The Role of Teachers in Enhancing a Culture of Teaching and Learning in Disadvantaged High Schools

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ABSTRACT The article explores the role of teachers in enhancing a culture of teaching and learning in disadvantaged high schools in the North-West province. In this study the researcher opted to use a qualitative generic approach with an aim of obtaining a more detailed understanding of the teachers' role in enhancing a culture of teaching and learning in the three high schools participated in the investigation. The findings of this study revealed that some teachers dodge classes/lessons and also arrive late for school. Thus there will be a probability of a decline in a culture of teaching and learning in disadvantaged high schools.

1. INTRODUCTION

The education system in South Africa had undergone many changes, but the culture of teaching and learning in many disadvantaged high schools has continued to decline. This is the reason why the researchers decided to embark on the research topic written in the preceding section. Surprisingly, various authors had also voiced similar concern about the collapse of a culture of teaching and learning in schools long before the democratic elections. For example, Govindaraju and Venkatesa (2011) postulated that most potential learners had dropped out of schools because of teachers' misbehaviour and lack of interest. The same opinion was expressed by Joubert (2007) when stating that teachers do not prepare for their lessons. The collapse of the culture of teaching and learning is also reflected in the irregular attendance with high absenteeism by teachers and learners, where, in some cases, they simply stand outside the classroom talking, playing cards and/or smoking.

1.1. The Background of the Study

This study focuses on exploring the role of teachers in enhancing a culture of teaching and learning in disadvantaged high schools. The researchers start this section by describing the location of three schools with an aim of understanding, supporting or opposing the argument within this paper. School 1, (with 100 Grade 12 learners, 18 teachers and 100 parents as participants) which is assumed to be one of the best schools in the area of Makapanstad over the period of five years in terms of matriculation pass rate results, is situated next to the tarred road, and is also nearer to the post office, shops, churches, bus stops and the Makapanstad Area Project Office (Circuit Office). School 2 (with 180 Grade 12 learners, 180 parents and 18 teachers as participants) is further away from School 1, serving another population within Makapanstad. This school resembles more or less the same characteristics as School 1, except the fact that it is far from the Makapanstad Area Project Office. In contrast to the two schools, School 3 (with 50 Grade 12 learners, 50 parents and 18 teachers as participants) which is the poorest school in as far as the Grade 12 results are concerned over the consecutive period of five years, is situated in a remote dry area where there is no sign of better infrastructures such as those mentioned above. All the three schools are more than 28 km away from Hammanskraal, a small town in the borders of North-West and Gauteng Provinces.

1.2. The Aim of the Study

Based on the preceding discussion, the aim of this study is thus to explore teachers' role in enhancing a culture of teaching and learning in disadvantaged high schools in the North-West Province. The results obtained from this study cannot be generalised to the whole population of schools in the North-West Province because the participants were only drawn from three high schools, which were purposefully selected. This

is supported by Scheerens (2001) when stating that … four studies is obviously too small a number to draw firm conclusions. The findings are therefore only a representation of a smaller population of three schools. The structured questions in the questionnaire also limit the generalisation of the findings.

1.3. Theoretical Framework

The framework within which this study is conducted is based on Scheerens' model (1990) for school effectiveness, a model viewed as complex as it not only takes into consideration variables, but also illustrates different levels. Its complexity is portrayed by the fact that "school effectiveness" is developed when many variables and lower-level systems are satisfied and move to higher level systems. This paper integrates well with Scheerens' model (1990) as it embraces similar factors such as learners' characteristics, for example, social economic status; teachers' characteristics, for example, rural or urban, resources available and staff members; and, lastly, school policies, for example, Curriculum 2005. These factors, together with systems such as the family, school, church, community and world of work, form part of larger inseparable, ecosystems. If these interact positively with one another, a possibility of school effectiveness will prevail, thus providing for a positive culture of teaching and learning in schools. Therefore, on this note, Scheerens' model (1990) and this article are compatible, as this article focuses on the role of teachers, which is one of Scheeren's variables for the improvement and quality of education.

