

The mediation of Representative Council of Learners policy in Western Cape schools — 1997 to 2003

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We investigated how education policy was mediated at a representative number of Western Cape schools, from 1997 to 2003, using the structure, symbolic, human resource and political frames of Bolman and Deal (1997) as the basis of the investigation. The investigation produced diverse research findings. At the one end there were a majority of representative councils of learners that received the full support of the main role players. These councils were fully functional and were making a significant contribution to the effective governance of their schools. At the other end there were significant numbers of representative councils of learners that were not receiving the requisite support, and which were merely tolerated to ensure legal compliance. The factors responsible for preventing the development of education policy into praxis, at these schools, are divided into three categories: technical challenges, cultural challenges and political challenges. In conclusion suggestions are made as to how these varied and complex challenges can be met in the interests of furthering the democratic goals that underpin RPL policy.

Keywords: cultural challenges; education policy; learner representative councils; policy mediation; political challenges; school governance; technical challenges

Introduction

The 1980s was a particularly turbulent era for schools, not only in South Africa, but worldwide. This resulted in the emergence of an international trend towards decentralization that found manifestation in the devolution of power to school governing bodies comprising of the representatives of relevant stakeholders, including the learners (Carr, 2005:23-59). As signatories to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, most countries were recognizing the right of children to express their views on all matters that affect them. In line with this, most of the major countries made statutory provision for secondary school learners to participate in decision-making, and some countries developed structures to represent the views of learners at school level. The inclusion of learners in school governance was regarded as a practical way to promote democratic values like tolerance, mutual respect and equality and develop a democratic political culture (Harber, 1997:9).

In 1994 the political emancipation of South Africa occurred. This resulted in the acceptance of a constitution based on democracy, equal citizenship and the protection of fundamental human rights and freedom. One of the most important policies formulated since 1994 has been the South African Schools Act of 1996, which attempts to transform the governance and management of South African public schools. This Act makes provision for a representative

council of learners (RCL) in each public school that offers instruction in the eighth grade or higher. The Act also specifies that the RCL should elect the learner members to serve on the governing body of that school. This policy of learner participation in school governance reflects the resolve of the South African Government to promote the principle of participation by all stakeholders in matters affecting them. However, almost a decade after the implementation of the policy of RCL there is still a difference between the policy-in-intent and the policy-in-practice at a significant number of schools. In order to make sense of this dissonance it is necessary to have an understanding of the policy process.

According to Bowe and Ball (1992) the policy process consists of three contexts: the context of influence, the context of policy text production, and the context of practice. Each context is characterized by struggle, a continual “push and pull” to achieve dominance and recognition. The context of influence is where public policy is normally initiated. It is here that interested parties struggle to influence the definition and social purposes of education policy. The context of policy text production is also an area of potential tensions and struggle. The fact that policy text is presented in generalized terms, is not exhaustive, and presents an idealization of the “real world” makes it an area of contestation (Bowe & Ball, 1992:21). The third context is the context of practice. Policy is not simply a matter of being written and then being received and acted upon. People do not engage in policy texts as naïve readers or passive recipients. It is, as Bowe and Ball (1992:22) point out, “subject to interpretation and then ‘recreated’”. Policies are interpreted differently as the histories, experiences, values, interests and goals of people differ. Smit (2003: 3) refers to these as “hidden contextual micro decision-making processes and dynamics”. Fitz and Halpin (1991:135) speak of the “complexities, contingencies and competing interests” which impact on policy implementation. As a result parts of policy texts will be “rejected, selected out, ignored, deliberately misunderstood, responses may be frivolous, etc.”, according to Bowe and Ball (1992:22). During the process of moving from central government to institutional level, a filtering thus takes place that could result in a mismatch between the intention of the policy and the implementation of the policy. This process of filtering is commonly referred to as policy mediation.

In this article we focus on the mediation of RPL policy in Western Cape schools from 1997 to 2003. More specifically we focus on determining the extent to which the policy has been implemented and explore the main factors that could have resulted in the filtering of policy at a significant number of Western Cape schools. In conclusion, a possible approach to the filtering of policy is suggested.

Research methods

As a basis for presenting the findings of the empirical research analysis, the framework proposed by Bolman and Deal (1997) will be used. The four frames that are applied in investigating the RCLs are: the structure frame — linking

the structures to the goals of the RCLs; the symbolic frame — stressing the importance of ethos, teamwork, shared faith and culture; the human resource frame — stressing the relationship between people and the organization; and the political frame — policies emerging from an ongoing process of bargaining and negotiation. These frames are not used as the basis of the data analysis. Instead the data analysis and the generalizations cut across the boundaries of the frames.

