School Leaders as Effective Negotiators and Mediators –
The Art of Lessening Conflict in Schools: A Literature Review

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ABSTRACT All organisations do experience conflicts from time to time. Intractable conflict can debilitate the running of organisations and make communication to be almost impossible. Organisations without a healthy climate will simply crumble and not be able to achieve their set goals. However, effective leaders with the necessary skills will be able to eschew conflicts as they uphold the vision of their organisations. This paper explores various necessary aspects of conflict competence with particular reference to negotiation and mediation. Generally, schools are beset with constant conflicts and challenges. Without competent school management, conflicts can be on-going and will affect all the teachers' morale as well as their commitment, and learner success. The literature explored here does not only illustrate what numerous authors say about negotiation skills but it also illustrates how some of the skills can be engendered. The discussion explicates why schools this century need adept, multi-skilled school principals who will uphold professionalism and elements of fairness as well as ethical and moral leadership.

INTRODUCTION

In an attempt to improve schools in South Africa, literature demonstrates the need to ensure that school principals are accountable and are well equipped in several ways in guiding their schools to success. Christie (2010) argues that 'the changing landscapes' of school leadership in South Africa have complicated the work of school principals who need to continuously bring improvement in their schools. Furthermore, Christie (2010: 696) contends, "ideally, schools should be replete with good leadership, at all levels; they should be well managed in unobtrusive ways; and principals should integrate the functions of leadership and management and possess skills in both".

Serfontein (2015) argues that school principals need moral and ethical leadership because their position empowers them to make broader decisions. This author points out that principals need to embrace certain leadership styles based on moral authority. Msila (2015) also argues that effective principals need to have a moral purpose and ethical commitment if they are to lead successful schools. To be able to diffuse conflict, schools need principals who lead with a moral purpose and caring leadership. Being able to resolve conflicts amicably is part of caring leadership. Principals who are caring can transform schools for the better. Van der Vyver et al. (2014) argue that there is a close connection between care and effectiveness. Principals

who have taught themselves skills to lessen conflicts care and are concerned about their employees' job satisfaction.

A Price, Waters and Coopers (PWC) (2015) survey also emphasises the need for accountable leadership from school principals. This survey declares that accountability is the philosophy that leaders need to improve the performance of pupils and their teachers. Effective principals will avert dysfunctionality in their schools. This paper focuses on the need for school leaders to have skills in lessening conflicts in their organisations. Numerous dysfunctional schools are conflict-ridden and usually their principals are unable to act decisively (Msila 2012). The paper also looks at two important aspects that school principals need namely, negotiating as well as mediating in school conflicts.

Objectives of the Study

This paper uses literature review to:
- Understand what skills are entailed in negotiation;
- Examine why school leaders need negotiation and mediation skills as they try to enhance communication and avert conflicts;
- Investigate the potential threats to effective negotiation;
- Explore why transformational leaders need sound communication skills; and
- Explicate the links between a healthy school climate and negotiation skills.

SOUTH AFRICAN SCHOOLS, CONFLICT AND PRINCIPALS

Msila (2014) writes about how teacher unionism can lead to conflicts in schools. Misunderstandings between a principal and union members or between teachers of belonging to union A and those of union B can lead to intense conflicts. These conflicts may lead to toxic environment if the school managers are not well prepared. The problems in many South African schools are exacerbated by the fact that many School Governing Bodies are not well trained in conflict management (Msila 2012; Majola 2013). The School Governing Bodies (SGBs) are crucial bodies in school governance that are supposed to work closely with the school principal or the entire school management team. Yet, in many schools, these are weak bodies that need the guidance of ethical, morally upright and knowledgeable principals. Empowered school principals may be able to empower SGBs that are not strong. Among the major responsibilities of SGBs in South Africa are:
- Decision making,
- Planning,
- Conflict management,
- Team building and
- Negotiation and finances (DBE 2015).

