School Leadership Role in Creating a Learning Organisation: Perspectives from the Primary School Teachers and School Management

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ABSTRACT The paper presents and discusses the findings of a qualitative study that was conducted in a primary school in a socio-economically depressed community in the Pinetown District, Durban, South Africa. Creating learning organisations out of schools is one of the democratic government's agenda of bringing about societal transformation since the country attained freedom in 1994. School leaders and managers have been entrusted with the responsibility to ensure that leadership and learning in schools is transformed to reflect a new dispensation. Various policies have been put in place in that regard. However, many schools still have not transformed to becoming learning organisations as expected. A small scale study comprising a principal, two heads of department and two teachers was undertaken. The results suggest that while school leadership understands the importance of creating learning organisations, translating this knowledge to practice has largely been unsuccessful. The findings also suggest that the way in which the school is managed is not consistent with values of transparency, inclusiveness, collaboration and democracy.

INTRODUCTION

Our vision is of a South Africa in which all our people have access to lifelong learning, as well as education and training, which will, in turn, contribute towards improving the quality of life and building a peaceful, prosperous and democratic South Africa (Department of Basic Education 2011: 8).

This extract indicates that the Department of Basic Education seeks to establish schools in which learning by all stakeholders is central to the life of schools and that improved learner achievement and the attainment of democratic society is the ultimate goal. School leadership and principals in particular are expected to play a prominent role in achieving these outcomes (du Plessis 2013; Bhengu and Mthembu 2014). In order to understand the extent to which some schools were achieving these noble ideals, a small scale qualitative study was conducted in one primary school.

This paper therefore, presents and discusses the findings of a small scale qualitative study

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which was conducted between January and June 2013 in Milpark Primary School (not its real name), in the Pinetown District, South Africa. The study sought to understand the extent to which school leadership (principal, heads of departments and teachers) displayed practices that promoted the notion of schools as learning organisations. The advent of democracy in South Africa in 1994 ushered in new demands in terms of how schools were to be led and managed (Bhengu 2005). Principals' leadership practices were expected to be founded on principles and values of democracy, transparency, equity and be inclusive of all stakeholders in the school community (Legotlo 2014). By school community the researchers are referring to the teaching staff, parents and the learners in the schools.

Transforming schools into institutions where effective teaching and learning takes place was one of the new democratic government's vision and goal (Woods and Gronn 2009; Mncube and Harber 2010; Bhengu 2013). The concept of school leadership is used in this study in an inclusive sense to include everybody within the school who can play an influential role in shaping an environment where effective teaching and learning can occur. In short, this kind of leadership that encompasses different stakeholders - appointed, influential teachers and School Governing Body (SGB) members. Each of these sec-

tors has a different role function in the school organisation. These roles are regulated and directed by legislation and policies of the Department of Education. The Employment of Educators Act, No. 76 of 1998 (Republic of South Africa 1998) stipulates that one of the roles of the school management team (principals, deputy principals and heads of departments) is to establish and maintain a learning environment. Leaders therefore play a significant role in establishing the platform for all stakeholders to learn.

Discussions about learning organisations concept have been held for the past 20 years or so. A major concern then was that while schools were supposed to be learning organisations, they were not (Moloi 2010). In the 21st century, the focus persists to be on the notion of learners learning as the main focus of schooling and the role of existing leadership cultures that support this (Hamzah et al. 2011). Therefore, research and debates on learning organisation is important at this stage. Researchers and readers alike have to know if schools have moved from where they were 20 years ago given the importance of their role in facilitating learning. The importance of learning organisations is therefore based on the view that learning organisations develop the capacity to learn and reflect, and also the capacity to innovate. A learning organisation uses these competencies to mobilise and to use resources efficiently, and to achieve the larger task of managing the changing environment inside and outside the school so as to improve the quality of teaching and learning (Williams et al. 2012).

