

Leadership practices of principals of successful primary schools

by

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ABSTRACT

21st century schools have great expectations of generating individuals with refined knowledge, skills and values to make a positive impact on human existence. Paradoxically, the report of the Annual National Assessments paints a bleak picture of the quality of learner attainment in South African primary schools where basic skills in communication, problem solving and analytical thinking should take root. Fortunately, however, sporadic pockets of successful schools do exist. There appears to be an inextricable link between leadership and learner outputs, and learner attainment seems to fall squarely on the shoulders of the school principal. The purpose of this study was to investigate and unravel the leadership practices of principals of successful public primary school as they led in accountability- and standards-driven environments. The framework that guided this study was the four core leadership practices: setting direction; developing people; aligning the organisation for success; and leading and managing the instructional programme.

Valuable insights and a rich understanding of how successful primary school principals create, nurture and sustain the conditions and processes necessary for high levels of learner attainment and instructional improvement were generated via an inductive, qualitative study. Three successful schools in the Uthukela district of KwaZulu-Natal formed the purposive sample and data was gathered from each principal via direct interviews. Two focus group interviews and participant observation triangulated the data.

The findings revealed that in setting the direction for their school, principals focused on aligning and motivating their people towards a common vision that strongly correlated to personal aspirations. Principals engaged their staff in continuous professional development and were particular about the working milieus of teachers. They ensured that relationships were characterised by open communication, collaboration, democratic decision making and trust. Leadership was distributed and instruction was effectively led by principals working in close consultation with their management team. Due to extensive monitoring and evaluation, the status quo was often challenged and the curriculum adapted. The successful school principals adopted an inside-out approach to their leadership practices, and they resorted to match-fit and hierarchical breakdown.

The study recommends that all principals should align their personal vision with the organisational vision, teach human resource management to all line managers, and establish and foster professional learning communities.

KEY WORDS:

Leadership

Leadership practices

Principals

Successful schools

Learner attainment

Instructional excellence

DECLARATION

I, Bishum Dasarathlal Parag (student number 11312476), declare that:

“Leadership practices of principals of successful primary schools” has not been submitted by me before at any other university. It is my original work and I have acknowledged all the sources consulted and quoted in the bibliography.

Signed: Date:

B D Parag

DECLARATION FROM EDITOR

I herewith declare that I,

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**Please note that no responsibility can be taken for the veracity of statements or arguments in the document concerned or for changes made subsequent to the completion of language editing.*

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ACRONYMS

AFL	Assessment for Learning
AGM	Annual General Meeting
ANA	Annual National Assessment
AST	Advanced Skills Teachers
B. Mus.	Bachelor of Music
BA	Bachelor of Arts
CAPS	Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statements
CCSSO	Council of Chief State School Officers
CDE	Centre for Development and Enterprise
CPTD	Continuing Professional teacher Development
DOE	Department of Education
EMIS	Education Management Information System
FAL	First Additional Language
FET	Further Education and Training
FEDSAS	Federation of Governing Bodies of South African Schools
GET	General Education and Training
HDE	Higher Diploma in Education
HEI	Higher Education Institutes
HODs	Heads of Departments
ICT	Information and Communication Technology
IMPACT	The Impact of School Leadership on Pupil Outcomes

INSET	In-service Education and Training
IQMS	Integrated Quality Management Systems
ISLLC	Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium
LOLT	Language of Learning and Teaching
LSEN	Learners with Special Educational Needs
LSTD	Lower Secondary Teaching Diploma
LTSMs	Learning and Teaching Support Materials
M+4	Matric plus four years of teacher training
NAPTOSA	National Professional Teachers Association of South Africa
NCLB	No Child Left Behind
NCS	National Curriculum Statement
NCSL	English National College for School Leadership
NEEDU	National Education Evaluation and Development Unit
NPFTED	National Professional Framework on Teacher Education and Development
NSC	National Senior Certificate
OBE	Outcomes Based Education
OSD	Occupational Specific Dispensation
PD	Professional Development
PL1	Post Level One Educators
PLC	Professional Learning Community
PTA	Parent Teacher Association
RCM	Resource Centre Management

RNCS	Revised National Curriculum Statement
RSA	Republic of South Africa
SACE	South African Council of Educators
SADTU	South African Democratic Teachers Association
SAOU	Suid-Afrikaanse Onderwysersunie
SASSL	South African Standard for School Leadership
SGB	School Governing Body
SMTs	School Management Teams
TLR	Teaching and Learning Responsibility
UNISA	University of South Africa
USA	United States of America
WSE	Whole School Evaluation

CHAPTER 1: OVERVIEW OF STUDY

1.1 ALARM BELLS...!

There is not a single documented case of a school successfully turning around its pupil achievement trajectory in the absence of talented leadership (Leithwood, Day, Sammons, Harris & Hopkins, 2006:14-15)

Why would anyone want the job of principal? Many school principals we know have the look these days of the proverbial deer caught in the headlights. Almost overnight, it seems, they have been caught in the high beams of the burgeoning accountability movement (Tucker & Coddling, 2002:1)

The above statements confirm the pivotal and daunting role school leaders are expected to embrace in an attempt to create, sustain, innovate and effectively and efficiently operate decentralised institutions that resonate excellence in teaching, learning and assessment in challenging accountability and standards-based environments. The human potential is the greatest asset that any country possesses. Unearthing and nurturing this potential to its optimum is therefore critical and schools are the primary agency tasked with this vital function. The burning question is: To what extent are South African schools meeting these expectations?

The South African Schools Act, Act 84 of 1996, has chartered a way for a democratic approach to education (Bloch, 2009:124; Motala & Dieltens, 2011:1) and efforts have been implemented to promote a culture of teaching and learning in schools, to redeploy and rationalise staff and to reform the curriculum through the implementation of Outcomes-Based Education (OBE) (Ngcobo & Tikly, 2008:1). Structures and processes have hence been engineered to propel schools towards attaining excellence, but sadly the present quality of public schooling in South Africa leaves much to be desired (Fleish, 2008:1; Monare, 2010 cited in Letseka, Bantwini & King-McKenzie, 2012:1197).

There is a perception that South African schools are plagued by ineffective and inefficient management and leadership practices (Spillane, Hunt & Healy, 2009:17; McCarthy & de Villiers, 2011:2; Mathibe, 2007:523; Harris, 2004:11; SAIRR, 2008, Mestry & Grobler, 2002:27). The past Education Minister Naledi Pandor aptly summarised the state of leadership in schools as follows:

“We have a school leadership that cannot analyse, cannot problem-solve, cannot devise strategic interventions and plans, and cannot formulate perspectives that are directed at achieving success” (Business Day, 30 November 2004). This indeed is a serious indictment on the caliber of leadership in our schools and necessitates new thinking in educational leadership development and management arenas. The Minister’s concern is strongly aligned with the views of Jones and George (2003:98) who contemplate leaders setting the values, norms and standards for behaviour and having the ability to communicate the expectations that influence the manner in which people interact with one another and collaborate to achieve organisational goals. The extant literature abundantly refers to the inextricable link between principal leadership and school improvement (Fullan, 1993; Sammons, Hillman & Mortimore, 1995; Hallinger & Heck, 1996; MacBeath, Oduro & Waterhouse, 2004; Leithwood & Rhiel, 2003; Hargreaves & Fink, 2006).

Despite this dreary backdrop, however, there exist those schools that continuously produce excellent learner outputs by engaging in quality instruction. These are the schools that are referred to as being successful and it is in this domain that I conduct my research. It is important to acknowledge that school leaders as the primary custodians of the educational enterprise have inherent in them the potential to unleash human excellence in every learner that passes through their sacred institutions.

1.2 BACKGROUND AND ORIENTATION

21st century principals are under enormous pressure to strive for improvement in what they do. Amongst a plethora of core roles and responsibilities, Shield (2004) in Gupton (2010:109) projects that school leaders are “expected to develop learning communities, build the professional capacity of teachers, take advice from parents, engage in collaborative and consultative decision making, resolve conflicts, engage in educative instructional leadership, and attend respectfully, immediately, and appropriately to the needs and requests of families with diverse cultural, ethnic, and socioeconomic backgrounds”. It is abundantly clear that the roles and responsibilities of the school leader are multidimensional and leading schools is a complex, delicate business. I therefore concur with Grant (2006:514) when she avers that “schools can no longer be led by a lone figure at the top of the hierarchy”.

On 5 December 2013 the Minister of Basic Education (DBE) Angie Motshekga revealed the results of the September 2013 Annual National Assessments (ANA). In excess of seven

million learners from Grade 1 to Grade 6 and Grade 9 wrote tests in Literacy/Language and Numeracy/Mathematics. The national learner attainment for Mathematics and First Additional Language (FAL) is captured in the tables below:

Table 1.1: Summary table: Maths 2012 and 2013

GRADE	MATHS 2012 (%)	MATHS 2013 (%)
1	68	60
2	57	59
3	41	53
4	37	37
5	30	33
6	27	39
9	13	14

Source: DBE (2013:3)

Table 1.2: Summary table: First Additional Language 2012 and 2013

GRADE	FAL 2012 (%)	FAL 2013 (%)
4	34	39
5	30	37
6	36	46
9	35	33

Source: DBE (2013:4)

An analysis of the maths results indicates a decline in performance that deteriorates drastically from the Grade 4 level onwards, as the national average drops below 50% and reaches an unmitigated low at the Grade 9 level (13% in 2012 and 14% in 2013).

A similar trend is observed in the First Additional Language results. What is disturbing though is the reality that the First Additional Language is the language of learning and teaching (LOLT). Here again the Grade 9 attainment of 35% in 2012 and 33% in 2013 simply paints a dismal picture. What needs to be acknowledged is that the Grade 9 level indicates an exit into the final phase of schooling that is commonly referred to as the FET band, which culminates in the National Senior Certificate. Grades 1 to 9 therefore represent foundation years and one shudders at the thought of basics not being grasped or inculcated during these years. What is petrifying though is the percentage of learners who achieved at least 50% in Maths and First Additional Language at the Grade 3, 6 and 9 levels, where the results had been verified by an external agent. Only 2% of learners in Grade 9 were able to score 50% and above in Maths in two consecutive years and only 17% achieved likewise in FAL in 2013 (see Table 1.3 below). Furthermore, the decline of achievement from Grade 3 to Grade 9 is gargantuan. The alarm bells should be deafening!

Table 1.3: Summary table: Percentage of learners achieving at least 50% of the total marks

GRADE	MATHS (2012) (%)	FAL (2012) (%)	MATHS (2013) (%)	FAL (2013) (%)
3	36	-	59	-
6	11	24	27	41
9	2	21	2	17

Source: DBE (2013:4)

These recent learner attainment statistics seriously question the state of affairs in South African primary schools. Bearing in mind the intricate link between learner attainment and leadership alluded to earlier, one cannot help but reflect on the quality of leadership practices of school principals. The entire ANA process has ushered in a new era of accountability and standards, and primary school principals need to take responsibility for the quality of learner attainment.

In addressing a South African Democratic Teacher's Union congress in East London, Zwelinzima Vavi, General Secretary of Cosatu highlighted the ineffectiveness and inefficiency of South African schools when he stated that “our education system is in a crisis.

In fact calling it a crisis is an understatement. This is a catastrophe”. Vavi further remarked that “of pupils who enrolled in Grade one in 1988, 64% dropped out before reaching matric and only just over 60% of those who wrote matric passed” (The Times, 29 September 2011). The sad reality is that there appears to be an absence of leadership strategy to retain learners and create opportunities for them to thrive.

To further exacerbate matters, South Africa continues to perform dismally in international school Maths and Science proficiency surveys (Letseka, Bantwini & King-McKenzie, 2012:1200). These are critical learning areas and are regarded as gateway subjects in educational arenas. According to the World Economic Forum’s annual report on development, South Africa is placed last amongst 62 countries on the quality of maths and science education (Child, 2012:2). Something is seriously amiss with the South African education system and this places our nation at risk.

The bleak learner attainment emphasises the need for school leaders to seek alternatives; different approaches and new strategies for transforming schools and school systems. According to Harris (in Bush, Bell & Middlewood, 2010:65) “in the struggle to transform educational systems, one thing is abundantly clear – we need new organisational forms and new approaches to leadership if we are to succeed”. Senge, Scharmer, Jawroski and Flowers (2005:12) corroborate this by declaring that “in a world of global networks, we face issues for which ‘top down’ leadership is inherently inadequate”. School leaders are ultimately accountable for the quality of learner performance and instructional improvement and the relevancy of their current practices is much in vogue. Perhaps there is logic in the following utterances of Trani and Irvine (2010:1): “Much of what you know or were taught about education is wrong, and it gets in the way of creating excellent schools.” They further elucidate that whilst the “current configuration of schools and the education system is the product of good intentions and thought, there is as much myth, obfuscation and wrong thinking as there is good design and planning” (ibid).

Sporadically amidst this apparent mayhem, there are what Christie, Butler and Potterton (2007:1) refer to as “schools that work”. These are the schools that have “achieved better than the norm but [...] not necessarily [...] excellent schools”. In defining “schools that work”, Christie et al. (2007:9) remark that these schools may achieve successful results through “rote learning and ‘drilling’ of a relatively narrow set of work, or through critical and creative thinking in exposure to powerful knowledge”.

1.3 THE PROBLEM

Two decades into a democracy and South Africa still has an education system that is struggling to produce quality learner outputs or results that are relevant to the global context in which we exist. If the Grade 12 (National Senior Certificate) results and the Annual National Assessments are reliable, one may be forgiven for questioning the existence (validity) of schools. These learner attainment statistics suggest that the quality of learner outcomes and instructional improvement appear to be diminishing as learners progress through the various grades. This is particularly evident in Mathematics, a learning area that is perceived to stimulate creativity and innovativeness. Data from the 2012 /2013 Annual National Assessments for Mathematics in successive grades (see Table 1.1) reveals that the longer a child stays in school, the less maths he/she will know. This is a serious indictment on the state of learning and teaching in our primary schools. The fundamental and unique purpose of any school is to promote learning and thereby to unearth the dormant potential within each and every learner. Learning is the most important part of schooling (Harris, 2004:12) and this sentiment is reinforced by Christie (2005:4) when she avers that learning is the central purpose of schooling. Reflecting on the current learner attainment landscape in South Africa, it may be argued that not many schools are achieving this objective – hence the scramble by the powers that be to implement schooling transformation and reform strategies.

The recent release of findings by the National Education Evaluation and Development Unit (NEEDU) in the Department of Basic Education indicates that learners in the formative years of schooling are not given adequate instruction to promote reading, thinking and problem solving. The report also indicated that many teachers themselves fail to evaluate, analyse or solve problems and do not know how to inculcate problem-solving and analytical skills (The Times, 6 May 2013). This is indeed cause for grave concern, considering the critical nature of the foundation years of learning. The age-old adage of ‘catching them young’ is indeed being recklessly flouted.

According to McCarthy and de Villiers (2011:3) there is an absence of proactive strategies with regard to the crisis in South African education. They maintain that the quality of teaching and teachers is fundamental to learner performance and that principals are the crucial link in inspiring educators and embedding cultures of learning and teaching. School leaders hence need to pay careful attention to both the certification and the associated

competence of teachers. Certification on its own is inherently inadequate – it is classroom practice that really matters.

The practices of principals as instructional leaders are hence perceived as a critical variable in the quest for high learner achievement. Spillane, Halverson and Diamond (2004:3) advocate that whilst changes in the organisational and leadership structures are key to creativity, what matters most is the practice of leadership. Knowledge of effective leadership practice is therefore bound to turn around failing educational systems. Ironically, the practice of school leadership has received minimal attention in the local literature (Bush, Glover, Bischoff, Moloi, Heystek & Joubert, 2006:11). Conceptualising the school as the functional unit of the education system, a rigorous analysis of the practices of school principals is of paramount significance in improving learner attainment.

A vast number of South African primary schools appear to be mired by poor performance and inadequate outcomes of schooling. This may be attributed to what has been described as the absence of a culture of teaching and learning (Bush & Glover, 2009). “The virtual collapse of the culture of teaching and learning in many urban and rural schools” has been corroborated by McLennan and Thurlow (2003:5) and they argue that the “confidence of education managers has been eroded”.

If school principals are worthy of being front-line managers, small business executives or battlefield commanders charged with leading their team to new levels of effectiveness (as conceptualised by Hess and Kelly (2005:2)), principals need to exude certain relevant leadership capacities, competencies and values. Are our principals competent enough? Do they have the expertise, capacity, disposition, values and mind-set to continuously and effectively execute innovative practices in managing and leading schools as professional learning communities?

Acknowledging the conceptualisation that high performing schools cannot exist in the absence of talented leadership (Leithwood et al., 2006:14) and that leadership is second only to classroom instruction (Leithwood, Louis, Anderson & Wahlstrom, 2004:5), it may be argued that principals need to continually improve, innovate and implement vital skills, knowledge and values to create and sustain high levels of learner attainment and instructional improvement. According to the Wallace Foundation Report (2012:2) on the school principal as a leader, research in education indicates that most school variables considered in isolation have insignificant effects on learning. However, the full effect manifests when individual

variables combine to reach a critical mass. The report further contends that creating the conditions under which that can occur is the role and responsibility of the principal. Principals therefore need effective leadership skills and knowledge to coordinate and integrate the various initiatives designed for learner success.

School leaders hence appear to be the pivot around which either excellence, mediocrity or dysfunctionality rotates. Far too many of our schools are mired in mediocrity, or worse still, spiral into the pits of dysfunctionality. There is a drastic need for principals to audit the nature and quality of their current leadership and management practices and to innovate these to align themselves with 21st century expectations. Leithwood, Louis, Anderson and Wahlstrom (2004:5) accentuate the value of school leadership. They suggest that school leadership influences learning by up to 25% and that this influence is second only to teaching (among the factors affecting learning). Furthermore, the impact of school leadership is greatest in schools where learner needs are most desperate (Leithwood et al., 2004:5). This reinforces the notion that principals are instructional leaders with the propensity to continually enhance classroom practice. According to Bush and Heystek (2006:68), South African principals do not conceptualise their role in this way, but appear to be more preoccupied with other issues than with the management of teaching and learning, which is core. This paradigm needs to change if school and learner outcomes are to be enhanced.

1.4 RATIONALE

Indeed – all is not doom and gloom. Amidst these negative perceptions and outcomes there exist pockets of academic excellence. Exactly what is it about leadership that impacts on disparate learner performance in primary schools within the same district? As mentioned before, it is precisely in this domain that my research endeavours to drill deep down. From my personal and professional experiences as a senior education specialist, the majority of learners transitioning from primary schools to high schools are simply not high school ready. As evidenced by the Annual National Assessment results, there are massive gaps in basic learner content knowledge, rendering their secondary school learner attainment prognosis very poor. Collective Agreement 1 of 2008: Annexure A (DoE) alludes to principals providing professional leadership that is based on curriculum management. This implies that principals are accountable for the quality of learning and teaching in schools. The leadership practices of principals are critical in producing quality learning outputs. The current study therefore endeavours to identify and investigate the leadership practices of successful primary

school principals that enable them engineer structures, constructive work environments and processes that lead to high levels of learner attainment and eradicate the myth that success is not possible in a daunting accountability-driven and standards-driven environment.

According to Spillane et al. (2004:4) “we know relatively little about the *how* of school leadership, that is knowledge of the ways in which school leaders develop and sustain those conditions and processes believed necessary for innovation”. What is abundant though, is knowledge of structures, programmes and processes that promote instructional transformation (Spillane et al., 2004:4). Leithwood et al. (2006:9) in their study of successful school leaders suggest that much of the literature on successful school leadership does not critique actual leadership practices. The research in hand therefore endeavours to generate a rich, robust understanding of how primary school leaders think, feel and act to create and sustain environments for optimal levels of learner attainment and instructional improvement. Its primary concern is to discover the effective leadership practices that positively influence learner attainment and instructional improvement. It also accords with the argument of Spillane et al. (2004:5) in that delving deep into leadership practices is tantamount to understanding leadership in organisations.

Hoadley and Ward (2008:1) concur that it is predominantly principals who create the climate for effective teaching and learning. However, there appears to be inadequate evidence of this, especially in the South African context. The authors further claim that a limited number of studies exist on South African school leadership, the majority of which concentrate on training and development and policy, rather than on actual practice (Hoadley & Ward, 2008:4). The findings by Bush and Heystek (2006:68) alluded to in 1.3 also indicate that many principals are not focused on their core which entails the leadership and management of teaching and learning. Could these variables be impacting on the learner attainment in Annual National Assessments? These claims have piqued my curiosity in quality educational leadership practices in the South African context and has prompted me to engage in a study that focuses on and unravels the leadership practices of principals of successful primary schools.

Leadership practice is not just about what leaders do, but dwells on the reason and strategies by which they lead. I therefore deem it vital to investigate the daily practices of successful primary school principals who presumably continually inspire and support their staff to engage in quality instruction that results in sustained high learner attainment. It is envisaged

that this research aspires for a clear and rich comprehension of the actual leadership practices that lead to enhanced levels of classroom practice and learner outputs. This research endeavours to expose evidence that highlights the leadership practices of successful primary school principals that distinguish them from principals in schools that struggle. The focus is on primary schools, as this is the arena where the habits of continuous learning and success are formed by both learners and teachers.

A synthesis of the deliberations in 1.2 and 1.3 clearly point to the inadequate learner attainment in primary schools and pre-empt the significance of principals as school leaders in determining and sustaining quality instruction and learner outputs. Furthermore a study located in primary schools would be a refreshing change bearing in mind that over the past decades the National Senior Certificate was used as the sole instrument to indicate learner attainment, biasing studies to secondary schools and not devoting adequate attention to the pedagogic modus and conditions that facilitate the acquisition of skills and knowledge during the critical formative years of learners. Reflecting on the practices of successful primary school principals can help other school leaders to consider challenges and focus on leadership issues that are future oriented in their quest for instructional excellence and its allied high learner attainment. This is bound to provide primary schools with a panacea to accelerate their metamorphosis/evolution from good to great.