As hinted above, research has also shown that many SGBs from historically black schools in particular are not equipped with the adequate skills for conflict management or other related skills (Msila 2011). School principals who are strong in these areas though will support their school committees as they enhance school achievement. Masitsa (2005) avers that all principals of effective schools know that good school management and administration are crucial in restoring the learning culture.

Effective principals will learn the skills of mediation and negotiation because even in the healthiest of schools, conflicts will arise. Unresolved conflicts break communication and are antitheses to the school vision. Momodu (2013) also avers that conflicts remain one of the greatest challenges confronting effective teaching and learning in schools. Furthermore, this author underscores the importance of tolerance, peer mediation, cooperative teaching and learning in the classroom between teachers and pupils and among pupils, as well as training for teachers, administrators and parents. School principals need to consider the values of fairness and social justice as they lead schools. An effective negotiator and mediator will strive to instil this ambience of justice in her school.

In this paper the focus is on the dynamics of negotiation. Negotiations have a number of critical challenges, ethics in negotiation, power dynamics, positional negotiation; steps to follow, cultural patterns are some of the aspects that affect negotiations. Negotiation is among the most common forms of conflict management. The two concepts *negotiation* and *mediation* are not necessarily synonymous. Yet both are used to diffuse conflicts. During the process of negotiation, mediation can be used. A negotiator bargains between two or more interests. Brandon and Robertson (2007) aptly put it when they state that people negotiate many things every day from when to get up, to what to eat for breakfast, what to wear. Self-negotiation might be the easier than negotiation with others. The author here explores the different kinds of negotiation as he attempts to answer the question of what works best during collaborative problem solving and negotiation. He starts by exploring social justice leadership and its relevance to negotiation and mediation. Then the focus is on how obstacles can stall negotiation as well as how empowered school leaders can salvage their conflict-ridden schools.

DEMYSTIFYING THE CONCEPT *NEGOTIATION*

Berghof (2012: 49) refers to negotiation as a face-to-face discussion "for the purpose of reaching an agreement on a situation that is perceived as a problem or conflict." People who are involved in this process must have a mandate to enter into agreement. Mediation is defined as a process that aims to reach an agreement through negotiation processes. "The difference lies essentially in the fact that mediation involves additional party who is responsible for directing and supporting the flow of communication" (Berghof 2012: 50). Anderson et al. (1996: 101) contend that negotiation is one of the most common techniques for creating agreements in the workplace. Furthermore, these writers cite Putnam who defines negotiation as a type of conflict management characterised by an exchange of proposals and counterproposals as means of reaching a satisfactory settlement. The Harvard

Business Essentials publication (2003: xi) concur with the above definitions when they aver:

Negotiation is the means by which people deal with their differences. Whether those differences involve the purchase of a new automobile, a labour contract dispute, the terms of a sale, a complex alliance between two companies, or a peace accord between warring nations, resolutions are typically sought through negotiations. To negotiate is to seek mutual agreement through dialogue. Negotiation is an ever-present feature of our lives both at home and at work.

Negotiations also present a form of conflict management that is more consciously controlled. Yet, although negotiation involves more controlled communication than other conflict situations, the overall process is marked by greater ambiguity because of the stakeholders' lack of control over the outcome (Anderson et al. 2003:102). Negotiations are sometimes plagued by pitfalls that might hinder any success in resolving the conflict situation. Deutsch (1991) highlights aspects such as cultural factors and how they have a potential of hindering negotiations. Deutsch argues that negotiators need to have an implicit understanding of cultural assumptions which are likely to determine how negotiators from different places perceive the world. "Lacking such knowledge, negotiators from different cultural backgrounds are likely to misunderstand one another and opt to engage in behaviour that is unwittingly, offensive to the other: circumstances not conducive to constructive conflict resolution (Deutsch 1991: 36). Lum (2005) also supports this when he posits that people bring different experiences when they negotiate and that even in the same family, a mother's experience and her daughter's may be different and they may be negotiating across a cultural gap. When negotiations break it is frequently due to the misunderstanding and miscommunication that is created by the problem of not being able to see the world through the other party's frame of reference. Negotiations work better in some conflicts than in others. Destructive conflicts are sometimes very difficult to resolve as they escalate.