From the preceding discussion the researcher argues that if the levels appearing in Scheeren's model were positively met, there would be higher academic achievement from learners and thus a better culture of teaching and learning. This means that if the environment in which a learner finds him/herself, for example, home, school and community at large, is conducive to learning, such a learner would have a positive attitude to learning. Christie (2001) argues that learning environments that are inviting, challenging and motivating, improve the quality of learning in schools, that is, if there is a positive atmosphere at school, home and community, there is the likelihood that a culture of teaching and learning could be promoted.

1.4. The Formulation of the Research Problem

I believe that in South Africa the majority of disadvantaged high schools would have achieved equilibrium of above average academic performance measured in terms of parameters of excellence, defined to assess the quality of education taking place in the country. This applies specifically to the quality of teaching taking place in the classrooms, as well as the performance of learners in the different grades, specifically in the final Grade 12 examinations. However, this is often not the case and many schools have remained alien environments of highly unproductive teaching and learning practices, where dropout remains high in the lower grades and the pass rate of final grade learners in the Grade 12 examinations is well-below provincial and national norms. When one takes into consideration the resources that have been channelled towards the upgrading of teachers' qualifications, the replenishment of resources, the maintenance of schools and classrooms, the introduction of Outcomes-Based Education (OBE), alternative measures of assessment and evaluation, and the improvement of the quality of management at schools, then it becomes evident that there might be unaccounted variables influencing the outcomes envisaged and expected from schools. The dynamic interaction of different variables impacting on the performance of teachers and learners in any teaching and learning environments is a complicated matter, demanding the exposition of the management/teaching / learning activities of such environments, in order to produce a closer understanding of the variables impacting on the establishment of a culture of teaching and learning in them.

There is evidence that the culture of teaching and learning is being eroded. For example, Fleisch (2002) states that despite the amount of over one hundred million Rand spent on school improvement initiatives in South Africa since 1994, the results are not overly promising. Since the matriculation results are still not satisfactory, it may be that this situation continues to be a contributory factor.

On the grounds of the above information, it is evident that little research has been conducted on the teachers' role in enhancing a culture of teaching and learning in high school settings. Guided by the Norms and Standards for Educators extracted from the University of Witwat-

ersrand participants manual (September 2005) teachers should therefore be learning mediators, designers and interpreters of learning programmes and materials, subject specialist, assessor, leader/manager, pastoral role, and lifelong learner/scholar. On the other hand, principals should work in harmony with their subordinates and encourage them towards the attainment of such a culture. Education Commission of the States (2003) states that there is a strong concensus these days that adequate subject knowledge is necessary for teachers to be successful. This means that teachers should study educational matters within their relevant field in order to grow professionally and also know how to teach that particular subject effectively.

Little research has been conducted in the North-West Province as far as this issue is concerned. An example is Joubert (2007), who conducted a research in the Mopani district of the Limpopo province on South African schools learning culture, while Kamper (2008) explored a study on the South African high-poverty schools. This shows that many researchers concentrated on other provinces, to the exclusion of North-West Province.

2. RESEARCH QUESTION, RESEARCH METHOD AND RESEARCH DESIGN

Against the above background, the research question can be formulated as follows:

What is the role of teachers in enhancing a culture of teaching and learning in disadvantaged high schools?

The above research question is intended to make a contribution towards the enhancement of a culture of teaching and learning in high schools. Attempts to answer this question are going to be done through employing literature review.

It is evident that no school can function effectively without teachers. Learning is a process that occurs in mutual relationship between a teacher and a learner in a conducive atmosphere. Positive social relationships in the school lead to effective schooling, thus an enhancement of a culture of teaching and learning. In supporting the above idea, Human Science Research Council (2011) advocates that parents are incorporated into an extended pedagogical team. This means that learning can occur where teachers, learners and parents work together, feel safe, free and motivated to learn.

With regard to research method, in this study the researchers opted to use a qualitative generic approach because she/he wished to obtain a more detailed understanding of the teachers' role, in enhancing a culture of teaching and learning in the three high schools that participated in the investigation. The above information is supported by Henning et al. (2004) when stating that phenomena are studied in their natural settings.