The establishment of a learning organisation rests upon the leaders of the school to create a platform for its relevant stakeholders to learn on a continuous basis in an effort to ensure effective teaching and learning (Hamzah et al. 2011). In the South African context, Moloi (2010) argues for the pivotal role of principals in transforming schools into a learning organisation. Good leadership practices contribute significantly to the outcomes which may be achieved when teachers aspire to create a learning organisation (Louis et al. 2010). Given the competences depicted above, it is clear that school leaders should have requisite skills that are necessary in order to be able to make schools learning organisations. The next most important question to be posed is whether or not the country has school leaders that can ensure that such a vision can be realised.

In an attempt to bring about the needed transformation in education, the government, through its education department, has promulgated various pieces of legislation and policies. These include the National Education Policy Act, No. 27 of 1996 (Republic of South Africa 1996a) which provides guidelines for the development of educators; the South African Schools Act (Republic of South Africa 1996b) which deals largely with issues of school governance and management of schools within the new era of democracy. One of the policies which were aimed at transforming the teaching and learning environment is the Norms and Standards for Educators of 2000 (Republic of South Africa 2000), in terms of which seven roles of educators were outlined. One of these roles is Role 4 which envisions educators as scholars, researchers and life-long learners.

The creation of learning organisations out of schools has obvious benefits. Learning is seen to have central significance for goal attainment in an increasingly changing and uncertain environment which includes globalisation issues (Hamzah et al. 2011). An empirical study conducted by Moloi (2010: 627) on what a learning organisation is and how schools in difficult education contexts build learning organisations, found that the creation of learning organisations are dependent on the "commitment of teachers to personal learning in order to teach effectively for student achievement." This illustrates the importance of the need for teachers as individuals to take responsibility for their learning which may ultimately impact positively on learner academic achievement. Therefore, the creation of an environment that is conducive to effective teaching and learning becomes essential. Williams et al. (2012) concur with the view expressed in the above paragraph and he illustrates the importance of the school leaders' ability to ensure that their schools are able to prepare every stakeholder for a learning society.

In the context of this study, anecdotal evidence suggests that the process of collaborative learning is limited to mentoring practices between mentors and mentees, who invariably happen to be novice teachers. These are newly employed teachers and assigned mentors in an informal basis. Teachers that have been in the profession for a longer period of time are implied

to have stopped learning. This is the opposite of the notion of learning organisations.

Research Questions

This study aims to answer the following questions
- What role does school leadership play in developing the school as a learning organisation?

Sub-questions

- What kinds of environment has leadership created that promotes learning in the school?
- How does leadership approaches promote the process of learning in school?

Learning Organisation and Improved Learner Achievement

It has been established in literature (Chan 2009; Waldy 2009; Moloi 2010) that where schools are perceived to be learning organisations, learner outcomes tend to be high. One of the reasons for that is that in such organisations, everybody is committed to life-long learning and where people continually learn how to learn together (Williams et al. 2012). Senge, Cambron-McCabe, Lucas, Smith and Dutton (2012) look at learning organisations as entailing the development of a comprehensible and frank understanding of present certainty that is accessible to the whole organisation; this is utilised to create fresh, equally accessible knowledge and that assists people take valuable action in the direction of their desired prospect. What is critical about learning organisations is not that learners are learning but, more importantly, it is that everybody in the organisation is learning new knowledge and skills (Williams et al. 2012). Such knowledge and skills should enable them individually and collectively to stay relevant for current demands of the environment (Hamzah et al. 2011).

Professional Learning Communities and Learner Achievement

Professional learning communities (PLCs) can be viewed as an environment in which teach-

ers interact, collaborate regularly around issues of teaching and learning and engage about improved teaching practices for students' learning (Sargent and Hannum 2009). On similar lines, Vescio et al. (2008) posit that PLC concept rests on the premise of improved student learning by improving the practices of teaching. An analysis of 11 research articles on PLCs suggests that participation in these communities leads to changes in the teaching practices which ultimately result in improved learner outcomes (Vescio et al. 2008). Collaborative efforts which, are the hallmark of PLC concept, include strategies that open practices in ways that encourage sharing, reflecting and taking risks necessary to change (Vescio et al. 2008; Robinson 2010).

