The Role of the Principal in Restoring the Culture of Teaching and Learning in Dysfunctional Schools

N. S. Sebopetsa, N. F. Litshani* and N. P. Mudzielwana

University of Venda, P/Bag X5050, Thohoyandou, 0950, Limpopo Province, South Africa
*E-mail: ndanganeni.litshani@univen.ac.za

ABSTRACT The study aimed to investigate the role of principals in restoring the culture of learning and teaching in dysfunctional schools. The study is underpinned by the situational leadership theory with specific reference to Hersey and Blanchard model. Data gathering took a qualitative approach. Interviews were conducted on sampled principals and curriculum advisors. Records were requested and observation done to support data gathered during interviews. Data analysis employed triangulation of citations from interview, observation schedule and literature. It was found that the community should develop a sense of patriotism on the school. Education is the responsibility of the collective. It was established that, sixty (60.0) per cent of teachers and learners practice a tendency of moving up and down during lessons. It is recommended that education is never a one man's show activity, but a system activity which needs positive and constructive contributions from various stakeholders which have interest in education. Principals need to work hard and delegate with responsibility to ensure that teaching and learning is approached in a positive manner and excellence must be publicly acknowledged

INTRODUCTION

Effective education leadership makes a difference in improving learning. Institutional problems reflect leadership incapacity. Leithwood et al. (2004) state that effective leadership encourages a focus on improving the classroom practices of teachers as the direction for the school. Leadership begins with an effective school principal. Capable school leaders, too often, migrate to the most favourable school settings. Struggling schools find high-quality principals in short supply, and yet these are the schools that need them the most.

Most schools have become dysfunctional even though they continue to function. However, they do not function to accomplish the purpose that they are created for. Such schools are referred to as dysfunctional. Bipath (2005) claims that dysfunctional schools manifest characteristics among others: poor leadership by managers; unclear aims and objectives that cannot be translated into classroom practice; no relevant and orderly classroom atmosphere; unplanned curriculum, and bad relationships with the community.

James and Pollard (2006) define effective teaching as that which leads to improved student achievement using outcomes that matter to their future success. Learning should aim to help individuals and groups to develop the intellectual, personal and social resources that will enable them to participate as active citizens, contribute to economic development and flourish as individuals in a diverse and changing society. This may mean expanding conceptions of worthwhile learning outcomes and taking issues of equity and social justice for all seriously. Teaching and learning should engage learners with the big ideas, key processes, modes of discourse and narratives of subjects so that they understand what constitutes quality and standards in particular domains.

As noted above, Bush et al. (2009) argue that the overall management of teaching and learning is regarded as a key role for South African principals reflected, for example, in the South African Standard for Principalship. Their responsibilities should include setting the framework for effective teaching and learning, developing policies to address this issue, and ensuring that curriculum delivery is being implemented successfully. Their role is to take a school-wide view. Principals have a direct responsibility for the quality of learning and teaching and for pupils' achievement. This implies setting high expectations and monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of learning outcomes.

The major shift of the roles and responsibility of school principals after 1994 has placed grave demands on all stakeholders within school communities. Principals in particular have been faced with a wide range of demands and challenges: establishing a culture of teaching and

learning (COLT) in their schools, improving and maintaining high standards of education, working more closely with parents, coping with multicultural learners, managing change and conflict, coping with limited resources, and ensuring more accountability to the community they serve (Mestry and Grobler 2004). It is expected that they are leaders in learning and teaching, and have explicit knowledge of contemporary theories as well as the skills to utilise this knowledge. Decentralisation of power to all stakeholders in the school community, in particular the Student Governing Body (SGB) and the School Management Team (SMT), directly and substantially increases the responsibilities of the principal, who has to share power and responsibilities about the daily operation of the school and take the position of collaborative leader rather than sole authority.

