

Tension between school governing bodies and education authorities in South Africa and proposed resolutions thereof

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The success of a country's education system depends to a large extent on the mutual trust and co-operation existing between all partners. However, numerous documented incidents in the media have confirmed that there is a field of tension between school governing bodies of public schools in South Africa and the Department of Education, which is of great concern to all partners in the system, especially as these parent bodies were established by the current government to be partners in the management of their children's schools. This empirical investigation was undertaken to identify and analyse the origin and extent of the tension and to suggest practical and workable solutions to defuse the situation. The views of respondents from both parties were elicited and the results confirmed the existence of tension and mistrust.

Introduction and motivation

The success of any country's education system is dependent to a great extent on the mutual trust and collaboration existing between all partners. It can be argued that transformation and reform of the education landscape in South Africa has indeed influenced all parties involved, including the Department of Education (DoE), school governing bodies (SGBs), the principal, staff, learners and the community in which the school is situated. In this regard, Bisschoff (1997:2) proposes that successful transformation is entirely dependent on whether the vision aspired to by political leaders for the education of the country, is mutually shared and embodied in their daily activity by people at grass-roots level. He does, however, have reservations as to whether this was the case in 1997, and states that although the vision was included in policy frameworks and legislation of the government, the ethos, structures and procedures did not reflect this vision.

The African National Congress (ANC) (1994:60) envisaged that democratic school governance structures were needed in order to fully develop the potential of the human resources of the country on assuming the reins of government in 1994. Kallaway (2003:11), in support of this system, argues that education, in whatever form, is a fundamental component of democracy. In this management system, the school governing body would consist of elected representatives from the parent body of the school, the staff members of the school as well as participation from the learners of the school in the form of consultation.

According to Squelch (in Lemmer, 1999:128-129) an essential feature of agendas for education reform has been the devolution of education management to schools, which implies that at school level more decentralised decision making responsibility and abilities are developed. Decentralising power

to govern schools and to be involved in decision-making is aimed at decreasing centralised bureaucratic management of schools. Although it seldom occurs in practice that a government in power rolls back all powers and responsibilities concerning school governance and management to school level, it is nevertheless desirable that a balance be struck between the authority of the state and the authority of the SGB at school level.

The change in government to the ANC in 1994 resulted in a new approach to education and a subsequent new dispensation for education. Changes were implemented on a large scale, which led to unprecedented demands and stresses on most partners involved in the education system. If one further accepts that many South Africans, given their political persuasions and/or historical traditions, are generally opposed to far-reaching and continuous change, it should be expected that these changes would not be implemented without difficulty. Ledell and Arnsparger (1993:1) support this notion and emphasize that change causes anxiety and stress in people — even when the mere possibility of change is mentioned. In this regard, the former national minister of education, Kader Asmal, also warned that change would not be without its own problems and that groups in education affected by these changes, should negotiate change responsibly — even if changes threaten and influence the most sensitive traditions in schools.

The domains of function and responsibility for the DoE and SGB are clearly demarcated in South African School law (Act 84 of 1996). Various instances and opportunities have arisen where both these role-players have indicated acceptance of their responsibilities and have committed themselves to close collaboration through their spokespersons. The charter of the Federation of Governing Bodies of South African Schools (FEDSAS) (2002:2) clearly supports the principle of maximum transference of school governance to governing bodies of public schools and endeavours to establish and maintain healthy relationships between all interested parties in education.

Statement of the problem and the aim

The advent of the new government in 1994 and the subsequent acceptance of a new constitutional dispensation in South Africa indicated the beginning of a new era in education. The new era saw an education system that was based on the fundamental principles of democracy, unity, non-discrimination, equality, and equity. The new system invariably led to differences of opinion and tensions between the partners in the education process, and particularly between the DoE, as the representative of the government, and the SGBs, as the representatives of the local school community.

A number of reasons and examples can be cited from literature that indubitably indicate the existence of a field of tension between the governing bodies of public schools in South Africa and the national and provincial Departments of Education. Specific reference to these will be made presently. This field of tension occurs despite the clear demarcation of the powers and responsibilities of the SGBs in SA School law (Act 84 of 1996). For example,

tension originates from issues concerning the funding of schools, appointment of staff, admission requirements at schools, the language policy of schools, measures applied to discipline at schools, and the policies on religion, religious instruction and practice.

The existence of a field of tension is a concern to all role players in the education process as it may seriously threaten the successful functioning of the education process in the country. Squelch (in Lemmer, 1999:136) on the other hand, emphasizes the reality that the powers and functions of SGBs before 1990 were considerably less demanding than is currently the case and that their role was predominantly supportive in nature to the DoE.

Different views exist on what the possible causes of these tensions are: Davids (2003:4) sees the field of tension as socially and legally very complex because it touches on the sensitive relation between the rights of the governing bodies and the need for transformation as prescribed by the state. In this regard, De Groof and Malherbe (1997:120) show that governing bodies have extensive executive powers entrenched by legislation, while the powers of the boards of education, at regional, provincial and national level, are limited to advice and consultation.

