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Effective Leadership, School Culture and School Effectiveness: A Case Study of Two 'Sister' Schools in Umlazi Township

Thamsanqa Thulani Bhengu[1] and Themba Thulani Mthembu[2]

School of Education, University of KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa
E-mail: [1]<bhengutt@ukzn.ac.za>, [2]<Themba Thulani Mthembu>

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ABSTRACT This paper explores how two schools, located in a poverty-stricken community, have taken different directions in terms of learner achievement. There is a general agreement among scholars that principals' leadership plays a pivotal role in ensuring high learner achievements. To obtain insights about how the two schools differed so distinctly, a small scale research located within a qualitative case study paradigm was conducted. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with the principals, heads of departments, teachers and parents. Instructional and invitational leadership theories were used as theoretical framework. The findings suggest that the differences in learner achievement could be attributed to the conditions within the schools. The findings confirm the current propositions that leadership plays a prominent role in shaping and sustaining school cultures that promote effective teaching and learning.

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

This paper explores how two schools, that were similar in many respects, and were located in the same community in Umlazi Township, South Africa, have taken different directions in terms of learner achievement. The two schools, named Nomzamo Secondary School (NSS) and Khathazile Secondary School (KSS), not their real names, served learners from socio-economically deprived backgrounds. Nomzamo Secondary was highly esteemed by the community because of its track record of high learner achievement. The opposite view was held with regard to Khathazile Secondary. Before the researchers embarked on this study, they had been aware of these differences from the general public's perspective. However, the researchers did not know what was going on inside these schools that contributed to these differences. The main question that the researchers grappled with was about why the two schools that were located in the same community could be so similar and also be so different at the same time.

To elicit information that would enhance their understanding of the two schools, a small scale research that was located within a qualitative case study paradigm was conducted between August and October 2012. In discussing this issue, the background to the problem is presented first followed by a brief outline of the concept sister school. This is followed by a discussion about contextual and theoretical issues regarding leadership and its possible role on learner achievement. Conceptual framework underpinning the study is presented, followed by the methodology and the results of the study.

There is no unanimity about what the sister schools concept really means. Nevertheless, three explanations seem to dominate. First, the sister school concept may mean two schools that are under the same management or two schools that are built using the same layout.Second, it can mean two schools found in two different nations and have established a collaborative international partnership (Prieto 2013). Third, it can also mean two schools that are located in the same neighbourhood; are approximately the same size, serve the same community, and student populations are identical (Sadker and Zittleman 2011). The sister schools concept is used in this paper to refer to the two schools that are located in the same geographical area, are almost the same size, admit learners from the same community and offer similar curriculum. In the context of this study, the two schools have consistently produced contrasting learner outcomes, and probably have two different school cultures. The researchers acknowledge the fact that the notion of same community is not uncontested and unproblematic, and that it can be quite complex. Such complexities can be associated with the fact that communities are also made up of different homes and these homes can be very unique. Such uniqueness may indicate the differences be-

tween learners from different homes. Therefore, the researchers did not want to assume that one community is constituted by same group of people.

Literature review has shown that there is a broad and universal agreement that principals' leadership practices play a pivotal role in ensuring high learner achievements (Mitchell and Castle 2005; Bush et al. 2010; Sim 2011; du Plessis 2013). To maintain high levels of learner achievements, principals need to be effective leaders and should function as instructional leaders (Leithwood et al. 2004; Robinson et al. 2008; Sofo et al. 2012). The views expressed above are based on the assumption that the life and direction that the school takes is driven by the school principal (Clarke 2007; Prew 2007; Ngcobo and Tikly 2010; du Plessis 2013). It should be remembered that since South Africa became a democracy in 1994, school principals were given a huge responsibility of acting as agents of transformation at school level (Bhengu 2005). Changes that were introduced as part of democratisation process meant that schools had to be led and managed in a different way (Mncube and Harber 2009; Woods and Gronn 2009). Whether principals had the capacity to play the new role is subject of further debate. What is evident though is that education was considered by the new democratic government as one of the vehicles to accelerate transformation and school principals had a major role to play in that process.

