

Traversing Metaphoric Boundaries between Schools and their Communities: An Ethnographic Study of a Rural School

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ABSTRACT Literature shows that spanning metaphoric boundaries between schools and their communities benefits both the schools and the communities. Improved learner performance and community development have been argued to be key benefits of bridging the gap between schools and their communities. However, it is believed that in the rural areas of South Africa, establishing a school-community partnership is not easy. For this reason, literature on successful school-community relations within the rural context remains at the periphery. Therefore, this paper reports and discusses the findings of an ethnographic study research conducted in one rural secondary school in the KwaZulu-Natal province. Semi-structured interviews with the school principal, heads of departments, teachers and a group of parents were conducted. The findings reveal that leadership that is boundary spanning and guided by a clear vision is critical in the attempts to traverse boundaries between schools and their communities.

INTRODUCTION

Educational leadership research (Sanders 2006; Bojuwoye 2009; Hands 2010; Naicker 2012; Myende 2013; Myende and Chikoko 2014) has continuously shown that spanning the boundaries between schools and their communities through establishing school-community relations carries voluminous benefits for both schools and communities. Improved learner performance and community empowerment are some of the key benefits of bridging the gaps between schools and their communities (Mncube and Harber 2010; Myende 2013). There are several demands pushing for those who are interested in creating successful rural schools to span boundaries between them and their communities. One of the current demands for South African rural schools is to ensure that their learners receive quality education like their urban counterparts, which currently is not the case (Hands 2010; Hlalele 2012; Myende and Chikoko 2014). In the midst of this need, these schools are also challenged by the lack of resources to support effective teaching and learning (Nelson Mandela Foundation 2005; Nkambule et al. 2011; Loots et al. 2012; Myende 2012; Myende and

Chikoko 2014). One way of traversing the boundaries between the schools and their communities is to bridge the metaphoric boundaries (Bhengu 2007) that exists between schools and the critical resources they need. In South Africa, schools, through their governing bodies, are expected to generate additional resources from their private sources, as government funding is not sufficient. Section 34 of the South African School Act, No. 84 of 1996 (Republic of South Africa 1996) assigns the responsibility of generating additional resources to the School Governing Bodies (SGBs). This may be a daunting task and it requires strategic approaches to be fulfilled. Creating relations between schools and their communities has been seen as one strategy to make the task of generating resources feasible (Anderson-Butcher et al. 2006; Sanders 2006; Moore-Thomas and Day-Vines 2010; Myende 2012). Moreover, bridging the gap between schools and their communities especially in rural areas is imperative given that rural schools are the “lifeblood” of their communities (Hlalele 2012:115).

In his study, Myende (2013:78) indicates that schools in some rural areas are the only institutions that promote community development. Therefore, the researchers argue that it is imperative that boundaries between schools and their communities are traversed. There is empirical evidence that shows that many rural schools are located in communities where poverty is the feature that may not be left out in defining the rural community (Kamper 2009; Nkambule et al.

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2011; Hlalele 2012; Loots et al. 2012; Myende and Chikoko 2014). The researchers are therefore, convinced that strong projects established to save rural schools and their communities can work better if these two parties collaborate. While the benefits of collaboration are known, research suggests that school-community relations are complex and establishing them is fraught with difficulties. Within the South African context, metaphoric boundaries feature prominently in rural areas (Bhengu 2013).

Despite attempts through the establishment of school governing structures that are democratic (Republic of South Africa 1996), this difficulty persists. Some of the challenges that thwart creating successful school-community relations include low literacy levels of community dwellers (Nelson Mandela Foundation 2005); the brain drain caused by migration to urban areas (Howley et al. 2009); the reluctance of educators to work in these communities (Lemmer 2007; Naidu et al. 2008), and lack of active participation in school matters by local community members may be because their focus remains on survival and fighting poverty (Kamper 2009). Despite the difficulties highlighted above, some rural schools have successfully navigated the boundaries between them and their communities to tap into the benefits of bringing the school to the community and vice versa (Bhengu 2013). The understanding of the imperative for school-community integrations propels the researchers to argue for an understanding of the extent to which rural schools have or are succeeding in traversing these metaphoric boundaries. In this paper, the researchers share their views about lessons from one secondary school in the province of KwaZulu-Natal. Drawing from this school, the researchers argue that despite various barriers to rural school-community integration, some schools may present profound lessons on how this can be realized.

