thereby creating much fear among teachers and principals.

The inspectorate prior to 1994 also undertook evaluation of teachers for the purposes of confirmation and promotion, while currently teacher appointments are recommended by SGBs. The shift from a tightly controlled and highly prescriptive system to a more self-reliant and less commanding school system after 1994 is reflected in the statement by a principal from a former DET school who points out that

[27] Professor Hugh Davies was previously the Superintendent General of the House of Assembly, and became Director General of the Education Coordination Service (ECS) in 1992. The ECS was tasked to investigate how the different education departments in the system were organised and structured, and how they could be unified in a new political dispensation.
[28] Advocate Boshoff is an official in the legal services Directorate of the DoE. He was absorbed into the DoE in 1995.

> prior to 1994, we expected the Department to do everything; now we have learned to do things for ourselves. The Department now encourages schools to take their own initiative (Interview, principal 6, 2004).

The inspectorate of the apartheid era was disliked intensely by most schools. Inspectors were widely reputed as being corrupt and perceived to be puppets of the apartheid regime (Hartshorne, 1992). By the 1980s, the inspectoral system had collapsed in most parts of the country, although officials still occupied their posts. Speaking from his experience of the then DET, Hartshorne (1992:49) points out that at the end of March 1990

> not a single school in Soweto was functioning. Inspector staff and subject advisors had lost touch completely with what was going on in schools, and it was admitted privately in the regional office, that the Department had no control over the situation.

Manganyi (Interview, 2005) confirms that the destruction of education monitoring and inspection in South African education left a vacuum that needed to be filled by the new government. The absence of a monitoring system in the country was recognised by the Committee of Heads of Departments (HEDCOM)[29] in February 1998, when it expressed concern that 'the capacity to monitor and evaluate school effectiveness was inadequate and suggested that it should be investigated and improved' (DoE, 1999a). In response to these concerns HEDCOM decided, at its meeting in February 1998, to engage research agencies to conduct an audit of quality assurance activities in the nine provincial education departments. It also noted the establishment of a Ministerial Committee that would analyse the findings and recommendations of the audit and propose a national policy framework on quality assurance matters (DoE, 1999a). A national quality assurance audit was undertaken by research agencies (the CEPD and the Wits Education Policy Unit), however it did not lead to any policy process directed at re-examining local education (DoE: 1999d). Instead, it resulted in the establishment of a national system of quality assurance, which to date, has focused on the identification of indicators for monitoring the national level of the system (DoE: 1999e) and the development of policies on Systemic Evaluation and Whole School Evaluation.

By 1990, it was clear to both the apartheid government and the liberation movements that an alternative vision needed to be in place for a complete overhaul of the apartheid education system. The development of such a vision for a post-apartheid system of

[29] HEDCOM is a structure comprising the Heads of the nine provincial education departments as well as the Head of the national Department of Education.

education occurred in two broad parallel processes. On the one hand, the then apartheid government established its own structures and commissions in its search for alternatives; on the other, the ANC and its allies began formulating their own proposals on education.

3.3 Preparing for the future: post-1990

In 1992 the apartheid government officially proposed its vision of a new education system in a widely publicised publication (which was strongly contested by the anti-apartheid movement), the *Education Renewal Strategy* (ERS). The ERS (DNE 1992:23) proposed two tiers of education governance, a 'central education authority, and regionally-based departments of education'. In addition, it floated the idea of a third tier of governance, at the *school* level of the system. It was silent about local or district levels of governance. Despite its reference to administration decentralisation (DNE, 1992:22), it did not articulate a vision for lower levels of management or administration.

By the end of 1993, the Education Co-ordination Services (ECS) – a co-ordination structure established by the National Party government, began seriously considering how the disparate 19 education departments could be unified. It proposed that the government be cautious about abolishing the existing regions and circuits of the education system, but added that there needed to be clarity about the powers of such structures. Regions and circuits were viewed as being important conduits of government policy, and there was even the view at the time that there should be some uniformity and standardisation of departmental sub-structures across the country (Interview, Davies, 2004).

One of the earliest policy proposals on the local level of education from the anti-apartheid movement emerged from the National Education Policy Investigation (NEPI, 1992), which was a project of the National Education Co-ordinating Committee (NECC), a significant education organisation of the anti-apartheid movement in the 1980s and 1990s. NEPI conceptualised local education from a dual perspective – that of both administration and governance. NEPI proposed two policy perspectives[30] on education administration and governance, a *system* perspective and a *school governance*

[30] NEPI uses the term 'perspectives' rather than 'options' to describe their two proposals for the structure of education governance, as they had many elements in common and differed only in terms of their starting points.

perspective. 'The system perspective involves seeing the administration and control of schools as part of the governance of education in general…' (NEPI, 1992:37), while the school governance perspective has as its starting point the 'democratisation of school governance and the role of civil society in that process' (NEPI, 1992:44). Both perspectives envisaged a four-tier system of education governance: national, regional (which in today's language could be understood to be provincial), local (or district, as it is sometimes described in the system perspective) and institutional.

The system perspective proposed the establishment of a political authority at the local level of the system, supported by an administrative structure and accompanied by a stakeholder-driven consultative structure. It advocated '*elected*[31] District Education Authorities supported by consultative District Education Forums and District Education Administrative structures for the district level of the system (NEPI, 1992). It envisaged the transfer of significant local autonomy to districts that could demonstrate both the capacity and the willingness to take on the local management of education. District-level policy formulation and adoption was proposed as being the role of the District Education Authority (with the power to adopt district-level statutes and regulations), while district policy implementation was seen to be the role of the District Education Administration. NEPI also proposed that districts could conduct their own inspections and monitoring of internal standards if they had negotiated autonomy over this policy area. However, it argued that external examinations were to remain the prerogative of the regional and national levels of the system.

In its vision of the governance and administration of education, the system approach of NEPI draws on policy as its starting point. The design of its proposed structures is driven by its 'fixation' with questions about decision-making and responsibility of policy processes at the different levels of the system, rather than with the details of organisational structure. This was understandable, however, given the preoccupation of the democratic movement with ensuring the participation of a previously disenfranchised society in education and other matters. Hence, in NEPI's system approach, bureaucrats at the local level were expected to be accountable to elected officials rather than to bureaucrats at the higher level of the system, thereby privileging the governance domain of education over the domain of administration.

[31] My emphasis. NEPI does not detail who would comprise the district electorate, or where members of this electorate would be sourced.

The systemic approach adopted by NEPI also suggests a high level of devolution of authority to the local level of the education system, while maintaining 'a strong equalising role for the central state' (NEPI, 1992:44). For example, in addition to districts being accorded the power to develop their own legislation and regulations (within the framework of national and regional policy), NEPI also advised that districts could supplement state financial provisioning from their own resources (NEPI, 1992:41). NEPI's system perspective on governance and administration was therefore characterised by strong elements of devolution and participatory governance.

While the systemic approach proposed by NEPI separated the different policy processes of formulation, adoption, implementation and monitoring in the different parts of the education system, its *school governance* perspective proposed 'a single structural hierarchy with differentiation in the modes of participation in the governance process' (NEPI, 1992:47). In simple language, this perspective offered the idea of a single entity, representing both stakeholder and government interests. This perspective advocated that the unit of governance at the local level be a school board, constituted on a tripartite basis with representatives from Parent-Teacher-Student Associations (PTSAs) from schools in the defined locality, government officials and representatives of student, parent and teacher organisations. It provided for school boards to have important functions such as the appointment of teachers, the development of local-level policy and the equitable utilisation of education resources. One of the key limitations of the school governance perspective is that it bypasses issues surrounding the administration and management of education at this level. For example, in referring to the composition of the school board, it did not specify how 'representation from government officials' was expected to take place – it was silent on how it envisaged the education bureaucracy to be structured, and how accountability was expected to occur. It also failed to distinguish adequately between the roles of the different structures it envisaged. In effect, NEPI's school governance perspective, quite like the systemic perspective, was high on governance and low on administration and management in its proposals for a model of education administration and governance.

A closer examination of NEPI's two perspectives on local education suggests a number of key underlying common features. Firstly, both perspectives emphasise the need for a

local (district) layer of governance in the system. In doing so, NEPI attempted to promote the widest possible participation of all constituencies in the governance of education. Secondly, the local layer of education was visualised as being fairly autonomous – having authority to develop district-level policy and even legislation, raise funds and distribute resources to schools. Both approaches attempted to accommodate the complex relationship between management and governance through the establishment of separate structures that would reflect management as well as representation modes, but which would converge at a common point at each level of the system.

However, while the system perspective distinguishes structures responsible for policy formulation and adoption and policy implementation, the school governance perspective tends to blur the enactment of policy processes between the different structures. A somewhat interesting element of the NEPI proposals is that both perspectives hesitate to foreground the relationship between local education and local government, though minor reference is made (in the system perspective) of the possibility of District Education Authorities being part of local government (NEPI, 1992:41).

The ANC, like its ally, the NECC, was also keen to introduce an intermediary layer of governance between schools and provinces. It believed that such structures would be useful in deracialising and democratising the education system. Karlsson *et al.* (1996) argue that the ANC was concerned primarily with the redistributive role that this level of the system could play in overcoming the historical legacy of inequity in resources such as sports facilities and skilled teachers between schools. The draft *Policy Framework for Education and Training* (ANC, 1994), which articulates the ANC vision of a post-apartheid education system, proposes that 'there will be a single national education and training system with four levels of *governance*: national, provincial, *local* and institutional' (ANC, 1994:23). Although the ANC envisaged a **local** level of governance linked to local government for the new education system, it did so cautiously, by noting that 'although local governance and management structures have an important role to play…., the form, role and powers of such structures, and their relationship to local government, if any, have still to be clarified through further investigation and consultation'. The ANC (1994:25) further spelled out that 'the responsibilities, if any, of elected local governments in the sphere of education and training are not yet clear'. It did, however, accede that there was scope for a local tier of *management* by delegation from

provincial governments (ANC, 1994:25).