The South African government spends a lot of money in education, hoping that such expenditure will enable schools to contribute in improving the quality of life among its citizens. In his budget speech in parliament on 22 February 2012, Mr Pravin Gordhan, the Minister of Finance in SA, stated that spending in education would grow from R209 billion in 2012/13 financial year to R236 billion 2014/15 financial year. This is an increase of 13%, within a financial year, and this is indicative of the priority that the government places on education. That is one of the reasons why high investment in education requires concomitant accountability on the part of the schools (Nicolaidou and Ainscow 2005) in terms of ensuring that effective teaching occurs. However, reality tells a different story. Despite high expenditure on education, major changes in education policy, governance and management structures, some of the schools are struggling; the culture of teaching and learning barely exists (Naicker et al. 2013). Chisholm (2004) for instance, argues that despite the large amount of money spent on education in South Africa, schools are consistently under-performing. To remedy the situation, research indicates that for the implementation of improved strategies in education, the effective unit remains the individual school (Reppa and Lazaridou 2008). Therefore, in order to move schools from a state of dysfunctionality to that of effectiveness, leadership within the school has to be effective.

Effective schools always ensure that teaching and learning takes place, and effective leadership is always credited for ensuring that this occurs. The importance of an effective schooling is also supported by the *2025 Schooling Action Plan for Improving Basic Education* which aims at school leadership and management capacity building. This Schooling Plan was intended to instil confidence in the public that the South African government had a plan to deal with poor quality schooling and that effective school cultures can be established and entrenched (Department of Basic Education 2010). Leadership abilities to establish a culture of teaching and learning, improving and maintaining high standards of education, working closely with parents, coping with change and conflict, coping with limited resources, and ensuring more accountability to the community they serve, are critical (Mestry and Grobler 2004). In this regard, principals' leadership is accountable for student performance, school effectiveness and quality education provision (Steyn 2008). This is because the overall performance of schools is the responsibility of the principal (Ross and Gray 2006; Berkhout 2007; Clarke 2007; Prew 2007). To achieve the above-mentioned ideals, James et al. (2007) propose three ingredients which, that they maintain, can bring about high learner outcomes and maintain high education standards. These ingredients are collaboration, reflective practice and focus on teaching and learning. When exercising leadership, principals need to be alert to the environment around the school. In addition, they should understand the emerging trends in education and needs to focus on improving learning opportunities for every learner in a school (Naidu et al. 2008).

Within a global context, emphasis on skills to deal with rapidly changing environments has been cited as critical (Harber and Stephens 2009;

Garmiston and Wellman 2013). It is crucial that leaders in schools, as drivers of the state's transformation agenda, understand and provide school cultures that facilitate these ideals. However, a number of hindrances that undermine the probabilities of success prevail, and these are mainly due to the lack of skills (Wahlstrom et al. 2010; Chikoko et al. 2011). Therefore, it should not be assumed that school principals possess such skills. For instance, socio-economic conditions around the schools have to be considered in designing school programmes, and principals are expected to be able to deal with such situations (Reitzug et al. 2008; Garmiston and Wellman 2013).

The debate around leadership skills and interplay between internal and external factors to organisations has raised two closely related discourses. One discourse suggests that what goes on inside schools is profoundly influenced by what goes on outside it. In short, it refers to the context and broader community within which schools are located (Nicolaidou and Ainscow 2005; Berkhout 2007; James et al. 2007; Bush et al. 2010; Sim 2011). Such a discourse proposes that effective leadership should have skills and knowledge that enable it to navigate the intricacies involved in ensuring that the environment does not negatively affect the quality of teaching and learning. Another discourse suggests that whilst the environment can have either a positive or a negative impact on schooling, the quality of leadership within schools can and does steer the schools' direction towards desired outcomes (Kamper 2008; Naidu et al. 2008; Ngcobo and Tikly 2010; Bhengu and Mkhize 2013). While the two discourses emphasise two critical factors, the connecting thread seems to be the quality of leadership that exists within the school.