The Aim of the Study

Given the argument expressed above, the aim of this paper is to examine how metaphoric boundaries can be traversed to create sustainable collaborations between schools and their communities. Thus, the critical question underpinning this paper is:

How can metaphoric boundaries between rural schools and their communities be tra-

versed to create sustainable and successful school-community partnerships?

Understanding Rurality and Rural Schooling

Several scholars have defined the concept of rurality but it has remained complex and difficult to describe (Myende and Chikoko 2014). Hlalele (2012) contends that the definition of 'rural' eludes those who try to understand it, due to both, its ambiguity and the often fallible comparison between rural and urban contexts. But almost all rural contexts face huge challenges that negatively affect the attainment of quality education (Carroll et al. 2001; Nelson Mandela Foundation 2005; Hlalele 2012; Chikoko and Khanare 2012). Suffering from social ills such as diseases, poverty, low levels of education, low learner achievement, low self-esteem among those who live there, unfavorable policy environments and limited facilities has been the common feature identified (Chikoko and Khanare 2012; Hlalele 2012). Myende and Chikoko (2014) argue that these and other related challenges often lead to what is often ignored about rural communities, namely, that they are unique in their own ways. Rural communities have enormous challenges, but within their ecology, community capitals through which challenges can be counteracted, exist (Hlalele 2012). For instance, rural people live in their communities by choice, and this should not in any way compromise the quality of education provided to them. For Hlalele (2012), it is this community capital that makes them attractive places to live and raise the family in.

The researchers acknowledge the unfavorable conditions within which schools in the rural areas operate. Notwithstanding, they also argue that these conditions do not and should not define all rural areas. In the absence of one agreed upon definition of rural areas, the researchers borrow from Myende and Chikoko (2014) and use this term to refer to those areas under the jurisdiction of *Amakhosi* (Chiefs) as defined in the Traditional Leadership and Governance Framework Act, No. 41 of 2003 (Republic of South Africa 2003) and the KwaZulu-Natal Traditional Leadership and Governance Act, No. 5 of 2005 (KwaZulu-Natal Legislature 2005). Therefore, in terms of this conceptualization, a rural school refers to any school that is located within the jurisdiction of traditional leadership in the KwaZulu-Natal province.

Understanding the Concepts - 'Community and School-Community'

The researchers define the term 'community' in two ways. First, this term refers to the location where people live, thus suggesting that people separated by a particular boundary are not one community (Molloy et al. 1995). Second, 'community' refers to a common cultural heritage, language, social interactions and shared interests and vision by individuals or organizations within or transcending local boundaries (Molloy et al. 1995; Sanders 2006). The second meaning suggests that a community, as people and organization, is not constrained by geographical boundaries. Instead, through common heritage and shared interests, individuals or organizations from different geographical areas can be bound to one community (Myende, 2012). The researchers argue here that defining school-community under the confines of local boundaries may negatively affect the success of school-community integration. This may result in the schools' failure to identify potential contributors in school-community relations due to limited conceptualization of community. Therefore, the researchers argue that their interests in the affairs of that particular school, rather than their geographical location should determine members of a school community.

A body of knowledge generated on school-community partnerships by authors such as Sanders (1996), Carroll et al. (2001), Johns (2003), Naidu et al. (2008), Bosma et al. (2010), suggest that businesses, higher education institutions, research institutes, government agencies, faith-based organizations and other non-profit organizations may be interested in a school's work and may usually interact with the school. Such stakeholders may not be located in the same geographical area as the school they are interested in. However, in terms of this paper, their interest and continuous interactions with the school qualifies them to be regarded as a school community. Moreover, in the South African context, access to schools is extended beyond learners coming from the school's vicinity. Therefore, the school-community is extended to all those people beyond the school boundaries who have their children in the school. Similarly, households whose children attend far away schools surround the schools. Due to the first definition of community, by virtue of sharing the same bound-

aries with the school, these households will possibly affect and be affected by the school. Therefore, the researchers argue here that despite the complexity of this scenario, such households constitute the school community for the local school and for the school where their learners are schooling.