Naidoo (2003:3) and Mkhwanazi (2003:3) on the other hand share the opinion that the reason for the existence of the so-called field of tension must be found in different interpretations of the changed legislation.

A third position on the existence of a field of tension resides in the idea that the DoE wants to contain the power of the governing bodies unilaterally. Sieborger, Head Executive Official of the National Union of Educators in the Western Cape, is quoted by La Grange (2003:5) as having said that it is especially the competencies of the governing bodies that come into play, and that the freedom of parents to make their own decision about the quality and standard of education in their children's schools is limited. Colditz, the national chairperson of FEDSAS, in conversation with Basson (2003:4), holds the same view of the government's interference into the democratic execution of the will of parents in the education of their children.

In the commentary by FEDSAS National on the proposed Education Laws Amendment Bill (2002:4), Colditz, on behalf of his organisation, questions the good faith of the education ministry. He questions the state's intentions with regard to the management of schools and the role of governing bodies who supply their services free and voluntarily. However, Baloyi (2003:4) quotes Asmal, as representative of the state, accusing governing bodies of not complying with the letter and spirit of the South African constitution.

Experts who are directly involved with the evaluation of the relationship between the state and governing bodies confirm with concern the existence of such a field of tension. Prew, a director of the National Department of Education, is quoted by Louw (2003a:5) as having acknowledged that the system of SGBs is riddled with problems and tensions, while Soudien (2003:11), chair of a ministerial task team that revised the role of the governing bodies, mentioned in an article that parents are generally concerned about the relation-

ship between the governing bodies and the DoE, because of the ways in which the power of governing bodies has been restricted.

From the above opinions it is clear that a field of tension does exist between the SGBs and the DoE. This tension stifles the education process and needs to be addressed urgently. The existence of such a field of tension is not denied by either of the two parties mentioned. What makes the case more complicated is that SGBs are an instrument put in place by the state to act in partnership with all the other role players to make inputs in the education process. It appears, however, that SGBs experience that they are not treated as equal partners.

The aim of the research, which was to find answers to the above problem, entailed:

- A comprehensive description of the nature of the field of tension between the SGBs and the DoE;
- a determination of the extent and gravity of the field of tension;
- a search into the origin of the field of tension and its effect on all stakeholders in the education process, considering that further heightened tension can lead to a breaking point with devastating results for all interested parties; and
- an attempt to find answers to these issues by means of proposals to alleviate the tension and to establish reconciliation.

The following specific aims were set for the research:

- A literature study that entailed the following:
 - A theoretical explanation of the legal duties and responsibilities of the DoE, as well as the SGBs of the public schools in the Free State who offer Afrikaans as means of instruction.
 - A critical discussion of already identified tense situations as reported in the recent past in order to identify core elements of such fields of tension, to identify facets thereof, to describe them, and to determine the effect on all educational stake holders.
- An empirical study amongst officials of the DoE and members of the SGBs of schools in the Free State that offer Afrikaans as medium of instruction, to gather information about the existence of such a field of tension between them.
- To analyse the results of the investigation and to propose solutions that could lead to a better understanding and co-operation between the DoE and the SGBs of public schools in the Free State.

The allocated role and functions of SGBs

The roles of the SGB and school principals are by no means enviable in the modern day and age we live in. Nowadays school management takes place, according to Van Staden and Alston (2000:112), in a dangerous minefield where governing bodies often have to step in to ensure that their school does not end up in court. Van Loggerenberg (2005:9) draws attention to the research that confirms unequivocally that parental involvement, despite the

educational background or social position of the parents, is an essential component for successful education and teaching at school level. This parental involvement manifests itself, among others ways, in organised structures such as SGBs and parent associations at schools.

The decision of the members of governing bodies to participate in government policy in South Africa can be complex because the term participation has different meanings for different people against the background of the cultural diversity in South Africa. Sayed and Carrim (1997:95) distinguish four ways of participation in the governance and management of schools in South Africa:

1. Community participation that points to common and shared aspects of human interaction. An unqualified allegiance to community participation becomes increasingly difficult because communities become increasingly fragmented on the grounds of class, race, sex, and nationality.
2. Participation as partners, which implies that legal partners obtain the right to participate in educational processes.
3. Regulated (co-operative) participation, according to which constraints are placed on the nature of participation in an attempt to move away from the potential antagonism that can be caused through community participation or the participation of partners.
4. Weighted participation, according to which certain groups of participants have more rights than others, for example, parental representation which, in the present situation in South-African schools, would constitute the majority in SGBs.

SGBs of public schools in South Africa before 1990 did not necessarily have a demanding task because of restricted powers assigned to them — their powers were more symbolic in nature than being actually enforceable. During the 1990s the situation changed dramatically and greater powers and responsibilities were legally handed over to the governing bodies (Squelch 1998:107). The role currently played by SGBs in schools is, according to Davidoff and Lazarus (1999:66), essentially a management role to ensure functionality of schools. According to them, successful school management implies the creation of certainty, trust, security and also opportunities for repose in the aspirations towards a school vision.

