

Women Educational Leaders and the Empowerment of Others¹

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ABSTRACT Educational management has generally been organized in a hierarchical manner that place more men in leadership roles in which authority and power are highly structured. However, more women are entering leadership roles that traditionally have been preserved and occupied by men. Women's approach to power and how they use it is of interest in this paper. This paper demonstrates how women primary school principals in the KwaZulu Natal (KZN) province in South Africa conceptualized power and utilized it to make things happen in their schools. A detailed description of the successes and challenges the women faced as KZN educational leaders is provided. A qualitative research design with an aspect of phenomenology was used to generate data. Analysis of data has been an ongoing process of identifying emerging patterns and themes. One of the major themes that emerged is that power is seen as a resource that enables communities and educational leaders to achieve their goals.

INTRODUCTION

South African Schools generally were organized in a hierarchical manner that placed more men than women in educational leadership roles, however, in the post-apartheid state, greater efforts are being made to redress inequalities and imbalances (Lumby and Azaola 2011). More women are entering leadership roles that were traditionally preserved and occupied by men. The major question in the study has been: 'What are the women school principals' lived experiences of leadership?' It is from this question that the women's experiences of power in primary schools emerged. Hence, the purpose of this paper is to examine women educational leaders' conceptualization of power in KwaZulu Natal province and how they utilize it to make things happen in their schools. The challenges women face as educational leaders, their successes and approaches used, are also documented. Literature suggests that women generally "view power as being multi-dimensional and multi-directional" and more often "encourage empowerment of all organizational members" (Fennell 2002: 100). This point is further elaborated by Shields (2014) and Muzvidziwa (2014) when they articulated the notion of interactive approach and transformative leadership in which every member is encouraged to participate and in the process gets empowered.

In this paper the concept of power as a resource is defined in relation to women's description of how they achieved success. Firstly the

paper looks at educational management and its traditional view of power, followed by a review of leadership literature and the concept of power from the women's perspectives. However, before looking at the mentioned concepts, there is a need to define the term power as well. Following Soanes and Hawker's (2006: 797) definition, "power is the ability...to act" in a certain way. Power has something to do with authority. It is the ability to influence or control people or events. The paper, in trying to understand women's concept of power, offers an analysis of transformational leadership theory, particularly its emphasis on empowerment of followers. Bogotch (2014) on educational theory suggests that: "the relationship between educational leaders and others is reciprocal" and that "power" as a resource should "create opportunities for others to better their lives". A brief highlight on methodology is followed by sections on findings and a discussion of women's stories on how they used power to empower others and progress in their schools.

According to Soanes and Hawker (2006), a resource is something like a source which one can draw from, particularly pertaining to information, knowledge or some kind of help. It is seen as a strategy adopted in a difficult situation. Soanes and Hawker's definition of a resource is quite useful in understanding the women's concept of power as a resource, and augers well with Bourdieu's notion of social capital. Bourdieu regards social capital as a resource that is produced via links and these are the net-

works (Westlund 2006). To possess social capital, a person must be related to others, and it is those others, not himself, who are the actual source of his or her advantage. Within the networks, individuals interact sharing information, encouraging one another and thus provide emotional support and develop a network of influence or a resource on which members can rely on in times of need. This suggests that social capital is produced through social networks and is a result of interactions between individuals or groups. Rutten et al. (2009: 3) discussing the spatial dimensions of social capital identified what they called bonding social capital and described how each individual gets connected to other individuals within the network structure. What is interesting is that Bourdieu sees “power resources...as forms of capital” and in a similar way “capitals as forms of power” (Portes 2011: 35). The concept of power is quite broad and therefore needs to be looked at from a broader perspective.