Framing School-Community Integration

As the researchers have stated earlier, schools are the "lifeblood" of their communities (Hlalele 2012; Myende and Chikoko 2014). The researchers are now extending this statement by further arguing that schools do not exist in a vacuum but their existence and their work is influenced by several environments surrounding them (Bhengu 2013). It is therefore important that the school's stakeholders from the surrounding environments are involved in the business of the school. In basic terms, the researchers in this paper argue for the involvement of school communities and they look at how schools can traverse boundaries between them and their communities. To provide a clear understanding of how the studied school managed to navigate all the challenges involved in creating working school-community partnerships, the study is framed within Epstein's six types of involvements (Epstein 2001). The framework is also used in this study to examine the kind of relationships established by the researched school with its community. Epstein (2001) states that the six types of involvement include:

- **Parenting** which consists of the basic responsibilities of families. This level is about helping all families establish home environments that support children as students.
- **Communicating** is about designing effective forms of school-home-community communications about school programs and children's progress.
- **Volunteering** is about recruiting and organizing parents' help and support. This will help for instance, in ensuring that teachers only focus on teaching and learning while community members take part in other extra-curricular activities.
- **Learning at home** is about providing information and ideas to families about how to help the children at home with homework and other curriculum-related activities, decisions, and planning.

- ♦ **Decision-making** is about including parents and the community in school decisions, developing parent and community leaders and representatives in all school activities. For the researchers, this aspect is the critical one in creating partnerships that are not based on mere involvement but on meaningful and strategic participation.
- ♦ **Collaborating with the community** is about identifying and integrating resources and services from the community to strengthen school programs, family practices, and student learning and development.

In this paper, the researchers draw lessons from one rural secondary school. The Epstein's model gives a clear explanation of reasons why schools need to destroy metaphoric boundaries between themselves and their communities. The researchers hope that, through the types of involvement, it can be established as to what the school practices in this case are, to ensure different forms of involvement of the community in the school.

METHODOLOGY

This paper is based on a qualitative ethnographic study that was conducted between May 2011 and June 2012 and it was located within a qualitative case study design. Qualitative studies are naturalistic, interpretive and use a multi-methods approach (De Vos et al. 2002) in capturing meaning as constructed by participants (Cohen et al. 2011). The researchers observed this in capturing the principal's lived experiences as he established ways of traversing metaphoric fences between the school and the community. The notion of researchers as instruments and meaning-makers (Henning et al. 2004), as well as, the need to spend extended time in the field, informed the design adopted, thus connecting with some element of ethnography. Research participants consisted of the principal, two heads of departments (HODs), two teachers, as well as a group of parents. The choices of the participants were inspired by the notion that they constituted an internal school community, and are thus assumed to possess lived experiences about how the school managed to traverse these boundaries. What was unique about parents is that they also understood the broader community outside the school and they gave two perspectives in this study, namely, that of being

internal stakeholders and that of being members of the broader community.

A combination of purposive and convenience selection methods were used to identify the school. It was purposive in the sense that the researchers wanted a school that was located in a rural area and also, which was known in the community as having created close links with the community. The school was also chosen because of its reputation for having undergone dramatic change within few years' time since the appointment of a new principal. The participants had rich information (Creswell 2012) relevant for the study. It was convenient in the sense that the researchers wanted a school that was not too far away from where they work and thus minimize travelling costs. Of the 11 months spent "in the field" (Wolcott 1995:65), the first three months focused on gaining access to the research sites, introducing the study and building rapport. This process is crucial in naturalistic and ethnographic inquiry (Bridges 2002; Mertens 2010).

Data was generated through semi-structured interviews conducted with the principal, HODs and teachers, and focus group discussions were held with parents. Semi-structured interviews are appropriate for their flexibility in posing questions, in-depth discussions, follow-ups and probes to clarify the responses (Cohen et al. 2011). In addition, semi-structured interviews offer participants an opportunity to open up and talk freely (Cohen et al. 2011). Focus group discussion is one of the most cost-effective methods of interviewing several people at once (Kitzinger 1994). It is a rapid data generation method where purposively selected participants gather and discuss issues or concerns.

Documents review and informal observations were also used for triangulation purposes. It comprised looking at various school records such as time book, logbook, National Senior Certificate (NSC) results schedules, as well as other documents for verification purposes. This method of data generation has gained currency in qualitative research (Neuman 2006; Cohen et al. 2011) and it is recommended for triangulating verbal data from participants.

The data was transcribed from audiotapes into written form and was manually analyzed using qualitative inductive data analysis. These entailed creating codes of meaning, which were later organized into chunks of meaning (Hen-

ning et al. 2004). Conducting research has an ethical-moral dimension that researchers are obliged to follow (Neuman 2006; Maree 2007). The researchers firstly obtained ethical clearance from our University Ethics Committee. The researchers then applied for and obtained permission to conduct the study from the Department of Education. Informed consent was also obtained from all the participants. To ensure the confidentiality and anonymity, participants' names and that of the school studied are not disclosed. Other issues such as the principle of beneficence and non-maleficence (Cohen et al. 2011) were also observed. For instance, the name of the school has been changed to Mhlabuhlangene as a way of protecting its identity.