1.5 RESEARCH AIM

The general aim of the study is to investigate and unravel the leadership practices of principals of successful public primary schools in the Uthukela district of KwaZulu-Natal, as they lead in environments that are increasingly characterised by accountability and standards.

Its purpose is to discover the themes of quality leadership practices and how these are implemented in the day-to-day instructional operations of successful primary school principals. The study, hence, would provide valuable insight into and a rich and robust understanding of how principals of successful primary schools create and sustain high levels of learner attainment and instructional improvement.

1.6 RESEARCH QUESTION

Contemplating the pockets of academic excellence that exist in turbulent accountability-and standards-driven teaching and learning environments, the primary research question may be coined as:

How do principals of successful primary schools exercise leadership practices?

An inductive exploratory study would be conducted to investigate and analyse principal leadership practices that result in instructional improvement and optimal learner attainment. To answer the main research question, the following secondary questions were explored to guide the research process:

1. What practices do principals of successful schools engage in to set direction and continuously develop their professional staff?
2. How do principals of successful schools create and nurture a constructive working milieu?
3. How do principals of successful schools implement instructional leadership practices to create and sustain high levels of learner attainment and instructional excellence?

1.7 ELUCIDATION OF CONCEPTS

It is imperative that the following key concepts that consistently feature in this research study are clarified to eliminate ambiguity and to explain the context in which they are used.

1.7.1 Leadership

Leadership, according to Yukl (2005:4), is a process of influencing others to understand and reach consensus on what needs to be done and how it can be done effectively. It also entails facilitating individual and collective efforts to realise shared objectives. The current study embraces this notion and also aligns itself with the understanding of leadership held by Leithwood et al. (2006:11) who believe that leadership is all about organisational improvement; more specifically, it concerns itself with “establishing widely agreed upon and worthwhile directions for the organisation and doing whatever it takes to prod and support people to move in those directions”. This study hence concerns itself with direction and

influence. Being an exercise of influence, leadership (unlike management) can occur within and outside formal organisations (Christie, 2010:695).

1.7.2 Leader

According to Turner (1998: 7), the word ‘leader’ comes from *lead*, implying ‘path’, ‘road’, ‘course of a ship at sea’ or ‘journey’. A leader therefore accompanies people on a journey, guiding them to their destination. It may hence be inferred that a leader unites people as a group whilst leading them in the right direction. O’Leary (2000:1) defines a leader as “the appointed head of a group, team or organisation” and indicates that a leader is “a charismatic person who is able to make good decisions and inspire others to reach a common goal”.

In this study a leader refers to the individual who is appointed to lead the primary school. It translates to the principal of the school.

1.7.3 Leadership practice

For the purposes of this study, leadership practice refers to leadership activities with deliberate design and intention that principals enact repeatedly, and when executed effectively, produce defined outcomes.

1.7.4 Management

Management and leadership are not synonymous but do however complement each other. According to Christie (2010:696) management is an organisational concept and she cites Buchanan and Huczynski when they aver that it entails structures and processes by which organisations realise their goals and primary purposes. Christie (2010:696) argues that management is linked to formal positions rather than to individuals. Cuban (1998) as cited in Bush (2007:391) conceptualises managing as “maintaining efficiently and effectively current organisational agreements”. This study embraces the above expositions and acknowledges that if schools are not competently managed, the core business of teaching and learning in all probability will be compromised.

1.7.5 Quality

This is a term most frequently used in various sectors, but rarely understood in the same sense. Therefore the various meanings linked to quality will be investigated to establish a meaning that will be adhered to throughout this study.

a) Definition 1

Arcaro (1995:16) states that quality refers to expecting the best from each and every learner, not just from the top-level learner.

b) Definition 2

Doherty (1994:260) proposes the following definitions:

- The total features and characteristics of a product or service that bear on its ability to satisfy stated or implied needs
- Conformance to requirements that are measurable or definable
- Fitness for purpose

In the context of this study, quality will be understood as a leadership process characterised by conformance to requirements; responsiveness; integration; focus on delivery; customer satisfaction and continuous improvement.

1.7.6 Successful schools

The concepts ‘successful’ and ‘effective’ are multi-dimensional and often used synonymously to describe schools that produce high learner outputs. This study employs the use of the concept ‘successful’ to describe schools that achieve and thrive. Rutter, Maughan, Mortimore and Ouston (1979:9) in their seminal work allude to the following characteristics of effective schools: effective classroom management; high expectations from teachers and learners; conducive working conditions for staff and learners; and staff presenting as good role models. Successful schools are also characterised by shared professional leadership; shared vision and goals; teaching that is efficient and purposeful; monitoring of learners and teachers; constructive feedback; school-based staff development; and parental involvement (Sammons et al., 1995; Reynolds, Sammons, Stoll, Barber & Hillman, 1996).

For the purpose of this study, successful schools are schools that are characterised by effective, efficient and innovative leadership practices that mould high levels of instruction that culminate in excellent learner outputs. Learners at these schools exhibit high attainment

in the Annual National Assessments (ANA) and teachers have high summative scores in their Integrated Quality Management System (IQMS) assessments. Successful schools are schools that function as learning communities that accommodate all learners, regardless of their cognitive ability and socio-economic backgrounds, to achieve their full potential and hence become meaningful citizens.

1.8 CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Permeating the seeming certainty that leadership matters, I concur with Spillane (2004:4) that there is much that we still do not understand about educational leadership practice. To achieve a rich understanding of successful/quality leadership practices, it is essential to clarify the lens through which I will be shaping my perspective and approaching my research venture. The conceptual framework that underpins my study emanates from the work of Leithwood, Day, Sammons, Harris and Hopkins (2006) as well as Spillane (2004), whose postulations over the years have provided persuasive insights about the complexities and processes of educational leadership practice. I use these insights to examine and explain the quality leadership practices of successful primary school principals in the Uthukela district of KwaZulu-Natal.

The literature refers to four core practices and fourteen more specific practice categories of successful school leadership (Leithwood et al., 2006:18). The core practices are as follows:

- (1) Setting directions
- (2) Developing people
- (3) Redesigning the organisation
- (4) Managing the instructional (teaching and learning) programme

Each of these core practices links extensively to existing leadership models or theories that promote successful schools. Setting directions is associated with Transformational Leadership theory, developing people with Situational Leadership, redesigning the organisation with Distributed Leadership and managing the instructional programme with Instructional Leadership. Note, however, that these linkages are not mutually exclusive but that they cut across the four core practices to varying extents. I elaborate on these theories in Chapter 2.

The diagram below captures the interplay between Leithwood's four core leadership practices and their associated fourteen sub-categories of good practice within the framework of Spillane's Distributed Leadership (which implies analysing the leadership practices enacted by principals in the context of the dynamic interaction between leader(s), follower(s) and the situation). It is hoped that the 'black box' of school leadership practice will become more transparent through generating the rich knowledge that this framework supports.

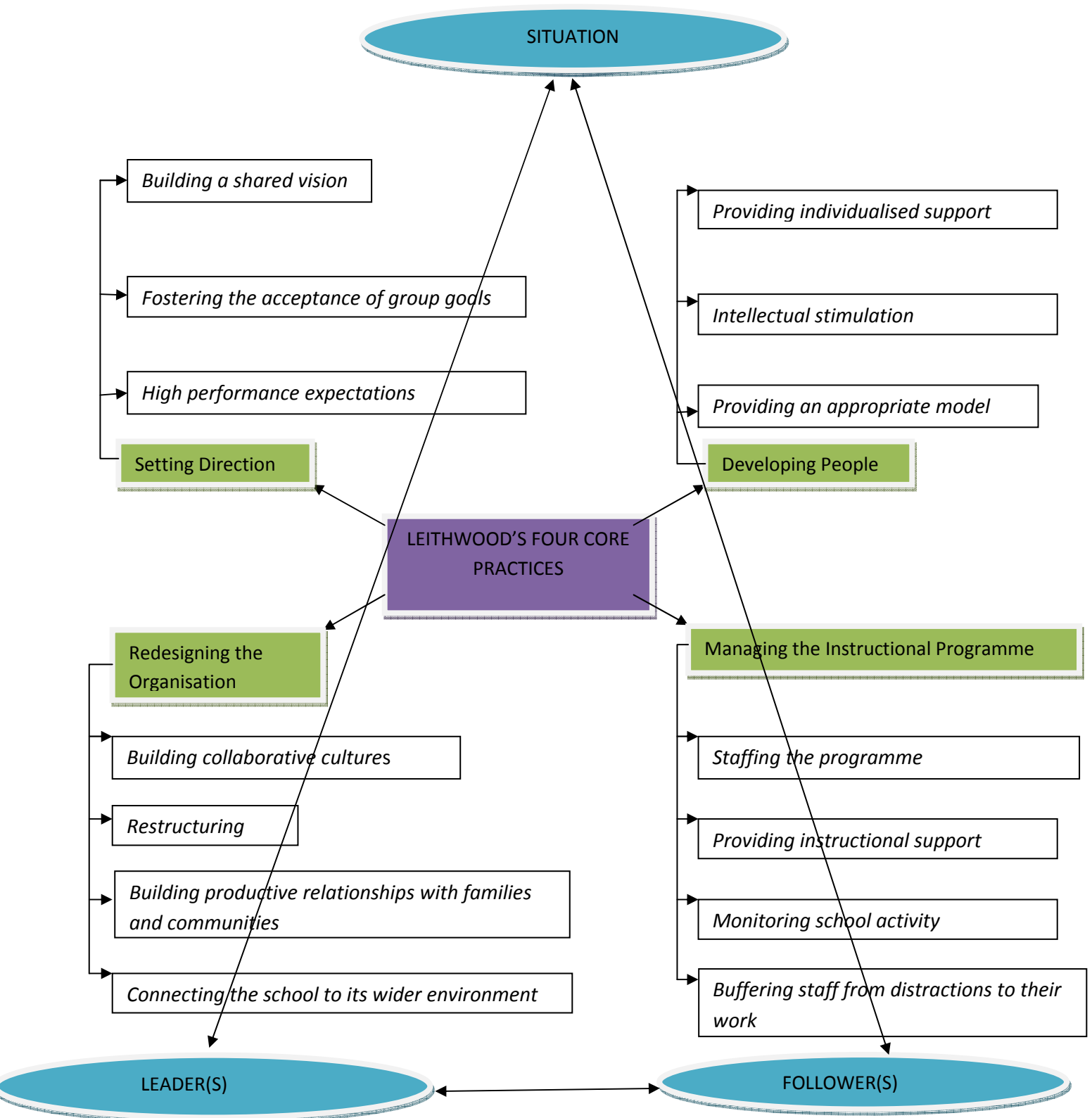


Figure 1.1: Leadership practice: An adaptation of Leithwood’s four core practices and Spillane’s distributed leadership theory

Source: Leithwood et al., 2006; Spillane, 2004

The diagram alludes to the practices of leaders in their endeavours to establish successful organisations. Leithwood et al. (2006:34) declare that leaders must establish a purpose for the organisation by setting a clear direction. A synthesis of the literature reveals that leaders are deemed successful if they promote the building of a common vision, foster the acceptance of group goals, and set high performance expectations. These leaders also build capacity in their schools by developing the skills, knowledge and efficacy of their people. They furthermore support their staff and act as role models in the quest for success (Leithwood et al., 2006:36).

The process of redesigning the organisation commences once a vision has been established and people have been capacitated. Teachers are motivated by the environment within which they work and their positive attitude plays an important role in creating successful schools (Gawel, 1997:1). Successful principals have the ability to create collaborative working cultures and to restructure or realign their organisation towards specific goals. According to Crum, Sherman and Myran (2009:53), leaders also need to pay attention to establishing relationships with families and external stakeholders.

Leaders are deemed successful when they can competently manage the teaching and learning programme. This implies staffing the school with competent educators, providing instructional support based on the feedback from monitoring and evaluating the instructional process, and creating an environment in which staff can concentrate on learner attainment (Crum et al., 2009:53; Leithwood et al., 2006:42-43).

Leadership activity is a focal point in the study of leadership practices and Spillane et al. (2009:10) argue that leadership activity manifests itself in the interaction among leaders, followers, and their situation in the performance of leadership tasks. Instead of conceptualising leadership practice merely as a “function of an individual’s ability, skill, charisma, and/or cognition”, Spillane et al. (2009:11) staunchly believe that leadership practice is activity distributed over leaders, followers, and their situation.

1.9 RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this inductive, exploratory study is to explore how successful primary school principals in KwaZulu-Natal conceptualise their leadership and management practices, and hence to reveal themes of quality leadership practice. As this study seeks to understand the relationship between constructs central to its participants and their experiences (i.e. the leadership practices enacted by principals that facilitate success at schools), it is situated

within an interpretive paradigm. The interpretative paradigm endeavours to “understand the subjective world of human experience” (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2005:23). In this inquiry, the setting is the school where dynamic interactions between the principal as the school leader and the professional staff members are studied in an attempt to discover the themes of leadership practices that precipitate in high learner attainment and instructional excellence – despite tumultuous accountability-driven and standards-driven environments.

A qualitative naturalistic research approach was used for this study as it allows “social reality” to be interpreted and presented from the viewpoint of the participants in the study (Basit, 2010:14). The study extensively engaged successful primary school principals as participants and critiqued their leadership practices with the intention of obtaining thick, real, rich and deep data to unravel specific themes of leadership practice.

Researching quality leadership practices of successful primary school principals makes qualitative case studies an ideal choice of research design. Nieuwenhuis (2007b:75) believes that a case study offers a “multi-perspective analysis” in which the focus is not only on the experiences or perspectives of one or two participants in the field, but which incorporates the perspectives of other pertinent individuals or groups and the interaction between them. It is precisely for this reason that principals alone are not the sole participants in this research, but their management and teaching personnel are also vital sources of information.

The current research involved participants who provided the most useful information about the phenomenon under investigation. The sample was chosen for a specific purpose (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2008:115), in this instance to provide “rich” information on leadership practices that promote and sustain successful schools. To provide depth in answering the research questions, I selected a purposive sample of the three highest performing primary schools (schools that achieve and sustain instructional improvement and high learner attainment) from the Uthukela district of KwaZulu-Natal.

The following data collection methods were operationalised to collate rich data and learn about the experiences, ideas, perceptions, views, beliefs, opinions and behaviours of successful primary school principals (Nieuwenhuis, 2007b:87):

- Individual interviews

The reason for conducting interviews in this study was to collect data and learn about experiences, ideas, perceptions, beliefs, views, opinions and behaviours. This entailed

face-to-face interactions with the three principals from the successful schools in the sample. An interview protocol was drafted and assumed a semi-structured format.

- Focus group interviews (Burton & Barlett, 2005:109)

This technique was employed with the express purpose of corroborating the leadership practice data furnished during the face-to-face interviews with principals. Two target groups were identified. Interviews were conducted with the School Management Team as one cohort and the second cohort comprised of Post Level 1 educators.

- Observation

This entailed the researcher accessing the natural teaching and learning environment and shadowing the principal as he/she interacted with the rest of the school community. The principal's leadership practices during a typical schoolday was observed and documented in accordance with a pre-determined observation schedule. The intention of observation as a research method was to unobtrusively probe deeply and to analyse the practices of principals as they interacted with the school community (Cohen et al., 2005:125).

The digitally recorded interviews were transcribed verbatim and analysed qualitatively. Notes of observed non-verbal behaviour were recorded and rigorously studied in an attempt to arrive at themes of quality leadership practices.

1.10 LIMITATIONS

Although conducting research in three successful primary schools has furnished me with the opportunity to capture rich descriptions of quality leadership practices through narrative accounts, arguments have been raised about the credibility of case study research to provide reliable information on the generalisability of the findings. Generalising the findings to the population of successful primary school principals on a national scale may hence not be possible and results from these findings may be limited to the schools involved in the investigation. Furthermore, despite twenty years of democracy, there still exists an enormous variation in the contexts within which learners learn and teachers teach, and this plays a significant role in learner attainment.

1.11 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

My affiliation with the Department of Basic Education may also intimidate the responses from the various participants. To elicit authentic responses and not merely what participants perceived I wanted to hear, regular briefing sessions were essential to enhance understanding and clarity of my studies. A clear distinction was made between this personal study and my professional involvement with the Department of Basic Education. Participants were also made aware of the ethical protocol that would be observed during a study of this nature and informed that should they be intimidated in any way, they reserved the right to withdraw from this study. The potential value of their participation was however explored with the participants at an initial meeting.

Each stage in the research process could present with ethical problems or dilemmas. Acknowledging this I applied for and received ethical clearance from the University of Pretoria before the commencement of this study. The clearance certificate is presented as Appendix I.

1.12 ORGANISATION OF THE THESIS

The study has been organised as follows:

Chapter 1: Overview of the study

The introductory chapter outlines the sense of urgency to unravel innovative leadership practices of primary school principals in order to minimise the scourge of poor learner attainment that has plagued the local education arena over the last decade. The purpose of the study, the rationale and the research questions are articulated. An outline of the theoretical framework that guides this study, the research approach and the limitations are also explained.

Chapter 2: Leadership in successful schools – A theoretical exposition and literature review

This chapter provides a broad knowledge base of primary issues that conceptualise leadership in education circles. The extant literature on leading learning, principalship and its allied accountability and standards is analysed. This chapter also generates a panoptical view of the South African educational leadership landscape.

Chapter 3: The practice of leadership in education – Literature review

Deliberations in this chapter seek to reveal the heart of successful school leadership. It expatiates on the theoretical framework by delving deep into findings related to setting direction, developing people, realigning the organisation, and leading and managing the teaching and learning process. The chapter alludes to the extant best evidence synthesis of international leadership practices.

Chapter 4: Research design and methodology

This chapter discusses the research design and methodology that was used to investigate the research questions that guided the inquiry. Qualitative strategies and techniques that were employed to unearth the implementation of leadership practices in successful schools are elaborated upon. Attention is devoted to issues of validity, as well as the limitations of the study.

Chapter 5: Findings on school principals' leadership practices – Data presentation, analysis and interpretation

This chapter deals with the analysis and presentation of the findings in respect of the main research question. The strategies and methodologies discussed in Chapter 4 are related to a summary of the findings from all sources, namely literature, interviews, observations and the data analysis to create a logical understanding of the findings. The instruments used in analysing the data are discussed in this chapter. The reliability of the investigation with respect to truth, value, applicability, consistency and neutrality is established in this chapter.

Chapter 6: Overview, recommendations and conclusion

This chapter presents the conclusions and the final recommendations for further research while reflecting on the purpose of the research, as well as stating how the research questions have been addressed. Conclusions and findings are reached in respect of the innovative leadership practices of successful primary school principals.

1.13 SUMMARY

There is grave concern about the large number of primary schools that are under-performing as is evident from an analysis of the ANA results. Amidst these under-performing schools there are those successful schools that continually produce excellent learner outputs. The

available leadership literature has pointed towards an inextricable link between school leadership and school performance. The current research endeavours to investigate the nature and quality of leadership practices of principals of successful schools that result in improved instruction and high learner attainment. In the next chapter, the generic literature on school leadership will be explored.

CHAPTER 2: LEADERSHIP IN SUCCESSFUL SCHOOLS: A THEORETICAL EXPOSITION AND LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 INTRODUCTION

The intention of this chapter is to critically relate the study to pertinent literature in an attempt to embed a solid foundation for the inquiry into the question posed, namely, how do successful primary school principals exercise quality leadership practices? The literature review clarifies the knowledge base for this study and highlights key issues that endeavour to craft this inquiry. The review considers leadership as a construct and attempts to identify quality practices in school leadership as they unfold amidst turbulent didactic environments that shroud the dynamics of 21st century learning organisations.

There is a growing expectation that schools require effective leaders who are able to nurture the growth and development of staff and learners, the involvement of parents and the support of the community (Mestry & Singh, 2007:477). According to Crum and Sherman (2008:562) schools are under enormous pressure to deliver high-quality instruction and learner attainment. Inevitably, adherence to accreditation standards and school improvement are seen as the responsibility of principals (Crum et al., 2008:562). Accountability is a phenomenon that pervades the operations of school leaders internationally and if standards are not satisfied, school leaders in countries such as the USA may face punitive measures in the guise of schools being taken over, finances being constrained, or they themselves being dismissed (Crum, Sherman & Myran, 2009:48). In the South African context, the Annual National Assessments (ANA) and the National Senior Certificate (NSC) are instruments that indicate learner attainment and hold principals accountable for the quality of learning and teaching at their schools. How then do successful primary school principals exercise quality leadership practices against these turbulent didactic backdrops?

In an attempt to illicit a possible response, the following framework will be utilised: Firstly the concept of leadership needs to be clearly understood and then distinguished from management. Since the present research is conducted in typical learning environments, insight into quality learning and its associated standards and accountability needs to be explored. The crux of the matter would then be a focus on school leadership and the standards and expectations that guide this crucial practice. Bearing in mind that principals are accountable for leading teaching and learning, as enshrined in the South African Schools Act (84 of 1996: Section 16 A) (RSA, 1996), the role of the principal as an instructional leader

and his/her prowess to effectively lead and manage teaching and learning will be examined. Other significant leadership models aligned with the conceptual framework (Leithwood, 2006), which craft innovative leadership practices in successful schools, will then be identified. Finally, one cannot engage in a study of this nature without recognising the profound influence of organisational culture and its implications for sound leadership practice.

2.2 CONCEPTUALISING LEADERSHIP

The 21st century has heralded in an enormous focus on educational leadership. The reason for this may be attributed to the perception that learner and school outputs are directly proportional to the quality of school leadership. Internationally, and in South Africa, there is a belief that in order to secure high-quality education, schools need effective leaders (Bush, 2008a:1).

Educational leadership is a complex construct that requires perseverance and astuteness to respond to typical school demands (Steyn & Kamper, 2001:36). In the context of globalisation, organisations are realising that their greatest assets are their human potential. In a school scenario, this translates to having competent teachers, led and managed by competent and effective leaders (Bush, 2007:391).

