Trails and tribulations of leadership and change in South African public schools.

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Introduction

South African school principals come from a background with multiple experiences and perspectives. On the one hand they are told they live in a new South Africa where human dignity, equality and education are guaranteed to all. They are told that this new democracy requires responsibility by an educated citizenry as the nation strives to rectify the reality of injustice suffered in the apartheid era. On the other hand, poverty, lack of facilities and resources, lack of management and leadership experience and various other inequalities still pervade the education system.

In education, the past fourteen years has meant a major overhaul of the apartheid education system. One national and nine provincial education departments have been created out of 18 fragmented departments based on race and ethnicity. Budgeting processes are no longer based on race and the curriculum no longer reflects the values of a white minority. Major gains include improved access, accelerated provisioning of school infrastructure, more equitable distribution of resources, improved learner-educator ratios, the introduction of school nutrition programmes and the establishment of democratically elected school governing bodies (Nelson Mandela Foundation, 2005).
However, rural education lags behind educational development in other parts of the country. This is despite the fact that the vast majority of school-going children in South Africa live in poverty stricken rural areas. The poor quality of education in rural areas is integrally linked to inadequate training of educators, infrastructure, nutrition and health.

It may be obvious that schools should be focused on teaching and learning. But the truth of the matter is that in some schools learners learn and progress, and in others very limited teaching and learning take place. The South African Government places much emphasis on providing a high-quality education for all learners. However, equal opportunities and quality means different things to different people. Before schools can deliver high quality curriculum, teaching

and learning experiences, we need to consider how principals could effectively overcome severe inequalities in the achievement of learners against the odds of poverty, illiteracy, unemployment and child-headed homes.

The research question – what should principals know and be able to do to improve teaching and learning in their schools – is the focus of this paper. This paper endeavours to examine aspects of leadership and change in the context of South African public schools. Improving the quality of teaching and learning requires strategies which broadly focus on change in schools and at classroom level. The successful implementation of these strategies depends on the transformation of school management. School leadership in South Africa is currently faced with two major challenges, namely to ensure equitable access to education and to improve the quality of education in general, which place huge demands on the educational leadership corps. The pace of change and the need to be adaptable and responsive to local circumstances requires that managers develop new leadership styles and management skills. Too many schools in South Africa are faced with significant problems of corruption, mismanagement, managerial incompetence, lack of leadership, limited capacity and a lack of courage and willpower to change.

Education managers are required to make huge mind shifts. These mind shifts are not easy to make or sustain because principals' own needs, habits and culture determine how they act and react. Managers who lead well should be able to adapt to changing conditions in the school environment and lead others to adapt well. For the purposes of this study, the National Association of Elementary School Principals' (hereafter NAESP) standards for what principals should know and be able to do to improve their schools was found highly appropriate for studying successful leadership in challenging circumstances (NAESP, 2002:3). A central characteristic of these indicators is that everything a principal does in school must be focused on improving teaching and learning.

Conceptualising education leadership and education management

Effective leadership is generally accepted a being a central component in securing and sustaining school improvement. Muijs and Harris (2003:437) points out that evidence from

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school improvement literature consistently highlights that effective leaders exercise a powerful influence on schools' capacity to improve learner achievement.

Seeking a clear definition of education leadership is problematic (Harber and Davies (1997). It seems as if some conceptual confusion exists over the exact meaning of education leadership. Ribbens and Gunter, 2002:359) explains that

> "The field within which the study and practice of education leadership is located has a number of overlapping and related parts to which various labels are attached – including educational administration, educational management and educational policy".

They are also concerned that there is too much emphasis on leadership and too little focus on leading (detailed and contextualized accounts of what individual leaders should do and why they should do it in varied specific circumstances, how to respond, what outcomes they want to achieve) and leaders (what leaders are and how they become leaders) (p. 362).

Leadership is essentially the process of building and maintaining a sense of vision, culture and interpersonal relationships, whereas management is the co-ordination, support and monitoring of organisational activities. To enact both roles successfully requires a careful balancing act (Day, Harris & Hadfield, 2001:6). Leadership is about having vision and articulating, ordering priorities, motivating others to go along with one's decisions, constantly reviewing what one does and holding onto that which one values.

