

Getting Principalship Right? Piloting a Principal Professional Leadership Development Model

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ABSTRACT Growing research in South Africa reflects the attention given to the professional development of school principals. The main objective of this study was also to explore models that can be adapted to inform principal practice in South African schools. The researchers initially used desk research before a qualitative study was conducted in eight underperforming schools in Gauteng Province. An intervention workshop was conducted and the eight principals interviewed. A number of models have been developed globally to address the principals' efficacy although some models are not suitable in other situations. After three months of this investigation, the participants developed a contextualised Professional Leadership Development Model. The model was informed by the needs of the participants taking into cognisance the nature of their schools. At the time of writing the article the Model was being piloted among the participants' schools and it reflected much potential for these underperforming schools.

INTRODUCTION

Professional Development and the Current School

There are quite a number of frameworks for professional development of school principals. The improvement of leadership quality arguably leads to the quality of learner achievement. Fenwick and Leslie (2004) contend that the modern principal is no longer merely the 'principal' teacher, but also the manager of a complex organisation. Furthermore, these authors point out that principals today are expected to create a team relationship among staff members, acquire and allocate resources, promote teacher development. All schools need effective principals. The Wallace Perspective (2012) contends that there is an empirical link between school leadership and improved learner achievement. This report also highlights that the principal remains the central source of leadership and (among others) needs to cultivate leadership in others. However, school principals lead organisations that are fraught with all sorts of challenges. As school managers and leaders of their organisations, the principals need to know how to lead or manage their colleagues. It is for this reason that principals need continuous professional development; to be able to uphold school success as well as the culture of teaching and learning. Much of the professional devel-

opment programmes for principals are introduced whilst they are in the job. The importance of the school principals' professional development though, needs to go a step further than the principals themselves. As pointed out above, the role of the principal encompasses the constant development of colleagues as well. The principals need to facilitate meaningful change and have to create conditions which promote the growth and development of the professionals within their schools (DuFour and Berkey 1995).

There are a number of models globally that attempt to address the principals' professional development. It is always a challenge to know exactly whether a model would work or not. Yet, it is always crucial to develop models that will address various intended contexts. What frequently creates a challenge is to try and replicate models in situations where they become irrelevant. This study was an intervention research in 8 historically Black African schools. All of them were deemed underperforming by communities around as well as the teachers. The main question asked was: What professional development model can be suggested for (underperforming) school principals in South Africa?

Objectives of the Study

This study wanted to achieve the following objectives:

- Conduct a desk research of effective professional development models;
- Identify major obstacles in school principal development and school success;
- Facilitate discussion among principals to draw an effective professional development model; and
- Give support in the implementation of an appropriate professional development model.

Rationale for Contextualised Professional Development Model

There are constant changes in education all over the world. In South Africa the education system has been revised a number of times since the introduction of post-apartheid Curriculum 2005 in 1998. The principals had to deal with confused staff members, to support them with their professional development needs. The nature of education is such that as it changes, teachers need to be developed as well. Professional development programmes should include all staff who are to contribute to the implementation of the intended changes (Hooker n.d.). As crucial agents of change, empowered role-players will be able to make sense of educational changes. The constant educational reforms bring forth new paradigms. School principals need not only to lead managerial activities—they also need to be curriculum leaders. Butler and Leahy (2003) underscore the need for professional development to focus on the confidence of change.

The context of many schools in South Africa calls for models that would suit the circumstances of various schools. Arguably, many principals and their teachers were schooled in apartheid South Africa and may not be easily receptive to current innovations. Imported models may also complicate matters leaving school managers and leaders even more perplexed by changes. Yet the role of the principals' expertise will always be invaluable to their schools. Clifford et al. (2012) state that principal knowledge, dispositions and actions affect school quality.

Waldron et al. (2011) also opine that principals play a key role in more general school-improvement activities. These authors point out that principals need to support schools (i) develop a school culture supportive to teachers;

(ii) provide opportunities to develop a collaborative learning community supportive of teacher learning; (iii) provide opportunities to develop teachers as leaders; and (iv) provide teachers with opportunities of high quality learning (Waldron et al. 2011: 51). The principals who employ these have a chance to immensely improve their schools. Alarimy et al. (2012) stress the need for principals to have some expertise in developing their schools. They assert that principals who will develop their schools are those who have the basis knowledge in certain concepts and expertise. There are a number of models that school principals can utilise and below the discussion focuses on some of these.