Bush (2007:393) further asserts that whilst there is much debate on leadership and management, there is gross uncertainty about the leadership behaviours or practices that lead to desired learner outputs. It is therefore crucial for leaders to establish an understanding of the various leadership practices to respond appropriately to the various challenging situations in which they may find themselves on a daily basis. It is precisely in this domain that the researcher has endeavoured to explore.

There are numerous conceptualisations of leadership and Yukl (2005:4-5) argues that the definition of leadership is varied and subjective. He argues that the majority of definitions of leadership identify an influence process whereby influence is exerted intentionally by one person over other people to coordinate relationships and execute actions in organisations. He further argues that leadership entails reaching consensus on what needs to be done and determining how it can be executed effectively to attain common goals.

Leithwood et al. (2006:11) believe that leadership is concerned with the improvement of the organisation and more specifically the establishment of commonly understood directions and acting to move individuals in the desired directions. Hence leadership concerns itself with direction and influence. They further assert that the focus of management is stability, whilst leadership concerns itself with improvement and acknowledges that both leadership and management are vitally important. They also maintain that stability and improvement, which are synonymous with change, have a synergistic relationship.

The notion of leadership as “influence” may be perceived as neutral in that it does not clarify the goals or actions sought by this process. Wasserberg (1999:158) therefore avers that leadership needs to be grounded in firm personal and professional values and that the fundamental role of leaders is to merge individuals around primary values. From a school leadership perspective, Wasserberg (1999:155) proposes the following core values:

- Learning and that everyone associated with the school are considered as learners
- Valuing the uniqueness of every member of the school community
- The school’s reason for being is to serve its learners and the community
- The holistic development of the learner both within and outside the classroom
- Trust, praise and encouragement to nurture individuals

Day, Harris and Hadfield (2001:53) corroborate this view when they state that the moral purpose of a school is evident by the way in which its leaders act and communicate both educational and personal values.

According to Bush (2008b:275), leadership is about influence as opposed to authority, acknowledging that both are components of power. He infers that influence can be exercised by anyone in the organisation, whilst authority is vested in formal leadership positions. Hence it is clear that leadership does not depend on a position of authority, unlike management (Bush et al., 2010:3). Bearing in mind the herculean demands that principals need to endure in the daily operations of their schools, this conceptualisation implies that anyone at any level or position in a school can engage in leadership roles. However, it does not imply that school leaders lose their power (Bush et al., 2010:6). This argument correlates extensively with the current emphasis on distributed leadership, as advocated by Spillane (2004) and Harris (2004), and equates leadership with the many rather than the few. Indeed, the notion of principals as “heroic leaders” is gradually diminishing.

A synthesis of the above leads to the following working definition of leadership as articulated by Bush and Glover (2003:8): “Leadership is a process of influence leading to the achievement of desired purposes.” Leaders craft a vision for their schools and seek every opportunity to articulate this vision and influence their staff and other stakeholders to purchase into it. The ethos, morale, structures and activities of the school are directed towards the realisation of the vision.

Research conducted in Europe, the USA and recently in South Africa reveals that principals play a critical role in establishing the conditions necessary to improve instruction (Marsh, 2002; Spillane, 2004; Taylor, 2007). From the extensive review of research conducted by Leithwood and Riel (2005), it may be concluded most emphatically that leadership makes a difference in learner achievement. What seems to be less understood though is how principals lead (Spillane et al., 2004:4). The ‘how’ specifically alludes to the actual practice of principals to create and sustain effective schools and constitutes the thrust of this research. At this juncture it would be wise to establish a difference between the concepts educational ‘leadership’ and ‘management’.

2.3 DISTINGUISHING BETWEEN LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Educational leadership and management may be considered as constructs concerned with the functionality of schools and other educational institutions. They are distinct features. Contemplating these related phenomena, Bush (2007:391) reflects on Cuban’s (1988) distinction and declares that leadership is linked with change, whilst maintenance activity is associated with management. The fundamental focus of leadership is influencing and shaping “the goals, motivations, and actions of others” and requires “much ingenuity, energy and skill”. Effective management on the other hand – whilst embracing leadership skills – has as its primary function “maintenance rather than change” (Cuban, 1988 in Bush, 2007:391-392). Both leadership and management are deemed important.

Bolam (1999:194) defines management as an executive function for implementing agreed policy, while educational leadership is concerned with policy formulation and organisational transformation. Day, Harris and Hadfield (2001:45) consider leadership to be focused on the development of people, whilst management is linked to systems and paper. The implication is that once direction, strategies and organisational capacity have been determined as a product of leadership, processes need to be executed, coordinated and controlled according to

schedule to ensure that agreed upon objectives are honoured. This often materialises in the format of management plans which clearly define work breakdown structures, responsibilities and time frames. The South African Task Team report (DoE, 1996:27) supports the management component in that it provides a clear framework to support teaching and learning. Hence there exists a subtle difference between leadership and management and their co-existence is accentuated in their synergy of optimising learning outputs.

In an era pervaded by educational transformation, there is undoubtedly an evolution of the school principal's primary function from one of managing to one of leading (Blase & Blase, 2004:54). This view is corroborated by Mestry and Singh (2007:477) when they aver that principals are expected to exude with energy, drive and values, and they function in the capacity of educational leaders rather than as managers. It is, however, important to recognise that sound management continues to be a critical ingredient of effective leadership.

The school leadership literature unearths a plethora of alternative and competing models. According to Bush (2007:394) the various conceptions of leadership may be clustered into broad themes or 'types'. He further cites Leithwood, Jantzi and Steinbach (1999), who from their research identified six leadership 'models'. This typology is further extended into eight models as indicated in the table below (Bush, 2007:394).

Table 2.1: Typology of management and leadership models

MANAGEMENT MODEL	LEADERSHIP MODEL
Formal	Managerial
Collegial	Participative Transformational Interpersonal
Political	Transactional
Subjective	Post-modern
Ambiguity	Contingency
Cultural	Moral
	Instructional

Source: Bush (2007:394)

An analysis of the array of leadership models mentioned above reveals that a common thread of influence and direction permeates each of the models identified. No model, style, trait,

profile or set of skills is superior to the other and each has its own significance in the diversity of contexts in which schools endeavour to thrive. For the purpose of this research, specific attention will be focused on instructional and transformational leadership. However, what is abundantly clear is that a delicate blend of management and leadership is essential to synergise high-performing schools. How then is this fundamental yet complex construct of leadership enacted in schools?

2.4 THE LEADERSHIP OF LEARNING

The recent two and a half decades have been characterised by the appearance of new conceptual models in the field of educational leadership. It is increasingly being acknowledged that leadership is a vital variable in responsive schools where the interaction between stakeholders and professional personnel precipitates in schools that can learn and evolve in response to the “adaptive challenges” they encounter (Heifetz, 1994:46). Principals are continually regarded to be sources of creative thinking and novel ideas, as well as resources of teaching, learning and empowerment, and this perception influences policy and practice. For this reason, leadership and its perceived accountability for learning, as cited by Leithwood and Riehl (2003:8), is the genesis of phrases such as ‘leading for learning’, ‘learning-focused leadership’, or ‘learner-centred’ accountability (Darling-Hammond, 1997; DuFour, 2002:14; Knapp, Copland, Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 2002). According to Leithwood and Riehl (2003:8) a “learning-focused goal for leadership” stimulates principals to design and implement strategy that supports the effective learning of learners.

The impact of leadership practice on learning and teaching in schools has been investigated from various perspectives. The general consensus is that leadership indeed makes a difference in the quality of learning in schools, and an extensive meta-analysis on leadership by Waters, Marzano and McNulty (2003) further reinforces the relationship between leadership and learning. Dinham (2005:340) concurs that in order to establish schools that are regarded as innovative, effective and sites of quality learning and teaching, leadership is vital. In their analysis of empirical studies on school leadership, Hallinger and Heck (1999:149) identified instructional leadership and transformational leadership as the predominant leadership models. This is not surprising, considering that the core business of schools is learning and teaching, and that school leaders need to be creative and innovate and usher in change to facilitate high levels of learner attainment in an era of accountability. As opposed to situational leadership, trait theories and contingency theory, which are former models

associated with school leadership, the express focus of instructional leadership and transformational leadership is on how leadership practices culminate in improved learner outcomes (Leithwood & Jantzi, 1999; Southworth, 2002).

Leithwood, Louis, Anderson and Wahlstrom (2004:5) emphatically state that “leadership is second only to classroom instruction among all school-related factors that contribute to what learners learn at school”. According to Middlewood (Bush et al., 2010:132), leadership and management of schools is seen by a growing number of countries as being a very significant factor in the improvement of learner performance. This complements what Leithwood and Riehl (2003:8) refer to as a learning-focused goal for leadership, which anticipates that leaders should focus intensely on systems and processes that support the learning process.

It is apparent that school leaders have an expansive influence on learning that transcends the obvious learning of learners and filters through to the entire school community. Accordingly, Knapp, Copland and Talbert (2003:11) identify three interrelated learning agendas:

- The process through which knowledge, skills and values are continually transmitted to learners
- The process whereby professionals, that is the adult staff component, acquire new skills and knowledge to enhance their competency level
- The process whereby components of the education system (e.g. school districts) acquire “insights into the functioning of the system”.

In an effort to create and sustain high-quality learning environments for learners, it behoves school leaders to acknowledge and incorporate all three of these learning agendas into the operations of their schools. Embracing this view of leadership practice enables one to conceive school leadership as a dynamic interaction between the current leadership skill and knowledge of leaders; their actual leadership practices; and what learners, staff and the system learn (Portin, Alejano, Knapp & Marzolf, 2006:12).

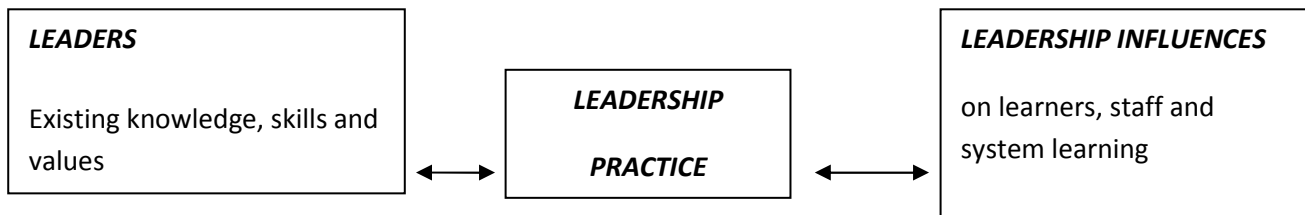


Figure 2.1: The exercise of school leadership in relation to learning

Source: Portin et al. (2006:12)

An important leadership strategy is to create opportunities for educators to learn, to lead and to teach effectively. Aligning professional development with learning and teaching goals is bound to result in improved learner attainment. Attention also needs to be devoted to the development of skills and knowledge in emerging leaders as this facilitates collectives reaching consensus regarding the purpose and direction of schools (Harris & Chapman, 2002:11; Gurr, Drysdale & Mulford, 2005:541; Moller, 2009:38). In conceptualising the principal as the ‘lead learner’, Christie (2005:8) identifies three aspects to be central to good leadership:

- Developing the habit of reflexive self-monitoring
- Doing the right thing and causing the right change
- Having the capacity to deal with the school as a whole

She concurs that leading learning is a complex and challenging process.

The above strengthens the current conceptualisation of schools being professional learning communities with the principal being the lead learner. The 21st century clearly demands a unique knowledge, skills and values set from its principals to act as catalysts in the implementation of innovative, quality leadership practices so as to generate and sustain world-class learning organisations. Principals need to re-invent themselves by re-programming their thinking and re-engineering their leadership practices in the quest for quality learner outcomes. The current conceptualisations of accountability and standards in the mission to remain on the cutting edge of world class education simply imply that school leaders either shape up or ship out.

2.5 ACCOUNTABILITY AND STANDARDS

According to Moller (2009:37), standards and accountability are a focal point of educational reform in many countries. Teachers and school leaders are guided by professional standards and benchmarks have been delineated. Professional standards present a comprehensive exposition of what is expected from principals and teachers. Since schools are perceived as a unit of measurement, they are expected to engage in public reporting. Accountability is hence an integral component in school leadership. Moller (2009:39) conceptualises accountability as “having to answer for one’s actions, and particularly the results of those actions”.

According to Leithwood et al. (1999:13), accountability entails a “report, description, explanation, justification, exposition of reasons, causes, grounds, or motives for observed occurrences”. Thus, accountability implies being answerable for one’s actions or inactions – thereby promoting conformance to standards.

Accountability has only recently been formalised to receive attention among educational leadership practices in South African public schools. In terms of Section 16A of the South African Schools Act (RSA, 1996) “the principal must prepare and submit to the Head of Department an annual report in respect of the academic performance of that school and procedures for assessment determined by the Minister”. The Act further stipulates that “the principal must provide the governing body with a report about the professional management” of the school (RSA, 1996).

From an international perspective, Crum, Sherman and Myran (2009:51) iterate that teachers in the USA have struggled with issues pertaining to standards and accountability since the advent of *A Nation at Risk*. Normore (2003:56) remarks that the intention of a system of standards is to improve learner attainment by clarifying the knowledge and skills learners need to acquire. This is encapsulated in a curriculum that also seeks to regularly assess learners to determine the level of compliance.

There is an increasing realisation among school leaders that they are accountable for what transpires at their schools. The findings of research conducted by Sherman (2008:675) in the USA indicate that the current accountability initiative is the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001. What the NCLB has in effect achieved is to establish minimum expectations or benchmarks that schools must meet within designated timeframes. As a result, principals ensured that an inclusive approach to teaching and learning was embraced to facilitate the

progress of all learners and hence avoid the punitive measures that the NCLB threatened if standards were not met.

Stevenson (2006:412) concurs that accountability is becoming increasingly recognised in educational circles and this is especially relevant, considering that schools nowadays operate in a fairly autonomous mode. However, the practice of accountability in the USA is not without its problems. Whilst the intention of accountability initiatives was to enhance access and learner attainment, it was not without controversy due to reports of learners exiting the school system at excessively high rates (Stiggins & Chappius, 2005:15). Crum et al. (2009:51) are confident nonetheless that whilst there are concerns about the validity of accountability in schools, it has made explicit learning expectations and reinforced inclusion. Successful school principals involve themselves in accountability processes within their own schools (Mulford, Edmunds, Kendall, Kendall & Bishop, 2008:23).

According to Bush and Glover (2009:12), the global trend of decentralisation and school-based management also pervades South African schools, and schools are exposed to district, provincial and national guidelines. Schools are under enormous pressure to perform and are accountable via inspections, stakeholder interaction and published results. Research conducted by Bush and Glover (2009:12) reveals that South African school principals as accountable officers must take responsibility not only for the development, implementation and monitoring of school improvement plans, but also for the adherence to targets.

Contemplating accountability and improved learner outputs, Elmore (2006:3) suggests that school principals' source and acquire the teaching and learning assets that they require via the accountability system. This would entail engaging their current resources to the maximum. He further contests that the current accountability practices will increase school performance only if there is a significant investment in personnel who are knowledgeable and skilled in school improvement practices.

Sirotnik (2005:10-14) reflects on good instructional practices and alludes to the following principles of accountability systems in learning organisations:

- Acknowledge and analyse successes and failures of prior accountability processes
- Acknowledge the intricacies of the schooling process
- Focus on the conditions of teaching and learning and equal access for all
- Be guided by valid educational practices

- Focus on continuing professional development

The adaptation and adoption of the above principles of accountability are bound to harvest effective and efficient teaching, learning and assessment environments that serve as catalysts for high learner attainment and improved instruction.

2.6 SCHOOL LEADERSHIP

It has been acknowledged that the role of the school leader is complex with high demands being placed on principals on a daily basis (Parkes & Thomas, 2007:205; Sanzo, Sherman & Clayton, 2011:33). The pivotal role of the school principal in enhancing the quality of learning and teaching in schools is corroborated by Webster (1994:1) when he links it to the primary aim of schools, namely learner growth. He goes a step further by suggesting that learner growth should actually be used as a measure for effective principalship.

In the South African context, Collective Agreement 1 of 2008: Annexure A10 (Occupational Specific Dispensation) (DoE) explicitly demarcates the aim of the post of principal as follows: “to provide effective school leadership and management that promotes a school ethos conducive to the delivery of quality education and positive learning experiences for all learners”. Commenting on the role of school leadership, Mestry and Singh (2007:477) aver that the task of a school leader has transformed from a managerial function to one of leadership. Hoadley (2007:1) concurs with this paradigm when she states that “there is a consensus around the importance of leadership to improved learner outcomes”.

Mulford et al. (2008:35) indicate that the current conceptualisation of principalship has drastically transformed compared to what was expected from principals a few decades ago. They therefore attest that successful leaders “adapt and adopt their leadership practice to meet the changing needs of circumstances in which they find themselves” (Mulford et al., 2008:39). Failure to do this is bound to create ailing institutions – the products of which will add no real significant value to societies that endeavour to improve on a continuous basis.

2.6.1 Perceived roles and responsibilities of school principals

The recent reform efforts (Fink & Resnick, 2001; McAdams, 1998) have highlighted principals as leaders of learning and teaching and their role to optimise learner and school outputs. Petzeko, Clark, Valentine, Hackman, Norn and Lucas (2002:4) – in their research with middle school leaders – indicate that contemporary school principals have a vast array of

responsibilities, which include engaging in collaboration and decision making, demonstrating prowess in teaching and learning matters, and promoting and nurturing change.

Principals are required to provide continuous professional development to their people in an attempt to capacitate staff to address the diversity of the learner population that inhabits their schools. They also need to embed a culture of high expectations and encourage collaboration (Kaplan et al., 2005:31). According to Bush, Joubert, Kiggundu and van Rooyen (2009:3) principals' responsibilities are "school-wide" and "should include setting the framework for effective learning and teaching, developing policies to address this issue, and ensuring that curriculum delivery is being implemented successfully". Stein and Nelson (2003:424) further articulate that it is essential for principals to recognise good instruction and promote continuing staff growth and development.

Research conducted by Hallinger and Heck (1996:43-44) reported that whilst principals had no direct impact on learners, they played a significant role in creating effective didactic climates. The research also indicated that the principals' influence on learners is indirect via their close engagement with staff that works directly with learners. Leithwood et al. (2006:15) remark that the role of leadership acts as a "catalyst for unleashing the potential capacities that already exist in the organisation".

Peterson's (1999:1) review of research into what effective principals do to help learners achieve success yielded the following condensed behaviour patterns:

- Principals provide instructional leadership and nurture it in others.
- Principals shape school culture and climate.
- Principals manage and administer complex organisational processes.
- Principals build and maintain positive relations with parents and the community.
- Principals lead and support school improvement and change.

In their review of principalship, the Wallace Foundation (2012:1-2) suggests that principals have the following responsibilities:

- Crafting a vision based on high expectations
- Generating a climate for effective education
- Facilitating leadership in others

- Upgrading instruction to enhance teaching and learning quality
- Nurturing school improvement by managing data and people

In view of the above, leaders need to hone in on convenient and manageable ways of strategically executing school leadership. Dimmock and Walker (2002:72) recognise eight interrelated elements of leadership, namely collaboration and partnership; motivation; planning; decision making; interpersonal communication; conflict management; evaluation and appraisal; and staff and professional development. These elements are often regarded as key operational areas of leadership. Knowledge and skills in these domains are therefore critical in the establishment of successful schools.

Research conducted by Dinham (2005), involving 35 American schools, enabled him to establish “a model of principal leadership for outstanding educational outcomes”. The findings revealed that these principals’ primary focus was learners and the way they learn. According to Dinham (2005:343) the 35 principals displayed the following attributes:

- Awareness of their environment and engagement with the school community
- Creativity and innovation
- Cherished relationships and personal attributes
- Awareness of the value of a common vision, culture to succeed and expectations
- Valued trust, responsibility and educator growth
- A focus on collaboration and learner support

The principals’ function to provide the excellence and professional leadership that is necessary for the creation of positive learning environments has become of paramount importance (Botha, 2006:349). The concomitant decentralisation and autonomy of schools have led to additional vocational responsibilities for school principals. Acknowledging the changes ushered in by School-Based Management (SBA), Masoge and Van der Westhuizen (1998:84) state that “School-Based Management is therefore not a fad or a cosmetic change, but an enduring phenomenon whereby each school in South Africa may renew its management and its members in a responsible way”. The implication therefore shatters the mould of the status quo and ventures into new didactic ground. This necessitates new leadership strategies and practices that ooze with creativity and innovation. Principals require

extended quantities of time and space to implement newly acquired leadership practices that will generate and sustain enhanced levels of classroom instruction, as well as yield improved learner outputs (Caldwell, 2006:9).

Contemplating the level of principals' communication and collaboration on issues pertaining to learning and teaching, Supovitz, Sirindides and May (2010:46) agree that principals are key to learners' learning, albeit in an indirect way. If indeed "leadership is second only to classroom instruction amongst all school-related factors that contribute to what learners learn at school" (Leithwood et al., 2004:5), principals have a window of opportunity to influence those actors who are directly responsible for classroom instruction. This reinforces and gives impetus to the notion of the principal assuming the role of instructional leader. The nature, extent and the quality of interaction between the principal and his/her teaching staff are therefore critical in a school system. It is apparent that a ripple effect occurs in the creation of high learner attainment and the pebble (or rather the rock!) that is the source of the interference is the practices of principals, which are transmitted via educators as effective classroom practices that subsequently transform learner attainment. A rigorous study to unravel the leadership practices that sculpture quality teaching and learning ought to illuminate what separates a successful learning institution from one that is mired in mediocrity. This necessitates an in-depth understanding of the principal as an instructional leader.