2.1. Interviews

McMillan and Schumacher (2001) define interviews as flexible, adaptable and involve direct interaction between individuals. Interviews were thus preferred and chosen to be used in this study. An unstructured interview is preferred where questions will be asked for collecting data in order to enable the researchers to understand the reasons why the culture of teaching and learning is deteriorating or increasing in high schools. The researcher, therefore, conducted interviews with the teachers, SMTs and Grade 12 learners of the three high schools. The reason why parents were not included in the interviews was that in most cases in that area of Makapanstad, they (parents) were not staying with their children, but working far away from their homes and returning only during the weekends or month-end. Therefore, it was difficult for the researchers to conduct interviews with the parents. Gubrium and Holskin (2002) refer to this as the mediation of contemporary life. The researchers were flexible and therefore also accommodated the questions that emerged as he/she trying to get a clear understanding of the given information by the participants.

2.2. Observations

The observational design method of collecting data was employed in this study. Out of two main types of observation, namely participant and non-participant observation, the researcher chose the latter which, according to Creswell (2008) is described as the recording of notes without becoming involved. The researchers chose this type of observation because it is a flexible technique that allows the observer to concentrate on the variable chosen for this study. Schools' documents such as learners' academic reports and various school's policy documents were also analyzed.

2.3. Sample Sizes and Sampling Procedure

A purposeful sampling was preferred in this research because of its good characteristics and representativeness. Three disadvantaged high schools have, therefore, been purposefully selected according to the history of pass rate of Grade 12 learners in the final examination over a period of five years, and one school should be that which performed below average, that is, below 50% and the other one should be above the average of 50%, while the other one should be around 50% with a total number of 100 learners in that Grade 12. A list of all schools with the average of above 50% was obtained and the schools' names were written on pieces of paper, put in a small dish where the researchers randomly selected one school. The same procedure was followed when selecting the school with an average of below 50% and that which is around 50%. This procedure helps because participants in most cases are equally assigned to a group.

Regarding the learners, the focus was on the Grade 12's boys and girls together with their SMTs and teachers who were responsible for those grades in those three selected high schools. It is expensive and difficult in any research study to engage all the high schools' learners, teachers, and SMTs of the province selected as sample population. As Terre Blanche et al. (2006) state, sampling is the selection of research participants from an entire population, and involves decisions about which people, settings, events, behaviours, and social processes to observe. The researchers were therefore convinced that the sample population drawn from the three high schools in the Northwest Province represented the entire population of the study, in which the role of teachers in enhancing a culture of teaching and learning will be described as this will validate the data collected and findings as the participants were alike.

3. OBSERVATIONS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. A Culture of Teaching and Learning in Disadvantaged High Schools

The culture of teaching and learning in disadvantaged high schools is of importance not only to educationalists, but also to psychologists, relevant stakeholders and politicians in South Africa. This has led to many debates in education, which in turn have led to the formulation of external evaluators, such as Whole School Evaluation Framework and a number of White Papers on Education. The recommendations of the Whole School Evaluation Committee on Education (1996) clearly indicated that there is a need for communities to influence the cultural ethos of their schools, with a view to promoting a sense of national common purpose. This implies that there is a need for a culture of teaching and learning, which is the responsibility of all, but in particular, the teachers who deal with the education of the growing child on a daily basis in an informal and formal situation. Asmal (*Pretoria News*, 21 February, 2000) adds that the Education Department was involved in a number of initiatives, such as South African Council of Teachers (SACE), established in 1994, its function being to improve the conditions of the teaching fraternity, since it is both a disciplinary tribunal and professional body. This regulatory body will help in enhancing a culture of teaching and learning because, as Asmal further states, teachers who are found guilty of misconduct by the South African Council of Teachers (SACE) will not be allowed to practice as teachers in any South African schools.