During the first phase of data gathering a questionnaire was given to the TLOs of the schools in each of the districts in the Western Cape which had attended the officially scheduled training session during 2001. The primary aims of the questionnaire survey were to ascertain whether the main role-players at school level had interpreted and internalized official policy regarding RCLs; to determine what operating procedures, regulations and programmes had been put in place in order to implement the national policy of RCLs; to determine what impact the implementation of RCL policy had on Western Cape schools in terms of the goal of enhancing democratic practices in schools. The purpose of the questionnaire was thus to determine the actual state of policy implementation in Western Cape schools. The composite questionnaire targeted five sets of respondents: TLOs, chairpersons of the RCLs, school principals, chairpersons of school governing bodies, and learners from the schools concerned. All the respondents received a copy of the questionnaire and were requested to complete and submit these separately. The process at each of the schools was facilitated by the responsible TLO. In the case of learners, at least 5% of the learners in Grades 8 to 12 were requested to respond. This gave an average of 50 learners per school of 1 000 learners, a manageable number for each TLO. The 52 schools that responded were from three rural areas and the metropole area and represented 11% of the schools with RCLs in the Western Cape. This relatively poor response was due to the unfortunate scheduling of the survey close to the final examinations. The 52 schools that responded were, however, fairly representative of schools found in the Western Cape: of the groups of schools with RCLs, the 32 secondary schools represented 11% of all secondary schools, the 12 primary schools represented 11% of all primary schools with RCLs, and the 8 combined schools represented 18% of all combined schools. The total number of respondents from these schools was 52 TLOs, 50 school principals, 46 chairpersons of school governing bodies and 600 learners. The variations between the responses of the rural and urban schools were not sufficiently significant to warrant that they be reported separately.

The second stage of data collection used the same questionnaire as that used during the first stage, and the survey was conducted during RCL and TLO workshops which were organized by the Western Cape Education Department in May 2003. A total of 127 RCL members and 130 TLOs participated. This represented just more than 25% of all schools in the Western Cape with RCLs. At these TLO workshops the research findings obtained during the first phase of the study were discussed and TLOs were asked to provide possible

explanations for emerging patterns.

A literature survey formed the basis for identification of the barriers to successful implementation of RCLs in Western Cape schools.

Research findings

What follows is a presentation and analysis of the main research findings on the implementation of the RCL policy. The findings are presented under the selected frames.

Structural frame

During the two phases 64.8% of the RCLs responded that they did have a constitution. This was a disconcerting response since all RCLs must have a constitution in terms of which they operate. There is also an example of a constitution in the Guidelines for Representative Councils for Learners that the national Department of Education made available to all schools in 1999.

The majority of the RCLs (64.8%) indicated that their RCLs had a code of conduct which governed the behaviour of their own members. It is disconcerting that 35.2% of the RCLs operated without clear guidelines governing their activities. This could also have resulted in a lack of accountability on behalf of the RCLs.

The majority of RCLs (64.8%) indicated that they had a copy of the constitution of their school governing body. This inevitably raised the question how RCL representatives could make a meaningful contribution towards school governance if they were unaware of the constitution of the school governing body.

Of the all the RCLs who responded, 65% indicated that they were in possession of the school's vision and mission statements. This is perplexing as it means that in the case of 35% of the schools the vision and mission statements were not guiding the activities of the RCLs. They could therefore have been operating as self-contained units with their own agendas and which could be divergent from those of the schools that they were supposed to be serving.

Most of the RCLs (64.8%) responded that they had a copy of the code of conduct of their learners.

When asked how regularly the TLOs met with their respective RCLs, the TLOs responded as follows: once a week: 29%; once a fortnight: 21%; once a month: 39%; and once a quarter: 11%. These responses were verified to a large extent by the RCLs who responded as follows: once a week: 40%; once a fortnight: 23%; once a month: 28%; and once a quarter: 9%. This indicated that in the majority of cases the TLOs met with the RCL at least once very fortnight.

When asked how regularly the RCL met, the RCLs responded as follows: once a week: 65%; once a fortnight: 13%; once a month 14%; and once a quarter: 8%. This indicated that RCL meetings were a regular occurrence at the overwhelming number of schools. The RCLs rated the attendance of the

meetings as follows: poor: 3%; room for improvement: 26%, generally good: 45%; and excellent: 26%. This was verified by the TLO chairpersons who rated the attendance of the meetings similarly.