The management role that SGBs play in schools requires a thorough knowledge of the following management aspects, as identified by Davidoff and Lazarus (1999:67):

- Management of systems (ensure that the appropriate structures and procedures are in place and function well).
- Management of time (setting of priorities, time limitations, and rules to abide by).
- Management of tension/stress (the creation of a work environment without unnecessary tensions).
- Management of conflict (the design of mechanisms to handle conflict successfully).

- Care for all in the school (their background, feelings, opinions, etc.). Mashile (2000:79) is more particular with regard to the role of SGB and stresses the fact that the day-to-day management of the school is not the task of the governing bodies. The role they should play, is to
 - execute the specific functions assigned to them by the SASA and the other provincial legislation and regulations;
 - set up, improve and develop rules and policies within which the school functions in the framework of the SASA;
 - supervise and manage the development and maintenance of the infrastructure and property of the school; and
 - establish and develop partnerships in the school between all the role players in the education process. Such partnerships consist of parents, learners, teachers and non-teaching staff at the school, the local community and the education authorities.

Van Wyk (2004:52) stresses the fact that SGBs in South Africa have at their disposal considerable powers and functions bestowed upon them by the South African Schools Act (Act 84 of 1996). These powers are reflected in the fact that governing bodies legally have the power to establish a school's character and ethos. Verhoeven (1996:142) points to the fact that this will especially be a challenge for the school principals because they have to share the power with other role players. School management will not rely exclusively on the management skills of the school principal but it will have to be developed, keeping in mind the ideas of other interested parties in the school as well as in relation to the provincial education authorities.

The responsibilities of SGBs of public schools, in respect of admission policy, language policy, policy for religion and code of conduct for learners, are allocated under the different articles of the SASA (South Africa, 1996:art 5-9).

As far as the specific functions of the SGBs of public schools are concerned, Foster and Smith (2001:76), Möller (2000:75), Mashile (2000:80) and Verhoeven (1996:138-140) have pointed out that the SASA makes provision for two groups of functions. These are assigned to SGBs by the legislation. There is a list of functions applicable to all governing bodies, but also the so-called assigned functions allocated to certain governing bodies after they have applied and shown proof that they have the power to perform such functions.

These specific functions of the SGBs of public schools are summarised in the South African Schools Act under article 20 and 21. The SASA (South Africa, 1996:art 20-21) distinguishes clearly between these two groups of functions. Article 21 of the Act in its original form excludes all functions with a financial implication. Therefore Article 20(1) only deals with the responsibilities of the governing body in respect of the best interests of the school. These functions broadly include the development of school documentation, support of staff, and handling of administrative matters of the school.

The so-called Article 21 functions have direct financial implications. These functions are only given to a public school after such a school has applied for

them from the head of education, or if the concerned MP grants one or more functions to the school through a notice in the Provincial Paper.

However, Van Wyk (2004:54) holds the view that the SASA only provides guidelines for the distribution of power in a school and therefore a strict legal approach to the distribution of responsibilities and functions will not have the desired outcome. She recommends a system of co-operative school management and describes it as an interactive approach to education where all the stakeholders are represented and take co-responsibility for the efficient and effective management of the school activities. In so doing, trust is established and other interested parties can be made aware of and be motivated for the critical role that governing bodies nowadays have to play and will have to play to a greater extent in future.

We associate ourselves with the opinion of Schofield (1999:112-113) that the formal education system in any country in the world has to be aimed at mobilising the members of the community to deliver services to the school, such that the school makes their knowledge and facilities available as a service centre for use by the community. Van Wyk (2004:54) indicates that the SGBs in South Africa have a clear statutory responsibility to execute critical functions in the school to achieve this end. In so doing, governing bodies can make useful contributions to ensure schools' efficiency and sustained improvement.

Definition and elements of the field of tension

A variety of meanings can be attached to the word 'tension', including 'a tense situation', 'psychological pressure', 'nervousness', 'fear', and even 'discomfort' (Barnhart & Barnhart, 1988). According to the Concise Oxford Dictionary of Current English (1995) 'tension' refers to a forced situation that is caused by opposing forces working against each other, a moment whereby further tension is placed on a already tense situation or even a situation of psychological excitement.

In this study, a field of tension was seen as a situation or territory where there is tension and where overstrain may lead to an imbalance or even confrontation. This situation could include elements such as a clash of interests, mutual threats, distrust, and a breakdown of good relationships and even an intentional restraint of co-operation.

Two recent issues in education, which placed the field of tension between the SGBs and the DoE under scrutiny, created the impression that the government of the day does not place much value on the democratic right of citizens to have a say in the teaching of their own children (Volksblad, 2005: 8). In the first case, schools were obliged to call on the courts to prevent their having to establish dual-medium teaching, which puts additional strain on the teaching situation and consequently also affects the quality of education received by the learners. In the second case, it was suggested that new legislation will restrain the powers of school-governing bodies, to make departmental appointments, even further.

