

Is the Whole More than the Sum of Its Parts? A Community of Practice Approach to Leadership Development of School Principals

Inbanathan Naicker and Surendra Vethaviasa Naidoo*

*School of Education, University of KwaZulu-Natal, Private Bag X03,
Ashwood, 3605, South Africa*

**E-mail: surennaidoo@mweb.co.za*

KEYWORDS Mentoring. Networking. Peer Learning. Reflection. School Leadership

ABSTRACT There is growing scholarship around the positive correlation between successful schools and effective leadership. Studies indicate that sound leadership is only second to effective classroom teaching in influencing learner outcomes. Whilst this is known about leadership, what remains contested is how good leaders are produced. In other words, what form and types of learning produce effective leaders? It is within this context that this paper explores the possibilities offered by a community of practice for leadership learning of school principals. In this qualitative study located within the interpretive paradigm, one community of practice was purposively selected for study. In order to produce data, semi-structured interviews were conducted with six purposively selected school principals. The data produced were subjected to qualitative content analysis which entailed the generation of grounded themes from the interview transcripts. The findings indicate that a range of leadership learning opportunities present themselves within leadership practice communities and these learning's have been used by school principals to improve their leadership practice. While this is a positive and encouraging feature of a community of practice, the leadership provided by the community co-ordinator is key to the successful leadership development of school principals.

INTRODUCTION

Effective leadership is considered a prerequisite for high quality education. Sound leadership is the key to the success of any school (Okoko et al. 2014). There is a growing corpus of scholarship that supports the claim that leadership does make a difference to learner outcomes and school effectiveness (Bush 2010; Rhodes and Brundrett 2010). Leithwood and Riehl (2003) declare that leadership has a significant impact on student learning. They proclaim that leadership is second only to the effects of the quality of the curriculum and teachers' instruction. While the correlation between leadership and student learning is known, what remains contested is

what types of preparation produce effective leaders. As Bush (2009: 375) puts it "there is ongoing debate about what preparation is required to develop appropriate leadership behaviours". Consequently, school leadership preparation and development is currently a "cutting edge" issue in both the practice and scholarship of educational leadership and management (Eacott and Asuga 2014).

In South Africa, there is no prescription that school principals possess formal qualifications in school leadership for appointment to the post of school principal. All they require is a three year teaching qualification and a minimum of five years' experience as a teacher (see Republic of South Africa 1998: PAM Chapter A). Such minimal requirements for school principalship is not only peculiar to South Africa but is characteristic of the African continent as well. Consequently, Bush and Odura (2006) claim that in Africa there is rarely any formal leadership requirement for school principals. School principals are appointed on the basis of their teaching record rather than their leadership potential. Are such minimal requirements adequate preparation for the demanding job of a school principal? Helsing and Lemons (2008) are of the view that the roles of school principals have become more

Address for correspondence

Dr. Inbanathan Naicker
Educational Leadership, Management and Policy
School of Education
Office G313, Main Tutorial Block
Cnr Richmond and Mariannhill Roads
Edgewood Campus
University of KwaZulu-Natal
South Africa
Telephone: +27 (0)31 260 3461
Facsimile: +27 (0)31 260 1598
E-mail: Naicker1@ukzn.ac.za

complex as they work to improve the teaching and learning for an increasingly diverse learner body. The expectations of school principals have moved from the demands of management and control to the demands for an educational leader who can foster staff development, parent involvement, community support, and student growth, and succeed with major changes and expectations (Mestry and Singh 2007). Given the fact that many school principals have not been trained on how to lead and have not been adequately prepared for the demands of the job (if at all) (Helsing and Lemons 2008; Avery 2012), in-service leadership development programmes become an imperative.

