


Fall 2010

# From Failing to Effective: A Case Study of Transformational Leadership and Teaching at a Township High School in Durban, South Africa

Kathlyn Pattillo  
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**FROM FAILING TO EFFECTIVE:  
A CASE STUDY OF TRANSFORMATIONAL LEADERSHIP AND TEACHING  
AT A TOWNSHIP HIGH SCHOOL IN DURBAN, SOUTH AFRICA**

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South Africa: Social and Political Transformation

Fall 2010

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## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

I would like to thank the following people for making this project possible:

John Daniel, Shola, and Langa for enabling me to see the real South Africa.

Gerard Boyce, my advisor, who provided me with critical wisdom from his own research in schools in Chatsworth.

Mama Pinky, who welcomed me into her home in Cato Manor. A Zulu teacher in a primary school in Umlazi, she helped me to better understand education reform in South Africa and inspired me to learn more about township schools and carry out this research.

Nkateko Chauke, who generously drove me to and from school and along the way, passionately shared her own experiences as a teacher at Menzi.

All of the teachers at Menzi who allowed me to observe their work and listen to their stories.

And finally, Felix Mshololo, whose dedication and commitment has allowed thousands of youth in Umlazi to have a better education. From his example, I have learned about persistence, drive and empathy. Leaders like him make me believe that a better South Africa is possible.

## **ABSTRACT**

Research has documented what leadership qualities are necessary to improve an under-performing disadvantaged school in South Africa. This research has called for further study of effective township schools in order to understand what makes them succeed. This research project will offer a case study of one such school's transformation from low to high quality. Menzi High School, an entirely African, under-resourced township school in Umlazi, has achieved extraordinarily high matric pass rates despite the fact that the majority of learners live in informal settlements. The school's success is due to the strong leadership of a principal who has led the school for the past twenty years. By enabling a complete shift in the school's 'culture' and pedagogy in order to foster high achievement, hard working and commitment to learning, he brought the school's matric pass rate from 26% to 92% in eight years. This ethnographic case study documents that process and identifies the key steps taken by Mshololo as he transformed Menzi from a failing to an effective school. While most previous studies researching school quality limit their fieldwork to either school leadership or teachers and compare multiple schools, this case study is unique in that it integrates the perspectives of leadership, teachers and learners and details the experience of one specific school in depth. The study outlines the strategies that enabled Menzi's improvement, including learner-centered pedagogy, effective time management and a relentless effort to improve teacher quality. The school's success is then placed within the context of education reform in South Africa, to document the case of one effective township school, its strong-willed principal and their relationship with the Department of Education.

## **INTRODUCTION**

At the start of 2008, newspapers and cable news channels in South Africa were focused around the issue of education. With the old, apartheid-era curriculum being completely phased out, that year's matric class would be the first to graduate having gone through high school with a curriculum entirely centered around C2005, or as most teachers called it, outcomes-based education. They were expected to fail miserably. Before the year's matric results were released, officials from the Department of Education warned that they expected 60,000 learners to fail, for the results to be worse than any other year due to the changes (Teacher B 2010). The old curriculum had hidden poor performance by categorizing learners according to different standards, enabling some schools to cheat the system by identifying more students as standard grade rather than higher grade. With the new

curriculum, all categories would be gone, and all grade 12's would be compared against each other. The 2008 matric would be a test of which schools were truly effective and which were just cheating the system. The day marked a watershed moment in the history of education in South Africa, as it was the culmination of twelve years of drastic changes. The country's disparate departments of education had been united in 1996 and C2005 had been implemented over the past ten years. The media heightened the expectations for failure by predicting dire results. On the day matric scores were to be released, journalists gathered at Menzi High School, on the crest of a hill in Umlazi township. Historically African, under-resourced, with a high-poverty body of learners, the school had somehow managed to achieve high pass rates on matric for the past ten years, always above 92%. The media and the country was sure that schools like this, with a majority of poor African learners, would undoubtedly fail under the new curriculum. Television crews and journalists wanted to be at Menzi to document the learners' and teachers' reactions to the news; they were sure that though the school had managed to succeed, surely it was due to some kind of cheating of the system and the school would flounder under the new curriculum. To their surprise, that year Menzi's matric class passed at a rate of 97.8%. All the video cameras documented that day were smiling faces. Because the entire student body and teachers are African, according to the predictions of the Department of Education, many learners should have failed. Instead, almost all of the matric class, a group of over 100 learners, passed and many would be going on to university. The 2008 results proved that Menzi's staff was effective despite what national policies were thrown at them. That day provoked the question: when so many township schools are failing, what is this school doing right? This case study aims to answer that question.

Menzi High School is a historically African school in Umlazi township. From 1990 to 2010, the school experienced a complete turnaround in quality, from an extremely low matric pass rate of 26% to close to 100% today. This reform coincided with the tenure of Felix Mshololo, who has been principal of the school for the past twenty years. For the past ten years, the school's matric class has passed at a rate close to 100%. The school's student body is predominantly African, it is located in a township and it is under-resourced, so according to the statistics it should be failing; however, the school is actually providing an education comparable to that of the best Model C schools. Menzi High School offers a perfect case study because the school has made exceptional improvement that is entirely the result of a powerful will and motivation to change building from within the inside, not as the result of

any outside initiative or policy. Newspaper articles in *the Mercury* and *the Sunday Times* have lauded Principal Mshololo's success. His school was visited by the President of India in 2004 and received brand new science labs worth 200,000USD from that same president in 2006. It has been acclaimed as an outstanding example of the kind of changes that department of education officials want to see occur in other rural and township schools across the country. Yet the department of education has not conducted a study of Menzi High School in order to find out what Mshololo has done right, so that the successes of the school can be replicated throughout the system. Let me be clear that success is defined according to matric rates, currently the only measure publicly available by which to measure the quality of secondary schools. In this context, I will utilize the definition of Mampuru: "A successful school is one in which learners progress further than might be expected with due consideration of its intake" (Mampuru 2003:1). Success is defined relatively. Menzi High School is deemed successful in comparison to other township schools in Umlazi and even amongst Model C schools because of the school's matric scores. For example, in the province of KwaZulu-Natal where Menzi High School is located, the average matric percentage passes in the years 2007, 2008 and 2009 were 63.8%, 57.8% and 61.1%. Menzi's matric pass rates in those years were 95.8%, 97.8% and 98.96%.

This case study will document the key steps taken by Principal Mshololo over the past twenty years that facilitated a process of reform and enabled the school's transformation. The case study will involve in-depth analysis of the school's process of transformation over the past two decades and the factors that enabled it to improve. The study will not only ask teachers and leadership what makes their school successful now, but also what made their school become that way over time. The researcher hopes to learn about the kind of 'culture' within a school that incentivizes effective teachers to stay and teach disadvantaged students when they could easily quit. In particular, the study will analyze the leadership qualities of Principal Mshololo and his unique role in the school's progress. The literature offers helpful findings concerning theories of leadership and the determinants of improvement, which the case study will examine in light of the particular experience of Principal Mshololo. The study will profile the relationship between a principal and teachers within a disadvantaged township school, and how despite a lack of financial resources, his leadership enabled them to be more effective teachers. The study will aim to explain why, in a system where many principals are failing to improve their schools, Felix Mshololo transformed Menzi High. No one has done research at Menzi before, and few newspaper articles have mentioned the

school. The experience of Menzi is a story that needs to be told because it offers insight into the Department of Education's strategy to affect change in failing township schools.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

Over the past fifteen years there have been a great deal of reforms to the education system in South Africa. Due to historical inequities in the way the system treated blacks, whites, Indians and coloureds, the department of education has had to try to completely change the system in order to rectify inequalities. They have largely failed at the task. Schools in townships, that serve predominantly black populations of learners, are still on the whole of a worse quality than former Model C schools. Though researchers know what kind of school environment will make good teachers stay, and the importance of strong leadership in fostering that 'culture' of effective learning, most township schools are still far from that ideal environment. The literature identifies a need to shift away from a traditional notion of financial and physical resources towards a more intangible notion of the human resources and skills that are necessary for a school to succeed. This literature review will assess the research on efforts to improve high schools in South African townships. I use the terms 'new school' approach and 'intervention' approach to distinguish between the main two types of whole-school reforms. I then identify a research gap and argue for additional research to document a third type of reform, the 'transformation' approach, to better understand the context of township schools that have been able to improve themselves without outside intervention. I make the case for a more in-depth look at outliers, or effective township secondary schools, in order to understand not only how they manage to be successful today, but also the process of how they have become that way over time. It justifies the need for a case study of Menzi High School, a township secondary school that fits that profile. By studying the context of Menzi's transformation from poor to high quality, we can better comprehend the incentives for poor quality schools to improve themselves and the factors that hinder or help them along the way.

### **The State of Township Schools Today**

In 1954, Prime Minister Verwoerd outlined a policy shift to implement Bantu Education, arguing that education should prepare blacks for their subordinate place in society. Decades later, in a rally in March 1990 in front of 80,000 students, Nelson Mandela recognized the resounding effect of Bantu Education and the crucial role of education to South Africa's future, saying, "education is a major factor in the liberation struggle—without



education you can forget about liberation.” Both men realized the power of education to enable or suppress future leaders. The political dispensation post-apartheid tried to improve the widespread of education for blacks by making a substantial financial commitment to public education. This is still apparent today in the fact that South Africa’s government spends a greater percentage of its budget on education than any other country in Africa. It is estimated that over R1 billion is spent each year on school improvement programs in the country (Taylor 2006:68).

Despite an array of government reforms, including curriculum changes, school governance policies, feeding schemes, modification of teacher education programs and most recently, salary increases, the majority of historically African schools are still not performing comparatively to their Model C peers. There is an endless amount of research detailing how the policies of the South African department of education have failed. Most exhaustive is the book *Changing Class*, published in 2005, which explains why C2005/OBE and other ambitious national policies were unsuccessful. The key reason was that leaders in the Department of Education focused too much on the details of written policy, and not enough on the implementation of policy. In the process of being translated down to students, the reforms became ineffective because teachers were not empowered with the skills to carry out the reform (Harley and Wedekind 2005). Additionally, the divide between high-performing (largely Model C) schools and low performing (usually township and rural schools) is explained due to the disparities in access to financial resources and human capital between the two. The overall effect of Bantu Education, combined with the post-apartheid government’s reforms, is that teaching profession in South Africa is no longer a well-respected one. Professor Johan Wasserman, a professor at UKZN graduate school of education, admits that of the graduates of his program, less than half continue teaching a few years beyond graduation. Many high quality teachers leave the profession because they do not feel supported or rewarded for their work. The Department of Education has focused on increasing the pressure at the matric level and on improving institutions of higher education, with less pressure on the learning environment within schools at all grade levels. This is the most crucial problem because ultimately, all the curriculum changes, interventions and infrastructure renovations do not matter if the quality of teaching inside the classroom is still low. The crux of the problem lies in the environment within most historically disadvantaged, under-resourced schools and the lack of support that exists for effective teachers.

The environment within the majority of government schools is not conducive to

learning. According to a report by the Institute for Justice and Reconciliation in 2006, “close to 80 per cent of South Africa’s schools are essentially dysfunctional” (Taylor 2006:80). A child in South Africa has less than a .01% chance of graduating from university. A student’s quality of education is still largely correlated with their parent’s level of income. The legacy of apartheid means that if you are black and poor, you will most likely go to a school where you have over 40 students in a classroom and on the first day of primary school, you have a 32% chance of graduating 12 years later. The majority of schools “are not able to counteract key effects of poverty on educational performance” (Folscher 2006:61). Poverty provides obstacles to a quality education that include the following: “The learners are often hungry and ill; do not have proper clothing; lack study facilities, parental support, study motivation, self-esteem and language proficiency; and move frequently from school to school” (Kamper 2008:2). Schools with poorer student bodies tend to charge lower school fees, which means that they usually have less financial resources for classroom renovations, limited resources for teachers and fewer number of teachers, leading to larger class sizes (all factors that contribute to lower matric pass rates) (Phurutse 2005:13). Many schools in disadvantaged environments collect fees from less than half of the students enrolled (Sailors et al. 2007:370). To compound these issues, there is an acute teacher shortage in the country, particularly in the hard-to-staff schools in rural areas and townships. At the same time, South Africa exports thousands of teachers abroad every year to countries such as the UK. The teachers that do stay are angry and frustrated with the education system, as can be seen from the 3-week long strike in September of this year.

### **The Ideal Learning Environment**

Research has sufficiently conceptualized the ideal that the Department of Education should be striving for: a school that provides sufficient mentoring and support for quality teachers. *Beginner Teachers in South Africa*, published in 2009, contributes to that argument, by identifying the factors that determine whether a teacher is likely to remain teaching or leave the profession. These factors include: more incentives, working environment (class size, workload), drastic educational changes (curriculum changes), resources for teaching and learning, and supportive and caring management (Arends and Phurutse 2009:37). Chiefly, the book argues that the problem is not that new teachers are inadequately prepared to teach; rather, it is that they are not supported as they go about actually teaching. It asserts that one of DoE’s strategies for teacher retention, workshops led by district-level management, is not seen as beneficial by either beginner or experienced teachers (Arends and Phurutse 2009:31).

What is most important is the process of learning to teach that occurs in practice within schools themselves; not what teachers learn in university or through outside workshops (Arends and Phurutse 2009:6). Mentoring and support from other educators is the key determinant of why teachers decide to continue teaching or go (Arends and Phurutse 2009: 7). In conclusion, the researchers argue, “The study of teachers and teaching deserves much more attention than it has been given, particularly in the light of growing empirical evidence that good teaching makes a huge difference to learning, regardless of the socio-economic status of the learners” (Arends and Phurutse 2009:45). This case study heeds that call by offering an analysis of a school that has managed to retain effective teachers despite a lack of resources.

The literature also supports the assertion that in order to retain effective teachers, a school needs strong leadership. Botha, in particular, summarizes the past literature about the changing role of the principal in South Africa and underlines the importance of an effective principal in achieving the ideal learning environment in schools. He concludes that reforms such as C2005 and Whole-School Evaluation brought about a new concept of principalship that stressed a ‘new professionalism’ (Botha 2004:239). The principal should be less administrative and more focused on fostering an environment for effective teaching and learning. The responsibilities in this role include knowledge about learners’ progress and learning styles, the context and background of their learners and knowledge about appropriate interventions (Botha 2004:240). The key, then, is how to reform the institutions of township schools with disadvantaged learners in order to foster the support necessary to retain effective teachers and strong school leadership.

### **Improvement Efforts Imposed from the Outside**

The literature has widely documented efforts to target populations of disadvantaged students and create this ideal learning environment. One method, which I term the ‘New School’ approach, is to start a completely different kind of school that does not have to deal with the burden of an existing ‘culture’ of learning. Examples such as the LEAP schools in Cape Town and Johannesburg have shown that with the freedom to create a new environment from scratch, talented educators can effectively teach disadvantaged students. Similar approaches have been applied globally, particularly in the United States. Paul Tough’s book *Whatever it Takes* details the work of Geoffrey Canada and the Harlem Children’s Zone in New York, which includes a network of brand new schools working with kids from low-income backgrounds. The KIPP charter network (Knowledge is Power Program) is also

lauded as a successful model for new schools that effectively teach disadvantaged students and enable them to succeed. However, it is unrealistic to think that new schools can be created wherever the current schools are failing. A much more fiscally responsible approach is to look at the schools that already exist to figure out how they can be improved. The ‘new schools’ have been beneficial for existing schools, in that they have been laboratories for innovation; they can try methods that might be too risky for an existing school and as a result, can develop best practices that can eventually be utilized in existing schools. They have also helped to inform the literature about what it takes for disadvantaged students to succeed.

Many of the reforms implemented by the Department of Education in South Africa could be considered part of the ‘Intervention’ approach. Taylor documents the effect of one such effort, the Dinaledi project, which aimed to improve schools’ performance through the imposition of changes from above by the government. He focuses on the impact of the policy, concluding that while some schools proved amenable to changes and showed rapid improvement, other schools did not benefit from the intervention at all. Those schools, he writes, “are able to absorb all resources directed towards them without showing any signs of the slightest improvement” (Taylor 2003:70). He posits that time management is a major problem in 85 percent of South African schools, and that curriculum changes and other reforms cannot be made without addressing time management first (Taylor 2003:71). Taylor’s major contribution is the identification of a fundamental problem at the heart of many South African education reforms; they assume that policy in writing will be rationally, effectively implemented by stakeholders within the schools themselves. This ignores the fact that many schools do have ineffective leadership, which will prevent any reform. Only a small percentage of schools have the qualities necessary for change. Similarly, Sailors et al. look at the effects of the Learning for Living project, implemented by READ Educational Trust, and identify the qualities that made some schools more responsive to the intervention than others. They utilized documents from project monitoring reports, interviews with school leadership and teachers, and extensive time observing schools and classrooms, particularly reading lessons. Their findings can be summarized in the following: safe environment, strong leadership, excellent teachers, “shared competence, pride and purpose,” and community involvement (Sailors et al. 2007:376). Both Taylor and Sailor et al. analyze ‘Intervention’ approaches and contribute to the growing body of literature that pinpoints what qualities make some schools more capable of improvement than others; chiefly, they argue that school leadership with effective time management, more than any other factor, is the determinant of

a school's capacity to improve.