2.6.2 The principal as instructional leader: Instructional leadership

The literature vigorously supports the notion that the ultimate responsibility of the principal lies in improving the quality of teaching and learning in schools (Donmoyer & Wagstaff, 1990:20; Budhal, 2000:38; Kruger, 1999:31; Steyn, 2002:255). The previous section (2.6.1) repeatedly referred to the positive impact that effective principals have on learner attainment via their role as instructional leaders, albeit in indirect ways (Dinham, 2005:338; Gurr, Drysdale & Mulford, 2006:371; Leithwood & Riehl, 2003:2-3; Marzano et al., 2005:3). DiPaola and Tschannen-Moran (2003:52) corroborate the notion that principals must be strong instructional leaders and use data to inform their decision making. It is therefore apparent that the quality of learning and teaching can be improved by principals when the latter adopt a strong focus on instructional leadership practices and acknowledge that teaching and learning are central to their role. What then is instructional leadership and how does it define principalship?

The following paragraphs contain an exposition on how renowned researchers conceptualise instructional leadership:

Bush and Glover (2002:10) adeptly conceptualise instructional leadership as “leadership that focuses on teaching and learning and on the behaviour of teachers in working with learners”. It is via the direct influence on teachers that leaders target the learning of learners.

Southworth (2002: 79) is of the opinion that “instructional leadership [...] is strongly concerned with teaching and learning, including the professional learning of teachers as well as learner growth”. He often uses the term ‘learning-centred leadership’ and maintains that principals’ influence learning and teaching in the following ways:

- A direct impact on learner outputs
- An indirect influence on learner outputs via other staff
- A reciprocal influence characterised by mutual influence between the leader and staff (Southworth, 2004:78).

According to Leithwood, Jantzi and Steinbach (1999:8), instructional leadership “assumes that the critical focus for attention by leaders is the behaviour of teachers as they engage in activities directly affecting the growth of learners”.

When reflecting on their empirical studies involving in excess of 800 American teachers, Blase and Blase (2000:130-131) argue that effective instructional leadership emphasises the fostering of reflective dialogue with educators and promoting teachers’ professional growth. They suggest that successful instructional leaders talk to teachers about their teaching and learning encounters, encourage collaboration between teachers and empower teachers to engage in decision making, professional growth and teacher leadership. They also view successful instructional leaders as being able to encourage those conditions that can foster a professional learning community of teachers and learners.

McEwan (2003:19-21) contemplates the following seven steps regarding the principal’s tasks towards effective instructional leadership:

- Striving towards the implementation and attainment of standards
- Serving as a teaching and learning resource
- Embedding a climate and culture that promotes learning
- Crafting and communicating a vision and purpose

- Establishing high expectations for self and the rest of the staff
- Engendering teamwork and facilitating teacher leadership
- Creating and nurturing healthy relationships among all in the school community

An analysis of the above abundantly indicates vital traits and practices that mould the school's core activity, namely teaching and learning. It also accentuates the reciprocal relationship that exists between teaching and learning and instructional leadership. The analysis furthermore emphasises the strategic vantage point at which principals find themselves and the absolute necessity for school leaders to have a thorough knowledge of pedagogy and strategic leadership practices to optimise both teaching and learning, and the resultant learning outcomes. It illuminates the potential for principals to make a positive impact on classroom teaching by strategically aligning their thoughts, instructions and actions.

It is further noted that principals on their own are unable to fulfil all of a school's needs for instructional leadership (Leithwood et al., 1999). King (2002:61-63) and Elmore (2000:15) perceive instructional leadership as distributed across the school community. Glickman, Gordon and Ross-Gordon (2001:16) further describe the principal as the leader of instructional leaders. This implies that other teachers – both in formal and informal leadership positions – are also perceived as instructional leaders in their own right, and instructional leadership within the school has the potential of being distributed among all educators, based on their expertise, competence and experience. This strongly alludes to the sentiments of Spillane (2004) and Harris (2004) who champion distributed leadership in organisations. A collaborative working culture among educators is hence important in ensuring optimal learner attainment.

It needs to be acknowledged, however, that the school leader ultimately remains a significant influence in sustaining the success of a school (Gurr et al., 2005:548). Brown (2005:136), on the other hand, articulates that apart from being proficient instructional leaders, principals need to be adept at negotiation and human resource management. He further maintains that they are expected to be moral leaders, transformational leaders, cultural leaders, servant leaders and visionaries (Brown, 2005:136). Undoubtedly this is essential for the holistic development of learners, but bearing in mind the core function of schools, thorough knowledge and the implementation of instructional leadership is of particular significance. A

conventional wisdom has emerged that instructional leadership is an essential factor in school improvement (May & Supovitz, 2011:333).

There is a consensus that only a few principals demonstrate an in-depth knowledge of instructional leadership (Lashway, 2002). Baseline research conducted by Bush and Heystek (2006:68) indicates that most South African principals have not internalised their role as instructional leaders. They appear more preoccupied with issues dealing with policies, human resources and finance. A survey conducted among more than 500 principals in Gauteng revealed that the very essence of schools, which is teaching and learning, was ranked seventh out of ten leadership activities. This is cause for grave concern seeing that management of the instructional programme has been identified by Leithwood and his collaborators (2006:18) as one of the four vital, core leadership practices.

Improving school outcomes and learner attainment therefore necessitates an approach towards leadership that focuses strongly on instructional leadership. This is of particular significance in view of the increased emphasis on organisational development. There is a dire need to transform the leadership paradigm and to let leaders conceptualise learning and teaching as the core of their roles and responsibilities.

2.6.3 Leadership standards in education

Standards-defining activities are crucial in the evolution or transformation of leadership in schools. According to Leithwood et al. (2006:9), standards are deemed vital for the effective practice of leadership in that they clarify expectations of leadership practice and the required competence of leaders. The Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC) in the USA, comprising 32 educational agencies and 13 educational administration associations, assumed a pivotal stance in this arena.

The ISLLC 2008 standards summarised below emphasise school leaders' paramount responsibility to learners (CCSSO, 2008:6):

“An education leader should promote the success of every student by:

1. Setting a widely shared vision for learning
2. Developing a school culture and instructional programme conducive to student learning and staff professional growth

3. Ensuring effective management of the organisation, operation, and resources for a safe, efficient, and effective learning environment
4. Collaborating with faculty and community members, responding to diverse community interests and needs, and mobilising community resources
5. Acting with integrity, fairness, and in an ethical manner
6. Understanding, responding to, and influencing the political, social, legal and cultural contexts”

Similar standards have been implemented in New Zealand, England and Australia (Anderson & Gronn, 2006). Gupton (2010:25) agrees that a thorough knowledge and understanding of standards is fundamental to being a responsible, effective and efficient school leader.

The South African Standard for School Leadership (SASSL) (DoE, 2004) identifies six key areas of principalship that are integral for organisational development and learner outcomes. These standards are:

1. Leading and managing the learning school;
2. Shaping the direction and development of the school;
3. Assuring quality and securing accountability;
4. Developing and empowering self and others;
5. Managing the school as an organisation;
6. Working with and for the community.

Principals are expected to design and execute strategic leadership practices that are modelled on these focal areas.

2.6.4 Leading and managing teaching and learning in schools

According to Bush and Glover (2009:4) there is an increasing recognition that the management of learning and teaching ranks among the most important (if not *the* most important) activities for principals. Christie (2005:4) makes it abundantly clear that schools are the only institutions whose primary purpose is the “formalised transmission of knowledge, skills and values”. If we accede to this being the central goal of schooling, it may be argued that the central goal of school leaders is to lead and manage teaching and learning.

In defining the essence of principalship, the SASSL (DoE, 2004) emphasises the need to lead and manage learning and teaching effectively. It behoves school leaders to create and nurture learning and teaching environments that project and support quality instruction (Bush &

Glover, 2009:4). Hoadley (2007:1) concurs that within the South African leadership contexts there exists consensus on the relationship between leadership and learner attainment.

Robinson (2007) emphasises that leaders' influence on learners' attainment is prone to escalate when leaders are directly engaged in developing their people, and in the planning and the coordination of the curriculum. "The closer leaders are to the core business of teaching and learning, the more likely they are to make a difference to learners" (Robinson, 2007:21). Thus, in their attempt to adopt a school-wide view to lead and manage teaching and learning, principals should devise frameworks to advance learning and teaching by ensuring effective curriculum implementation and delivery.

According to the National Guidelines for principals in Wales (National Assembly for Wales, 2005:3), "leading learning and teaching" is a cardinal function of the school principal. The principal, in collaboration with the staff, generates the conditions and resources required to ensure quality learning and teaching for everyone. This entails engaging in a process of monitoring and evaluating the quality of school and learner outputs and setting high expectations. Being cognisant of the enormous challenges faced by the 21st century school leader, it is becoming increasingly evident that the responsibility for leading and managing teaching and learning ought to be shared among principals, their management teams and classroom teachers. The strategic distribution of leadership in this domain has to be acknowledged, and perhaps learned and implemented by principals in the quest towards increasing learner outputs.

The English National College for School Leadership (NCSL) (2005:38) declares that "improving the quality of learning and teaching is the most important thing that school leaders do". The indirect or mediated influence of principals on learners has already been alluded to on numerous occasions in this chapter. The English NCSL (2005:38) avers that this influence may be executed in the following ways:

- *Modelling*: This entails utilising the power of example. Leaders need to engage in some form of teaching and display good pedagogy and coach and support teachers in their classroom practices. Assemblies should also be viewed as opportunities where leaders can promote the nurturing of values. Southworth (2004:78-79) argues that by virtue of their interest in learning, teaching and classrooms, learning-centred leaders serve as effective role models to the rest of the staff.

- *Monitoring*: This is a process that entails inter alia analysing and responding to learner attainment data, and engaging in classroom observation. Lesson planning and preparation data are also monitored.
- *Dialogue*: This refers to professional conversations with staff. Southworth (2002:84) considers team dynamics, meetings and planning sessions as catalysts for dialogue. Informal discussions with teachers are also advocated.

In addition to the above three ways to enhance the quality of teaching and learning, Bush et al. (2009) maintain that evaluation is also critical. Evaluation is conceived as analysing the impact of teaching and learning at a more strategic level and this normally materialises as the analyses of examinations and test scores at the individual and whole-school levels (Bush et al., 2009:16). It is therefore imperative that principals pay careful heed to these vital skills and implement them strategically if they desire to develop and foster successful schools.

Principals need to acknowledge, support and constantly develop their deputies and Heads of Departments (HODs) to optimise quality teaching and learning. Cardno (2006), in reminiscing on the educational context in New Zealand, emphasises that the middle leadership role such as that of Heads of Departments, should focus specifically on learning and not on administrative functions. Contexts within which the management of teaching and learning is effected include

- working cooperatively with staff to manage the curriculum;
- monitoring the teaching resource quality and advise staff on its use;
- keeping abreast of curriculum changes and engaging in professional development that is aligned with strategic goals; and
- leading the curriculum planning and coordination process (Cardno, 2006:464).

An analysis of the above confirms the promotion of learning and teaching to being the essence of schooling. In acknowledging the centrality of learning, it behoves principals to devote much time and energy to leading and managing teaching and learning, and not to withdraw into their office to pursue mundane administrative chores (Bush, Joubert, Kiggundu & Van Rooyen, 2009:6). Leaders are expected to lead by example when dealing with inter alia assessment, lesson preparation, general learner welfare, curriculum content and pedagogy. Principals should also engage in a well-planned and coordinated process of

monitoring and evaluating teaching practice with the express purpose of providing constructive feedback. The evaluation of learning outcomes and the establishment of benchmarks/standards also constitute an important expectation of school leaders (Bush et al., 2009:6).

2.7 SELECTED LEADERSHIP MODELS IDIOSYNCRATIC TO SUCCESSFUL SCHOOLS

In this section I explore the literature on leadership models that are associated with the four core leadership categories (Leithwood et al., 2006:18) that I use as the framework of my study. The identified models are instructional leadership, situational leadership, transformational leadership and distributed leadership. Instructional leadership has already been deliberated on in Section 2.6.2. The links between these models and the conceptual framework will be explored in the next chapter.

Instructional leadership has been alluded to as a fundamental component of successful schools that are characterised by continuous high learner attainment and instructional prowess. On its own however, instructional leadership is bound to be inadequate. Innovative leaders always seek a blend of theories to synergise the practice of leadership. One needs to be mindful that the conception of a singular, ‘heroic leader’ is no longer relevant, as the focus is now on teams with both teachers and learners operating as leaders (Harris, 2004:11). The current leadership scenario is effectively captured by Hargreaves and Fink (2006:95) when they state that “in a complex, fast-paced world, leadership cannot rest on the shoulders of the few”. They contend that “sustainable leadership is distributed leadership that ultimately stays centred on learning” (Hargreaves et al., 2006:35). This paradigm also represents an increasing understanding of the importance of informal sources of influence within organisations. Distributed leadership theory greatly enhances this understanding by offering a framework that explores and analyses the various ways in which leadership interactions, both formal and informal, occur within a school (Spillane, Halverson & Diamond, 2001b:24).

2.7.1 Distributed leadership

In the past decade distributed leadership has emerged as one of the most widely used frameworks to understand school leadership in educational reform (Harris, 2004:12). There is a body of evidence that reveals how school leaders are increasingly acknowledging the

deficiencies of current organisational structures to promote growth and transformation (Fullan, Hill & Crevola, 2007; Harris, 2008; Chapman, Ainscow & Gunter, 2008). Spillane et al. (2001b:23) contend that “the prevailing framework of individual agency, focusing on positional leaders such as principals, is inadequate because leadership is not just a function of what these leaders know and do”. They argue that school leadership should be perceived as a practice that spans its situational and social milieus (Spillane et al., 2001b:23).

Leithwood and Rhiel (2003:9) remark that leadership may be defined as individuals who assume various roles in a school, who collaborate to provide direction and who influence others in their quest for common goals. This definition accommodates the notion of individuals in schools other than principals being leaders. Goleman, Boyatzis and Makee (2002:14) corroborate this perspective by arguing that leadership is not the sole prerogative of the principal, but distributed to others at different levels in the school who can assume the role of leader.

Grant (2006:514) argues that the transformation of South African schools drastically requires teacher leadership and emphatically states that “schools can no longer be led by a lone figure at the top of the hierarchy”. She further suggests that leaders can effectively meet the enormous challenges they face by utilising the leadership potential in their staff. This in effect would enhance staff gaining ownership of change processes (Grant, 2006:514). The envisaged process would entail the following:

- Generating a collaborative culture characterised by a common understanding of the vision and participatory decision making
- Identifying and living the values that sustain this collaborative culture
- Both the principal and management teams engaging in a process of leadership distribution (Grant, 2006:521).

As a result of this realisation, many school leaders are engaging in a process of re-engineering their organisational structure and the leadership practices at their schools (Harris, 2008:174). Teacher leadership, a previously neglected format of leadership, is currently being vigorously pursued (Wilmore, 2007:2).

According to Spillane et al. (2004:24), distributed leadership is characterised by two aspects, namely the ‘leader-plus’ and the ‘practice’ aspect. The leader-plus aspect recognises that the

role of managing and leading schools does not rest exclusively with the school principal. It engages a variety of other individuals in the school community such as deputy principals, heads of departments and mentor teachers. The current empirical investigations have revealed that focusing exclusively on the principal as a leader is limiting, as others associated with the school also play a vital role in leadership (Camburn, Rowan & Taylor, 2003; MacBeath et al., 2004; Harris, 2005; Spillane, 2006; Leithwood & Mascal, 2008). Harris (2004:14) further postulates that distributed leadership seeks to engage expertise, irrespective of where in the organisation it is vested, and equates it with maximising the human capacity within organisations.

According to Spillane (2005:143), the primary focus of distributed leadership is leadership practice. He conceives leadership practice to be a “product of the interactions of school leaders, followers, and their situation” (Spillane, 2005:144). The distribution of leadership takes into consideration the nature and form of the practices of leadership and the patterns of leadership distribution across leaders, followers and the situation (Spillane, 2006:14).

The success of distributed leadership is therefore dependent not only on individuals engaging effectively in a variety of leadership functions, but also on varied patterns of influence and interaction among staff (Scribner, Paredes, Sawyer, Watson & Myers, 2007:76). These authors also consider distributed leadership as a social influence where interactions are at the core of leadership practice. The interaction of leaders takes precedence over their formal leadership roles, responsibilities or functions. Hence, apart from knowing what leaders do, the analysis and comprehension of patterns of influence from a distributed perspective would indeed add value to the actual practice of leadership.

The extant literature projects the idea that distributed leadership overlaps substantially with shared (Pearce & Conger, 2003), collaborative (Wallace, 2002), democratic (Gastil, 1997) and participative (Vroom & Yago, 1998) leadership concepts. According to Harris (2004:15), distributed leadership is characterised by collegiality and collaboration, which she regards as the essence of this practice. She cautions however that in practice it exceeds mere mutual collaboration between educators. Spillane, Halverson and Diamond (2001a:10) reinforce the idea that distributed leadership manifests itself when there is interaction between people and the environment. Harris further remarks that distributed leadership does not translate to mere teamwork, but results from activity that is the product of integrated activities such as study groups, inquiry partnerships and learning communities (Harris, 2004:15-16). Hence it is

important to acknowledge that distributed leadership is not any practice that is delegated, spread or shared in a school.

A question that often arises is whether distributed leadership is a vertical or a horizontal practice. According to Spillane (2006:58), distributed leadership encompasses both these dimensions of practice. This implies that the distribution of leadership acknowledges both informal and formal forms of leadership practice within its constitution (Bennette, Harvey, Wise & Woods, 2003:9). Spillane (2006:58) further states that distributed leadership is “primarily concerned with the co-performance of leadership and the reciprocal interdependencies that shape that leadership practice”. It is important to note, however, that some investigations have identified the principal as the driving force, impetus or catalyst for executing distributed forms of leadership (e.g. Blase & Blase, 1999; Gold et al., 2002; Harris, 2004:15).

2.7.2 Situational leadership

Bearing in mind that schools are organisations, i.e. living entities, I find this model particularly relevant in that it focuses on the nature, quality and psyche of personnel. It implies that effective leaders should be familiar with their people to optimise their operational and emotional capacities so as to impact positively on learner outputs. The situational leadership model enables successful leaders to diagnose the demands of their situation and respond appropriately. According to Hersey and Blanchard (1988:83), research indicates that “leadership is a dynamic process with changes in leaders, followers and situations”.

Situational leadership theory (Hersey & Blanchard, 1988) is modelled on the amount of direction (task behaviour) and the amount of socio-emotional support (relationship behaviour) that needs to be provided by a leader, considering the situation and the level of readiness of the follower or group. The basic assumption of this model is that leadership styles need to be altered to fit the employee’s readiness in terms of his/her competence (task behaviour). This readiness is based on job experience and skills, as well as on job commitment, which is measured by the willingness and desire to complete the job (relationship behaviour) (Hersey, Blanchard & Johnson, 2008:142).

An analysis of this model reveals that task behaviour may be understood to be the measure to which a leader directs follower behaviour, specifying in intricate detail what needs to be done

where, when and how. This normally assumes one-way communication. Relationship behaviour on the other hand is the measure to which a leader provides socio-emotional support to the follower and this is effected via two-way communication. Readiness refers to the competence and willingness of the follower to take charge of and be responsible for his/her own behaviour.

Situational leadership is therefore an interplay among task behaviour, relationship behaviour of the leader and the level of readiness of the follower (Hersey et al., 2008:144).

This theory propagates that as the readiness component of a follower gradually escalates in terms of accomplishing a specific task, the leader ought to reduce task behaviour and increase relationship behaviour. It is assumed that this will continue until a moderate level of readiness is reached by the follower. Once this has been attained, the leader is expected to decrease not only task behaviour but relationship behaviour as well. An application of this dynamic by leaders results in increased levels of competence, confidence and commitment in their people. Furthermore, reduced levels of close supervision and an increase in delegation by the leader generate an ambience of trust and belief. This cycle can be illustrated as a bell-shaped curve superimposed on four leadership quadrants. In summary, the situational leadership model empowers effective leaders to know who their people are in order to identify their unique needs and nurture and develop their dynamic abilities – thereby realising their latent potential. An analysis of the discussion on this model clarifies its potential to provide leaders with concise information regarding the competence and attitudes of their people and hence it directs appropriate professional development leadership practices.

2.7.3 Transformational leadership

Synonymous with the construct of change is the concept ‘transformation’ and one cannot allude to aspects of quality leadership practices without traversing the confines of the theory of transformation. Successful school leaders know that they have to change organisational culture if their organisations are to survive and thrive (Hellriegel, Jackson, Slocum, Staude, Amos, Klopper, Louw & Oosthuizen, 2004:350). Hence it is necessary to acknowledge the significance of the transformational leadership model in the creation and sustenance of successful schools.

According to Leithwood et al. (1999:9), transformational leadership considers the commitments and capacities of people in an organisation as the focal point of leadership. It is

assumed that if people are committed to the common goals of an organisation and are capacitated to achieve these goals, then organisations would be more productive. The typical features of this leadership style include a shared or common vision among the people in the organisation and the charisma of the leader (Burns, 2010:241). A major premise of the transformational leadership theory is “the leader’s ability to motivate the follower to accomplish more than what the follower planned to accomplish” (Krishnan, 2005:443). According to Burns (2010:244), a salient feature of transformational leadership is the interaction between leaders and followers that has the potential of raising each other to higher levels of “motivation and morality”.

Transformational leaders have the capacity to align the values of followers with the organisation’s values and by so doing increase the productivity of the organisation (Burns, 2010:257). In the context of successful schools, transformational leadership provides directed cognitive growth opportunities for staff and aims at creating change within the organisation, while capacitating and encouraging teachers to engage in decision making (Conley & Goldman, 1994:239). It therefore creates valuable and positive change in the followers by redesigning their perceptions and values and changing their expectations and aspirations. In the final analysis transformational leadership strives to develop followers into leaders and enhance their motivation, morale and performance.