Additionally, in South Africa, there is a clarion call for the improvement of school leadership. The underperformance of the schooling system in South Africa is directly correlated to the quality of school leadership. In the words of the Minister of Basic Education, Ms A Motshekga “a school stands or falls on its leadership ... school principals are critical to the improvement of our levels of learner performance ... they are a key weapon in our arsenal to turn underperforming schools around” (KwaZulu-Natal (KZN) Department of Education 2010: 3). While there is an attempt to improve school leadership and transform schools through formal courses offered by institutions of higher education such as the Advanced Certificate in Education: School Leadership (ACE:SL), improvements in the output of schools of school principals who have completed such a qualification is not that immediately visible. Bush, Kiggundu and Moorosi (2011) observe that in the majority of the case study schools in which the school principal’s completed the ACE:SL there has been no significant school improvement. Rather, in some schools there has been a decline in output. In Conley’s (2011) estimation the school principals who completed the ACE:SL may have not successfully translated the theory they have been exposed to into practice. It would thus appear that the formal training of school principals alone is not sufficient to run successful schools. They may also require ongoing support from various stakeholders such as ward managers, circuit managers and fellow school principals. Can this be done through a community of practice?

Much work on communities of practice in education, both nationally and internationally, have focussed on teacher’s sharing of knowl-

edge of their pedagogy and the collective solving of specific problems of practice (Printy 2008). A few international studies aside (see Helsing and Lemons 2008; Hirsh and Hord 2008), there appears to be a dearth of scholarship around school leadership learning within a community of practice. Hemmasi and Csanda (2009) observe that the concept of a community of practice is still new, fluid and emerging. Consequently, empirical studies on the subject are scant. Therefore this study is significant in that it builds on and contributes to the corpus of empirical studies on communities of practice.

Objectives of the Study

The objective of the study is to explore the possibilities (if any) that a community of practice offers for the leadership development of school principals.

Leadership and Leadership Development

Leadership is an elusive and difficult concept to define in any categorical way. This notwithstanding, we draw on Jwan and Ong’ondo (2011) who refer to leadership as a higher set of tasks encompassing goal setting, visioning and motivating. This said, leadership cannot be understood without reference to management. Leadership and management are closely intertwined. Management is viewed as an aspect of leadership concerned with the maintenance of performance through planning, organising, coordinating and controlling (Jwan and Ong’ondo 2011). Thus, in this paper whenever the term leadership is used, management is subsumed in the discourse.

Similar to leadership, the term leadership development has no agreed upon definition. Allen (2006) alludes to the contested nature of the concept. In this study, we borrow from Gray and Bishop (2009), and view leadership development as any activity that builds the capacity of school principals to be better leaders. To be effective school leaders requires developing skills in various areas including leading change, managing resources and improving instruction (Gray and Bishop 2009). The literature is replete with examples of pedagogies, processes and methods that have been used in developing leaders in different sectors and contexts. Olsen (2007) advocates that leadership development programmes be root-

ed in practice by engaging participants in solving problems through case studies and simulations. Gray and Bishop (2009) suggest that role embedded learning, mentorship, focused learning experiences and reflection on practice enhances leadership learning. Bush (2009) adds to these methods by suggesting that networking and site visits may lead to powerful leadership learning.

Community of Practice

Communities of practice refer to groups of people who share a concern or a passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly (Wenger 2008). Thus school principals who gather regularly to talk about their leadership practice in order to transform their schools may be viewed as a community of practice. For the purposes of this paper, the regular gathering of school principals under the banner of a ward (a grouping of schools) forum is construed as a community of practice.

The core principle of a community of practice is profoundly simple. To paraphrase Stamps (1997), it represents something many of us know to be true, that is learning is a social phenomenon and should be linked as close as possible to one's practice. In unpacking the key characteristics of a community of practice Wenger, McDermot and Snyder (2002) identify three core components. Firstly, there needs to be a recognised *domain of interest* that people within the group are passionate about. In this study we take the view that the gathering of school principals within a ward forum is the result of the common interest they share in the effective leadership of their schools. Secondly, in pursuing their interest in the domain members build *relationships* that allows them to engage in joint activities, share information and help each other. The ward forum is a space where school principals have the potential to build symbiotic relationships that can lead to an exchange of knowledge and skills among members. Thirdly, there needs to be the development of a *shared social practice*. Members of a community of practice are practitioners. In Stamps (1997) view, practice includes both the explicit and the tacit. It includes the shared resources, language, experiences, stories, tools, etc. as well as the shared worldviews, untold rules of thumb and the specific perceptions (which may never be articulated). The school principals within the ward fo-

rum have, through their shared practice, collected and documented the tricks and lessons they have learned in leading schools into a knowledge base.