Other researchers have analyzed interventions and concluded that in order to be effective, the will to change needs to come from within a school organically, rather than imposed from the outside. Bisschoff and Mathye analyze the government policy of IQMS assessment, and discuss what determines the policy's success or failure when implemented in schools. IQMS, or Integrated Quality Management System, is the appraisal policy meant to promote personal evaluation amongst teachers and emphasize effective performance (Bisschoff and Mathye 2009:394). They contend that workshops facilitated by DoE, specifically around the IQMS project, were ineffective because, "The success of any performance system is based on a sense of ownership by those affected" (Bisschoff and Mathye 2009:10). Ownership can only be fully gained in a change process if stakeholders are working with a leader that they fully trust; this is contrasted with a leader coming in from the outside such as DoE administrators. Teachers are more likely to be committed to a change process when it involves their input. Swanepoel analyzes the government policy of School-Based Management and comes to a similar conclusion, writing, "It appears that the more teachers are involved in initiating and taking responsibility for school change, the more positive they feel about the change, and the more willing they are to engage in future change" (Swanepoel 2009:462). The literature shows that school transformation, if successful, has to come from within a school of the leadership and teachers' own accord, rather than from an initiative imposed by provincial or national officials. Both Bisschoff and Mathye and Swanepoel conclude that concrete factors such as salary increases, working conditions or tighter management of performance will not necessarily lead to an improvement in a school; it is intangible factors such as expectations, feedback and recognition of each individual staff member's needs that do. Swanepoel recognizes the importance of human capital, as opposed to financial capital or physical infrastructure. "You can eliminate the finest buildings and the most widely developed curriculum, but leave the learner with an intelligent, cultivated and humane educator and the educational process will continue satisfactorily" (Swanepoel 2009:464). Swanepoel also asserts the pivotal role of a principal in a school-based management approach, as they set "the tone and ethos of a school... He/she influences an educator's sense of job satisfaction, morale, loyalty to the organization, and level of motivation to do well" (Swanepoel 2009:463). In analyzing both IQMS and School-Based Management, researchers conclude that reforms only succeed if there is already effective leadership in a school. It is not a policy that dictates how well a school will perform; more

likely, performance will be a result of specific educators and their commitment or lack thereof. This justifies the need for more research about schools that improved without intervention, where the will to change came from school leadership itself; by further analyzing those schools, researchers can begin to understand just what factors do bring about school improvement organically.

Prew's discussion of the Soshanguve Township Development Project expands upon this importance of leadership and posits the impact of a principal's particular leadership style on a school's possibility for change. Prew asserts that it is the principal that is key to whether the school is effective or failing (Prew 2007). The goal of the Soshanguve Project was to foster more community involvement through incentive grants, community-based fundraising, and support from schools and interns from the UK. The Project aimed to introduce 'Western-style' development practices into the schools strengthen the district office in order to implement the changes in other schools. Prew argues that "principals of 'effective' schools communicate goals, share decision-making, create and articulate the school vision and support staff" (Prew 2008:449), and it is these schools that implemented the Project successfully. All the 'Intervention' approaches point to the need to look more closely at the environment within schools, particularly at the interactions between school leadership, teachers and learners.

### **Intangible Determinants of School Success in Disadvantaged Environments**

In order to better understand the environment within schools, researchers have asked the participants of the institutions themselves what makes their schools successful. Phurutse captures the perspectives of matric teachers in township schools in her 2006 research. She utilized an interpretive case study methodology, asking teachers why their learners succeeded or failed their matric exams. The key factors that emerged were commitment by teachers and learners, teachers who know their subject matter, inadequate teaching in lower grades and socio-economic conditions of the schools and learners (Phurutse 2006:219). However, an intangible quality separated those schools that succeeded from those that did not: whether teachers used their resources effectively. Her findings identified the importance of what occurs in the environment inside certain schools. She writes, "This paper supports...a shift away from conventional conceptions of resources—such as money, teachers' qualification and school facilities—toward particular instructional practices and organizational arrangements, and the actions, strategies, knowledge, skills and culture that teachers provide in relation to these resources. As one of the teachers argued, the effectiveness of resources

depends on their use in instruction” (Phurutse 2006:225). What is most important is the culture created within a school and the way that teachers utilize the resources available to them, not the overall amount of resources inputted into an educational system. Though South Africa spends a greater share of its GDP on education than any other continent in Africa, the country’s results are among the worst. It is crucial, then, to look beyond financial resources and identify those “institutional practices and organizational arrangements” that determine school success in high-poverty environments. My case study will attempt to identify these intangible determinants at Menzi High School.

Moloi et al. completed a similar study but targeted exceptional schools and asked learners why their schools are successful. The study pinpoints the key qualities necessary for success in the relationship between student and teacher, including high level of trust, motivation and dialogue, and interpersonal relationships among staff (Moloi et al 2010). Learners felt that their schools succeeded because teachers focused constantly on creating time where learners would have the opportunity to learn. The study concludes that it is existence of interaction and dialogue, the act of listening and responding between teacher and student, that is the reason for the schools’ success (Moloi et al. 2010:483). A continuous process of feedback and corrective action is necessary to achieve mutual acceptance between the two, which is necessary for the learner to learn effectively from their teacher (Moloi et al. 2010:486).

Kamper focuses on the perspectives of principals, as he writes case studies of effective leadership in four South African high-poverty schools in Gauteng, Free State, Stellenbaush and Pretoria. He identifies key traits, writing, “The main challenges for bringing about change are successively (1) rigorous intervention, (2) problem solving, (3) school development planning, (4) establishing a culture of continuous improvement, and (5) maintaining momentum through shared leadership” (Kamper 2008:4). (A more extensive list of his determinants can be found in Appendix A). Kamper’s findings are based upon interviews with principals of six schools, observations of school facilities and surroundings with photographs and field notes. He frames his research as a ‘leadership profile’ and utilizes invitational school leadership theory, the concept that principals communicate to their teachers that they are “able, responsible and worthwhile” (Kamper 2008:4). His characterization of effective principals can be summed up in the following:

The case studies highlight the principals’ passion for the upliftment of the poor, and their unshakable belief in the potential of high-poverty learners to excel

personally and academically...the prominent mechanisms for achieving success in high-poverty schools has to do with the case study principals' 'learning centred leadership'...their pastoral care for learners, teachers and parents; and their ability to think and act in a visionary way, to set and maintain high expectations in view of specific standards and norms, to inspire (not only motivate) others, to build team spirit and pride, and to seek and explore every possible opportunity, source and action to provide for meeting the schools' needs.

The effective schools placed the welfare and effectiveness of teachers as their top priority, and in return teachers were highly committed, willing to put in extra tuition over weekends and holidays and accept the necessity of close monitoring of their work (Kamper 2008:10). Overall, he concludes, "the true test of teacher excellence in the high-poverty school was the extent to which the learners experienced that the teachers truly cared for them" (Kamper 2008:10).

Mampuru also focuses on the viewpoint of leadership, writing case studies of four schools that have 'beaten the odds', pursuing the question, "Which factors determine school success in a disadvantaged environment?" (Mampuru 2003:3). His study compares four schools in Gauteng province and involves interviews with principals, heads of departments and SGB members. After reviewing the previous literature, he compiles a list of determinants for school success in disadvantaged environments (The full list of determinants can be found in Appendix B). He analyzes the concept of TQM (Total Quality Management) in practice within schools, which stresses continuous improvement in all sectors of a system (Mampuru 2003:5). He concludes, "the success of leaders lies in their ability to make activity meaningful; not to change behaviour, but to give others a sense of understanding of what they are doing" (Mampuru 2003:18). The study involves discussion of what makes an effective team, interactive communication, parental involvement, reflective teaching, consultative leadership and appraisal system. One of the major contributions of the study is its recognition of the power of expectations in a high-poverty school. "High expectations mean that the staff expects and demands more from learners than is typical of other schools serving similar populations. With time, the learners can perform more and more closely to the behaviour expected of them. Successful schools are characterized by efforts to set clear expectations and standards and to apply them uniformly" (Mampuru 2003:26). Both Kamper and Mampuru pinpoint exactly what qualities school leadership needs in order to succeed in disadvantaged environments. Overall, the literature on the environment of township schools has accurately identified the intangible factors that make a school amenable to change.



## The Research Gap

A tiny band of schools situated in the poorest communities provide some of the highest quality education. They are performing heroic deeds under difficult conditions, and serve as role models for the rest of the system. They should be prioritized for investment: unlike the situation in poorly functional schools, where resources are not used anywhere near optimally, these schools make the very best use of the limited resources at their disposal (Taylor 2006:88).

Past research tends to focus on what has gone wrong in the education system and not what has gone right. However, as Taylor asserts, there are schools that have managed to perform well despite immense challenges. There is a need to identify these ‘outliers’ and study their success in a more in-depth way. This follows a long tradition of researchers analyzing ‘outliers’ in order to analyze what they have done correctly. In 1971, Weber looked at outliers in inner-cities to disprove the thesis of the Coleman Report, which argued that children from disadvantaged backgrounds were inherently less able to learn than children from more affluent backgrounds. When he analyzed the outliers, he found that they all had similar features, including: “(a) a clear school mission; (b) effective instructional leadership and practices; (c) high expectations; (d) a safe, orderly, and positive environment; (e) ongoing curriculum improvement; (f) maximum use of instructional time; (g) frequent monitoring of student progress; and (h) positive home-school relationships” (Sailors et al. 2007:368). Though there has been extensive research about outliers in other areas of the world, particularly in the US, there has been limited study of the subject in South Africa. To contribute to that process, I will provide a case study of an ‘outlier’ that analyzes one South African school’s success.

The literature has documented what leadership qualities are necessary to make disadvantaged schools succeed. However, there is a need for further research to better understand the context of that success: to document the schools’ process of change, not just their current state. The report “How Schools Become Exemplary” written by the Achievement Gap Initiative at Harvard University explains the process of how fifteen low-performing schools in the US improved themselves (Ferguson et al 2010). That report, and others, finds that the most important indicator of the quality of teaching is the quality of school leadership. Ultimately, it is the culture of a school that is most important, the environment created within it, that determines whether an effective teacher will stay or go. Ferguson et al. brings together reports written by the school leadership at the schools themselves, documenting the process of how their schools improved over time. They provide

an in-depth look at each change process. There is a need for a similar research approach in South Africa. Researchers need to analyze not only the ‘New School’ and ‘Intervention’ approaches, but also the ‘Transformation’ approach, which stresses the importance of how schools transformed themselves over time without outside intervention.

The literature has shown what leadership qualities are necessary to make a school effective in a disadvantaged environment. Further research should investigate ‘outliers’, or effective township secondary schools, in order to understand the push factors that led to their improvement and what steps are needed to make their success attainable for all historically disadvantaged schools. This case study will do just that and build upon past research which concluded that it is the intangible environment and leadership style of a school that determines whether it succeeds or fails. The study will identify the determinants of one school’s success, just as Kamper and Mampuru did; it will be different in that it will analyze, in greater depth, the context of one school that is successful and how it is treated by the Department of Education. The case study will contribute a deeper understanding of the experience of leadership and teachers in Menzi High School, exploring only what makes the school successful today, but also how teachers reached that point—the school’s process of transformation—as well as the factors that will restrict or assist their future success. What happens when a school does achieve what is conceived as ‘success’ by the Department of Education? How are they rewarded or punished? Where is the incentive for ineffective schools to change? What are the incentives for high-performing teachers and school leaders—why did Mr. Mshololo change Menzi, when he could have easily not done so? By taking a closer look at what happens when a school does change, I can begin to understand why other schools do not.

## **METHODOLOGY**

This is an ethnographic case study in that it studies the ‘culture’ of teaching and learning amongst teachers at Menzi High School. My findings are primarily based off of qualitative research completed over the course of six days spent at the school. I utilized interviews, written surveys and observation of the school environment. The interviews ranged from 45 minutes to an hour, with a total of eight interviews as well as one group interview. The methodology involved:

1. Two interviews with principal (at beginning and end of research)
2. One interview with deputy principal

3. Two interviews with HOD's
4. Three interviews with teachers
5. One group interview with three matric learners
6. Written, anonymous, confidential surveys of nine teachers (2 beginner, 3 mid-career, 4 veteran, spanning all grades from 8-12)
7. Classroom observations (1 veteran teacher and 1 beginner teacher)
8. Observation of principal's routine for a day
9. Observation of school environment including physical infrastructure of offices, classrooms, staff rooms and interactions between students and teachers
10. Photographs of school
11. Document analysis of school documents, government documents and newspaper articles
12. Analysis of matric pass rates
13. Analysis of school budget

Overall, I spent six full days (from 7:15 am to 3 pm) at the school. I interviewed every member of the SMT (School Management Team) as well as three additional teachers and three learners. I chose two of the teachers because they had both attended teachers' college with Mshololo and could provide greater insight into his life and personal character. One had been an inspector for the Homeland Department of Education so he was able to place Menzi within the context of education reform in general. I chose the third teacher because she is a star teacher, chosen by the province to represent her subject on a national radio program for matric students. All interviews were tape-recorded and transcribed. For the classroom observations, I chose to observe a beginner teacher (in his first year) and a veteran teacher (who had been teaching for decades). I observed classrooms because I was interested in gaining greater insight into the pedagogy of the school and seeing how teachers cope with having more than sixty students in a classroom.

I chose to shadow Principal Mshololo my first day at the school. By observing his daily routine I learned a great deal about his leadership and the school that enabled me to prepare and ask more informed questions in my interviews. During my other days at the school, when not interviewing or observing classes, I spent time in the staff rooms doing my own work and talking informally with teachers. I observed their interactions with other teachers and students' interactions with one another at recess. The teaching staff and learners were aware of the purpose of my research because I had been introduced by Principal

Mshololo at an all-school assembly. By spending many hours at the school beyond the minimum amount required for my research, I was able to become more integrated into the school environment and observe everyday interactions that I would not have been able to see if I had just come into the school to do interviews. In this way, I gained information by watching interactions between the principal and teachers, which enabled me to prepare informed questions for my interviews. I believe the teachers were willing to talk about sensitive subjects such as the influence of the unions because they viewed me as non-threatening; I pursued sensitive in an informed way, based off of what I had already observed at the school.

Originally, I planned to do seven one-on-one interviews with twelve written surveys. I found that interviews were much more rich with valuable information than surveys, so I decided to add another interview with a teacher as well as a group interview with matric students to gain their perspective. The surveys were helpful in gathering basic information about class sizes, teachers' satisfaction and assessment procedures; they were less helpful in getting more in-depth opinions on complex issues. The interviews became richer as I moved deeper into the research and the questions varied depending upon the subject. In the first few interviews, I gathered more basic information about assessment processes and school leadership structures. In later interviews, I pursued information about more complex issues such as the school's relationship with unions and provincial policies. The interviews were open-ended and differed based upon what the teacher wanted to discuss, so the questions varied in each. I have chosen to refer to interviewees by their title rather than by name, due to the sensitive nature of the topics discussed. All teachers, HOD's and learners will be referred to by title. The deputy principal and principal have agreed to be referred to by name. Teachers who completed questionnaires will be referred to as survey respondents.

All information utilized in this paper, if not explicitly cited otherwise, comes from my own observations of the school, interviews and surveys of Menzi's staff. All quotes are from my own original research. This case study includes many quotations because I view my role as enabling Mshololo and the teachers at Menzi to tell their own story. I hope to integrate the perspectives of many stakeholders into a narrative that documents the story of the school and its extraordinary staff.

## LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

Similar to the methods of researchers discussed above, I will ask the participants of an institution why they believe that it works well. This is not the most objective approach, because my writing serves the purpose of giving a voice to the stakeholders of Menzi High School. It is the story told from the viewpoint of those on the inside. The case study is a micro level view, which can provide useful indications of what is going on at a macro level. However, the research may be biased in some ways because I did not interview Department officials. The teachers and leadership interviewed have their own biases about politics, which are reflected in the findings of the case study. Though this case study may not be objectively 'true' in the sense that it does not document the reality of what occurred at Menzi taking into account the complexity of both macro and micro level perspectives, it is 'true' in the sense that it aims to document a different sort of reality; what teachers believe happened, the narrative that they tell themselves about their school. Though the perspective of teachers and school leadership may be biased, they offer a sense of what people at the ground level in a township school think is happening. If they do exist, their biases can serve to illuminate the disparity between national policy and what is occurring at the level of implementation. By telling the story of Menzi's teachers, I hope to provide them with a mechanism to give feedback to the Department of Education about their experiences.

Most limitations to the study were due to time constraints. Though I aimed to interview every SMT member, I could only interview one deputy principal because the other deputy principal was on leave due to sickness. I would have liked to do a more systematic analysis of the teaching staff, to find out more about their qualifications and analyze whether that contributes to whether they are effective teachers. It would have been helpful to learn more about the hiring process, whether principals are allowed to choose their own teachers or whether they are provided with candidates by the department. Additional research on other high schools in Umlazi would have been helpful, in order to better understand Menzi's success in comparison to other schools. In order to fully understand Menzi's success, the reader must understand the leadership of Principal Mshololo. In my research I learned more about his personal background and analyzed what enabled him to become an effective leader, but could not include those findings in this report due to time constraints.