Goldman and Rojot (2003) do not distinguish between negotiating and bargaining. They perceive the two terms as alluding to how two or more parties communicate in an effort to agree to change or refrain from changing:

i)   Their relationship with each other;
ii)   Their relationship with others; or
iii) Their relationship with respect to an object or objects.

Some authors have pointed out that when the necessary conditions are present people should avoid negotiating when agreement is not the goal of both sides (Anderson et al. 1996: 120).

WHAT ARE THE OBSTACLES TO EFFECTIVE NEGOTIATION?

As highlighted above, cultural factors can pose threats to effective negotiations. Yet true negotiations are possible when both sides have the desire to reach an agreement. In order to be successful you need to be able to identify when negotiation is possible, who to negotiate with and how to avoid biases in your own thinking (Anderson et al. 1996). Furthermore, Anderson et al. highlight a crucial point that underscore an obstacle:

In some negotiation situations, agreement is not the goal of the other side. They might be interested in stalling for time, making points with their constituents, or obtaining media coverage for their grievances. Both sides must be interested in reaching an agreement through negotiation in order for the process to yield productive results. If both parties are not committed to reaching an agreement, negotiations are likely to become bogged down in technicalities.

In many schools this might happen especially when some staff members appear not interested in solving the conflict. Ideally, in negotiations the parties need to collaborate and be interested in resolving the conflict situation. However, this is not always the case because some parties in conflict situations are not interested in because they are satisfied with the status quo. The Harvard Business Essentials (2003) suggest three aspects that can be utilised to ensure that reluctant bargainers to come and negotiate:

- Offer incentives;
- Put a price on the status quo; and
- Enlist support.

Using any of the above tactics might may the other party see the reason they need to negotiate with you. Basically, there are two types of negotiations; distributive and integrative. On the one hand, distributive negotiation is the one

in which the parties compete over the distribution of a fixed sum of value. The key question in distributive negotiation is "Who will claim the most value?" (Harvard Business Essentials 2003). On the other hand, integrative negotiation is one in which parties cooperate to achieve maximum benefits by integrating their interests into an agreement. Anderson et al. (1996) state that sometimes it is necessary to use coercive power to ensure that parties are motivated to negotiate. In a school, a leader should know what strategies to employ at all times. A skilled principal will know what negotiation styles to employ at any given time.

Collaborative Strategies

Many conflict specialists support collaborative problem solving strategies; this is a risk because one party engages in a dialogue and moves towards the opponents based on the celebration of differences, a desire to learn from them and a desire to collaboratively satisfy everyone's underlying interests (Cloke and Goldsmith 2003). Brandon and Robertson (2007) investigate collaborative problem solving and negotiation as they describe the strategies and interventions that mediators use most frequently to help parties through mediation process and that are most likely to result in comprehensive agreement that settles their dispute. Below, the focus is on some of these strategies as explicated by Brandon and Robertson (2007). These will be as follows:

- Collaborative problem solving and negotiation
- Ethics and power dynamics in negotiation
- Interest-based negotiation and positional negotiation
- Cultural background influences on problem solving
- Reframing in negotiation
- Managing challenging negotiations
- Impasse breaking strategies

Collaborative Problem Solving and Negotiation

This refers to any processes in which parties work towards resolution with or without third party assistance. Brandon and Robertson state that to be able to collaborate with others workers need to negotiate. There are many instances in life where people avoid conflict by not negotiating; however, people who have time learn to engage in negotiations. Furthermore, Brandon and Robertson (2007: 176) argue:

In the conflict resolution and alternative dispute resolution literature there are many descriptions on how parties negotiate. Some behaviour in negotiation is less useful for resolving a conflict at work. Positional bargaining, for example, may get the parties to a deal by making demands while minimally yielding to others. Opponents in turn make counter demands leaving all parties in a situation of compromise.