Models of Principal Professional Development/in-Service

The authors, Fenwick and Pierce (2004), argue that over the decades three varying philosophical orientations have guided the education and professional development of school managers: traditional/scientific management, craft as well as the reflective inquiry. Below these three are explicated.

The Traditional Model

For years institutions of higher learning have had programmes that “show” the school managers how to manage their schools. The Traditional Model, according to Fenwick and Pierce, exposes the principal to the research base on management and the behavioural sciences. In many of these programmes the managers and leaders were actually passive learners who frequently had to deal with learning that did not address their needs and specific contexts. Learning activities are institutionally defined and are usually not tailored to the specific learning needs of the principal or reflective of his specific school context (Fenwick and Pierce 2004).

The Department of Education in South Africa has for years ran (in-service) workshops that were supposed to enhance professional development of principals. In many of these the participants would get course packs as they would do from higher education institutions. Fenwick and Pierce refer to the latter as modern versions of the traditional model. This traditional model is however different from the craft model.

The Craft Model

The Craft Model is characterised by the principle that the principal is trained by experienced professionals. In this model the principal learns other ways of handling the challenges faced in his or her school. Shadowing and mentoring are important aspects of the craft model. The principals learn to deal and respond to various kinds of conflict. In South Africa the Advanced Certificate in Education – School Management and Leadership (ACE-SML) can be said to be some version of the craft model. Although the programme is delivered by higher education institutions, it is different from the traditional delivery. The programme is practice based and materials hands on. The ACE-SML is an interactive programme that was initiated by the national Department of Education in 2007 to enhance the skills of school managers and leaders in South Africa. In the first study to investigate its effect it was found out that principals who were in the pilot group found this a worthy programme which needed to be proliferated (Bush et al. 2009). Many part of the ACE-SML encourages the principals to employ the reflective inquiry approach.

Reflective Inquiry Approach

Part of the ACE-SML is networking for professional development and this aspect forms a large part of the reflective inquiry approach. Networking involves linking principals for the purpose of sharing concerns and potential solutions to problems. In fact, this was one of the findings in the ACE-SML research by Bush et al. (2009). A number of principals saw the programme as a plan that enabled them to share their successes and failures. The reflective inquiry approach stresses the need to create principals who are able to make informed, reflective and self critical judgements about their professional practice (Fenwick and Pierce 2004). Principals are active participants in their professional development and the goal is to enable them to reflect on their values and beliefs about their roles as school leaders. The creation of reflective inquirers is very crucial in professional development. The role of the mentor is also largely valued by the reflective inquirer. Usually the networking experience is combined with the mentoring experience mentors provide the

necessary guidance in professional development. Mentors help the principals when they reflect about their practice and help the principals to shape their management and leadership styles.

These three models will feature in the discussions to follow in this work. Professional development of principals does reflect one or more of these approaches. Below, the focus is on one professional development model, Hughes and Beatty's Model.

Hughes and Beatty's Model

Developing strategic leadership is a learning process (Hughes and Beatty 2005). These authors also develop a strategic leadership cycle which has five continuous stages. Hughes and Beatty stress the need to follow these steps in the process of developing the strategic model. The steps are as follows:

1. Assessing where one is;
2. Understanding who one is and where one wants to go;
3. Learning how to get there;
4. Making the journey; and
5. Checking one's progress

After the first step there is a return to the first one hence this is presented as a cyclical model.

This cyclical model shows the need to do a SWOT analysis when one considers the present and future effectiveness as an effective leader. It shows the importance of understanding the weaknesses and strengths of the people involved. It is during this cycle that an individual can understand much of what was discussed above; leadership styles, the environment, and other related aspects. This model also shows some kind of a map as how to move towards being the "ideal" envisaged leader. Important in this model too is the idea of assessing and evaluating oneself as one moves towards the realisation of being an effective leader. The above model can briefly be explained as follows:

Assessing where you are – this involves assessing one's own leadership development needs. This involves a personal SWOT. The acronym refers to Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats. At this stage of the process one searches for any of these elements.

Understanding who we are – Hughes and Beatty affirm that this refers to the "inspirational

dimension of organizational strategy, including the organisation's vision, mission and core values (Hughes and Beatty 2005: 20).

Learning how to get there involves understanding and carefully preparing the essential elements of the strategy.

Making the journey involves translating the strategy into action by identifying and implementing tactics.

Checking progress refers to the continuing assessment of effectiveness. It completes the learning cycle.