The ANC appears to have adopted a somewhat pragmatic stance in its policy towards the local tier of education. In one section of its *Policy Framework for Education and Training* (ANC, 1994:23), it proposed a local tier of *governance* for the education system, possibly linked to the system of local government, while in another section (ANC, 1994:25), it referred to the possibility of 'a local tier of *management* … by delegation from the provincial governments and under the supervision of the Provincial Education and Training Authorities'. The rather open-ended stance of the ANC reflects its somewhat ambiguous and vague position on local education. In one sense, its position is probably a product of the uncertainty surrounding the possible outcomes of the constitutional negotiations that dominated education policy thinking at the time. On the other hand, it could be a reflection of the uncertainty with which the ANC approached its policy on local education. Coombe (Interview, 1995) confirms that

> there was much constitutional uncertainty in the period that the ANC proposals on education were drafted, and that it was impossible to predict whether there would be a role for education in the local government system under the new Constitution.

An important consideration in this instance is that proposals for local education were subject to the outcomes of political negotiations being conducted by political groupings in the Congress for a Democratic South Africa (CODESA), a body created in the 1990s to facilitate the transition from apartheid to democracy. Nonetheless, the ANC conceptualised its vision of the 'district' more as a tier of governance (with potential connections to local government) rather than a tier of management or administration of provincial education departments, though (as mentioned above) such a possibility was articulated almost as an afterthought. Indeed, the ANC *Policy Framework* (1994) conferred little attention to the management and administration domains of education, but instead foregrounded the realm of education governance.

Coombe (Interview, 2005) explains that the ANC's proposed policy framework on education did not detail management and administrative issues partly because

> there was real perplexity, and virtual ignorance on the part of those who were formulating policy on how public administration worked, owing to their lack of experience.

Moreover, Coombe (Interview, 2005) adds that 'the dominant discourse then was about

achieving legitimacy through democratic expression of the public', and the 'comrades were struggling to formulate proposals in the absence of a settled Constitution'. Coombe's admission to the limited focus on administrative issues on the part of the ANC is supported by Fleisch (2002a:26) who points out that policy researchers paid little attention to 'the actual structuring of specialist functions, such as the provision of administration and support services, or the demarcation of administration units'.

There also appeared to be little clarity regarding the distinction between governance and administration at this level of the education system. A study carried out by Karlsson *et al.* (1996) found that most stakeholders, in particular the ANC and its allies, supported the idea of at least one intermediary level of governance between schools and provinces. They add, though, that many of the stakeholders had not formulated definite ideas about the nature and composition of the governance structure at the regional/district/circuit level of the system. Karlsson *et al.* (1996) attribute this to the lack of prior experience on the part of stakeholders about governance at this level of the system. Karlsson *et al.* (1996:53) note, for example, that both the NECC and the South African Democratic Teachers Union (SADTU) only referred to administrative functions (rather than governance ones) in articulating their understanding of the local level of the education system. For instance, the NECC highlighted the role of intermediary structures as implementation arms of provincial education departments – those that 'would adapt provincial plans into local implementable programmes', rather than structures that would be responsive to local constituencies.

The debate on local education in circles outside of the apartheid government, therefore, emerged from a governance perspective rather than an administrative one. Hence preparations by the anti-apartheid movement for managing and administering South African education were inadequate with regards to the conceptualisation and design of the new education bureaucracy. By 1994, therefore, there was limited vision of how the education bureaucracy would be constituted at the lower levels of the system.

3.4 The future arrives

Soon after 1994, events such as the adoption of the new Interim Constitution (RSA, 1993), and the urgency and complexity of establishing a unitary system of national and

provincial education overtook the debate on the local governance of education. Krige (1998) argues that the process of moving the administration of education from 19 racially determined education departments to nine spatially determined provincial departments was one of the biggest major restructuring processes that the new South African government had to deal with. However, this is not to downplay the massive task of unification faced by other sectors of government, and other government departments had similar experiences to that of education. The Department of Health, however, followed a different route to that of Education in its consideration of the local level of its system. Instead of discounting the local level of service delivery, it foregrounded the importance of a district health system and established district health structures as central to its service delivery strategy (see Chapter 4 for details).

The Interim Constitution (RSA, 1993), which was a product of high-level and intense political negotiations, allowed for three layers of political governance, namely, the national, provincial and local spheres. Interestingly enough, the Interim Constitution (RSA, 1993) permitted the function of education to be distributed across all three spheres of governance. (Note that this is not case in the final Constitution, where the function of education is allocated to only the national and provincial spheres of government – see Chapter 4 for details). However, while Schedule 6 of the Interim Constitution compels the national and provincial spheres of government to have concurrent responsibility for pre-tertiary education, it does not compel, but merely makes it possible for local government to absorb education functions. Section 175 (3) of the Interim Constitution (RSA, 1993) in particular states that:

> A Local Government shall, to the extent determined by any applicable law, make provision for access by all persons residing within its area of jurisdiction, to water, sanitation, electricity, EDUCATION (my emphasis), primary health services, housing……provided that such services and amenities can be rendered in a sustainable manner and are financially and physically practicable.

A reading of the above suggests that the Interim Constitution places the onus on local government to decide whether it has the financial and other means to provide for education on a sustainable basis. The final Constitution (RSA, 1996) on the other hand, passes on the decision about any role for local government in education, to provinces, through the legal mechanism of 'assignment' (see Chapter 4 for details). The changes made to the final Constitution regarding the role of local government in education, suggests reluctance on the part of the post-1994 government to empower local

government structures to take on education functions. This disinclination could be ascribed to the recognition by the new government, of low levels of capacity in local government to absorb too many functions, particularly those like education, that have not had a history of local government involvement.

An additional point about the Interim Constitution is that it makes no reference to the possibility for an additional layer of education governance, thereby placing the issue of district governance in the background of education transformation processes.

The establishment of provincial departments of education was undertaken in terms of the Interim Constitution (RSA, 1993), which empowered provinces to establish their own administrative structures with facilitation by the Public Service Commission (PSC). The Interim Constitution granted much authority to the PSC with respect to provincial organisation. Section 210 (1) of the Interim Constitution (RSA, 1993), for example, notes that the Commission 'shall be competent to make recommendations, give directions and conduct enquiries with regard to:

(i) the organisation and administration of departments and the public service;
(iv) the promotion of efficiency and effectiveness in departments and the public service'.

Section 210 (3) of the Interim Constitution (RSA, 1993) further spelled out that a recommendation or direction of the Commission should be implemented by the appropriate person or institution within six months – and could only be rejected under particular conditions, namely:

(a) if the recommendations or directions of the Commission are rejected by the President, or
(b) if they involved approval from Treasury for the expenditure of public funds (adapted from Section 210 (3) (a) (b) of the Interim Constitution).

The Interim Constitution (RSA, 1993) was therefore clear about the guardianship role of the PSC in provincial administration and organisation. Provincial departments were expected to seek approval of their organograms from both the provincial cabinet and the PSC (Interview, Davies, 2004). Provinces also established Provincial Service Commissions that supported them in the establishment and organisation of their departments.[32] This was undertaken in terms of Section 213 of the Interim Constitution,

[32] The Pretoria-Witwatersrand-Vereeniging (PWV) provincial legislature passed the Provincial Service Commission Bill in 1994, which mandated the Provincial Service Commission 'to make recommendations,

which provides for provinces to establish Provincial Commissions that would have similar competencies to the PSC. Provincial education departments were thus accountable to the PSC (or Provincial Commissions, where they existed), rather than the national Department of Education with respect to their organisational and administrative structures.

In the absence of a national role in the determination of provincial structures, each provincial education department went about the process of organising and structuring themselves in their own way. Some provinces established specialised task teams to set up their education structures, while others such as Limpopo obtained external advisors from Tanzania to assist them to develop their organograms. KwaZulu-Natal sought the advice of individual consultants in their efforts to organise and structure themselves. Consultants from tertiary institutions did much work in the offices of the MECs in KwaZulu-Natal and Gauteng,[33] and the former Head of the KwaNdebele Department of Education played a significant role in Mpumalanga. Both the PSC and the Finance and Fiscal Commission (FFC) also played significant roles in the structuring efforts of provinces. Much of this was in the form of advice regarding post levels proposed by the education departments (Interview, Davies, 2004).

The burning question that comes to mind, however, is, what was the role of the Department of Education during this tumultuous period?

According to Davies (Interview, 2004), although the national Department had hoped to provide a framework for the organisation of provinces, it played a minimal role in the restructuring endeavours of provincial education departments in 1994 because of, among other reasons, the limitations placed by the Interim Constitution. Coombe (Interview, 2005) confirms that the Interim Constitution greatly influenced DoE thinking on local education in the 1994-1995 period. This, according to Coombe, occurred in two ways. Firstly, the Interim Constitution's exclusion of local government from education functions 'wiped out any consideration of a local governance tier for education'. Secondly, the statutory authority of the PSC in provincial administration foreclosed DoE

---

give directions and conduct inquiries with regard to the establishment and organisation of departments of the province' (PWV Legislature, 1994).

[33] Clive Harper a senior staff member of the University of Natal assisted in KwaZulu-Natal (Interview, Davies, 2004), while Patrick Fitzgerald, a public service specialist from the University of Witwatersrand assisted the GDE in the unification process (Interview, Coombe, 2005).

rights in provincial organisational development. Indeed, an examination of the minutes of HEDCOM meetings held between 1995 and 2000 indicates that there were almost no discussions at the national level about matters pertaining to local-level education structures (DoE, 1995c; 1996; 1997; 1998; 1999a; 1999b; 1999c).