Traditional View of Power and the Concept of Management in Schools

The concept of management is rooted in Frederick Taylors’ background and experience, as a laborer and chief engineer whose belief was that “individuals could be programmed to be efficient machines” (Hoy and Miskel 1987: 8). School leaders working from this perspective see management of schooling as directed towards the achievement of certain educational objectives without consideration of the human factor. Power is seen to reside in one person who is the principal or head of school. Enomoto (2000: 376) argued that early management theories were developed primarily by men for men, giving examples of classical theories expounded by Taylor and others. Approaches from this perspective emphasize on hierarchical control over people. In Owens’ (2001) observation, schools as organizations and their settings were strongly influenced by such classical management theory and bureaucracy. Currently this approach to management is quite contested. Literature shows that modern organizations require perspectives of a manager who possesses flashes of vision and commitment of wise leadership (Bolman and Deal 1997). In reflecting the term wise and how one gets wisdom, the proverbs of Solomon (2009: 706) advise that “lean not on your own under-

standing” and “do not be wise in your own eyes”. This suggests that some form of interaction with others is needed for one to be wise. Communication and moral responsibilities are at the core. Thus in a way, the principle of caring for each other and mutual support is inculcated. This is why for instance Muzvidziwa and Muzvidziwa (2012) discussing *Hunhu (Ubuntu)* and school discipline in Africa examined the relationship between ‘ubuntu’ and school leadership since it has an aspect of respect and caring. While the meaning of *Ubuntu* suggests that a person to be called someone is because of other people and hence the need for respect for one another. School leadership has an important role of creating an environment conducive to both teachers and students, as well as parents. This can only be achieved through a network of influence and by empowering subordinates. The traditional view does not take into consideration the human relations aspect.

The problem with the earliest works in leadership is the way research perceived leadership. For instance, the trait approach to leadership which recognized the innate differences was emphasized. Feminists regard trait thinking to be by nature “gender stereotypic” (Blackmore 1998: 102) and argue that the construct of leadership remains male-gendered as it exhibits the desired traits such as (height, weight) energy and a number of other personality factors that are perceived as masculine. Thinking from the trait approach suggests that power requires leadership skills which are seen to be masculine and the appropriateness of this is associated with men. This suggests that using this approach encourages discrimination by gender. Muzvidziwa (2014), in favor of a new paradigm shift, suggests that a sense of justice and moral development need to be nurtured in schools if these institutions are to be socially just educational environments. Sensitivity to gender is of great importance and this does not apply only to one type of gender. Another argument on trait thinking was raised by Bartram (2005) on her analysis of Rosener’s (1990) work, on how women and men are perceived and labeled regarding their approaches to leadership and management. The debate was on terms ascribed to both men and women such as aggressiveness, toughness, nurturing and caring contending that these words present stereotype thinking. Though the concept of leadership has been described by

many and in different ways, Botha (2013: 2) concluded that generally “it involves elements such as influencing and motivating people, either as individuals or groups”. This definition does not discriminate and augurs well with what is expected of a modern organization.

Prior to 1994 in South Africa, the concept of management was regarded as an activity for the one who holds a senior position in an organization, usually this position was dominated by white males. The South African Schools Act (SASA) of 1996 set out frameworks, norms and standards for governance of schools. The principal no longer holds all the responsibilities for running of the school as he/she is expected to be part of the School Management Team (SMT) made up of the school head/principal, the deputy and heads of departments. The school governing body as a parallel structure represent the parent body and community. SASA made a shift from centralized control and decision-making to consider shared and collective decision-making. The introduction of this shift came into being when post-apartheid was busy drafting other policies including those that had something to do with addressing inequalities of the past and gender imbalances in positions of authority and leadership in education was not an exclusion (Christie 2008; Mkhize and Msweli 2011). Implementation plans to redress these imbalances meant recruiting females into leadership positions. As women increasingly enter leadership roles that traditionally have been occupied by men, and the quest for South African schools to be democratic, learning organizations, the question is how do women educational leaders reconcile their own gender predisposition of power with that which they have experienced in the male dominated world? It is also interesting to examine literature on how women use power to make things happen.

How Do Women Lead?

Success of women educational leaders depends mostly on their ability to network. It has been observed in previous studies that communicating with other schools and sharing information with colleagues enabled the women leaders to develop a network that empowered them. Their interaction patterns become useful for keeping them abreast with new things and changes that happen within school communities (Jeffery

et al. 2003). These networks are made possible by attending workshops and conferences. By organizing activities around shared work, women use networks to broaden both the leaders’ and teachers’ experiences through collaboration. Information sharing is knowledge shared and more importantly, knowledge is power and an important resource. Lieberman and Grolnick (1997) observed that women in leadership roles establish and create informal collegial groups or networks as opposed to hierarchical models that are authoritative. In these networks, women leaders get the opportunity to become facilitators and resource persons for their own schools.