Ethics in Negotiation and Power Dynamics in Negotiation

Marsh (2000) lists five styles of negotiation that mediators might employ:

- Fighting or attacking by making threats;
- Demanding to achieve a one-sided gain;
- Appeasing;
- Attempting to convert fair agreements; and
- Fleeing or dithering.

The above styles though can be seen as attacking and delaying the processes. Ethics are however, very crucial in all negotiations although not all parties act ethically. Some parties never admit to their mistakes and they would turn the facts to suit their own point of view. Others use unfair tactics such as stalling the process and exaggerating during negotiations. The personalities of conflicting parties are usually different hence they will tend to negotiate differently. Power dynamics also play immense role during the negotiation processes. Effective mediators will try and know how to respond to try and prevent competitive behaviours. Some parties may want to use power advantage by engaging in unethical tactics; deceptive tactics such as not disclosing information, misrepresenting inappropriate information are some of these tactics. Brandon and Robertson (2007) add by stating that some parties may use bribery, bluffing, or manipulation through using emotional tactics such as faking anger or satisfaction.

Interest-based and Positional Negotiation

Sometimes parties may want to use their interests when they want to be successful in a negotiation. These interests are from human needs and are mostly informed by values and beliefs. There needs to be some level of trust if

interest-based negotiations are to work. A high standard of listening and communication skills need to be part of this too. However, in positional negotiations, the parties usually fight over limited resources and to come to a conclusion, "the winner takes all". Offers are made during negotiations until one of the parties withdraws or stays firm. When parties cannot find any common ground, the process of bargaining can be counter-productive and costly.

Cultural Background's Influence on Problem Solving and Negotiation

Issues of cultural background influence the negotiation process and this may include cultural language patterns. Employees from different cultural backgrounds may have to deal with their conflict within an organisational culture that misunderstands both parties due to stereotyping based on assumptions (Brandon and Robertson 2007). Parties in conflict bring a set of values and beliefs as part of their culture. Negotiations are much likely to be influenced by cultural perceptions. Within a conflict situation some parties' culture may be more prone to embrace collectivism while another party because of culture may prefer individualism.

Within this same context of culture, mediators need to understand the language patterns of warring parties. It is very important to understand the language of parties in a conflict situation. Some experts argue that effective mediators need to be 'multiculturalists'. They also warn that parties and mediators should not make cultural and gender specific assumptions.

Reframing in Negotiation

Reframing is among the most crucial tactics in negotiations. Brandon and Robertson (2007) cite Fritz who points out that there are three main reasons for using reframing techniques. These include:

* Helping parties understand their own needs, feelings and outcome requirements;
* Assisting the parties to put themselves into the other party's shoes and appreciate their feelings, needs and outcome requirements; and
* Assisting parties to take an objective view of the whole situation as if they were dispassionate observers, assessing the state of play and the relative behaviours of those involved.

Mediators need to remain vigilant that parties attack the problem and not one another. There needs to be a constant need to reframe and create new possibilities. Mediators must also encourage the exploration of alternatives.

Managing Challenging Negotiations

In many instances negotiations can be difficult and challenging. Mediators in some of these challenging negotiations might find themselves just blaming the parties for being difficult. Parties may also complicate the circumstances by adding more demands and even refuse to negotiate any further. Moreover, as highlighted above, when each of the parties come from different cultural groups. Brandon and Robertson (2007) cite Parker who uses a 'chunking' technique in addressing the workplace disputes and challenges:

* Chunking down – is the process in which mediators break down the negotiation issues from the general to the specific. By splitting the discussions into manageable parts, common ground and agreement can be reached on smaller issues first;
* Chunking up- is the process in which mediators combine many aspects, parts or issues together into one package and deal with this as a whole. Chunking up helps those who like the big picture perspective; and
* Lateral chunking – refers to thinking, moving out of what appears logical, and thinking outside the square. It shifts thinking into new dimensions or frames of reference. Brainstorming can help towards this ideal.