The DoE did, however, establish a Provincialisation Task Team (PTT) in December 1994, which played a major role in prodding the transfer of education administration and management functions from the apartheid education departments to the newly established provincial education departments. The major aim of the PTT was, according to Dirk Meiring,[34] the then Head of the PTT, 'to create provincial head offices, not provincial sub-systems'; it focused on the task of education transfer rather than education restructuring (Interview, Meiring, 2005). The PTT assisted provincial education departments in human resource issues, administrative systems, logistics, information technology and the installation of common databases (such as PERSAL, the personnel salary system). across the provinces. It used the mechanism of an 'agency' in 1995 to absorb staff, documentation and other resources of the former education departments into the PTT. According to Meiring (interview, 2005), the Agency Co-ordination Structure (ACS) focused on the capacity building of provincial officials, and the development of management systems, procedures and infrastructure for the eventual take-over of functions from the relinquishing departments. The Agency, however, was, in terms of decisions adopted by HEDCOM and the Council of Education Ministers (CEM), only permitted to act upon the instruction of provinces, and not initiate their own actions. Hence the ACS did not involve itself with the restructuring efforts of provinces. Only two provinces, Western Cape and Free State, requested assistance from the ACS on their regional structures (Interview, Meiring, 2005).

In essence, therefore, the PTT played a minimal role in establishing new provincial organisational structures (either individually, or collectively); instead it understood its mandate to be the absorption the 'old into the new', and to facilitate the transfer of functions from the old education departments to the new ones. The PTT assisted provinces to develop the crucial and effective administrative systems and infrastructure to manage those functions, which were identified as critical by the CEM. These were obviously functions to be executed by the new provincial head office structures. In fact,

[34] Dirk Meiring was the Head of the former DET, and Deputy Director-General in the newly established DoE.

by agreement, no functions could be transferred to the new provincial departments unless the necessary systems were in place and the necessary qualified staff had been absorbed or appointed (Interview, Meiring, 2005).

According to Meiring (Interview, 2005), the then Minister of Education, Professor Sibusiso Bengu, was keen on establishing influence on the structuring efforts of provinces but could not steer developments from the national level, as he was at the same time sensitive to the 'autonomy' of provinces. In retrospect, the Minister could have engaged with structures such as HEDCOM and the CEM to debate ideas on the local level of education; alternatively, provincial Heads of Department and MECs could themselves have initiated discussion on this matter. However, this did not occur, as indicated in meetings of HEDCOM held between 1995 and 2000 (see reference to HEDCOM meetings above). Meiring (Interview, 2005) confirms that neither HEDCOM nor CEM raised the issue of a common education sub-system in any substantial way.

According to Davies (Interview, 2004), the absence of permanent appointees to these structures and other priorities of the provinces precluded any significant discussion on the matter of local education. In addition, the structuring of the new provincial education departments was linked closely with the establishment and allocation of posts, a function for which the PSC was responsible.[35] Hence, the promotion of common structures for all provincial education departments posed huge challenges at a time when each province had to function within its own budgetary constraints, and within the legacy of its own staffing profiles. Moreover, the national policy environment in the period immediately following the April 1994 elections was itself subject to major contestations.

Coombe (Interview, 2005) recalls that in the first few months after the elections, there was no Department of Education as it is now known; instead 'it was the old apartheid structures with a Minister placed on top of it'. He adds that 'all the old structures were alive and kicking and there was much jockeying for influence with the new Minister of Education'. Although the Minister had established a Strategic Management Team (SMT) made up of people from the democratic movement to advise him on new policy directions, the SMT had no legal authority and, according to Coombe (Interview, 2005),

[35] Section 210 (1) (a) (iii) of the Interim Constitution (RSA, 1993) stipulates that 'the appointment, promotion, transfer and discharge of members of the public service and matters connected with the employment of personnel' is the competence of the PSC.

'operated through force of personality and the goodwill of existing officials'. The focus and energy of the SMT in the first few months after April 1994 was the development of the Education White Paper (RSA: 1995) as it was seen 'as the most sensible and rational way to proceed' (Interview, Coombe, 2005).

In prioritising the implications of the new Interim Constitution (RSA, 1993) for education and in charting the untested terrain of providing form to the relationship between national and provincial spheres of government, the White Paper did not take into account the local tier of education governance. Both Coombe (Interview, 2005) and Manganyi (Interview, 2005) claim that since the DoE had to locate itself within the framework of the Interim Constitution, the White Paper focused on national and provincial governance relations, as opposed to local education matters. The second major pre-occupation of the DoE at the time was the issue of schools. Coombe (Interview, 2005) reminds us that 'achieving a legislative basis for a national schooling system was a dominant priority, because racially divided schools had become a political flashpoint and there were real threats of violence from the Right on the one hand, and invasion of White schools by Black students on the other'. Coombe (Interview, 2005) adds that the process for legislating on schools 'could not be done summarily, since Section 247 of the Interim Constitution stipulated that the legal status of former White schools be negotiated individually by the DoE'.

An examination of Section 247 of the Interim Constitution (RSA, 1993) suggests that it did indeed protect the governance systems of former White schools by stipulating that:

> the national government and the provincial government … shall not alter the rights, powers and functions of the governing bodies, management councils or similar authorities of departmental, community-managed or state-aided primary or secondary schools under laws existing immediately before the commencement of this constitution, unless an agreement resulting from bona-fide negotiations has been reached with such bodies and reasonable notice of any proposed alteration has been given.

In lieu of this, the Department of Education held over 350 meetings across the country in 1994, to deal with issues of governance in former White schools (Interview, Manganyi, 2005). Davies (Interview, 2004), however, believes that despite these challenges, the DoE lost an opportunity to establish a uniform sub-system of education in the first few months of its establishment.

The demands of education service delivery prompted provincial education departments to

concentrate on their mandate, which was, in the main, to ensure that the system was kept running. Boshoff (Interview, 2004) notes that many of the new provincial departments of education 'used pre-1994 sub-structures to deal with administrative issues'. He adds that although these structures were not perfect, they provided for a basic level of functionality. Buckland and Hofmeyr (1992:19) predicted the continued utilisation of the apartheid bureaucracy post-1994, and in 1992 cautioned that 'most of the existing bureaucrats will have to be used in the future to keep the administrative machinery of the new system running'. Kruss (1997), however, expresses concern about the continuity of apartheid structures into the new system. Writing from her experience of the Western Cape education department, Kruss (1997:96) complains that 'the expertise of the former Cape Education Department has become a justification for many of its divisions and personnel to provide the administrative basis for the new Ministry'. Tensions between preservation and transformation were therefore rife. In attempting to embrace the challenge of keeping the system running, while simultaneously trying to fix it, education departments appear to have had, on the face of it, no choice, but to continue to function with some components of their original system relatively intact.

Several provincial education departments had established their new structures by 1995/996,[36] while many others such as Eastern Cape and North West provinces restructured themselves much later (Interview, Boshoff, 2004). The complexity of the transition was such that most of the apartheid education departments relinquished all their functions and staff to the new provincial education departments only by July 1996 (Meiring, 1998).[37] Until then, education was run simultaneously by the new provincial departments, as well as by the former apartheid departments. Even by June 1995, no functions had moved from the former education departments to the new provinces (Interview, Meiring, 2005). This could be attributed to the fact that the heads of relinquishing departments remained accounting officers to the national treasury for their respective budgets up to March 1995 (Meiring, 1998:97). In addition, the apartheid legislation of the former education departments was only withdrawn in 1996 (Interview, Meiring, 2005).

The period of transition, therefore, offered little opportunity for newly created, activist-

[36] For example, Gauteng and Northern Cape.
[37] The transfer of education functions from the former departments to the new provinces was not a once-off event. Provinces took on functions gradually, as their capacity to do so grew (Interview, Meiring, 2005)

oriented strategic management teams and transition task teams working in the offices of the MECs to focus on administration and management issues. Meiring (1998:95) expresses no surprise in observing that '1994 can be characterised as the period in which more attention was given to the political and provisioning aspects of education, and less to the establishment of sound and functioning managerial practices and systems'. It is even less surprising to note that the sub-structures of former education departments continued to exist in many provinces well into the 1995/1996 period.

Despite provincial initiatives to establish their own administrative sub-divisions, calls for a local tier of governance persisted. For example, the report of the *Committee to Review the Organisation, Governance and Funding of Schools*[38] (DoE, 1995) recommended that 'provincial authorities will also establish district and local governance structures …. District level governance structures must have representation by officials of the provincial department, parents, teachers, learners and members of the community' (DoE, 1995b:53). The Department, however, paid little attention to these recommendations of the Hunter Committee. Instead it focused on those aspects of the report that dealt with matters of school governance, and ignored those advocating the need for local or district governance structures.

In 1995, the Centre for Education Policy Development (a research arm of the ANC at the time) expressed concern that 'the establishment of governance structures between schools … and the provincial level had received little attention in national policy development' (Coombe & Godden, 1996:1). This disquiet was expressed in a context where provincial departments of education had already embarked on establishing their own administrative structures and systems. The CEPD attempted to place the local governance of education back on the agenda by hosting a major national colloquium on local education governance in June 1995. However, there appeared to be little interest on the part of the new government to take on the challenges of introducing a system of local governance as it would have involved dramatic changes to the existing system. Advocate Boshoff (Interview, 2004) observes that the priority in that period was to ensure the establishment of non-racial national and provincial departments of education, which unified the racially based 19 departments of education into a single system. In addition, the Interim

[38] This committee was established by the then Minister of Education, Professor Bengu (DoE, 1995), and chaired by Professor Peter Hunter. In South African education circles, it is commonly referred to as the Hunter Committee.