Mhlabuhlangene Secondary School's Profile

The story is drawn from a case study of Mhlabuhlangene Secondary that is located in a rural community in KwaZulu-Natal province, South Africa. The school is renowned for resources it had mobilized and improved learner performance it had achieved within a few years. Previously, the schools' performance was mediocre in many respects. For instance, the National Senior Certificate (NSC) results consistently ranged between fifty percent to fifty-five percent; no ownership of decisions made in the school prevailed; parents did not show any interest in the affairs of the school and their meetings were not well attended; parents who served in the SGB had no understanding of their duties and responsibilities as contemplated in the government policy. All of these issues had to be addressed in order to turn the school around. At the center of the principal's initiative was a realization of the need to establish and strengthen existing relationships between the school and the community within which it is located. Thus, in this study, the researchers focus on how this relationship was achieved. The principal, in consultation with the teachers, worked on strategies to achieve community ownership of the school.

This is a school of approximately 800 learners and 30 teachers, including the School Management Team (principal, a deputy-principal and 4 HODs), and all teaching staff members are fully qualified, that is, every teacher has a minimum of a 4-year professional qualification. Pass rates for NSC examination has improved from around

fifty percent in 2000 to eighty percent in 2012. Within the school premises there are two vegetable gardens, one operated by teachers, and the other by members of the community.

RESULTS

To answer how the school traversed metaphoric boundaries between itself and its community, the results are presented in four themes, which emerged from the analysis of the data. The results show that the boundaries were traversed through, (1) renewing the school's vision and mission, (2) valuing the community in the school's life, (3) reskilling the teachers and SGB, and (4) encouraging teacher-parents communication.

DISCUSSION

This section presents a detailed discussion of the results, which are framed in four themes mentioned in the section above.

Renewing School's Vision and Mission

Research indicates that successful leadership in schools is based on a clear vision and mission (Clarke 2007; Steven et al. 2011). The findings show that the vision and mission can be very helpful in connecting the school and its community. The vision and mission formulation process was used to enhance the relationship between the school and the community. The school principal was of the opinion that it is through the process he followed in renewing the school's vision and mission that created strong social capital between it and community. In his vision renewal he ensured that community interests and needs were catered for through the curriculum and development of new activities that were going to attract and integrate the community and the school. The principal said:

When I started at the school I had an understanding that I needed to start from the basics...for me, revisiting the vision and mission of the school was the starting point. We involved the community in crafting the school's vision and mission statement in order to cater for their interests and make them see the school belonged to them. To further cater for the interest of the community, we started community gardens... (Principal)

The above views were corroborated by the parents in the focus group discussion (FGD). The extract below was drawn from the FGD and was shared by all. This is what she said:

We are always made part of the school. The principal consulted with us and discussed his plans of changing the school and he also asked us what we thought was necessary to be done in the school... (Parent from the FGD)

Emerging from the voice of the principal and parents is that renewing the vision and mission is important but to ensure buy-in of the community, the vision and mission must cater to its needs. Furthermore, the principal argued that community involvement must go beyond the vision and mission formulation process. There should be action plans making them feel part of the school members on a daily basis. For this to work, community gardens were conceptualized and implemented. From the Epstein's model of the spheres of influence (Epstein 2001), collaborating with the community is a way of ensuring meaningful involvement. From this perspective, schools and the community should identify and integrate resources and services from the community to strengthen school programs, family practices, and student learning and development. In keeping with this view, the school identified gardening activities as a strategy to bring the unemployed youth, women and the other members of the community into the school. Confirmed in this study is the argument that in order to bridge the gap between schools and their communities, there should be a common and shared vision (Blank et al. 2012). In this study it is ascertained that, by accommodating the interests of the community in the school vision, the gates for the community to be part of the school were opened.