To Hodgkinson (1991:49) the concept leadership is variable, impenetrable, elusive and delusive. He says that to understand the theory and practice of leadership we must acknowledge that leadership encompasses education management. Hodgkinson defines leadership as moving someone towards goals through organization and it can be done well, badly or indifferently (1991:30). Such a definition stresses that leadership, and being a leader, is about what people do and not what they are.

Gronn (2000:317) splits the concept leadership into two broad polarities: the one an ideal type of transformational leadership, representing the highest point of individualism, and the other managerial leadership which is characterized by systemic properties and role structures. Of the two polarities the individualistic view of leadership dominates the field. This individualism might

be typified as the belief of the power of one and is grounded on the assumption that an effective school depends on the leadership of the principal who has the skills to find the right path and motivate others to take it (2000:319). This kind of reasoning in which leaders are perceived as superior to followers and that followers depend on leaders and leadership consists in doing something to for and on behalf of others.

Sustainable leadership looks beyond individual leaders and building capacity of principals only. Leaders developing leaders is at the heart of sustainability (Hargreaves and Fink, 2005:95). Capacity building initiatives mean that careful attention should be paid to developing leadership of others in a school. Leadership then becomes a distributed responsibility. Distributed leadership among senior management, educators and learners requires routines and management tools of various sorts in the school such as scheduling procedures, evaluation protocols and sharing of information (Spillane, 2006). The culture of schools and the diversity of those that lead them have not always kept pace with the growing diversity in the educator and learner population. Ryan (2005) examines leadership as a collective influence process to promote inclusion. Schools which Sergiovanni (1994) considers as much communities as organisations, are built through process of debate, dialogue and interaction between individuals and collectives, leading to the implementation of values and perspectives of all role players.

A hallmark of the South African government's approach to education and training has been a commitment to address two key priorities:
- achieving equitable access to education; and
- improving the quality of provision (Department of Education, 1996).

Improving the quality of teaching and learning requires strategies which focus broadly on change in schools and at classroom level. The successful implementation of this strategy depends on the transformation of school management. Managers can no longer wait for instructions or decisions from government. The pace of change and the need to be adaptable and responsive to local circumstances requires that managers develop new leadership styles and management skills. They must be capable of providing leadership to diverse teams and be able to interact with heterogeneous communities and stakeholders. The findings of leadership studies in the United Kingdom have demonstrated that effective leadership is determined and

driven by individual value systems, rather than by instrumental managerial concerns (Day, Harris & Hadfield, 2002:2).

McLennan and Thurlow (2003:1) posit that South Africa requires a paradigm shift in education management training. They believe that the scientific education management approach should be replaced by a new approach that focuses on the leadership role of the manager in change management, relationship building, strategic alignment and continuous learning. However, one should take note of Gunter and Ribbens (2002:387) view that

"engaging with issues of knowledge and knowledge production is a demanding task as it requires description, understanding and explanation of what is done, how its done, who does it, where is it done and why is it done".

Education management and leadership are burdened with the task of ensuring that educators are equipped to facilitate cultural understanding and cooperation both in schools and society at large. There is a critical need for all education managers to engage in the new society imbued with the values and principles of an enlightened, modern and democratic constitution (Nkomo, Chisholm & Mc Kinney, 2004:1). The development of education management training programmes requires the developers to engage knowledge (the available literature) and the knowledge production (research). The developers could take up four broad positions in working within and between knowledge or theory and practice: training, consultancy, expertise and intellectual work (Gunter and Ribbens, 2002:407). All four positions should be underpinned by ideology, pedagogy, research and theory. However, taking up the position of training there should be no explicit association with a particular ideology and the presentation of the content should be political neutral. The pedagogy should be to facilitate the content. Research should be done to determine organisational and personal needs to construct the training process and the learning outcomes. The theory component should include models of good practice applied to the organisational context.

Education management and leadership training in South Africa

Schools is South Africa vary enormously, with some being extremely well resourced and in others there is a total breakdown in the culture of teaching and learning. Developing education

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leadership and management programmes for this broad spectrum is daunting. A too strong emphasis on the leadership role of education managers could result in training programmes that negate the generic managerial skills required by principals.