Constitution (RSA, 1993) brought pressure to bear on the national Department of Education to provide for the governance of schools, rather than local education, which in itself was an extremely politically fraught and complex undertaking.

The lack of attention to local education in the period following the 1994 elections can be explained from both legal and rational dimensions. Legal explanations for the 'neglect' of lower levels of the education system seem to lie with the Interim Constitution (RSA, 1993), which directed the new government to deal with matters of institutional governance, and national and provincial governance relations, rather than local governance. And the powers in provincial organisation accorded to the PSC by the Interim Constitution undercut a potentially dominant role that the centre could have played in directing the nature and form of local education in South Africa. However, as is discussed later in this chapter as well as in the next one, the Interim Constitution did not actively *prevent* the centre from playing a more co-ordinating and facilitative role, or for that matter a policy role, in shaping the form and nature of local education in South Africa. The rational explanation for the indifference demonstrated by the new government towards local education appears to lie with the challenge of dealing with change. The element of the system that seemed to require the least refurbishing (at least, at the time), and which would have been the most complex to change (given the role of the PSC in provincial organisation, and the lack of prior experience in local level education governance and government administration), appears to have been the local tier of education.

3.5 Tracing the origins of the term 'districts'

The term 'district' is ubiquitous in contemporary South African education policy discourses.[39] However, its usage is not inherited from the apartheid era, nor was it a strongly fore-grounded concept in the policy texts of the democratic movement prior to 1994 (see above). So how did 'districts' come to represent the dominant discourse for local education in the country? Although this question is but of minor importance to this study, the story of districts begs for a beginning, and the opening lines need to explain how the idea of districts came about.

[39] This is evidenced in many policy texts (for example, that on Whole School Evaluation and Inclusive Education) of the Department of Education.

In searching for a beginning though, one discovers that there are multiple starting points to the origins to the concept of 'districts'. This is so because each of the nine provinces engaged in individual debates about their organisational forms. In Gauteng, for example, Fleisch (2002) observes that the Strategic Management Team adopted the idea of 'districts' to neutralise power blocks in the apartheid bureaucracies, which existed in the then existing circuits and area offices.

This study though, confines itself to a national perspective on how the idea of districts came into being, as the national discourse did influence (as chapter 4 demonstrates), though in a limited way, the adoption of the idea of districts by provincial education departments.

Davies (Interview, 2004) recalls that the term district

> emerged in the education debates of the post-1990 period; it was not a term that was used, it certainly wasn't used in the House of Assembly where I worked.

He recalls that the House of Assembly comprised 'school board areas', while the Department of Education and Training was sub-divided into regions and area offices. The education department in the House of Representatives was constituted of regions, while the House of Delegates consisted of regions and circuit offices. According to Davies, only one education department (of the 19 that existed at the time), namely the Venda Department of Education, used the term districts to describe its administrative sub-divisions.

Davies (Interview, 2004), believes that the use of the term district became dominant in education circles since 1992 when stakeholders from across the political spectrum began exploring options for a post-apartheid system of education. He suggests that

> the term 'district' was borrowed from the US; that it began to be used as part of the debate when people were looking quite seriously at American schools; and that it was not engineered in South Africa at all.

Manganyi (Interview, 2005) expresses no surprise at the adoption of a 'foreign' term to represent the local tier of education. He points out that 'South African policy making was not only home-grown, it had many international connections'. However, Coombe (Interview, 2005) contends that it is not entirely correct to conclude that the concept of

districts was imported from outside the country, and points out that District Councils have existed for a long time as part of local government structures in South Africa. In the historical context of education, the notion of education districts is not entirely new. Indeed, if one travels as far back as 1917, both the Jagger Commission, which was established by the Union of South Africa, as well as the Malherbe Commission, established by the then Transvaal government, advocated the idea of education district councils (Buckland & Hofmeyr, 1992). The Jagger Commission recommended 'the establishment of District Councils that would be responsible for the administration of government decisions, but with a fair amount of autonomy with respect to detail', while the Malherbe Commission proposed the idea of 'district councils with financial responsibility, in an attempt to create more local involvement in education' (Buckland & Hofmeyr, 1992:22,23).

Advocacy for education districts by various government Commissions continued up to 1981.[40] In that year, the De Langa Report

> suggested the idea of local school districts consisting of groupings of schools, as units of management smaller than regions. The districts were seen as cooperative rather than controlling mechanisms, and based on the principle of free association (Buckland & Hofmeyr,1992:27).

Despite the advocacy of districts as important levels of the education system by many of the above-mentioned Commissions, the stream of governments that established these Commissions did not adopt their propositions. Hence, while the idea of education districts is not entirely new in South African education history; it has always remained as such – merely an idea in text. Since 1910, therefore, the term districts never really occupied a meaningful place in the South African education system.

On the side of the democratic movement, one of the first policy texts that referred to the idea of districts (albeit in conjunction with the term 'local'), were the NEPI policy options on local education (see earlier section). The ANC (1994:23) *Draft Policy Framework for Education and Training* used the term 'local' rather than 'districts' to describe the third tier of governance that it envisaged for the new education system. However, in its more detailed depiction of the system, it does make passing reference to districts to describe the

[40] In 1939, the Nicol Commission in the Transvaal also reconfirmed a belief in the local control of education (Buckland & Hofmeyr, 1992:24).

role of the local level of the education system.[41]

Both the NEPI and ANC policy proposals, therefore, were indefinite about the adoption of the term districts to characterise local education. Even the title of the landmark colloquium organised by the CEPD in June 1995 to look into local education, *Local/district Governance in Education*, is indicative of a lack of commitment to the idea of districts as a term to describe the local tier of education, though it retains the commitment to the idea of a level of governance between schools and provinces.

Post-1990 thinking on districts therefore, has always been unclear, ambiguous and lacking in definition. There was never complete commitment to the usage of districts as a term to describe local-level education, and its application consistently co-existed with the idea of 'local-level' education.

3.6 Conclusion

This chapter concludes by highlighting several significant findings about the origins of districts in South Africa. It has drawn attention to the vision of local education articulated by those in the liberation movement in the 1990s. It has also revealed that this vision was not always clear; rather it tended to be clouded with uncertainty and lack of attention to detail. This can be largely attributed to the inexperience on the part of researchers and policy makers in public administration, and the uncertainties surrounding political negotiations on the new Constitution.

In the post-1994 period, the attention directed to school-level governance deflected attention away from local-level governance. In addition, stipulations of the Interim Constitution (RSA, 1993) directed the responsibility of establishing provincial government departments to provinces and the Public Service Commission, thereby reducing the role of national government in matters of local administration and governance.

Both the colonial and apartheid governments, as well as key constituencies in the

[41] The *Policy Framework* (1994:23) proposes that 'local governance and management structures have an important role to play in planning and co-ordinating education at district or local level….'

democratic movement, had flirted with the possibility of a role for local government at the local level of the envisioned education system. In the case of the post-1994 period, the discourse of local education *governance* rather than local level *administration or management* continued to dominate policy rhetoric because the former was not constitutionally viable in terms of the Interim Constitution (RSA, 1993), Provinces, through default rather than conscious engagement, continued to function with the local system of administration they inherited from the apartheid era.

The next chapter will demonstrate why the new government did not radically intrude into the form of local education that had been inherited from the apartheid government. The structures of the new local education system took on a similar form and shape to what existed before; one that largely mirrored the administrative formations created by former education departments.

This chapter also explored the origins of the term 'districts', given that the district discourse was not one inherited from the apartheid era, nor was it particularly prominent or distinctive in the policy discourse of the democratic movement.[42] In the recent past, the district discourse appeared to have percolated into the discussions and debates that emerged when alternatives for a post-apartheid education system were being explored, rather than adopted as a definite policy measure by policy makers. Throughout the transition period, the district discourse remained vague, ambiguous, undefined and indeterminate. Much of this haziness stemmed from the uncertainty surrounding the role of local government in education, which was more of a Constitutional matter. However, it is also reflective of a tendency, particularly on the part of the democratic movement, to privilege governance at the expense of administration. Many stakeholders appear to have appropriated the term districts to describe the local level of the education system, as it reflected a desire on their part to adopt a local system of education governance that enhanced local-level participation in education (possibly through the system of local government), as opposed to envisaging districts as administrative field units of provincial education departments.

Though ideas for local governance in education were advocated for by a range of different education role-players throughout the course of South African education history,

[42] I refer here particularly to the ANC and NEPI education policy proposals.

these were not taken seriously by any of the ruling parties. Nor has the present government been particularly responsive to calls for a tier of local education governance. This chapter has demonstrated that the vision of an intermediate layer of governance between schools and provinces, as articulated by many stakeholders prior to 1994 and in the immediate period thereafter, did not materialise in the turbulent period following the country's first democratic elections in 1994. The fundamental reason for this appears to be the Interim Constitution (RSA, 1993), which favoured provincial autonomy for the development of provincial organisational structures, with the backing of the Public Service Commission (see the next chapter).

However, let this matter not be stymied by constitutional barriers alone. Clearly, the principle of co-operative governance did allow for national and provincial structures to agree jointly on issues of common concern, and structures such as HEDCOM and the CEM could have facilitated a stronger role for the national government in matters of provincial organisation. However, as I have pointed out above, this did not occur, owing in part to the need to continue the delivery of education administration services.

There is another plausible explanation for the non-implementation of the democratic movement's policy proposals on local education governance by the new government. This is what Jansen (2002a) refers to as 'policy symbolism'. Jansen argues that 'politicians do not always invent policy in order to change practice'; instead, 'it often represents a search for legitimacy' (Jansen, 2002a: 212). In the case of local education, the discourse of democracy and participation, and the imperative to legitimise the new government, appear to be drivers of policy making, rather than a serious intent to change education practice on the ground. Hence policy symbolism also partially explains the reluctance on the part of the new government to practically implement prevailing ideas on local education governance.