Sinclair (2012: 15) discussing women in leadership from an Australian context, sees leadership as “a set of practices distributed across a group and collectively achieved”. When practices are shared and distributed, there is involvement of others and participation that take place. Robertson (2008: 20) shares similar views about leadership by referring it to “actions taken to improve opportunities for learning”. It is the type of actions that set the tone of the organization or school. Educational leadership is seen as “a capacity to nurture a learning community” (Caldwell 2003: 26). Moreover, women are associated with the feminine characteristics of caring, nurturing and sharing. Such qualities form part of a relationship building and trust in subordinates. Similar arguments were presented by Madziyire and Mapolisa (2012) who refer to the Zimbabwean context. Literature shows that generally women perceive themselves as caring and nurturing in their approach to leadership. In South Africa, Lumby and Azaola (2011) on women principals in small schools found that the women interviewed saw themselves as nurturers. These echoed views were also noted by early researchers on women Carol Gilligan (1982: 24) who observed a gendered difference in women’s perceptions arising out of their lived experiences. Her observation was that such experiences lead to gendered differences in educational leadership. Even Sawati (2011) in Pakistan engaged in a study to identify the leadership styles of secondary school principals and how those styles impact the student’s performance. Female principals were seen to be nurturing, mentoring and motivating both, students and staff, and this contributed to better results as compared to their male counterparts. Motivation is one of the tools to empower students to take charge of their own

learning. On a similar note, Posamentier (2012) discussing the issue of motivating students in class, sees the practice as a creative way of channelling students even to specific topics or subjects which they may not have confidence in but eventually become successful. Women principals tend to adopt these approaches in their efforts to mentor their staff. Similar studies were conducted by Burns and Martin (2010), Addi-Racah (2010), Brooking (2008), Nogay and Beebe (2008), and Court (2007). From the above discussion it shows that motivation is an empowering process that gives confidence to others. For instance, the emphasis on empowerment of followers within transformational leadership theory has generated interest within the community of researchers and a search for understanding of how women practice their leadership (Kark 2004).

Leadership as Empowerment

In exploring how various approaches in feminist thought intersect with the study of gender and transformational leadership, Calas and Smircich (cited in Kark 2004: 161) argued that “feminist theories are not only concerned with women’s issues but rather offer a gamut of inclusive field of organizational studies”. Involvement of followers in organizational activities is an informal way of devolving power to subordinates, their participation helps them feel included and take ownership. Transformational conception of leadership originated most visibly in Burns’ work concerning political leaders. This concept is very critical in trying to understand how power can be used in a less hierarchical manner. For Burns (1978: 3), transactional political leaders “approach followers with an eye for votes, or subsidies for campaign contributions, such transactions comprise the bulk of the relationships among leaders and followers”. Burns noted that, while a transformational political leader also recognizes that potential followers have needs, he or she goes further, seeking to satisfy own higher needs in terms of Maslow’s (1954) hierarchy of needs, and to engage the full potential of the follower. This concept reflects some form of respect for the human factor. When higher level needs are authentic, effective leadership occurs. It is in this view that leaders exchange promises of rewards and benefits to subordinates for the subordinate’s fulfilment of agreements with the

leader. Drawing on Burns’ theoretical ideas, Bass (1985) developed a model of transformational leadership, which conceptualized transactional and transformational forms as separate but interdependent dimensions.

Kark observed that developments in leadership theory have shifted interest from earlier theories of charismatic leadership that viewed the leader as extraordinary and followers as dependent on the leader to neo-charismatic theories and transformational leadership theory which is one of those concerned with the development and empowerment of followers to function independently and effectively. The transformational leadership theory has four components that makes it more applicable and flexible for use by both female and male leaders. According to Bass (1985), the four components are the Idealized influence, Inspirational Motivation, Intellectual Stimulation and Individualized Consideration. These are the key components to leaders operating from a transformational stance. To further unpack these concepts, flexibility emerges in terms of how and what women and men decide to focus on. For instance, creativity features in all the four components. Within the transformational leadership framework followers are challenged to be part of the organization by engaging them for instance, in school activities and shared decision-making. This kind of approach gives them hope and trust to take ownership of the organizational undertakings without coercion. The process empowers followers to gain confidence and self-esteem thus the four components noted above are a resource which is cyclic in nature. A resource is a means of support which comes in the form of networks and through mentoring. By paying special attention to followers’ needs, transformational leaders empower their subordinates as they display individualized consideration among their people. Mentoring, reciprocity of dialogue, creativity and meeting followers’ needs, which are elements within the transformational theory featured in Hurty’s (1995) and Fennells’ (2002) studies on women. How the study was conducted is discussed next.