Other issues were that my research coincided with matric exams in November as well as the end of year exams, so I observed the school during an atypical time period. I attended classes and observed teachers as they reviewed for exams and took exams, not during normal

class times, which may have influenced my views of the school's culture. Another issue is that the qualitative nature of the research means that it is hard to know for sure how much of the improvement in the early 1990's was due to Mshololo and how much was due to decreased political violence in the township. It is impossible to answer this question for sure. In this study, I have relied on the recollections of teachers to tell the story and answer that question as best as they can.

## **BACKGROUND**

### **Menzi in Historical Context**

Menzi High School was the first high school built in Umlazi township. Before it was established, in 1965, the only matric classes offered to Africans in KZN were at boarding schools or missionary schools, with dominantly white teachers. Menzi considered an experiment, the first day school to offer matric classes for blacks in the entire province of KwaZulu-Natal. It was under the jurisdiction of the KwaZulu Department of Education, one of the country's eleven educational departments for the Bantu Homelands. As a result, historically it received less funding than white schools in the country's National Assembly, the Department of Education for whites.

Over the decades the school's performance varied according to whatever principal was in power, but in the 1980's it took a turn for the worse. The school was plunged into disorder and chaos. Due to the violence between Inkatha and ANC in the township, high schools in KZN became highly politicized zones that were not conducive to learning. One current student at Menzi, whose uncle graduated from the school in the late 1980's, says that the year his uncle graduated, only 5 students in the entire graduating class passed the matric exam (Learner A 2010). A teacher who has taught at Menzi since 1986 says that when she arrived at the school, so many learners had left school that there were only grades 11 and 12. During those years, "Learners do whatever they like, and the results were very poor" (Ntombela 2010). A current HOD, who has taught at Menzi since 1986, says that the years before 1990 were "a time of riots...the learners...didn't even care what we were saying" (HOD A 2010). The violence in the township made it impossible for teachers to impose discipline in the classroom, let alone teach students effectively.

According to a few veteran teachers, the female principal in the early 1980's was not strict and did nothing to help the situation. A man took over the position of acting principal in 1986 when the woman retired, but he was no better. According to the current deputy

principal, he “had no backbone” and teachers were afraid to even come to school because learners threatened to rape them (Ntombela 2010). She and the other female teachers grew so frustrated that they wrote a letter of complaint to the Department and he was demoted in 1989. The school ran without a principal for six months, until a new principal, Felix Mshololo, was appointed mid-year in 1990. The deputy principal says she and the other female teachers were glad to finally have a new principal who seemed to want to change things. “When they gave us a person who is willing to work, we were excited. We wanted someone who will help us to improve our school” (Ntombela 2010). And improve the school he did. Over the course of the next twenty years, he would work with the school leadership team to completely turn the school’s performance around. Looking back on that year, the principal says that he faced a mammoth task. When he arrived at Menzi, it had run without a principal for 6 months and had devolved into chaos. Alongside the violence in the township, the school’s main obstacles were the poverty of its students and its lack of financial resources from the Department.

### **Challenges to Improvement**

The issue of poverty was apparent in 1990 when Mshololo arrived and is still one of Menzi’s toughest challenges today. Teachers say that historically, most of the school’s students have come from disadvantaged backgrounds. Mshololo estimates that currently, 75% of the school’s student body lives in informal settlements (Mshololo 2010). They come from around the township, from neighborhoods with high unemployment rates, often from single or no-parent households. One HOD estimates that over a quarter of the school’s students come to school not having eaten, some for days at a time. She accounts the kind of conversation that she has frequently with students:

You find that the child is sick, she or he says ‘I’m sick, I’m having a headache, I’m having stomachaches.’ When you ask, ‘did you eat this morning?’ ‘No.’ ‘When last did you eat?’ ‘About two days ago. I didn’t eat yesterday. I didn’t have supper. There was no food.’ And you’re just stressed out. Its not even one—maybe it would be better if it was one learner—but you find that there are many in the class who are having the same problem. And some of them...they come to school with no shoes, wearing shoes with holes underneath. Wearing uniforms torn (HOD B 2010).

Teachers at Menzi try to overcome these poverty-related issues through their school policies, but there is only so much they can do with the limited amount of resources available to them. They care about their students’ welfare and are extremely dedicated, but that commitment can only go so far. To address the issue of hungry students, in past years the principal has

used some of the school's resources to buy bread and butter for students to eat during the mid-day break. During the second break, some students go to another school to a 'Noa' Program where they can receive samp or soup and bread. However, one HOD says that this year the principal was forced to discontinue the lunch provision at Menzi because of financial constraints (HOD B 2010). The 'Noa' Program only runs a few days a week so most days many students still come to school hungry, which teachers say is a factor that makes learning extremely difficult. Though over the past twenty years, Mshololo and his staff have found strategies to enable some of their students to succeed, they still point to poverty in the home environment of learners as one of the key challenges they face.

The majority of Menzi's learners come from disadvantaged environments, but the school is also disadvantaged financially as well. Despite provincial policies that are supposed to achieve equity in funding for suburban, township and rural schools, high schools such as Menzi face crippling challenges due to a lack of resources from the department. The school charges R220 a year for school fees, but Mshololo and other teachers estimate that usually 50-60% of the learners do not pay because they cannot afford it. Money from school fees, coupled with funding provided by the department, is supposed to cover all of the school's costs excluding salaries, which are paid directly to teachers by the department of education. Menzi is classified as a quintile 4 school, which theoretically means that it is a relatively well-resourced school (out of 5 quintiles, from high-poverty at 1 to well resourced at 5). Mshololo argues that this quintile ranking does not adequately take into account the actual situation of the learners at Menzi.

I always say the formula that is used, the criteria is wrong, because to me, the school should not be seen as the physical structures. The school should be seen as the stakeholders. Now the people who are the learners and parents for this school are very poor. So they should be classified, say as quintile 3 or quintile 2. But now because the criteria that they use is, structurally, they look at the physical structures situation more than the economic position of the people in that particular institution. So we find ourselves being in the higher ranks (Mshololo 2010).

Menzi is a Non Section 21 school, which means that the Provincial department of education allocates the amounts of funding for specific purposes and that the school can only procure goods and services through the department. Only Section 21 schools manage their own finances. In total, R421,418.46 is allocated to the school from the province, which is combined with R116,380 from school fees to make up the school's total annual budget. The province's allocations are not always enough to meet the school's needs. For example, the Province allocates R42,141 for 'Domestic and Security Services', but Menzi has to pay



20,450 for a night watchman each year, along with a private security for patrol, which costs 8,000 a year. Because the school is located in a high-poverty area, there is a great deal of crime and the school needs additional protection.

Additionally, the overall physical infrastructure of the school is poor, as the original buildings have not been renovated since they were first built in 1965. A broken concrete fence surrounds the school and most of the glass windows are broken. Teachers complain that students are chilled from the wind coming through the open windows in the winter and sweat from the heat of the summer. When it rains, water leaks through the walls of the staff rooms and the entire school yard is filled with a few inches of water. As a result of this lack of resources, even though the average ratio of teacher to pupil in KZN government schools stands at 1:34, the average class size among teachers surveyed at Menzi is 61. Everyone interviewed and surveyed argued that large class sizes pose a challenge as teachers try to get to know their individual students. The school has no library for students, only a small library of curriculum resources for teachers.

Though the school is under-resourced, the SMT has usually been able to keep the school on budget. They have received a few donations that have helped, including computers from Telkom in 2002, a math projector from Macro as a performance-based reward, and flat screen computers from Dell in 2008. However, even when they do receive donations, the crime of the surrounding neighborhood inhibits their ability to use those objects. For example, the flat screen computers were kept in a special room with no windows, thick brick walls and a secure door with heavy steel bars and a lock. Despite that security, combined with the night watchman and security patrol, one night in October 2010 burglars attempted to steal the computers using an ax to break through the brick wall in one corner of the room. Fortunately, the security guard saw them and called Mr. Mshololo. He rushed over but by the time he arrived the burglars were gone. All he found was a hole about half a foot wide, too small for computer monitors to fit through. The SMT quickly patched up the hole with cement, but now they are forced to store the computers in the strong room at the back of the principal's office. Any time they want to use them, teachers and students have to go retrieve them from storage and set them up; by that time they only have thirty minutes of class time left before having to break them down and place them back into storage (HOD B 2010). This shows how due to the environment of poverty and crime surrounding the school, learners and teachers and Menzi face challenges unique to Umlazi township that pose great challenges to effective teaching.

## TRANSFORMATION PROCESS

When Mshololo arrived in 1990, he faced challenges due to the learners' poverty and the school being under-resourced, compounded by the political violence surrounding the school. Despite these challenges, he aimed to completely transform the school so that the learners, despite their economic circumstances, could have chance at a better life. The key policy changes are summarized in the following table and explained in-depth in this section.

MENZI'S POLICY STRATEGIES FOR IMPROVEMENT		
1	Discipline	No late coming and low absenteeism, due to teachers calling parents
2	Monthly Tests	Moderated and checked for quality by HOD's
3	SMT Teaches	Principal requires himself, all deputy principals and HOD's to teach matric classes
4	Extended Time in Class	Class periods increased from 35 minutes to 60 minutes
5	Lengthened School Day	Learners required to be present from 6:30-4 pm so that they can complete homework at school
6	Increased Number of School Days	Classes held on Saturdays, some Sundays and holidays
7	Admission in Grade 8	Admit majority of students in grade 8, a few in grade 9
8	Assessment of teachers	HOD's evaluate teachers through monthly tests, quarterly exams, files and classroom observation
9	Clear Expected Outcomes	Expected outcomes laid out for teachers at beginning of year through meetings with subject advisors and HOD's
10	Improvement of ineffective teachers	HOD's and subject advisors work with teachers to improve their performance, utilizing team teaching where appropriate
11	Evaluative meetings	HOD's meet with their teachers, all-staff meetings, SMT meetings for reflection and feedback
12	Cluster meetings	Teachers meet with teachers from other schools to share expertise and write syllabi together
13	Proactive Preparation	Registration for the coming year is always completed by the end of November so that the new year can begin smoothly
14	Parental Involvement	Parents' meetings at beginning of year, parents' day each term and phone calls to parents when necessary
15	Prize-Giving	Recognition of high achieving learners and teachers through all-school assemblies and prize-giving

### Discipline

Mshololo did not arrive at Menzi with a list of specific policies to implement; rather, he identified effective policies through a trial and error process, learning through his own experience what would and would not work. Initially when he arrived at Menzi, in order to understand why the school was failing, he spoke to educators about the problems that they

were experiencing. One of the key issues teachers mentioned was a lack of cooperation from learners. The situation of the school was so bad that the only change he could implement in his first year was imposing discipline upon the learners and reducing late coming. He made it clear that learners were expected to come to school every day and on time. According to an HOD who has been at Menzi since the 1980's, Mshololo also implemented a 'zero absentee' policy, where if learners are absent, the teacher actually calls their parents and asks where the child is. This is important because according to her, so that both parent and teacher are aware of where the student is (HOD A 2010). The current deputy principal also says that if a student is noticeably absent, Mshololo will "phone the parents and drive to the home of the learner to get him" (Ntombela 2010). He and the other teachers admit that they had to apply a bit of corporal punishment. One teacher, who attended Menzi as a learner and has spent her entire teaching career there, says that before 1991, "The students were trying to test us, our strength. And after Mr. Mshololo came in, you see all the chaotic students, they dropped one by one" (Teacher A 2010). These policies have evidently worked in the long-term because according to teachers surveyed, they have an average of two students absent a day and zero late students. Imposing discipline and reducing late coming and absenteeism were the first steps Mshololo took to bring order to the school.

### **Monthly Tests**

His second year, in 1991, Mshololo made it mandatory for learners to sit for monthly tests that would count for a grade. He says that this got learners "realizing that every learning day was important" and made both learners and teachers think more seriously about their use of class time. According to the deputy principal, before he implemented this policy there was no measure of accountability for teachers. "Before there were no tests. It was up to the conscience of the teacher. If you don't want to give the learners the test, if you are lazy, then no one will say anything to you" (Ntombela 2010). At the same time, even if teachers did want to give tests, the lack of discipline in the school made it impossible to do so because learners would not cooperate and would run away. Mshololo changed that by requiring consistent monthly tests, controlled invigilated and supervised by HOD's. Learners came to expect that they would have to take tests and it became a part of their regular routine. Monthly tests were the second strategy that Mshololo used to change the 'culture' of the school, because it helped to make the learning environment more strict. The tests gave him a way to evaluate teachers, which would allow him to identify weak teachers and help them to be more effective. One HOD says that the SMT uses the tests to evaluate teachers to make

teachers accountable. She says to teachers, if “in your subject, learners failed, you need to explain how did they fail?” (HOD A 2010) The frequent testing also helps students to become comfortable with test taking from a young age, so that by the time they get to matric they are accustomed to the experience.

### **School Leadership Teaches**

The next year, in 1992, Mshololo was frustrated by the lack of changes in the school’s performance. He decided that he needed to teach a class of his own and see the problems that faced teachers for himself. That year, he recruited an old friend from his days at teaching college to come to Menzi, and they started working as a team to teach a new commercial stream in grade 11. In 1993 that first group sat for their matric exams and surprisingly, every student in their stream passed. Mshololo says that other teachers found this 100% pass rate in his stream unbelievable. His success showed teachers that despite the challenges they faced with the learners from poor backgrounds, it would be possible for them to teach effectively. It proved that he wasn’t just going to tell them to achieve high performance, but that he would do so as well and show them that they could. In his view, “My involvement in the actual teaching somehow commanded some form of discipline, was somehow expressed the importance of being a cooperative” (Mshololo 2010). Teachers say that because he teaches, he understands the perspective of a teacher and the realities of their work. As one HOD puts, it “now its easy because we speak the same language.” (HOD A 2010). ‘Speaking the same language’ is crucial because one of the key determinants of school success is communication between different parts of the school structure.

Mshololo found his teaching practice so helpful that he has continued to teach matrics since 1992 and requires all SMT members to do so as well. Many of the teachers pointed to this as the key reason why they enjoy working at Menzi, because “the principal is not only a principal, he is a teacher” (HOD A 2010). They greatly value the fact that he is not just sitting in an office making up policies, but is actively involved in the process of teaching alongside them. Mshololo chooses to teach because “if one is caused to sit with the office work, you at the end of the day realize that there is not much to live for, to do in office work. So you are somehow wasted and you miss a lot of information.” He believes that teaching enables his SMT members to be more effective leaders because it allows them to better understand the challenges that their subordinate teachers are facing.

You also get the cooperation because you are not seen as an instructor, you are seen as more than anything, you are seen as a practitioner, also as a person who is

also deeply involved in the teaching... it does help us as the school management team, to have a better understanding, to have a feel of how learners feel...to get a full understanding of what is happening in the school, to get the mood of the school (Mshololo 2010).

He views his SMT's teaching to be integral in their effort to gather information about the state of the school. He believes that you have to interact with your institution's stakeholders, teachers and learners, in order to see your school's successes and failures and then work to change them in order to improve your outcomes. One HOD says that more teachers respect her as a leader because "I'm not just a bystander, just observing. I'm actually involved" (HOD A 2010). Teaching the matric class helps HOD's to see how well teachers at other grade levels are reaching the school's desired outcomes. Teaching matric is a 'quality assurance check' in a sense, because it allows the SMT to see where learners' gaps of knowledge are, if they do exist. Mshololo argues that requiring the SMT to teach has been crucial to his school's success and sets Menzi apart from other schools in Umlazi; according to Mshololo, only a few other principals in the area's schools actually teach.

### **Resistance to Change**

Not all the teachers at Menzi responded positively to Mshololo's changes and the increasingly strict environment at Menzi. Teachers were actually a key factor in creating the chaotic environment of the school due to their high absenteeism. In his first year, Mshololo imposed discipline on them as well, by requiring them to provide a reason and apply for leave of absences in order to make them accountable. Veteran teachers say that Mshololo faced a lot of resistance because teachers were not used to being supervised. For example, Mshololo decided to phase out biblical studies, because he felt it "was no longer making learners marketable after matric" (Mshololo 2010). He also changed the curriculum of the school to unify each grade, because when he arrived in 1990 students were in two streams, general and science streams (Ntombela 2010). These decisions created tension and bitterness amongst some of the teaching staff, because some teachers felt that he was personally attacking them, trying to push them out of their jobs. Mshololo tried to combat this by attempting to be objective in his decision-making, emphasizing that he was just trying to improve the quality of instruction for the learners. To help the change process along, he and the SMT tried to motivate teachers by giving them incentives such as certificates, Menzi golf shirts, trophies for high-performance. Two teachers even received a cell phone and microwave from sponsors (Ntombela 2010).