Plecki et al. (2006) state that the role of principals has changed as from the democratic era to the present scenario. The core responsibility of the principal as a leader, in collaboration with all the stakeholders, is to facilitate the establishment of attainable goals and expectations; through strategic planning, designing, coordinating, evaluating the curriculum, teaching and economical allocation of resources. Historically, education authorities were more concerned with monetary allocation per student, or creating balanced budgets. Too little attention was paid to how resources were related to performance. The new role of principals, as leaders of their schools, requires them to examine critically the equity, efficiency, and effectiveness of existingresource allocation policies or practices and make decisions regarding ways in which resources might be reallocatedin more productive ways.

Hakala (2008) states that a leader with a vision has a clear, vivid picture of where to go, as well as a firm grasp of what success looks like and how to achieve it. Bush (2008) affirms that the success of a school lies on the contribution and participation of motivated educators, supportive parents and learners who are eager to learn, as well as school management team (SMT), including the principals who understand their obligations and responsibilities as leaders.

In line with COLT, the theory of situational leadership asserts that no one style of leadership pertains to all given workplace situations (Mwai 2011). This means that, the leadership style changes according to the followers' knowledge and skills in a given task. Using a situational leadership model, a leader should be able to place less or more emphasis on the task, and more or less emphasis on the relationship with the people he is leading, depending on what is needed to get the job done successfully.

Leithwood et al. (2004) and Schriver (2001) maintain that successful educational leaders develop their schools as effective organisations that support and sustain the performance of administrators and teachers, as well as students. In addition, they believe that specific practices typically associated with this include strengthening school cultures, modifying organisational structures and building collaborative processes. Bush and Odura (2006) and Lunenburg (2010) on the other hand argue that there is rarely any formal leadership training and that principals are appointed on the basis of their teaching record rather than their leadership potential.

Many schools in Mopani District have become dysfunctional since they failed to serve the needs of learners, teachers and the community. Growth, change and evolution are almost impossible when an institution such as a school becomes incapable of radical self-criticism in order to address its challenges (Bipath 2005; Schriver 2001). It is for this reason that Sindhvad (2009) sees School Based Management (SBM) as relevant an ideal approach to address challenges. The SBM is democratic since it allows for teachers and parents to make decisions about education rather than leave those decisions to a select group of central-level officials.

Motupa circuit obtained the last position from the 24 circuits which constitute Mopani District for the three consecutive past years. The circuit average pass percentage has been below 60 percent of the set provincial average pass percentage. Based on Table 1 it can be concluded that Motupa circuit is dysfunctional.

Table 1: Motupa Circuit grade 12 results 2010-2012

S. No.	Grade 12 examination statistics			
	Year	Limpopo Province Pass %	Motupa Circuit Pass (%)	Fail (%)
1	2010	57.9	33.1	63.9
2	2011	63.9	46.5	53.5
3	2012	66.9	50.5	49.5

This pattern of dysfunctional schools is common in Motupa circuit (Table 1). This pattern is

marked by low teaching-learning transactions and high teacher and student absenteeism. For this reason, many parents (although they recognise the importance of education) consider it futile to send their children to public schools.

Whilst a lot has been written on how to restore the COLT in schools, a need arises on how to contextualise such material to transform dysfunctional schools into functional schools. This study seeks to draw principals' attention to the study done by Mwai (2011) who further clarifies that leadership is about being flexible and using the needed leadership style to nurse a given development level of a follower to be successful in a given working environment. In practicing leadership, then a leader with official authority has the ability to influence his followers' emotional state to a great extent. Leadership at workplace can be a challenge if the leader does not have the characteristic of an effective leader, simply because their followers to be led and if a leader cannot lead as of the situation of every follower, work will not be done well and visions will not be achieved. Leaders should be able to make an overview of their followers to know what to improve and how, check their work to see the level of knowledge and skill they have on each given task.

METHODOLOGY

A qualitative approach was employed. The study used an interview and observation schedule to gather qualitative data. The qualitative approach focuses on society and culture. It uncovers and describes beliefs, values and attitudes that influence the behaviour of a group (Merriman in White).