METHODOLOGY

This is a qualitative study located within the interpretive research paradigm. Owing to the fact that qualitative research emphasises the lived experiences of the participants (Cohen et al. 2011), we felt that this was congruent with this study in that it enabled us ontologically to enter the school principal's life-world and understand and make meaning (Merriam 1988) of how school principals experienced and interpreted the experiences of leadership development within a community of practice. We also chose to work within the interpretive paradigm since it relies on first-hand accounts (Terre Blanche and Durrheim 1999) which in the context of this study meant the accounts of the participant school principals. Additionally, this paradigm is also used to research peoples' behaviour, attitudes, beliefs, and perceptions (Terre Blanche and Durrheim 1999) which is what we set out to elicit from the school principals with regard to their leadership development within a community of practice.

One community of practice was purposively selected based on convenience in terms of ease of access to the community's members (Cohen et al. 2011). The selected community of practice comprised 32 school principals who gathered regularly under the banner of a "ward forum" co-ordinated by the ward manager (community co-ordinator). These 32 school principals serve a rich diversity of schools in terms of location, type of school, resourcing of the school and socio-economic status of the communities the school services. The school principals themselves represent a rich diversity in terms of race, gender and experience as school principal. Diversity among members in a community of practice is viewed as an essential ingredient in order to promote productive learning (Printy 2008).

From this group of school principals six of them were purposively selected, based on convenience, to be interviewed. We must point out that the views of the selected school principals are not representative of the population of school principals within the selected community of practice, nor are they representative of the wider population of school principals in the country. They only represent themselves. Con-

sequently, Cohen et al. (2011: 157) affirms that purposive sampling “is deliberately and unashamedly selective and biased”. Therefore this study’s findings cannot lead to any generalisations but rather to an understanding of the experiences of leadership learning of the selected school principals.

A semi-structured interview schedule was developed with questions geared to elicit information on leadership development within this community of school principals. Each of the six school principals were interviewed for approximately an hour at their school sites. Informed by Henning’s (2004) assertion that data analysis involves converting ‘raw’ data into patterns of meaning, all six interviews were audio-recorded and then subjected them to *verbatim* transcription. McMillan and Schumacher (2006: 355) contend that audio recording the interview “...ensures completeness of the verbal interaction and provides material for reliability checks”. After member checking, the transcripts were subjected to a rigorous process of qualitative content analysis which comprised an inductive process that focused on the meaning of the message communicated by the participants. This is supported by Patton (2002: 453) who asserts that qualitative content analysis is a “sense-making effort that takes a volume of qualitative material and attempts to identify core consistencies and meanings”. We commenced by condensing the raw data into themes based on valid inference and interpretation of what the participants were saying in the transcripts.

The observation of ethical practices in research is of paramount importance in order to protect people from the harmful effects of research (Mertens 1998). To this end the aim and purpose of the study was explained to all participants at the commencement of each of the interviews. The consent of the participants was then obtained and they were assured that their participation was voluntary and they could withdraw from the study at any time if they felt uncomfortable. We also made it clear that their names and that of their institutions would remain confidential and in any reporting of the data *nom de plumes* will be used to anonymise their and their institutions identities.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

In the findings and discussion that follows, a selection of key quotes from the semi-structured interviews that captures the participants’

experiences of leadership development within the community of practice (ward forum) is presented under themes that emerged from the data.