Examples of such issues are misreported in the media on a daily basis,

and it confirms the existence of a definite field of tension between the DoE and the SGBs of public schools in South Africa. Verhoeven (1996:132) indicates that, in his experience, school principals and SGBs have never readily accepted decentralisation and devolution of power as they are fearful that all the responsibility for the solving of problems will be shifted one-sidedly onto schools.

A further factor that needs to be considered, according to Le Roux and Coetzee (2001:42), is the expectations of people concerned about education at grass-roots level, measured against the current ANC government's proposed policies for education transformation after 1994. These expectations are often disappointed by the realities of the present situation, which may differ greatly from the idealised vision for education.

Several reasons for the existence of a field of tension between the DoE and the SGBs of public schools are found in the literature:

Karlsson (1998a:45) shows that the transformation process from *apartheid* to a democracy in South Africa necessitated forming of partnerships, also in the field of education. However, the problem is that there are no standardised mechanisms and procedures that may help facilitate the forming of such partnerships, and this will inevitably lead to tension. Naidu (2003:4) shows in this regard that the majority of elected members of SGBs are largely ignorant about the purpose of an SGB is. They are also not clear what their respective roles and responsibilities involve.

Confusion at grass-roots level on the governance of public schools is a further matter that can lead to the development of extensive situations of tension. According to Naidoo (2003:3), the DoE and SGBs have been in conflict for years on the matter of who holds the final say in the management of public schools.

The researchers are of the opinion that an important reason for the existence of a field of tension can be found in the perception amongst interested parties that the powers and expertise of the SGBs are undermined by the Department. Although Lewis, spokesperson for the teacher union SADTU, in an interview with Joubert (2005d:2), voiced his satisfaction with the limitation of the powers of SGBs, representatives of other organisations strongly opposed this view — particularly concerning the legal modification concerning the appointment of new teaching staff. Zille, DA representative in conversation with Joubert (2004a:1), Smit, representative of SAOU, in conversation with Fourie (2004b:7), and Colditz, in conversation with Joubert (2005d: 2) and De Vries (2004e:1) all expressed their discontent with the abridgement of the powers of SGBs, and that this abridgment was contrary to the principle of healthy democracy and ran counter to the fundamental rights of parents to have a say in the education of their children.

Van Staden and Alston (2000:110) are of the opinion that a space is created for the possible development of tense situations between SGBs and the authorities, because schools are indifferent to the changes in the education system.

The more recent pressure from the Department, to force parents to ensure

SGBs are racially more representative, has caused great tension and unhappiness. Monare (2003:1), on this matter, quotes Prew, a director in the DoE, as having confirmed that the government is considering enforcing some form of representation on SGBs in future. However, Colditz, in interviews with Basson (2003:4) and Rademeyer (2004a:4), states that any interference in the election of SGBs would undermine the democratic process.

The following documented cases of direct conflict and tension between SGBs and the DoE are well known, and a source of great concern because, in the end, the majority of the cases have had to be resolved in court. The following are examples of these cases.

Financial management of schools

- The case of Ermelo High School (Colditz, 2003b:28-29)

Appointment of teaching staff

- The case of Settlers Agricultural High School (Colditz, 2003b:30)
- The case of Douglas High School (Colditz, 2003b:1)
- The case of Destinata School (Oelofse, 2003:4)
- The case of FH Odendaal High school (Rademeyer, 2005d:11)
- The case to transfer school principals in the Free State and to refer them for re-training (Versluis, 2005:1)

Language policy at schools

- The case of FH Odendaal High School (Colditz, 2003b:29)
- The case of Mikro Primary school (Cruywagen, 2005:5)
- The case of Kalahari High School, Wrenchville Secondary School, Seodin Primary School, Kuruman Primary School, Wrenchville Primary School and Northern Cape Agricultural High School (Van Wyk, 2004b:1; 2005a:4)

Discipline in schools

- The case of HTS Louis Botha (Colditz, 2003b:29)
- The case of Wordsworth High School (Colditz, 2003b:30)

The researchers draw the conclusion, from the above cases, that the education authorities often make hasty decisions without applying the law and regulations consistently, and that SGBs often respond emotionally to issues such as these. It is also clear that the principle of administrative justice is not yet applied and understood by all stakeholders in the education process. This could possibly be the main reason for the unnecessarily tense situations that develop and are harmful to the image of education in South Africa, because the courts have to settle an increasing number of cases between education partners. Administrative justice, according to Colditz (2003b: 24), implies that all citizens in the country have a constitutional right to legitimate, just, reasonable and procedurally fair administrative behaviour, and this right should be respected.

The empirical investigation

The aim of the empirical investigation was to determine the nature and extent of different facets of the field of tension between the Free State DoE and the SGBs of public schools where Afrikaans was the medium of instruction; to identify the possible sources of the field of tension; and to determine its effect on the two partners in education.