Qualitative researchers are interested in understanding the meaning people have constructed, that is, how people make sense of their world and the experiences they have in the world (Merriam 2009). Qualitative method of research uses methods such as participant observation or case studies which result in a narrative, descriptive account of a setting or practice. This means that qualitative research studies phenomena in their natural setting and attempts to make sense of, or interpret problems in terms of the meaning people bring to them. The researchers interviewed participants face-to-face and observed how the principals and curriculum advisors responded.

Participants

The researchers used purposive sampling. Two secondary school principals were chosen based on the performance in grade 12 as per 2010, 2011 and 2012 results. Three primary school principals were chosen on the basis of their schools being feeder schools of the two secondary schools. A total of 5 principals were identified and participated in focus group interview.

Motupa Circuit office has a total of seven curriculum advisors. The three curriculum advisors for subjects which are classified as scarce skills subjects, namely English, Mathematics and Life Sciences were interviewed. These are subjects in which most of the Grade 12 learners perform badly in the final year examinations. The responsible curriculum advisors were identified and they were asked to participate in the focus group interview. Thus, the total number of people who were interviewed is eight (two focus groups).

Material

Interview Schedule

This schedule consisted of three unstructured open-ended questions (see 3 results). These questions were informed by the research questions of the study.

Focus Group Interview

Tewksbury (2009) views a focus group as guided conversations in which a researcher (or research team) meets with a collection of similarly situated persons for purposes of uncovering information about a topic. Researchers chose the focus group interview over a series of one on one interview because the group setting, the comments and statements of each principal/curriculum advisor are available to all other participants and can serve to stimulate memories, alternative interpretations and more in-depth information is likely to come from principals/curriculum advisors interacting and engaging with one another.

Observation Schedule

Observation, as a research technique of a qualitative research design deals with the actual

looking at point or research area but for gathering systematic information about people, places and things (Tewksbury 2009). The researchers openly told principals what the observation schedule entailed. The observation schedule was used to collect data from school records, attendance and school environment (White 2005).

Procedure

Permission to Conduct Research

Researchers sought permission to visit schools from the Head of Department of Education for Limpopo Province. The same permission was also sought from the District Senior Manager and Circuit Manager of Motupa Circuit. All principals within Motupa Circuit were informed of the exercise by the circuit office. They were informed that the researchers would also visit 10 schools to record observations and request for some records from the principals. The sampled principals and curriculum advisors were given consent letters to complete. They were assured that their data would be treated with confidentiality. The interviewees were given codes (Principals 1-5 and curriculum advisors 1-3), in order to conceal their identity.

Data Collection

Data that is used in qualitative research comes from a range of collection methods. These include interviews with individuals, observations of people, places and actions/interactions, immersion in settings so as to understand the what, how, when and where and how of social structure and action/interaction, the analysis of media (written, spoken, drawn) content and guided conversations with groups of individuals (Tewksbury 2009). The researchers collected data through the interview schedule. Interviews took 45-60 minutes at the principals' agreed venue. The same with curriculum advisors, theirs took place at one of the offices. The focus group interviews were tape-recorded and transcribed verbatim. The observation schedule was used to collect data from 10 schools which included 5 schools of the principals who participated in the focus group interviews. The observation schedule entailed availability/unavailability of schools' records, environment, and direct observation of behaviours of teachers and learners to complement reports from the focus group participants.

Data Analysis

Much qualitative data exists in the form of narrative (text) scripts, commonly gathered from interviews, survey questions, journals, recorded observations, or existing documents, among other sources. Words combine into meanings, but meanings must be sorted, interpretations considered, and conclusions reached. One begins with a sharp but flexible focus, recognising that refocusing may be required to extract the greatest meaning and most trustworthy conclusions from the data (Corbin and Strauss 2007). For example, the researcher may focus on the literal meaning of a person's story, only to find a pattern in deeper meanings, details not mentioned, an emphasis on time, avoidance of emotional content, or any number of other subtle clues that help identify a coherent theme, and realise that the researcher should be focusing on the hidden meanings of the story. Data from observation schedule or checklist were numerically arranged into percentages for the purpose of comparison by researchers. A generalisation was made and assisted to answer the research questions.