The discussion on why the new government did not adopt policy proposals on local education governance does not end here. It continues in the next chapter, which examines further explanations for the non-involvement of the centre in matters of local education, not only from the point of governance but also from that of administration.

Chapter 4

HOW PROVINCIAL GOVERNMENTS ASSIGN MEANING TO DISTRICTS

4.1 Introduction

This chapter explores further the reasons why there is no formal policy on the local level of the education system. It questions why, given the proclivity of the new government towards national unity, uniformity, centralisation and standardisation, the present education sub-system remains disparate and incongruent, particularly in terms of its form, organisation and design. While Chapter 3 concerned itself primarily with the imperatives of the Interim Constitution (RSA, 1993) and the (perceived) limits it placed on central government in determining a uniform system at the local level, this chapter focuses on the framework of the present Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (as adopted in 1996), and the subsequent legal position of districts in the system. Unlike Chapter 3, which focused on the transitional period from apartheid to democracy, this chapter centres on the post-1996 period. It responds to a key research question of this thesis, namely, *how do education stakeholders understand the meaning of education districts in the constitutional, policy and legislative contexts of post-apartheid South Africa?*

In addition, this chapter describes the present education sub-system with a view to demonstrating how provincial education departments have configured themselves in the absence of national policy on local education.[43] Thus, this chapter responds to a second research question of this study: *in what ways do provincial governments organise, structure and assign meaning to education districts given the policy vacuum around the specification of district design and organisation in South African education?* In particular, it examines the constitutional and legal arguments advanced by key education

[43] I use the term 'local education' broadly to refer to the intermediate structures that lie between schools and provincial education departments.

role-players to explain why, even at present, there is no national policy on local-level education.

4.2 Implications of the South African Constitution for local education

An examination of the South African Constitution is crucial to this study, as it underpins many of the constitutional and legal arguments for and against national level intervention in local-level education. The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (RSA, 1993, 1996b) is a product of long-standing and arduous negotiations between representatives of the apartheid political order and leaders of the liberation movements that had fought for decades against apartheid and colonialism. Hence it is not only a legal document, but one that mirrors the aspirations of the majority of South Africans. In line with the Constitution, the South African government has established a single national system of pre-tertiary education, which is largely managed by nine provincial education departments.

The Constitution (RSA, 1996b) provides for the establishment of two governance and management levels for the education system: the national level[44] which has powers and authority vested in the Minister and Head of the Department of Education, and the provincial level which has powers and authority vested in the Members of the Executive Council (MECs) and Heads of provincial education departments. In its distribution of functional areas between the different spheres of government (Schedules 4 and 5), the Constitution refrains from allocating any education functions to the local sphere of government, thereby nullifying earlier aspirations to link local-level education to local government.[45]

While the Constitution (RSA, 1996b) restricts education governance to the national and provincial spheres of government, education legislation does provide for a third tier of governance, namely that at the school level of the system. In terms of legislation, the

[44] The use of the term 'level' is used with some circumspection here, as the Constitution refrains from using this term and instead consciously refers to the idea of national and provincial *spheres* of government.
[45] Pampallis (2002) asserts, though, that the Constitution does permit a provincial government to assign any of its legislative powers to a Municipal Council in the province (Section 104 (1) (c)). He observes that with respect to education, this possibility has never been given serious attention by any provincial government, nor have any serious suggestions to this effect been made by any significant constituency.

South African Schools Act (RSA, 1996c) provides only for *school-level* governance and management, where power and authority is vested in the principal and governing body of the school in terms of the functions listed in SASA.[46] Hence, neither the Constitution nor current education statutory frameworks direct how local-level education should be constituted.

Schedule 4 of the Constitution (RSA, 1996b) stipulates that 'education at all levels, excluding tertiary education,' is an area over which national and provincial governments have concurrent powers. (The national government has sole competence over tertiary education). This means that both national and provincial governments can legislate on any matter concerning pre-tertiary education. The idea of concurrent powers immediately raises questions about the possibility of conflict in legislation between the two spheres of government. Here Section 146 of the Constitution (RSA, 1996b) comes to the rescue. It states that where there is a conflict between national and provincial legislation, then national legislation will prevail over provincial legislation if the following conditions are met:

- if the national legislation deals with a matter that cannot be regulated effectively by provinces individually;
- if the national legislation deals with a matter that, to be dealt with effectively, requires uniformity across the nation. It provides such uniformity by establishing norms and standards, frameworks or national policies;
- if the national legislation is necessary for:
  - the maintenance of national security;
  - the maintenance of economic unity;
  - the protection of the common market in respect of the mobility of goods, services, capital and labour;
  - the promotion of economic activities across provincial boundaries;
  - the promotion of equal opportunity or equal access to government services; or
  - the protection of the environment.

In all other circumstances, provincial legislation prevails over conflicting national legislation.

In the context of this study, the Constitution does appear to provide space for the development of national policy, frameworks or norms and standards by national government for the provincial sub-system of education. This is conditional upon the national government considering *uniformity across the nation* as an effective mechanism

[46] Section 17 of SASA does, however, provide for the governance of two or more schools to be vested in a single governing body if it is in the interests of education at the schools in question.

to deal with education delivery. Moreover, the Constitution permits the national sphere of government to exercise the right to legislate on matters or develop policy on issues that promote equal opportunity or equal access to government services. Indeed, the National Education Policy Act (NEPA) (RSA, 1996a) lists a wide range of functions for which the national Minister of Education could develop policy.

For the purposes of this thesis, Section 3 (4) (b) of NEPA (RSA, 1996a) is of particular relevance. It states that the Minister may determine national policy for 'the organisation, management and governance of the national education system'. If one interprets 'national education system' to mean the *whole* system of education, as Coombe (Interview, 2005) confirms, then it suggests that the Minister could choose to develop policy on provincial organisational, management and governance systems. Coombe (Interview, 2005) explains that the NEPA clause referred to above 'should be interpreted literally', but adds that any intervention by the Minister could not be imposed on provinces, but needed to occur in a consultative manner through structures such as HEDCOM and the CEM. To date, Ministers have decided not to follow this route, and have left it up to provinces to decide how they should structure and organise themselves.

The Constitution (RSA, 1996b), then, while silent on the role of local government in education, does seem to provide an opportunity for national government to intervene in matters related to local-level education on the grounds of uniformity, equal opportunity and equal access to government services. Moreover, the Constitution does not actively preclude national government from legislating, or developing policy, on any aspects of pre-tertiary education, including that of the education sub-system.

4.3 Districts on the agenda [47]

The preoccupation of the Department of Education and provincial education departments with the unification of racially divided education departments into non-racial provincial departments of education in the immediate post-1994 period (see Chapter 3) was translated several years later into increased attention to the arm of education service delivery closest to schools, namely, the local level of education. This was driven largely

[47] This section is adapted from a DoE (2003) report, *Districts at a Glance*.

by the increasing emphasis placed on policy implementation (as opposed to policy development), and the crisis in functionality of provincial education departments in the 1998/1999 period. Rensburg (2000) observes that the 1998/1999 period reflected a shift in the priorities of government – from policy making to policy implementation. Indeed, as a DoE (2000:1) report observes, the major national conference on districts hosted by the Department in 1999 'came at a time when a shift to policy implementation aimed at school improvement became critical'. Prew (2003:52), too, points out that 'until 1999, there was a tendency among South Africa's key policy makers to sideline the district and discount its potential role in any change and delivery process'.

Boshoff (Interview, 2004), speaking in relation to the functional crisis in provinces, claims that 1997/1998 represented 'a period of the virtual collapse of provincial education departments'. The DoE policy on educator rationalisation and redeployment at the time contributed to this crisis. Boshoff (Interview, 2004) argues that the extraordinarily large number of vacancies created in districts as a result of the Voluntary Severance Packages (VSPs) offered by the government in that period resulted in much pressure on districts, leading to an inability of districts to deliver education services to schools. Meiring[48] adds that the complex processes involved in the staffing of provincial education departments as well as the retrenchment of the majority of senior and middle management personnel in the 1995/1996 period contributed to the apparent lack of managerial skills experienced by provinces in the early stages of their organisation. Moreover, provincial education departments were cash-strapped, and the deluge of policy mandates churned out by the Department since 1994 had weighed heavily on provinces. Whatever little capacity provinces had, was stretched to the limit.

Coombe (Interview, 2005) attributes the provincial fiscal crisis to the changes in the budgeting systems instituted by Treasury in 1997. He points out that 'it was only in 1997 that provinces assumed budgetary control in their own right', when provincial treasuries were tasked with allocating budgets to individual provincial departments. Prior to that, grants flowed directly from the national treasury to individual departments in the provinces. Coombe adds that 'all hell broke loose' in 1997, because very few provinces were able to handle their new fiscal responsibilities adequately.

[48] E-mail comment received from Meiring on 10 August 2005 as part of the respondent validation process.

The establishment of the District Development Programme in 1998 (DoE, 2000), and its advocacy of the importance of districts, bears testimony to the increasing attention paid by the Department of Education to districts. As Chetty, the then Head of the DoE's District Development Programme, argued, districts are important 'because they are the closest departmental link to schools, and working with districts is more efficient than working with individual schools' (DoE, 2000:3). The role of the District Development Programme was, according to HEDCOM, to focus on 'providing capacity to district and circuit level officials to enable them to support the delivery of education at school level' (DoE, 1999a: Item 6.6 (a)).