In the final analysis, it can be seen that effective professional development is not an event; it is a carefully planned process that requires planning. The plan must be focused and outcomes be clearly spelt out.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

An intervention research was used among 8 low performing township schools. The principals from participating schools were included in workshop like sessions to try and intervene in the management of the schools under study. In an environment where there were discussions, the participants suggested a number of strategies that might enhance the teachers' effectiveness. After a number of deliberations a model was drawn with the assistance of the researcher. The model was informed by the needs of the participants who highlighted what they needed in a programme of professional development. At the end a cyclical model was developed. The model was drawn during the sessions which were attended by all the principals at once. The researchers met the principals once a week for three months. Each week there was a working programme where teachers shared their challenges in schools and tried to draw solutions. During this process they talked about what they needed in a programme that would develop them. On the first week were interviewed individually as well as in focus groups. In the interview they talked more about their philosophies in management and leadership as well as specific management challenges in their schools. It was on the second week that the group started drafting the professional development model that would address their professional development needs using intervention research.

Fraenkel and Wallen (2000) describe intervention studies as a certain method or treatment meant to influence one or more outcomes. Fur-

thermore, they declare that such studies enable researchers to assess for example the effectiveness of various teaching methods or curriculum models and many other efforts influencing the characteristics of individuals or groups. Rothman and Thomas (1994) maintain that one important aim of intervention research is to create means for improving community life, health as well as well being. Usually in intervention studies a model is developed. In this study there was a development of a model after certain steps were followed critically. According to Rothman and Thomas (1994) intervention research comprises of six phases namely:

- Problem analysis and project planning
- Information gathering and synthesis
- Design
- Early development and pilot testing
- Valuation and advance development
- Dissemination

The model is still being piloted and the current applications of its elements reflect the promise of the model. This article does not present the research on the findings of its effectiveness but is more on the elements of the model itself. Below, the model is discussed.

The Principal Leadership Development Model

The suggested principal leadership development model for school leaders consists of six stages namely:

- developing an awareness of self
- strategies for re-education
- analysing one's unique circumstances
- establishing oneself and understanding the role of others in the organisation
- application of professional practice and
- revisiting and evaluating professional development goals and objectives

The model is cyclical as it begins with stage one and proceeds in a circle through succeeding stages and eventually reaches the initial stage. It incorporates mentoring, networking and reflective practice as components of induction and takes into account the findings. The model is graphically represented in Figure 1.

An explication of the model is as follows:

Stage 1: Developing an Awareness of Self

Professional development is about developing the individual principals so that they can be