RESULTS

The following are major findings drawn from two focus groups interviews with principals and curriculum advisors respectively.

Research Question 1:In Your View, What Role Should Principals Play to Restore COLT?

Research Question 2: What Indicators Are There in the School Environment Which Shows that the Culture of Learning and Teaching Has Collapsed?

Research Question 3: In Your View, What Strategies/Guidelines Can Principals Do to Restore the Culture of Teaching and Learning?

Research Question 3: In Your View, What Strategies/Guidelines Can Principals Do to Restore the Culture of Teaching and Learning?

Theme 1: The Principal and SMT Should Lead and Manage the Curriculum

Principals	Curriculum advisors	Observations
"It is the duty of the principal as the final and accountable senior school manager to set direction so that their vision is accepted by all staff members (principal 1)	"The principal is accountable for the poor performance of learners in the entire school, although he is not personally responsible for curriculum implementation. The departmental heads are directly responsible for the day to day running of curriculum within their departments" (Curriculum advisor 1).	Sixty (60.0) percent of the teachers and learners practise the tendency of moving up and down during lessons, while 40.0 percent do not practise the tendency of moving up and down during the lessons.
"Principals must ensure that schools place the curriculum at the apex of school existence" (principal 2).	"Yes, you are correct! (Referring to the previous participant). Most of our schools perform below the required standard because of many reasons, and one of them is the lack of quality learning and teaching in schools." (Curriculum advisor 3).	90.0 percent of the schools, management records such as communication book, class register, time book, leave register and minute book of teachers' meetings are available, while almost 10.0 percent are not available.
"The departmental heads are responsible for monitoring and providing support towards learners and teachers within their departments. They have to manage their departments as departmental leaders" (principal 5).		

Theme 2: Conducive School Environment

Principals	Curriculum advisors	Observations
"...litter around the school yard, unnecessary and uncontrolled movements of learners and teachers, and so on" (principal 3).	"Some school governing bodies tried to erect school fences but the same community vandalised them. The same applies to learners. They break school property such as chairs, doors, windows and water taps for no apparent reason. Buildings and walls are characterised by graffiti." (Curriculum advisor 3).	
"…I think the school environment will depict the characters such as, late coming of learners and bunking classes" (principal 4).	"The little resources that are supplied by the Department and donors are stolen! *(shaking his head is shame)*.	20.0 percent of the schools have security at the entrance gate, while 90.0 percent of the schools do not have security at the entrance gate.
"…but I can add by saying that the environment that the poor culture of teaching and learning will be seen by lack of order on both learners and teachers" (principal 2).	The sense of personal ownership of the school does not exist." (Curriculum advisor 1).	
"…the infrastructure can also show a passer-by that the culture of teaching and learning has collapsed if the school has no fence and people can pass through the school at any time, there are no toilets (principal 5).	"Most of the teachers do not report for duty at the right time and even leave early. Teaching and learning is not treated as a key factor in the school." (Curriculum advisor 2).	
"I fully agree with what my colleagues have said." (Principal)).		