METHODOLOGY

The research was qualitative in nature and conducted along the lines of a phenomenological-interpretive approach. The women principals’

views, experiences, hopes and fears were documented using in-depth interviews. This paper draws its material from three principals who are part of a larger study in KwaZulu-Natal (KZN) Province involving 25 women principals. Purposive sampling was used to locate the initial principal who then identified the next participant. Like a ball rolling, the sample grew, hence 'snowball' was the key sampling technique. The semi-structured interviews emerged as a conversational dialogical technique. Data analysis was an ongoing process starting with transcript analysis, obtaining a sense of the whole, identifying meaning units, emerging themes and integrating descriptions of women's experiences. For phenomenological validity, both methodological and experiential concerns are important. The study reflected unique features of phenomenology. Grant (2005: 187) in her study also acknowledged the uniqueness of the approach because of its focus on the individual's unique interpretations of her lived world. The women in this particular study expressed themselves in terms of how they achieved their goals. Thus in other words, the women principals described how they performed their leadership roles. A phenomenological perspective offers ways of understanding not offered by other orientations (Campbell 2004: 5). Although phenomenological theory ignores the issue of power and emancipation, it is however not unusual that where there are disadvantages, advantages also feature. Van Rensburg (2001: 26) observed that the empowering ideal of critical research can be approached in naïve ways, and can ironically perpetuate unequal power relationships, as researchers facilitate others' empowerment against a mutual understanding. Phenomenology does not per se have a critical dimension, that is, it does not seek to emancipate or empower the research participants or the wider professional community. However, the enquiry has the potential to unveil power relations that are normally concealed. In order to maintain anonymity, the three principals cited in this paper are referred to as Mary, Martha and Maggie as their pseudonyms.

RESULTS

Three Cases of Women Principals in KwaZulu-Natal

The information the researcher got from interviewing research participants was rich and

reflected varied issues and experiences. For the sake of this paper the researchers will focus on those stories the women felt were the key to their success in schools. As reflected in the introduction, women principals perceived power as a resource. Each of the three women in this study indicated that she had a vision for the school that she was leading. The vision for all the women was to improve their schools in one way or another, however, it was a challenge for some principals. They indicated that at their initial entry into the position of head, it was difficult to know where to start and how to move forward, since some of them received resistance from those who were acting before their substantive appointments. Others were deployed in poverty stricken environments with lots of challenges and no resources.

Without them mentioning their personal qualities but describing how they made progress, one could identify "personal qualities that help" them "to cope in a difficult situation" (Soanes and Hawker 2006: 876). Networks were seen as critical by women principals. The women principals' emphasis on networking suggests that their social networks had become forms of capital which they used as a resource.

Mary

The first principal Mary began her story of becoming a principal and what challenges she experienced by saying:

"We were at the same school, the acting male applied but I got the job. Adverts went into the bulletin...you could apply to any number of schools. I applied to fifteen schools...I got on thirteen schools...I had casual tension. Only two females were shortlisted. I felt, it has to be fair... I believed heading this school would need a male."

The last comment from this principal reminded the researcher of Parsaloi and Steyn's (2012) study on women primary school principals' experiences in Kenya suggesting that women at times do not see themselves as leaders. The researcher however argues that sometimes it is a result of the unsupportive environments they pass through that leave them without confidence.

Mary went further to say:

"When I got the job, the acting male head shouted at me. The male H.O.D refused to talk

to me. He stayed away for three weeks...was feeling sick.”