In 2007 five South African universities commenced with the delivery of a pilot two-year programme leading to an Advanced Certificate in Education (ACE) in school management and leadership. This professional development programme was developed by South Africa's National Department of Education and the five participating universities are bound to deliver the same content to principals selected by the provincial departments of education in the different provinces. The national Minister of Education has set a goal of training all school principals in South Africa by 2011 and of making this qualification a baseline for principalship. The ACE programme curriculum, spread over four semesters, includes coursework on education management and leadership, education law, leading and managing people, and managing physical and financial resources. Students complete a portfolio, participate in limited research projects and must demonstrate competence with computers. They also must demonstrate proficiency in English, which for many South Africans is their third or fourth language. Each principal is paired with a mentor, mostly a retired former principal, who regularly visits five to six schools to observe their progress and offer support.

Research design

The research approach for this study was qualitative, since this study focused on interpretation. McMillan and Schumacher (2001:395) defines qualitative research as an interactive inquiry in which researchers collect data in face-to-face situations by interacting with selected persons in their settings (field research). Qualitative research describes and analyses people's individual and collective social actions, beliefs, thoughts, and perceptions (McMillan and Schumacher (2001:395). Thus in qualitative research, the researcher is concerned with understanding the social phenomena from the participants' perspectives and therefore interprets phenomena in terms of the meaning people bring to him/her. A case study method was used focusing on gaining greater insight and understanding of the way rural schools are managed in the Limpopo province of South Africa.

The research was conducted in the Mopani District of the Limpopo province. This district includes towns of Tzaneen, Phalaborwa and Gyani. This rural district is one of the most disadvantaged areas in South Africa. For many schools the roads leading to the schools are in a very bad state, sometimes only accessible by 4X4 vehicles. On rainy days both teachers and learners find it extremely difficult to reach these schools. A very large percentage of the parents are unemployed, the illiteracy rate amongst parents is high, many children are orphans who rely on the school feeding scheme for their meals. This deprived setting relates to many schools in the country, and although this is a case study, the data and implications from the research may be applicable to many school principals enrolled for the ACE in school management and leadership in the various provinces in South Africa.

Fifty school principals from the Limpopo province were selected by the Limpopo Department of Education to enroll for the ACE. Six principals from the Mopani District were purposively sampled for this research project because they provided a representative sample. The sample included principals from two high schools, one an affluent Quintile 5 school and the other a very deprived Quintile 2 school. The other four principals include one pre-primary school (Grades R to 4) principal and three primary schools (Grades 1 to 7) principals. The numbers of learners in the primary schools range from 404 to 1745. The four primary schools range from Quintiles 1 to 3.

The distances between the six schools vary between 30 and 180 kilometers. We visited each school for a day, interviewed the principal, was shown around the school grounds and briefly observed the classes and met the staff. With the permission of the principals we took pictures of the school grounds, the classrooms and groups of learners. We were shown the storerooms and met the parents who prepare the meals at the primary schools.

Credibility and trustworthiness were ensured by visiting a representative sample of schools and through triangulation of data collection. The school principals were interviewed using semi-structured questionnaires and non-participant observation of classrooms and the school grounds in general provided additional data. The hope was that the responses regarding teaching and learning given by the principals would either be confirmed or refuted by actual practice in the classrooms. Of course, classrooms are unpredictable, complex places that are not

necessarily under the control of the principal or sometimes even the teacher. Observations made in a classroom are not always readily interpretable. What was being sought was some sense that the teachers were teaching and that the learners were learning in a managed way. The data was analysed in accordance with Mouton (2001) and McMillan & Schumacher (2001) by grouping the data into themes and finding trends and patterns.

The schools

High School A is a fully integrated parallel medium high school. The languages of teaching and learning are Afrikaans and English. The staff is multicultural. The school buildings and grounds are exceptionally well maintained with trees, shrubs, flowerbeds and neat paved parking areas. Excellent sport facilities, an administrative building, a school hall and well-secured fence were observed. One thousand learners are taught by 44 teachers of whom 29 are paid by the governing body and therefore they are not employed by the Limpopo Department of Education. The senior management team consists of 13 members. The school governing body also employs three additional administrative staff members. This Quintile 5 school only receives 5% subsidy from the government and has to raise its own funds mostly through the parents paying school fess. Only 66% of all the parents pay school fees. The principal's highest qualification is a Higher Diploma in Education and he has 16 years experience as an educator including four years as a school principal.