Impasse-breaking Strategies

Brandon and Robertson (2007) argue that an impasse is a situation in which neither party seems to what to shift. "To overcome a breakdown in negotiations mediators need to choose their techniques thoughtfully as not all parties overcome their final hesitations to settle in a similar way. The timing of using impasse-breaking strategies is important to consider." It is crucial to use impasse-breaking strategies when challenges pertaining to impasse occur. Building a more conducive atmosphere, reminding parties of their achievements, reframing questions are some of the strategies to employ dur-

ing an impasse. Having a break and refreshments, changing seating arrangements can also be used by mediators as some form of strategies to break an impasse. Some suggest that props could be used to stimulate creativity; overheads with cartoons, video clips, stuffed animals, battery operated toys and stress balls to squeeze are some of the props that can be used by mediators in negotiation to break an impasse (Madonik 2001).

All the above are some of the aspects that school leaders need to have as they lead schools. More crucial is the fact that many schools in South Africa are fast becoming diverse. Conflicts are likely to be frequent when people in a workplace are from diverse backgrounds. Understanding the roles of culture, power, ethics as well as collaboration are all pertinent for any school leader. In addition to these, they need to have some skills in bargaining and how they will use various styles in different contexts.

SOME BARGAINING STYLES

All successful negotiators use a number of styles in resolving conflicts. All what has been discussed above will be influenced by the negotiators' styles. In part the negotiating style reflects the negotiator's personality and value system as well as his training, education, culture and experience (Goldman and Rojot 2003: 111). Various styles are suitable for different negotiating tasks and settings. In addition, Goldman and Rojot highlight eight styles of negotiating and effective negotiators will know and decide whether a particular style is appropriate to the particular occasion and whether it is suitable to the background and personality of the negotiators on each side. What ensues is a list of bargaining styles:

 i.   The Hard Nut negotiator;
 ii.   The Nice Guy negotiator;
 iii. Building Block;
 iv.   Tough Issues First;
 v.   Best Offer First;
 vi.   Give and Take;
 vii. Honey and Vinegar; and
 viii. Brinkmanship.

Each of these is briefly explained below.

The Hard Nut Negotiator

The Hard Nut approach is often encountered in negotiating. It is a super-tough stance which the negotiator modifies only with the greatest reluctance, if at all. Goldman and Rojot (2003) point out that the Hard Nut bargaining style requires negotiator conduct that is aggressive, dominant and power oriented. This approach also raises the stress level in the parties' interaction. The classic stress syndrome is a response of flight or fight (Goldman and Rojot 2003). Moreover, these authors aver that research shows that when stress becomes excessive in negotiations, the person under stress either fights back or withdraws from the situation.

The Nice Guy Negotiator

This is the opposite of the Hard Nut. For this is a bargainer who concentrates on making the other side feel happy about what has been proposed. The nice guy bargaining is that of the congenial sales person. Negotiators who use this style listen sympathetically, show concern for other side's problems, emphasises common interests, appreciate other side's values and objectives and make efforts to achieve a settlement.

Building Block

This bargaining style is the approach of dealing with easy issues first. Both parties must be able to expend their early efforts trying to resolve some easy issues. "Therefore, if it is to succeed, the initiator of this approach (or a mediator) must persuade the other side to alter its negotiating style so as to give the parties an opportunity to demonstrate their ability to resolve differences and operate with mutual trust". (Goldman and Rojot 2003:119).

Tough Issues First

The Tough Issues First approach seeks to determine whether there is likelihood that a settlement is attainable. This approach strives to reduce the costs of negotiating. A negotiator using the Tough Issues First approach does not hesitate to make his position known firmly and clearly. However, this approach is also compatible with flexibility and sympathetic listening to the other side's values and goals as well as receptiveness to the other side's ideas so long as there is no serious distraction from the priority issues (Goldman and Rojot 2003). Moreover, the primary focus in Tough Issues First bargaining

style is that its primary focus is upon the bargaining agenda. Unless the other side accepts a Tough Issues First agenda, a deadlock may result from bargaining over agenda without ever exploring the prospects of achieving a mutual accommodation regarding the underlying substantive matters.

