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# ENSURING EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP IN THE CREATION AND LEADERSHIP OF SCHOOLS

## Abstract

*Researchers have grappled to speculate about why people in almost all societies share a concern with social justice and equity in education. It is increasingly recognized, internationally and in South Africa, that leading and managing teaching and learning is one of the most important activities for principals and other school leaders. This paper shows that managing teaching and learning are often inadequate, and largely fails to improve educational problems facing school communities. A lot was written about arguably the biggest challenge facing today's teachers and principals. The question remains how schools could be made to work effectively and equitably for all learners in ever more diverse classrooms. This article will attempt point the way to ensure that there is educational leadership in the creation and management of schools. Quality leadership skills and competencies for effective teaching and learning in schools are also highlighted. The rationale for this study is based on the growing concern that school leadership is not sensitive to the needs of the learners they serve and continue to experience unjustifiable expenditure in relation to community expectations in terms of teaching and learning. Equity theory underpinned this study. It is imperative to note that people feel most comfortable when their relationships are maximally profitable and they are giving and getting exactly what they deserve from their relationships; no more and certainly no less.*

*The ethics of care theory is used as a lens to understand how principals lead and manage schools to improve learner performance. This theory is considered pertinent for this study due to the fact that leaders have authority and power over their subordinates. A leader should possess instructional leadership skills that emphasize the achievement of the core task, teaching and learning, in schools. Effective leaders understand their staff and learners' unique needs, can create a supportive environment and engage in practices that build on employee self-confidence to enhance their performance. Ethics of care is deemed suitable for this study since school leaders should have a passion to care for teachers and learners they lead. Ethics of care is a suitable way to connect people and emphasize helping others. Leaders should go an extra mile to address, nurture and support the needs of the teachers. The role of caring in a school environment has a more specific aim, which is to establish an environment that is conducive to effective teaching and learning because an environment that is caring enhances productivity.*

*An investigation was conducted to explore effective school leadership through teaching and learning. This effect presents an exhaustive review of the article and suggests a direction for future developments. Based on the study, a qualitative approach was employed to investigate effective school leadership practices as perceived by school leaders. The belief is that schools should be led by quality of leaders in order to produce good results. It is on this backdrop that schools need effective, dedicated, responsible, accountable school leaders, and staff members, if they are to provide quality education for all learners. It became evident from the findings that effective principals locate learning at the centre of their daily activities and that this can only be achieved if the creation of a conducive environment plays a major role in developing a professional community of teachers who work as a team under an effective instructional leadership. Recommendations evolved from the findings.*

**KEY WORDS:** *Social justice, educational equity, school leadership, teaching and learning, accountability, school vision, instructional leadership, learner performance.*

# 1.    INTRODUCTION

Effective school leadership is an important condition for a successful school, and occurs because of some contributing factors (Bryk et al., 2010). Teacher support by effective leadership is seen as one of the factors leading to improved performance (Chapman & Adams, 2002). Successful principals explore behaviour, practices and competencies associated with positive indicators of quality and improved teaching and learning. Effective leadership and management focus on student learning; developing teacher knowledge and teaching skills; and good interpersonal relationships. Support for teaching and learning, such as teacher preparations and interactions with parents; management of instructional programmes for the attainment of school goals; and education support, can be provided through monitoring, evaluation, and resourcing to improve teaching and learning. Principals should set targets that are manageable and achievable for tomorrow, but realistic today. A good principal (leader) always listens to people around him, knows who they are and is sensitive to other people's feelings. A sense of paranoia about own colleagues is true of many school leaders, where people are never allowed to settle emotionally because the leadership feels threatened. Hampden and Trompenaar (1993) claim that involvement in participation is not a technique designed to get workers to do what their leaders want, but a willingness to allow the staff to provide initiatives. The principal who believes in constructive schools, provides inspiration or modelling, thereby prevents failing in one of the key tests of good leadership.

# 2.    How to ensure effective leadership

Effective leadership, a process whereby one person or groups of individuals influence others, has been of interest to social scientists and policy-makers alike (Bass, 1990; House & Aditya, 1997). Achieving the demands for student outcomes for all learners and inclusion of increasing numbers of learners with behavioural challenges in general education classrooms requires important changes in schools (McLeskey, Rosenberg & Westling, 2010). According to Silns and Mulford (2002), effective leadership means improving learner outcomes and distributing leadership resources throughout the school community. Teachers should be empowered in their areas of need and, according to the authors above, school principals can create and sustain the conditions for a productive development of learners if these conditions exist. Empowering principals and providing them with opportunities to lead is based on the simple but profound idea that, if schools are to become better at providing learning for learners, then they must also become better at providing opportunities for principals to innovate, develop and learn together (Silns & Mulford, 2002). According to Benson-Armer and Hsieh (1997), the challenge for leaders of teams is to create a level of collaboration and productivity and to accomplish these outcomes against the backdrop of the rapid changes facing nearly every organisation today. Leaders must be able to facilitate team cohesiveness by taking full advantage of existing and emerging collaborative innovations.