High School B is a black school with 638 learners and 20 educators. Currently the school has vacancies for three teachers in the learning areas of Mathematics, Science and Biology. Five of the current teachers hold temporary posts. The school has a new fence with a security guard at the gate. The school is situated on a hill and the condition of the access road is so poor that ordinary motor vehicles cannot drive to the school. The teachers and learners walk up the hill to the school. There are no trees, shrubs, flowers or grass. The grounds are covered with weeds. Initially the school had only four classrooms. A private company sponsored the building of additional classrooms. Very limited sports facilities exist. Pit toilets were built two years ago. Previously this high school had no toilet facilities for staff or learners. The principal shares an office space with the deputy principal. This room is also used as a storeroom. The three computers are covered. They are not used because the teachers are not familiar with the

software. New boxes of office paper and other equipment are stacked against the walls. The adjacent room is used as a staffroom with five desks and chairs. Before 2008 the school had no filing system, the principal used to carry all school documents in a plastic bag in her car. This Quintile 2 school is categorized as a no-fee school and receives 100% subsidy from the Limpopo Department of Education. The principal holds a B.A. degree and a Higher Diploma in Education. She has been the principal of this school since 2002 and has 24 years of teaching experience.

Pre-primary school A serves 480 black learners from Grades R to 4 with 18 educators. The school buildings and grounds are neat and maintained. The learners sweep the grounds early in the morning and there are two flowerbeds and a vegetable garden. The assemblies take place under a huge tree. The pit toilets are clean and well maintained. In front of each classroom is a plastic basin with clean water for the learners to wash their hands. The principal's office is small, but very neat. The school has a storeroom where the school's computer and the food supply delivered by the Department of Education to the school is stored. A group of volunteer parents prepare the food for the learners on open fires next to the classrooms. This no-fee, Quintile 1 school receives 100% subsidy from the Limpopo Department of Education. Many learners are orphans and come from child-headed homes. The principal holds a primary Teachers Diploma, a B.A. degree and a Further Diploma in Remedial Education. She has a total of 16 years teaching experience and has been a principal for two years.

Primary School B has 465 black learners in Grades 1 to 7 and 14 teachers. The school has no electricity and experience problems with getting sufficient water for the toilets. The classrooms and school grounds are well maintained and neat. The number of classrooms is not enough and overcrowded. The school has a vegetable garden and special efforts have been made to beautify the buildings and grounds with bright coloured paint. The school has a fence with a security guide at the gate. The area is very poor. Parents are mostly unemployed, young, single parent mothers. Many learners are orphans living on their own. The school has divided one classroom into two sections. One section is used as the principal's office and the other as a storeroom. The principal's office is neat and electricity from a neighboring house is borrowed to operate the fax machine. The school's feeding scheme is functional and volunteer parents prepare food on a daily basis. This is a no-fee, Quintile 1 school that receives 100% subsidy for the Limpopo Department of Education. The principal holds a B.A. degree and a Junior Primary Teaching Diploma. She has a total of 20 years teaching experience and has been a principal for nine years.

Primary School C has 404 black learners taught by 15 educators. The school buildings are well maintained with a small garden. There are enough classrooms, but no computers or administrative facilities. The school pays small salaries to a security guard and two parents who work as cleaners. The school has won a competition for the neatest grounds.

This is also a no-fee school, categorized as Quintile 2. The parental support is satisfactorily and parents regularly attend meetings. One classroom is divided into two rooms. One side is used as the principal's office and the other half as a small staffroom. The principal's office looks professional and tidy. The principal holds a B.A. and BEd degree and has a Primary Teaching Diploma, a Senior Education Diploma as well as a Diploma in Education Management. She has a total of 19 years of teaching experience and has been a principal for two years.

Primary School D is a very large school with 1745 black learners and only 37 educators. Five teaching posts are vacant. The school governing body employs one cleaner and three security guards. This is a Quintile 3 school and the school fees amount to R50 per year. About 60% of parents pay the school fees. The school started without any classrooms. The community built the first block of classrooms and thereafter the Department of Education added more classrooms. The school is very overcrowded and did not have desks for all the learners for two years. A week before my visit the school received 500 desks from the Department of Education. The Grade 1 learners are still taught under a huge tree. The community is very poor and many learners are orphans. The feeding programme is very well organized and 15 parent volunteers prepare food for all the learners on a daily basis. According to the principal the educator: learner ration is 1:87. The relatively small school grounds and the large number of learners attending this school make it difficult to plant any grass or shrubs. The school buildings and grounds are covered in dust and keeping the classes neat is a challenge. The school divided one room to us as an office for the principal and a storeroom. The school's two computers are in the principal's office, neatly covered. The principal holds a B.A degree and a Senior Teaching Diploma. She has 24 years of teaching experience and has been a principal for 16 years.