Collaborative learning requires working together towards a common goal (Dooly 2008). Emphasising the importance of collaborative learning, Dooly (2008) cites 'words of wisdom' which are attributed to Henry Ford which say *"Coming together is the beginning- keeping together is progress-working together is success"*. Clearly, within the school context, these words are relevant as staff, management, parent governors and learners find themselves being together. However, whether they do work together is another matter altogether. What is evident though is that working together has beneficial effects on student learning.

Learning is at the heart of what schools are about and leading communities of learners means ensuring that opportunities for all members of the community (Stoll and Bollam 2005; Leithwood et al. 2008; Hord and Summers 2008) and leadership is critical for the success of professional learning communities (Chikoko et al. 2011). Stoll and Bollam (2005) further posit that in learning communities, teachers and school leaders, collaborating with and supported by support staff, exercise professional judgements, for instance, about the best use of evidence and research for improving learning and teaching, within an agreed accountable framework. Evidently, there is a strong belief that professional learning communities have a positive impact on student learning (Stoll and Bollam 2005; Leithwood et al. 2008; Louis et al. 2010). Drawing from the discussions above, it is evident that issues of leadership and capacities to lead in ways that support the creation of environment

that support learners' learning is of absolute importance.

Transformational Leadership

James McGregor Burns is usually regarded by many scholars as the father of Transformational Leadership theory (Bhengu 2013). Burns (1978: 20) describes it as "a process of influencing major changes in the attitudes of employees so that the goals of the organisation and the vision of the leader are realised". Due to intense interplay between leaders and subordinates on one hand and the environment on the other, transformational leadership has emerged as a promising approach in responding to increasing demands to develop and implement innovations in schools (Moolenaar et al. 2010). These scholars furthermore argue that there is a strong correlation between transformational leadership and the attitudes of the teachers with regards to the changes in instructional behaviour at school. Therefore, since school leaders are entrusted with the responsibility of driving transformation at school level (Hamzah et al. 2011) it is crucial that they display capabilities to interact with staff in ways that engender positive attitudes.

Discussing Distributed Leadership

Distributed leadership holds that power or authority does not rest within one individual, but with a number of stakeholders within the institution (Harris 2004). Spillane (2005), one of the adherents of distributed leadership, maintains that knowledge and skill should be leveraged to all participants throughout the learning institution. This theory of leadership argues that leadership is not only about making every person a leader, but it is about practices that emanate from liaison amongst the role players within the organisation. The theory destabilises the notion that leadership practices are ascribed only to those people in formal positions to lead (Spillane 2005). This theory is appropriate to institutions where everybody is a learner, and not just those in the lower rungs in the organisation such as learners and or teachers.

METHODOLOGY

The study on which this paper is based was a qualitative case study design that was located within the interpretive paradigm. Qualitative research "emphasises elaborate description of social or instructional setting, intended to explore social phenomena by immersing the investigator in the situation for extended periods" (Slavin 2007: 121). Further, qualitative research is naturalistic, and uses multi-methods approach (Creswell 2012) in capturing the lived experiences of the participants from their own perspectives (Cohen et al. 2011).

A combination of purposive and convenience sampling method was used in identifying the school. It was purposive in the sense that it was a primary school that was located in a poverty-stricken community, and had the characteristics that the researchers were looking for. Purposive sampling is a process whereby researchers hand-pick the cases to be included in the sample on the basis of their judgement of their typicality or possession of the particular characteristics being sought (Cohen et al. 2011). It was convenient in that it was easily accessible, closer to both researchers and thus the costs of conducting this study were minimal.