Best Offer First

This is meant to minimise negotiating costs. According to Goldman and Rojot (2003) this style is designed to convince the other side that it cannot alter the mediator's perceptions. The latter is done by taking a wholly rigid bargaining position – making an offer and doing everything to demonstrate to the other side that nothing can be said or done in negotiations. The Best Offer First style is suggested in situations in which the party making the offer has reason to assume that the other side perceives that few if any other proposals are likely to be received.

Give and Take

This style acknowledges that the bargainer does not have a perfect knowledge pertaining to the transaction in question. This style should be one of reciprocation in an attempt to find a mutually satisfactory resolution. Without the reciprocation the style can easily become the Nice Guy Strategy. For the Give and take bargaining style to work, the initiator must insist on reciprocation.

Honey and Vinegar

Goldman and Rojot (2003) cite Carl Stevens who contends that on the one hand bargaining strategies that emphasise the affirmative reduce the stress levels of the negotiators. On the other, strategies that emphasise the negative increase the parties' stress levels. This bargaining style involves balancing accentuation of affirmative and negative elements in the bargaining strength model. Goldman and Rojot (2003: 121) also maintain that this strategic approach presents a potential of many different variations in the attention given to combining elements of bargaining strength on the two sides of the balance scale. The two authors also continue arguing for this strategy by citing Stevens:

Although Steven's analysis suggests that emphasising the negative consequences of rejecting a bargaining proposal poses risks, he points out that it also holds out the prospect of an accelerated resolution- a prompt decision from the other party, whether favourable or unfavourable. Stevens further explains that by emphasising the affirmative, the bargainer's stress level can be reduced. This tends to keep the other side at the bargaining table, though it also reduces the prospect of a prompt decision to settle or disengage.

A negotiator using this strategy maximises his results. This style requires considerable self-discipline, flexibility, creativeness, persistence and communication skills.

Brinkmanship

This is a particular type of the Hard Nut approach to bargaining which emphasises altering the other side's perceptions, respecting the negative side of the bargaining strength equation (Goldman and Rojot 2003). Brinkmanship needs a negotiator who has a total confidence in his judgement and a willingness to take high stakes risks.

If the practitioner of the Brinkmanship approach succeeds, the other side becomes convinced that it has no choice but to accede to the Brinkmanship offer. Dulles, for example, asserted that the only way to negotiate successfully with the Soviet Union was to lead them to the brink of nuclear war in support of our demands. He counted on the underlying rationality of the Soviets, and their acknowledgement that we were the superior military power, to cause them to back down rather than lead both sides over the precipice (Goldman and Rojot 2003: 128)

Wise school leaders will know what bargaining style to adopt during times of school conflict. School conflicts assume different modes and one form of negotiation might not work in another hence the negotiator will have to determine which particular style to follow at any given time. There are just so many things to expect during negotiation.

WHAT TO EXPECT DURING NEGOTIATIONS

When parties engage in negotiation they seek resolution to a conflict situation. Conflict resolution is crucial all the time. It enables solu-

tions to be achieved, or even perceived which are better for everyone. There are various stages and strategies that can be followed in negotiation depending on what the mediator or researcher prefers. Anderson et al. (1996) state that there are three broad phases that are employed in most negotiations: initiation, problem solving and resolution. It should however, be noted that negotiation does not progress smoothly from one stage to the other. Below there is a brief look at the three stages.

Initiation Phase

This is an important phase where the negotiators focus on discovering incompatible goals and defining multiple issues. Anderson et al. point out that each party at this level try to specify priorities and here the parties might want to clarify differences on issues without creating a negative frame that breaks the relationship between the parties. There is much proliferation in this stage.