The study was quantitative in nature. The empirical investigation consisted of two research phases, namely, a data collection phase (Phase 1) and interpretation of the findings (Phase 2).

The sample

Sixty-five officials of the Free State DoE who were closely involved with the functioning of SGBs were identified as the respondents and were requested to complete a questionnaire. These officials included the Chief Director, district directors, and developers of school governance. These officials were predominantly English speaking.

The same questionnaire was sent to all the members of the SGBs of 40 randomly sampled schools where Afrikaans was one of the languages of instruction in the Free State province. This sample included single-, dual- and parallel-medium schools. These schools were selected because similar tensions regarding language policy, diversity and governance had been experienced at the schools. At least 360 respondents who were members of SGBs were included in the initial sample. 52.6%, of the total number of questionnaires sent out, were returned and data collected were statistically analysed using a computer program. Table 1 is a representation of the constitution of the research sample.

Table 1 Constitution of the research sample

Denomination	N	%	Male		Female	
			N	%	N	%
Members of the SGB	194	84.7	147	75.8	47	24.2
Officials of the DoE	35	15.3	30	85.7	5	14.3
Total	229	100.0	177	77.3	52	22.7

The questionnaire

A structured questionnaire was designed based on the theoretical background developed from the literature review, as well as on the experiences of one of the researchers, having been a member of a school governing body and a principal of a school. Questions were designed with the intention of ensuring that the nature and variety of the questions were representative of the theoretical chapters in the study and the practical experience of the specific researcher.

The questionnaire consisted of 37 items relating to the identified examples of the field of tension between the DoE and the SGB of a public school, using Afrikaans as one of the media of instruction in the Free State province. Although the questions were divided into nine categories by the researcher, the individual questions were distributed in no particular order in the questionnaire, in an attempt to create a measure of objectivity. Respondents were required to complete the questionnaire by circling the appropriate number of their choice for each item on a six-point scale. The respondents were requested to base their choice on the extent to which they estimated the specific assumption contributed to a field of tension between the DoE and the SGBs of public schools.

Responses to the items were interpreted according to the nine categories postulated by the researchers in an attempt to identify the true sources of the field of tension. The categories were as follows:

- Different interpretations of the concepts management and control.
- Political beliefs and the practice of bureaucratic control.
- Lack of knowledge and uncertainty regarding the purpose and responsibilities of the school governing body.
- Mutual mistrust and weak relationships of trust.
- Lack of support and participation.
- The intrusion into and limitations placed on the powers of the school governing body.
- Different interpretations of education legislation.
- Inadequate communication.
- Differences concerning the conditions of the revised policy on religion in schools.

The questionnaire included biographical questions which were aimed at facilitating meaningful interpretation of the respondents' answers.

The questionnaire was developed in Afrikaans and English. As the schools where the questionnaires were to be distributed offered either Afrikaans as language of instruction or Afrikaans and English as languages of instruction in parallel- or dual-medium, it was expected that the respondents completing the questionnaire would be fluent in at least one of these languages and would therefore understand the instructions and the questions in the questionnaire correctly, and thus contribute to the reliability of the study to a certain extent. Respondents were also afforded the opportunity at the end of the questionnaire to name any other factors that could lead to a field of tension developing between the said two partners, which they thought had not been covered in the questionnaire.

Data analysis

The analysis attempted to identify underlying dimensions from the responses of respondents on the scaled items in the questionnaire. These dimensions were formulated based on high correlation between items.

Validity and reliability of the data-gathering instrument were ascertained as follows:

- A factor-analysis procedure was used to investigate the construct validity of the instrument concerning the examples of the field of tension.
- A Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) Test (0.911) and Bartlett Test (0.000) were used to measure the fitness for purpose and comprehensiveness of the research group, respectively.
- Item analysis utilising the Cronbach α reliability coefficient (> 0.7) indicated a high reliability for the instrument.

Findings of the empirical investigation

The research was undertaken in the specific context of schools in the Free State that utilized Afrikaans as the medium of instruction within the milieu of a new education dispensation in South Africa since 1994. Findings from this investigation should be considered accordingly.

Table 2 Extent to which respondents of school governing bodies were familiar with the content and conditions of the South African Schools Act (Act 84 of 1996)

Scale	N	%	Male		Female		
			N	%	N	%	
Not at all:	1	8	4.1	6	4.1	2	4.3
	2	31	16.1	18	12.2	13	28.3
	3	44	22.8	33	22.4	11	23.9
	4	62	32.1	53	36.1	9	19.6
	5	31	16.1	25	17.0	6	13.0
Completely:	6	17	8.8	12	8.2	5	10.9
Total	193	100.0	147	100.0	46	100.0	

It was found that members of the SGB were not sufficiently familiar with the content and conditions of the South African Schools Act (see Table 2). Lack of knowledge and uncertainty on the application and interpretation of the appropriate education act in practice was therefore inevitable and subsequently would lead to tensions developing with the author of the policy, namely, the Department of Education.