In 1985, Bass further expanded on Burn’s theory to describe specific behaviours that comprise this leadership style (Givens, 2008:6). Transformational leadership may be examined along the following dimensions, namely idealised influence; inspirational motivation; intellectual stimulation; and individual consideration (Bass, 1985, in Marks & Printy, 2003:375). Each of these factors is elaborated upon below (Avolio & Bass, 1995, in Aaron, *no date*:2; Hall, Johnson, Wysocki & Kepner, 2012:1-2):

- Idealised influence is often referred to as charismatic leadership. This characteristic contemplates leaders as role models who display sound moral and ethical principles. Leaders displaying this trait emphasise the importance of having a shared or common sense of purpose.
- Inspirational motivation reflects on the extent to which a leader encourages followers to reach goals of high standards. These leaders thrive on enthusiasm and optimism, and emphasise commitment to a shared goal to energise their people.

- Intellectual stimulation is when leaders instil creativity and innovation in their people by challenging normal beliefs or views of individuals or groups. They constantly seek new ways of completing assignments. Critical thinking and problem solving is promoted. Leaders regard learning to be a value and view unforeseen circumstances as opportunities for growth.
- Individual consideration is when leaders are interested in the continuous development of their followers and act as mentors and coaches while acknowledging individual needs and desires within a group. Leaders encourage two-way communication and provide support and empathy. Respect is maintained and followers are encouraged to contribute to the team (Avolio & Bass, 1995).

According to Caldwell and Spinks (1992:49-50), transformational leadership is essential for self-managed schools in that it inspires commitment from followers to stay continuously focused on and move rapidly towards organisational goals. This type of leadership has the potential of generating enormous value within the current school designs. Leithwood (1994) bears testimony to this when he conceptualises transformational leadership along the following dimensions, namely “building a vision for the school; creating common school goals; providing intellectual stimulation; offering individualised support; modelling good practices and important values; demonstrating high performance expectations; embedding a productive school culture; creating structures to promote shared decision making” (Bush, 2007:396).

In synthesising the literature above, I concur with Bush (2007:396) when he states that the transformational model is “comprehensive in that it provides a normative approach to school leadership, which focuses primarily on the process by which leaders seek to influence school outcomes rather than on the nature or direction of those outcomes”. Bush (2007:397) further articulates that the model of transformation has the capacity to focus all stakeholders on the attainment of educational goals. According to Hickman (1997:9), transformational leaders “generate visions, missions, goals, and a culture that contributes to the ability of individuals, groups, and the organisation to ‘practice its values and serve its purpose’ ”.

An analysis of the models that I have associated with successful schools each reveals its subtle linkages to the four core leadership practices that frame this study. These linkages will become evident when leadership practices are elaborated on in Chapter 3. Each of the four models discussed has the propensity to craft a leader who can create, nurture and sustain successful learning organisations. It is important to note that none of the models mentioned is

mutually exclusive, but in an integrated format has the potential to precipitate a type of leadership that is bound to have a substantial influence on pedagogy and the quality of learner outputs.

2.8 SCHOOL CULTURE

The mere application of leadership and management strategies such as monitoring, observation modelling and evaluation is not adequate to broker profound changes in teaching and learning. Of paramount importance is a cultural shift enabling all school stakeholders to comprehend the reasons for imminent change. Schein (2004) in Heystek, Nieman, van Rooyen, Mosoge and Bipath (2008:67) considers organisational culture to be a pattern of basic assumptions that are invented, discovered or developed by a specific collective of individuals as they learn to cope with its external adaptation and internal integration. He further argues that culture may be analysed as a phenomenon that surrounds us all the time and that is constantly enacted and created by our interaction with others. The embedding and transmission of culture is the prerogative of the leader (Schein, 1997:231).

Brown and Desmond in Heystek et al. (2008:66) define culture as “the deeper level of basic assumptions, and beliefs that are shared by members of the organisation, that operate unconsciously, and that define a basic taken for granted fashion of an organisation’s view of itself and its environment”. He also enunciates that school improvement is a direct consequence of school culture. Hence leaders have the responsibility and the leverage to create, embed, develop, manipulate, manage and change culture.

Heystek et al. (2008:67) claim that school improvement is essentially a process of changing school culture. Leaders are believed to generate the conditions and the climate for improvement to be initiated and sustained. They orchestrate rather than dictate improvement and establish professional learning communities within their schools. School leaders are the catalysts that create learning environments for both teachers and learners. This entails “building the capacity within the school for learning and improvement” to occur (Harris & Lambert, 2003:15)

In reflecting on the current era of schooling, Southworth (2004:85) emphasises that school cultures should radiate leadership distribution, collaboration and continuous learning for all. Successful learning cultures stimulate principals to engage in dialogue with teachers and to

contemplate and share teaching and learning experiences that exceed the confines of the school.

According to Motala and Pampallis (2001:76), the urgent embedding of a culture of teaching and learning is vital to address the challenges faced by South African schools. Developing and sustaining supportive cultures is critical to ensure that schools continually yield high learner attainment and instructional excellence. To this effect, Coleman (203:145) argues that managers of schools need to critically reflect on variables that enhance the culture of quality learning and teaching. This implies that principals need to consider aspects such as continuing professional development and the implementation of sound pedagogy in classrooms.

It is evident that leadership and culture are phenomena that complement each other. In their quest to achieve excellence school leaders therefore need to strategically create positive school cultures that would lead to success. Culture is usually deeply embedded and therefore changing it has to be a deliberate process based on innovative goals. Culture is created from deliberate decisions and it is imperative that school leaders seeking to create and sustain an excellent school should pay attention to the school's culture.

In this chapter I have defined and distinguished the concepts of leadership and management and catapulted the function of leadership as being a key construct in the establishment and maintenance of successful schools. From the literature it is clear that quality leadership in successful schools is not an option in the turbulent accountability- and standards-driven didactic environment of the 21st century, but a necessity. Decentralisation of schooling and the expected rigorous standards put school leaders squarely in a position where they are accountable for the quality of instruction and learner attainment. To lead learning is a skill, and successful leaders understand the high expectations placed on them. Hence they acquire the necessary capacity, competence and values, and also develop these in others as espoused by the selected leadership models. Leading learning however requires an intricate culture to thrive in and successful leaders strategically factor in this crucial variable. Chapter 3 next endeavours to diminish the chasm that exists between this rhetoric and the reality of how successful leaders put into practice their knowledge, skills and values.

CHAPTER 3: THE PRACTICE OF LEADERSHIP IN EDUCATION – LITERATURE REVIEW

3.1 INTRODUCTION

The deliberations in Chapter 2 emphatically highlighted the need for effective school leadership to ensure high-quality learner attainment and instruction. We know much of the ‘what’ of school leadership, but in the final analysis it is the ‘how’ that really matters. Praxis is always the challenge and Chapter 3 endeavours to explore this critical domain to isolate the synchrony between theory and practice. The leadership practices of successful school leaders will be determined and explained. If we are to understand and comprehend the internal dynamics of leadership practice, it is essential to investigate it from within a conceptual framework.

As alluded to in Chapter 1, the four core categories of leadership practices as delineated by Leithwood et al. (2006) will be elaborated upon, reaffirming that they form the ideal lens through which this study is executed. I therefore make extensive reference to the extant literature generated by Leithwood and his collaborators Day, Sammons, Hopkins and Brown (2011). A synthesis of the best evidence on effective and quality school leadership practices will be implemented, bearing in mind that 21st century principals dare not respond individually to disparate leadership tasks, but reflect with a cooperative and collaborative paradigm to understand and respond to situations within the larger context of the entire organisation. The link and the synergy between the selected leadership models identified in the previous chapter and the core leadership practices will become clear. This chapter ultimately seeks to investigate and explore the practices that leaders execute in their quest to generate, support, nurture and sustain successful learning organisations.

3.2 GENESIS OF CORE CATEGORIES OF LEADERSHIP PRACTICE

The sentiments expressed by Harris (2004) and Christie (2005) strongly define schools as centres of learning. It therefore stands to reason that those entrusted with leading schools should focus primarily on optimising quality learning. Leithwood et al. (2004) allude to classroom teaching as the single most crucial school-related factor that contributes to learner attainment. If teacher performance is central to what learners learn, it would be logical to assume that the primary task of school leadership in optimising quality learning would be to optimise teacher performance. There therefore exists an inextricable link between leadership

practice and teacher performance. The quandary that arises is to isolate the variables that define teacher performance and enhance them. This serves as a powerful guide to leadership practices.

The literature reveals the empirical compilations of O'Day (1996) and Rowan (1996), which succinctly capture the relationship between teacher performance and identified variables that impact on performance. This relationship may be summarised in an equation as follows:

$$P = f(M, A, S)$$

where P represents teacher's performance; M represents teacher's motivation; A represents the professional knowledge, skills and abilities of the teacher and S the teacher's work environment (O'Day, 1996; Rowan, 1996 as cited by Day et al., 2011:18-19). An analysis of the equation yields that the classroom performance of teachers is a function (f) of their motivations, abilities, and the situations in which they work (Leithwood et al., 2006:32).

A synthesis of the literature concerning this formula indicates that the relationship between teacher motivation, teacher competence and the situation in which teachers teach is interdependent, implying that changes in all three variables must occur in harmony to ensure a substantial improvement in performance. This has implications for leadership practice in that leaders will need to strategise and execute practices that have the inherent potential to enhance all variables in the equation, namely the settings in which teachers work, their motivation and their abilities. It is imperative for leaders to simultaneously engage in these practices. Endeavours to achieve high ability and high motivation will not bear success in a dysfunctional work environment (Leithwood, 2006:33). Significantly, a teacher's work environment translates to the learner's learning environment and leaders need to be mindful of this when engaging in practices to engineer didactically conducive environments.

From the preceding discussion it may be argued that principals improve teaching and learning profoundly through their influence on staff motivation, teacher competence and the working conditions of teachers. Recent studies executed in the United Kingdom by research teams from the University of Toronto and the University of Minnesota indicate that leadership practices had the strongest impact on the working conditions of teachers, followed by their motivation to implement teaching strategies and finally capacity to implement an effective teaching strategy (Leithwood, Harris & Hopkins, 2008:8). According to the evidence, capacity to implement effective teaching strategies is the strongest direct contribution to

enhancing classroom practices. It may therefore be argued that whilst it is essential for leaders to focus on working conditions and motivation, it is critical for leaders to focus more directly on strategies for building relevant capacity and competence in their staff in an attempt to optimise the quality of the learning and teaching experience.

These findings are captured in the path-analysis diagram below:

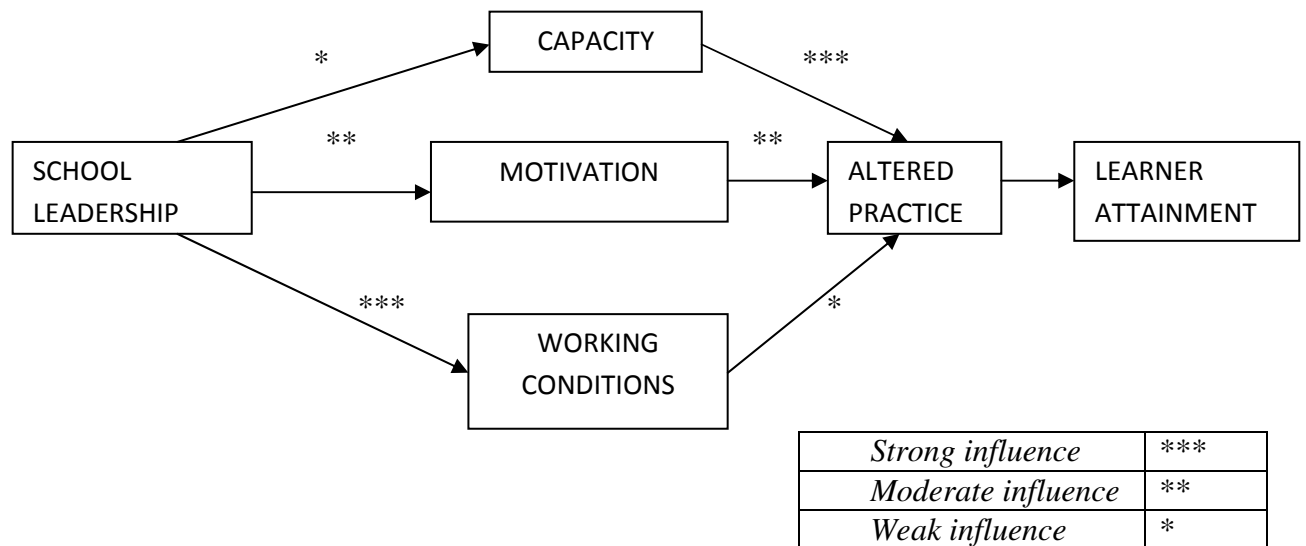


Figure 3.1: Leadership effects on teacher capacity, motivation and working conditions

Source: Leithwood et al. (2008:33)

Knowledge of how the teacher’s capacity, levels of motivation and working conditions affect classroom practice is of vital importance to all school leaders who desire improved learner attainment and instructional excellence in that it justifies and guides the crafting and the enactment of a particular type of leadership practice. It may be inferred that ‘teacher capacity’ links to the professional development of people, ‘motivation’ links to inspiring individuals towards a common vision and setting their direction, and ‘working conditions’ deal with the organisational structure and climate. Leithwood et al. (2006) provide a powerful guiding source and a framework on which this may be structured in their core categories of leadership practices.

3.3 A REVELATION OF THE CORE LEADERSHIP PRACTICES

Exactly what is it that principals do that continually results in high learner attainment and instructional excellence? A synthesis of the extant literature reveals rigorous research

conducted by Leithwood et al. (2006) who tactfully identified core leadership practices or the basics of successful school leadership. The four broad categories of leadership practice that they identified are:

- Setting directions
- Developing people
- Redesigning the organisation
- Managing the instructional (teaching and learning) programme

Each of these fundamental categories is further extrapolated into more specific leadership practices. I concur with Leithwood et al. (2006:19) when they acknowledge that “core practices are not all that people providing leadership in schools do”. They do however present as critical practices those issues that significantly influence organisational goals.

Prior to embarking on an investigation of the four categories of leadership practices suggested by Leithwood and colleagues, it is imperative to ascertain whether they correlate with and corroborate how other researchers in the field of educational leadership have tried to grasp the concept of successful school leadership practices.

For example, Hallinger’s (2003:331) model of instructional leadership highlights three categories of practice:

1. Defining the school’s mission, which acknowledges the framing and communication of goals. This is aligned with the ‘setting direction’ category.
2. Managing the instructional programme, which incorporates coordinating the curriculum and monitoring and evaluating learner attainment. This links to the ‘managing the instructional programme’ category.
3. Promoting a positive learning climate, which incorporates maintaining high visibility, protecting instructional time, providing incentives for teachers, providing incentives for learning, and promoting professional development. This correlates with the ‘developing people’ and ‘redesigning the organisation’ categories.

Research on the effects of school leadership by Robinson, Hohepa and Lloyd (2009) as cited in Day et al. (2011:20) alludes to a five-fold classification of successful school leadership practices (core leadership category correlations are indicated in parenthesis):

1. Crafting goals and expectations (setting directions)

2. Resourcing strategically (redesigning the organisation and managing the instructional programme)
3. Planning and coordinating the curriculum and evaluating teaching (managing the instructional programme)
4. Planning and participating in professional development (developing people)
5. Creating supportive didactic environments (redesigning the organisation and managing the instructional programme)

Day et al. (2011:21) in turn identify three recent individual studies that accentuate empirical support for Leithwood et al.'s four-pronged core leadership practices that lead to success:

- Research conducted by Leithwood, Harris and Strauss (2010), which validates the contributions of the four sets of practices to school turnaround success and relate to essential modifications of the actual practices as they are enacted.
- The empirical findings of Finnigan and Stewart (2009) also cite evidence to support the value of Leithwood et al.'s four sets of practices for leaders who work to turn around underperforming schools.
- The findings of Supovitz et al. (2010:46) who discovered that principals are a significant driving force in learners' learning, which they attribute to collaboration and communication with teachers on matters concerning learning and teaching. They also highlight the principals' involvement in the communication of goals, and in engendering community and trust (ibid: 43).

In their study of American teachers' perspectives of how principals promote teaching and learning at schools, Blase et al. (2000:130) identify the following themes of effective leadership namely, talking with teachers to promote reflection and promoting professional growth. The former links extensively to leading and managing the instructional programme and promotes the leadership strategies of making suggestions, promoting inquiry and inciting advice and opinions, giving feedback, modelling, and giving praise. The latter focus on developing people and restructuring the organisation via the leadership strategies of a strong focus on the study of teaching and learning, developing coaching relations amongst educators, embracing the tenets of adult learning, growth and development, promoting collaboration amongst educators, inspiring and supporting the redesign of educational programmes and executing action research to make informed decisions (Blase et al.,2000:133-135).

There is consequently ample empirical support for Leithwood et al.'s four core practices of successful school leadership, which in my opinion are the hallmark of all successful school leaders. It is also imperative to note that successful leadership depends on the sensitivity of leaders' practices to the diverse contexts that characterise school environments. It most certainly is not a one-size-fits-all philosophy. Innovative leaders are therefore required to adapt their core practices and conjure appropriate combinations and accumulations of these practices in response to the contexts in which they operate (Day et al., 2011:17).

The rest of this chapter examines the leadership practices of successful school principals. I use an adaptation of the four leadership categories suggested by Leithwood et al. (2006) to determine and explain what constitutes good practice and ultimately results in quality instruction and high learner outputs.

3.3.1 Setting directions

This core practice enables the creation of a compelling sense of purpose in organisations by establishing a common vision of the future, building consensus about relevant organisational goals and creating high expectations for people (Leithwood, 2006:34-36). The empirical compilations of Hallinger and Heck (1998:169) suggest that setting directions plays a predominant role in motivating people and spurring them into action. However, merely being in action is grossly inadequate – direction is critical. Setting direction therefore steers all actions at all levels of the organisation towards the attainment of specific goals.

3.3.1.1 Building a shared vision

The organisational vision encompasses the ideal state of the school. It clarifies a shared vision of a desirable and attainable future situation together with a strategy required to attain it. Rampersad (2003:24) remarks that “it indicates what the organisation wants to achieve, what is essential for its success, and which critical success factors make it unique”.

According to Day et al. (2011:22), building and communicating compelling visions of the organisation's future is a primary task that comprises what Bass (1985) refers to as inspirational motivation. I tend to agree with this statement in that people will only be spurred into action if they can see the target or the end goal. A similar sentiment is expressed by Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Moorman and Fetter (1990:112) when they conceptualise this phenomenon as leadership behaviour that seeks new opportunities for organisations by “developing, articulating, and inspiring others with a vision of the future”. Locke (2002:3)

emphasises that formulating a vision is a fundamental practice implemented to align, integrate and synergise activities in an organisation.

In their study of schools facing challenging circumstances, Harris and Chapman (2002:6) state explicitly that the alignment of staff and learners with the leader's vision and values is of paramount importance. They aver that this is achieved via a "variety of symbolic gestures and actions" (ibid) performed by the leader. Day et al. (2011:64) corroborate this view and remark that successful principals "strategically translate their values, beliefs and ethics into their visions, purposes, strategies and practices and that these are widely communicated, clearly understood and supported by staff and learners and the external community".

Harris (2002:18) reflects on the communication of the vision and believes that "heads walk-the-talk through the consistency and integrity of their actions". Principals seem to model behaviour that they believe to be appropriate in an attempt to achieve the school goal. They pursue a relationship of mutual trust and strive to care, actively support, encourage, as well as "challenge and confront when necessary" (Harris, 2002:18). Thus, by establishing relationships built on these core values, principals are able to communicate their vision. In their research into principals' leadership influence on teachers' instructional practices, Supovitz et al. (2010) discovered that lucid communication of the school mission and goals strongly correlates with teachers making significant changes in their teaching and learning practices.

According to research by Sanzo, Sherman and Clayton (2011:36), principals constantly articulate the phrase "professional learning communities" when accounting for the presence of a shared vision. They contemplate the importance of establishing and sustaining a community of professionals and realise that the establishment of professional learning communities requires structured settings and processes.

The following deliberation on the findings of the IMPACT study (Day et al., 2011:110-112) clarifies the practice of 'setting direction':

Generally, the initial focus of principals involved in the IMPACT study was to create and share their vision of the school with the staff. Establishing a clear sense of direction and purpose for the school was regarded as one of the most powerful dimensions of effective school leadership. Principals continuously engaged in defining, discussing and communicating a set of values to all in their school community so as to establish purpose and

direction for school improvement. Principals were driven by a strong and clear vision that was widely shared, clearly understood and supported by all staff. It was this vision that would influence and shape school culture. Core values like trust and high expectations as modelled by principals in their daily interactions, influenced both teacher and learner behaviour, attendance and attainment levels. School leaders were also conscious of the need to periodically reflect on any changes in the school's circumstances by engaging in situational analyses, horizon scanning and timely judgement and by responding with appropriate adaptations (Day et al., 2011:110-112).

3.3.1.2 Establishing common goals

Having a vision on its own is grossly inadequate. To gravitate towards this vision, it is of paramount importance that organisational goals are strategically crafted. Leithwood et al. (2006:35) emphatically state that this practice concerns itself not only with the identification of important organisational goals, but with influencing others in the organisation to own these goals. Only then will organisational goals have a motivational value. Podsakoff et al. (1990:112) are of the view that this practice defines the relationship behaviour of leaders towards “promoting cooperation among [teachers] and getting them to work together toward a common goal”. This is of particular significance for the practice of leadership, for it is only when a critical mass of people in the organisation has a common understanding of the organisational goals that they can engage in meaningful behaviour aimed at the realisation of high learner attainment and instructional excellence. Collaboration and cooperation are therefore of vital importance for the interactions within schools.