For those senior women who became the pioneers to the position of educational leadership indeed some faced great resistance. It took courage for this particular woman to take up the position as she continued her story,

“I had time to think about it. Teachers encouraged me but there were no handover notes to take over. Fortunately, he too was promoted to another school.”

The first thing that Mary wanted to do was introduce sports at the school. She could not do that without involving the teachers. She explains thus,

“As a principal I had meetings with my teachers, but first I tried to work with the senior management team (S.M.T.). At this school there were no sports, no extracurriculum.”

For Mary, the senior management team is a very important group to work with if one has to make progress at school. She also felt that for a principal to be powerful, she/he needs to be working together with her/his team. What she believed in was that the team only needs support for them to be confident with whatever they are doing. Focusing on the transformational theory, leaders operating from this stance change follower’s attitudes, values and beliefs to align them with those of the organization, influencing them to develop themselves further and achieve greater than the expected accomplishments (Bass in Charbonneau, 2004). Thus the female leaders have come to symbolize new forms of leadership “that connotes greater effectiveness and synergy” than the traditional past (Ageze 2010: 701). Such leaders use idealized influence when they appeal to subordinates. The women leaders in this particular study gained respect and trust of their colleagues and followers through the use of intellectual stimulation and by encouraging them to be innovative.

Further to her comment on working with the SMTs the principal added:

“I value people’s ideas. I encourage new initiatives. If they don’t work we try something else.”

Mary’s comment shows that she perceived leadership as learning together and constructing meaning and knowledge collectively. This involves social relations. From the comment it is possible to conclude that the principal shows her ability to create an atmosphere that gives

space for others to try out new initiatives, if any. Balasubramanian and Krishnan (2012) observed that leadership is the ability to influence and motivate others. The women principals from which this paper draws from enabled other teachers to contribute towards the effectiveness and success of the school. They empowered them to be confident to participate in the school’s activities.

The first principal Mary believed that in order for teachers to perform well, they need certain skills as she indicated that:

“Much of the supervision of teachers is done by the H.O.D. who also provide staff development programs for them. Staff development of teachers is however, done depending on what the needs are.”

She highlighted that one of the programs developed was on managing discipline as she notes: *“We have a staff development workshop called ‘life’. It educates our teachers coping with challenges. Our deputy who has attended a course assists us.”*

One way of empowering teachers is to equip them with relevant skills. Staff development is a form of support for individual teachers. Although it is done collectively it provides intellectual stimulation that promotes desired practices (Leithwood and Day 2007). Hence, the women educational leaders though they did not mention that this is how they use power, how they described their approach to leadership was unique and reflected that element of power as a resource. Mary acknowledged that she was not inducted as a principal but used to network with other principals. She also believed that parents are important even those from poor backgrounds. Her comment was, *“I am a person that does not discriminate, every child is my child. My approach has always been respect.”* She related her way of doing things to how she was raised up in her family as she notes,

“I do things the way I was brought up, respect the elderly, respect parents, they get all my attention. I have a good relationship with parents...talk to them about the importance of their children.”

This is where Muzvidziwa and Muzvidziwa’s observation of *Ubuntu*, noted in the previous section comes in. Women earned respect by humbling themselves and according dignity and humility to their juniors and others, including parents. The approach the women used is in line

with the transformational leadership style that stimulates followers to change their beliefs and values. Mary's comment reminded the researcher of Sinclair's (2012: 15) argument referring to Australian women's leadership, noting that it is not just about "adding women in but shifting public images and imagination about what good leadership is." Sinclair's argument suggests a shift from focusing on what is perceived as, to what the practices are. The women leaders were highlighting their practical experiences of how they run their schools.

This first principal, Mary experienced that children can only learn when they are understood, when their needs are met. It also shows how important the concept of Maslow's hierarchy of needs is, and how it seems to be observed by women in a unique way. This is reflected in her other comment on handling challenges when she said:

"You cannot run a school like a business, look at mentors, grandparents heading the family, you are like a mother...to see that teachers are catering for the needs of students. For example, you can't just say to a child why have you not done this homework, you need to know the background". She gave an example of how she handled another case as her story goes,

"One child started crying after I asked her...she said I don't want to go home because my mom is so sick with HIV...I called the granny...I talked to the teacher and told them to be more sympathetic."