A disconcerting finding was that the majority of the 37 assumptions relating to the existence of a possible field of tension in the questionnaire were indeed rated by respondents, both separately and collectively, as aspects of the field of tension which exists to a great extent between the two partners (see Table 4). It was also noticeable that both the respondents from the SGBs and respondents from the DoE separately identified those items considered to contribute greatly to the tensions experienced. On consideration of these findings, it could be suggested that a clear indication of the mutual lack of trust and lack of positive inclination toward the other is evident.

Table 3 Items in the questionnaire grouped according to the factor analysis

Underlying dimensions	Factor	Item	Description
Interference by the state in the religious character of schools and implications for learners	1	D18	The new approach to religion as explicated in the revised policy on religion
		D24	Interference of the state through legislation in the democratic execution of the will of parents in the education of their children
		D25	When the curriculum concerning religious instruction propagates values and beliefs conflicting with the values and beliefs of communities with specific religious beliefs
		D30	Imposition of religious instruction according to the revised policy on religion without freedom of choice
		D34	Indoctrination of learners through the revised policy on religion
Lack of knowledge and uncertainty amongst partners in education about Education Act as a result of a lack of training which leads to mistrust, inadequate communication and misinterpretation	2	D5	Mistrust between the DoE and SGB
		D6	Confusion between departmental officials and members of SGB caused by breaks between education policy and the application thereof in practice
		D8	Differences in interpretation between the DoE and SGB
		D9	Ineffective functioning of communication channels between the DoE and SGB
		D11	Uncertainty of the DoE and SGB about what the management function of schools entails
		D12	Lack of knowledge of partners in education concerning the content and conditions of the South African Schools Act
Inadequate collaboration and support by role players in the education process which undermines mutual faith and loyalty and is mutually experienced as a lack of transparency	3	D14	When good faith in SGB becomes questionable
		D23	Lack of departmental support for SGB
		D27	Role players in the education process are uncertain as to what exactly their duties and responsibilities involve
		D32	If SGB should experience victimization by the DoE
		D33	Lack of mechanisms to facilitate a partnership between the DoE and SGB

Table 3 Continued

Underlying dimensions	Factor	Item	Description
Ill-considered actions by the Department of Education concerning the education act and the interpretation of regulations in an attempt to interfere with the powers of the SGBs	4	D7	Perceptions that the DoE wishes to unilaterally curtail the powers of SGBs
		D17	Precipitous and emotional actions by the DoE without consequent and consistent application of education act and regulations
Inequitable distribution of power in the mutual relationship in the long term	5	D13	When good faith in the DoE becomes questionable
		D16	When it is experienced that the state wields too much power in the partnership with SGB
		D20	When the DoE does not devolve legitimate authority of SGB to school level
		D28	The realities of the vision for the future of education in South Africa of the current government
Deliberate abstention from collaboration by SGBs and an unwillingness to adapt to change	6	D15	When all role players in the education process do not sincerely commit themselves to adapt to change
		D19	The unilateral preferment of their own school's interest without concern for departmental guidelines by SGB
		D21	Lack of knowledge of SGB concerning existing departmental structures
		D22	SGBs that ignore departmental training sessions concerning their responsibilities and duties

The fact that the respondents from the SGBs experienced this field of tension more intensely than the respondents of the Free State DoE should be considered against the growing mistrust between the two partners owing to the fear of the curtailment of the powers of SGBs becoming a reality. This polemic is currently receiving much media attention and is creating additional tension according to the researcher.

The various items were grouped into six factors by means of a factor analysis, each with an own identified underlying dimension (see Table 3).

Table 4 Item analysis: rank order of items pertaining to the field of tension between the SGBs of public schools and the DoE in the Free State province