According to Leithwood et al. (2006:35) cooperation and collaboration pervade the strategic and improvement planning processes in organisations such as schools. This is corroborated by Yukl's (1994:30) Multiple Linkage model that embraces ‘planning and organising’ as practices employed to identify long-term objectives and strategies, and to determine approaches to accomplish projects or activities. Leithwood et al. (2006:35) argue that this critical function would not be possible if leaders were to neglect fostering the acceptance of group goals in their schools. Research on successful school principals conducted by Moos and Johansson (2009:770-771) reveals that principals personalise organisational goals and motivate teachers in accordance with such goals, and they cement a sense of trust between their teachers and themselves.

3.3.1.3 High performance expectations

The setting of high expectations is associated with setting directions because the latter correlate strongly with goals. High performance expectations are linked to the values of leaders and demonstrate what Podsakoff et al. (1990:112) aptly explain as “the leader’s expectations of excellence, quality, and/or high performance” in the achievement of those goals. Sun (2010) believes that leaders’ expectations of high performance contribute extensively to many school conditions linked with improvement. It is also imperative to acknowledge that the demonstration of high expectations is a core element in virtually all modes of transformational leadership (Leithwood et al., 2006:36).

High expectations constitute an essential monomer of a positive school culture that supports quality teaching and learning (Gupton, 2010). Porter, Murphy, Goldring, Elliot, Polikoff and May (2008:13) argue that having high expectations for all is an effective strategy for bridging the achievement gap between advantaged and less advantaged learners and for raising the overall attainment of all learners. The setting of high expectations coaxes high performance from both educators and learners.

It therefore seems evident that setting the direction is a fundamental leadership practice and everyone is held liable for the learners’ learning. This behoves a shared vision and common sets of goals among all those involved in the art and science of teaching and learning. I concur with Moos et al. (2009:771) when they argue that everyone in the school is accountable via three principles, namely caring; accountability and a firm focus on learning. Day et al. (2011:22) claim that if building a shared vision and fostering the acceptance of group goals and high expectations of performance are skilfully executed, setting the direction motivates and inspires organisational activity. Setting direction also clarifies the desired state to be aspired for and leaders who engage in this practice “breath the life force into the workplace” (as suggested by Bhindi & Dugan in Harris (2002:18)), and keep people focused and energised.

3.3.2 Developing people

The deliberations in Chapter 2 adequately demonstrated that classroom teaching has a primary impact on the quality of learning. This point is corroborated by Cheng and Cheung (2004:72) who state that what teachers achieve in the classroom has an effect on the performance of the school. Teachers are relatively autonomous in their classrooms and I

support the statement by Maldonado and Victoreen (2002:1), namely that “it is the teacher management of classroom instruction that can be indicators or catalysts for learner achievement”. Moos and Johannson (2009:770) acknowledge that since teachers are pivotal elements in the learning process, the conditions under which they work must be conducive to fostering healthy relationships with learners. It is against this background that the professional development of teachers receives great importance to ensure that educators are knowledgeable and skilled in curriculum content knowledge and pedagogy.

3.3.2.1 The need for continuous learning

Knowledge has the tendency to age rapidly and it is susceptible to wear. Therefore everyone in an organisation needs to learn. Rampersad (2003:20) states that “learning is a continuous personal transformation that is a cyclical and cumulative process of actualising one’s knowledge” in an attempt to alter behaviour to advance personal functionality. He further argues that successful organisations need to learn continuously in order to “develop, mobilise, share, cultivate, review, and put into practice, knowledge” (Rampersad, 2003:20).

According to Senge (1990) as cited by Rampersad (2003:21), learning organisations are organisations where individuals increase their capacity to create the outputs they aspire for, where novel and “expansive patterns of thinking are nurtured”, where “collective aspirations” are liberated, and where individuals are “continually learning”. I argue that for schools to be successful, it is imperative that principals are knowledgeable about and adhere to the expectations just mentioned. Furthermore, it is important to note that learning organisations comprise of individuals who share knowledge and communicate openly with each other, who continually learn from their own mistakes and have leaders who help inspire, coach, motivate, stimulate and intuitively make decisions. Schools therefore must function as learning organisations with school leaders creating the space and time for continuous learning.

Principals need to recognise that the main objective of professional development is to enhance the performance of the individual or team and thus to increase the organisation’s competitiveness (Heystek et al., 2008:162). Development and training are viewed as a means of advancing individuals from one level of productivity to a higher level. This is an essential occurrence in successful schools where educators keep abreast of new developments and avoid what Smith (2003:204) refers to as ‘professional fossilisation’.

Teacher quality plays a significant role in successful schools. Chapman, Armstrong, Harris, Muijs, Reynolds and Sammonds (2012:149) believe that a primary focus of school improvement is to improve the quality of teaching. A review of studies of learner attainment in the USA by Darling-Hammond et al. (2001:10) reveals that the qualifications of teachers based on the measures of knowledge, experience, education and expertise was the single most important factor contributing to learner attainment variance. Jensen (2010) in Chapman et al. (2012:151) avers that “with an excellent teacher, a learner can achieve in half a year what would take a full year with a less effective teacher”. This escalates the need for the continuous professional development of teachers, which is regarded to be critical in enhancing the curriculum content knowledge of teachers and improving their classroom practices (Harris, Clarke, James, Gunraj & James, 2006).

Successful leaders are knowledgeable about building capacity within their schools by developing their people. Capacity building in the form of people development focuses not only on knowledge and skills that are critical for the accomplishment of organisational goals, but also on persevering in the application of that knowledge and skills (Harris & Chapman, 2002:12). By developing people, their levels of ‘commitment and resilience’ in organisations are enhanced and these significantly contribute to their levels of motivation (Bandura, 1986 in Leithwood, 2006:36). I therefore concur with Glickman, Gordon and Ross-Gordon (2007) in Crum et al. (2008:568) when they argue that principals must understand adult learning theory and that “proper developmental practices [must] be employed to bring out the full potential of teachers so that they are not wasted as valuable ‘in-house’ resources”.

3.3.2.2 Providing individualised support

Individualised support or individualised consideration (Avolio & Bass, 1995) is one of the components of transformational leadership theory that were alluded to in Chapter 2. According to Bass and Avolio (1994:64) individualised support can be actualised by “knowing your followers’ needs and raising them to more mature levels by the use of delegation to provide opportunities for each follower to self-actualise and to attain higher standards of moral development”. It therefore links extensively to developing people in that it explores the extent to which the leader responds to needs, coaches and mentors, and listens to the followers’ concerns. It is not unusual for the leader to support, communicate openly with, empathise and challenge followers. Respect for one another is promoted (Podsakoff et al., 1990) and individuals are encouraged to contribute to the well-being of the team. Leaders

need to interact with their people to ensure that the desire and aspiration for self-development thrives and that individuals are intrinsically motivated to perform their tasks.

3.3.2.2.1 Identification of developmental needs

It is common knowledge that one cannot improve what you cannot measure. It is therefore essential that teacher performance be measured and appraised so that it can be continually improved. Principals as school leaders must engage in a process of assessment and performance appraisal to identify areas of need in their staff. To this effect, Heystek, Roos and Middlewood (2005:109-110) draw attention to Wood’s model of personnel appraisal and suggest that

- the appraisal criteria must clear;
- the appraiser should possess adequate knowledge about the appraised, the work situation and the skills and competencies essential for the task; and
- the assessment process should adhere to the sequence of the steps described in Wood’s model below:

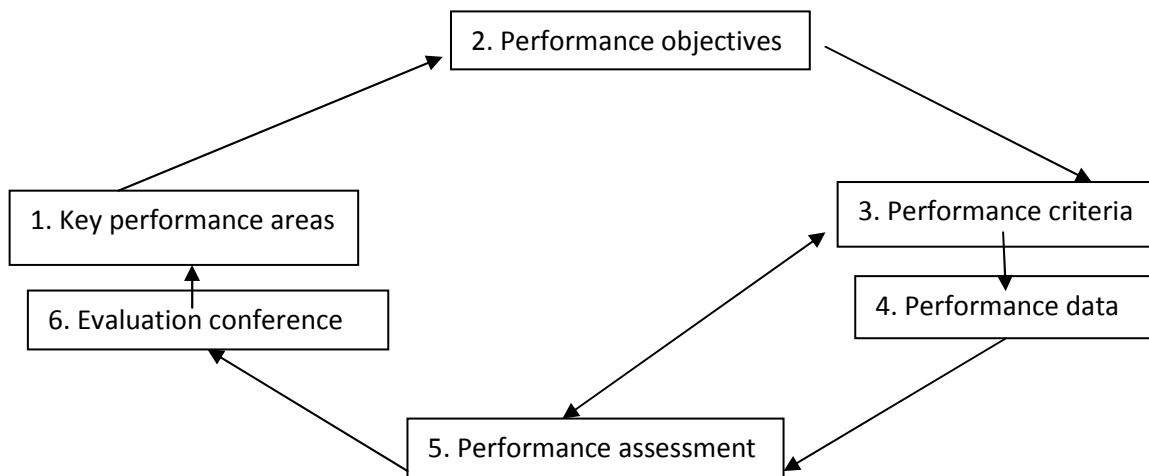


Figure 3.2: Adaptation of Wood’s model for personnel appraisal

Source: Heystek et al. (2005)

The model assumes that the following criteria will be adhered to:

- The process will be based on mutual trust.

- Performance areas to be assessed must be clearly understood by all involved in the process. (Step 1)
- Job descriptions must allude clearly to performance objectives. (Step 2)
- Detailed criteria and performance indicators should be provided to reduce the element of subjectivity. (Step 3)
- Appropriate rating scales that prevent a middle tendency should be devised.
- An assessment instrument needs to be populated by all involved in the process. (Step 4)
- Every item will be discussed and consensus will be reached on the rating to clarify strengths, areas of excellence and areas that require improvement. (Step 5)
- The information will eventually be utilised to identify mentors and engineer mutually agreed programmes of intervention for growth and development. (Step 6)

The above represents a formal system of appraisal and needs identification that school principals may implement to enhance instruction. A more informal process of appraisal and development exists where a peer, an experienced colleague or the immediate senior colleague acts as a mentor or coach to a new or inexperienced staff member. The interaction between individuals assumes a format of guidance and counselling and is based on open democratic relationships. Principals create opportunities at their schools for these supportive interactions to thrive. Leaders should display an awareness of the needs, motivations and professional desires of their people and respond to these accordingly (Crum et al., 2009:57). In earlier research conducted by Crum and colleagues (2008:571) reference is made to principals establishing professional development committees to conduct staff needs assessments and to inform growth activities.

3.3.2.2.2 *Mentoring*

Mentoring involves a development strategy that takes the form of support given by an experienced colleague to a novice educator or to an experienced but under-performing educator. Smith (2003:209) believes that novice educators develop professionally if they take the initiative to discuss plans and problems with an experienced educator and have someone available for verbal reflections, questions and observation. By analysing feedback from appraisal activities, principals are in a position to identify experienced but poorly performing educators and subject them to mentoring as part of an intervention aimed at teacher growth and development.

The typical scenario entails the mentor – usually an experienced, successful educator – being assigned to an inexperienced educator to render support and academic leadership. Heystek et al. (2008:185) indicate that the success of the support depends on the cordial relationship between the mentor and the mentee, where the mentor serves as the interpreter of the curriculum and a guide to teaching methods. It may hence be inferred that principals need to devote an enormous amount of energy towards ensuring that sound and healthy human relationships prevail in their schools. I agree with the observation made by Moon, Butcher and Bird (2000:97), namely that collaborative teaching with a mentee allows modelling of lessons, observation of the mentee in action and provision of fruitful discussion and feedback.

Principals need to develop a core of support staff at their schools to drive this useful development intervention as it addresses issues at the classroom practice level. Undoubtedly, mentoring is a challenging task and as a consequence educators engaging in this process need time and in-service support appropriate to the increased responsibilities being allocated to them (Heystek, 2008:186).

3.3.2.2.3 Peer coaching

Peer coaching is similar to mentoring in that both provide face-to-face learning opportunities. It is a process that occurs when two or more peers (usually teaching the same grade or subject) collaborate with each other on teaching and learning content and methodology. Oldroyd and Hall (1991:117) define peer coaching as a “process through which teachers share expertise and provide one another with feedback, support and assistance for the purpose of refining skills, learning new skills and /or solving classroom-related problems”.

Coaching is of particular significance where educators have accessed similar training and find opportunities to compare and discuss how they implement their newly acquired skills. For this action to materialise, principals are required to create a school climate that promotes collaboration between teachers. According to Heystek et al. (2008:186), coaching requires interpersonal skills of a higher order, as well as openness and trust between educators.

3.3.2.3 Intellectual stimulation

Intellectual stimulation is also a component of the transformational leadership model advanced by Bass and Avolio (1995). Intellectual stimulation refers to that aspect of leadership practice that reflects on the extent to which the leader interrogates assumptions, engages in risk taking and solicits ideas from his/her people. Successful leaders are fond of

stimulating and encouraging creativity in their people. They value, encourage and nurture independent thinking. Such leaders consider learning to be a value and view challenging circumstances as opportunities to learn. Individuals in the organisation are encouraged to think deeply, ask questions and devise better ways to execute tasks.

Leaders are perceived as motivating their subordinates to “appreciate, dissect, ponder and discover what they would not otherwise discern...” (Lowe, Kroeck & Sivasubramaniam, 1996: 415-416) and to challenge the status quo (Waters et al., 2003; Marzano, Waters & McNulty, 2005). It involves leaders mobilising their people in continuing professional development activities with the express purpose of enhancing their performance in their core roles and responsibilities.

Engaging in practices that stimulate the cognitive capacities of their people reaffirms principals as instructional leaders and situates them at the core of teaching and learning improvement endeavours in their schools. The leader is hence perceived as playing the key role in the organisation’s professional development and this necessitates a thorough understanding of both formal and informal learning “as constructed, social and situated” (Leithwood, 2006:37). Principals attempt to promote a learning culture among their teachers as it grossly improves learner achievement, more especially when leaders themselves participate in learning with their staff (Robinson et al., 2009). Ideally, principals should therefore craft and implement strategies for encouraging professional development within their schools.

3.3.2.4 Strategies for encouraging professional development within schools

Principals must establish a school culture that promotes critical enquiry and stimulates professional dialogue. However, according to Darling-Hammond and McLaughlin (2011:84), principals do not capitalise on these opportunities and they cite the following possibilities that are missed in this regard:

- Strategically using department meetings for dynamic professional development.
- School policy incorporating professional development.
- Staff growth and development being stimulated by allowing teachers to function as teacher-researchers.
- Strategically using peer coaching and peer reviews to build capacity in staff.

- Encouraging dialogue on new practices by promoting teacher-driven assessments of instruction.

Darling-Hammond and McLaughlin (2011:84) suggest that principals can only effect constructive professional development by establishing systems that create time for teachers to plan, share, learn and evaluate collaboratively as teams. They further maintain that for professional development to make an impact, it must practically engage teachers; be relevant; use coaching and modelling to provide support; be grounded in experimentation, enquiry and reflection; and be intensive and sustained (Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 2011:84).

Whilst acknowledging that principals considered in-service education and training (INSET) and opportunities to external qualifications, Day et al. (2011:112-114) prioritised internal training and development in the following formats: peer observation, informal observations, open-door policies, collaboration among teachers, coaching and mentoring. Opportunities were provided for shadowing as an avenue to succession planning and staff members were encouraged to assume new roles for limited periods of time. Staff members were also encouraged to share their expertise with and learn from one another.

Recent findings by Moos et al. (2009:772-773) highlight the following strategies for teacher growth and development:

- Principals support the formation of autonomous professional learning teams that formulate their own goals. The teams are tasked with the responsibility of building the capacity of colleagues within the team.
- Meaningful classroom visits are executed with a view to identifying needs, and teachers are encouraged to be accountable leaders.
- Emphasis is placed on building trust and supporting each other. Knowledge, thoughts and observations are shared among colleagues.
- Capacity building should be tailored to individual needs and be informed by data.
- By engaging the services of subject teams, teaching specialists and peer mentors, principals support teachers in their work environments.
- Teachers from all grades constitute leadership teams, which encourages peer observation and learning.

It is evident that professional development must be regarded as a fundamental component of the process of creating centres of excellence. Principals also need to be strategic in devising

the modes of delivery and taking the time to execute this core practice. Leithwood et al. (2006:38) refer to principals' commitment to providing an appropriate model and leading by example. Harris and Chapman (2002:6) add that successful principals "modelled behaviour that they considered desirable to achieve the school goal". For this practice to be successful, it is necessary for principals to maintain high visibility in their respective schools and to interact extensively with both staff and learners.

3.3.3 Aligning the organisation

The leadership practices that constitute this category are concerned with the establishment of favourable work conditions. The working environment is an inherent component in the nurturing of a successful school in that it plays a critical role in motivating teachers (Gawel, 1997). Increasing the capacity and levels of motivation among staff will not achieve much if working conditions impede their effective implementation. Day et al. (2011:26) cite Bandura (1986) and aptly indicate that people are only motivated when they conceive their current working situation as conducive to realising the goals that are dear to them. Successful principals have the ability to promote organisational goals by restructuring the work environment, creating collaborative work cultures, and developing healthy relationships with external stakeholders. It is believed that these practices have the potential to generate work environments that would encourage staff to optimise their motivation and capacities.

In an attempt to identify leadership practices that contribute to the establishment of an effective organisational structure and milieu, the creation of collaborative cultures, building of relationships and realignment of roles and responsibilities will be discussed next.

3.3.3.1 Creating collaborative cultures

The culture of a school may be regarded as decisive for high learner attainment and instructional excellence. According to Brown and Desmond (1999) in Heystek et al. (2008:66), culture may be defined as "the deeper level of basic assumptions and beliefs that are shared by members of the organisation, that operate unconsciously, and that define in a basic taken-for-granted fashion an organisation's view of itself and its environment". Schein (1997:231) emphatically states that "it is the leader who needs to embed and transmit culture". Heystek et al. (2008:67) agree and argue that for improvements to materialise at schools it is essential to change the school culture.

The Oxford English Dictionary (1982) succinctly defines the word collaborate as ‘work jointly’ or ‘co-operate’. A collaborative culture therefore entails working together with a group of individuals with the intention of generating synergy. From a leadership perspective, this would imply orchestrating rather than dictating the behaviour of individuals in a system in the quest for improvement. Successful principals foster cultures of collaboration by establishing cohesive teams and creating climates conducive to dialogue. Printy (2010:113) argues that in order to realise quality teaching, solid collaboration focused on improvement is a necessity. Sanzo et al. (2011:41) state that principals cannot lead schools without staff collaboration and that staff members need to be empowered to make their own decisions. Principals are also expected to engage with staff in a “cooperative, collegial manner” (ibid:41).

Building collaborative cultures requires teamwork, communication and trust.

3.3.3.1.1 Teamwork

According to Rampersad (2003:192), a team is a collective of people with “complementary skills and personalities who feel committed to a shared objective and who need each other to achieve results”. Whilst the formation of teams in schools may be a managerial function, leadership is a pre-requisite to energise their dynamism and effectiveness. In order to establish and foster highly productive teams, principals are advised to heed and implement behaviour that promotes coherence and harmony, clear objectives, trust, open communication and respect (Rampersad, 2003:192-193). Teams that are effective, inspire creativity and innovation, learn from their experiences, acknowledge the different learning styles in members and resolve internal conflicts and problems.

Establishing and sustaining effective teams is a challenging process. According to Hackman (2002:28), “effective teams operate in ways that build shared commitment, collective skills, and task-appropriate coordination strategies ... not mutual antagonisms and trails of failure from which little is learned”. Hackman (2002:31) also argues that the productivity and effectiveness of a team are only enhanced when it has a compelling focus, is authentic, receives support and coaching, and is sustained by structures that facilitate teamwork. It is abundantly clear that principals must have the capacity and positive attitude to create the conditions in which teamwork can thrive.

3.3.3.1.2 *Communication*

Interpersonal communication is a vital element and is often regarded as the glue that holds organisations together. Apart from creating mutual understanding, it broadens knowledge and hence changes the attitudes and behaviour of people. For interpersonal communication to be effective and augment collaborative cultures in the workplace, leaders need to be transparent, egoless, empathetic and compromising. It is also necessary for leaders to listen to their staff attentively, solicit their opinions, give constructive feedback and desist from blaming (Rampersad, 2003:2005).

Classroom practice can only be enhanced when leaders engage in dialogue with their staff. Professional conversation normally assumes the form of formal and informal meetings with meaningful feedback. Blase and Blase (2000:133) embrace the notion of “talking with teachers to promote reflection” and report that “effective principals valued dialogue that encouraged teachers to critically reflect on their learning and professional practice”.

3.3.3.1.3 *Trust*

Trust is a value that cements relationships and promotes collaboration. It may be defined as the “confidence in or reliance on some quality or attribute of a person or thing” (Oxford English Dictionary, 1982). Trust and trustworthiness are reciprocal relationships and in order to grow and sustain trust in others, leaders must be trustworthy. Seldon (2009:26) claims that for leaders to be recognised as role models, they must be technically proficient and behave ethically. The latter are regarded as the two key criteria for trustworthiness. He further avers that leaders have the power to easily destroy trust, especially in the absence of honesty and competence.

I agree with Sockett (1993:62) when he argues that it is not only the actions of leaders that are important in the creation of a culture of trust, but also the values and virtues that they possess, articulate and communicate. The values identified as fundamental to teaching include honesty, courage, care, fairness and practical wisdom (Sockett, 1993:62). Leaders themselves must not only live these values, but also create opportunities for their staff and learners to realise them. The values pursued by leaders constitute a critical variable in the movement towards excellence.

According to Seashore Louis (2007:3) there are “qualities that contribute towards the creation of trust but these interact constantly with other variables to create an environment for

improvement, making trust a necessary ingredient for cooperative action”. The analysis of trust reveals that it traverses the individual, relational and organisational domains and plays a vital role in improving learner outputs.