Findings

The six schools function under the jurisdiction of the same school district. This means that for the past decade these schools had access to the same documentation, training opportunities and support from departmental officials. The total number of years teaching experience of the six principals varies between 16 and 24 years and all principals have between two and sixteen years experience as school principals.

Interviews with principals and observations of classes and school facilities confirmed that the attitudes, norms and values of the principals affect the teaching and learning in their schools. No link could be found between the formal qualifications of the six principals and their school's performance. The principal with the least qualifications seemed to be a more effective leader and manager as those with two degrees.

The general achievement of the learners

During the interviews the principals were asked to comment on the achievement of the learners and on the greatest challenges they experience in the management of their schools.

School A had a Grade 12 pass rate of 99% in 2007. The principal attributed the achievement of the learners to positive attitudes of the teachers, the dedication and hard work of both staff and learners and the way the school involves the parents in the education of their children. Parents are informed on a regular basis of the assessment results of their children. In cases where learners do not meet the assessment standards parents are informed immediately.

The Grade 12 results of High School B improved from 15% pass rate in 1999 to 80% in 2001. Since then the pass rate dropped to 34% in 2007. The principal attributed the low pass rate to unqualified teachers and the fact that three teaching posts are vacant.

The principals of all the primary schools described the achievement of the learners as average to poor. All principals identified the fact that learners cannot read and write as their main challenge. Three primary schools contribute the fact that learners cannot read or write properly to their teachers not having the necessary knowledge and skills to implement the "OBE policies" (Outcomes based education policies) and "new way of teaching". One principal said that due to

the lack of desks and overcrowding the learners had to write on the floor and never acquired the basic reading and writing skills.

The management of teaching and learning

The principals mentioned the following about the way they manage teaching and learning in their schools.

High School A has six heads of departments and each subject within a learning area is managed by a subject head. These subject heads are not remunerated for their extra work. Every Wednesday afternoon all teachers responsible for teaching a specific subject in a learning area meet with their peers to plan their lessons. Learning programmes and work schedules are development by teams. The school uses a computer programme to develop the school timetable. Afrikaans and English classes are separated, but all staff members teach in both languages. This means that all planning is done in two languages. The teacher: learner ratio is 1:30. The smaller classes result that teachers teach different grades and have very few free periods. The principal has access to all learner data (including their progress reports), staff data, the school budget and other management information on a computer on his desk.

High School B has two heads of departments and teachers do not serve as subject heads. According to the principal most of the teachers are unqualified and the school battles to teach the prescribed National Curriculum because teachers find it difficult to adapt to the new teaching methods. This despite the fact that Revised National Curriculum was introduced in 2002 and the National Curriculum (Grades 10-12) will be examined in Grade 12 this year. She also said that although some of the teachers attended workshops, they resist change. Limited subjects are offered. The school's timetable is hand written. Computers with the necessary software to assist with timetabling and other administrative functions have been delivered to the school, but "the staff is not trained to use the computers". During my visit I observed six different classes. These classes were over crowded. However, at least three at a time (out of a total of 16 teachers present that day) sat in the "staffroom". While moving from one class to the other no teaching was observed. The learners had no textbooks, exercise books or any other stationery on their desks. In three classes there were no teachers present. The principal

explained that teachers do not prepare for their lessons and they are not committed to their work. The principal is not familiar with concepts such as learning programmes and work schedules.

Pre-Primary School A has two heads of departments. The principal said that although they did receive the documentation about the Revised National Curriculum (2002), they find it very difficult to understand. The teachers do lesson planning in the "old way" and have not yet started implementing the new curriculum. The school anxiously awaits the curriculum advisors to come and assist them. The principal expressed her wish to get exposure to see and learn from other well functioning schools. The school has no assessment policy and has not yet developed learning programmes for the foundation or intermediate phase.

Primary School B has one head of department, but according to the principal she does not assist in the management of teaching and learning at the school. The school has received the documentation about the new curriculum and it is available in the principal's office, but the school has not introduced the new curriculum yet. The principal said teachers do not understand why they should work in the afternoons preparing their lessons. Therefore they do not apply new ideas and methods.