The first four years were extremely difficult for Mshololo, but by 1994 the culture of the school had noticeably changed. That year, the school's matric class passed at a rate of 83%, improving upon the 31% of the previous year. From then on, teachers were more willing to trust Mshololo and the SMT when they recommended changes. One HOD says that though teachers were initially resistant to his strict policies, over time "People have adapted. And they have seen the change and the difference that it has made" (HOD A 2010). The success of Mshololo's own teaching, in conjunction with his efforts to impose discipline on the learners, made teachers more willing to implement other changes that he wanted. Because he fixed the teachers' foremost concern first, they were willing to listen when he proposed other changes.

We used to have different opinions, but over time, especially as a result of cooperation that they enjoyed from learners, they then started to believe in me. Because their serious problem, their serious unpleasant experience, was the nature of the learners that were there before I came. And winning over learners, making them amenable to discipline, was also a factor that helped them to cooperate to some of my instructions (Mshololo 2010).

However, not all teachers wanted to adapt to the changing culture of Menzi. In Mshololo's first few years as principal, five teachers took transfers to other schools, and a few other teachers were re-deployed (Ntombela 2010).

### **Increased Time Spent in School**

According to one HOD, in the early 1990's some learners approached the SMT and "asked if they could use the school for study purposes because they cannot study at home" (HOD A 2010). She says many students are from informal settlements where their whole family might be living in one room or they may not have a table and chair that they can use to study. They can't afford to waste precious candles or electricity for studying. Mshololo and the SMT decided that in order to address this problem, they would keep the school open beyond normal operating hours. Each day, learners are required to arrive at school at 6:30 am for morning study until 7:15. When class ends at 2:30, learners stay for afternoon study until 4 pm. The SMT introduced these morning and afternoon study periods so that learners could finish their homework at school. The school management team is required to be present at school during those hours to supervise the study time so that students can receive help. Other teachers choose to stay when they have work to do or when they need to work with students individually. Learners expressed to me how much they appreciate these extra hours. As one learner said about her home environment, "When you go out, they want to take your money,

they want to take your cell phone, they want to steal it. Here we are safe and we are able to study. When I'm at home sometimes I'm not able to study" (Learner B 2010).

This is just one example of how the SMT tailors its strategy to accommodate the particular context of the learners at Menzi, in particular high-poverty learners. The school compensates for the fact that learners don't have a home environment appropriate for study by creating time within the school day for learners to complete all of their work so that they do not have to do it at home. Teachers argue that this has helped to lessen the rate of teenage pregnancy among learners as well. Mshololo says that before the extended study hours, the school experienced a high pregnancy rate, which "dropped significantly" after the extra hours were introduced in 1996. He argues that because most schools end at 2:30, most learners have a lot of free time before their parents home from work around 5 or 6, if their parents work. Some students don't even have parents. Just adding those few extra hours at school makes it less likely that students will engage in activities that could keep them from succeeding in school, such as alcohol, drugs or sex, which could lead to teenage pregnancy. Teachers say that many parents support this policy of extended hours and want to send their learners to Menzi because "to have their learners to be kept here from half past 6 to 4, it protects them from unwanted pregnancy and temptation. Because when they arrive home at 4, at half past 4 or 5, they are tired! They are tired, they need to wash their uniform, they don't have time to mess around" (HOD A 2010).

In addition to an extended school day, Mshololo and the SMT also added classes during weekends and holidays to increase the amount of time students spend in the classroom. The extra hours are necessary because most students come to Menzi lacking the necessary background to excel. As one teacher explains, "there's a lot of gap filling that you have to do for kids to do well in grade 12... You have to train the learners, do the remedial work, work on holidays, work during the extra times. Because the school does not admit the best learners" (Teacher A 2010). Even though learners' primary schools may not adequately prepare them for high school, Menzi's teachers attempt to make up for that failure by providing extra hours to teach and fill in those gaps. Also, because class sizes are so large at Menzi, with an average of 61 learners, teachers say that it is necessary for them to spend a lot of time with kids after school hours in order to get to know them as individuals (Teacher C 2010). Other high schools may start weekend classes in the months leading up to matric, for extra revision, but at Menzi, weekend classes start at the beginning of the year in January and go on consistently throughout the year for grades 10, 11 and 12. The deputy principal says

that teachers are willing to be so committed and teach extra hours because they recognize that it is necessary for their learners to succeed. Due to the culture of learning and teaching created at Menzi, all teachers feel invested in their learners' success and as a result, are willing to put in the extra hours to make it possible. She says that teaching classes during holidays and weekends is never compulsory, but "we always volunteer" (Ntombela 2010).

Mshololo and the SMT not only lengthened the school day and increased the amount of school days, but also increased the amount of time learners spent in each subject. The current deputy principal, who has been at Menzi since 1985, says that before Mshololo, "we were teaching for 35 minutes. We didn't get the time to finish our work. So he changed that then we teach for an hour, then we can finish our work" (Ntombela 2010). Mshololo changed the length of time periods so that teachers could have more time on task. Teachers point to these three policies, and the resulting increased time learners spend in class and studying, as one of the most crucial strategies that makes learners succeed on matric.

### **Admission in Grade 8**

Another policy that assists Menzi's success is that the school rarely admits learners from the upper grades of 10, 11 or 12. Almost all learners are admitted in Grade 8 with a few in Grade 9. According to Mshololo, "We believe in nurturing our own talent" (Mshololo 2010). Having the same group of students for six straight years enables the students to become acclimated to the school's unique approach to learning. "When they come here, they learn quickly, they understand the culture of the school. They stay overtime...and that alone helps us to sustain the culture of the school...We don't experience disciplinary problems, mainly because learners come young, and they learn all the systems of the school, they get adapted to everything that we do" (Mshololo 2010). The end result is that after six years of exposure to extended hours, regular test-taking and an emphasis on performance, by the time learners reach matric exams they are likely to excel. Mshololo believes that, "By the time they reach that grade, the grade 12, whosoever manages to reach grade 12, is always at his or her best in terms of performance" (Mshololo 2010).

### **Parental Involvement**

Another strategy that Mshololo implemented in the early 1990's to change the culture of the school was increasing parental involvement. When he first arrived at Menzi, he called parents individually and held parents' meetings. He spoke to them about their problems with the school and shared his vision with them. One HOD says that this was challenging at first



because most parents had never been involved at the school before. She says that because Mshololo “is a local man” from Umlazi, he was able to relate to parents and learners in a way that former principals could not. “He understands the challenges faced by people of this area. So now he can talk to them, and make them understand that their children come first. And then it dawned to learners and their parents that education is important” (HOD A 2010). Because he understands the parents’ perspectives, he can effectively convince them to buy in to the culture of the school. The HOD says that many of the parents are former learners who attended Menzi years ago when it was still a failing school. By referring to their negative experiences with education, Mshololo can convince them to work for a better experience for their child. She accounts the type of conversation he would have with parents. He would call them and say, “ ‘This is what I want from your child. Do you want your child to be like you?’ And then the parent he says ‘no, I want my child to be better than I am.’ ‘Then let us work together. Lets do 1, 2 and 3 to improve the child.’ Its not a top-down. We discuss things with parents and then they understand” (HOD A 2010). Mshololo calls parents when he needs to intervene when a child is struggling, but he also speaks to parents initially to set clear expectations. At the beginning of the year, Mshololo holds a parents meeting where parents are told how their learners are expected to behave. He also sends a letter home to every parent explaining the same information (HOD B 2010). One HOD says this is one of the key reasons why Menzi is successful. “We are fortunate because the learners...they are not that troublesome like other learners. The reason being at the beginning of the year we call parents of prospective learners, and then we tell them the expectations” (HOD A 2010).

The school also has a parents’ day at the conclusion of each term. Parents are expected to come to school the Sunday after the last day of term to pick up their children’s report cards and meet with the teacher to discuss their child’s progress if necessary. The deputy principal says that this enables teachers to keep contact with parents about their child’s progress and performance, “So that if the child fail at the end of the year, the parent is aware the child was not doing their work during the course of the year.” (Ntombela 2010). Parents’ Day creates a feedback mechanism that helps students from getting lost. According to one teacher, “there is no space for the child to hide” (Survey respondent 2010). As a result of Mshololo’s effort to increase parental involvement, parents are clear about his vision and the expectations of students at Menzi High School. One HOD says that Menzi is effective because all the stakeholders share the same vision. It is this clarity and open communication that is the reason for Menzi’s success. “It’s the involvement of the parents, and the structure

of the parents, school management, as well as teachers. We all talk the same language. So no one differs and say other things” (HOD B 2010). Through meetings at the beginning of the year and on parents’ day, in addition to phone calls to intervene when necessary, Menzi’s SMT makes parents aware of the school’s high expectations for students and helps parents to play a part in achieving those expectations.

### **Assessment of Teachers**

Menzi’s approach involves a rigorous evaluation and assessment of teachers at all grades, to ensure that each is teaching as effectively as possible. This process utilizes frequent communication between teachers, HOD’s, SMT, cluster groups and subject advisors. HOD’s do the majority of work in assessing teachers. The Department requires quarterly examinations, which HOD’s use for assessment. Each quarter, they usually take a random sample of each teacher’s graded tests and remark them to check whether they were properly marked. This helps them to identify problems that they should discuss with the teacher. The deputy principal, who is currently an acting HOD, describes her responsibilities as the following: “I moderate their work. Their test question papers, marks, learners’ marks, and then I have to visit them in class to see them, their performance in class, and then if the teacher has a problem, I provide her with the material she needs. Taking them to workshops, informing them about the workshops, organizing them to help them” (Ntombela 2010). Along with assessment through analysis of their learners’ exam grades, HOD’s are also expected to observe teachers in class each term.<sup>1</sup> Teachers assessed based upon clear expectations outlined by their HOD’s and Subject Advisors at the beginning of the year. This is helpful because, in the words of HOD “a person will know, I must start from here and end up here” (HOD A 2010). Knowing what outcomes are expected from them enables teachers to plan far in advance to ensure that they can meet those goals.

If teachers do not meet those expectations adequately, then HOD’s will make sure that they receive the help that they need. Menzi has a well thought-out process of improving ineffective teachers. Usually HOD’s will work with the teacher themselves individually or will invite a subject advisor to come and help the teacher. If they are not happy with a

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<sup>1</sup> However, HOD’s at Menzi say that because they are so overloaded with work, they usually end up observing teachers in class only about twice a year (Ntombela 2010). Though there are supposed to be four HOD’s at Menzi, one was promoted to be a subject advisor and another was promoted to be a principal at another school. They have not been replaced so currently the deputy principal is acting as an HOD, and the two existing HOD’s are both advising teachers in multiple subjects.

teacher's performance than they will talk to them about it and work with them to identify strategies for improvement. One HOD says, "If there needs to be some remedial work, we'll do some remedial work. Because what is important is the welfare of the learner. It is not about us. Its about the learner" (HOD A 2010). In particular with newer subject areas such as technology, they will often utilize subject advisors to come in and help teachers. Teachers also attend quarterly workshops, run by HOD's or subject advisors, where they are taught new skills and information. Speaking about this process, one HOD says, "Let's empower them. If I cannot help them then maybe we can network, then maybe a neighboring teacher can come. We can then assist whosoever wants to be assisted. And it does work" (HOD A 2010).

Along with receiving help from HOD's and subject advisors, teachers also work with each other to gain new teaching skills. One veteran teacher told me how he often works with younger teachers and they help each other to improve. "We assist each other a lot. Well they assist me too (laugh). Nobody knows everything. You have to learn from other people, too, all the time" (Teacher C 2010). At Menzi, there is a culture of improvement in which teachers are always striving to become better. They use each other as resources and team teach when necessary, playing on each others strengths to make sure that the learners are receiving the most effective teaching possible. If the methods of accountability between teachers, HOD's and subject advisors fail and Mshololo detects a problem when he is looking over teachers' pass rates on the end of term exams, he will talk to the teacher personally and work with the HOD's to create a plan for how the teacher can improve.

### **Evaluative Meetings**

Evaluative meetings between groups of teachers, the SMT and with teachers at other schools helps each staff member to stay in communication with school and district policies. HOD's meet with their teachers as a group at least once a month. Mshololo calls meetings for the entire staff when necessary. For example, when I was at the school on the first day of the end-of-term exams, the principal called a meeting during break to talk to the teachers about the invigilation schedule and the exams. At beginning of each year during the December holidays, the SMT always has a meeting to run a 'post-mortem', to evaluate what went well the previous year and what challenges they faced. They analyze the entire school's results and assess each teacher's performance (Ntombela 2010). Through these meetings, the SMT assesses its collective progress and formulates strategies for the future. Even after over ten

years of extraordinary pass rates, Menzi's SMT and teachers are always thinking about ways that they can do better.

Along with in-school meetings, HOD's also meet in clusters with HOD's from other schools. The clusters meet monthly to discuss their work. Teachers say that clusters are a helpful forum for dialogue because with some issues, "some of the problems are common" and they can work out solutions together (HOD B 2010). However, they admit that though cluster meetings are usually helpful, Menzi's teachers are usually helping more than benefiting from them. Teachers said that in clusters, Menzi's teachers are usually chosen to organize and lead the cluster because they are seen as the best in the group (Teacher A 2010). "We are the top school. They benefit from us. But at least we are helping them, and at the same time if they have a problem, if we can help them we do help them." (HOD A 2010) Cluster meetings are a mechanism by which Menzi's teachers share their knowledge and expertise with less effective schools. Cluster groups and subject advisors are the main mechanisms by which Menzi's teachers get help from the department. Deputy principals, HOD's and teachers say that they rarely interact with other district or provincial officials. In the words of one HOD, "We do interact, but mostly they wait for us to shout. If you don't shout, then they won't look at you. But if you shout for them, they do come" (HOD B 2010).

### **Proactive Preparation**

To make these assessment and evaluation practices work, Menzi's SMT places a high value on effective time management and preparation for the coming year. The SMT believes that teachers will be able to teach effectively if the SMT plans ahead and provides what is necessary for them to do so. Overall, the SMT thinks proactively about what is necessary for them to succeed, how they can be made capable of high performance, not only how to react to failure. For example, in November 2010, the SMT is already finished with registration for the 2011 school year. While other schools are chaotic at the start of each year with new students registering, Menzi's classes have already begun on the first day of term and are running smoothly. Everything for the coming year, including books, stationary and class sizes, is prepared before the close of the year so that the teaching can begin on time. Mshololo argues that proper time management and planning are what enables his teachers to be effective, saying, "teachers have no reason to fail to complete the syllabus if everything is made available in good time" (Mshololo 2010). In this way, the school as a whole models what it expects from students—proactive thinking and preparation for the future so that they will have time to handle contingencies if they do arise.

## Prize-giving

In order to create a culture of achievement in the school, Menzi's SMT utilizes positive reinforcement through prize-giving and recognition of high performance. The school used to have a full day of prize-giving each August, which involved parents and recognized students for academic and extramural activities (Ntombela 2010). This initiative was helpful because parents would "see the other learners obtaining the prizes and then they will motivate their children at home" (Ntombela 2010). However, they have not had a full day of prize-giving for the past three years because the SMT realized that planning for the day was cutting into teachers' preparation time for class. Now they reserve thirty minutes on Fridays at the end of each term to recognize the top 10's on exams in each grade in front of the entire student body. Teachers argue that this encourages learners to work hard because it gives them a goal to aspire to, which was confirmed in my discussions with matric students. For two of the top students in the matric class, their proudest day at Menzi was when they were chosen to stand up in front of the entire school during assembly and be recognized for being in the top 10 in their grade. They say striving to be in the top 10 motivates them to work harder and spend more time studying, because they are in friendly competition with their peers and want to improve on their performance from term to term. The SMT provides incentives not only for students, but also for teachers. For example this year, the deputy principal is in the process of trying to get sponsors for the teachers whose learners perform highest on their exams. She wants to provide financial incentives to the three teachers with the highest number of A's on their exams, rewarding the top teacher with R1000 (Ntombela 2010). Past prizes for teachers have included a cell phone and microwave sponsored by Mr. Price.

The school also has an array of other initiatives that help to create a specific school culture and strong social cohesion among students. Every morning, the entire student body and staff gather for speeches, singing and prayer from 7:15-7:30 am. Students are required to shave their heads until grade 12, when girls are allowed to plait their hair for their matric dance. Two of the physics and maths teachers reside in a cottage on the school grounds. The school offers extracurricular activities including soccer and netball teams organized for tournaments in Umlazi and English Academy, a club that meets frequently for students to practice their English in political discussion, poetry and debate. There is also a peer education program, where a few students are chosen from each grade to be peer educators, facilitating six workshops for each grade a year on issues such as drug use and HIV/AIDS. One learner who is a peer educator argues that this is effective because learners are listening to each other

talk about these issues. Learners also use peer educators to mediate conflicts they are having with other learners or for guidance on personal issues. With the help of peer educators, “learners communicate with each other about problems that they have and try to solve them amongst themselves” (Learner C 2010). Through peer education, Menzi effectively teaches learners about social issues that might provide an obstacle to them being successful in school and in life. The program is probably more effective than a typical LO class, because students are talking to each other and learners are listening to people who have practical experience with the relevant issue. The peer education program also shows that there is strong ‘social cohesion’ amongst the student body at Menzi. It is not only teachers that support each other and their students, but learners support each other as well.