Irrespective of the discourse that one subscribes to, the key element remains the leader and the manner in which leadership is practiced in the school. Scholars have tended to provide different explanations about factors that can contribute to the creation of effective schools. To further explore how leadership can attain effectiveness in the schools, the researchers draw mainly from James et al.'s (2007) notion of three ingredients and Sadker and Zittleman's (2011), five factors theory. As highlighted in the previous section, James et al. (2007) talk about collaboration, reflective practice and focus on teaching and learning. Drawing from various studies, Sadker and Zittleman (2011) concluded that the five factors are strong leadership, a clear school mission, a safe and orderly climate, monitoring student progress and high expectations.

Lessons from the above discussions show that effective teaching and learning occurs in effective schools. Such schools are invariably led by effective principals who have been successful in establishing positive school cultures that promote effective teaching and learning climate. Reitzug et al. (2008) encapsulates the importance of the school principals by emphasising their role in preparing and sustaining an environment that is conducive to effective teaching. Such a view dominates the instructional leadership discourse and is also helpful in explaining the importance of what happens within a school as a key factor separating an effective school from a struggling one. This discussion leads to the main questions underpinning this study.

Main Questions

- What makes the two schools to differ in terms of learner achievement despite their similar circumstances?

Sub-questions

- What leadership approaches are used in the two schools?
- In what ways do the leadership approaches used in the two schools contribute to the differences in school effectiveness?

There are a number of theoretical constructs that are used to examine the role of principals in ensuring that their schools were run smoothly. These are instructional leadership, school improvement and school effectiveness, school culture and entropic culture. To examine how principals' practice leadership contribute to improved learner outcomes, the researchers have drawn from both James et al.'s (2007) framework of three ingredients, and Sadker and Zittleman's (2011) five factor theory.

Instructional Leadership

Instructional leadership can be understood as an approach used by school principals in emphasising the direction of the influence process (Wahlstrom et al. 2010). Instructional lead-

ership focuses on teaching and learning and on the behaviour of the teachers in working with the learners. In other words, the leaders' influence is targeted at student learning through the teachers (du Plessis 2013). Putting it differently, Mitchell and Castle (2005) argue that instructional leadership entails the principals' actions which target improved learner outcomes. Such actions are more meaningful and fruitful if the principal understands how to align his or her actions in ways that build structures to support leadership in others and influence instruction in ways that will result in increased student achievement (Mitchell and Castle 2005).

School Improvement and School Effectiveness

School improvement focuses on the actual steps that are taken in order to bring about institutional change, while effectiveness focuses on how schools that are considered effective look like. Thurlow et al. (2003) are of the view that the twin concepts of school improvement and school effectiveness are central to both equality and quality in South African schools. There are debates about the focus of school effectiveness research; some scholars (Nicolaidou and Ainscow 2005; Ngcobo and Tikly 2010), question its over-reliance on examination results as a measurement for effectiveness to the exclusion of other factors that contribute to lack of effectiveness. Having argued that results in these two sister schools differ drastically, the researchers not base their understanding of school effectiveness to the National Senior Certificate (NSC) examination results only. However, their intention was to uncover what could possibly contribute to these differences beyond the quantitative measures. The researchers for instance, sought to look at how non-quantifiable factors such as leadership and organisational culture contributed to these differences.

School Organisational Culture

There is no unanimous conception of culture or organisational culture among scholars; nevertheless, there is broad agreement about what constitutes it (Mestry et al. 2012). The way in which schools handle their day-to-day activities may be a reflection of the type of the prevailing organisational culture. This is because a school organisational culture is a "pervasive aspect of the school life that influences every other aspect" (Mestry et al. 2012:57). Several studies of school organisational culture have identified a number of ways in which organisational culture manifests itself (Schein 2005; Niemann and Kotze 2006; Engels et al. 2008; Macneil et al. 2009; Mestry et al. 2012). Four of these ways are symbols, heroes, rituals and values.