Participants in the study consisted of a principal, 2 Heads of Department (HODs) and 2 Post-level One educators (referred to throughout the study as teachers). Semi-structured interviews were used as the main data generation method. This type of interview was preferred due to their flexibility in posing questions; in-depth discussions; follow-up and probes for clarity purposes (Cohen et al. 2011). Interviews were recorded using a digital voice recorder. Audio-taping is always preferable because it provides a permanent record of what was actually said; instead of what the interviewer thought was said (Slavin 2007). The recorded data was transcribed and subjected to qualitative content analysis.

Throughout the study ethical practices were considered and observed. These considerations included seeking and obtaining ethical clearance from the researchers' university and also obtaining permission to conduct the study from the KwaZulu-Natal Department of Education. The researchers also obtained informed consent from each of the participants. All participants were assured of confidentiality of the entire research process, including anonymity. For instance, the fact that the school was given a *pseudonym* (Milpark Primary School), to protect

its identity, is one of the ethical considerations that the researcher observed.

Profiling the Case Study Site: Milpark Primary School (MPS)

MPS is located in a socio-economically disadvantaged community in the eThekwini Metropolitan Municipality in the west of Durban, South Africa. The school has been declared a 'No-Fee school' and belongs to Quintile-3. The quintile system is a funding formula used by the Department of Education (DoE) to rank schools in terms of economic conditions of the population around it. This is done to assist the DoE in determining the level of financial support it will provide. The lower the quintile in which the school belongs, the higher the level of funding it will get, and *vice versa*. As a No-Fee School, parents do not pay fees due to their poor economic situation.

MPS has 1080 learners and 32 educators, comprising the School Management Team (a principal, 2 deputy-principals and 4 HODs), and 25 teachers, all of whom are fully qualified. This means that each teacher has a minimum qualification of a 4-year degree. There are 26 classrooms including a prefabricated building, a library as well as a sponsored computer centre. Due to the quality of education offered, there is a huge demand for admissions.

RESULTS

Participants were first asked to express their understanding of the concept schools as learning organisations. They were then asked about the role that school leadership plays or can play in learning organisations, as well as, the role of learning organisations in improving learner achievement. The results show that there are four themes that characterise the participants' understanding of learning organisations and the role that school leadership plays in the realisation of that concept. These themes are (a) How the SMTs conceptualise learning organisation, lifelong learning and collaborative learning (b) Role of leadership in developing the school as a learning organisation (c) Leadership approaches used in identifying and meeting the teachers' needs (d) Individual learning, personal mastery and improved learner outcomes.

DISCUSSION

How the SMTs Conceptualise Learning Organisation, Lifelong Learning and Collaborative Learning

The findings suggest that there was no clear understanding and agreement among various participants from MPS about what a learning organisation entails and what is the relationship between this concept and lifelong learning and collaborative learning respectively. To some of them, the fact that they as teachers and adults were involved in some learning activities, and therefore were life-long learners implied that the school was a learning organisation. For others, such as school management teams (SMTs), to have information and knowledge implies that the organisation is a learning one. For instance, HOD-1 said:

I think at management level we are being empowered and we are considered a learning organisation but when it filters down to staff level I don't think we are achieving much in that regard.

The above extract clearly indicates that possession of information is regarded by this HOD as constituting a learning organisation even though, in his own words, such information did not reach the teaching staff at a lower level.

In trying to make sense of various participants' understanding 'learning organisation' concept, two strands seem to dominate the discourse around learning organisation concept. The School Management Team (SMT) seemed to emphasise the notion of continuous learning, life-long learning and growth for the individual staff members. For instance, HOD-2 had this to say:

It's an organisation that is continually, empowering the staff with the ultimate aim of improving learner achievement. A learning organisation is not an event; it's a process where you are taking all stakeholders to higher levels.

The ideas expressed by HOD-2 are consistent with transformational leadership theory as espoused by Burns (1978). However, whether the content of this extract was reflected in the school's daily activities is a subject for another debate. When the principal was asked about what he understood by a learning organisation concept, this is what he said:

I believe that an organisation is people aside from structures and in terms of learning, all role players in this organisation must engage in continuous development and growth...lifelong learning.