3.2. The Role of Teachers in the Teaching and Learning Situation

Various authors have emphasised the role of teachers as crucial to the entire educational process. Cuban (2003) for instance, believes that for creating more good schools, the role of the teacher is important. Meanwhile, Fraser and Gestwicki (2000) write that the role of the teacher is to form a circle of relationships with parents and children with an aim of forming a mutual community of learners among all protagonists. The position of the teacher in the process is changing from one of dispenser of knowledge and a position of complete authority, to one of facilitator of the construction of knowledge by the learners themselves. Pondoursky et al. (2004) add that teachers' roles are important in the learning process, as learning is a labour intensive process.

Indeed, teachers play various roles in the teaching and learning process, from controlling their classes, to being flexible in managing them, being dedicated and well-prepared for every

class activity, and providing motivation for their learners. Education of learners in any formal setting is in the hands of such teachers. The task is to attain fulfilment in the aim of formative education, namely the guidance of the child to lifelong learning and adulthood, so that critical and specific outcomes could be achieved. As mentioned in the previous section, The *Government Gazette* (2001) lists seven integrated roles appropriate for any teaching and learning situation: teachers as learning mediators; interpreters and designers of learning programmes and materials; leaders, administrators, managers, scholars; researchers and lifelong learners; community, citizenship and pastoral role; assessors; and learning area / subject / discipline / phase specialists.

Teachers should therefore be continual learners and be well- organised for their lessons, in order to make their learners enjoy and love the subject content being taught, because a planned lesson improves the quality of teaching and learning, and decreases problems such as restlessness, truancy, absent-mindedness, high failure rate and drop-out. Teachers should also try to create a conducive atmosphere in their classrooms which can enable learners to freely form positive relationship and participate in the lessons with ease.

Trumbull et al. (2001) are of the opinion that teachers' role began to shift from teacher-subject to collaborator and teacher-researcher. Knowles (2000) states that the behaviour of the teacher probably influences the character of the learning climate more than any other single factor. The *Sowetan* (13 October, 2000) supports the above opinion by stating that if teachers are not willing to deliver their services to the learners, the gates are opened for them to vacate the premises.

It is only through teachers' professional knowledge and personal character that a culture of teaching and learning can be enhanced, because through these two factors, teachers are inwardly influenced in such a way that they successfully sum up situations in the classrooms, as well as make sound decisions with regard to a variety of matters. Teachers should have that sense of caring, respect, trust, responsibility and friendship, because learners learn best when taught by teachers who treat them equally, without discrimination and favouritism. These views have in large part been informed by the following authors, Flecknoe (2002) who states that teachers should know their learners' names in order to learn and cater for their needs. Flecknoe (2002) also believes that by learning the learners' names as quickly as possible, the teacher could enhance classroom management. Belvel and Jordan (2003) write that there is a high correlation between a caring teacher-student relationship, academic achievement and cooperative student behaviour. This will promote learners' growth in self-concept, thus a positive culture of teaching and learning will be experienced.

On the basis of the above, it can be stated that teachers play an important role in the teaching and learning situation, where some have a much more limited repertoire than others and their role behaviour will be determined by the nature of their personality, experiences and the teaching situation in which they find themselves. If a teacher is unable to match his/her style to the situation, it is likely that s/he will be ineffective and unhappy, thus leading to a boring subject matter resulting in an eroded culture of teaching and learning.

Teachers are the main intermediaries between the real world and the ideal world, who lay the foundation for learners. Their task is regarded as that of preparing learners for proper adulthood. Brooks and Goldstein (2004) note that it is from adults that learners gather strength and with whom they identify. Teachers should be role models and also supportive.

These responsibilities play an important role in enhancing a culture of teaching and learning, and will, therefore, be reappearing frequently throughout this research. This is seen in one of the high schools in Mpumalanga, as reported in a newspaper, where teachers and learners were sacrificing their holidays aiming at finishing the syllabus early so that they could have enough time to revise the work they had been doing during the year before the final examinations. On this story, the *Sowetan* (13 October 2000) reported that some pupils took time off to frolic on the beach during the two weeks of September holidays while matric learners and teachers at one high school in Mpumalanga used the period to catch up with the remaining schoolwork before the coming examinations. This shows that there are teachers who are dedicated to their work and who regard learners as their children and want to see them achieving better outcomes in life.