Exposure to Presentations by “Experts” in the Field and by Community Members Themselves

Almost all of the participants spoke of the deep learning’s they experienced as a result of their exposure to presentations by invited speakers on issues that school principals often find challenging. The participants recounted that on issues that can lead to a fair bit of contestation such as leave measures for educators, school governance issues and staff labour relations issues, the community co-ordinator gets the relevant personnel from those directorates to address school principals. The participants commented:

Basically it’s the people the ward manager [community co-ordinator] invites to these meetings... these people are very helpful... They are key role players in developing new principals. When they speak of leave management, of basic conditions of employment, labour issues... we become in a good position of handling these issues. (Mr Gumede)

The experts do come in from time to time... By way of example, one of the most contentious issues that a principal faces is how to manage leave... She [community co-ordinator] brought the people directly from the service centre to address the principals on leave matters. (Dr Naidoo)

She [community co-ordinator] gives us opportunities to talk about things that are affecting us at our schools and she then gets the relevant people to address us. She brought in Mr X... he is involved in governance issues.... Mr Y... he is involved in leave issues, Mrs Z in school maintenance. So in the ward forum we get information from the horse’s mouth. (Mrs Bodasingh)

Printy (2008) refers to several studies that confirm the knowledge contribution of outside experts to a community of practice. She adds that these experts challenge current ideas within the community of practice while simultaneously introducing new ones. In addition to invited speakers, the community co-ordinator also draws on local expertise i.e. members from within the community of practice to share their experiences of issues that are perplexing school principals. The participants shared accounts of ex-

amples where school principals who demonstrate best practice in certain areas of school leadership are called upon to share their knowledge and skills with others in the community. Some of the comments of the participants were:

You know Ms X who is a principal of a school in Area Z, she dealt with an aspect of record keeping. You may think that it is such an obvious thing. But in that week after she dealt with record keeping about five principals visited her school to see practically what she means about how you keep proper records. She was able to demonstrate to them this is how you file your HRM [human resource management] circulars, this is how you file your curriculum circulars.... (Mrs Bodasingh)

The ward manager got me to do a workshop... I did a workshop with the entire ward forum on the distinction between professional matters and governance matters because of the tensions that were arising in certain schools. (Dr Naidoo)

The invited speakers and the engagement of 'homebred' expertise play a significant role in developing the leadership capacities of school principals within the community. The school principals are capacitated on a range of issues ranging from leading and managing people to issues of school governance. The intention is to make school principals *au fait* with the knowledge, skills, attitudes and values that are needed in leading and managing effective schools. According to Gray and Bishop (2009), for leadership learning to succeed one of the preconditions is to provide focused learning experiences for emerging leaders. The speakers (both invited speakers and those from within the community of practice) are intended to provide learning experiences by providing a valuable body of technical and practical knowledge on school leadership and management issues. While this may sometimes involve largely a didactic approach, it nevertheless plays a significant part in leadership development (Bush 2010).

Pivotal to successful learning by the members of the community of school principals is the role played by the community co-ordinator (which in this study is the ward manager). Having an overall picture of the needs of the school principals within the community she draws on people who can engage with the school principals on the content, processes and procedures that are most likely to address the wards, indi-

vidual schools and school principals priorities (Hirsh and Hord 2008). An encouraging feature of the presentations is that sometimes school principals undertake site visits to observe best practice in school leadership and management. Visits with a clear purpose may lead to powerful leadership learning.

Learning from Colleagues within the Community

Four of the six participants indicated that the strength of their community of school principals lies in the learning that they share from interacting among themselves at community meetings. The diversity of contexts the school principals hail from as well as their experiences adds to the richness of the interaction among members. One participant, Mr Shaik (a novice principal) pointed out that he has learnt a lot as result of his interaction with senior school principals. He commented:

I would say that this ward forum is the ideal place and the ideal set up where we can learn from others. Some of us are new to the principalship post. We have others who are senior... with more expertise... more knowledgeable. So we communicate with one another. In this way we gain new ideas, sometimes innovative ideas.

Mrs Bodasingh emphasised the learning that goes on among her peers. She volunteered:

We learn from our colleagues because she [community co-ordinator] always says 'okay does anyone handle the situation like this?' and then someone says okay we did and we learn from that and basically we learn and share together.

Mr Shaik (a novice principal) indicated how he communicates the information gathered from colleagues in the community of practice to his school management team in order to get them to see what can be put into practice at his school. He stated:

I have certainly used ideas that have been shared. I come back to my Office and to my management team and say this is what is being done in school X... can we use anything from this?