# 3.    Implications of poor leadership

This selection draws policy implications from the article findings on ensuring the creation of effective educational leadership and management for improving school performance, which is mainly based on the relationship between instructional leadership and school performance. The purpose of this article was to establish leadership practices that are conducive to effective teaching and learning, and enhances a caring and productive environment. The implication, of this phenomenon is that effective leadership may influence the leadership actions of new principals. This finding is consistent with research on leader succession and socialization, suggesting that new leaders in organizations may encounter problems with trying to change existing norms of behaviour (Hart, 1991; Ogawa, 1991), but instead, they tend to adjust to the existing norms. In an earlier study of principal succession, for example,

Rowan and Denk (1984) found that changes in principals produced primarily short-term achievement gains which were also moderated by community socio-economic status. This finding is confirmed by further research, that reforming low-achieving schools may extend beyond merely changing principals, and it may lead to an effective leader reshaping the schools in a lasting manner (Louis & Miles, 1991; Pitner & Hocevar, 1987). The research base on principal leadership indicates that effective leaders can transform poorly achieving schools. As Hart (1991) suggests, with demands for more creative leadership from principals and for school improvement, researchers need to expand inquiry into deliberate strategies to promote increased outcomes during succession when expectations for change are high. Ellett and Logan (1990) further argue that the school's staff and surrounding community can play a significant role in shaping the school's culture and norms, which ultimately may influence student outcomes. Certainly, the ability to classify correctly, almost every high- and low-achieving school with a new principal (although admittedly from a limited sample), provides preliminary support of this assumption.

## 4.    Research methodology

This study used a qualitative research method to understand the creation of effective educational leadership for improving school performance. Practices of principals were investigated through semi-structured interviews and observations about how development programmes and policy stipulations are used to ensure effectiveness in educational leadership. This qualitative multi-case study approach used interviews and observation to gather in-depth information and experiential data, and examined policy documents guiding the leadership operations. The sample consisted of principals, deputy principals, heads of departments and teachers. The participants were interviewed to understand how the different principal leaders lead and manage schools for improved performance (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2000).  An observation schedule developed guided the process of establishing leadership effectiveness activities and discussions with principals.

## 5.    Participants

The participants were purposively selected from the Vhembe District primary schools. The sample involved in this study comprised four principals, four deputy principals, four head of department and eight teachers from public primary schools in the four local government areas within Vhembe District. Of these participants, ten (10) were female and ten (10) were male. The participants had different qualifications: Four held B. Ed (Honours) degrees; six held a bachelor's degree in education and ten (10) of these participants held diplomas in education. Sixteen (16) of the participants had more than 18 years' experience. Other participants' teaching experience came to three teachers 6-12 years and one (1) 7 years' teaching experience. The semi-structured interviews and the observation schedule were developed by the researcher based on the research topic to explore the effective educational leadership and management strategies used for improving school performance.

## 6.    Data analysis

Each site visited produced a case study of the programme visited, and systematically revealed the multiple sources of qualitative data from interviews, observations, and documents. Where pre-service and in-service programmes operated at a common site, the data from the two programmes were analysed together to describe the interactions among programmes and their influences on the leadership involved. Data analysis followed an iterative process that included moving back and forth between gathered qualitative data, comparing coding schemes across cases, and refining the final coding scheme to reflect both common themes and unique characteristics of each case. Cross-case analysis focused on uncovering principles and practices common across the distinctive programmes and on

surfacing differences illustrated by the distinct exemplars. The cases were also analysed in relation to the state context to evaluate the potential impacts of policy and other features of the state on leadership.