Of the RCLs who responded, 76.3% indicated that they did receive notice of school governing body meetings, 71.5% indicated that these notices included an agenda of the meetings, 64.3% indicated that they met in order to prepare for these meetings, and 67% indicated that they did receive feedback regarding decisions taken at school governing body meetings. Although generally positive, these responses indicated that RCL involvement in the governance of schools was an area that required attention, since RCL involvement in school governing bodies is a legal requirement. Such involvement can only be meaningful if proper meeting procedures are followed.

Symbolic frame

The symbolic frame stressed the importance attached to ethos, teamwork, shared faith and culture.

It was assumed that the participation of RCL members in school activities is an important indicator of the success of the RCL as a representative body for the learners. The general perception of the majority of respondents was that RCL members were actively involved in numerous activities: 58% of the TLOs, 67% of the RCLs, and 70 % of the school principals rated the level of participation of RCL members in school activities from generally good to excellent.

The rating of RCLs with regard to their visibility at schools was related to the above-mentioned indicator which reflected whether the RCL was a token body or whether it was functioning as prescribed by the South African Schools Act. The fact that 48% of the TLOs rated the visibility of the RCLs as poor or in need of improvement is significant. It contradicted the indicator about the level of participation in school activities. This does seem to indicate that although the RCLs participated in a number of school activities, this participation was not deemed to be meaningful by almost half of the TLOs.

The general response of the TLOs was negative: 11% of the respondents rated the contributions as poor while 47% stated that there was room for improvement. On the other hand 43% of the RCLs regarded their contributions as generally good, while 14% rated the contributions as excellent. This indicated a major variance in the responses of TLOs and RCLs, an area that required further attention. In schools where the RCLs had been contributing to the building up of school morale, numerous examples were cited to illustrate this. The following are some examples of the activities in which some RCLs were actively involved: providing bursaries and other financial assistance to indigent learners, peer counselling, organizing awareness programmes to curb the dangers of substance abuse, helping with fund raising activities, organizing various recreational activities like talent shows, helping to beautify the school building and grounds, providing a service to the needy by means of community outreach programmes, and actively participating in the management of the school in a number of ways.

Human Resource frame

This frame focused on the relationship between the RCLs and the people with whom they had to work in order to attain their objectives. It looked therefore at the relationship between the members of the RCL and the TLOs, the principals and the management team, the school governing bodies, and the learners at the school. It also concentrated on the level of support that the RCL and TLO received from the other role players.

A good relationship between the RCL and TLO is crucial if the RCL is to work effectively. The data indicated that at most schools this was the case. As many as 86% of the RCLs rated their relationship with the TLO between generally good and excellent, compared to 77% of the TLOs.

The ratings for the level of support that the RCL received from learners were generally low: 18% of the TLOs rated the level of support as poor and 42% rated it as having room for improvement; similarly 12% of the RCLs rated the level of support as poor and 35% rated it as having room for improvement. This indicator suggested that whatever was done by the RCL was not generally supported by the learners. In follow-up discussions with TLOs the following comments were received:

- At some schools the trust level of learners for the RCL was still low due to the disproportionate status accorded to prefects.
- At the majority of schools proper communication channels of accountability were non-existent. As a result the RCLs were not accountable to the learners whom they were supposed to be representing.
- Both these responses indicated that at a significant number of schools the RCL was not given the necessary recognition and status as the only legally recognized representative body of the learners.

There was a big difference between the rating of the RCLs and the TLOs with regard to the level of support the RCLs received from educators. Whereas 75% of the RCLs rated this level of support from generally good to excellent, only 43% of the TLOs did so. This seemed to indicate that the responses were largely based on uncorroborated perceptions.

The ratings of the various TLOs of the level of support the TLOs received from other role players were generally negative: 26% of them rated the support received from other educators as being poor and 34% indicated that there was room for improvement; 16% of them rated the support received from their school management teams as being poor and 30% indicated that there was room for improvement; while 24% of them rated the support received from their school governing bodies as being poor and 36% indicated that there was room for improvement. This response indicated that whole school communities had generally not embraced the notion of RCLs and had not provided the TLOs with the required support. In follow-up discussions with TLOs strong sentiments were expressed:

- Many of the TLOs felt that the work with the RCLs had become a burden because they were not receiving the support required to make a success of the endeavour. This resulted in an inordinately high turnover rate of

TLOs.