Rank Position	Respondents											
	Collectively				SGBs				DoE			
	Item	N	\bar{x}	SD	Item	N	\bar{x}	SD	Item	N	\bar{x}	SD
1	D17	229	5.26	1.181	D16	194	5.41	0.896	D15	35	4.71	1.319
2	D16	229	5.19	1.107	D17	194	5.39	1.013	D36	35	4.69	1.157
3	D7	229	5.18	1.318	D7	194	5.36	1.193	D22	35	4.69	1.367
4	D24	229	5.08	1.275	D24	194	5.32	1.053	D21	35	4.54	1.400
5	D36	229	5.00	1.058	D32	194	5.13	1.235	D17	35	4.54	1.704
6	D32	229	4.92	1.441	D36	194	5.05	1.032	D19	35	4.40	1.499
7	D28	229	4.88	1.277	D28	194	5.02	1.149	D27	35	4.29	1.384
8	D25	229	4.83	1.354	D25	194	5.01	1.238	D9	35	4.23	1.330
9	D5	229	4.81	1.273	D20	194	5.00	1.101	D7	35	4.23	1.573
10	D13	229	4.79	1.323	D13	194	4.97	1.185	D4	34	4.18	1.218
11	D20	229	4.77	1.302	D5	194	4.95	1.168	D10	35	4.17	1.599
12	D30	229	4.74	1.527	D30	194	4.95	1.391	D28	35	4.14	1.665
13	D9	229	4.73	1.273	D23	194	4.84	1.243	D3	35	4.11	1.451
14	D15	228	4.69	1.284	D9	194	4.82	1.244	D5	35	4.03	1.543
15	D23	229	4.69	1.327	D33	194	4.81	1.132	D14	35	4.03	1.543
16	D33	229	4.67	1.265	D14	194	4.76	1.349	D16	35	3.97	1.361
17	D14	229	4.65	1.402	D6	194	4.75	1.206	D2	35	3.91	1.380
18	D3	229	4.62	1.454	D3	194	4.71	1.439	D18	35	3.91	1.483
19	D4	227	4.60	1.153	D15	193	4.69	1.282	D8	35	3.89	1.549
20	D6	229	4.60	1.296	D18	193	4.69	1.379	D25	35	3.86	1.556
21	D18	228	4.57	1.420	D4	193	4.67	1.128	D33	35	3.86	1.630
22	D27	220	4.55	1.325	D31	194	4.60	1.192	D23	35	3.83	1.465
23	D8	229	4.49	1.303	D8	194	4.60	1.227	D1	35	3.80	1.511
24	D1	229	4.48	1.340	D1	194	4.60	1.272	D13	35	3.80	1.605
25	D31	229	4.46	1.299	D27	194	4.60	1.312	D6	35	3.77	1.477
26	D2	229	4.27	1.303	D34	194	4.50	1.451	D29	35	3.77	1.477
27	D34	228	4.27	1.595	D2	194	4.34	1.282	D24	35	3.74	1.559
28	D11	229	4.07	1.434	D11	194	4.18	1.362	D32	35	3.71	1.872
29	D10	229	4.05	1.483	D10	194	4.03	1.464	D12	35	3.69	1.388
30	D29	229	3.90	1.550	D29	194	3.93	1.565	D31	35	3.66	1.571
31	D26	229	3.79	1.613	D26	194	3.85	1.602	D30	35	3.60	1.752
32	D12	229	3.74	1.312	D12	194	3.75	1.301	D35	35	3.51	1.652
33	D19	229	3.74	1.600	D19	194	3.62	1.593	D26	35	3.51	1.669
34	D21	228	3.73	1.533	D21	193	3.58	1.512	D20	35	3.49	1.579
35	D22	229	3.65	1.593	D22	194	3.46	1.561	D11	35	3.49	1.687
36	D35	229	3.34	1.597	D35	194	3.31	1.589	D34	34	2.97	1.766
37	D37	229	2.97	1.708	D37	194	2.99	1.726	D37	35	2.83	1.618

- Factor 1: Interference by the state in the religious character of schools and implications for learners.
- Factor 2: Lack of knowledge and uncertainty amongst partners in educa-

tion about the education act as a result of a lack of training, which leads to mistrust, inadequate communication and misinterpretation.

Factor 3: Inadequate collaboration and support by role players in the education process, which undermines mutual faith and loyalty and is mutually experienced as a lack of transparency.

Factor 4: Ill-considered actions by the DoE concerning the education act and the interpretation of regulations in an attempt to interfere with the powers of the SGBs.

Factor 5: Inequitable distribution of power in the mutual relationship in the long term.

Factor 6: Deliberate abstention from collaboration by SGBs and an unwillingness to adapt to change.

Table 5 Analysis of mean scale scores of respondents collectively

Factor		Item				Cronbach α	K M O	Bartlett
No.	\bar{x}	No.	N	\bar{x}	SD			
1	4.70	D18	227	4.57	1.423	0.835		
		D24	227	5.09	1.271			
		D25	227	4.85	1.345			
		D30	227	4.74	1.534			
		D34	227	4.26	1.594			
2	4.41	D5	229	4.81	1.273	0.828		
		D6	229	4.60	1.296			
		D8	229	4.49	1.303			
		D9	229	4.73	1.273			
		D11	229	4.07	1.434			
3	4.70	D12	229	3.74	1.312	0.800	0.911	0.000
		D14	229	4.65	1.402			
		D23	229	4.69	1.327			
		D27	229	4.55	1.325			
		D32	229	4.92	1.441			
4	5.22	D33	229	4.67	1.265	0.697		
		D7	229	5.18	1.318			
		D17	229	5.26	1.181			
5	4.91	D13	229	4.79	1.323	0.838		
		D16	229	5.19	1.107			
		D20	229	4.77	1.302			
		D28	229	4.88	1.277			
6	3.95	D15	227	4.69	1.287	0.767		
		D19	227	3.74	1.604			
		D21	227	3.72	1.528			
		D22	227	3.63	1.584			

An evaluation of the findings of this investigation pointed to the following underlying core problems that needed immediate attention, as conditions for the renewed development of a healthy relationship and a mutual partnership between the SGBs of public schools in the Free State and the DoE in the Free State:

- Mutual mistrust of each other's motives.
- Lack of knowledge about the content and conditions of the SASA.
- Inadequate communication and misinterpretation of education law and legislation.
- Lack of transparency and ill-considered actions by the DoE.
- Lack of support for SGBs.
- Application of education law in practice which is not in accordance with the conditions of the SASA.
- SGBs' fears of interference by the state relating to their powers.
- SGBs' apparent deliberate refusal to adapt to the new changes in the education system.