Theme 3: Strategies to Improve Teaching and Learning

Principals	Curriculum advisors	Observations
Sub-theme: Professionalism "The newly appointed principals must be inducted about the duties and responsibilities of their position as leaders and managers. Principals must have knowledge about their roles as principals." (principal 2). "…The Department must constantly conduct refresher courses for principals so that they are always in line with the expectations of the employer." (principal 4). "Training and re-training of principals can change the situation" (principal 1). "Principals need to be up-to-date time and again about changes that are happening in the education set-up. They should also get an opportunity to share experiences together as principals within their schools." (Principal 3).	*Sub-theme: Professionalism* "I think the Department must constantly provide induction and crash courses for the training of principals during their entire career life because our education is dynamic and full of changes." (curriculum advisor 2).	*Sub-theme: Professionalism* 100.0 percent of the principals adhere to the starting time for lessons. 90.0 percent of the schools" management records such as communication book, class register, time book, leave register and minute book of teachers' meetings are available, while almost 10.0 percent they are not available.

Theme 3: Strategies to Improve Teaching and Learning

Principals	Curriculum advisors	Observations
Sub-theme: Involvement" The process of learning is not a lone ranger activity... It needs the participation and - of the parents…. Parents must be brought on board… They must assist on matters such as discipline; and even assist on learner's work such as home works and projects" (principal 3). "…The community activities must support education in schools. Learners' parents must always respond positively to the needs of the school. They must attend parents' meetings and respond positively for its success" (principal 5). "The community should develop a sense of patriotism on the school. The school should be part and parcel of the community, and the community should do the same. The work of teachers will be easy and learner performance will improve because of parent participation" (principal 1).		20.0 percent of the schools have security at the entrance gate, while 90.0 percent of the schools do not have security at the entrance gate. 90.0 percent of the schools, management records such as communication book, class register, time book, leave register and minute book of teachers' meetings are available, while almost 10.0 percent they are not available.

DISCUSSION

The modern principal's job is to mix both leadership and management skills, in varying proportions for different activities (Hersey and Blanchard 1996). Many principals are excellent leaders and managers, but feel less confident about their roles as curriculum leaders.

Theme 1: The Principal and SMT Should Lead and Manage the Curriculum

Both the principals and the curriculum advisors believe that it is the duty of the principal to act as a curriculum leader and manager of the school (Hakala 2008; Bush 2008). There is also a contrary view by some principals who maintain that it is the role of the class teacher, HOD and DoE respectively. Affirming this view, there are principals who display feelings of frustration and disillusion about what is happening in education as of now. Curriculum advisors in addition strongly maintain that the principal is accountable for everything in the school and for ensuring that the culture of teaching and learning is maintained. They further support the view of two principals (principals 3 and 5) that HODs are directly responsible for curricula matters; however, finally accounting officer remains the principal.

One of the curriculum advisors expressed concern that most principals are not worried about lack of proper teaching and learning. They only get worried at the beginning of the year immediately after the grade 12 results are released. In addition, from observation sixty (60.0) percent of the teachers and learners practise the tendency of moving up and down during lessons, while 40.0 percent do not practise the tendency of moving up and down during the lessons. This state of affair shows the principal's inefficiency in taking charge and control of the situation. Both teachers and learners are ill-disciplined. This hampers the curriculum coverage because time for teaching and learning is wasted.

Since the HODs are responsible for ensuring that the curriculum takes shape in schools, therefore, they must have a thorough knowledge of curriculum matters. This means that there must be enough and suitable curriculum advisors for all subjects to support the circuit office. This will assist them to make common circuit curriculum planning which will be disseminated to all schools (Bush 2008). In addition, Learner Representative Councils (LRC) are not effective in schools to see to it that time on task is effective. The role of teachers unions need to be redefined such that they advocate for COLTS (IEPL 2008).

Responses from observation schedule show that 90.0 percent of the schools have management records such as communication book, class register, time book, leave register and minute book of teachers' meetings, while almost 10.0 percent do not have such records available. It is the researcher's perception that principals are more of administrators than leaders and managers of schools. They are involved more with paper work (records). This effort is commendable but it does not restore COLTS in dysfunctional schools.

It is the researcher's' contention that HODs should be responsible for curricular implementation and that the principal should be accountable for all school activities such as curriculum implementation in the school. The principal should harness all support materials so that teaching and learning is brought to its rightful place. HODs and curriculum advisors should do their work as expected. Circuit plans (which must be provided by curriculum advisors) should be available for the whole circuit so that principals can ensure that their schools have plans in place at the right time.