The peer learning that takes place is not only confined to the formal meeting sessions of the community but also extends outside of the meetings. Some of the comments of the participants were:

The other thing is that the ward forum is not necessarily a formalised situation because during the breaks we discuss issues with our colleagues... that's how we learn... (Mrs Bodasingh)

During break times we would share our experiences... this is where you learn you are not alone in this thing [of school principalship]. Others have similar problems. (Mr Khoza)

Within this community of practice there is an open sharing of ideas among members of the community. An invitational ethos prevails for members to dialogue with each other. In any community of practice there will be people who know things that others do not. There will be people who are more knowledgeable about certain issues than others (Grossman et al. 2001). Consequently, each member's expertise, experience and cognition level is available as a resource to others to draw upon and reflect on (Maistry 2008). Lumby (2008), drawing on Walker and Dimmock (2004), labels this 'confrere', where one colleague learns from another. Within a community of practice a forum is created where individuals learn to collaborate and turn to one another for learning and resources (Fulman 2009). Learning occurs through the social engagement of the members of the community. This type of learning is endorsed by Wenger (1998) who emphasises that we become who we are as we learn through social interactions. Through this process the learning identities of members are transformed and they experience, shape and take on new identities.

The opportunity for novice principals (like Mr Shaik) to dialogue with colleagues about what it is they are doing gives them the courage to go to their schools and apply learnings from the community of practice. Helsing and Lemons (2008:16) note in their study that the conversations among school principals "helps bolster courage if you hear from your colleagues that this is what they've done... and this is how they've handled the situation". The conversations with colleagues become opportunities to share strategies and clarify an individual's thinking on issues. The authentic problems that they face are dealt with meaningfully in a less threatening environment (Duke 2014). Extrapolating from Wenger (1998), novice principals through their interactions and work with other members of the community of practice, can develop legitimacy and experience and over time possibly become core members of the community of practice.

Networking among Colleagues of the Community

All the participants spoke about the networking that takes place among members of the community. In addition to their regular meetings as a community they continue to make contact with each other outside of the meetings either face-to-face or through the available technology. Dr Naidoo and Mr Gumede commented respectively as follows:

Without fail during the course of the day you get between three to five calls from fellow principals... As principals we are able to link up and find out what other schools are doing.

This networking thing helps... when things go wrong I check with other principals...

The networking has helped school principals in discharging their day to day functions. As an example participant school principals pointed out how the networking among fellow school principals has helped to solve human resource related problems. They commented:

Don't expect anything from the Department [of Education]. If you don't get up and do it for yourself and interact with your colleagues nothing will happen... the principal is left to his own devices to staff the school... If you look at some of the staff I got here, it is people that Mrs X [a fellow school principal from the ward forum] has recommended. This is the tremendous value of the Ward Forum... Similarly, I have helped many schools in sorting out their staffing. (Dr Naidoo)

Where you get a teacher who has suddenly fallen sick and you need a substitute educator... we liaise with other principals in the ward forum. They may have [substitute] teachers who have been to their school. They recommend those [substitute] teachers who have the expertise and who are passionate about education. (Mr Shaik)

Networking is considered to be one of four main leadership development approaches and is regarded as the most favoured mode of leadership learning (Bush 2010; Bush and Glover 2004). The members of the community of practice build networks among themselves which open up channels for communicating with each other outside of the formal meetings of the community of school principals. Within this community of practice the school principals exploit the available technology to make contact with each

other in order to clarify issues and obtain suggestions in a relatively short time frame. The communication through networking thus provides a strong potential for ideas transfer among school leaders (Bush 2010). Moreover, Hirsh and Hord (2008) note the “loneliness” school principals feel and contend that through networking they are able to reduce this isolation. They gain collegiality and the help and support of their peers in solving the hard problems they encounter on a daily basis. Evidence from this community of practice illustrates how networking is used as a tool to address staffing problems that school principals encounter in discharging their duties as human resource leaders and managers.