Symbols are reflected in words, gestures, pictures, or objects that carry a particular meaning within a culture (Schein 2005; Deal and Peterson 2009). The term 'heroes' refers to persons who possess characteristics that highly prized in the culture and who therefore serve as models for behaviour (Schein 2005; Niemann and Kotze 2006). *Rituals* refer to those practices that are performed as a way of retaining and sustaining it because of the value attached to it. Such practices are visible to an observer, although their cultural meaning lies in the way they are perceived by insiders (Schein 2005; Niemann and Kotze 2006). *Values* refer to non-specific feelings of good and evil, beautiful and ugly, normal and abnormal, rational and irrational which form the core of the school organisational culture (Schein 2005; Niemann and Kotze 2006; Deal and Peterson 2009). There is broad agreement among scholars that principals play a prominent (if not a decisive role) in cultivating and sustaining schools' organisational culture (Niemann and Kotze 2006). Also important is the notion that once established, a school culture gets learned, reinforced and transmitted from one employee to the new one that joins the school. In that way leadership in the school has to ensure that new staff members are properly inducted into it.

Entropic School Culture

To maintain a positive school culture is not easy, particularly due to the characteristics mentioned in the above section. Negative or entropic school cultures also exist. Entropic organisational culture has been explained by Deal and Peterson (2009) as characterised by negativity, where conversations, interactions, planning and where the only stories recounted are failures. Mestry et al. (2012) emphasise the view that entropy, is a sense of disorganisation or degradation, normlessness and disconnectedness, and that it epitomises an entropic school culture. Highlighting the issue of negativity, Mestry et al. (2012) maintain that where the culture of a

school is entropic, it tends to display a limited capacity for improvement, a poor sense of optimism, low teacher commitment, as well as a low level of certainty. Evidently, such a school culture is incongruent with effective schools.

METHODOLOGY

To obtain an understanding of leadership practices in the two schools, and in keeping with qualitative research approaches, a qualitative case study design within an interpretive paradigm was adopted. Purposive and convenient sampling methods were used. Research sites were chosen because of their particular features that related to behaviours, roles and characteristics. For instance, the schools' reputation, contexts and proximity were the main characteristics that were considered. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with the principals, heads of departments (HODs), teachers, and focus group discussions with the parents. Dahlberg and McCaig (2010) state that qualitative research seeks to contribute to a better understanding of social realities and to draw attention to processes, multiple meanings, patterns and structural features. Semi-structured interviews were also deemed appropriate because they provide flexibility in posing questions; in-depth discussions, follow-ups and probes to clarify the responses (Cohen et al. 2011). A focus group discussion is one of the most cost effective methods of interviewing several people at once (Romm et al. 2013).

The data was transcribed from audio-tape into written form and was manually analysed using content analysis methods. Content analysis was preferred for its flexibility, since it can be used to analyse different types of data including documents and interview transcriptions. Analysing transcribed interviews entailed creating codes of meaning which were later organised into chucks of meaning (Henning et al. 2004). Various techniques were used to enhance trustworthiness of the findings. These included triangulation, member-checking and confirmability. For instance, to ensure that the findings were credible, triangulation of both the data generation methods and data sources was adopted. Data generation methods were semi-structured interviews and focus group discussion, while data sources included school principals, HODs, teachers, and parents. By interviewing different participants, a balanced view regarding the phenomenon under the gaze was solicited.

Throughout the study ethical considerations were observed. These included seeking and obtaining ethical clearance from the university to which the researchers are affiliated. Permission to conduct the study was also obtained from the provincial Department of Education. In addition, informed consent from each participant was obtained and assurance that the conversations between them and the researchers would be treated with strict confidence and anonymity was given and accepted. Participants need to be assured of the confidentiality of information supplied by them (Cohen et al. 2011). For instance, the fact that the two schools were given pseudonyms to protect their identities is one of the ethical issues that were considered.