The above-mentioned idea was also expressed by HOD-1 who emphasised life-long learning as critical. This HOD maintained that:

A learning organisation is a place where all stakeholders are involved in promoting constructive teaching and learning...it's got to be well organised for constructive learning to take place and it's an on-going process because we are all life-long learners.

Participants' understanding of this concept was limited, and highlighted the notion of continuous growth and stakeholder participation in tackling pressing issues within the school. The researchers argue that their understanding was limited because it did not touch on key elements of learning organisations such as those highlighted by Waldy (2009) and Williams et al. (2012).

Another strand that dominated the discourse among the teachers emphasised the notion of stakeholder participation in the decision-making processes in the school as a crucial component of the learning organisation concept. Because of these views, teachers felt that school management excluded them from decisions that were taken in the school, and they viewed the school as not being a learning organisation. In this regard Teacher-2 had this to say:

Everyone is supposed to be a role player in our school when it comes to the school as a learning organisation but because some of the things especially being a post level one educator you find some of the things are just imposed on me as an educator.

This view was shared by another teacher who added that the top-down leadership approach that management used in the school was responsible for their alienation and the school not being a learning organisation. Despite the views expressed by HOD-2 that "*I'm a transformational leader and as such I try to marry all the different types of leadership styles*", the views expressed by the two teachers contradicted this. These teachers suggested that leadership approaches used in the school were not inspiring the teachers as contemplated in transformational leadership theory (Burns 1978). Leadership approaches were also not distributed as

proposed by Harris (2004) and Spillane (2005). Therefore, this study is suggesting that leadership approaches that were used at MPS were not creating an environment that is conducive to learning organisation concept.

One of the major elements of learning organisations is that of collaborative learning. The narratives from the SMT (principal and HODs) and the teachers suggested that some elements of collaboration happened. For instance, the principal's interviews and that of the HODs suggested that management had a potentially positive contribution to make in ensuring that collaborative learning occurred in the school. When asked how collaborative learning was promoted in the school, the principal had this to say:

We create the climate and environment in school...where we engage in collaborative learning...formally and informally. Informally it takes place in corridors. Peer mentoring, supervision, induction plays a role in lifelong learning and collaborative efforts at school.

Similar sentiments were expressed by one of the HODs. For instance, when asked how shared learning was encouraged in the school, HOD-1 mentioned a number of activities which are consistent with collaborative learning theories. The narratives from the teachers indicate that they organised themselves into a group which shares ideas and subject focused problems. This is what the HOD-1 said:

We network with other HODs to ensure some kind of standardisation is taking place... we share ideas, we share expertise, we share new teaching methods, anything that comes up like: workshops, new curricula's, any new documentation... within our school, it's the junior primary and senior primary who work together because we rely on each other.

The views expressed in the extract above are congruent with those of Robinson (2010) who regards collaborative learning as a social activity where the individual involved will experience learning as part of a group.

Different views were expressed by the teachers regarding collaboration, particularly in preparations and sharing problems in their clusters. For instance, collaboration assisted them when one of them was absent from school. Commenting about how collaboration happened among them, Teacher-1 had this to say:

I've got a Grade 3 and the Grades 3 teachers sit together and discuss our problems; we

discuss our preps, what we are planning for the week. We actually plan ahead so the 3 of us know exactly what we got to do for the week. So if for some reasons someone is not in school then we know we have to cover up.

Similar views were expressed by Teacher-2. When asked if management supported teachers learning endeavours, this participant painted a negative picture. From her perspective, school management did nothing to provide support to them. In this regard, this is what Teacher-2 had to say:

Ai! That one is very difficult! The leadership is supportive but I wouldn't say they go all the way out in supporting the educator learning because I think it goes back to the previous question where I said with the new developments they do not.

This view indicates that there are contrasting views and experiences in MPS regarding leadership role in supporting collaborative work. It also suggests that SMTs did not understand new developments. That scenario contradicts key tenets of learning organisations where everybody is a learner (Williams et al. 2012).