## **MENZI’S UNIQUE EDUCATIONAL VISION**

I have already documented the specific policy changes made by Mshololo and his SMT that have contributed to the school’s success. Now I will discuss the more intangible factors of their vision for the school and the school’s pedagogy.

### **All Learners Are Capable of Success**

The first, and I argue most crucial, aspect of this vision is the belief that all learners, regardless of economic background or home environment, are capable of high achievement. This is evident in the fact that Menzi admits learners in grade 8 on a first-come, first-served basis, regardless of their performance in primary school,. The only factor that they examine is whether the learner falls within the correct age bracket. Mshololo says there is no reason to look at a learner’s grades before grade 8 because “we believe at such tender age, they can improve as they mature...Its not about the IQ level that does much for the learner, but it’s a question of being there in good time and being attentive” (Mshololo 2010). He and the SMT believe that all learners are capable of success later on in life. They firmly believe that the school’s policies should enable every learner to succeed as long as they have the will to stay in school during the recommended hours and listen to their teachers. Because of this policy, they do admit many students in grade 8 who are not adequately prepared for high school. “We do experience problems, especially in the field of mathematics, because some of our feeder schools, normally, supply poor quality in terms of mathematics ability. So we work hard, it is always a challenge. But we stick to admitting them. We don’t change” (Mshololo 2010). The SMT believes that every person has the capacity to succeed if given the right support and necessary time to develop themselves. Even if students aren’t adequately

prepared when they arrive in grade 8, it is still possible for them to get caught up and eventually excel because Menzi's teachers work overtime to try and fill in their gaps of knowledge. Teachers believe that every learner is capable and thus have high expectations for them. These positive expectations make it more likely that students will succeed, because they will have more confidence in themselves. One of the top students in the matric class told me that he believes the reason he has been able to do well is because " [my teachers] always tell me that I have the ability to do my work" (Learner B 2010).

### **Time on Task is Paramount**

The second most important aspect of the school's vision is an emphasis on the importance of the time teachers spend teaching and learners spend learning, or in other words, time on task. Mshololo and the SMT frequently stress the importance of teachers' work, that every moment in class should enable each student to learn and develop. Mshololo does not allow staff meetings to be held during class time, requiring that they be held during breaks or after school. Any function or excursion during school hours must benefit learners. He explains, "We try not to compromise learning hours, in whatever we do...that is actually a way of making everybody aware of the importance of working hours" (Mshololo 2010). One teacher, a former inspector for the Department of Education, argues that it is this child-centeredness and promotion of time on task that makes Menzi succeed.

Menzi has well-motivated teachers because of the principal who always says 'when all is done, note that we are here simply for the child and therefore let the interests of the child take central position.' Therefore as a result of that you find that all the teachers share the same values, they share the same vision, they all simply want to make sure that they do more than just their bit to ensure the children gain (Teacher B 2010).

Mshololo says that this vision has become so engrained in the school that he no longer has to push teachers and students to get to class because they so fully understand the importance of class time. The school's commitment to 'time on task' is evident in the fact that none of the teachers at Menzi participated in the teachers' strike in September 2010. When most other schools were on break during the world cup, Menzi's teachers held classes for grades 10, 11 and 12. The SMT and Mshololo place a high value not only on class time, but also on time learners spend studying. One student gave an account of how one night mid-year, he and the other matric students asked Mshololo if the school could close late that day so that they could have more time to study. Mshololo agreed and the student explains, "that's when I saw that he really cares about us. He is willing to pay more for the granny who's locking up the

school. Just for us to learn” (Learner B 2010). Principal Mshololo is dedicated to providing as much time on task as students need to succeed. He is understanding of the learners’ financial circumstances and adjusts the school’s policies accordingly.

One teacher argues that Menzi is different from other schools because teachers love what they are doing and as a result, are willing to put in the time necessary to do their jobs well. He worked as an engineer for a number of years while on a break from teaching, and describes how he felt in that job: “I could work in the production environment up to 2, 3 o’clock in the morning without expecting the employer to pay me anything extra, just to make sure my size is done, and it’s done well. That’s what you need on the teaching side as well” (Teacher C 2010). He finds a similar love for the work at Menzi, but does not see it in most other schools in South Africa because for most teachers, the profession was not their first choice. Menzi is able to overcome many of the challenges that township schools face because the school has a culture that emphasizes effective work and rewards, even if it is intangibly, high performance. On average, teachers spend 12 hours a day on job-related tasks including teaching in class, working with students one-on-one, writing lesson plans and grading assignments. Teachers are willing to be so committed and spend so many extra hours working because they see themselves as integral parts of a successful institution. They know that the time they spend will have a positive effect and will not be wasted. If one individual teacher were working within a school that did not have a vision like Menzi does, they might be working extremely hard and spending extra hours with students with only a limited impact, if all the other teachers at the school are not doing the same. The reason that teachers are willing to spend so many extra hours at Menzi is because they know that they are part of a cadre of teachers who are all working extremely hard, striving for excellence, and that their individual effort, in tandem with the effort of all of the other teachers in unison, can achieve great things.

### **The Time to Prepare for Matric, University and Life is Now**

The third aspect of the school’s vision is proactive, long-term thinking about how time on task can be used to effectively prepare students for matric, university and life in general. Monthly tests and quarterly exams ensure that by the time learners reach matric, they will have taken many tests in a strict, controlled environment and are comfortable with the format. The theory behind this, Mshololo says, is that “things that we do in our daily interactions are things that are easy to remember” (Mshololo 2010). The more students take tests, listen attentively in class and work hard to meet high expectations set for them, the



more likely that they will use those same skills in life and as a result, excel in their careers. Mshololo has a saying that summarizes his philosophy: “the year ends as it begins.” He believes that teachers and learners cannot waste a moment because every second counts.

The minute you get into a class, you are doing something that will be of importance at the end of the year in terms of examination. You’ll be expected to be writing your exam on this very same material. So passing or failing is not at the end of the year, its now. You decide now whether you pass or fail (Mshololo 2010).

Teachers are always conscious that their students will have to write the matric exams and that they need to use every minute in class wisely. The school’s vision means that ideally, if a learner is attentive in class, learning from knowledgeable, effective teachers and working hard to complete their assignments well during school hours, that should be enough to enable them to pass. Learners should not need to do a great deal of independent study on their own to prepare for matrics; their school should do everything possible to prepare them.

The school’s vision emphasizes that wasting even a bit of class time and falling behind even a little can make a huge difference in the long run. The SMT and teachers think proactively about what is necessary for learners to succeed, rather than just helping them after the fact when they do fail. Mshololo emphasizes the urgency of the task at hand, that there are future implications and repercussion for teachers’ actions in every lesson plan. “Suppose the learner fails at the end of the year. Missing a year is a lot of time in ones life...A minute wasted is never regained. A year is too long” (Mshololo 2010). The school’s vision is evident in the way that he speaks to learners. On the morning of the first day of end of year exams during prayer time, he spoke to the entire student body and gave a motivational speech saying, “Don’t compromise your time. I don’t want anything that compromises your time because you are never going to get this opportunity again! By next year if you repeat the class you’ll be older and you will have wasted a whole year” (Mshololo 2010). He tells learners that if they do not maximize the help and support that they have now in their youth, they will look back and regret it because eventually they will be without parents and teachers to help them. The school recognizes how critical the time period of high school is for learners, and that teachers’ time must be managed wisely in order prepare students with the habits and work ethic that they need to succeed in the workplace. Teachers are conscious that their goal is not only to get through the syllabus for their specific subject, but also to prepare students to excel on their matric exams, complete university and thrive in life. One matric student, who will be attending University of Cape Town next year, sums up how Menzi has prepared him

for life. “The only thing left for me is to work hard. I’ve got the information here at high school, so next year...I will also work hard because I’m used to working hard here in Menzi” (Learner B 2010).

Menzi’s policies are designed to prepare its students not only to do well on matric, but also to do well in university and to become well-educated citizens who contribute to the growth of society. Every policy is made with the long-term future in mind. For example, Mshololo chose to phase out the subject of biblical studies because he felt it was no longer making learners “marketable after matric” (Mshololo 2010). His approach and that of the school’s is similar to that of a business, in that they are conscious of the specific outcomes and targets that they want to reach. One of the key goals is for all students to move on to further education when they graduate from Menzi. According to one HOD, the school has partnerships with universities such as University of Cape Town and University of Port Elizabeth (HOD A 2010). Past students have succeeded at those schools so now they usually accept some of Menzi’s graduates each year. Students estimate that dozens of this year’s graduates will be attending University of Cape Town next year (having already been accepted, contingent upon good matric results). Another goal is more intangible: to prepare learners not only for further schooling, but also for life. Mshololo describes how he tries to get students to make good choices. “We emphasize to learners not to become somehow immoral. Its good to become educated, but its good to live the type of life that is valued by your, by the other residents within your communities” (Mshololo 2010). One teacher who teaches matric students says that he views students in terms of their professional development. “Yes, passing grade 12 is success, but this is just a process in achieving a very long-term goal for them which is about trying for 60 years” (Teacher C 2010). The same teacher defines his success as a teacher as such:

You need people who come out of the school to stand out in society...if I’m a teacher at the school, the kids in four years time, if I’ve done my job well, they must be better than me. Otherwise its useless. Its absolutely worthless...Otherwise there’s no growth in society...What I was telling them, that its not worth it if 5, 6 years down the line when they’ve passed grade 12, they’re still worse than me. We’ve wasted time. They must be better than me (Teacher C 2010).

Mshololo knows what goals he wants to achieve and has built his organization and chosen the right senior management team to implement the necessary strategies to reach those outcomes.

## **Learner-Centered Pedagogy**

The fourth component of the school's vision is for teachers to utilize a pedagogy that relates subjects to the home environment of the learner and issues they face in their real lives. At Menzi, teachers effectively implement outcomes-based education because they utilize the constructivist theory of learning where students go out and find information for themselves. One physics teacher explains, "Science for me is outside, not in a book. Kids have to go out and find out things, and combine things, and develop things all on their own... You look at what's happening around and use that to follow what the syllabus wants us to achieve" (Teacher C 2010). Another teacher, who was selected by the province to teach maths on a weekly radio show for matric students because of her excellent performance, describes her pedagogy: "you must tell them to go and find out what they don't know. They have to relay what is happening to their homes, together with what would be happening in the subject... There must be a relationship between the informal environment together with the formal environment" (Teacher A 2010). For example, she teaches GIS (Geographic Information Systems) by relating it to sound systems for music that learners would already be familiar with, building upon learners' existing knowledge to teach them about computer systems (Teacher A 2010).

Top matric students said that their favorite teachers taught them not only about a particular subject, but also gave them guidance about their choices and other issues that related to their own lives. In describing his favorite teacher, one student says, "he motivates us about school. He tells us how is life in the university... When maybe when he finishes teaching us, maybe maths, then he will stand in front and tell us about life, tell us about the right things and bad things to avoid in life, and what to do and what not to do. But one thing he always tells us is that 'its you who makes the choice' " (Learner B 2010). Describing the same teacher, other students say, "if I've got an obstacle I will relate it to him on how we will handle the situation and I will follow his advice and I will pull through" (Learner C 2010). Another student says, "He is the kind of teacher you can say is your friend... He will sacrifice his spare time at home to be with us during the weekends, so we get more time with him" (Learner A 2010). The students interviewed agree that the best teachers are the ones that give them advice about how to handle challenges in their lives and who spend the most time outside of class talking to students. From the students' perspective, giving time, guidance and advice makes a teacher more effective because they have an ongoing dialogue between themselves and their students. One teacher surveyed writes that she is an effective teacher

because she always tries to get to know her students on a personal level. “I befriend learners as much as I can, this is a great weapon for me, a friend would never want to disappoint you.” (Survey respondent 2010) On average, teachers at Menzi spend over 2 hours each day interacting with students one on one, whether giving them personal guidance or helping them with their schoolwork. It is this willingness to spend time with the learner and provide guidance to them that makes learners enjoy coming to school.

The SMT and teachers at Menzi take a ‘no excuses’ approach to learning. Though Menzi is under-resourced, teachers take advantage of that by using resources wisely and encouraging students to be creative and utilize the world around them in order to learn. The school prioritizes its resources to make sure that teachers have what they need; at the same time, teachers are inevitably faced with a shortage of equipment and think creatively to make that a strength by forcing learners to relate their learning to the world around them rather than a book. One science teacher says that he usually has less than half of the equipment that he needs for experiments. Even without the proper equipment, he manages to teach lessons because he gets the students to go out into their community and find materials that they can use. When they lack an object, he directs students, “go out and find it” (Teacher C 2010). They utilize objects such as plastic bottles for beakers, soil, wires or other pieces of plastic in order to do science experiments. The teacher accounts this process.

I always tell them that ‘3 and 400 years ago there was no car. But somebody found oil to make a car. Same thing with you. Find a way. What do you need to do? Think. Get it out of your head. Think about it. Find a way to make it. You can’t say, ‘I don’t have this, I don’t have anything.’ Yes, there are cases because of the advancement of technology, where it won’t be. But the basic things which we do at our level, by and large the majority of them we should be able to do finding things out here around us’...And almost 99% of experiments, that’s what we did. Picking up rubbish and get them to do it (Teacher C 2010).

Teachers at Menzi take what resources they have available and use them in the most powerful way possible. He argues that a lack of equipment should ever not pose an obstacle to learning.

What I refuse for them to do is go and buy things. Make it yourself. Its all around us...You have to go and find them. They’re in the dumps. *You must be able to see*—that’s so crucial...That’s where the difference is between the modern teachers who are book driven, and the previous teachers. Everything, sometimes they are amazed that these things are just around the school. They walk over them...they think it’s in the book which again, I don’t agree. I don’t agree that’s the right way of teaching. Be conscious of these things around you—I think that’s when they will make good scientists...I teach people to become scientists. That’s my objective (Teacher C 2010) (emphasis added).

Teachers learn to cope with a lack of resources and adapt their curriculum accordingly; at the same time, if a teacher cannot cope without a particular teaching aid then the SMT will usually buy it for them. Teachers say that the principal's first priority is always the students, and that he is willing to spend money on whatever resources teachers need to be effective. For example, one HOD says, "Yes the school has no resources, but the priority if I go to the principal now, and I tell him, I need this book because I have seen that this book is good, he will give me a signed check just to buy that book. So now with learners they come first" (HOD A 2010). The pedagogy at Menzi shows that though teachers may only have a limited amount of resources at their disposal, they utilize their resources as effectively as possible. They respond to the lack of teaching aids by relating their teaching to the world of the learner. In that way, the teachers model exactly what they expect from students, that there should be no excuse for failing to learn, even economic circumstances.

### **A 'Culture' of High Achievement**

The fifth and final aspect of the school's vision is a school 'culture' of respect for teachers and the expectation of high achievement due to the legacy of past graduates. When Mshololo first started teaching back in 1992, the students had never experienced success. When he began teaching the first commercial stream with his colleague, they had to create a culture within their classroom that differed from the culture of failure that pervaded the rest of the school. Initially, the students did not think it was possible for them to succeed because no one had ever told them that they could. In order to instill them with confidence, Mshololo used to praise his colleague in front of the learners and tell them about his own accomplishments at his past principalship at another high school. His colleague also praised himself and Mshololo. Mshololo explains this process: "I made them understand that they were under perfect teachers, that they were to give their best because they had the best in terms of teachers. I made learners also to believe in teachers...that alone, somehow helped our learners to ooze with confidence, each time they take their exams. They were aware that they had good teachers" (Mshololo 2010). After imposing discipline upon the learners, Mshololo made them more confident in the skill of their teachers. He and his colleague supported each other in the classroom and explained that they had high expectations for the students. Succeeding on matric is a matter of learners having the confidence to believe that they will do well. If they are told that they are expected to do well then they will be more likely to meet those expectations. In this way, Mshololo enabled his first group of students to obtain a 100% pass rate in the commercial stream. Other teachers saw his success and wanted

to learn more about how he was able to do it. Mshololo worked with them to make them more willing to improve themselves, teach at a higher quality and become more confident as teachers, which in turn had the effect of making students want to commit more time to learning. One top matric student today sees how this approach continues to pervade the school's culture today. "If you have a teacher who's dedicated, you also want to learn more, you become interested in your work" (Learner A 2010).

Mshololo and his team have continuously built upon their first successes back in 1993 by fostering a school environment where learners want to do better than those who came before them. Once the first class was able to do well on their matrices, other students and teachers saw that example and realized it would be possible for them to do the same. Mshololo argues that success builds upon success to achieve excellence. "With the learners especially, the motivation comes from the predecessors. Now they always compete against their predecessors, they always want to do better than the predecessors. So that is what keeps us at this level. Learners are also aiming to get 100% at all times. And that does motivate our teachers" (Mshololo 2010). I asked one teacher what keeps her motivated to commit such long hours to her job and she says: "to have other teachers, again, who are dedicated in their work...each and every teacher is very proud of his or her results. That puts more motivation more than anything" (Teacher A 2010). She says there is friendly competition among the teachers to produce the best learners and that "everyone wants to have better results" (Teacher A 2010). There is a school 'culture' of constant improvement. As a result, for the past ten years, the average matric pass rate has been roughly 97%. Learners are motivated to beat those who came before them. I spoke to a student on a break from taking her matric exams in November and she told me the following:

I want to produce good marks that will make an impression that Menzi is a good school and that will influence the grade 11's to do better, and the thing of working hard will go through generations, generations, generations of Menzi. And that will leave a legacy for people who want to come here (Learner C 2010).