There exists an intricate relationship between trust and transparency. Ormerod (2000) in Wilcox and Angelis (2011:54) postulates that by working together, trust and transparency feed a positive reinforcing cycle and contribute to the ability of schools to achieve synergy that has a positive impact on learner performance. Leaders need to be mindful that continuous professional dialogue leads to trust and this in turn leads to the transparency of the challenges and successes that are encountered in the school.

3.3.3.2 Leadership distribution

The prevalence of organisational trust and cohesive teams present a perfect environment in which leadership may be distributed. The deliberations in Chapter 2 indicate that, given the roles and responsibilities of school principals in the current era, a heroic model of leadership focusing solely on the principal fails to produce optimal benefits for the school. I therefore agree with Harris (2004:14) when she states that “distributed leadership equates with maximising the human capacity within the organisation by engaging expertise wherever it exists rather than seeking this only within a formal position or role”.

The distribution of leadership often culminates in a phenomenon referred to as teacher leadership. According to Katzenmeyer and Moller (2001:17), teacher leadership may be conceived as “teachers who lead within and beyond the classroom, identify with and contribute to a community of teachers, learners and leaders and influence others towards improved educational practice”. Successful leaders distribute leadership progressively. Grant (2006:521) remarks that a collaborative culture characterised by a shared vision, democratic decision making and a combination of values promotes teacher leadership.

Research recently conducted by Day et al. (2011:234-235) reveals the following findings regarding the progressive distribution of leadership by successful principals:

- There was a link between the increased distribution of leadership and improved learner attainment.
- Leadership was distributed by initially sharing new roles and responsibilities with the senior leadership team.

- A pattern of progressive and selective leadership distribution emerged and was determined by the following factors:
 - The principal's perception of what would benefit the school
 - The principal's judgement about the readiness and ability of the staff to lead
 - The extent to which trust had been established
 - The principal's personal training, experience and capabilities

Commenting on their research with successful school principals, Moos et al. (2009:772) indicated that continued efforts were made to establish teacher teams and divest “elements of leadership from principals and middle leaders to teacher teams and individual teachers”. It was also discovered that the relationships between principals and teachers grew with respect to “personal relations of trust, support, care, direction and expectation” (Moos et al., 2009:772). Successful school principals hence promoted the structured distribution of leadership.

3.3.3.3 Establishing relationships

The establishment of healthy relationships based on mutual trust and respect is of paramount importance for schools to be successful. Relationships examined in this study may be categorised as within the school community and outside the school community.

3.3.3.3.1 Relationships within the school community

The quality of relationships between the principal, his staff and learners determines the quality of teaching and learning. This has been inferred from an analysis of the findings of research conducted by Day et al. (2011:118-121), which reveals the following:

- The establishment of positive relationships within schools was a priority among principals.
- Heads were supportive of staff and made them feel valued.
- Principals listened to and respected staff, valuing their inputs.
- Heads were perceived as approachable.
- Principals engaged staff in discussions about future planning and strategic thinking.
- Principals motivated staff, promoted participation by engaging them in leadership roles, and displayed care and encouragement.
- Relationships were characterised by mutual respect.

- Principals called children by name and engaged with them with care and respect.
- Principals endeavoured to build trust with staff and learners and viewed this as a vital variable in developing capacity for schools to function as learning communities.

Teachers need to be surrounded by an environment that is supportive and infused with the element of care. It is only when people realise that their leaders genuinely care about their well-being that they are motivated to perform at their very best. Moos et al. (2009:773) agree that principals should be conscious of the need of teachers to be supported, cared for and provided with a safe and secure working environment.

3.3.3.3.2 *External relationships*

The transformation from a purely internal school focus to one that recognises and embraces the meaningful role of parents and relationships with the larger community pervades current educational parlance (Leithwood et al., 2006:40). This practice of establishing inter-relationships with parents and the external community is a crucial element for improving schools, especially those that encounter challenging circumstances (Muijs, Harris, Chapman, Stoll & Russ, 2004:153).

Successful school principals strive to maintain contact with parents. As Wilcox and Angelis (2011:62) indicate, keeping close relationships with parents can become a challenge. Parental involvement is normally captured by engaging them in communicating with the school and this may be achieved via letters, phone calls, parents' meetings, workshops, membership of the Parent Teacher Association (PTA), individual visits, lobbying or fund raising (Chapman et al., 2012:101). Wilcox and Angelis (2011:62) also suggest having bilingual staff to assist in keeping in touch with parents.

Based on the findings of their research, Day et al. (2011:123) state that principals went to great lengths to communicate with parents and inform them about all aspects of their child's education. Parents were encouraged to participate in school activities, set targets for their child and ensure that these are met. This implies that parents had to forge close links with the school, more especially with their child's teachers. Principals emphasised the importance of parental support to support learning in the home.

According to Day et al. (2011), relationships with other schools were also established, which enabled staff and learners to develop new skills and pool their resources. Furthermore, principals not only ensured that links were set up with external agencies such as social

services to enable learners and teachers to access specialised services, they also established sound relationships with universities for the purposes of research and training (Day et al., 2011:123).

3.3.3.4 Realigning roles and responsibilities

A changing school culture directed towards high learner attainment and instructional excellence implies that the organisation has to be restructured to align itself with transformed goals and objectives. Since organisational culture and structure are the flip sides of the same coin (Leithwood et al., 2006:40), developing and sustaining collaborative cultures requires from leaders to establish complementary structures. Existing organograms and the roles and responsibilities of the various layers that exist in schools therefore need to be revisited and reengineered.

Recent studies by Day et al. (2011:115) reveal the following findings:

- Principals purposively and progressively redesigned organisational structures and they redefined and distributed leadership and management responsibilities more extensively.
- Trends in changing the existing hierarchy included the use of teaching and learning responsibility (TLR), payments to staff, advanced skills teachers (ASTs) and the increased use of support staff.
- New leadership and management responsibilities were allocated in accordance with competence and organisational needs. These were extensively communicated by means of improved communication channels.
- Individuals that constituted the school leadership team were deployed more strategically and great emphasis was placed on effective team work.

The research conducted by Finnigan and Stewart (2009:600) indicates that successful turnaround principals not only developed a positive and collaborative school culture, but also provided teachers with the resources they needed and allocated blocks of time for teachers to collaborate.

3.3.4 Leading and managing the instructional programme

Principals need to have a single focused concentration on teaching and learning as the essence of education and hence transforming schools into learning organisations. Leading and managing the instructional programme as a core leadership practice links extensively to the

model of instructional leadership that was referred to in Chapter 2. It is worthy to once again acknowledge the contribution of Bush and Glover (2002:10): “Instructional leadership focuses on teaching and learning and on the behaviour of teachers in working with students”. Principals make an impact on learners and their learning via teachers. Application of the precepts of the transformational model (Avolio & Bass, 1985), also alluded to in Chapter 2, has the potential to evolve schools into centres of instructional excellence.

It may be argued that the concepts of leadership and management are often employed interchangeably in schooling arenas and hence the use of these words in the title of this subsection. This research considers as management mainly the tasks performed by school management teams and entails inter alia, the organisation, coordination, monitoring, evaluation and assessment of the delivery of the curriculum (teaching and learning), control and performativity as per agreed upon goals in the quest for high learner attainment and instructional excellence. Planning an enriched curriculum may be linked to setting direction; curriculum organisation and coordination blends with developing people and realigning the organisation for success; whilst the leadership of the instructional programme informs monitoring, evaluation, assessment and control of the didactic process.

3.3.4.1 Staffing the programme

The essence of this practice is to recruit, select and retain teachers with the interest and capacity to move the school towards its goals. Leithwood et al. (2006:420) indicate that recruiting and retraining staff is a fundamental task for principals who lead schools that are faced with challenging circumstances. Selecting and appointing personnel of quality is an essential point of departure in the quest for quality education. According to Crum et al. (2008:568), successful principals regard the idea of acquiring the right personnel as being “critical to the success of a school, even before developing a sense of team and facilitating leadership”.

Oldroyd (2005:192) argues that the effective and productive performance of any person in a specific post is not a mere technical match between the person and the specific post number. Pintrich and Schunk (2002:254) aver that people have feelings and need to experience a sense of belonging. Hence they perform at their optimum “when they feel safe, secure, loved, stimulated, welcome and are valued as integral components of the team”. Personnel recruitment and selection is not just a matter of filling a post – it requires leadership functions

that seek individuals with attitudes, skill and knowledge who can assist the school in negotiating the trajectory towards excellence.

Leaders also need to ensure that all staff members have a career plan as this is a vital staff retention strategy (Burke & Cooper, 2005:119). Principals must endeavour to be knowledgeable about the career aspirations of every individual and support them towards reaching their goals.

3.3.4.2 Coordinating the curriculum

To ensure leadership practices that enhance the quality of the implementation of the curriculum in successful schools, the following aspects will be considered:

3.3.4.2.1 Rigorous curriculum and high expectations

Wilcox and Angelis (2011:95) define rigor as “an intense focused ethic of striving to do the very best one can do”. It may be considered as a driving force that continually seeks for improvement and innovation. Higher-performing schools in their study were characterised by a climate of rigor that was not limited just to the curriculum and other academic mandates, but also in the expectations for behaviour and responsible action by everyone associated with the school (Wilcox & Angelis, 2011:19). This implies that principals need to continually scrutinise the curriculum and the individuals responsible for implementing it to ensure that rigor is being maintained. Wilcox et al. (2011:22) identify the following practices which they argue play a significant role in closing achievement gaps:

- High expectations are made explicit and inclusive to all learners, and teachers are also clear as to what is expected of them.
- Responsibility of being successful in school is shared by learners, teachers and parents.
- Higher-level classes are offered to a larger variety of learners.

McEwan (2003:93-99) identifies the following indicators of principal practices that promote high expectations from staff and oneself:

- Helping educators in crafting and attaining professional and personal goals linked to instructional improvement, learner attainment and professional development
- Planning and conducting frequent formal and informal classroom observations
- Engaging in post-observation collaborations

- Evaluating individual needs and making recommendations for professional and personal growth and development
- Engaging in classroom teaching
- Encouraging upward feedback to refine instructional leadership practices

Research conducted by Day et al. (2011:125) found that the development and embedding of high expectations or academic optimism was a significant feature in the roles and responsibilities of principals. This practice boosted the self-esteem of both learners and staff members, and heightened the belief that improved learner attainment was possible.

Learner behaviour was also identified by principals as an area where high expectations were important. Discipline was viewed as essential and by establishing a culture where poor behaviour was not tolerated, principals enhanced both learner and staff motivation and created an environment conducive to learning, teaching and success. According to Day et al. (2011:127) improvements in learning was secured through the development of school-wide policies that focused specifically on improving learner behaviour and attendance, and this was supported by strong pastoral systems that strengthened respect between staff and learners.

3.3.4.2.2 Redesigning and enriching the curriculum

Recent research conducted by Day et al. (2011:130) reveals that principals made deliberate changes to the curriculum with the express purpose of broadening learning opportunities and providing access for every learner – all as part of attempts to extend engagement and improve achievement. Their study emphasised stage and not age learning, with the curriculum being adaptable to the needs of all learners. Principals also adapted the curriculum to promote learner creativity, self-esteem and key life skills, whilst at the same time preserving the academic content. Teachers were encouraged to cater for the wide spectrum of differing learning needs that embraced extra- and co-curricular activities.

3.3.4.2.3 Enhancing teaching and learning

Successful schools do not engage in programmes and practices that support the status quo. Wilcox et al. (2011:15) remark that principals of high-performing schools practice ‘disciplined innovation’, whereby both leaders and teachers experiment with new academic strategies in a disciplined manner and not haphazardly. These principals promote innovation from within to discover new approaches to meet challenges and achieve their school goals.

Findings from research conducted by Day et al. (2001:128-129) indicate the following:

- Principals encouraged staff to extend their teaching approaches and experiment with new or alternative teaching models. They created an infrastructure where it was safe to explore new teaching methodologies, in effect encouraging calculated risk taking. This activity boosted self-esteem and the teachers' sense of self-efficacy.
- Principals of successful schools acknowledge that we exist in a digital era, and promote the use of information and communication technology (ICT) to enhance the quality of learning and teaching. Day et al. (2011:129) reveal that there was extensive use of interactive whiteboards and evidence of schools investing in technology to facilitate independent and interactive learning.

3.3.4.2.4 Strategic targeting of resources

Principals of successful schools engage in a process of consciously determining their conceptualisation of success and then contemplate how they can use the resources they have to achieve more of it. By engaging in a thorough analysis and interpretation of data, school leadership devise disciplined plans that are widely communicated. The plans focus on the targeting of resources where they will have the greatest positive impact, especially on those learners who present with significant gaps in their performance.

According to Wilcox et al. (2011:88) the strategic targeting of resources may be effected in the following ways:

- Matching well-qualified teachers with learners in ways that enhance such teachers' positive impact on learners and learner performance.
- Systematically analysing and interpreting trends in learner performance to offer more inclusion classes taught by highly qualified teachers.
- Drawing on the synergies of teacher expertise to implement 'tutorial sessions and labs' led by teachers who can best help the learners.
- Synchronising the use of teacher and school time in a systematic and proactive manner.

3.3.4.3 Monitoring and evaluating teaching and learning standards

Monitoring and evaluating the standards of teaching and learning are fundamental leadership practices that need to be implemented in a systematic way so that constructive feedback can be provided to both staff and learners. According to Southworth (2004:79), monitoring is accepted as good leadership practice and entails observing teachers at work by conducting

classroom visits and providing them with feedback. Bush and Glover (2008:45) concur that monitoring is a continuous process, executed to determine the quality of learning and teaching. There is evidently a link between good monitoring and good teaching.

3.3.4.3.1 Observation

O’Sullivan (2006:253) argues that the quality of education can only be enhanced if there is systematic observation of classroom practice. This practice entails recording, analysing and reflecting on inter-relationships and outcomes and it provides insights that are crucial to escalating educational quality. According to O’Sullivan (2006:254) observation questions the quality of education with the intention of diagnosing the cause for the current situation. It also stimulates thinking on how to realistically improve the quality of teaching and learning, given the resources that are available. The process therefore suggests that leaders engage in an exercise that involves a whole-school audit (initiating personal introspection), and devise strategies to enhance quality teaching and learning.

Principals need to be clear about the purpose of observation. In managing the teaching and learning process, it may be used as a monitoring tool that

- establishes the level of educator preparedness for the lesson;
- assesses the level of classroom control;
- assesses the learning environment;
- establishes the curriculum content knowledge of the educator;
- gauges the nature, extent and quality of the interactions between learners and teachers;
and
- assesses the relevance and the implementation of pedagogy (DoE, 2008b:71).

Principals often use classroom observation in a developmental manner in order to support, guide and advise staff about how they can improve. Day et al. (2011:130), commenting on their recent research, indicate that teachers welcomed observation as an initiative of sharing practice and refining teaching approaches. They further agreed that observation was not viewed as surveillance but rather as a form of professional support and an opportunity for reflective dialogue (ibid).

3.3.4.3.2 Evidence-based decision making

A striking feature of successful schools is the manner in which principals and their staff gather, analyse and use data. They make systematic use of a wide array of data or evidence to inform the crafting of goals and strategic plans. Wilcox et al. (2011:72) identified four fundamental aspects of this practice, namely embracing data; redefining evidence of success; analysing, interpreting, and sharing various data; and using evidence in planning and goal setting.

Evidence incorporates not only that which can be quantified as learner attainment data in the form of assessment scores, but also listening to learners, teachers and individuals from the community about their lived experiences associated with the school. Wilcox et al. (2011:17) contend that school leaders interpret the variety of data or evidence and make informed, focused decisions that impact on curriculum revision and delivery, staffing and professional development.

Data is hence used extensively to inform changes in the teaching and learning process. This is corroborated by research conducted by Day et al. (2011:129) who illustrate that learner attainment data were viewed from both a formative and summative perspective to analyse performance and plan future teaching strategies. Many schools also incorporated Assessment for Learning (AFL) into their classroom practice. Research by Crum et al. (2009:55) in successful schools in the Commonwealth of Virginia furthermore indicated that principals relied heavily on data and not on intuition to make decisions about their respective schools' instruction programmes.

3.3.4.4 Transforming the physical environment for learning and teaching

Teachers' working conditions translate to the learners' learning environment, and as was suggested in the opening discussions, the condition of the teaching and learning environment is a significant predictor of the quality of learner outputs. Principals recognise the need to improve the conditions that support quality teaching and learning. Day et al. (2011:125) revealed that this could be achieved by devising and implementing a deliberate and continuing strategy to upgrade the school buildings and facilities. Their study found that brightening up the learning environment and display received a great deal of attention. The principals involved evidently realised the importance of the link between high-quality

learning and teaching conditions and the well-being and achievement of both learners and teachers.

3.4 SUMMARY

Education is constantly in a state of flux and schools cannot possibly be managed the way they were a few years ago. Innovative leadership practices must characterise the daily operations of 21st century principals who need to be in continuous surveillance mode, constantly hyper-sensitive to the didactic environment and ready to adopt, adapt, combine and sequence appropriate responses. All too often it is not the absence of innovative actions but the “presence of too many disconnected, episodic, piecemeal, superficially adorned” behaviour that results in schools being mired in mediocrity (Normore, 2003:71). Principals must therefore acknowledge the three crucial variables of workplace performance and strategically structure their leadership practices to enhance the quality of instruction and subsequent learner attainment. Leithwood et al. (2006:18) provide a powerful source of guidance and a framework on which this may be structured in their four broad categories of leadership practices (see 3.3.).

The extant literature on leadership practices bears testimony to the repertoire of these leadership practices that most effective school leaders employ on a frequent basis to ensure success at their schools. It is evident that principals cannot lead successful schools without sharing a compelling vision, developing people in alignment with that vision, redesigning the organisation to exude collaboration and collegiality, and diligently engaging in instructional leadership to ensure that there is high-quality curriculum implementation and delivery. Principals have come to the stark realisation that in this day and age there is a dire need to distribute leadership, which necessitates a fundamental re-conceptualisation of leadership practices in schools. The next chapter deals with the research design and methodologies that guide this study.

CHAPTER 4: RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

4.1 INTRODUCTION

The previous two chapters were concerned with the literature study in an attempt to discover what the available research reveals on the leadership and leadership practices of successful school principals. Engaging in this particular academic process was of immense value in that it helped craft the framework for the impending empirical investigation. The current chapter concerns itself with identifying a relevant research design and methodology to effectively execute the investigation in an attempt to resolve the research problem stated in Chapter 1. According to Slavin (1992:14) the basis of choosing a research design is to consider the research question and then select research methods that answer this question in an impartial manner whilst using available resources. This correlates with Creswell (2009:3) who is of the opinion that the research design addresses the gap between the wider research question and the specific methods of data collection, analysis and interpretation. The rest of Chapter 4 deliberates on these vital components.

4.2 RESEARCH DESIGN

Yin (2009:24) considers research design as “the logic that links the data to be collected (and the conclusions to be drawn) to the initial questions of the study”. This is strongly aligned with Mouton’s (2001:56) belief that the research design focuses on the end product and elucidates the logic of research. Hence it is vital that careful consideration be given to the choice of research design so as to effectively answer the research questions. Mouton (1996:107) also cautions that in order to ensure valid findings, forethought in the formulation of the research design is an absolute necessity.

4.2.1 Research premises

One’s understanding of the world is informed by the way in which one views the world, by what one views understanding to be and by what one regards as the purpose of understanding (Cohen et al., 2005:3). According to Maree and van der Westhuizen (2009:19), a paradigmatic perspective refers to a way of viewing the world and entails certain assumptions by the researcher.

The purpose of this inductive, exploratory study is to explore how successful primary school principals in the Uthukela district of KwaZulu-Natal conceptualise their leadership and

management practices, and hence to reveal common themes of quality leadership practice. Since the study seeks to understand the relationship between constructs central to its participants and their experiences (namely the leadership practices enacted by principals to facilitate high learner outputs in schools), it is situated within an interpretive paradigm. According to Morrison (2002:18), interpretivists do not consider the “reality ‘out there’ as an amalgam of external phenomena waiting to be uncovered as ‘facts’ but as a construct in which people understand reality in different ways”. Nieuwenhuis (2007a:60) argues that the ultimate aim of interpretivist research is to provide insights into the way in which a particular group of people make sense of their situation or the phenomena they encounter. In this inquiry, the setting is the primary school where dynamic interactions between the principal and his/her professional personnel, as the phenomenon, will be studied in an attempt to gain insights into the innovative leadership practices that precipitate in high learner attainment and instructional excellence in tumultuous environments that are both accountability and standards driven.

Methodologically, the positioning of the research within this paradigm assumes a participatory stance for myself as the researcher and necessitates the description of specific cases through narrative articulation and interpretation. From an epistemological viewpoint, the underlying assumption I bring into the inquiry is that leaders possess and use interpretive schemes of leadership and management practices that must be understood. This therefore highlights the need to explicitly articulate the character of the local context of the study.

Ontologically, the interpretive paradigm locates the participants in this study, as well as the constructs being investigated, within inter-subjective social fields. A realist stance is assumed in that the study of leadership practices of successful primary school leaders has an objective existence that can be understood from an external point of view (Maree et al., 2009:21).

4.2.2 Research approach

4.2.2.1 Qualitative research approach

A qualitative research approach will be adopted for the purpose of this study, as it will allow social reality to be interpreted and presented from the views of the participants in the study (Bisit, 2010:14). This implies that the social world can only be understood from the point of view of the participants who are an integral part of the study (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2007:19). Nieuwenhuis (2007a:51) further explains that qualitative research focuses on

understanding and describing phenomena within their naturally occurring context with the intention of acquiring an understanding of the meaning(s) imparted by the participants – a “seeing through the eyes of the participants” – so that the phenomena can be described in terms of the meaning that they have for the participants. The proposed study extensively engages successful primary school principals as participants whose leadership competencies are investigated with the intention of eliciting themes of leadership practice. According to Cohen et al. (2007:21), situations should be examined through the eyes of the participants instead of those of the researcher.