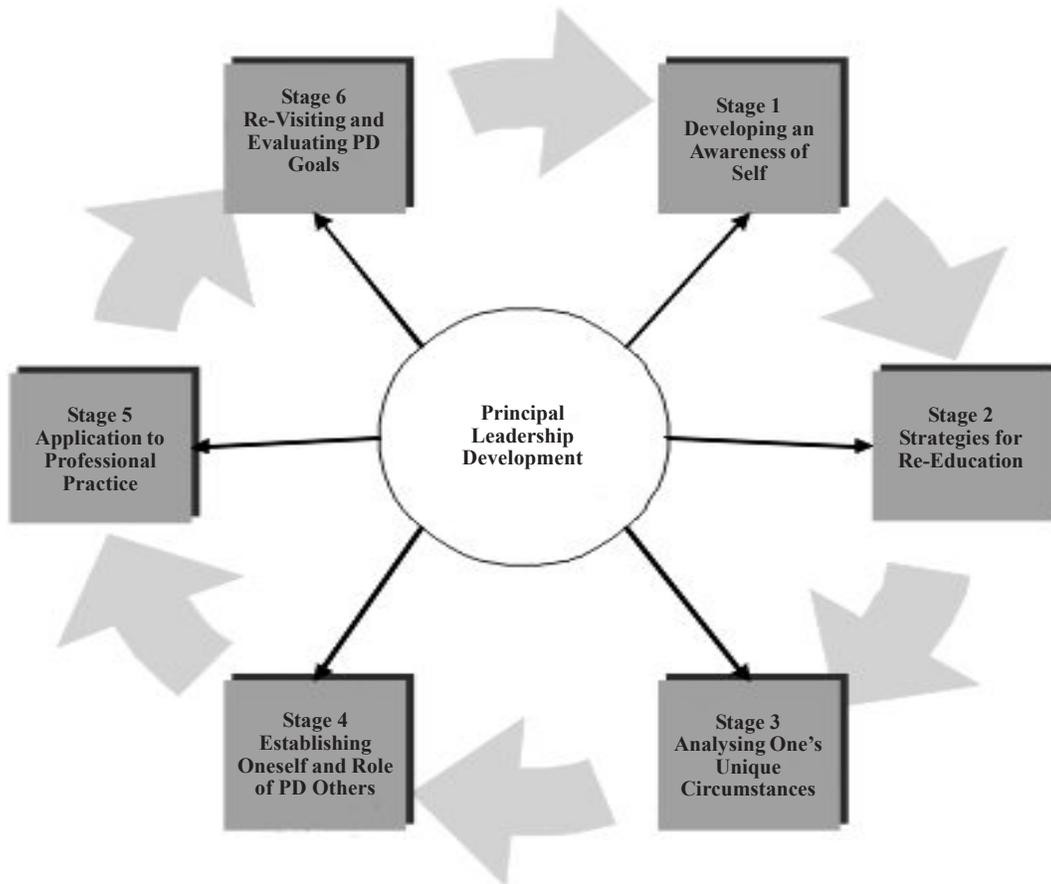


Fig. 1. Principal leadership development model

equipped with knowledge, skills and attitudes to competently and efficiently execute leadership and management duties in order to improve learner achievement. The starting point of all professional development activities is raising awareness about one's self (Walker and Dimmock 2006). Self-aware leaders spend time in self-reflection. Aspiring and practising principals need to engage in serious introspection and reflect on: the kind of leaders they are; their strengths and shortcomings as leaders; the values they espouse and uphold; their goals and vision; and the state of their qualifications. It is through reflection and introspection that they will develop a greater awareness about themselves and their leadership and management practice. Goleman (1997) posits that self-awareness is foundational to emotional intelligence. He describes it as the ability to both recognise

one's mood and thoughts about those moods. Recognising one's emotions is necessary to understand the emotions of other people, thus empathising with them. Further, self-awareness enables individuals to observe and monitor their behaviour; and is vital for effective job performance, thus facilitating appropriate responses to a range of interpersonal interactions experienced in the workplace.

Apart from reflection and introspection, one can become a self-aware leader by seeking feedback from colleagues. DuBrin (2007:453) confirms the importance of receiving honest feedback from peers, subordinates and superiors through his definition of self-awareness. He defines it as "insightfully processing feedback about oneself to improve one's effectiveness." One can also develop a small group of people with whom one can be completely open, share,

and confide in. This small group can provide honest feedback, support and valuable insights in challenging times. It is through reflection and introspection that principals should by the end of this stage possess the following attributes:

- awareness of their strengths and weaknesses regarding leadership and management practice
- ability to set goals and develop a vision
- ability to observe and monitor ones behaviour

It is people who have become aware of themselves who will judge and decide whether or not they need to re-educate themselves.

Stage 2: Strategies for Re-education

Many principals have been through a system where the traditional model was emphasised. They neither had any chance of learning the craft of leadership nor the reflective inquiry process required by critical leaders. In order to be able to manage and lead change school principals need re-education to enhance their current skills. This should be part of the ongoing professional development. Re-education entails encouraging school leaders to be risk takers (Valerio 2009). Taking risks implies moving out of one's comfort zone, being open to new ideas, exploring new opportunities and possibilities of bettering oneself by engaging in professional development activities aimed at improving leadership and management competence. As pointed out above, effective re-education ensures that principals are set to be managers and agents of change.

Management of change refers to the ways in which managers, as defined above, deal with change. Gibson et al. (2000:446) describe three alternative change management approaches, which are:

- managing change through power;
- managing change through reason and
- managing change through re-education.

These authors also explain each of these approaches. Managing change through power involves the use of coercion (usually by autocrats), where non-managers are forced to change. Managing change through reason involves the dissemination of information before the intended change and the assumption is that reason alone will prevail and participants will make a rational choice in order to change. Finally, manag-

ing change through re-education is the middle approach between the above two. Here there is reliance upon re-education to improve the functioning of an organisation. Gibson et al. (2000: 446) define re-education, as a set of activities that affirm that power or reason cannot bring about desirable change.

As one re-educates oneself one has also to learn about salient qualities in the organisations they are leading. The people at the helm of organisations need to understand the unique circumstances of the organisations they are leading.