The result of this layering of success effect is that today, most learners at Menzi are acclimated to a culture of improvement and high achievement, and do their part to enable an orderly, hard-working environment. One student describes how this culture of learning enables the teachers to be effective despite large classes sizes. "Though the numbers are huge, but then, the learners here at school, they know that studying is everything. So you'd

find that in class, maybe two or three people are making noise. The rest of the class is focused. So you don't get difficulties in listening to the teachers" (Learner A 2010).

## **PRINCIPAL MSHOLOLO'S LEADERSHIP STYLE**

The research has shown that the key to a school's success is usually the school's leadership. My research at Menzi confirmed this. Every teacher I spoke with said that the key reason for Menzi's success is the leadership of Principal Mshololo. Under his guidance over the past twenty years, the culture of the school has completely changed and it has transformed from low to high quality. In order to understand what kind of leadership is necessary to improve a school, I explain the components of Mshololo's leadership style.

### **Invitational Leadership**

In all school decisions at Menzi, Mshololo utilizes invitational leadership. Researchers such as Kamper and Mumpuru have found that effective principals 'invite' their stakeholders to participate in key decision-making and that they are always open to input from their staff. Mshololo is no different. HOD's say that key decisions are always discussed in staff meetings and he keeps the lines of communication to his staff open. He always prepares an agenda and allows staff to suggest topics for discussion ahead of time, giving them early notice so that they can prepare in order to engage in discussion. When he first arrived in 1990, he held many staff meetings, which he argues "helped me a lot because that's the only way that one could get into the understanding of how the institution runs" (Mshololo 2010). He is conscious of the need to listen to teachers at Menzi in order to comprehend what is going on within his organization. According to one teacher, "the school is operating so smoothly because of the cooperation. The principal listens to what the teachers are saying, and also stays strong to the decisions that we take" (HOD B 2010). Though he is an invitational leader and does try to get input from his staff on decisions, he is also a strong leader in that he ensures implementation of those decisions. One teacher explains, "its not like he's a tyrant. He's transparent. He gets people to discuss things. But then once they've said, 'we agree on this' then he says 'you agreed on this lets see thing done. Let's see it happening. Go ahead and do it' " (Teacher B 2010). Mshololo not only discusses administrative decisions with his staff, but also is open to discussing personal issues with them. Many teachers explained that Mshololo is "like a mentor to us" (HOD B 2010). One teacher says,

Whatever he says he speaks the truth. He doesn't lie about things. Like if there is something that you are not doing right, he calls you and tells you that this and that is not going okay, so we must try and do this. So if you have problems also, we are not afraid to tell him. We tell him our problems, like family problems and stuff like that. So he understands. He comes up with solutions, he helps us to find solutions to those problems (HOD B 2010).

Through both discussions as a staff and one-on-one with individual teachers, Mshololo ensures open communication throughout his institution. He invites them to make key decisions together and fosters open, frank discussion with teachers to work through their problems. By promoting honest discussion of the school's challenges and strengths, he creates an environment where teachers feel that they can speak their mind and contribute to the school's vision.

### **Leading by Example**

Mshololo not only discusses his vision for the school verbally and in discussion with teachers, but also leads by example in his own actions and through his teaching practice. The research of Kamper and Mampuru shows that a school's leader sets the tone and mood of the school's culture, and Mshololo does so by modeling the commitment, learner-centeredness and integrity that he expects from his teachers. The deputy principal echoed the sentiments of every teacher I spoke with, saying that Mshololo's dedication is the key reason why the school has succeeded and why teachers are willing to be so dedicated. "He sacrifices a lot. He is exemplary. When I arrive at school, he is always here. He is always at school. I can say if you can take the register, I can count the number of days when he was absent" (Ntombela 2010). Mshololo confirms this, saying, "Myself, I've never been away from school. For the past 20 years, I've only been away for about 5 days...I was at the hospital by there. I've never been away and I've never been late...One needs to be exemplary. There's just no way you can motivate people to follow [if you are not]" (Mshololo 2010). He is consistently at school and available to help teachers whenever they request it. By requiring himself and the SMT to teach matrics, Mshololo shows that teaching is the most important function of the school and that he is invested in the fate of learners as well.

Mshololo treats learners exactly as he expects his teachers to treat them. One matric student says, "He does not take the privilege that he's the principal, he will treat us anyhow. He will treat us with respect. He will talk to us about our problems and try to help us. Like if we have problems at home, he will intervene and try to help" (Learner C 2010). Another matric student says that what makes Menzi different from other schools in Umlazi is "the



principal, because he always sticks to the rules of the school, and makes sure that we also stick to the rules of the school” (Learner B 2010). The school’s strict policies and discipline not only apply to learners, but to the principal and teachers as well. He does not just tell teachers to focus on the learners and help them as much as they are capable; he does that himself and thus sets a good example.

You always copy what your leaders do in most of the institutions. People do emulate to some degree their leaders. So my emphasis is on learner achievement...It’s a way that I do my work that makes teachers to understand that the core business of the school is teaching...It has to be clear that we are solely for the learners (Mshololo 2010).

### **Effective Time Management**

Mshololo also models effective time management and is constantly striving to improve himself, which helps to create a culture of growth and improvement among teachers and learners at Menzi. This is crucial to Menzi’s success because as Taylor argues, a lack of time management is the key factor that renders a school unable to improve. One teacher, who has known Mshololo since they were in school together in teachers’ college, says that Mshololo’s saying ‘the year ends as it begins,’ indicates how focused he is on ensuring that he uses every day wisely. He describes Mshololo saying, “He is that kind of person who won’t attempt anything that is not going to, that he doesn’t believe he might not have enough time for it, or enough skills for it, or enough opportunity, or for that matter, success” (Teacher B 2010). Mshololo thinks pragmatically about time in order to be successful in his present endeavors, but he is also driven to constantly improve in order to be better for the future. In his words, “time is not only about your duties, your responsibilities, but that additional time can be used for learning new things...there are so many other things that you can learn. There are so many new things that can help you to grow, to develop. So basically you can’t improve on anything if you neglect the importance of time usage” (Mshololo 2010). He is constantly striving for high performance just as he directs his teachers and learners to do. He considers his life a process of continuous learning and places a high value on evaluation of the past and discussion of issues honestly in order to improve and develop better practices for the future. He argues that in order to become effective, teachers need to always think about how they can improve as well. Mshololo is so interested in time management that he wrote his master’s thesis on the topic.

I wouldn't be saying I've also reached my ceiling, in terms of—I learn new things, almost every year. I keep on proving, I have to evaluate myself, staff against my previous achievements, see how far have I gone, what is it that has not been put right...Its wrong for anyone to remain where he is. You know, one should improve. You can't be static in life. You need to progress (Mshololo 2010).

### **Consistent Expectations**

Though he is always trying to improve himself, over his twenty years at Menzi Mshololo has always set consistent expectations for his staff. He has always expected high performance from teachers and learners and tells them to do the best job that they are capable of. This is consistent with the findings of Mampuru, who argues that in order to succeed in a high-poverty environment, teachers have to have extremely high expectations for their students. One teacher, who has known Mshololo since they were young men in the 1960's, says that even as decades pass, Mshololo is still the same person that he was when he was a young man. The teacher argues that this consistency of character "helps a lot when you are a leader, because it helps you to get understood" (Teacher B 2010). Mshololo has always expected excellence and because he has been clear about this ever since he arrived at Menzi in 1990's, that expectation has pervaded the culture of the school and is now embedded in the teachers' approach to their work. Stakeholders say that he voices these expectations through motivational talks to teachers and learners. As a result of Mshololo's expectations and the school's policies, the deputy principal says, "We want to excel. We have that good competition. We want our learners to get A's. We compete with our results" (Ntombela 2010). Because the teachers know exactly what Mshololo expects from them, quality teaching and high performance, they are more likely to achieve it because they have a specific goal in mind and see that other teachers are working towards it as well. Due to Mshololo's high expectations and the school's policies, teachers are committed to achieving excellence and are willing to put in the long hours necessary for high performance. Learners, too, actively foster the school's culture of excellence. One top matric student says, "Our principal always tells us that we are 'mighty doers' and so by that, that have instilled confidence in me and hard working" (Learner C 2010). The culture of the school is one where dedication to your work, for both teachers and learners, is the norm because it is expected. The teachers are dedicated and committed because they see themselves as integral components of a team striving for excellence. The deputy principal says the key reason why Menzi has higher matric scores than other schools in Umlazi is because "We work hard. That's it" (Ntombela 2010).

### **Strong School Management Team**

One of Mshololo's key strengths is that he recognized the importance of building a strong leadership team at Menzi. Though his individual leadership has been instrumental in creating a school culture of success, he has been able to do so by choosing the right teachers for his SMT. He recognizes that he does not lead the school alone, that the HOD's and deputy principals actually handle the bulk of assessment of teachers, while he focuses on providing support to them, handling administrative matters and sustaining their vision of the school through all-school assemblies and interactions with students. The deputy principal describes Mshololo's leadership style as collaborative. She says, "We work as a team. He doesn't make decisions on his own; he involves us as his SMT" (Ntombela 2010). Another teacher says, "HOD's are part of the very engine that must take the school forward...the principal needs to be simply a good leader, but then in the various departments...there's got to be very strong pillars that he simply organizes and then they make sure that their departments are productive" (Teacher B 2010). Mshololo has built a strong leadership team not by viewing them as assistants to whom he delegates responsibilities, but rather as partners who are equally as important to the school's success as he is. The extent to which he values his team is evident in the fact that the school's copier and printer are located in his office, so teachers are coming in and out all the time to talk with him. SMT members frequently consult with him and his door is always open.

Teachers at Menzi respect their SMT because teachers are chosen for senior positions due to their past commitment and proven success. When a new post for HOD or deputy principal opens up, Mshololo looks for the better performing teachers from within the school to appoint. His teaching staff always supports his appointments because "its sort of a consensus view. People can see that these people deserve this. Not only in terms of their own academic qualifications but in terms of the effort that they put into the organization as a whole" (Mshololo 2010). He rewards people with senior positions based upon their merit, not upon their personal connection with him. As a result of this, the SMT shares Mshololo's vision of excellence. They are motivated and willing to take on as much responsibility as they can because they also want the school to succeed. For example, the deputy principal says that when she sees a problem, "I don't say 'this is not my duty, it's the principal's duty.' If he is busy, then I will do what I see" (Ntombela 2010). The SMT does not just rely on the principal, but rather is actively working to support him as much as possible so that the school can achieve consistently high performance. Mshololo views his SMT as a great asset because

they are the ones who develop his teachers' talent and teaching skills, which is the most crucial factor in his learners' success.

### **Mshololo's Vision for Menzi**

These five qualities of Mshololo's leadership style are all key pieces in achieving his vision for Menzi High School. He promotes this vision through the aforementioned policies and through motivational talks to the student body and teachers. Learners and teachers agree that to Mshololo, the well-being of the learners come first. He believes that it is the responsibility of teachers to do the best they possibly can with what they are given, and that learners should do as best as they can in response. All stakeholders interviewed spoke about Mshololo's love of his students, how he treats every learner as a parent would and expects teachers to do the same. In order to summarize Mshololo's vision for Menzi High School, I offer the perspectives of a matric learner, a teacher and Mshololo himself. I will offer the perspectives of a matric learner, a teacher and Mshololo himself to summarize Mshololo's vision for Menzi High School.

"He believes in the learner. Learner and education. One day he told me, 'you can have it all, as long as you are studying.' Our principal is this person who doesn't mind going a thousand miles just to see a learner succeed. That's what makes him different from all the other principals" (Learner A 2010).

"We often have the meetings with the principal, telling us that 'We should give all we have for these learners'...even when it is hard, when it is hard situations, difficult situations, then we have to do our job. We have to build future leaders...Even if the learner doesn't want to learn, we have means to take the learner to the principal. The principal talks to the learner: 'You want to learn? Or you don't want? If you don't want then the gates are open, you should go. But what will you be in the future? What will you be? Because you will be nothing. You won't achieve anything by going out of school' " (HOD B 2010).

"I always emphasize time spent on learners, time on task then...If that learner now happens to be going through your hands, you need to make sure that whatever goes through your hands is a genuine product that will be a true representation of what you contributed in life. So that's what pushes me most. I want to make it a point that poor as they are from disadvantaged families, we need to make sure that we protect them against some form of exploitation. And we give them the best, so that education finally changes...somehow transforms their life" (Mshololo 2010).

## **IMPACT**

### **Consistent Results**

The result of the school's unique policies and the strong leadership of Mshololo is that Menzi High School is now one of the best township schools in the country. Though in

1990, Menzi was just another township school with an extremely low matric pass rate, now its matric class consistently passes at a rate close to 100%. One teacher who has taught at Menzi since 1990 says that in the past twenty years, the school has been completely transformed. “After the arrival of Mr. Mshololo, I felt that I am a recognized teacher. Because even the school results, they changed. We were now even recognized provincially. You see, if you are teaching in a school that is without any order, everyone undermines you” (Teacher A 2010). The following table shows how the matric pass rates have changed over the past twenty years, with key events from the school’s history. Matric pass rates from 1991 are not consistently available or reliable due to a lack of bookkeeping from principal to principal.

<b>MENZI HIGH SCHOOL – TIMELINE</b>		
<b>Year</b>	<b>Matric Pass Rate</b>	<b>Key Events</b>
1965		School established
1990		Mshololo appointed principal
1991	25.64%	Monthly testing implemented
1992	25%	Mshololo began teaching matric learners
1993	31%	Mshololo achieves 100% pass rate on his commercial stream
1994	83%	
1995	72.73%	
1996	82.96%	Extended hours begun
1997	87.5%	
1998	92.3%	
1999	97.92%	
2000	94.59%	
2001	100%	
2002	95.71%	Computers donated by Telkom
2003	96.9%	Two trailers provided by Department for temporary classrooms
2004	95.06%	State Visit by President of India
2005	98.86%	
2006	97.53%	Science labs worth 200,000USD donated by President of India
2007	95.8%	
2008	97.8%	Media visit on day matric results are released Flat screen computers donated by Dell
2009	98.96%	

The school can be considered exceptionally successful because although the majority of learners live in informal settlements, almost all graduates go on to further education after matric. Mshololo says, and other teachers confirmed, that about 65-70% of Menzi’s graduates go on to get a degree from universities. Most of the others get diplomas from technical

colleges. This is an extraordinary achievement considering the fact that in South Africa on average, only 1 in 10 black pupils even qualifies for university (Economist 2010). Though finances do pose a challenge for the majority of students, it usually does not stop Menzi's graduates from making it through university. They access financing through the federal TAFSA program or bursaries. Many are sponsored by companies such as Eskom, Hewlett or Tutuma, particularly those strong in accounting, engineering or science. In the past, some students have been so poor that they cannot even afford the application fee, but Mr. Mshololo says that in the past few years he and the SMT have enabled the majority of students to find the funding to apply and attend higher education. Teachers say that Mr. Mshololo is the one who helps many students to get information about their options and find financial means to go to university. He assists matrices in the application process by going to get application forms from the district office and leaving them in his office for matrices to come and access. Mshololo uses the goal of university as an incentive to motivate learners to perform well in high school and on their matric exams. "That's the gospel that we preach, again, that you don't have to worry about your economic status. Yours is to produce good results. Because sponsors are there waiting for assisting those that are producing good results" (Mshololo 2010). I argue that so many learners go onto attend university because they feel prepared and are confident that they can handle the work because of their experience at Menzi High School. One matric student, who will be attending University of Cape Town next year, says, "the word Menzi means you're a 'doer,' you're doing something... The legacy that the school has keeps me going. It makes me feel like I can change anything or go anywhere, just by being here" (Learner A 2010).

Teachers also view Menzi as an exceptional school due to the orderly environment and support they receive for high quality work. One teacher, who came to Menzi last year after working at a high school in a rural area, says that the two schools are like completely different worlds. "The kids, although the background is still the same from poor, disadvantaged, but the kids they were not the same... here they are always disciplined because they are always told about the morals. The good morals of the school, how they should behave. And I think that contributes to their behavior, because they are very good. They are obedient, they do their work they are supposed to do" (HOD B 2010). Two of the teachers interviewed had both taken a break from teaching to work in the private sector and when they decided to return to teaching, chose to come to Menzi because they believed it to be one of the best township schools in the country. One of the teachers, a former inspector for

the Homeland Department of Education, has seen many failing schools and knows that Menzi has a unique culture of learning and teaching that makes it stand out and achieve excellence.