The issue of empowerment is not just about sending teachers on workshops and staff development courses, it is also about giving emotional support and encouragement. It is about social development and social relations. An act of not just caring is reflected in this scenario not just multiple roles. Mary was both, a mentor and a counselor. This woman principal's approach to power, demonstrates someone who has individualized consideration through her concern and care for the followers and the community. Bourdieu's notion of social capital is reflected in this woman principal's behavior in addressing school issues. Ralph and Walker (2013: 76) in their article "Adaptive Mentoring" discussed formal types of mentoring which are seen as a "developmental process by which an individual with more knowledge and skill in a field (that is, the mentor) assists a person with less knowledge and skill". However the type of mentoring

that was happening within this context of the principal and her teachers and parents and/or community was in a way informal. The principal was a resource person in terms of Soanes and Hawker's definition stated earlier. She saw herself as achieving the school goals due to a number of factors done collectively. Most of the women principals interviewed were happy with the achievements they had made in their schools.

Martha

Moving on to the second woman principal Martha who started by saying,

"It's not easy to be promoted where you have been teaching. There is resistance, people don't trust you...and are jealous."

What it shows is that resistance was one of the challenges women encountered but managed to handle it. For Martha, gender did not seem to be a factor contributing to anything since out of the 19 teachers, only one was male. It seemed to be a cultural thing and the societal attitudes of being used to seeing male leaders. This principal was keen to talk about the successes that she felt she achieved since she gained the position of power. She described how she was motivated to improve her own school. Martha said:

"I visited a school in Scottsville and admired it. My vision is that every teacher should come to school prepared...with teaching aids."

She did not say exactly what she admired but she said her first project was to build a shelter for pupils and to fence the school so that students are kept indoors. This school was at the centre of one of the locations and her comment was *"fencing the school is required so that students are kept indoors to avoid students to buy any unhealthy things."*

Martha's concern was regarding the wellbeing of pupils as a starting point. The children's wellbeing must be considered first and their learning can then be improved. However, the way it was done is quite creative. A sign of caring is reflected in the comment. As the dialogue proceeded, this second principal went further to describe how supportive the parents were and how she managed to motivate them to be part of the school. Involvement of parents and the community was of great importance to her. She found communication being very useful as she introduced newsletters. She also acknowledged the importance of the program introduced by the

Ministry of Education that she adopted for her school and she notes,

“Adult Basic Education Training...most schools don't want ABET to come to their schools. I promise you, ABET helps a lot. Now parents are able to help their children with homework. There is progress.”

That knowledge is power is sometimes taken as just a saying, yet from this story it really is, in addition it shows that power is a resource. Without the basic minimum knowledge that the parents got from the above mentioned training program, the parents did not have the energy or power to encourage their children. Or even if they had, they could have easily been cheated with kids.

“I remember one day my own child when she was still at the grade two level. She said to me when I was driving her home, Mummy, I have finished my homework, then I responded, when did you do it? She indicated, I have just been doing it now when you were driving. When I asked her what the homework was about, she said reading. I said to her, but I didn't hear you read. I need to listen to you while you read. Imagine if I had no idea of how to monitor or assist with homework, I would have just signed that she did her homework.”

How women principals used their power to make progress is in line with the transformational leadership theory, which is concerned with the development and empowerment of followers to function independently and effectively. Women educational leaders empowered their communities in a very special way. Empowerment is about giving someone confidence. Parents became confident enough to assist their children after receiving just a minimum amount of knowledge. As parents, even without knowing the answers, they were motivated to monitor their child doing homework. From a transformational perspective, leaders mentor and empower their subordinates encouraging them to develop their potentials and thus contribute more effectively to their organizations (Eagly 2007). Such a characteristic is also featured more in women than men.

Martha was happy with how she works with the teachers at her school. With the assistance of other teachers, she felt the school is making progress. Power as a resource feature throughout the women principal's practices. One of her achievements is that she managed to start a pre-

school class which they call grade R as Martha the second principal expresses,

“There is a difference between a child who starts from home and the one who starts from school.”

Discipline was highlighted as a challenge. And this is how she puts it,

“I am not happy about discipline at this school because, maybe, other parents have passed away and the pupils are staying with other people...and even concentration is not very good.”