Role of Leadership in Developing the School as a Learning Organisation

All participants emphasised the important role that leadership can play in establishing and sustaining the concept of the school as a learning organisation. The principal described his role as being critical in creating a learning environment by saying that:

Leaders have to be visionaries. I play a critical role in sustaining and creating a learning environment because first and foremost I am an appointed leader with formal authority... I am someone who is able to influence the proceedings at school. My job description entails empowering, mentoring, developing and supporting the staff at school.

The importance of school management was also highlighted by one of the two teachers who argued that without management, the school cannot function well. His views echoed those of the principal by emphasising the position that school leaders and managers occupy as crucial in developing learning organisations. This is what this teacher said:

A learning organisation first has to actually start from the top. If the management is well organised you will find it fizzles down in schools to the teachers themselves... If management themselves are not organised and developed you will find that there will be a problem in schools (Teacher-1).

While the principal focused more on his role in setting the tone, and Teacher-1 emphasised the importance of management. One of the HODs focused on the implementation of ideas and plans to ensure effective teaching and learning. These entail guiding teachers, providing support and supervision with a view to ensuring that effective teaching occurs. Without effective implementation of the notion of learning organisations, effective teaching and learning may not occur effectively. In this regard HOD-1 had this to say:

We have a phase plan in place, we have ongoing supervision...to ensure constructive teaching and learning is going on. As a leader we are there to assist professionally, guide, offer support on an on-going basis.

The above extract is consistent with the views expressed by Sargent and Hannum (2009) about the importance of creating an environment that supports effective teaching and learning so that learner achievement can be improved. Preparing such an environment is the responsibility of school leadership generally and the principal in particular (Chikoko et al. 2011).

In addition to what HOD-1said, the principal emphasised the importance of various committees and effective management which he believed contributed immensely in making the school a learning organisation. He said that:

I ensure that we have an effective management in place...secondly, we ensure that we have a vibrant and dynamic staff which serves as a vehicle for learning...thirdly, we have our committees in place like the staff development committee who are overly active in ensuring that we have empowering workshops at school...also it involves informal structures of development of people (HOD-1).

This extract suggests that some elements of distributed tasks and responsibilities did occur in MPS, however limited that may have been. The researchers say this because various narratives that emerged in this study do not suggest that power rested in the stakeholders in the school as advocated by scholars of distributed leadership such as Harris (2004) and Spillane (2005). In addition, while all participants supported the

view that a number of committees existed in the school, the teachers still did not believe their school was a learning organisation.

Leadership Approaches Used in Identifying and Meeting the Teachers' Needs

This theme emerged from the analysis of extracts from all participants in the study. The theme pointed to a link between the leadership approach that was used in the school and the manner in which teachers' professional developmental needs were met. From the SMT's perspectives, the Integrated Quality Management System (IQMS) processes were used to identify and address the teachers' professional developmental needs, both collectively and individually. To this end, HOD-2 had this to say:

We have the IQMS programme that happens annually and once that process is concluded we draft a school improvement plan and out of that plan we will get development needs from a holistic perspective of the school in general. Also we identify individual development needs of educator and in many instances the HOD deals with that as they are interacting with those individuals on a daily basis.

Sharing the views expressed by HOD-2 above, the principal and HOD-1 both claimed that the teachers' professional developmental needs were identified and met in the school. When asked about how the teachers' needs were identified and met, the principal mentioned various stages that IQMS process goes through as part of performance management at school as regulated by the Department of Education. This is what the principal said:

It is multi-fold, key will be our... individual PGP, personal growth plan in terms of IQMS where the teacher indicates the challenges then in terms of our school improvement plan where we collect all the information and...We will have a professional programme or a workshop for these people.

While the school management perspective painted a positive picture, teachers' views were partially positive. The teachers viewed the IQMS process as having a potential to identify the teachers' professional developmental needs. However, shortcomings existed in the school which, from their perspective, undermined the opportunities for the identified needs being met. They regarded the implementation of decisions

and policies that had been made as the main weakness. For instance, Teacher-2 had this to say:

My professional needs are identified when we are doing the IQMS and things like that but what I have noticed is that it is just on a piece of paper. When it comes to implementation it is not taken into consideration because at times you might say that you need to be developed on a certain area but in the end it doesn't happen.