I decided to join a school like this one because...I just have to get to a school where learners are disciplined, where the teachers are simply all showing the sense of responsibility and I can easily join them, because otherwise it could frustrate me after so many years outside the field, to simply get to any school where people do any thing any how (Teacher B 2010).

The other teacher chose Menzi because of Mshololo's leadership.

In Umlazi, all of Umlazi, I thought this is the person who because of the thinking, he's thinking the same as mine, and if we work together I think we will achieve wonders together. I like to see progress and see people succeeding. I like developing people (Teacher C 2010).

The fact that they chose to come to Menzi is a good indicator of how the school is performing in comparison to other schools in Umlazi and other townships. It shows how once a school does improve, it will act as a magnet to attract effective teachers because it will give them what they want, a school environment conducive to learning. Good teachers will be willing to teach disadvantaged students if there is effective leadership in a school, because they want to know that their actions will bring about a positive impact and will not be futile.

Another indication that the school is doing a good job is that some of Menzi's teachers send their own children there, even if they can afford to see them to more expensive, former Model C schools. For example, one HOD brought her daughter to Menzi for grades 11 and 12 after going to Queensburgh Girls for high school, because she knew that Menzi would better prepare her to do well on matric. Her daughter is now a nurse while many of her friends from Queensburgh have lower-paying jobs. She explains her decision: "The principal says, 'teach the learners as if you are teaching your own child.' So now if you can do that, then you won't see a need of paying that extra thousand. So now most of us have brought our relatives here, our children here, because they are getting the best education" (HOD A 2010). This shows that Menzi's teachers trust the institution of the school so much that they will place their own children in it, which means they believe it is effective and trust their colleagues' work.

Though the physical infrastructure of the school is poor, learners value the education they have received at Menzi. Hundreds of students apply for grade 8 each year because have heard positive reviews and believe it to be a good school. One matric student, who will be attending University of Cape Town next year, says, "I didn't want to come to Menzi because of the physical appearance of the school...you get learners from all these learners from all

these all these fancy schools and you say you're from Menzi. Menzi township school. That's, in a way it was embarrassing. I was ashamed of my school. But not anymore" (Learner A 2010). Another student who will attend UCT says, "I don't have any regrets from coming to Menzi because I'm proud of my school producing good results. The physical appearance doesn't matter to me because what matters is what is inside. The teachers and the education" (Learner C 2010).

### **Mandisa's Story**

Teachers and students point to the story of one particular student that exemplifies the impact of Menzi High School. Mandisa Nene was a learner in the matric class that graduated in 2009. Though her family was extremely poor and lived in a shack, she was self-disciplined and a dedicated student. Mandisa placed 6<sup>th</sup> in the province on her matric exams. Because she achieved such extraordinary matric results, she was rewarded with a bursary of R85 000 from Ithaca Bank to go to University of Cape Town. The municipality built her family a new house and now she is now able to sponsor her brother to go to technical college. One teacher who taught Mandisa points her out as an example of what inspires her to be a committed teacher: "When you see learners changing situation, the situation changing" (HOD A 2010). Because of students like Mandisa, teachers at Menzi know that their work can change lives and make a significant impact on poverty in the families with which they work.

Mandisa's story indicates not only how teachers help learners at Menzi, but also how learners support each other as they each try to excel. Learners create a supportive environment where excellence is encouraged. One teacher recalls how after long days of studying, when Mandisa needed to return home, "the boys will actually accompany her at home, so that she will be safe. They will leave here at 8 o'clock, and then they will protect her, to her place so that she will be safe" (HOD A 2010). Though learners are in friendly competition with one another for the top spots in the class, they work with each other and help each other along the way. Learners from each grade also support each other in that high-performing learners inspire younger learners to also succeed. Current matric students say that Mandisa's story is their biggest motivator to spend such long hours in school in order to perform well on their matrices. One top matric student said, "We know that with education, everything is possible. We've seen it... Mandisa was just like us... She is like a hero now to us" (Learner A 2010). The top student in the matric class said, "when I think about her I also want to produce results like her... When I asked her what to do to get to university, she told me that the only thing I have to do is work hard and listen to my teachers. That's all"



(Learner C 2010). When learners see their peers succeeding, people who are from the same circumstances as they are, they realize that it is possible for them to succeed as well. When they see the example of excellence played out before their eyes, they are more likely to work hard because they know that their work can actually achieve something. The net results of Menzi's policies and school leadership is that the school now has an entrenched culture of high performance that brings consistently high matric pass rates and has enabled the school to continuously improve. Mandisa's story is not an isolated incident. Dozens of students from this year's graduating class will be attending University of Cape Town next year, many with company sponsorships, and most other graduates will be attending other universities or colleges.

### **Limitations of Menzi's Approach**

Menzi High School is by no means perfect. Despite the teachers' best efforts, many students who arrive in grade 8 end up dropping out before they reach matric. Teachers remarked that every year, usually about half of grade 9 students drop out instead of continuing to grade 10. Reasons included the fact that students have to specialize in grade 10 and that they simply aren't prepared for the higher level of work. One HOD says, "I think most learners they come to high school not prepared for high school... now in grade 9, there's a decline. And few of them they go to grade 10. Because in grade 10 is where they specialize... then they end up getting frustrated" (HOD A 2010). Mshololo argues that the drop out rate is due to a larger problem in the home environment of many students, where there is a lack of parental guidance. He also believes that as they mature some learners realize that they want to be in a school with less discipline, so they transfer to a high school that is less strict.

The high drop out rate raises an important question: what kind of person succeeds in the kind of intense, disciplined environment that exists at Menzi? Can Menzi High School truly be considered a good example when there are still so many students who slip through the cracks? One teacher argues that learners with a certain type of personality end up spending more time with teachers and end up passing matric. "The kids that you understand better are those which are open, extroverts. There are those that you find very difficult to get to, I'd say that's 30% that don't understand, are not outspoken" (Teacher C 2010). He says that

Menzi High School—2010	
Grade	Number of Students
8	290
9	330
10	164
11	160
12	114
Total	1,058

Saturday classes are technically optional and not all students choose to come. Those students, he says, “are the ones that get left behind” (Teacher C 2010). Menzi’s approach does not ensure that every student who enrolls in grade 8 will make it to university; according to teachers, typically only about half the students will end up making it that far. But the students who do are likely to go on to further education and as a result, probably have a high chance of finding a job and improving their economic circumstances.

The school still doesn’t address the more fundamental issues of poverty and lack of parental guidance that many students from disadvantaged environments face. There is only so much guidance that a teacher with 60 students a class can give. One teacher remarks that sometimes, even if he does try to talk to parents about how their children need to attend class on Saturdays, they don’t listen and do not have their priorities straight. “They don’t understand even though you write, that is to tell them that your kids need extra tuition, otherwise he or she is not going to progress, he or she still don’t understand what you’re saying” and they give the excuse of a lack of finances (Teacher C 2010). Mshololo also cites a lack of parental guidance, that parents don’t place a high value on education, as the key reason for the drop out rate.

Despite these issues, Menzi can still be considered an effective school relative to other high schools in Umlazi, if not other township schools in South Africa, according to its matric pass rates. This begs the question, how replicable is Menzi’s model? Every staff member I spoke with admitted that Menzi’s approach requires teachers to spend many extra hours outside of class in preparation and working with students in smaller groups. This kind of commitment is sustained by the culture of the school and the teachers’ love for the learners. Teachers are paid salaries similar to teachers at other high schools even though they might be achieving better outcomes. They are not paid for the extra hours they spend with students outside of normal class hours. As education policy in South Africa stands today, teachers are primarily motivated to be effective based upon their own altruistic will to be good teachers. Menzi’s success was only achieved through a long-term transformation, where its leadership was continuously focused on improvement and created a school culture that fostered effective teaching and high performance. Other high schools will not be able to achieve a similar transformation unless they have strong leadership similar to Principal Mshololo. Also, Menzi’s approach is not applicable in every type of geographical area. The school is in an urban area, so the department’s support structures of cluster groups and subject advisors has worked for Menzi’s teachers because they are nearby other schools. The

same kind of assessment and support structure would not be as effective in a rural area because subject advisors can not travel to schools and cluster meetings cannot be held as easily. However, Menzi's strategies could possibly be utilized at other schools with a similar profile: under-resourced urban township schools with entirely African, high-poverty learners.

## **MENZI IN PERSPECTIVE**

In previous sections, I have explained the policies, vision and leadership that have enabled Menzi's success. It is important to situate this success in the context of education reform in South Africa in order to understand the affect of departmental and national policy on township schools.

### **Relationship with Department**

First of all, Menzi's staff is generally positive when it comes to departmental policy. They believe that the department's policies of providing assistance through cluster groups and subject advisors, and requiring quarterly exams, are usually effective. Their relationship with the district is quite good because subject advisors are generally willing to help whenever requested. Mshololo and other teachers like this support structure and the department's policy of having quarterly exams. Mshololo says that the department recognizes him for his achievements by inviting him to speak at annual district meetings, so that he can tell the success stories of how his SMT has improved Menzi. He says the department does appreciate him because they know that he will continue to produce good results. For example, in June he received a communiqué from the district director, saying, "from Menzi High School, we are expecting nothing less than 100% this 2010" (Mshololo 2010). Also, in 2004 the President of India chose to visit Menzi because of its high matric pass rates. He promised to donate two new science laboratories, which were later built in 2006. However, from my observations, it seems that the department expects success from Menzi but does not reward it.

Though Menzi is one of the best township schools in KZN, the school's physical infrastructure has not been renovated or expanded since it was first established in 1965. Mshololo says that he has applied for ten additional classrooms every year since 1992 and his request has never been granted (Mshololo 2010). Initially, he wanted to do so in order to broaden the curriculum and offer more options for learners, but now he just needs the classrooms and additional teachers in order to have smaller class sizes and admit more students in grade 8. He says, "I've always been applying for the extension for the school to be expanded, but the department will always make promises, and promises have always been

empty” (Mshololo 2010). However, he is empathetic to district officials and recognizes that they are under financial constraints that limit their ability to renovate schools. “Most of the time you ask for something that has to do with finance, the answer will always be something like ‘our coffers are dry’ and for me, I understand that language, so I wouldn’t be referring to such responses as straining our relationship. So I take it” (Mshololo 2010). He has continued to try and apply for renovations through the existing channels of the district. However, teachers say that in 2003, Mshololo had been pressuring the department for so long about extra classrooms that they consented and provided him with two trailers, supposedly temporary. Today, the trailers still sit in the parking lot, continuing to be used as classrooms, with no sign of more permanent renovations in sight. In 2009, the SMT was told that they were going to finally be renovated, and they made plans for how they would adjust their classes to facilitate the expansion. The construction team never appeared, and the principal’s calls for more classrooms continue to go unheeded. Despite the false promises, Mshololo is not bitter about the situation; he recognizes that there are schools in rural areas that should be a priority for the department, whose buildings are in a much worse condition.

### **Influence of Unions**

Some members of the school’s staff think that the lack of renovations are due to the influence of unions on district policy. Though teachers at Menzi are union members, most are not active union members. The deputy principal estimates that 6 out of Menzi’s 26 teachers are SADTU members, and that most of the rest are NATU members (Ntombela 2010). Though the SMT are all union members, they do not actively participate because according to the deputy principal, “We prefer to be neutral because we are SMT members” (Ntombela 2010). Menzi’s teachers are not active SADTU members, which is evident in the fact that teachers at Menzi did not strike in September 2010 along with most other teachers in township schools. Menzi’s teachers choose not to strike because they believe that the welfare of the learner must come before that of the teacher. One teacher told me she believes that Mshololo is different from most other principals because he is not interested in gaining more power from a union.

Most of the schools around here, they have the younger principals, who are very very active in their unions...So if the unions say, ‘let’s jump’ they also jump together with their teachers...They put the unions first, rather than the school...The mature teachers like Mr. Mshololo, they put the learner first, rather than the union (Teacher A 2010).

She says teachers at Menzi are different than most teachers in townships because they follow Mshololo's example and think independently of SADTU. They do not follow the union's orders blindly. "I put the learner first, because I became a teacher before I became a union member...I am a teacher before I became SADTU...I am independent...They cannot stand on their own. I am able to stand on my own" (Teacher A 2010). Teachers say that they are not active SADTU members because SADTU calls many meetings during teaching hours and does not encourage teachers to make up for that lost time. They are learner-centered and do not want to take away from time in the classroom.

Teachers spoke about how they believe that because Mshololo and Menzi's staff are not active supporters of SADTU, the department tries to undermine Menzi's success. For example, one teacher spoke about how in some newspaper reports of high-achieving schools, Menzi's name is not listed even if it has the necessary pass rates. He believes that department officials may purposely remove Menzi from the lists before they are submitted to the newspaper in order to punish Mshololo and his staff for not supporting SADTU (Teacher C 2010). Teachers also spoke about how they believe that the school has not been renovated because Menzi's staff do not support district officials when they request favors in regards to politics or SADTU. One teacher says that when a principal applies for funding for school renovations, "They look at the unions which you are affiliated in. And then if you are not in affiliate of that union which is favorable with the ruling party, they don't support you" (Ntombela 2010). Other teachers hold the same belief.

They will be trying to put you down. They don't seem to want to work for the child, but for themselves and for their organizations. You see, therefore, when you start saying 'I need this and that' they've got to check which side you fall...its not everybody that will appreciate the good that the school does. There will be those that wish it was their own man that was that successful and therefore, do things that may discourage (Teacher B 2010).

The teacher says that in return for rewards such as renovations, district officials expect principals to give political favors and meet the demands of the union. For example, one teacher says, SADTU will call Mshololo and request that he use Menzi's schoolchildren for a political rally. They will ask him to send his learners dressed in their uniforms with political flags to stand in the crowd at a rally before elections. He always refuses.

### **A System that Rewards Politics, Not Performance**

Teachers spoke about how they think the influence of the unions is the reason why many teachers promoted to top district positions are not adequately qualified.

Regarding why they are not that eager to come forward and simply help with the renovations of the schools, you would also notice that maybe they might as well not be that eager to have him promoted. You see. Because that's also part of the way they always want to sort of reward their own people... Their own people in the sense that when they say, 'we want to use the children this way, to convey this message' and so forth, he says, 'not these. You may go to other schools. Not these. These are here in order to study, they are not going to benefit out of that' (Teacher B 2010).

Mshololo is a strong leader because he does not bend to the political will of unions. He puts the goal of high performance and excellence of learning and effective teaching above all other goals, including his own career aspirations. Mshololo believes that since 1994, the influence of unions has brought about a lack of professionalism in historically African schools. Teachers argue that increasingly, principals and other leadership positions in the district and province are appointed because of their political affiliation with a union and not because of their merit. In the words of one veteran teacher, "In South Africa these days, you're only recognized when you are affiliated with a certain party. If you are not an ANC member, it doesn't matter what you do" (Teacher C 2010). Some teachers at Menzi believe that the reason Menzi's success is so isolated is because at other schools, principals are not being appointed because of the quality of their past work, but rather on their political connections.

It doesn't matter that the competitor is so good. They won't lie down, they won't lie back, for as long as their man hasn't got the position. Despite of the fact that they know he knows much less... You find there are subject advisors who come to advise our teachers only to find our teachers know more than they do. Because they've only been taken over there on the ticket of the union (Teacher B 2010).

The result of the union's influence, Menzi's teachers argue, is that many higher officials are not doing their jobs well, and are not capable of enabling other high schools to improve as Menzi has. Promotions within the department are not based around performance, but rather on personal connections. When asked why Menzi has not been more recognized and rewarded for its high matric pass rates, teachers pointed to a lack of effective leadership in their district. Though the district may Mshololo to speak to principals and district officials from other schools at annual meetings, that does not make many principals change to be more effective because, he believes, their primary motive is to make more money, not to improve the quality of teaching within their schools. "What I've learned is that most of the people who aspire for senior positions are merely aspiring to get better paid. It's not about the task involved... the core business of the position is secondary... That is what is really killing the

standard of education of late” (Mshololo 2010). He believes many officials want more power and the higher salary that comes with it, without the responsibility that the office entails. Mshololo does respond to the media whenever asked to comment about issues in education, and he always makes it know that the quality of a school is determined by the leadership guiding schools and the larger Department of Education. He argues that the current promotion system is a problem because many principals think about power and are aspiring for senior positions within the department that will bring a higher salary. Because promotions are usually based around one’s connections to SADTU, this means that principals may put the union first, rather than the learner. As a result, many principals and education officials are not interested in providing the high quality of work that they are supposedly paid for. If in order to be promoted, a principal only needs to be politically savvy, not improve their school, then where is the incentive for ineffective principals to change? The end result, Mshololo acknowledges, is that the district does not function as well as it should because most of the people in high offices in the department “were underachievers at school level.” He says even if the director of the department does want Menzi to be renovated, the person in charge of planning and allocating funding for renovations may be irresponsible and may not follow through with the necessary funds. According to Mshololo, “Most of those leaders, ranking in high offices, are a shame in terms of the profession” (Mshololo 2010).