Owing to the regular association with fellow school principals of the community, three of the participants indicated that their professional relationships with some members have evolved to that of critical friends. They often interact with these individuals to solicit advice on school matters. Some of the comments of the participants were:

I have learnt very quickly that you cannot operate in isolation as a principal of a school. You need to associate with others and in this regard I would like to mention Dr Naidoo. We get on well. When I approach him for information he is not shy to let us know what is going on. (Mrs Bodasingh)

Because of the ward forum ... we have become colleagues, we become friends, we are able to communicate... you see I am able to phone a principal and share my problems and ask for help. (Mr Gumede)

If I got a problem in management I ask Dr Naidoo how do you tackle this?... He tells me do 1, 2, 3 and 4. We work as colleagues... I have got Mr Nzama next to me. If I got a problem I pick up the phone... I ask what do you do in this case. (Mr Khoza)

Critical friends are a valuable resource in leadership development. Bush and Middlewood (2005) drawing on Day (1995) view critical friendships as partnerships of equals entered into voluntarily among individuals. A critical friend offers constructive critique and advice of a person's work as a friend and consequently the friend becomes an advocate for the success of that work (Schley and Schratz 2011). Some of the school principals in this community of practice have built healthy relationships with selected peers. These peers have become “sounding

boards” with whom they can interact freely and seek advice on matters they find troubling.

Mentoring of Fellow School Principals

Four of the six participants spoke of the mentoring that goes on among the community of school principals. The mentoring is not a formalised programme where a mentor is matched to a mentee. Rather, it has evolved organically where one who is more knowledgeable guides and supports another colleague. Mrs Bodasingh puts this in perspective:

There is mentoring involved which is not formalised. Somebody just decides I will help this guy...

Two experienced participant school principals shared how they involve themselves in the mentoring process. They commented:

Being experienced in my field [as school principal] and having been through the posts of teacher, HOD and deputy principal I have actually mentored others in the forum who are now successful principals. (Mr Smith)

We have been involved in mentoring... not necessarily new principals. Some are quite seasoned principals. By way of illustration, we have three poor performing schools [in the Ward]. She [community co-ordinator] picked me up and we visited the three schools and we tackled some of the problems. In each of the schools we were able to make some recommendations to the school principals and support them in turning their schools around. (Dr Naidoo)

Mentoring refers to a process where one person, usually a wise and trusted guide, provides individual support and challenge to another (Thorpe and Bennett-Powell 2014). The mentor may be a more experienced leader or the process may be one of peer mentoring (Bush 2010). The literature is replete with evidence of the growing recognition of mentoring in developing aspiring and practising leaders (Bush 2010; Thorpe and Bennett-Powell 2014). Following an increased use of mentoring in the business world, there is growth in its use in education in relation to the training of both teachers and educational leaders (National College for School Leadership (NCSL) 2003). For school principals the benefits include: the development of a better understanding their role; an increase in their confidence; improved leadership knowledge and practice; and expanded opportunities for reflection (Leithwood et al. 2011).

The matching of mentors and mentees has been reported in many studies as critical to successful mentoring (NCSL 2003). The mentoring in this community of practice is not formalised through careful and purposive matching of mentor and mentee. It evolves democratically out of a need to help a fellow colleague. The mentoring itself is nevertheless effective in providing support to fellow school principals in working through the problems that they experience in leading their institutions. It is not only the novice school principals that need mentoring. Rather, it is sometimes the established school principals that need “a push in the right direction” to get their schools on track.

Becoming Reflective Leadership Practitioners

All six participants confirmed that as a result of their participation in the community of practice they have become more reflective of their role as principals. The deliberations within the community has helped them to assess their practice in light of what other school principals are doing and accordingly transform their practice. Some of the comments of the participant principals were:

When you come back from the ward forum you say ‘am I doing it the right way’. (Mr Shaik)

To me it has been of great assistance ...seated in the Ward Forum meetings quite often you are compelled to reflect on your practice and you admit at times that you could be doing things differently... you could be doing things better... Sometimes you reflect that you are doing things better than what is actually suggested... It has provided the kind of affirmation that you need from time to time that you are doing things correctly and you are doing it of a high standard. (Dr Naidoo)

We do things in a different fashion sometimes. When we discuss these things you realise I have done well here. Then you also realise that you have slipped up here so I must try and correct myself... so it helps you to learn more and correct your mistakes (Mr Khoza).