- No provision was made in the timetable for the work of the RCLs. Support of the RCL was regarded as an add-on to the other responsibilities of the TLOs.
- It appeared that whole school communities had not accepted the RCL model and it had not become part of the school policy on leadership development of learners and school governance.
- TLOs had attended workshops, but on their return to their respective schools no provision was made to allow them to give feedback to the rest of the staff and the school governing body.
- If the RCLs were to become fully functioning learner representative bodies, school principals would have to take the initiative in acknowledging, promoting and supporting it.

The TLOs regarded the following as the main areas of focus of the training that they had provided to meet the needs of the RCL members: leadership (61), role and function (43), meeting procedures (25), conflict management (12), planning and organization (12), team building (7), communication (7), code of conduct (7), self-esteem (5), democracy education (5), grievance procedures (4), social issues (4), decision making (4), assertiveness (4), peer counselling (3), networking with other RCLs (2), cultural diversity (1) and environmental awareness (1). Nineteen TLOs did not respond to this question, 25 responded that they did not do training as the school did not have a budget for this, and three indicated that no training took place because they did not have time. This indicated that at many schools the TLOs were not utilized to bring the leadership potential of RCL members to full fruition due largely to the lack of financial and structural support. It was therefore not surprising that 37.5% of the RCLs indicated that they did not have enough knowledge/skills to fulfill their responsibilities as RCL members.

Political frame

This frame looked at the ongoing process of negotiating and bargaining leading to policies and decisions and the implementation thereof.

The fact that 66% of the TLOs rated the contributions made by the RCLs towards school governance as between poor and having room for improvement indicated that many RCLs had not yet come to full fruition. The RCLs responses were more positive: 44% of the respondents rated the contribution as generally good, while 14% rated it as excellent. However, in discussions with RCL members during the conference the following general comments were received:

- The RCLs were not seen as equal partners or stakeholders in important matters. Some learner representatives were called in to school governing body meetings to deal with issues involving learners, after which they were dismissed. They felt inadequate and disempowered.
- Policies affecting learners were approved without input from learners.
- At some schools the RCLs did not feature on the school's budget at all.

- Learners were not treated as full SGB members. Often they did not receive notices of meetings, or an agenda, or a copy of the minutes.

The above-mentioned responses from RCL members again indicated the glaring disparity found amongst different schools.

The chairpersons of the SGBs rated the participation of learner members in discussions in school governing body meetings as follows: poor: 4%; room for improvement: 37%, generally good: 37%, and excellent: 22%. This too indicated that perceptions regarding learner participation varied greatly from school to school.

An analysis of the statistics provided under the Symbolic frame and the Human Resource frame indicates that general responses of the learners at the schools, who participated in the empirical study, were varied. This is indicative of the fact that the level of RCL policy implementation differed from school to school due depending on the contexts within which the schools were located. At some schools the RCLs had become firmly entrenched and were doing sterling work. At other schools the RCLs had been established merely to ensure minimal compliance with the South African Schools Act.

Lastly, school principals were asked to rate the contribution of the their RCLs towards the following aspects of school management: co-operation between learners and school management, democratic practices and decision-making, a spirit of mutual respect and good manners, good communication between learners and school management, the implementation of the school's code of conduct, and the realization of the school's vision. The overwhelming response by school principals was very positive: 45% of the school principals rated the contribution as generally good, while 21% of them rated it as being excellent. A significant percentage (31%) indicated that there was room for improvement.

Barriers to the successful implementation of RCLs

One of the significant features of the above findings is the wide-ranging responses of the various respondents. At the one end of the continuum RCLs (at approximately 70% of the schools) received full support and were treated as full partners in the governance of the school. At the other end of the continuum RCLs (at approximately 30% of the schools) were tolerated to ensure legal compliance but received little or no support from the school governing bodies and the school management teams. Due to the fact that some schools were lethargic in implementing RPL policy, and were still giving precedence to their prefect systems, the Education Amendment Act (No 57 of 2001) was promulgated stating that the RCL was to be the only recognized and legal representative body for learners at schools. This legislation was further clarified in the Western Cape by the Extraordinary Provincial Gazette 5956, dated 31 January 2003, and Western Cape Education Department Circular 0056/2004 sent to all Western Cape schools on 27 October 2004. The circular pertinently states that the RCL is to be the only legitimate body elected to represent the learners; the prefect body may operate at a school to assist with discipline

only as a sub-committee of the RCL; and the RCL only functions in terms of elected office bearers. The last stipulation effectively debar the appointment of head boy and head girl. This bears testimony to the fact that the national and provincial departments regard the undue prominence that was given to prefect bodies in schools as being contrary to the ethos and principles of RCL policy. In spite of these regulations there are schools that still ignore these regulations with impunity as evidenced by the public announcement of the appointment of head boys and girls in local media.