Valuing the Community in the School's Life

The results of this study also confirmed that the community plays a very crucial role in the life of the school. It was found that one of the ways to traverse the metaphoric boundaries was the creation of community awareness of their value in the school. Keeping parents in the same loop with the school's internal stakeholders is one of the strategies that were used by the school to ensure active and meaningful involvement of the community, especially parents. Parents were always informed of what is happening

in the school and ways to involve the broader community were prioritized. The mobilization of unemployed youth to be involved with learners in the school seemed to be working for both the school and the community. The principal explained it this way:

We mobilized the unemployed youth that is out of school doing nothing. I mobilized them to mix with those that are still at school. They are involved in the garden project with the learners of the school... (Principal)

Echoing similar sentiments expressed by the school principal, parents emphasized that they were always kept informed about the school's activities. This is how she put it:

We receive letters about trips that the school plans to take; we are invited to the school to deliberate about challenges learners face in their studies, and we get to be involved in making decisions on how such challenges can be addressed. Because of all these, 'ubudlelwanebethu' [our relationship] with the school has matured (Parent from the FGD).

The study reveals that valuing the community should not be symbolic but should entail active involvement of different community members. In Epstein's model (overlapping spheres of influence), it is also posited that partnerships that community members are mobilized to be part of, include their active participation in the decision-making process (Epstein 2001). In her other work, Epstein (2011) postulates that relationship growth between schools and communities is witnessed as the level of influence grows. In this case, from the garden project, the school strived to ensure that parents and some community members are involved in decision-making. The voices of parents confirm that this impacted positively in ensuring mature relationships. Research has also proven that building social capital between schools and community is important if both parties are to harness resources for mutual benefit (Mathie and Cunningham 2003; Emery and Flora 2006). The school's continuous commitment to connect with the community through different activities may be seen to be what Emery and Flora (2006) refer to as bonding social capital. This is important for creating a sustained relationship between them. As witnessed in this study, the bonding social capital transcended the creation of ties, but moved to making sure that such ties were sustained.

As part of connecting the school with the community, the school identified vulnerable learners who needed help of different kinds. When these learners were identified, through the school principal, help from external donors was sought. From the participants' viewpoint this was one way of showing the broader school community that their contributions were invaluable. From the voice of the teacher below we ascertained the principal's attempt to bring the broader community into the school's life:

We have identified these learners who had no real parents or responsible people with whom they could stay. The principal approached different donors to donate clothes for them. When they were approached they valued that the school approached them and for them, this was an indication that the school valued them. Most of these donors collaborate with our school in many activities now... (Teacher A)

It was also found that sometimes the school relied on parents and the community in general to address challenging issues and this made the community to be aware of the value they had in the school. This is how the HOD put it:

We do not only ask parents and the community to come in when we need to use them but we make sure that they are fully involved. For example, where there are learners who bring dangerous weapons to the school we make sure that we use community suggested ways of disciplining those learners. We sometimes include them in administering discipline (HOD).

The view expressed by the HOD was corroborated by one of the parents that participated in the focus group discussion. This is how she put it:

The school also shows that we are important by also including us in coming up with the solutions to the school discipline issues... (Parent from the FGD).

The symbiotic relationship between the school and the community was also expressed by one of the teachers. This is how the teacher put it:

We draw a lot from the community's ways of doing things and in this way they feel valued in the school. For example, we have involved them in formulating the code of conduct and we use their indigenous knowledge when it comes to ensuring learner discipline (Teacher B).

From the participants' point of view, the school practices that were embedded in what had served the community well were utilized as a strategy to create a strong bond between the two parties. The principal also confirmed the above voices wherein he highlighted that involving the community solved some problems experienced by the school and in this way the community felt valued in the school. From the framework utilized in this paper, it can be argued that the aspect of decision-making as articulated by Epstein (2001) is crucial. Epstein (2011) aptly puts it that participation in decision-making is crucial in creating working relationships. The researchers therefore, argue that participation should be based on valuing all contributions as seen in the case school.

Encouraging Teacher-Parent Communication

"Children are raised within the overlapping set of systems, and therefore open communication between the mesolinks is imperative if children are to grow and learn" (Eberly et al. 2007:9). The argument by Eberly et al. (2007) shows why schools have to communicate with parents. Indeed learning and leaner social development is arguably the key reasons for communication with parents, and through this study, another important reason was identified. The results demonstrated that ensuring teacher-parents communication is also important for integrating the school and the community. Drawn from this study is the notion that communication is not only important for learning but also that it helps in creating a community that cares and is committed to the holistic development of the school. Communication between the school and parents was not just an event but also a well-planned process. Voices of the parents and the teachers bear testimony to this. This is how one parent in the FGD put it:

There is a parent information week, which starts on Mondays until Fridays. Parents from Grade 8 to Grade 12 are called to come in to the school on different days to have conversations with teachers about their children's work... We get first-hand information from the teachers about our children's conduct at school. Where they lag behind in terms of the subjects, we are told and we can see for ourselves. In addition, teachers show us how to check children's work when we are alone with them at home (Parent from the FGD).