Views expressed above were shared by Teacher-2, and contradicted those of the principal. Teacher-1 argued that although the teachers' professional developmental needs were identified through the IQMS process, such needs were not being met by managers in the school. When asked about how her professional development needs were identified and met. Teacher-1 had this to say:

To be very honest, we have to develop ourselves because there isn't much support coming from management themselves; working with peers, sharing ideas is exactly how our professional development happens.

While the above extract indicates that the SMT was not helpful in supporting the teachers address their challenges, the teachers' practice of learning from one another is the hallmark of collaborative learning (Vescio et al. 2008; Robinson 2010; Williams et al. 2012). That too, suggests that collaboration among the teachers occurred.

Individual Learning, Personal Mastery and Improved Learner Outcomes

It emerged from the data that various stakeholders in the school engaged in individual learning in a personal capacity. For example, when the HOD was asked as to how they engage in individual learning, this is what HOD-1 said:

Firstly by improving my qualifications; studying part-time, then also reading the latest education bulletins, the internet, watching the news, networking with other schools, other institutions, engaging in healthy debate with other people that are furthering their studies.

The principal also acknowledged the importance of individual learning and has a similar view about learning as the HOD cited above. This is what the principal had to say:

I personally engage in tertiary studies. I believe there are various sources of learning

out there which I take mileage of. These include various publications, newspapers, newsletters, the internet, serving on various professional bodies such as departmental training committees, district task teams, interacting with colleagues, and by also empowering myself through union activities.

The above views which illustrate the significance of learning, is consistent with Bangs and Macbeath (2012). Similarly, Senge (2006) maintains that organisations learn only through individuals who learn. This signifies the importance of individuals in organisations and intricate relationship between them. In addition to individual learning in an organisation, equally significant is personal mastery. Senge (2006) posits that personal mastery is a phrase for personal growth and continuous learning discipline, from which the spirit of the learning organisation comes. Leaders need to exemplify personal mastery first in order to create a learning environment for other stakeholders in an organisation (Senge 2006). Unfortunately, in the context of this study, it does not seem that leadership in MPS has established such an environment and ethos.

CONCLUSION

The first conclusion is that there was a disjuncture between the espoused leadership approaches and leadership practices and that leadership practices in the school did not play any significant role in making it a learning organisation. The second conclusion is that some of the teachers have taken it upon themselves to come up with ways to engage in constructive teaching and learning that ensured that quality teaching and learning occurred in the school. In some limited scale, collaborative learning occurred in MPS. However, contrary to the views expressed by the principal, leadership in the school did not play any meaningful role in supporting collaboration, collective learning, and participation of stakeholders in shaping the future of the school. Another conclusion is that the understanding of the concept learning organisation was inadequate. Therefore, it is not surprising that the views espoused by the SMT in the school have not been translated into tangible action. For instance, various stakeholders in the school did not feel welcome to take part in the deliberations regarding, for instance, the direction that the school is taking.

It is evident therefore, that there has been no remarkable shift in terms of practices of leadership in this school in relation to the notion of schools as learning organisation as it was observed 20 years ago. While the school engages in activities that are directed at learning, it has not moved towards becoming a learning organisation.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The study has confirmed the view that while all schools are supposed to be learning organisations some of them such as the one that participated in this study, are still far from that reality. It is therefore recommended that leadership development programmes are intensified and that the concept of learning organisations should be entrenched and also that leadership practices that are aimed at turning schools to learning organisations should be emphasised.

It is evident that if the school has to change to become a learning organisation, the principal needs to embrace the values enshrined in the concept of learning organisation and collaborative learning. More importantly, school principals need to embrace and entrench the values of transparency, democracy and participation of stakeholders in the activities of the school.

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