An analysis of the research findings indicates that there are numerous factors within the context of practice that have contributed to the fact that the policy of RCLs have not been able to develop into praxis at the majority of schools in the Western Cape. For the purposes of this article the categories of barriers to policy implementation as identified by Jerald (2005) will be used. These are technical challenges which include the lack of “know-how” about new strategies; cultural challenges which comprise traditional beliefs, expectations, norms, habits and “ingrained patterns of behaviour”; and political challenges which refer to passive or overt resistance due to a perceived loss of power. We will not consider Jerald’s distinction between internal and external challenges as these appear nebulous given the great measure of overlapping between the internal and external barriers.

In the South African context the technical challenges are many and varied. In 2001 an investigation among top officials within the Western Cape Education Department (WCED), school leaders at three local schools with historically advantaged and disadvantaged backgrounds, three teachers’ organizations and two non-governmental organizations involved in leadership development in Western Cape schools revealed many of the technical challenges facing educators. It was obvious that the transformation of the South African education system since 1994 had resulted in what one school principal referred to as “policy overload”. In an effort to deal with the transformational initiative, educators had generally become strained and spent, and increasingly unmotivated and frustrated. Linked to this is the perception that the Western Cape Education Department was not providing the back-up support that was required to bring about systemic transformation. The staff development programmes that were provided by the provincial department were generally sporadic and often took the form of crash courses to acquaint educators with some of the new policies they were expected to implement. These programmes were derogatively referred to as band-aid measures meant to remedy perceived shortcomings and to ensure the implementation of policies. These programmes were not regarded as a means of empowering educators to become self-fulfilling and self-sustaining leaders. A need was expressed for programmes that aim at capacity-building and that break down the cyclical hierarchy of dependency (Williams, 2001b).

Mangena (2002), the Deputy Minister of Education in South Africa at the time, made the following admission: “No matter how progressive and globally competitive our education policies, they will remain meaningless if we do not have adequately trained, motivated and dedicated personnel to implement at

the point of service delivery.” Due to the pressure of globalization and the ideological shift toward neo-liberalism, the South African Government has adopted a conservative macro-economic policy. This has resulted in what Nzimande, as quoted by Nxesi (2001), refers to a maintenance budget in which no funds are allocated for transformation and resources. Nxesi (2001) bemoans the fact that no national plan for teacher development exists. To him this represents “a reluctance to make resources available, and a failure to appreciate the importance of investing in human capital in a skilled labour market intensive such as education” (Nxesi, 2001:7). This is confirmed by Nzimande (2001) who refers to the lack of a focused and systematic programme on teacher re-education and development. So although Section 19 of the South African Schools Act of 1996, for example, makes provision for funds to be set aside at provincial level for the capacity building of SGBs, in most provinces this has not actualized (Mathonsi, 2001:3). Whatever training was offered to school governors was not sustained (Vandeyar, 2002:104). This had a detrimental effect on the functioning of SGBs, especially in historically disadvantaged communities where the need is most intense and therefore led to a reluctance to give prominence to the RCL and governance structures.

An investigation of the technical challenges facing the implementation of RCLs confirms the above. At most schools school principals were still the main gatekeepers of the policies which were meant to be implemented at school level. At no stage were RCL workshops arranged specifically for school principals to acquaint themselves with the underlying theory and logic of RCLs. A mistaken assumption existed that what was learnt in the workshops attended by the TLOs would automatically be passed on to other school leaders — the so-called cascade model. At many schools TLOs who had attended the orientation workshops were not accorded an opportunity to inform the rest of the staff what the RCL policy entailed. It was expected of school principals to implement the policy without taking ownership of it. The result was that TLOs were thrown into the deep-end without the necessary support from the school. It should therefore come as no surprise that 54% of the TLOs in the Western Cape, who attended the 2003 workshop, had experience of only one year or less (Carr, 2005:154). This signified that educators generally opted not to accept the responsibility of TLO for more than a year. This had dire consequences for the successful functioning of RCLs as TLO workshops were not held on an annual basis.