RESULTS

The results are presented under the following themes: the role of leadership in school effectiveness; the focus on teaching and learning; high expectation from both the teachers and the learners; the role of school culture. The results show that the principals in the study played a prominent role in school effectiveness. The said role can be positive and ensure that school effectiveness is realised as can be observed in Nomzamo Secondary or it can be negative as can be seen in Khathazile Secondary. The results also show that effective leaders focus on teaching and learning; that effective leaders have high expectations from both the teachers and the learners and also that the school culture plays a decisive role in maintaining high learner achievement.

DISCUSSION

A detailed discussion of the results presented in the previous section is done below.

The Role of Leadership in School Effectiveness

The study has shown that leadership is a significant factor that sets the two studied schools apart. The data indicates for instance, that Nomzamo Secondary was achieving its targets and had defined the future it wanted to create. The leadership practices that prevailed promoted collaborative efforts of all the staff

members and there was a clear focus on teaching and learning in the classroom. This is consistent with James et al.'s (2007) framework of collaboration, reflective practice and focus on teaching and learning. The study has also suggested that while the leadership style used by the principal of Nomzamo Secondary was collaborative, it was also firm, with ill-discipline among both the teachers and the learners not tolerated. In this regard the HOD from Nomzamo Secondary observed, "*The principal was not interested in pleasing anyone when making decisions"*.

According to the principal of Nomzamo Secondary, collaborative crafting of the school's vision is crucial, and it is not a short-term issue to be thought of and done overnight but requires forward thinking and sticking to the vision.

It is not overnight exercise. It is a collective effort by all stakeholders; between the SGB and teaching staff, with the School Management Team leading the way. For me, what has been key to success for this school has been to stick to the basics…Students attend their lessons regularly and teachers are always there to teach them.

Collaboration in crafting school the vision and mission statement can be linked to the type of prevailing leadership in the school. The views expressed by the principal of Nomzamo Secondary were corroborated by a member of the School Management Team (SMT) who attributed the success of the school to team work, collaboration among various stakeholders, instructional leadership, as well as, distributed leadership that was practiced in the school. When leadership is distributed as it was the case in Nomzamo Secondary, teachers tend to be empowered to take constructive decisions without fear and threats. In supporting this position, a member of the SMT from Nomzamo Secondary said:

I attribute this great success in our school to team work and the visionary leadership of our principal and the desire by all stakeholders to see our school achieve more. Decision-making in our school is through consultation and consensus. We are all empowered to be leaders in our different fields within the school. Every opinion and idea that aims to improve school performance is given a hearing.

The above extracts are congruent with the five factors theory highlighted by Sadker and Zittleman (2011) as being critical for school effectiveness. These extracts emphasise collaborative vision making, monitoring of learner progress, high expectations of the learners and strong leadership. Views elicited in the focus group discussion confirmed Nomzamo Secondary School's commitment to effective teaching and learning and also to parental involvement in the school's activities. One parent from the focus group discussion summarised the situation at Nomzamo Secondary by saying that:

Teachers in this school teach, learners learn and parents give support. We all have a common vision and we strongly believe that the only way we can improve the quality of our lives is by providing the best education for our children.

In contrast to the situation described above, the data suggests that at Khathazile Secondary commitment to teaching and learning was generally lacking from the teachers. Consequently underperformance prevailed. The practice of constantly looking back at the past performance and make necessary changes is part of effective leadership and reflective practice. While there was evidence of this at Nomzamo Secondary, it was completely absent at Khathazile Secondary. Instead of looking at what was working or not working well in the school, the principal of Khathazile Secondary expressed exasperation with everybody. He blamed the education department for "*using our school as a dumping place for difficult students who do not seek admission on time and then flock to the offices of the Department of Education which will instruct us to admit them"*. The principal also blamed the parents for being "*nowhere to be found whenever there are school issues that needed their attention"*. Teachers did not escape the blame as they were accused of lacking discipline which was linked to the notion that they had increasingly become unionised. It is noticeable that the principal did not take any responsibility for the current situation in the school. He seemed to be able to describe the ills affecting the school but did not see the way forward. Such an attitude raised questions about the type of leadership that the principal provided.