Communicating with parents continues to receive attention and advocacy from research. The kind of communication that is valued is the one based on designing effective forms of school-to-home and home-to-school communication (Epstein 2001). Through the parent information week, this school managed to design effective two-way communication and this has contributed towards minimizing the gap between the school and the community. The value of communication in school-community integration is not new. Research conducted by Myende (2013), and also by Myende and Chikoko (2014) identified the lack of communication as one of the challenges that resulted in the failure of partnerships they researched. The current study reveals that the school understood the value of communication and succeeded in creating space for communication to occur. From the participants' perspective it is communication that made them create long lasting relationships. Therefore, the researchers argue that investing in two-way communication is one of the pillars that try to bridge the gap between the schools and communities.

Re-skilling the Teachers and SGB

Miller (2007) and Sanders (2007) contend that connecting schools and their communities requires setting a school culture that is supportive and conducive for the two parties to collaborate. This can be achieved by identifying school personnel who have skills and the provision of resources (Sanders 2007). The study found that the principal invested resources in re-skilling the teachers and the SGB members as a way of ensuring that they had the capacity to deal with the new changes brought about by school-community integration. The extracts below encapsulate the value that the principal and teachers attached to the skills that everyone required in the school for stronger school-community relationships. The principal put it thus:

...To close the knowledge gap and to ensure that our projects are successful we train all the personnel involved...I value the contribution of our community such as NGOs in the development of the school and I approached the chief for land to have a garden project and I also ensured that everyone is trained to run the project.... (Principal)

Supporting the above view, the teacher provided a detailed description about the format,

the place and some of the companies that facilitated the training session. This is what he said:

We had workshops at Kullog at Umzumbe. The entire staff and SGB attended that training over three consecutive days...personal development was the main focus in the school...the principal has organized the Valley Trust, one of the NGOs in Botha's Hill to sponsor our developmental workshops and also train us... (Teacher A)

The re-skilling of role players seemed to have helped the school immensely. However, it also needs to be emphasized that even during training and development of staff, the value of community was always paramount. In the principal's perspective, approaching the NGOs for sponsorship and for training strengthened the relationship between them. Moreover, it is this training that made parents appreciate the teachers and the SMT in the school, as well as, to embrace collaborative efforts. To this end, one parent had this to say:

'Othisha kanye nabaphathi besikole' [Teachers and the School Management Team] are trained to be able to work with us well. There is a good culture in the school that makes us feel welcome... (Parent from the FGD)

The parents' voice confirms the argument made earlier that a culture that is supportive of school-community collaborations is important for successful relationships. Moreover, Epstein's (2001) model at the level of collaborating with the community puts emphasis on the identification of resources and services for the benefit of both the school and the community. In this study the researchers found the principal to be creating networks that are helpful to the school and the community and this has strengthened the work of the school. As much as the principal seems to be the driving force of all initiatives, the researchers ascertained that value and the importance of all stakeholders is understood and cherished. This is established through the principal's initiatives to ensure that all stakeholders are developed and they are part of all processes of the school's change.

CONCLUSION

In the paper, the researchers have argued that crossing metaphoric boundaries between the school and its community is essential if schools are to achieve their goals of providing

quality education. They have pointed out that, although this is essential, many schools especially in rural areas find it difficult to traverse these boundaries. Motivated by one school where evidence pointing to the ability to traverse metaphoric boundaries has been witnessed; the researchers have embarked on the process of eliciting ideas about how such boundaries can be traversed. Having presented different activities and strategies used to integrate the school and the community the researchers conclude that the school through the principal's leadership has managed to create a strong connection with the community.

Although the principal was central in the entire process, based on the findings of this study it can be postulated that creating connections with the community is achievable given that all stakeholders are involved in the process and embrace it. Also identified in the study and important to reflect on is that all the activities aimed at connecting the school and the community can only be achieved after a clear vision and mission have been collaboratively established. While the researchers focus on one school, they are of the view that the findings of this study can provide insights about practices of some schools within the rural context that successfully engage in school-community collaborations.

RECOMMENDATIONS

This was a small-scale study comprising only one research site. Therefore, the practices identified in the study are limited to that research site only. Notwithstanding this limitation, the results can be used as categories for big scale quantitative research that aims to examine the same phenomenon.

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