## 7.      Measuring Leadership and Management

This article made use of contingency theory, which focuses on aspects such as change, teamwork, leadership development and ethical leadership and diversity. For change to occur, Buns (2003) maintains that effective school leaders should create social changes that articulate and outline transformation. An effective leader is one who takes care of his teachers and improves institutional services to address the school's needs and to improve learner performance. Effective leadership requires four components. Firstly, the leader should have ideological influence, that is, the school leader should be a role model for his or her teachers and should model positive behaviours that the teachers will idealise. Secondly, an effective leader practices motivation. People learn effectively and efficiently if they are inspired to teach (Reynolds, 200). Effective leaders should create a team spirit and motivate his or her teachers. Thirdly, an effective leader shows consideration: School leaders should consider the desires and needs of their teachers to be effective and prosper in leading and managing schools. An effective leader should also consider the teachers' interests and appreciate individual differences (Bass & Riggio; Lunenburg, 2003; Stewart, 2006:12). Lastly, an effective leader practises stimulation. S/he should encourage teachers to be creative and critical in their thinking in order to produce new ideas and be in a position to solve problems.

Teamwork, according to Darling and Leffel (2010), involves mentoring and enhancing performance of team members. School leaders can affect other team members' behaviour by inspiring and enhancing enabling competencies (DeChurch et al.). Effective team building increases cohesiveness, cooperation, and identification with the group. Effective leaders put forward leader-centred and group-centred approaches for leading meetings. For leadership development McCauley (2014), states that it requires expanding the collective capacity of organisational members to engage effectively in leadership roles and processes. Leadership development programmes prepare people for leadership roles and situations beyond their current experience. Leadership development in the widest sense involves the acquisition, development and distribution of leadership capability or potential (Burgoyne, 2010:43). Lepak and Snell (1999) say that one of the main reasons that schools invest in training and developing teachers is to improve and keep their human capital. Effective leadership should encourage the practice of ethical leadership and diversity to initiate efforts that stops unethical behavioural activities. Ethical leadership should increase people's loyalty and trust to improve people's effort (Piccolo, Greenbaum, Den Hartog & Folger, 2010). Fairness is one of the factors of ethical leadership, and power sharing is leadership behaviour. Yukl (2010) says ethical leadership encourages supportive leadership, empowering leadership, self-confidence, development of skills and interests. Principals as ethical leaders are moral managers who use their powers to represent the best interests of their schools and teachers. They set personal and ethical behaviour and manage ethical responsibility (Brown & Trevino, 2006).

## 8.      Discussion

It became evident from the findings that effective principals locate learning at the centre of their daily activities and that this can only be achieved if the focus is on effective teaching and learning in a conducive environment. If this is achieved then a major role would have been played in developing the professional community of teachers who work as a team under an effective instructional leader. Since the focus was on exploring the effectiveness of the school leaders in schools, the following core elements of effective leadership were outlined through the literature review:

- Transformation – creating social changes that articulate and outline transformation;
- Teamwork – encouraging teams in the school for improved learner performance;
- Leadership development - being a role model and modelling positive behaviours;
- Ethical leadership - considering the desires and needs of teachers, and
- Diversity - appreciate and learning from individual differences.

An effective leader motivates teachers to enhance their confidence and to stimulate their creativity. Teachers' creativity and critical in their thinking skills will develop in a trusting and comfortable environment. The trust developed will help build strong teams who can work towards enhancing the performance of team members, learners and the school. Teachers have potential and their different skills can be developed through inspiration and encouragement to unearth competencies (DeChurch et al.). An effective leader always strives to develop team members into future leaders through cohesiveness, cooperation, and identification with the group. Leadership development means expanding the collective capacity of organisational members for the development of programmes that prepares teams for future leadership roles. Leaders who have the passion to care for teachers and learners they lead can only develop future leaders. Effective leaders strive to connect and empower all the members of staff for the success of the school.

## 9.    Conclusion

School leaders should assist colleagues and implement forms of leadership skills to enhance teaching and learning in the schools and community, they work in. Effective leadership should lead to the development of documented knowledge that will help develop foundations of teacher leadership and management. Effective school leaders respond effectively and efficiently to the challenges of leadership and strive to create accountable-oriented school leadership policy. Principals should help achieve the schools' ore business entrenched in the vison and mission of the school. Effective principals provide cognitive and affective lives of the school, combining structural building alliance and educational leadership as well as human leadership. Policy markers' reforms should influence the nature of principalship (Southworth et al., 2008) that builds social and emotional bonds, which are stimulants to motivation. Effective leadership happens in an environment where principals, staff and learners exchange ideas on the needs and services required in the school for the achievement of school objectives. Leadership should maintain an ethical focus that is oriented towards democratic values within a community. The principals' role is in guiding and defusing the tensions between competing values for leadership effectiveness. The school principals should at all times exemplify effective leadership that is in touch with educational developments. Effective leadership can be realised through visions shared by various stakeholders in the schools. Future school leaders will be empowered by the existing developmental climates of collaboration and application of good standards and the team spirit where members are free to seek the support from groups within the school community.

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