Problem-solving Phase

During this phase the conversation shifts from asserting priorities to talk focusing on problem solving. The function of the problem- solving stage is to sift through, reduce, and jointly evaluate the multiple issues raised in the first stage (Anderson et al. 1996: 113). There is much reason- giving behaviour during this stage, information exchange and bartering. Many negotiators look for areas of agreement that are promising, but will make concessions reluctantly only after clear signs of tacit agreement. Important during this phase are the following:
Trying to define problems in the smallest terms.
Fractionating the problem-separating it into manageable levels.

Resolution Phase

During this phase, resolution happens as deadlines approach. The phase is characterised by the following:
- Formalisation of agreements;
- Attending to the details of final agreement;
- Sometimes a yes-no format of question and answers aided the careful control of information; and

- Forced- choice options also helped the narrowing process.

All effective training programmes will include these and other steps to ensure that the school managers are able to deal with all sorts of conflicts. The challenges in schools will be different but the principals have to look at contexts and see how best to apply some of the strategies highlighted above.

GOOD NEGOTIATORS AND HEALTHY SCHOOL CLIMATE

Research conducted in the past on school principals and negotiation illustrate that there are a number of skills that principals need if they are to be able to resolve conflicts in their schools (Sebetlete 2005, Msila 2012). In his recent study, Msila found that school leaders are not prepared at all in conflict resolution skills. Furthermore, this author discovered that school managers need to be equipped given the rampant conflicts in schools today. Negotiation is the missing link in the creation of working schools. Negotiation is among the most crucial tasks of the school principal. It ensures that communication is ever healthy in a school and also leads to an effective school climate. As pointed out in the discussions above, when school climate is positive and communication is flowing, this will have a positive influence upon the results. Negotiation skills have the propensity to transform low performing schools. Adam (2013) reports on one study on school climate, argues that school climate is associated with improving or decreasing pupil achievement. Furthermore, she contends that improving school climate helps schools and can turn around low performing schools. Conscientious district officials will always empower their principals with skills of being able to avert conflicts.

School principals will only have the mediation and negotiation skills highlighted in this paper if they get the necessary professional development. There are many authors who have shown the need for continuous professional development of school principals (Bush 2007; Mathibe 2007; Msila 2009). The Zenex/ACE Research and longitudinal study showed that school principals in South Africa lack certain skills necessary or are not exposed to pertinent aspects related to their jobs. These include;

- Mentoring;
- Networking;
- Training in leadership/management;
- Lack of parental and community involvement; and
- Understanding change dynamics (Bush et al. 2009)

Furthermore, the Zenex/ACE Research cited above illustrated that school principals in many South African schools need to be supported as they try to build effective schools. Negotiation and mediation skills usually do not form part of training. Many in-service training short courses and programmes merely mention *Conflict Management*. However, this is usually treated in a mundane fashion and not regarded as a specialist area. Moreover, it is frequently not taught by conflict management specialists. Given the rife conflict in South African schools today, it will help immensely to have school managers who have the capacity to bring forth social justice leadership in schools by (among others) being able to be useful negotiators. School principals should always see the bigger picture of change management and pupil success. On one hand, they should never suppress conflict for it is healthy for any organisation. Yet on the other, they should continue to learn about the creation of good schools that make positive use of conflicts.

Soon principalship will be like any other professionalised occupation. The century we are moving in will have more demands on principals if they are to lead effective schools. School principals will not be agents of change and change agents if they lack some necessary skills. Moreover, a wise school principal never subdues conflicts but perceives them as opportunities to address change initiatives. A skilled leader will know what to do when conflicts arise in the school. There are two things that effective school leaders will always need for their school to produce good results. These are teacher commitment and teacher cooperation. An effective negotiator will develop these. As evident in the above discussion, a principal who is an adept negotiator will build healthy communication in her school.

CONCLUSION

Arguably, good schools have worthy negotiators at the helm. Conflicts in schools are the main obstacles to effective communication. When the conflicts are not resolved, they lead to this ineffective communication. However, skilled negotiators will use their expertise to rebuild healthy school climates. Effective negotiators have effective conflict competence necessary to sustain functional schools.

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