An important enabling policy mechanism that facilitated the establishment of the District Development Programme was the introduction of the system of conditional grants. The notion of conditional grants was introduced in 1997/1998 as a method of steering policy and management by the centre. According to Coombe (Interview, 2005), 'conditional grants were a deliberate policy initiative, encouraged by Treasury, to concentrate on areas where quality had to improve'. The DoE believed that conditional grants should focus at the district level where it was felt that greater improvement would be made in schools, thus paving the way for a district-focused programme (Coombe, Interview, 2005).

The post-1997 period, therefore, provided a new context in which local-level education was being considered. The fiscal collapse of provinces, the absence of effective education service delivery, the availability of conditional grants as a tool to steer change, and the focus on policy implementation, in combination served to provide a milieu in which districts were accorded attention by the education system. The increased interest in districts by the national Department in the 1998/1999 period was therefore not driven solely by pedagogical considerations. Instead, it was driven primarily by the DoE's desire to ensure the implementation of new policies, and made possible through the system of conditional grants.

It is not surprising, then that, since 1999, restructuring and reorganisation have been prominent on the agenda of provincial education departments, resulting in constant changes to the ways in which provincial education sub-units are configured. In some provinces, functions and staff have moved from one geographic sub-unit to another, while in others, a geographic sub-unit has been removed completely from the provincial

education landscape.

The restructuring of provincial departments of education has been driven, in part, by the need for more efficient and effective education service delivery to schools. The attention paid to districts by the DoE in the 1998/1999 period through its District Development Programme, too, prompted provincial education departments to take a closer look at their organisational structures.

However, there was another compelling reason for provinces to restructure themselves. A signal from Cabinet that all provinces should demarcate their sub-structures in line with local government boundaries (Mali, Interview, 2004) directed many provincial education departments to re-examine the demarcations of their provincial sub-structures (see Chapter 5). Fleisch (2002a:187), writing from his experience of the GDE restructuring processes, notes that 'the new district boundaries were to be inextricably linked to and dependent on alignment with local government boundaries'. Moves to align education district boundaries with those of local government were not confined to the GDE alone. As a DoE report on districts points out, by 2003 restructuring initiatives of provincial education departments had resulted in the boundaries of their key sub-units corresponding very closely to those of local government (DoE, 2003a).

Tracking the new developments in provincial design has not been easy because provincial education departments have been in a constant state of organisational flux. As Fleisch (2002a:159) observes, 'from August 1997 to the middle of the year 2000, internal restructuring became an organisational obsession in the GDE'. By 2004, though, most provincial departments had reached some level of stability in their reorganisational processes. However, some provincial education departments, such as Eastern Cape and KwaZulu-Natal, are likely to soon undergo some adjustments to their organisational configurations,[49] while others, such as the GDE, are in the process of 'tweaking' their organograms to accommodate new changes.

A study undertaken by the Department of Education in 2003 found that provincial departments of education had sub-divided themselves into myriad different configurations

[49] Telephonic conversation with Martin Prew, Director: Education Management and Governance Development.(EMGD) in the Department of Education.

(DoE, 2003a). Provincial departments of education are currently sub-divided into tiers[50] that vary in number from one to three (see Table 4.1).

Table 4.1 Number of geographical tiers within provincial education departments

One Tier	Two Tiers	Three Tiers
Eastern Cape (districts)	Limpopo (districts and circuits[51])	KwaZulu-Natal (regions, districts and circuits)
Free State (districts)	Mpumalanga (regions and circuits)	
Gauteng (districts)	North West (regions and area project offices)	
Northern Cape (districts)		
Western Cape (EMDCs)		

Source: DoE (2003a)
EMDC = Education Management Development

Although Table 4.1 reflects a similar sub-provincial organisational design in five of the nine provincial education departments, the picture also reflects some diversity in the overall system. This is perhaps not surprising, given the contextual realities of provinces in terms of their respective histories, their different geographical landscapes, their access to resources, and most importantly, the absence of a national policy or framework on local education (see above and Chapter 3).

Provincial education departments are broadly organised in three different ways. Five education departments have a single tier between schools and the provincial head office, three provincial education departments have two tiers, and one provincial education department has established three intermediary layers between its schools and the provincial head office. In addition to provinces reflecting a variety of organisational configurations, they also reveal fairly substantial differences in nomenclature.

Table 4.2 below indicates that each tier of the provincial departments of education is made up of a number of sub-units that vary across provinces in terms of their nomenclature and size.

[50] A 'tier' refers to the layer that exists between schools and the provincial head office.
[51] Circuits have been described as a separate tier only for those provinces where their organisational designs have formally established circuits as separate offices.

Table 4.2 Geographic sub-units of provincial departments of education

Province	Regions	Districts	Circuit offices
Eastern Cape	Nil	24	Formally, circuit offices do not comprise a separate tier of administration in the Eastern Cape education department. However, the Department has established several circuit offices, especially in rural areas, that are physically separate from district offices (but under the jurisdiction of districts).
Free State	Nil	5	The Free State education department has not established separate circuit offices.
Gauteng	Nil	12	There are no circuit offices in the GDE.
KwaZulu-Natal	4	12	**45 circuit offices** that are physically separated from districts. In KZN, a circuit office is made up of a number of wards. The term 'wards' is used to describe what is traditionally known as the circuit. KZN has a total of 189 wards.
Limpopo	Nil	6	**140 circuits** (Some circuit offices are physically separate from district offices, while others are in the same building as the district office.)
Mpumalanga	3	Nil	**57 circuit offices** that are physically separate from the regional offices.
Northern Cape	Nil	4	This department has not formally constituted circuit offices. However, in some districts it has established a few circuit offices that are separate from district offices.
North West	5	21 (APOs)	This Department has opted not to establish separate circuit offices.
Western Cape	Nil	7 (EMDCs)	There are no separate circuit offices in this department.
Total	**12**	**91**	

Source: DoE (2003a)
APO = Area Project Office; EMDC = Education Management Development Centre

There are 12 education regions, 91 districts and 242 formally established circuit offices in the South African education system. However, such aggregate figures need to be used with caution, particularly for national planning, policy implementation and policy analysis purposes, as the concepts of 'regions' and 'districts' hold different meanings across provinces in terms of the functions and powers they carry. For example, regions in Mpumalanga carry curriculum advisory functions, while the regions of the North West Education Department carry mainly administrative functions (DoE, 2003a). In

recognising the diversity that exists in the education sub-system, HEDCOM concluded that 'there is tension between the provinces on their approaches, models and district structures and processes, especially on how knowledge is mediated and how districts relate to institutions' (DoE, 1999c: Item B 3.1. (b) (ii) (ff.). Despite this diversity, and substantial differences in staffing levels, resources and programmes of provincial sub-structures across the country, there is a common stated purpose for provincial sub-units: to take education service delivery spatially closer to schools (DoE, 2000). Whether the existing structural designs of provincial education departments are successful in meeting this goal is a matter for further reflection and review.

Although the term district is used in six of the nine provincial education departments, it does not have the same meaning across the provinces in terms of the functions for which they are responsible. Some district offices carry both corporate (administration, financial and human resources) and professional (subject and management advisory) functions, while others carry only professional functions. In some instances, the professional functions are split between circuit offices and district offices (DoE, 2003a).

Currently, five different terms are used to describe provincial education sub-units: Region, District, Circuit, Area Project Office and Education Management Development Centre. This raises a number of questions, the key one being whether the use of the term districts that currently dominates South African education discourse is appropriate in the face of a diversely designed education sub-system. Can and should the term 'districts' be used in an all-encompassing way to refer to all of the geographic sub-units that exist in provincial departments of education (as is the case presently in most policy texts), or should a new discourse that reflects the diversity of provincial sub-structures and their nomenclature be created? One could assume that it is useful to maintain the term districts as an all-encompassing concept, as it is already in wide use in the South African education policy discourse. In addition, the concept serves as a 'meeting point' for accommodating diverse sub-provincial designs. Moreover, many countries the world over embrace districts as a local tier of their education systems, thus prodding South Africans to adopt a discourse that enables international dialogue (see Chapter 2).

An obvious danger, though, of adopting a single concept that accommodates a range of different models of sub-provincial designs is that it masks the complexity of South

African local education, and potentially undermines the implementation of national policy. As the Head of Department of the KwaZulu-Natal Department of Education remarked at a HEDCOM meeting held on 13 December 1999 (DoE, 1999c: Item B 3.1 (b) (v)), 'the discussion regarding districts has raised some concerns as it should be borne in mind that some provincial education departments also use a regional level of management'. The reduction of the variety of sub-provincial configurations to a single denominator, namely districts, therefore has the potential of confusing and distorting communication between national and provincial education systems. However, let not too hasty a conclusion about the diversity of the education sub-system be reached through interrogation of its structural and nomenclature-related dimensions only.

Notwithstanding the absence of a national directive on the nature of the education sub-system, provinces have created local education structures in South Africa that are strikingly similar, if not in their nomenclature, organisational design, size and shape, then certainly in their overall legal arrangement with provincial head offices. In all of the nine education departments, provincial sub-units are established as administrative units of the provincial head office. No sub-units have received original powers or authority in terms of provincial legislation, and none have been established as tiers of education governance in provinces. Hence local education structures exist largely as deconcentrated units of the provincial head office. Officials in these structures are directly responsible to their respective provincial departments of education, and not to any elected local constituency or political authority (Pampallis, 2002; DoE, 2003a). The nearest forms of local education governance are District Education and Training Councils that exist in some provinces, including Gauteng (Pampallis, 2002; Chapter 6 of this thesis). However, these exist largely as consultative bodies rather than as organs having any formal power or authority.