When left alone, without the required technical support, people naturally revert to what they are acquainted with. Jerald (2005) refers to this as “regression to the mean”.

The reluctance on the part of school leaders and school governors to involve learner leaders in the governance of school can be ascribed to cultural factors, more specifically to the ideology of conservatism which is ingrained in the fibre of large sectors of the South African society (Williams, 2001a). The defeat of the National Party in 1994 and the end of Christian-National Education did not signal the demise of conservatism in the South African education system. Many of the basic tenets of conservatism have become ingrained in

South African society after years of conditioning. Furthermore, traditional African society is also conservative by its very nature. According to Morrow (1986:189) conservative tradition excludes the young from democratic participation on the basis of their lack of rationality. It depreciates the learner as a source of claims and critical judgement on which education for democratic participation is supposed to be based (Morrow, 1986:204). In this way the growth of the capacity for independent judgement is not nurtured. It should therefore not come as a surprise that many schools opted not to involve learners in meaningful decision-making in matters of school governance.

The political challenges are to a great extent interrelated with the cultural challenges. Although policies have been enacted in an attempt to democratize the decision-making process the authoritarian ethos that existed before 1994 still pervades the education system at micro and macro level. The national Department of Education (2003) refers to this as "... the entrenched bureaucratic and hierarchical management practices inherited from apartheid traditions". In a similar vein Mathonsi (2001) refers to "a seemingly inherited ethos of the old bureaucracy". According to Grant (2006:513) school principals are only exhibiting a "rhetorical commitment" to democratic deliberations. An empirical study undertaken in the Western Cape amongst school governors has revealed that deliberations in the school governing bodies are still dominated by school principals on the basis of their authority (Adams & Waghid, 2005). Furthermore decisions taken by school governing bodies are often ignored by the school management team under the guise of what is considered to be in "the best interest of the school". Grant (2006:525-526) attributes this affinity for autocratic leadership on the part of South African school principals to factors like an authoritarian mentality, fear of the loss of power, school cultures that are steeped in deeply ingrained attitudes, values and skills as well as ethnic, cultural and gender biases. She furthermore ascribes it to an understanding of leadership as being linked to a formal position owing to, amongst other things, a sense of insecurity on the part of teachers and official policy that emphasizes principal accountability. Within this essentially top-down functionalist perspective of leadership in South African schools teachers are relegated to what Watkins (1986:4) refers to as "mere ciphers or automatons devoid of any semblance of human agency". In sum: the conventional orthodoxy of the single, individualistic leader still prevails in many South African schools.

Concluding remarks

In conclusion, the investigation of mediation of RCL policy provides an apposite window onto education reform processes. In this article we illustrate that while progress has been made towards implementing RCLs, there is still some way to go in establishing sustained and substantial participation by RCLs at all Western Cape schools. Furthermore, we illustrate how complex technical, cultural and political challenges have resulted in the uneven implementation of RCL policy. The technical challenges facing role players are redoubtable,

but surmountable. For these challenges to be met, it is vital that all role players within and outside schools commit themselves to the development of democratic principles, values and beliefs within the school society. This should find manifestation in the provision of the requisite support, resources, training and development to all RCLs. The political challenges can also be overcome but this requires a paradigm shift regarding school leadership and management. School principals especially should be made to realize that a shift in the patterns of school leadership and management does not indicate the elimination of the executive power of the principalship as the principal remains “the focal point of demands for accountability by the community and the educational authorities” (Harvey, 1994:31). The empowerment of learners to participate meaningfully in the decision-making of the schools should not be regarded as an erosion of the power of the school principal. Distributed leadership and hierarchical forms of leadership are not necessarily incompatible (Woods, 2005:166). Distributed leadership is not meant to displace the crucial role of the school principal. In fact, for distributed leadership to come to full fruition the structural framework which is provided by hierarchical forms of leadership is a prerequisite (Fullan, 2003:22).

However, the cultural traditions are deeply ingrained within various sectors of the South African population and cannot be eradicated by merely enacting new policies, and by providing requisite support to the various role players. What is required is the development of a democratic culture and ethos to pervade South African society. This could contribute towards the temperance of those conservative practices that are decidedly ant-democratic. Any attempt to suppress conservative traditions could be construed as an attempt to further totalitarian aims and interests — which is anathema to the true tenets of a democratic culture and ethos and the principles which underpin RCL policy.

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