Reflecting on one’s practice can be a powerful leadership learning tool. The profound words of John Dewey (cited in Johnson et al. 2006: 37) are relevant here when he states that “We do not learn from experience. We learn from reflecting on experience.” Gray and Bishop (2009)

consider reflection on practice a core ingredient in the success of leadership development initiatives. They declare that leadership development is most effective when leaders understand and practice leadership behaviours and then reflect on their decisions and actions. When reflection is absent there is the risk of making poor decisions and bad judgements. According to Densten and Gray (2001), without reflection leaders may be convinced by past successes of their invincibility and fail to consider other viewpoints with the possibility of disastrous consequences.

In this community of school principals reflecting on one’s practice is the order of the day for the participants in this study. Owing to deliberations within the community of practice school principals are interrogating their own practice and assessing the level of their performance. Reflecting on one’s practice does not mean that one has to find fault with one’s practice. As noted by one participant school principal that it could mean affirmation or reinforcement that one’s practice is indeed of a high standard.

CONCLUSION

A community of practice does offer possibilities for leadership development. A range of leadership learning opportunities present themselves within a community of practice for the development of its members. Focused learning experiences owing to exposure to experts in the field, peer learning, networking, learning through the establishment of critical friends, mentoring and reflection on practice are some of the methods that can be used to develop appropriate leadership behaviours in members. In a community of practice, it is not the sum total of the individual member’s leadership knowledge, skills and values that matter. Rather, it is the extent to which the members (the whole) are willing to engage with each other. It is about the mutual sharing of one’s expertise in a non-threatening environment where learning and development of fellow members are paramount.

Key to successful learning within a community of practice is the strength of the community co-ordinator. The community co-ordinator must be committed to shepherding and supporting learning. In this community, the co-ordinator (ward manager) was the glue that held the school principals together. She played a facilitative role by creating conditions for leadership learning within the community of school principals.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Given the potential for leadership learning within a community of practice and the limitation of this study in terms of generalisability of its findings, there is a need for further research in this area. Perhaps a larger scale study using a different research design with multiple methods and sources of data production may reveal a more complex and far richer gestalt of leadership learning within a community of practice.