The deconcentrated nature of local education structures can be attributed largely to the legacy of the apartheid system, which had established regions and circuits as administrative units (rather than as autonomous or governance units) of the racially and ethnically defined education departments (see Chapter 3). In some ways the Constitution (RSA, 1993, 1996b), too, played a role in 'harmonising' the deconcentrated nature of provincial sub-units by foreclosing debate on a local tier of governance in education (see Chapter 3). Mphahlele (Interview, 2004) credits the Department's 1999 District Development Programme for nudging provinces towards some form of uniformity in the

education sub-system. He observes, for example, that the Northern Cape Education Department changed its nomenclature from regions to districts, while Limpopo adopted the idea of districts in its 1999 restructuring exercise. National dialogue, then, did serve some purpose in unifying what could have been an even more widely disparate form of local education.

In addition to local education structures across the nine provinces reflecting a common form of decentralisation (namely deconcentration), the core functions of provincial education sub-structures are also quite similar (DoE, 2000, 2003). For example, the EMDCs of Western Cape and the Area Project Offices of North West carry functions that are similar to those of districts in Gauteng and Northern Cape (DoE, 2003a). In addition, districts and circuit offices (or wards) in KwaZulu-Natal, placed together, also serve a similar function to districts in Northern Cape and Gauteng.

Hence while local education structures are diverse with respect to their design, nomenclature, size and shape, they do reflect common features such as their existence as administrative (as opposed to governance) units of provincial education departments. Moreover, the aggregated functions of the different units in each of the provinces reflect common features.

While the diversity in provincial organisational design is welcome on the presumption that it reflects contextual realities, and the assumption that a contextually driven structure would be more responsive to local realities, the absence of a uniform local system of education raises a number of questions. Should such a uniform system exist in the first instance? To what end? Does the diversity in local education structures undermine equity of education service delivery in any way? Can a semblance of uniformity be attained for national deliberations on districts to take place in a coherent manner? Does a divergent local system of education imply that a uniform system of education in South Africa is non-existent? These questions are explored further below.

The quest for uniformity in a diverse system is overlaid with the search for attaining the goals of equity and quality in education, and poses dilemmas about whether unity of organisation is a prerequisite for unity of purpose. Perhaps disparities in nomenclature, diversity in design or variations in how functions are distributed vertically between

provincial sub-structures do not necessarily imply that the South African local education system is fundamentally fragmented and disjointed. It is conceivable that the unity of *purpose* of sub-provincial structures (namely, to provide education services closer to schools) could override the effects of variations in organisational design within local education.

4.4 The quest for a national policy on districts – abandoned?

At a major conference on districts hosted by the Department of Education in 1999, Godden and Maurice (DoE, 2000) called for stronger intervention by the DoE on districts. In visualising prospects for the future, they proposed a national agenda for districts that would clarify the legal framework, roles, functions, power and authority of districts. They suggested that the Department do this through the development of legislation, policy frameworks and the establishment of norms and standards on districts (Godden & Maurice, 2000:28).[52] As recently as 2004, renewed calls for a local district governance structure have emerged from the *Ministerial Committee on School Governance* (DoE, 2004:171). The Committee proposed the establishment of a local governance structure composed of a wide range of stakeholders,[53] tasked to deal with all issues of governance affecting learners, parents and educators in the area. To date, the DoE appears to have been reluctant to take this route, although internal exploratory discussions on this matter have taken place.[54] This part of the thesis probes deeper into the reasons why the quest for greater central intervention on the roles, powers and functions of districts (as advocated by the District Development Conference in 1999) was not pursued further by the Department of Education.

In the period following the 1994 elections, a number of factors appeared to have constrained the hand of the Department of Education (the Interim Constitution being one)

[52] Godden and Maurice (DoE, 2000:28) proposed that the national agenda should, through legislation, clarify and establish the legal framework and authority of district offices.

[53] The Ministerial *Report on the Review of School Governance* provides a detailed proposal on the composition, functions, powers and duties of the local governance structure. It proposes that the local governance structure be composed of school principals, union representatives, circuit office, district office, SGB associations, local councillors, business representatives, traditional healers, South African Police Services, Department of Health, Public Works, learner organisations, etc., and be convened by the circuit official (DoE, 2004).

[54] During the period of my secondment to the DoE, there an was initiative to examine the establishment of norms and standards (and possibly policy) for districts.

in intervening in provincial matters (see Chapter 3). However, despite the promulgation of NEPA in 1996, which permits the DoE to develop policy on matters of provincial organisation (see earlier discussion in this chapter), many stakeholders interviewed in this study believe that it is still inappropriate for the DoE to direct the form and nature of local education.

The arguments against national intervention in the form of policy, legislation or frameworks for local-level education are rooted in either practical or legal paradigms. Speaking from a practical perspective, Prinsloo (Interview, 2004), an education law expert,[55] charges that

> it is crazy to use the same structure for all provinces – we need different kinds of sub-divisions for different provinces because of their geography. The DoE cannot provide one model. For example, the North West has a large number of farm schools, and would require different kinds of arrangements from other provinces.

In commenting on the reasons why provinces did not duplicate their sub-provincial designs, Boshoff (Interview, 2004) makes the following argument:

> Provinces did not "copy" each other with a winning recipe because of disparities in their budgets and infrastructures. For example, the Free State had a massive number of small schools, and the cost of running small schools is much higher than that of running bigger schools. In advantaged provinces there are bigger schools and support systems for bigger schools are easier to deal with. Also, the Northern Cape has small schools linked by big distances resulting in a higher cost of delivery. At that time the budget was based on the number of learners.

In sum, the practical arguments against a trend towards uniformity of provincial sub-systems suggest that it is not feasible for the South African education system to constitute identical local structures for all provinces. These are based on the conviction that the dynamics in provinces are too divergent to allow for the imposition of a single model from the centre. More specifically, factors such as the wide differences in provincial budgets and priorities, dissimilar geographical conditions of provinces and differences in the types of schools (big, small, urban, rural) that are dominant in provinces, do not lend themselves to a single model of local education.

However, while these arguments are valid, it is not uncommon to find single local models of education systems in countries that experience similar diverse conditions. Many countries such as Namibia, Canada, India, the UK, Scotland and the USA have

[55] Mr Justice Prinsloo is a legal advisor to the Suid Afrikaanse Onderwysers Unie.

established single local education systems (Coombe & Godden, 1996). Hence explanations other than practical contexts are essential to explain the absence of a uniform local education system in South Africa.

Speaking from a legal standpoint, Professor Malherbe[56] (Interview, 2004) was very clear that, in terms of the Constitution (RSA, 1996b) it is the prerogative of provincial departments to decide upon their own sub-divisions. This view is supported by senior officials of the Department of Education who claim that the current constitutional arrangements of the country prevent the DoE from intervening in provincial arrangements (Interview, Boshoff, 2004). The former Director-General of Education, Thami Mseleku, is also of the opinion that the DoE cannot legislate on the authority of districts – because they are not a governance entity.[57] He adds that districts reflect an arrangement of provincial management and that the DoE cannot legislate for management. He argues further that

> structures cannot be legislated unless there is original authority. How the provincial HOD organises to fulfil his/her authority is not for the DoE. Districts are currently management instruments, not governance instruments.

In response to the question about the legal space available for the DoE to develop norms and standards for districts that could facilitate greater equity in the system, Boshoff (interview, 2004) contends that

> the district is not an entity on its own. It does not have original authority and an original budget. Therefore, the DoE cannot norm what districts must do.

Boshoff adds that if we want a uniform system we will have to amend the Constitution to make education an exclusive national competence. This would imply that there would be a single management structure for a single education department. Boshoff (Interview: 2004) also believes that

> there is no need to look at governance structures for districts because their functions are administrative and professional – and therefore the responsibility of provinces.

There is also concern that if districts were established as discrete legal entities, it would lead to further fragmentation of the education system, as districts could become 'independent' and the delivery of education would not be able to be controlled (Interview, Boshoff, 2004).

[56] Professor Malherbe is a legal expert on education, based at the Rand Afrikaans University.
[57] At a meeting held on 10 October 2004.

The legal arguments advanced by stakeholders against national intervention in provincial organisation are fairly complex. It is perhaps easier to separate them into aspects based on governance issues and those based on an administrative perspective. The 'governance argument' against national intervention by the Department of Education is based on the reality that because districts do not represent a separate level of governance in the education system, the law prevents it from developing policy or legislation about them. In a way, this is a circular argument because mechanisms do exist for the Minister to establish legislation that can create an intermediary layer of governance in the system. Such mechanisms could include:

- A bottom-up approach that allows for school governing bodies of individual schools to coalesce at the district level of the system, and form a district layer of governance. Existing legislation could be amended to make this a possibility.[58]
- A 'top-down' approach involving the application of Section 17 of the South African Schools Act (RSA, 1996c), which provides for the MEC to determine that the governance of two or more public schools could vest in a single governing body.
- The establishment of a discrete intermediate layer of local governance through new legislation (as suggested by the *Report of the Ministerial Review Committee on School Governance* (DOE, 2004:171).
- The convergence of local education governance with local government, which allows for local government to play a role in education governance.

The point made in this instance is that legal mechanisms *do* exist for the introduction of a local level of governance in the system. However, to date the various Ministers of Education have been reluctant to draw on their legal powers to do so.

To return to the administrative aspect of the legal arguments forwarded by stakeholders regarding reasons for the lack of DoE intervention in provincial organisation. This matter seems to be one of legal interpretation as it appears to be surrounded by conflicting legislation. On the one hand, as pointed out earlier in this chapter, Section 3 (4) (b) of

[58] Patel (presently a senior official in the DoE), at a GDE District Development conference held in October 2002, proposed the idea of establishing autonomous districts through national or provincial legislation. Such legislation would allow each district to have its own district governing body, elected either by existing school governing body members, or by pupils and parents from schools within in the district (Pampallis, 2002:13).