Proposed resolutions

A major finding of this investigation was that the mutual mistrust between the SGBs of public schools and the DoE in the Free State was the most important factor that led to the existence of a field of tension between the two partners in education. In the light of this finding it could be prudent to arrange a provincial *indaba* with the express purpose of assuring one another of mutual good faith and trust.

This *indaba* should also be attended by the respective governing body associations and unions and should preferably be facilitated by a competent independent facilitator and should be initiated by the DoE as the policy maker, particularly in its role in a typical constitutional state. The state will thus have an opportunity to demonstrate its good intentions and trustworthiness as an honest attempt to address issues related to the existing field of tension in the interests of orderly school governance at the base level. A separate Directorate: School Management and Governance exists at the national education level, namely, the Education Management and Governance Directorate (EMGD). This came into being in 1999 at the insistence of FEDSAS, a National Consultative Forum (NCF) at national level, with the explicit purpose of resolving conflict situations. A statutory Council of Governing Bodies was also created earlier by the Free State DoE as an extension of the said Directorate: School Management and Governance.

In this regard it would be expedient for the Free State DoE to seriously consider the idea of duplicating the national-level functional NCF (National Consultative Forum) at provincial level, in an attempt to create a body which could address and resolve possible tension situations. Such a forum could be called a Provincial Consultative Forum (PCF). It would be important to ensure that all interest groups are represented as equal partners on such a forum. Reaching decisions by consensus rather than by majority would also be an essential principle to be accepted as it would immediately level the playing

fields and reaffirm mutual trust. This initiative should also ensure regular and direct communication between SGBs and the DoE. The fact that much of the communication between these two partners has taken place in the media of late is not conducive to healthy relationships and will inevitably lead to mistrust and suspicion-mongering.

Newly elected governing bodies and departmental officials who are involved with school governance at school level should be trained in the content and conditions of the SASA, and about what their respective duties and responsibilities entail. Although members of SGBs cannot be compelled to undergo such training, it would be in the best interests of education if governing body organizations could encourage their members to attend these training opportunities. Continually revisiting changes in education legislation and refreshing memories of members on their application in practice is also essential. The training of school governing body members and departmental officials should be of a high standard and should be presented professionally. Contracting of expert trainers who are knowledgeable on all aspects of school governance by the DoE is of the utmost importance in this regard. Ensuring professional and meaningful training should assure sound knowledge and practical competence for those being trained.

Considering that SGBs are constituted, for the greater part, of parental representatives from different cultural groups, it becomes apparent that mutual differences between members in respect of language, knowledge, skills, and so on, will be inevitable. These differences should be considered when implementing training opportunities for SGBs. Training should be designed to accommodate different groups in SGBs and trainers should be informed beforehand of these differences, abilities, and skills of the group to be trained, to ensure full participation and development for all. During such training sessions mutual agreement should be reached concerning interpretations of the education law in question and the application of these conditions and regulations in practice. We would also strongly recommend that developers of school governance attend the training with the members of the SGBs they service, to stimulate mutual trust and positive disposition towards one another.

SGBs should also continually guard against the view that in practice education law is subversive to the rights of SGBs. The DoE on the other hand must guard against their actions and decisions being seen as encroaching on the rights and powers of the SGBs as this would inevitably lead to SGBs becoming less involved and less committed to the relationship, which would have catastrophic consequences for education and governance in schools.

Of critical importance is the communication between SGBs and the parent body of the school they represent. Each and every school governing body should commit themselves to ensuring that these communication channels and opportunities are continually monitored, revised and improved to defuse possible conflict situations well before they arise. The governing bodies are after all accountable to the parents of whom they are the chosen representatives.

This study has once again accentuated the critical need to eradicate the sense of mistrust which may exist between the DoE and the SGBs. Every effort should be made to re-establish a sense of mutual trust between the parties before any of the above-named strategies are even considered. Without a sense of mutual trust and understanding prevailing, any attempt at long term solutions may prove futile.

Conclusion

The challenge, faced by those involved in the education system and more specifically officials of the DoE and members of the SGBs, is not to allow mutual and apparently insurmountable differences to cripple the education system in South Africa. Although differences about education management and governance will always exist, these differences should be addressed in a transparent, professional manner in order to benefit all the partners in education, as well as the dynamic education process itself.

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