Theme 2: Conducive School Environment

All the participants agree that the school environment must be conducive for learning to take place. The indicators of a poor school learning environment are poor infrastructures, teachers and learners wasting time by moving up and down during lessons, no school fence, vandalism by communities, absenteeism etc. Curriculum advisors concur with the principals that schools within Motupa Circuit are not in a good physical condition and this has an impact towards teaching and learning. School property is destroyed, infrastructure and surrounding is not looked after or even stolen by the community.

Regardless of the situation, one curriculum advisor has hope that even if the situation is not pleasing, some schools can still make it. Lethoko et al. (2001) concur with principals and curriculum advisors when they indicate that effective principals ensure that structures for effective

teaching is laid out, that available teaching time is effectively utilised, and that there is a safe and orderly environment for both learners and teachers. Furthermore, the observation schedule confirms the vulnerability of the schools' environments. 20 percent of the schools have security at the entrance gate, while 90.0 percent of the schools do not have security at the entrance gate.

The researchers believe that the environment remains the image of the school. In most cases, the school environment tells everybody what is happening in the school. The opinion of the researchers on this is that the school environment should be conducive and attractive for teaching and learning to take place. Learners, teachers and the buildings should be positive and comply with the COLTS initiatives (IEPL 2006) which all education stakeholders have pledged to undertake. For instance, the DoE must supply resources, learners must be in class everyday attending classes and doing school work, teachers must be on time teaching and assist learners and learners must have text books, and finally parents must support their children by monitoring their performance.

Theme 3: Strategies to Improve Teaching and Learning

Sub-theme: Professionalism

Some participants agree that principals must be given professional development programmes immediately they are appointed so that they know their role expectations on a continuous basis. Bush and Odura (2006) and Lunenburg (2010) are concerned that there is rarely any formal leadership training and that principals are appointed on the basis of their teaching record rather than their leadership potential.

The observation schedule responses show that principals act professionally in terms of punctuality. 100.0 percent of the principals adhere to the starting time for lessons. Teachers and learners' structures need to reinforce the importance of adhering to the starting time for lessons. Punctuality is a crucial factor to restore COLT in schools.

Sub-theme 2: Involvement

Principals agree that the involvement of stakeholders such as parents is of vital importance to improving teaching and learning in

schools. Sindhvad (2009) supports SBM. SBM is more relevant as the decision-making power is closest to where problems are being experienced – in the school. But curriculum advisors, the crucial partners of the school were silent on the aspect of involvement of the school's stakeholders to promote COLT.

Finally, principals must involve and decentralise school activities to the relevant stakeholders such as teachers, curriculum advisors, parents and the business community. Responsibility should not lie on an individual and problems such as poor performance should be addressed.

CONCLUSION

The principals are responsible and accountable for all school activities including teaching and learning. The SMT assists to drive teaching and learning on daily basis but planning, monitoring and implementation of programmes remain the ultimate responsibility of the principal. The principal has to provide decisive leadership and ensure that all teaching and learning activities are in place and functional within a school setup programme.

An effective school is characterised by order, discipline and a healthy environment for learning. For instance, classrooms must be clean, no leaking roof, no broken doors and windows, available running water, clean toilets and no unnecessary movements of both teachers and learners.

The principal is expected to set the school vision on which all participants understand the direction which has to be taken by the school. All school plans must be available and implemented as planned. It can also be concluded that the principal is a visionary planner and analyzer of school and all school programmes including activities that place teaching and learning at the center of school development.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Education is never a one man's show activity, but a system activity which needs positive and constructive contributions from various stakeholders which have interest in education. Curriculum advisors, learners, parents, the community and the business community must work hand in hand as partners. The principal must ensure that various stakeholders develop a

sense of ownership of school and school activities.

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