It is evident from the above discussion that the teacher plays an important role in any school setting, because s/he is the only person in the classroom with the attention of learners, who is able to enhance a culture of teaching and learning. Through developing a positive interpersonal relationship between teachers and learners, stable emotional growth and warm social climate, with a high work output of learners' abilities, will be achieved. Teachers should, therefore, in all respect see to it that they exert an indirect influence on the teaching and learning situation, by accepting the feeling tone of their learners through praising and rewarding their positive behaviour in the classroom. In this manner, teachers will play an important role in the teaching and learning situation, because successful teachers work from the beginning of the year to build a positive classroom environment, characterised by warmth, understanding and a sense of shared meaning. Working together also means sharing, and this plays a vital role in shaping the school's quality and character, thus a better culture of teaching and learning where learners' achievements will increase. This implies that collaborative approach should be encouraged in order to allow teachers to be better equipped to deal with promotion of schoolwork ethics.

3.3. Findings

Regarding the role of teachers in enhancing a culture of teaching and learning in disadvantaged high schools, the findings revealed that teachers dodge classes/lessons and also arrive late for school. Some further their studies on the expense of their learners. This is a problem because if lessons are missed it will be difficult to catch up, achieve the objectives of the lessons, and finish the syllabus. Teachers will therefore just rush over the prescribed content without allowing and enabling the learners to internalise and understand the schoolwork. Thus there will be a probability of a decline in a culture of teaching and learning in schools. The cheating for example of Grade 12 final examination by learners in Mpumalanga Province, reported in the *City Press* (2 January, 2005) that "… matric candidates … were still under investigation of examination fraud." This implies that teachers and management teams resorted to cheating after seeing that the Grade 12 work was not covered because of, for example,   factors such as teachers missing or

dodging lessons. The implications in this regard is that both teachers and SMTs are minimally playing a role in enhancing a culture of teaching and learning in schools, as evidenced by the previous 2010 Grade 12 results. This is further supported by the News 24 (6 January, 2010) when it was stated that the National Senior Certificate results improved by 1% in 2010.

4. CONCLUSION

In this study, the role of teachers in enhancing a culture of teaching and learning in disadvantaged high schools was discussed, using relevant literature review. The literature review therefore showed that the phenomenon of a culture of teaching and learning is complex and debatable, amongst the teachers, learners and relevant stakeholders. The cause of debate on this issue originates from the legacy of apartheid where disadvantaged schools in rural areas were inadequately financed, with demoralised teachers facing difficulties in teaching learners under unfavourable conditions. This does not mean that teachers should wander and relax when faced with this discouraging and frustrating problem. Instead teachers should strive for efficiency and commitment by, for example, employing new approaches to teaching with an aim of developing a child holistically.

It is through these new approaches and committed to teaching with other factors that learners as tomorrow's citizens of this country will be fully equipped and prepared to improve the quality of education throughout South Africa, thus enhancing the culture of teaching and learning in schools.

5. RECOMMENDATIONS

- The government should restructure and reorganise the education system in such a way that services in Life Orientation, career guidance and counselling as well as other learning areas (subjects) are maximised and are also in line with both current societal, cultural and social background of learners. This will therefore improve the culture of teaching and learning, as there will be continuous flow of sufficient information relevant to learners, teachers and other stakeholders.

- Proactive approach to partnership should be implemented where Higher Education Institutions, parents and community groups be in close partnership with schools with an aim of guiding and providing continuous support to teachers and learners. This could help in improving the quality of education in schools. This means that there should be collaboration between education department, unions, teachers, communities, schools and Higher Education Institutions where the partnership personnel share decisions. To bring the above recommendation into operation, and be successful, there should be joint planning and contributions from all the partners in the teaching and learning situation.

- Well- resourced after school centres be introduced or built in disadvantaged schools to help learners cope with homework helped by experienced expert teachers deployed from other best schools. These types of centres should be in such a way that they are multi-disciplinary and support learners in their holistic development, for example, looking at (them) learners in their totality. This assistance should be thoroughly supervised by the department of education.

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