She acknowledges that the senior management team assists her a lot with mentoring and they have since reduced the problem of discipline. Another achievement mentioned was that of senior students who studied at the school and have been through colleges and universities who then come back as promoters of their school showing, gratitude and she concluded,

“I used to go out for donations...old students are now part of the community helping. So many people passed through this school even my son is now an engineer, they come and give support.”

She also sends her teachers for workshops to improve their skills. This second principal described how she networks and interacts with different organizations for funding.

Maggie

The third principal Maggie did not imagine herself in the teaching field when she was growing up as she said this:

“Teaching was not my first choice...I wanted to do social work because I wanted to help people.”

She did all her foundation phase education, from preschool to junior school, at the school where she became the principal. She was appointed acting to that position after she obtained a bachelor of education degree. She indicated that at that time, they used to decide who to take up the acting position. Her appointment was after the previous principal retired who also was a woman. When the post was advertised she got encouragement from other staff members to apply and she was successful. Her vision was to be the best school in the country.

How she would do it was another story. Her approach to leadership was as follows,

“I call parents according to grades. They should know what we do, the only challenge is

that most parents are unemployed and children do not pay fees. Parents are poor, (pause) and in their homes, there's lots of sickness, (pause) HIV and AIDS."

The school, community and parents interaction was one of the major challenges raised, which as a principal she was working on to make sure the learning of the pupils is not compromised. An aspect of caring is also reflected. She introduced a pastoral care committee with five teachers who identify orphans and children with special needs. She launched an 'Adopted Children Scheme'. This was a deliberate plan for wealthier people to assist the poor children by paying fees or supporting the child in some way while he or she stays at his or her home. However, the school would register that the child is adopted by Mr X or Y and all the support goes through the school committee to the child. The mentioned form of initiative started when the principal saw the level of poverty that was prevalent within that community. She felt that no effective teaching and learning could take place in such an environment as she elaborated,

"There was a lot of vandalism, I called the community and parents and talked to them about my vision. Everyone was happy. Even with educators, if you are working with people, you don't just shout. I call the teacher and talk to him or her politely and generally s/he would thank me when going out of the office. I talk to them separately and at times as a group. Communication is very important."

To draw her back to how she managed the Adopted Children Scheme Maggie paused and said,

"I invited big people to a prize-giving ceremony for this school—business people, managers, shop owners and education officers as special guests. After the celebration I held a meeting wherein I drew their attention to the situation of the school and my vision for the school. I made the suggestion that one person can sacrifice to adopt a child, but not the real adoption of taking him or her home. This worked. Now I am actually calling neighboring schools on our prize-giving days to see what we do because we have managed and achieved great successes".

DISCUSSION

From all that was described by the women leaders, what emerged was that power was seen

as a resource that could be shared, developed and expanded. Hence the discussion of this paper is guided by three themes which start with building a network of influence, empowerment of followers and subordinates, and finally development of the school. These were emerging themes in which women primary school leaders perceived power as a form of resource that assisted them to make things happen.

Building a Network of Influence

As mentioned early in this paper by Bogotch (2014) in relation to leadership and the importance of reciprocity, the women leaders communicated and networked with other school principals. These principals seldom gave orders but encouraged participation of followers. One of the issues mentioned by the women was the challenge of resistance to women leadership and lack of induction or mentoring at their initial entry into leadership positions. Resistance to women leadership was not just from one group—the males, but even some women had this negative perception about being headed by another woman. When analyzing the women's responses with regards to resistance, one can conclude that a moral obligation of *Ubuntu* as suggested by Muzvidziwa and Muzvidziwa (2012) was lacking from these particular schools. The term 'follower' in this paper is used to mean any member within the school who is not part of the senior management team (SMT) including parents and the community. The women in their descriptions of dealing with resistance, acknowledged that they had to 'work with the paper' meaning, the policy documents. However, creativity in adapting to 'these papers' was emphasized. From these women, what was perceived as challenges turned out to be a gateway to other levels of breakthroughs, as the women had to work hard resulting in making links with other schools where women leaders demonstrated that they were capable of leading.