Primary School C has no head of department. The school did receive all the documentation about the implementation of the Revised National Curriculum (2002). They have not yet studied these documents and thus have not yet implemented the "new policies". The principal was only invited to attend a workshop on the new curriculum at the beginning of this year. She hoped that the advisors from the District would visit her school to explain to them "how to do things". Although the school has 12 teachers, the learners are only divided into eight classes, one class for each grade. For example 65 learners in Grade 2, 65 in Grade 4 and 44 in Grade 7. In the foundation phase there are five teachers, but only four class groups. The intermediate phase has four class groups, but nine teachers. This means that there are always a number of teachers who are not teaching, but act as substitutes for absent teachers.

Primary School D currently has two heads of departments and three vacancies for heads of departments. The school did receive all the information about the new curriculum. Most of the

teachers attended workshops presented by the Department of Education. However, they still find it very difficult to implement the new curriculum. The principal only attended one workshop on curriculum implementation at the beginning of this year. According to the principal the teachers work very hard and in comparison with other primary schools in their area their learners do better in the high school. The school has no learning programmes or assessment plans yet. They urgently need advice from the district on how to develop these plans.

Monitoring of teaching and learning

On how they monitor teaching and learning in their schools, all principals mentioned class visits. The principal of High School A uses a schedule to visit every class at least once a year. The heads of department do regular class visits and submit their reports to the principal. Teachers are in possession of the class visit schedules and they are informed in advance of a proposed visit. A specific template is used for reporting on class visits. Feedback is given to teachers after each class visit. The deputy heads act as mentors for newly appointed teachers.

The principal of High School B said that the teachers do not allow class visits. She mentioned that they are very negative, even aggressive about class visits. She is of the opinion that the teachers are embarrassed because they are not familiar with the National Curriculum.

The principals of all four primary schools said that they do class visits. However, none of them has a specific template that they use. They are not sure what it is that they should monitor. They do give feedback, mostly verbal and not in a pre-structured way. These principals are not familiar with the learning outcomes of the Revised National Curriculum (2002) and they do not use prescribed formats for lesson planning or assessment plans.

Parental involvement

High School A informs parents about their children's achievement on a regular basis. Parents pay school fees to appoint additional teachers, support curricular and extra-curricular activities and participate in fundraising activities. In cases of learner misconduct or non-performance parents are contacted to visit the principal to jointly address the problem.

The principal of High School B said the majority of parents are not aware of what the school does. Many parents are unemployed while others work far from home. Parents are not informed about the performance of their children. Many learners drop out of school because of pregnancy or trying to find employment elsewhere. After the fence was erected, the school experienced very little disciplinary problems with learners.

The principals of Pre-Primary School A and Primary School D reported that parents respond well to requests made to them. Learners are motivated to inform their parents about meetings and other school activities. Parents therefore regularly attend parent meetings and do visit the school when asked to participate in school activities. The well functioning feeding schemes run by parent volunteers are indicators of the level of parental involvement.

According to the principals of the other two primary schools, poverty, unemployment and illiteracy result in parents not being involved in school activities. They said it is difficult to contact the parents and the many child-headed homes make it more difficult to get the support of parents.

Not one of the six schools visited experienced vandalism or school violence. They only complained about late coming. Orphaned learners, learners from child-headed homes and learners living in extreme poverty do not have access to alarm clocks or watches and find is very difficult to be at school on time.

Discussion

The findings from the six schools visited in this study confirmed that diversity regarding socio-economic status, attitudes, norms and values of educators and school principals contributes to inequalities in education.

Poverty and unemployment of parents are challenges that the principals of all six schools have to cope with. However, four of the schools are no-fee schools and they receive 100% subsidy from the Department of Education in Limpopo. At the two other schools a large percentage of

parents pay school fees. All primary schools have well functioning feeding schemes. All the schools have school buildings, furniture and fences for security purposes. The principals have offices and five of the six schools have computers.