Focus on Effective Teaching and Learning

The focus on effective teaching and learning is one of the themes that emerged in the data

but, it surfaced differently in the two schools. For instance at Khathazile Secondary, it emerged during a conversation between the researchers and the teachers that the issue of effective teaching and learning was a 'present absence'. While effective teaching seemed to occupy their consciousness, it was seldom visible in practice as an aspect that could solve or address the school's predicaments. However, at Nomzamo Secondary, teaching and learning focus dominated the discourse and actually, it characterised the school life.

The data indicates that school leadership at Nomzamo Secondary ensured that maximum focus was put on the issue of time on task. Teachers focused on teaching and ensured that all periods were honoured. Learners focused on studying and their work was closely monitored by their teachers. When asked about what made Nomzamo Secondary to consistently score high marks in the National Senior Certificate (NSC) examinations, this is what the principal said:

For me, what has been key to success for this school, has been to stick to the basics. Students attend their lessons regularly and teachers are always there to teach them. Our school has always focussed on instructional leadership. Our teachers monitor learner attendance closely, and they do a follow-up on absent students.

The above extract touches on the tenets of instructional leadership which emphasises special focus on classroom learning. The data also shows that the opposite scenario existed at Khathazile Secondary where NSC examinations results have consistently been poor. When asked about what made Khathazile Secondary to consistently score poor marks in the NSC examinations, the principal cited various factors such as poor discipline among the teachers and the learners. He blamed the learners for "*high levels of absenteeism in the school"*. He also blamed the teachers for being *"so divided and not interested in the core business of the school"*. It is therefore evident that the basics that the principals of Nomzamo Secondary talked about did not exist at Khathazile Secondary. It may also be worth noting that the importance of focusing on teaching and learning was mentioned by all participants including those from Khathazile Secondary except its principal. For instance, when the question about Khathazile Secondary's persistently poor NSC examinations results was posed to the SMT member, he highlighted the lack of effective leadership in the school, saying that:

No matter how much attempts and interventions are made to turn things around, we are frustrated by the lack of decisive leadership from the principal. There are plans, policies and strategies that are discussed but the implementation part is a huge problem.

This suggests that members of the SMT are clear about what they were not doing right. However, there is no evidence to suggest that corrective measures were taken. This raises questions about the kind of leadership that existed in the school.

High Expectations from Both Teachers and Learners

This theme emerged in two contrasting ways in two schools. At Nomzamo Secondary, there were high expectations about what the learners and the teachers could do. Both the teachers and the learners were aware of high standards that were expected of them. In expressing high expectations from the learners, this is what the principal of Nomzamo Secondary had to say:

Our teachers have high expectations of their students and students are positively competitive and never satisfied with mediocrity. Work taught is constantly consolidated and reinforced through on-going assessment of student abilities and knowledge of lessons taught.

Where teachers had high expectations of their learners, attitudes by both the learners and the teachers were positive and effective learning prevailed. Consequently, learner achievement also improved (Parsley and Corcoran 2003; Thompson et al. 2004). However, at Khathazile Secondary, the principal did not show any expectation from his staff and the learners. Instead, the principal regarded the learners as being not fit to be in the grades they were in. In his view, they benefited from government policy which is known to be against learners repeating grades. On this matter, the SMT member from Khathazile Secondary had this to say:

Learners who are not ready to proceed to the next grades are given condonation and are promoted to the next grades. They tend not to take their school work seriously throughout the year because policy allows even weak learners to be promoted to the higher grades.

The learner behaviour highlighted by the SMT and the principal of Khathazile Secondary

confirm the current views in the literature about the learners' achievement in relation to their teachers' expectations. In many instances, where teachers' expectations are low, learners' achievements tend to be low as well.