REFERENCES

- Allen SJ 2006. *An Exploration of Theories of Action in Leadership Development. A Case Study*. PhD thesis. Los Angeles: Antioch University.
- Avery N 2012. Effective school management – getting it right? *The Witness*, 12 March.
- Bush T 2010. Leadership development. In: T Bush, L Bell, D Middlewood (Eds.): *The Principles of Educational Leadership and Management*. 2nd Edition. London: SAGE, pp. 112-131.
- Bush T 2009. Leadership development and school improvement: Contemporary issues in leadership development. *Educational Review*, 61(4): 375-389.
- Bush T, Kiggundu E, Moorosi P 2011. Preparing new principals in South Africa: The ACE School Leadership Programme. *South African Journal of Education*, 31: 31-43.
- Bush T, Middlewood D 2005. *Leading and Managing People in Education*. London: SAGE.
- Bush T, Odura KT 2006. New Principals in Africa: Preparation, induction and practice. *Journal of Educational Administration*, 44: 359-375.
- Cohen L, Manion L, Morrison K 2011. *Research Methods in Education*. 7th Edition. London: Routledge Falmer.
- Conley L 2011. Training of principals not sufficient. *Sowetan Live*, 15 February.
- Densten IL, Gray JH 2001. Leadership development and reflection: What is the connection? *International Journal of Educational Management*, 15(3): 119-124.
- Duke LD 2014. A bold approach to developing leaders for low performing schools. *Management in Education*, 28(3): 80-85.
- Eacott S, Asuga GN 2014. School leadership preparation and development in Africa: A critical insight. *Educational Management Administration & Leadership*, 1-16. doi: 10.1177/1741143214523013
- Fullan M 2009. Leadership development. The larger context. *Educational Leadership*, 67(2): 45-49.
- Gray C, Bishop Q 2009. Leadership development. *JSD*, 30(1): 28-32.
- Grossman P, Wineberg S, Woolworth S 2001. Towards a theory of teacher community. *Teacher's College Record*, 103(6): 942-1012.
- Helsing D, Lemons RW 2008. Leadership practice communities: Improving teaching and learning. *Leadership*, 38(1):14-17.
- Hemmasi M, Csanda CM 2009. The effectiveness of communities of practice. *Journal of Managerial Issues*, xxi(2): 262-279.
- Henning E 2004. *Finding Your Way in Qualitative Research*. Pretoria: Van Schaik.
- Hirsh S, Horde SM 2008. Leader & Learner. *Principal Leadership*, 9(4):26-30.
- Jwan JO, Ong'ondo CO 2011. Educating leaders for learning in schools in Kenya. The need for a reconceptualisation. In: T Townsend, J MacBeath (Eds.), *International Handbook of Leadership for Learning*. Dordrecht, Heidelberg, London, New York: Springer, pp. 397- 417.
- KwaZulu-Natal (KZN) Department of Education 2010. Final Evaluation and Rollout Proposal. Principal's Management Development Programme. KZN: Department of Education.
- Leithwood K, Reid S, Pedwell L, Connor M 2011. Lessons about improving leadership on a large scale: From Ontario's leadership strategy. In: T Townsend, J MacBeath (Eds.): *International Handbook of Leadership for Learning*. Dordrecht, Heidelberg, London, New York: Springer, pp. 337- 353.
- Leithwood KA, Riehl C 2003. *What We Know About Successful School Leadership*. Philadelphia, PA: Laboratory for Student Success, Temple University.
- Lumby J 2008. International Perspectives on Developing Educational Leaders. *Paper presented at the annual meeting of the Commonwealth Council for Educational Administration and Management, International Convention Centre, Durban, South Africa*, Sept 8-12.
- Maistry SM 2008. School-university CPD partnerships. Fertile ground for cultivating teacher communities of practices. *South African Journal of Higher Education*, 22(2): 363-374.
- McMillan JH, Schumacher S 2006. *Research in Education: Evidence-Based Inquiry*. 6th Edition. Boston: Pearson Education, Inc.
- Merriam SB 1988. *Case Study Research in Education: A Qualitative Approach*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Mertens DM 1998. *Research Methods in Education and Psychology: Integrating Diversity with Quantitative and Qualitative Approaches*. London: SAGE.
- Mestry R, Singh P 2007. Continuing professional development for principals. *South African Journal of Education*, 27(3): 477-490.
- NCSL (National College for School Leadership) 2003. *Mentoring and Coaching for New Leaders*. Nottingham, UK: NCSL.
- Okoko JM, Scott S, Scott DE 2014. Perceptions of school leaders in Nairobi about their leadership preparation and development. *International Journal of Leadership in Education: Theory and Practice*, 1-25. doi: 10.1080/13603124.2013.877160
- Olsen L 2007. Getting serious about preparation. *Education Week*, 12: 3-19.
- Patton MQ 2002. *Qualitative Research and Evaluation Method*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE.
- Printy SM 2008. Leadership for learning: A community of practice perspective. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 44(2):187-226.
- Republic of South Africa 1998. *Employment of Educator's Act, 76 of 1998*. Pretoria: Government Printer.

- Rhodes C, Brundrett M 2010. Leadership for learning. In: T Bush, L Bell, D Middlewood (Eds.). *The principles of Educational Leadership and Management* 2nd Edition. London: SAGE, pp. 153-175.
- Stamps D 1997. Communities of practice. Learning is social. Training is irrelevant? *Training*, 34(2): 34-42.
- Terre Blanche M, Durrheim K 1999. *Research in Practice: Applied Method for the Social Sciences*. Cape Town: University of Cape Town.
- Thorpe A, Bennett-Powell G 2014. The perceptions of secondary school middle leaders regarding their needs following a middle leadership development programme. *Management in Education*, 28(2): 52-57.
- Wenger E 1998. *Communities of Practice: Learning, Meaning and Identity*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Wenger E 2008. Communities of practice. Learning as a social system. *The Systems Thinker*, 9(4): 1-10.
- Wenger E, McDermot R, Snyder W 2002. *Cultivating Communities of Practice. A Guide to Managing Knowledge*. Boston: Harvard Business School.