NEPA (RSA, 1996a) permits the Minister of Education to determine policy on matters related to the organisation, management and governance of the national education system. On the other hand, Part III Section B. 2 (a) of the Public Service Regulations (DPSA, 2001) directs MECs to determine their own organisational structure. It stipulates that 'based on the strategic plan of the Department, an executing authority shall determine the department's organisational structure in terms of its core and support functions'. In addition, Part III Section A of the Public Service Regulations (DPSA, 2001) notes that 'within available funds, she or he shall, based on the department's and Government's service delivery objectives and mandates, plan to execute functions with an efficient and effective internal organisation'. Hence the Public Service Regulations direct responsibility for provincial organisation to provincial departments.

On closer reading of NEPA (RSA, 1996a) and the Public Service Regulations (DPSA, 2001), though, one finds that these two pieces of legislation do not necessarily contradict one another. While the Public Service Regulations do make provinces *responsible* for the organisation of their respective departments, they do not preclude national government from developing frameworks or norms and standards, which provincial governments can draw upon for the establishment of provincial structures and sub-structures. In fact, in the case of education, the Minister of Education can draw on existing legislation (such as NEPA) to develop policy on the organisation, management and governance of the provincial education system (see earlier reference to NEPA). However, as mentioned earlier, Ministers of Education have thus far refrained from doing so. Instead key education role-players (as quoted earlier) have used legal arguments to justify the lack of national intervention in matters of provincial organisation.

It is perhaps constructive, therefore, to turn to other national government departments to examine how they, within a similar Constitutional framework – that is, those having concurrent powers with their provincial counterparts in terms of Schedule 4 Part A of the Constitution–have considered the local system of service delivery. In this instance, the district health system established by the Department of Health (DoH) is worthy of exploration.

The Department of Health places its district-level health system at the centre of its entire health strategy, rather than the national or provincial levels of health care (DoH, 1997).

Its first White Paper, the *Transformation of the Health System in South Africa* (DoH, 1997), advocates the establishment of a single national health system, based on a district health system that would facilitate the promotion of health services in communities. However, the White Paper does not specify how the district health system should be governed or organised. Instead Section 2.3.1 (b) of the White Paper (DoH: 1997) considers three possible governance options for its proposed district health system:

- the provincial option – where provinces would be responsible for all district health services through a district manager;
- the statutory district health authority option - where the province, through legislation, creates a district health authority for each health district; or
- the local government option – where the local authority would be responsible for all district health services.

These three options strike a familiar chord with education. They reflect similar debates that have occurred in education since the 1990s. Education, too, considered options for local government involvement in local education, and possibilities for a distinct local tier of education governance (ANC, 1993; NEPI, 1992). However, after 1994 it settled for what the Department of Health White Paper describes as the provincial option, where provinces are responsible for local service delivery. What is interesting about the approach adopted by the Department of Health, particularly in the context of the legal issues confronting the debate on local education, is that the post-1994 Department of Health was not reticent about its authority on local service delivery. Unlike the case of education, it did not allow itself to be bogged down by Constitutional and legal provisos. In adopting a district health system as the core of its health strategy, it forged ahead with explorations of how this could be made possible through the examination of various governance options.

The Department of Education, however, did not thrust local education forward as the centre of its service delivery strategy; hence it paid little attention to districts. In fact, the first White Paper on Education and Training (DoE, 1995a), makes little reference to the local level of the education system. This is not to argue that it should have, as there is little basis in this study to claim that a locally driven education service delivery system would have reaped higher quality education in schools. My contention in this instance is

that the legal arguments advanced by the Department of Education in justifying non-interference in local-level education are not entirely valid, as has been demonstrated by the Health sector.

More recently, the Health Ministry promulgated the National Health Act (RSA, 2003), which establishes a district health system that is closely aligned with that of local government. Section 29 (2) of the Act stipulates that the boundaries of health districts be co-terminous with local government boundaries. Hence the governance of the district health system, through district health councils, is the responsibility of both provincial government the relevant local government authorities. The National Health Act (RSA, 2003) invokes Section 156 (4) of the Constitution to facilitate the assignment of functions from provincial health departments to the local sphere of government.

Perhaps I should reiterate that I am not suggesting that Education follow a similar route to that of Health. My point in this instance, that it does not appear to be legally impossible for Education to establish a uniform system of local education should it believe that it has pedagogical advantages and could advance the cause of quality education. Whether or not local education should form the core of an education service delivery strategy is explored in Chapter 8. This chapter merely seeks an explanation as to why there is no single, uniform education sub-system in South Africa.

The practical and legal arguments advanced by key education role-players (see above) to justify the reluctance of the Department of Education to develop a single education sub-system are not entirely convincing. What then are other explanations for the lack of willingness on the part of the Department to give serious consideration to the local level of education? This question is explored below.

4.5 Conclusion

This chapter has revealed two contrasting, but co-existing, features of South African local education. Firstly, South Africa does not have a single, uniform, homogeneous system of local education; instead local education is characterised by major variations in organisational design, size, form, shape and nomenclature. Secondly, South African local education structures simultaneously displays several common traits that do provide a

semblance of coherence. In this vein, there is a stated unity of purpose of local education structures, namely that education services be taken closer to schools (DoE, 2000), and local education structures are all constituted within a similar decentralisation framework, namely, as deconcentrated units of provincial Head offices. Hence local education structures in South Africa can be characterised as being inconsistent in terms of their design, structures and nomenclature, but coherent with respect to the purpose they supposedly serve, and identical with respect to their deconcentrated status within provincial education departments.

It is fairly obvious that the absence of a national policy on the education sub-system, and the non-interventionist stance adopted by the Department of Education and by Ministers of Education regarding provincial organisation has resulted in the absence of a uniform local education system in South Africa. Simultaneously, however, the inheritance of deconcentrated administrative units from the apartheid education system has led to the continued existence of similar local education formations in the post-apartheid period.

This study questions why the system has, to date, resisted developing policy on the local level of education, particularly given its penchant for policy making over the last decade. Perhaps part of the answer lies in posing the question in another way: what are the forces that drive governments to arrive at certain policy decisions? Psacharopoulos (1990:1) asserts that educational policy is often enacted to serve a particular purpose, 'be it pedagogical, political, economic or other good causes'. Certainly ideology does not appear to be 'a good cause' in this instance, as the ANC policy framework on education (ANC, 1994), the policy proposals by NEPI (1992), the Hunter Report (1995) and the more recent *Report of the Ministerial Review Committee on School Governance* (DoE, 2004) all reflect a similar desire for a discrete level of local governance in education. What, then, have been the drivers of policy making in the Department of Education?

Coombe, at a seminar held at the University of the Witwatersrand on 16 July 2004, elucidated that national education policy is generally driven by a number of considerations, including constitutional imperatives, presidential and Cabinet directives, general government policy, court decisions, national Treasury frameworks, reports of Ministerial Commissions and pressure from lobbyists, stakeholders and the public in general. In this instance, constitutional imperatives certainly did impact on national-level

thinking about local education. Chapter 3 revealed that in the transitional period, the Interim Constitution (RSA, 1993) played a central role in influencing national thinking on local education by directing provinces, instead of the national government through the PSC, to establish provincial organisations, and by compelling government to focus on *school*-level governance, rather than *local*-level governance.

Pampallis (2002), however, advances a political argument as to why there is little incentive for the national government, and indeed provincial governments, to explore the possibility of introducing a level of district governance in the education system. He argues that there is little inducement on the part of governments to do so simply because there is no strong local constituency advocating it. Since 1994, there has been little lobbying from local communities for greater power at the local level of the education system. Hence a plausible explanation for the apathy displayed by the Department of Education in engaging with local-level education governance lies in the absence of political pressure from 'the ground', so to speak.

Unlike the case of school governance, where political temperatures regarding school autonomy were and continue to be very high, there is no political impulse driving government towards policy making for local-level education. This is not to suggest that there has been no interest on the part of government, and the DoE in particular, in local education. Certainly, in 1998, the Department directed resources (through the system of conditional grants) towards the establishment of a District Development Programme, which was aimed at promoting the effectiveness of provincial sub-structures. However, this interest was, in the main, inspired by the need to ensure the implementation of national policy, rather than address the direct pedagogical concerns of schools, or a desire to thrust local education to the centre of education service delivery.

One could attribute other reasons to the relative indifference by the DoE to local education. Firstly, as has been demonstrated in Chapter 3, South Africa has no history of a strong system of local education management and/or governance; hence the post-apartheid government did not inherent a vibrant system of local education on which it could build new approaches to education service delivery. (This is in contrast to the Health sector, where municipalities were traditionally involved in the provision of local health services). Secondly, the post-1994 government was preoccupied with the

provincialisation of education, and the amalgamation of the 19 racially and ethnically divided departments of the apartheid education system. Local-level education did not occupy the centre stage of its strategic framework, as it was presumably less complex to prioritise transformation of the national and provincial levels of the system. And thirdly, the importance attached to *school-level* governance as a consequence of the political negotiations at CODESA, compelled the government to concentrate on institutional governance, rather than local governance. Hence the path of education decentralisation in South Africa followed individual schools, rather than local communities. Buckland and Hofmeyr (1992:41) point out that trends in the decentralisation literature suggest that there are often tensions about whether the unit of local control should be at the school level or with the local community. South African education did not have the luxury of debating where in the lower levels of its system control should be located, as political considerations and constitutional imperatives predetermined and framed the centrality of school self-governance, as opposed to local-level governance.

The reasons for the absence of a policy on districts are multiple and complex. Political, constitutional and historical forces woven together in a strong web scuttled any aspirations for a homogeneous and uniform level of local education. However, as was mentioned earlier, South African local education, while incoherent with respect to its organisation, design and nomenclature, is consistent in terms of its purpose and the decentralised space it occupies in the education system. The next three chapters examine the details of this space and the roles and functions of the structures that occupy it, through a case study of the Tshwane South District in Gauteng.