The Role of Organisational Culture

Organisational culture is always about how things are done in an organisation, and it separates one institution from another. The data shows that the two schools had two contrasting school cultures. For instance, at Nomzamo it was largely characterised by positive school culture while at Khathazile it was characterised by entropic school culture. Positive culture seems to have prevailed at Nomzamo, but not at Khathazile Secondary. The data indicates that at the former, time on task was high and was emphasised, whereas in the latter this was not the case. Such a practice may have been inspired by a desire by both the Nomzamo Secondary School's teaching staff and the learners to maintain high achievement standards. As a result, they were prepared to remain in school for long hours, and even to sacrifice their time during holidays for teaching and learning. In fact, the time dedicated to supporting the learners was additional to what was provided for in the curriculum. This is could be linked to the fact that the school had developed a culture of success. Nomzamo Secondary had made it a norm to start its activities early (06:30) and finish late (16:30). This was supported by the parents during focus group discussions. One of them said:

The school start as early as 6H30 every morning and finishes at 16H30. Our children are taught to work hard and this makes them better able to cope with the harsh realities of life out there. The school conducts supervised study periods, which for me is a recipe for the success for which the school is known.

The above extract reflects the views shared by the parents that participated in the focus group discussion at Nomzamo Secondary. Because of the culture that existed, the school has consistently been able to "*finish syllabi well before time and students had enough time to revise"* as the principal of Nomzamo put it. Empirical evidence indicates that such a school culture did not exist at Khathazile Secondary. The school culture that has persisted for many years at Khathazile Secondary did not promote effective teaching and learning. The extract from a teacher from Khathazile Secondary confirms this claim by saying that "*the culture of teaching and learning is non-existent in their school"*. He further highlighted other factors that negatively affected effective teaching and learning. These factors were staff's low morale and indiscipline among the learners. This is what he said:

The staff morale is very low. There are cliques and a lot of conflicts among the -staff. Learner indiscipline and drop-out rate are very high at our school. Parental apathy is a common feature in our school.

The above extract indicates the gravity of the situation at Khathazile Secondary and the organisational culture that prevailed.

CONCLUSION

The main finding is that what made the two schools to differ so drastically was the type of leadership approaches that were used by the two principals. For instance, at Nomzamo Secondary, the principal was collaborative, instructional and focused on school improvement while leadership practices at Khathazile Secondary was characterised by the lack of vision and collaboration. Linked to this finding is that, due to the different leadership approaches employed by the principals, two contrasting school cultures existed and had become entrenched. Effective school cultures dominated life at Nomzamo and the teachers were proud of their school. They also regarded their principal to be an effective and efficient leader. Entropic school culture dominated life at Khathazile Secondary. Consequently, fragmentation, corridor gossips and other negativities dominated life in the school. Participants from this school characterised leadership in the school as rudderless. The other finding is that environmental factors around the school played a minor role in influencing each school's effectiveness. It is evident that despite the adversity of environmental conditions around the two schools, the principal's leadership practices that involve focus on instruction and curriculum delivery in the classroom mitigated those negative environmental factors.

In view of these conclusions and without implying any kind of generalisation, the study of these two schools gives credence to the view that foregrounds human actions over and above

environmental factors. This, however, does not in any way dismiss the importance of environmental factors as there is sufficient evidence of this. Effective and instructional leadership makes the difference between effective schools and less effective ones.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the above conclusions, it is recommended that principals need to focus on and dedicate all their energies to the core function of the school. The core function of the school is to provide and environment where effective teaching and learning takes place. The core function of the principal is to ensure that such an environment exists and is sustained. In trying to map a way forward for the school, it is crucial that active participation of all relevant stakeholders within the school is promoted. Various studies have shown that when people who are affected by the decisions or plans are not actively involved in their construction, it is unlikely that they will support them. It is therefore recommended that active stakeholder participation is promoted. It is also recommended that leadership in a school should, from time to time, reflect on progress that has been made and that necessary revisions as may be deemed appropriate should be made.

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