The interviews with the principals and visits to classrooms clearly showed diversity in attitudes, norms and values of the principals and educators. The successful High School A is organized around learning and teaching activities. The principal contributes the achievement of the learners to the dedication and hard work of the educators. They work in the afternoons as teams, they monitor learner progress and they contact parents if learners do not perform. This finding correlates with a report published in the Pretoria News (27 May 2008) about a secondary school situated near the sample schools, thus experiencing the same challenges. This school had a pass rate of 100% in Grade 12 last year. The school principal commented that "the secret of our success is hard work on the part of teachers and pupils". After school closes each day, a further 80 minutes are set aside for supervised study. The school also offers Saturday and winter holiday classes for those learners who need additional help.

In High School B classes are left unattended, teachers lack knowledge and understanding of the National Curriculum, they refuse class visits. The school appears untidy, computers are unused and staff members sit in the staff room.

All the primary schools identified the reading and writing skills of their learners as a problem. Only two school principals introduced special remedial programmes to address this problem. I found evidence in all the primary schools that not all the educators are effectively utilized. Class sizes are very big because all teachers do not teach all the time.

What principals should know and be able to do

> "Effective principals set high expectations and standards for the academic and social development of all students" NAESP, 2003:19.

If school principals are serious about providing quality education, then they must rethink the what, why and how of school management. Successful school leaders should be able to:

- *Articulate a clear vision that reflects the beliefs, values and commitments of the school community*

Knowledge and understanding of the school's vision could instill the intangible forces that motivate educators to teach, the learners to learn and the parents and community to have confidence in their school.

- *Demonstrate a balance between management and leadership*

Leadership is a balance of management and vision. Bush (2008:272) explains that school principals experience difficulty in deciding the balance between higher order tasks designed to improve staff and learner performance (leadership) and routine maintenance of the day-to-day running of a school (management). The principal as a leader shape the goals, motivations, attitudes and actions of the staff. Managing a school, and specifically teaching and learning requires planning and implementing curricular activities to achieve learning outcomes, effective use of human and financial resources and monitoring performance. Bush (2008:276) identifies three main characteristics of leadership. They are leadership as influence, leadership and values and leadership and vision. Influencing people is an intentional process with the aim of achieving a specific purpose (vision). It is important that leaders ground their actions in clear personal and professional values.

Effective leaders create a culture of continuous learning for all educators. What teachers know about the subjects they teach and whether they have access to the latest research and materials on those subjects is essential to achieving high levels of learner performance. Simply providing more opportunities for professional development (workshops) is not enough. It is the quality of the interventions that counts. Principals must ensure that professional development activities are provided and that they are focused on teaching practice and learner activities. It must happen in real-time, at the school and be team-based. Effective principals enforce participation in development activities, leading by example.

Expectations determine results. Effective leaders understand how to identify and meet the development needs of all staff members. A detailed professional development plan nurtures the growth of all individuals in the school community. The principal also engage in one-on-one discussions with staff members identifying teaching and learning successes and concerns. The

success of professional development activities should be based not only on teaching practice changes, but also on whether learner performance increases.

Effective managers schedule time for teachers to work, think and plan together. Teams of teachers who share responsibility for teaching a learning area, subject and phase should meet regularly to plan lessons and assessment activities. This should ideally take place once a week in the afternoons. Principals set specific expectations that teachers will continually seek information about academic content and teaching practice. Teachers often learn much more from each other as they do from outside sources. Principals should see themselves as team leaders and team members. During meetings with the phase groups and learning area teams, principals are able to identify barriers to learner performance and help to change the teaching and learning strategies.

- *Create safe and secure school environments*

All learners need a balance of emotional and personal support, especially orphaned learners and learners who come from child-headed homes. Children need to know that someone cares for them in the school. They should enjoy coming to school, build positive relationships, gain new knowledge and develop new skills. A safe and secure environment is not only about a school fence and lack of violence, it is about creating an environment that supports, motivates, builds self-esteem protects human dignity.

- *Manage teaching and learning to ensure learner achievement*

The Revised National Curriculum (2002) and the National Curriculum (Grades 10-12) promotes social justice, equity and development. Social justice requires that those sections of the population previously disempowered by the lack of knowledge and skills should now be empowered by the new curriculum. The curriculum specifies the minimum standards of knowledge and skills that are to be achieved in each grade. The learning outcomes and assessment standards in the Revised National Curriculum represent integrated skills, content and values.