Stage 3: Analysing One's Unique Circumstances and Perceiving Novel Ways of Leading

Two of the factors that destroy professional growth are to be oblivious to one's circumstances and being uncreative when it is necessary to be so. Effective school managers will know the circumstances of their schools. They will know that each school's circumstances are unique and solving these would not require a "size fits all" solution for all schools. The previous apartheid demarcations continue to loom large in South Africa. Historically Black African schools are much different from historically white schools. The principals of these schools are faced with different challenges. There is also a difference between poor working class schools and opulent as well as middle class schools. The challenges are different and when principals understand the unique nature of their schools this is among the first steps in embracing professional development.

Having identified the nature of the school an effective principal will search for innovative ways of dealing with problems. With the changing times new challenges continue to surface and this usually calls for new ways of dealing with such. The principals who are committed will read more about their practice and will be interested in learning from the experiences of others.

Stage 4: Establishing Oneself and Understanding the Role of Others in the Organisation

After the understanding of one's circumstances, it is crucial for one to understand what

they stand for within an organisation. In order to understand others within the school, the principals have to understand themselves; their philosophies and their preferred styles of managing their schools. In real life it is much better when principals know which leadership or management behaviours they prefer. Even experienced effective school principals know the immense role of colleagues in the organisation. Some leaders would prefer shared leadership, authoritative leadership or democratic leadership depending on the person's philosophy and the circumstances. However, a number of conscientious leaders prefer facilitative approaches which seem to be equal to with achieving site-based management and power-sharing. Furthermore, facilitative leadership behaviours such as demonstrating trust, providing support and encouraging creativity and risk-taking are all required by democratic empowering leadership (Blase and Anderson 1995). It is very difficult to lead others without a planned strategy that reflects establishing oneself and understanding others within the organisation. The success of any schools is dependent upon determined leaders who believe in the role of others as well.

The concept "others" within the context of a schools involves a number of role-players and these include the community, the parents and the school governing body. The principals need to build a rapport with other role-players. The school can only grow and professional development makes sense if they forge these links with others. Clifford et al. (2012) aptly summarise this as they aver that principals today need models that will work for all team members. They also write about the need for principals to shift from the traditional role – that of working alone. They need to build the school with all other teachers.

Stage 5: Application to Professional Practice

When people undergo professional development they would need to apply the skills learnt. Stage five of the Model focuses on how the trainees apply what they had learnt. The stages do not necessarily follow one after the other. It may happen that whilst one is in stage two, they might start applying what they have already learnt to their practice in their schools. In fact, this should be the goal of any professional development programmes; leaders must be able

to constantly apply what they are learning on a continuous basis. Principals at the beginning of their formal professional development might draw down specific goals that they would like to achieve. Some would like to be emphasise collegiality, some would like to be transformational leaders and others might want to entrench a teacher leadership programme in their schools where through instructional leadership they build other leaders within their schools. It is during Stage 5 that the participants will be able to see how to apply their objectives upon their schools.

Stage 6: Revisiting and Evaluating Professional Development Goals and Objectives

Like all effective development programmes there needs to be a stage when the programme's effectiveness is evaluated. This stage serves to take a look at the entire journey and see what was achieved and what was not. The schools are always good grounds for testing theories of what works in reality. The principals of many low performing schools frequently complain of strategies that do not work in their schools. This stage seeks to explore what else needs to be done in ensuring the success of professional development programmes. The impact of the programme should be felt by the participant who would have tested the impact on their own schools.

This stage enables the participants to reflect whether their original goals have been achieved. At this stage it is also crucial to investigate how the principals use professionalism to deal with conflicting interests in the school. The journey is likely to start all over again because professional development is never completed, it always continues as long as the principals are working.

CONCLUSION

This paper shared the experiences of a professional development model inspired by the context of selected underperforming schools in South Africa. Any meaningful educational change will be as effective as the current professional development programmes. The in-service workshops might not be enough because most of them are usually once-off events. The

strength of the model discussed in this paper is that it responds to local challenges. It also supports the notion of continuing professional development. Today's school leaders need to learn the craft of management and leadership. Furthermore, they need to be reflective practitioners who will also improve the professional practice of their colleagues. Effective professional development models should also be relevant to the circumstances of the participating schools' principals. Moreover, there should be a shift away from the traditional model in professional development programmes. The participants in professional development programmes should be hands-on as they undergo the learning experience. Interactive materials and continuing workshops are necessary for lasting learning. As participants form networks, they learn to share experiences. The latter is the best in off loading the burden from the managers of "failing" schools.

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