At Menzi, promotions to senior positions such as HOD or deputy principal are based upon merit. Mshololo believes that it needs to be the same way within the education department. People should rise through the ranks based upon their proven effective work in schools. He believes that before a promotion, the department needs to clearly define its expectations for a position and then make sure people are qualified and have the resources to meet those expectations.

If we could as a country, as a school, as any educational institution...if we could define the deliverables—what is it that is expected of one to perform? Versus what one is capable of doing—then we go places, I tell you, we can improve. But now what is lacking seriously is that each time we look at positions, senior positions or promotion positions, we think of it in terms of money. Not in terms of the tasks, or the deliverables (Mshololo 2010).

Mshololo thinks like a businessman, in terms of specific outcomes, goals and expectations for performance, and this is one of the main reasons why he has been able to achieve such high matric pass rates at Menzi. That kind of emphasis on performance by leadership is what is needed for education to improve in every school. Principals need to take a managerial

outlook that critically analyzes every level of the system and identifies what needs to be changed in order to create better outcomes. One teacher, who has known Mshololo since they were young men in teaching school, believes that one of the reasons why he has achieved such a transformation at Menzi is because he chose to focus solely on that task, of bringing about effective teaching within his one school, rather than viewing his work at Menzi as a stepping stone to another position. “I think he made a conscious decision that he’s not going to go up to a higher level job. He will stay in his job and do what he wants to do” (Teacher C 2010). If this is true, it would have given Mshololo the freedom to change the culture of Menzi in whatever way he chooses, because he is not worried about promotion or how union officials will react. He has effectively led Menzi’s staff because his ambition rests with the school and the learners.

Menzi’s success is an ‘outlier’ because as a result of the department’s affiliation with unions, the department does not reward principals for high performance, but rather for their political affiliation. In the words of one teacher, “the system at present encourages that. It doesn’t matter how badly you perform, as long as you make a lot of noise about how good certain party is in politics, that’s when you get rewarded” (Teacher C 2010). Some people may blame low performance in township high schools on the lack of motivation in the learners themselves, that their disadvantaged home environment hinders them from wanting to be high-achievers. However, Mshololo argues that the opposite is true.

If, for example, the school is under-performing...learners are not...responsible for that failure. It’s the people employed who fail to apply the policies. Its the department that is failing to impose some forms of punishment or some forms of support to these teachers...Its the department that is failing to come out with some form of mechanism of making the ineffective teachers effective. So at the end of the day, learners are being the victims of that poor organization. They are the people who suffer (Mshololo 2010).

He believes that the department focuses too much on learners and places the onus of responsibility onto them for not working hard, instead of on the teachers for not teaching effectively. There are no repercussions for principals that fail to transform their school.

If I were to be minister today, a national minister...I wouldn’t be paying a bonus to a principal that is running a school that is under-performing...People get away with wrong things because there are no effective measures in place to correct the wrong. So whether your school is getting 0%, the other one’s getting 100%, you are all paid the same if you fall in the same category, and that’s it. You get away with murder, learners are failing, you have destroyed the nation, but nothing is done to you (Mshololo 2010).



## Implications for Future

The fact that the education department does not always reward good performers for their work will lead to the decline of the entire educational system. If effective leaders are not compensated for their work, then the system will have to rely on principals like Mshololo, who have the strong personal character and commitment necessary to devote long hours to the task of improving a school. In the long run, that will only go so far, because that type of leader is rare. It takes an exceptional strength to be able to pursue high performance and excellence when higher officials don't necessarily support that vision or work with the same sense of urgency. One of Menzi's teachers, a former inspector for the Homelands Department of Education, confirms this, saying, "When you happen to have a vision for an educational system that people don't share, and they happen to be higher up and more influential, you actually find yourself frustrated, because you can't do it" (Teacher B 2010). In the context of Menzi, though Mshololo and his SMT may wish they could enable more learners to pass matric and lower their drop out rate, they need the financial resources from the department to hire more teachers and build more classrooms. Currently, Menzi's teachers believe that due to the influence of SADTU in the department of education, officials are increasingly being hired based upon their politics and not upon their merit. Sadly, as one teacher recognizes, "These days the situation is becoming so bad that the bad performers in numbers exceed the good performers. And then they can push around the good performers" (Teacher C 2010). The more that effective leaders like Mshololo become frustrated with the education department, the more likely that they will give up. Strong leaders will be pushed out by weak leaders promoted due to their connections with unions. The story of Menzi High School shows that teachers are capable of good work if they are under the right leadership and managed correctly. The key piece missing in most township schools is effective leadership. In order for every township school in South Africa to transform and improve, there needs to be effective leadership throughout the department of education. If officials continue to be promoted due to their union connections, Menzi's success will continue to be an 'outlier' rather than a normal occurrence. Mshololo believes that the department of education does not reward effective leaders if they improve their school. In that kind of irrational system, eventually those that are doing good work will become so fed up that they will leave.

At the end of the day, we have so many uncommitted people who are holding high positions. And that alone is not only destroying that person, but it is destroying the organization. You know, people serving under a directionless leader get frustrated. They suffocate. They get frustrated and do everything

they can. Others end up being destroyed in the sense that they abdicate their duties...But if they have the right people to follow, if they get the right leaders in their workplaces, I can tell you people will perform. People like to work, but they need to be managed, they need the right direction...obviously, whosoever is leading should be the practitioner. You cannot theorize, you cannot just preach things and never practice such things (Mshololo 2010).

The more immediate impact of the district's policies is that while Menzi has many more applicants than it can take, hundreds of students each year who want to attend because they know Menzi is an effective school, it only has the capacity to take less than 300 of them. They admit learners on a first-come, first-serve basis, so the only factor that determines whether a student will succeed is whether they or their parents come to Menzi early enough in October when admissions opens after that term's exams. Those that do not get in will most likely go to other high schools in Umlazi that have much lower matric pass rates than Menzi. According to Mshololo,

We are getting on a daily basis, we are getting more and more applicants coming to apply but we can't accommodate them. But schools, some schools adjacent to us are still empty. They will have learners who finally find themselves registered inside schools much against their will. But whose fault is it? It's the control measures on the side of the department (Mshololo 2010).

One HOD says that it is depressing to turn away so many parents because of a lack of capacity, because unlike at other schools in Umlazi, "If you look at our learners, they have a shot" (HOD A 2010). She says that Menzi's high rate of acceptance and sponsorships to universities draws parents because at Menzi, "they know that very well, if I can manage to have my child up to grade 12, then my child, the child will be able to study. Regardless of whether the child will have registration money" (HOD A 2010).

## CONCLUSIONS

On average, classes at Menzi have 61 students each. Menzi is already relatively successful with those large class sizes and poor infrastructure. Imagine what a leader like Mshololo could do with more classrooms—equipped with modern technology and more desks—and more teachers. Menzi could serve more students, students who would otherwise attend failing schools, and could enable a greater amount of learners in Umlazi to pass matric and go on to further education. Over generations, those hundreds of extra university graduates would make a huge difference in creating leaders in Umlazi and lessening the rate of poverty and unemployment in the township. Good schools prepare good leaders who then go and create more good schools. If Menzi were able to serve more students, maybe more

learners would go on to be effective principals and transform their own township schools. Even though Menzi is now an ‘outlier’, if its capacity is expanded, its graduates could go on to affect change and improve other schools so that its success would become common.

Education in South Africa will not improve unless effective teachers and school leadership are rewarded for effective work. Most township schools are failing because that is not occurring. The education system is dysfunctional because high performance is not rewarded. Principals like Mshololo are not given everything that they need to continuously improve and expand upon their school’s performance. Unless learner-centered principals are supported, schools like Menzi, township schools that have been able to succeed, will become more and more uncommon. Principals doing effective work will feel more frustrated than helped by the department of education. Leaders such as Mshololo might be appointed to the position of principal and feel so intimidated by the task of working within an oppressive, failing system that they will leave before they even begin the task of transforming a school. The task is urgent because the more the Department of Education becomes politicized on the basis of unions, the less likely that effective leaders like Mshololo will be supported.

Menzi was originally considered an experimental school by the Homeland Department of Education. Officials should reconsider as an experiment today. Back in 1965, the school was one of the first to offer matric classes to African students. What if today, the school was one of the first schools in the country to be rewarded for its outstanding matric pass rates, with renovations of buildings, rewards for high-performing teachers and funding for new classrooms and new teachers? Though this kind of paradigm shift may not be politically feasible due to the influence of SADTU, this kind of revolutionary thinking is critical in order to transform failing township schools across South Africa.

Based upon my research at Menzi, I thus offer four recommendations to the Department of Education in order to make Menzi’s high performance possible for other disadvantaged township schools. The recommendations might be politically unfeasible but they are important to offer nonetheless. Though ideally the interventions would be funded by the Department of Education itself, district or provincial officials might lack the political will to do so. The responsibility thus falls to NGO’s or private funders to implement the interventions.

### **Recommendation 1: Performance-based rewards**

In order to incentivize effective leadership, the Department of Education's intervention efforts should recognize the need to expand incrementally off of existing effective schools. Instead of spending money to renovate schools whose leadership has not proven successful, they should focus on supporting already effective leaders. If they continue to fund all schools, despite performance, equally, they might be directing resources towards a school that, even with better classrooms, due to ineffective leadership will not produce better outcomes no matter how much funding it receives. The Department needs a performance-based strategy that rewards effective leadership in high-poverty schools. They should identify successful schools and reward them with more classrooms, renovations, and funding for more teachers so that they can serve more students. They should reward good leadership. The strategy should be more of a free market system where schools with more learners are given the classrooms and teachers they need to expand.

### **Recommendation 2: Expand Menzi to primary school**

Many teachers talked about how most students come to grade 8 without having already learned the information they need for high school. The earlier grades don't prepare them adequately and that lack of knowledge builds on itself in a layering effect. This is coupled with the national policy of promoting students through grades 8 and 9 despite whether they pass or fail, just based upon their age. The end result is that many students get to grade 10 without the skills they need in the workplace, after having been passed along for so many years from teacher to teacher without getting the attention that they need. If Menzi could partner with a specific primary school and implement some of the same strategies that worked to improve Menzi, Menzi's drop out rate might be smaller because the school leadership could more adequately prepare the students earlier on. Already, HOD's at Menzi speak to their feeder primary schools about what they expect from learners (HOD A 2010). They find that many of the students arriving in Grade 8 are not prepared for high school, so they talk to the primary schools about how they can alter their curriculum to better prepare their students coming out of grade 7. What if that relationship was more formalized? Menzi, an effective high school, could partner with a failing primary school nearby and they could work together to improve the primary school. Menzi's success should be studied and replicated in other schools in a deliberate fashion. Effective teachers from Menzi or other 'outlier' schools should be sent to failing schools to try to apply strategies for improvement and turn them around.

### **Recommendation 3: Leadership program for principals, led by Mr. Mshololo**

Effective teachers in disadvantaged environments should be identified, trained with the tools specifically necessary for principalship, and sent to failing schools with the goal of transforming them into effective schools. Already, Mshololo is asked to speak to district meetings of other principals to talk to them about his work, but even he argues that this is not an effective way of transferring his best practices to other schools. Instead, the Department should identify successful teachers based upon merit and have them attend a leadership program meant to specifically train effective principals in high-poverty environments, led by Mshololo. He himself learned time management and leadership skills from his upbringing and past experience, not from listening to a teacher tell him about them. Teachers chosen for the program need to have already had experience working in a high-poverty school and to have been identified as effective, motivated teachers. Even if district officials tell other principals to improve, they will not do so unless they make the conscious decision and have the intrinsic motivation to do good work. The Department should identify who has that intrinsic motivation and allow them to enroll in this professional development program. The department should reward principalships to teachers that thrive in the program, who have the requisite motivation and changes in attitude to be strong leaders, not personal connections. Due to the current influence of SADTU, the Department might not be capable of implementing such a program fairly. If so, it is the responsibility of civil society to create the leadership development program. Instead of implementing interventions in a ‘blanket’ way, without regard to whether a school has the capacity to respond well to the initiative or not, Educational NGO’s should identify existing success stories and effective leaders and enable them to develop their leadership skills and build stronger institutions.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER STUDY**

The Department should develop a monitoring and evaluation system to track graduates from Menzi in comparison to other high schools with lower matric pass rates. A longitudinal tracking study would enable the Department to see where students end up after graduation, how many go to university and their long-term economic standing. This is necessary in order to see the effects of different types of schools, in order to determine what methods best produce citizens who are economically self-sufficient. It would also analyze the long-term affects of a matric pass. There needs to be more research on the long-term effects

of effective and ineffective township schools, to determine just what it is that makes a school one way or the other.

There is a need for further research on outlier schools such as Menzi in order to expose their good work and bring them the resources and support that they deserve. Research should compare the experiences of outlier township schools. Journalists should write not only about the stories of schools such as Menzi and successful learners such as Mandisa Nene, but also about effective leaders such as Felix Mshololo. In order to understand education reform in South Africa, we must understand what motivates leaders such as Mshololo and what is needed to enable more leaders to be like him.

## INTERVIEWS

HOD A. Personal interview by author. Menzi High School. 2 November 2010.

HOD B. Personal interview by author. Menzi High School. 4 November 2010.

Learner A, Learner B and Learner C. Group interview by author. Menzi High School. 10 November 2010.

Mshololo, Felix. Personal interviews by author. Menzi High School. 2 November 2010 and 19 November 2010.

Ntombela, Thulisile. Personal interview by author. Menzi High School. 4 November 2010.

Teacher A. Personal interview by author. Menzi High School. 4 November 2010.

Teacher B. Personal interview by author. Menzi High School. 7 November 2010.

Teacher C. Personal interview by author. Menzi High School. 10 November 2010.

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## APPENDIX A: KAMPER'S PROFILE OF EFFECTIVE PRINCIPALS

### The personal profile

The principal of a high-poverty school:

- has a strong social conscience and is passionate about the upliftment of the poor;
- has respect for the human dignity of the poor;
- is knowledgeable about the poverty situation and poverty alleviation measures in South Africa, and identifies fully with the survival struggle of the poor;
- adheres to a 'can do' ethos and believes strongly in the potential and capabilities of each learner, whatever his/her home background, to excel academically, as well as in the potential of the school to provide high-quality teaching, and in own capabilities of leading the school to sustained success;
- avoids all forms of labelling and views every learner as an asset to the school;
- accepts no compromise regarding high expectations, learner achievement goals and standards of excellence;
- believes that every learner, teacher and parent deserves to have growth opportunities and accepts that the school is essentially a learning organisation where everybody, from the principal to the illiterate parent, has ongoing opportunities to learn;
- is committed to empowering teachers to engage in excellent teaching, learners to achieve optimal success, and parents to participate as much as they can;
- accepts the school's role as a support, care and upliftment centre for the community;
- believes that school success depends very strongly on teamwork and collaboration;
- trusts others with decision-making;
- models an invitational disposition, commitment, hard work, punctuality, accountability, neat personal appearance, and effective classroom teaching;
- is strong and articulate in religious belief;
- is innovative and courageous in tackling seemingly insurmountable problems; and
- is energetic and radiates enthusiasm and bravery for the tasks at hand.

### The capability profile

The principal of a high-poverty school must in particular be able to:

- think and act like a visionary;
- establish an inviting and safe school environment;
- tirelessly acquire what the school needs for effective caregiving and quality tuition by opportunistically exploring every possible source and by establishing a support network for the school;
- inspire teachers both as educators and in their roles as counsellors and caregivers;
- delegate decision-making through the establishment of a culture of teacher leadership;
- allow teachers to be innovative and even take risks;
- monitor learner progress meticulously, constructively and individually, in close consultation with the teachers;
- create a sense of family in the school;
- build a team spirit and pride in the school;
- mobilise parents for school involvement and support; and
- overcome feelings of desolation and self-pity in the event of a lack of support from, or even smothering measures on the part of, provincial and district education authorities.



## APPENDIX B: MAMPURU'S DETERMINANTS OF SCHOOL SUCCESS

1. Leadership styles.
2. Motivation on the part of learners and teachers.
3. Sharing the vision and mission statement.
4. Staff and learner involvement.
5. Partnership for change.
6. Initiating planning, organising, guiding and controlling.
7. Open door policy (learners, staff, parents and community).
8. Commitment to excellence (raising standards).
9. Appraisal of teachers, self-assessment of learners and whole-school evaluation.
10. Learner behaviour policy (conflict resolution).
11. Safety and security: an orderly and industrious climate.
12. Extra-curricular activities.
13. Monitoring.
14. Collaborative participatory decision making.
15. High consistent expectations.
16. Focus on TQM.
17. Fostering teamwork.
18. Good communications skills.
19. Negotiation and listening skills.
20. Receiving feedback.
21. Parent and community involvement at all times.
22. Mentoring and an appropriate training target.
23. Rewards and incentives encouraging learners to succeed.
24. Building good relationships with everybody.
25. The encouragement of external critical friends.
26. Accountability.
27. Management by Wandering Around (MBWA).
28. Brain storming.
29. Setting targets for learners and teachers.
30. Time management.
31. Delegating responsibility to staff members.
32. Giving feedback to learners and colleagues to enhance learning and teaching.
33. Linking school and staff development policies.
34. Using parents and community in teaching support.