As suggested earlier by Sinclair (2012) and Robertson (2008), women educational leaders tend to be interactive in their approach, the women in this study extended the level of interaction from communicating within the school to networking across and among schools. The sharing of information by women educational leaders created for them a pool of resources from which they could draw. It was through these

social interactions, that they discovered the different talents in each one of them. Sometimes encouragement is not by word of mouth but by learning that its not you alone experiencing certain challenges. The “connectedness of actors in networks” (Merin et al. 2012) and the type of information and knowledge shared provides potential access to key resources and social capital that others might not have but need. In the case of these women, their experiences were varied because of the different locations of their schools. However, the uniqueness of those experiences broadened their resource base in terms of the information gained, since challenges encountered and how these were addressed became a learning experience for others in the group. The principals held meetings and planned workshops for both themselves and their colleagues, where necessary. From their approach it shows that women shared power in terms of sharing knowledge, to gain more knowledge. The way the women principals improved the situations in their schools and how they interacted with their communities earned them respect. In a way, they used their positions to improve their pupils’ situations and encouraged others not to think of themselves only but raise their communities and consider others in need. They developed in other people, a spirit of caring and responsibility. Creatively they transformed their communities in a special way.

Even at the school level, the women primary school principals developed networks that became a source of their power which they in turn used to empower both their staff and the community. One of the principals organized meetings with parents according to their children’s grade. It was a way of getting to know parents at a more personal level within a smaller group. This gave the principal an opportunity to listen to specific challenges faced by pupils of different levels, thereby argumenting Bass’ (1985) concept of individualized consideration within the transformational theory. On the other hand, the parents had the opportunity to pose questions of relevance to their children within a specific grade and in the process, a certain level of understanding was developed, trust and respect was also inculcated.

Empowerment of Followers

What empowers followers is not dictating to them what to do, but lending them an ear gives

hope and self-esteem, a feeling that they are respected boosts their morale and motivates them to participate more. Women’s approaches were less authoritative but the effects were positive and empowering both to the community and staff. Sinclair (2012: 15) saw leadership as practices that are distributed to others. When challenges arise at the individual level, like in the case of a child who started crying when the head wanted to know why the homework was not complete, having discovered the pupil’s challenge, the principal found it easy to call both parties, the teacher and the grandparent. The foundation had already been laid through day-to-day interactions, the relationship between the school and the parent already existed through such meetings as described above. This is where the notion of transformational theory intersects with the women’s approaches as leaders, from this stance we see the creation of a supportive work environment, stressing self-worthiness of followers (Wang and Lee 2009). Where there is a network, there is a consistent flow of information. People draw strengths from one another. If there is any project that needs to be completed, development is likely to succeed as noted by the women. This discussion touches on the notion of theory that moves away from the traditional past to the one that empowers followers, bringing the community together and learning together (Muzvidziwa 2014). The women principals in the study had a desire to develop the school as well as the community.

Developing the School

Wanting to develop the school emerged as one of the aims for most of the women principals. They wanted to develop their schools in different ways. For instance, the principal who indicated that she wanted to have the best school, meant she had to do a lot in order to produce the best. One of them wanted to build a shelter for students (for example, when at assembly). Another one wanted a fence for the school and yet another wanted to introduce sports. In order to do that they said they had to work with their colleagues, some of whom needed training, workshops and other forms of empowerment to be able to do the work. From their descriptions and their experience they had to motivate their followers to see the relevance of what they wanted to do. As suggested by Posa-

mentier and Krulik (2012) regarding teachers and students in class, it has become clear from the women principals that best leaders motivate their followers by raising their interests to higher levels. Their participation was by nurturing them.

CONCLUSION

The women described how they managed their schools to develop from extremes of poverty to being recognized in terms of performance and achievement of learners. Their interactional patterns and networks linked them with their communities, business people and donors who assisted them to support their schools and children. They talked of the projects they introduced, which gained popularity because of the way they were being operated, for instance, the Adopt a Child Scheme. Some of such projects were significant to women as caring mothers rather than just ordinary principals leading by way of traditional approaches. The women felt that their success was through networking and from these networks they gained information that they used to make and empower their own school communities. Learning together and sharing provided them with strength and they used that as the source of their power and success.

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