A successful school should rethink the what, how and why of teaching and learning. All school policies, planning, decisions and available human resources must used on the belief that every child, irrespective of their socio-economic status, physical or mental ability can and will achieve at high levels. In a democracy where human dignity, equality and education are guaranteed to all, all learners must be given a legitimate opportunity to achieve the national outcomes.

Children are active learners who learn best from tasks that require them to relate new facts, concepts and processes to their existing mental images and to their ongoing experiences. It is therefore imperative that all educators should take collective responsibility to design learning programmes that build on learners' active learning capacity, multiple intelligences and amazing resiliency. It is the responsibility of school principals to monitor and implement intellectually rigorous teaching practices that move learners to higher levels of learning.

Academic rigor and intellectual development must be combined with humanity. How children see themselves is largely influenced by how educators see and treat them. Social justice requires that all learners be enabled to confront the injustices visited by inequality and poverty on the vast majority of children living in South Africa's rural areas (Nelson Mandela trust, 2005:141).

- *Develop a school culture conducive to teaching and learning*

All schools have a specific philosophy, beliefs, traditions, discipline, climate and organisational goals. Principals should develop a school culture that is flexible, collaborative, supportive and innovative to improve the achievements of all learners. A flexible school culture accommodates change and diversity. A collaborative and supportive school culture motivate staff members to move from a individual sense of "I" to a collective sense of "We" in efforts to improve teaching and learning. Open communication and sharing are key elements of a positive school culture. Schools usually have formal structures for decision-making. In a collaborative school culture principals adopt the role of a facilitator and leader that sets the course for the school. The successful principal instils leadership capacity into all staff members, giving them authority to be full participants in decisions about policy, budget, learning programs and teaching and learning improvements. This requires shifting traditional lines of authority to individual staff members. A

school culture conducive to teaching and learning requires self-discipline and responsibility among all educators.

- *Actively engage the community to create shared responsibility for learner and school success*

Schools and communities are inextricably intertwined and the principal is the linchpin in creating an engaged community. Public schools play a key role as a model of democracy at work in a society. Parents and other citizens have a say in decisions that affect the schools in their community. Effective principals understand that they must engage the community in conversations and decisions about their children. Communities expect schools to be safe places that provide quality education for their children. They often expect schools to provide food, to address problems of childcare, health care and other social problems. Greater understanding of the school's goals and more parental involvement lead to greater ownership of schools. With greater ownership of schools, parents are more willing to commit time, resources and assistance to their children's learning.

Concluding comments

Kamper (2008:14) found that many rural schools in South Africa appears to be challenged by acute survival problems such as abject socio-economic circumstances and a lack of provisions from the educational authorities regarding facilities, learning and teaching support materials and support from the education district offices. More importantly, he found that poverty-related challenges could be overcome through energetic, compassionate, innovative and empowering leadership. The key ingredients of school success appear to be the principal's passion for upliftment, the teachers' commitment and care, the parents' involvement and the learners' positive life-view.

The findings of this research revealed that the achievement of learners in the Mopani District of Limpopo is poor. The principals appear not know how or are not able to manage teaching and learning effectively. The empirical research conducted in the six schools identified specific problems that require urgent attention by the developers and providers of the ACE (Leadership

and Management) programme. These problems particularly concern the effective delivery of the national curriculum. The findings of this research revealed that principals in the rural areas of the Limpopo province have very little knowledge and understanding of the Revised National Curriculum and National Curriculum Statement and are therefore not able to implement the prescribed curriculum. These schools have no learning programmes or work schedules. Very limited resources for teaching and learning are available because educators are not familiar with what to order. The few resources that schools have are not managed effectively. Teaching and learning is not monitored and there is very little collaboration between the educators.

The key focus of the ACE (School Leadership) programme is to facilitate real transformation in schools that is grounded in recognition of the challenges of particular contexts and the values underpinning the South African Constitution (Department of Education, 2006). According to the Department of Education the success of the programme will be measured by the proven ability of the principals who have completed the course to lead their school in a way that:

- Allows effective delivery of the national curriculum
- Maximizes the appropriate use of available sources
- Encourages positive staff relations and staff career advancement
- Empowers members of the school community to confidently engage in their tasks

Despite the commendable efforts of the National Education Department to improve the level of leadership and management in South African schools, alarm bells sound over the general performance of the students who have already completed their first year. One has to ask whether the developers of the module content were familiar with what principals need to know and be able to do in a diverse South Africa.

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