A qualitative, naturalistic approach will enable the researcher to obtain new insights about a particular phenomenon, establish new concepts or theoretical perspectives and fathom the problems that exist within the phenomenon (Leedy & Ormrod, 2005:134). Qualitative research focuses on small numbers of participants who will provide in-depth data based on their views and perceptions (Basit, 2010:14). The qualitative research design also acknowledges that there are multiple realities and not necessarily only one truth to be discovered (Leedy & Ormrod, 2005:133). Principals, school management teams and educators from the same and different learning sites will present different realities to the phenomenon of innovative leadership practices.

Swanson and Holton (1997:90) confirm that social scientists turn to qualitative research methods and techniques because these are well suited to exploration and discovery in an era of rapid and fundamental change. The educational leadership environment, especially in this era of accountability and standards, is constantly in a state of flux, which renders the said approach a logical choice. In researching the leadership practices of successful primary school principals, the researcher acknowledges the following characteristics of qualitative research (McMillan et al., 2010: 322-323):

- It is normally executed in natural settings.
- It utilises the researcher as the means to gather data directly from the source.
- It is context sensitive.
- It emphasises detailed narratives that provide a deep understanding of behaviour.
- It focuses on the process of behaviour.

- It uses multi-data-gathering methods to facilitate understanding and explanations that are complex.
- It employs an inductive approach to data analysis and extracts its concepts from an aggregate of detail.

4.2.2.2 The research design as a case study

Researching leadership practices of principals of successful primary schools from a distributed perspective makes a case study the ideal choice of research design. Stake (2006:8) considers a case study to be “both a process of inquiry and the product of that inquiry”. According to McMillan et al. (2010:344) a case study is an in-depth analysis of a single entity. My research entails a process of in-depth study of a single entity or a bounded system (Creswell, 2008:476), which is the leadership practices of successful primary school principals. Cohen et al. (2007:181) support the notion of a case study being a specific instance that is often structured to illustrate a more general principle. Hoberg (2002:37) points out that case studies are largely used to probe contemporary real-life situations experienced by the research respondents. She further maintains that case studies emphasise the detailed contextual analysis of a limited number of selected research respondents and their interpersonal relations. This links to the type of sample I use and the data to be managed in my investigation of innovative leadership practices, which are much in vogue among contemporary education researchers.

Various types of case studies may be conducted. Stake (1995:3-4) distinguishes between three types, namely intrinsic, instrumental and collective case studies. Since an instrumental case study provides insight into a specific theme or issue, which in my investigation is innovative leadership practices, it makes it an ideal choice. Furthermore, such a study will facilitate a focus on the in-depth understanding of leadership practices and elucidate innovative behaviour. Nieuwenhuis (2007b:75) believes that a case study allows a multi-perspective analysis in which the researcher not only reflects on the contribution and perspective of one or two individuals, but takes into consideration the perspectives and interactions of other relevant groups. It is precisely for this reason that principals are not the sole participants in this research but their management teams and teaching personnel are also vital sources of information.

Yin (2009:18) adopts a two-pronged perspective to case studies as a research strategy. He initially considers the case study to be “an empirical enquiry that investigates a phenomenon in depth and within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident”. A case study therefore is a natural choice and will add immense value to my investigation in that an in-depth exploration of innovative leadership practices will be executed in successful schools set in rigorous standards-driven and accountability-driven contexts. This would also enable me to harness the “close-up reality” and “thick description” (Geertz, 1973 cited in Cohen et al., 2007:182) of how successful school principals exercise innovative leadership practices. Yin (2012:13) furthermore alludes to many more variables of interest than just specific data points and to one result relying on multiple sources of evidence. Whilst the focus of attention is on the principal of the school, the perceptions of the school management team (comprising the deputy principal, heads of departments and level one teachers) regarding the innovative leadership practices of the principal are of great importance to triangulate data. It is critical to establish these converging lines of evidence to enhance the findings of this study.

Another factor that supports the suitability of a case study as my choice of research design is that it facilitates the investigation of innovative leadership practices of successful school leaders in its entirety, as opposed to examining only specific aspects or facets of it. This strongly correlates with the holistic explanations and descriptions that Merriam (2009:42) associates with case studies. It also aligns itself with the precepts of case studies by investigating a singular entity – in the current case, the leadership practices of successful school principals in a single school district. The study assumes a stance that is highly exploratory, descriptive and heuristic in nature (Merriam, 2009:43). The type of case study decided on is an instrumental case study, since it provides insight into a specific theme or issue, namely leadership practices of successful school principals in particular (McMillan et al., 2010:345).

4.3 RESEARCH METHOD

In the view of Cohen et al. (2005:44), research methods constitute the range of techniques and procedures available to the researcher for the collection of data that facilitates “inference and interpretation, for explanation and prediction”. Research methodology aims to describe and scrutinise the research methods employed by contemplating their shortcomings and

potential for illuminating the phenomenon under study (Kaplan, 1973, cited in Cohen et al., 2005:45).

4.3.1 Research sampling

A sample may be considered to be a smaller group of individuals from the larger target population that the researcher intends to study (Cresswell, 2008:152). Neuman (2006:219) is of the opinion that the main purpose of sampling is to obtain data on specific cases, events or actions that can clarify and deepen understanding. Qualitative research expectations involve allowing the researcher to discover more about the processes of social life in a specific context (Neuman, 2006:145). Hence it is critical for the researcher to identify the sample in accordance with the research question that needs to be answered (Leedy & Ormrod, 2005:145).

Furthermore, the research should involve participants who can provide the most useful information about the phenomenon under investigation. In the current study, the sample will be chosen for a specific purpose (Cohen et al., 2008:115), namely to provide ‘rich’ information on innovative leadership practices of successful principals that promote and sustain high levels of learner attainment and instructional excellence.

Purposeful sampling, which is synonymous with qualitative data collection methods (Christensen et al., 2011:162), involves the deliberate selection of members from the wider population (Cohen et al., 2005:99). According to Christensen et al. (2011:162), a researcher focusing on a particular case should use purposive sampling to pinpoint persons that he/she believes are information-rich, to facilitate an in-depth study of that person to gain insight into a phenomenon. Such individuals should have the potential to provide distinctive insights that are not likely to be obtained from other sources (Yin, 2012:56).

To ensure insightful answers to my research questions, I selected a purposive sample from three successful primary schools, namely the school leaders (principals) of the three highest performing primary schools (schools that achieve and sustain high learner attainment and instructional excellence) in the Uthukela district of KwaZulu-Natal. The principals had to be bona fide school leaders with a minimum of three years’ experience in principalship at their respective schools. Their tenure would be ratified by scrutinising appointment letters at the district’s Human Resource directorate.

The following criteria were used to identify the successful schools:

- The results of the Annual National Assessments (ANA). This information was sourced from the district's Examination and Assessment directorate.
- IQMS summative scores of all educators in the identified schools based on the data captured by the district. This was sourced from the Performance Management directorate.
- Whole School Evaluation (WSE) reports, if still on record, from the Performance Management directorate.
- Assessments obtained from Circuit Managers/Superintendents of Education Management. Their knowledge of learner outcomes, school performance, teacher development and peer recognition would be acknowledged.
- Reports on sustained school performance and quality of instruction from Subject Advisors (General Education and Training (GET) Band) based at the district's Teaching and Learning Services.
- The general awareness and ambiance one experiences when in the confines of the school environment. As an official of the Uthukela District Office I visit schools frequently and the general impression gleaned serves as a post-fact criterion.
- The list of learners waiting for possible admission. This appears to be a phenomenon peculiar to high-performing schools. Due to limited infrastructure, many learners cannot be accommodated at a school in a specific academic year and therefore they place their names on a waiting list for potential future admission.

In choosing the sample schools careful consideration was given to the schools that scored the highest in the objective criteria mentioned above. I did not spontaneously take a unilateral stance in determining the sample but used this evidence to direct consultation with relevant Circuit Managers/Superintendents of Education Management who consistently interact, support and advise schools that are delegated to their care. I needed clarity on my choice of sample and viewed this action as a necessary step in finalising my sample. Circuit managers ought to know their schools intimately as this is a given expectation in their role function. Whilst a small proportion of schools presented as exuding with instructional excellence and high learner performance, the final sample was determined by carefully considering the clarifying contributions that circuit managers made on the quality of structures, conditions and operations that prevailed at these schools.

4.3.2 Data collection strategies

In order to generate rich data that would facilitate a deep understanding of the innovative leadership practices of successful school principals, I deemed it critical that direct interviews, be used as the primary data-gathering strategy, with two focus group interviews and direct observation playing a vital role in triangulating the data.

4.3.2.1 Interviews

It is generally not possible to observe feelings, thoughts and intentions (Patton, 1980, cited in Merriam, 2009:88). However, conducting an interview with a respondent allows the researcher to gain valuable insights into his/her opinions, feelings/emotions and experiences, which require in-depth, detailed exploration (Denscombe, 2010:173-4). A research interview is perceived as a conversation between two people that serves to elicit information pertaining to the research (Cannell & Kahn, 1968, cited in Cohen et al., 2005:269; Merriam, 2009:87). Interviews are also relevant when a researcher needs to collect sensitive and privileged information – in this case the innovative leadership practices. Interviews not only generate detailed and useful information, but also serve as a flexible tool for data collection (Leedy & Ormrod, 2005:146; Cohen et al., 2008:349). They also afford participants the opportunity to express their own points of view and interpretation of a phenomenon.

During the process of conducting interviews, the researcher enquires about a specific issue or phenomenon and the interviewee responds by providing as detailed information as possible (Cohen et al., 2008:348). The interviewer has the opportunity to build communication and rapport with participants, thus engendering a trusting relationship. It is exactly this nature of the relationship that enables the interviewer to encourage the interviewee to answer questions as openly and honestly as possible. The interviewer also gets the opportunity to explain the question and clarify any issues that have not been understood.

According to McMillan et al. (2010:360), the primary data of qualitative interviews are verbatim accounts of what transpires during the interview. To this effect, I obtained the permission of the respondents and made digital recordings of the interview to ensure the completeness of verbal interaction and to promote reliability checks. Although interviews have the disadvantage of being time consuming and expensive, the response rate is much higher than for other data collection methods (Basit, 2010:101). Two types of interview strategies, namely direct interviews and focus groups interviews were employed in the

present research to comprehensively capture rich data that would effectively respond to the research questions.

4.3.2.1.1 Individual interviews

In-depth interviews were conducted with each of the three principals from the successful primary schools identified. Principals had to have a minimum experience of three years of principalship at their current schools to be considered for the sample. These interviews were conducted on a one-to-one basis and were digitally audio recorded with the permission of the participants (Creswell, 2003). These person-to-person interviews served as the primary data collection strategy and hence formed a significant part of the data collection processes.

In order to facilitate this process, an interview protocol in the form of what Patton (1980, as cited in Cohen et al., 2000:269) refers to as the interview guide approach was designed and used. A semi-structured interview approach as advocated by Cohen et al. (2008:271) was adopted and served to increase the comprehensiveness of the data collected. In this type of interview, the area of discussion is chosen and the questions are formulated in advance, but the interviewer decides on the sequence of the questions during the course of the interview.

The questions were predominantly open ended and the interviewer was at liberty to add questions or to modify them as he deemed fit, depending on the responses of the participants. The types of questions posed included a mixture of both direct and indirect forms and included mostly what Kvale (1996) as cited in (Cohen et al., 2008:358) refers to as process questions. These are questions that either directly or indirectly ask for information, that follow up on a topic or ideas, that probe for further information or responses, and that ask respondents to specify and provide examples. In crafting the questions, care was taken to eliminate dichotomous response questions (McMillan et al., 2010:357).

In order to acquire the depth of data that was needed to answer the research questions, probing was critical. Probes were skilfully used to spontaneously follow up the participants' responses to the open-ended questions. Before probing, I ensured that the interviewee had completed speaking so as not to interrupt his/her train of thought. During the interviewing process I also became aware of the drawbacks of interviews. Of concern were the biases, predispositions and attitudes that affected the interaction between the interviewer and interviewee (Merriam, 2009:109). I also anticipated that during interviewing, the participants might express what they believed I wanted to hear. Indeed, Christensen et al. (2011:58)

suggest that interviewees might convey only what is socially desirable. Therefore much emphasis was placed on creating an interview environment that promoted trust and honesty, where interviewees could be at ease and be encouraged to respond in an authentic manner. As the interviewer, I too had to be careful not to lead the respondents towards answers, keeping in check body language and tone of voice (Slavin, 1992:89). I observed the same variables (non-verbal communication) in the interviewees as they responded, and sought for any signs of fabrication. The interview questions that were asked are presented in Appendix A.

Prior to this study, I piloted the interview questions with a successful school principal who is not in the sample to ensure that the questions asked what they were intended to ask. In line with the thinking of Basit (2010:95), the responses obtained in the pilot study indicated clearly whether the questions asked were relevant and hence sought and yielded rich responses.

4.3.2.1.2 Focus group interviews

According to Burton and Barlett (2005:109), a focus group consists of a number of participants to be interviewed in a group so as to gather data on the phenomenon under investigation. The reason for using this data-gathering tool was to corroborate the leadership practice data furnished during the face-to-face interviews with principals in their attempts to give authentic answers to the research questions.

Two target groups were identified. Focus group interviews were firstly conducted with the members of the School Management Team (SMT). This group was composed of Post Level 2 Education Specialists or Heads of Departments and Post Level 3 educators or Deputy Principals. All SMT members from each school were requested to be part of the first focus group. The second core group comprised of Post Level 1 educators and I ensured that each learning area or subject field of specialisation was represented. I also made certain that the participants of the second focus group had been exposed to the leadership style of the principal for a minimum of three years, thus enabling them to make valid contributions on the principal's leadership practices. The size of the focus groups was limited to five. The modus of the interview process for the individual interviews was replicated for the focus groups.

Both focus group 1, comprising SMT members, and focus group 2, consisting of Post Level 1 educators, were exposed to the interview guides delineated in Appendix B and Appendix C respectively.

4.3.2.2 *Observation*

McMillan et al. (2010:350) state that observation is a way for the researcher to see and hear what is occurring naturally in the research site. It differs from interviews in that the observer does not query the respondent. In my research I observed how successful primary school principals exercise leadership practices. Creswell (2007:134) claims that observation in a setting is a special skill that requires addressing issues such as the potential deception of individuals being interviewed, impression management, and the potential marginality of the researcher in a strange setting. Bearing in mind that interviews are the primary data-gathering strategy in this research, observation was a logical choice to triangulate the data that was captured. Furthermore it facilitated a deep understanding of the context within which principals operated and their resultant leadership practices. The intention of observation as a research method was to “probe deeply and to analyse intensively the multifarious phenomena that constitute the life cycle of the unit...” (Cohen et al., 2008:125). Thus, I made concerted efforts to watch, listen and follow carefully the dynamic interactions between the principal and the school community. Observation hence enabled the capturing of behaviour as it occurred (Merriam, 2009:119).

According to Cohen et al. (2008:186) one may differentiate between two broad categories of observation in a case study, namely participant observation and non-participant observation. My stance as a researcher enabled me to adopt the role of participant observer because I engaged in the daily school activities to experience and witness the principal’s leadership practices rather than to just be a non-participant who stood outside the group. My role can nevertheless be described best as ‘observer-as-participant’ (Merriam, 2009:124). The ‘observer-as-participant’ gets into the situation, but concentrates mainly on his/her role as observer in the situation. McMillan and Schumacher (2010:350) state that the participant observer is one who completes the observations as he/she takes part in activities as a regular member of the group, i.e. as a complete insider. As ‘observer-as-participant’, I had the distinct advantage of interacting inconspicuously with the senior management team, teachers, principals and learners in their natural contexts on a regular basis and recorded my conversations, comments, impressions and observations. This strategy eliminated the negative impact of the Hawthorne effect (Stern, 1979 cited in Mouton, 2003:106).

Attention was devoted not only to verbal constructions but also to non-verbal and tacit knowledge that was observed. According to McMillan et al. (2010:352) non-verbal cues

include “facial expressions, gestures, tone of voice and body movements, whilst tacit knowledge is personal, intuitive knowledge that is difficult or impossible to articulate but it can be demonstrated by actions or by the use of created objects”. My intention was to shadow the principal as he/she interacted with the rest of the school community – his/her every action during a typical school day was observed and documented. It is envisaged that observations implemented in this manner would enable me to gain deeper insight into and an understanding of the context within which effective leadership practices are manifested. When I was satisfied that I had saturated my data collection using this method, I gradually withdrew from the site, thanked the participants and informed them of the use of the data and their accessibility to the study (Creswell, 2007:135).

The following framework guided my observation in the field:

a) *When* will these observations be made?

- prior to the commencement of the academic day
- during the course of the academic day
- at the end of the academic day
- during breaks

b) *Where* will these observations be made?

- in the principal’s office
- in the HOD’s office
- in the staffroom
- in classrooms
- in school corridors
- on the playing fields

c) *What* will be observed?

The principal’s interactions with the school community as delineated by the observation template in Appendix D.

Responding to the template translated into the capturing of comprehensive field notes that recorded not only what was seen and heard, but also reflections on what had occurred (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010:350). Morse and Field (1996:91) define field notes as attempts to describe as literally and accurately as possible that which is observed in the setting. These field notes were used as data that was analysed.

Reflex records that synthesise predominant interactions, monitor the quality of the data and pre-empt questions and tentative interpretations, were captured immediately after leaving the site. This was of great value in that it enabled me to engage as researcher in self-monitoring to avoid potential biases (McMillan et al., 2010:354).

4.4 DATA ANALYSIS

The qualitative data that was collected via interviews and observation was transcribed and coded. The interviews were recorded digitally and transcribed verbatim to provide in-depth information (Basit, 2010:114). Participants were given the opportunity to review these transcripts at the end of the entire data collection period to ensure accuracy and to provide additional research data.

According to Mouton (2003:108), data analysis entails “the breaking up of the data into manageable themes, patterns, trends and relationships”. This is executed with the intention to gain an understanding of the composition of the data via “an inspection of the relationship between concepts and constructs” and hence to determine trends, patterns and themes (ibid). This is the typical coding process and it correlates with Nieuwenhuis’s assertions that the primary purpose of the inductive analysis of qualitative data is to “allow research findings to emerge from the frequent, dominant or significant themes inherent in the raw data” (2007a:59).

Coding will enable the researcher to reduce large amounts of raw data into smaller, more manageable data units, which will also allow the researcher to quickly get to the important and relevant parts (Neuman, 2006:460). According to Nieuwenhuis (2007a:61), coding of the raw data will entail their close scrutiny and the identification of important themes or ‘meaningful units’ to which codes in the form of unique identifying names or symbols will be assigned. Mouton (2003:109) asserts that once coding is complete and the relevant data has been grouped together according to assigned codes, it will be analysed to identify patterns and trends in the data. These would be related to existing theoretical frameworks or models to determine whether they hold true or are falsified by the new interpretation. The common themes of leadership practice that emerged from the current research were scrutinised using the lens of Leithwood’s core leadership practices, namely setting the direction, developing people, redesigning the organisation and managing the instructional programme. Leadership practices were investigated in an environment that entailed the dynamic interaction between leader(s), follower(s) and the situation.

The Atlas-TI software package was also utilised to facilitate the analysis of the data.

4.5 ISSUES OF VALIDITY AND RELIABILITY

Two important concepts in research trustworthiness are reliability and validity. Validity refers to ensuring the accuracy of the findings using certain procedures (Creswell, 2009:190). Reliability refers to the consistency and dependability of the researcher's findings (Merriam, 2002:27; Creswell, 2009:190).

In qualitative research parlance the concepts 'credibility' and 'trustworthiness' are preferred to 'validity' and 'reliability', which dominate quantitative research conversations. Credibility, transferability and trustworthiness are terms that are used concurrently (Golafshani, 2003:600). The credibility of a study in qualitative research is ensured through the honesty, depth, richness and scope of the data obtained, as well as by triangulation and the objectivity of the researcher (Cohen et al., 2007:133).

In contrast, the trustworthiness of the study is determined by neutrality, confirmability, dependability, consistency and applicability. The transferability of the trustworthiness is aligned or congruent with what researchers record as data and what really takes place in the natural setting (Cohen et al., 2007:149). Schwandt (2007:299) corroborates this by outlining four requirements for the trustworthiness of research studies, namely that the data should be credible, transferable, dependable and confirmable.

In order to make this qualitative study credible, I devoted attention to an appropriate time frame of the study, the availability of resources and the relevance of the instrumentation used to gather data. I engaged in replication to ensure trustworthiness, i.e. the same interview schedule and modus of observation would be used in each of the three successful schools in the sample in an attempt to obtain the same results (Cohen et al., 2007:144). They (2007:150) further contend that the credibility and trustworthiness of interviews can be ensured by

- not changing sampling instructions, thus preventing biased sampling;
- establishing a good rapport with the interviewee so that a relationship of trust is formed;
- using effective prompting and probing to elicit further details without causing harm or embarrassment to the participant;
- use consistent coding of responses;
- the honest transcription of data; and

- handling difficult interviews appropriately.

The data was verified using the strategy of triangulation. Cohen et al. (2001:112) define triangulation as the “use of two or more methods of data collection in the study of some aspect of human behaviour”. Triangulation can also be understood as “supporting observations or conclusions in more than one way, in particular, confirming data collected in one way with data collected in a completely different way” (Shipman, 1981 cited in Slavin, 1992:72). As researcher I employed the process of triangulation to corroborate information obtained from the different sources of data, namely data from the individual interviews was triangulated with data from each of the focus group interviews and observation. The findings were then taken back to the participants to ascertain the accuracy of the report.

My own reflections, thoughts, observations and uncertainties during the course of the study were recorded in a journal and provided an audit trail. They assisted me in identifying and acknowledging possible personal biases and preferences that may have affected the data analyses (Gay & Airasian, 2003). According to McMillan et al. (2010:332) reflexivity is rigorous self-scrutiny by the researcher throughout the entire process and therefore an important procedure for establishing credibility.

4.6 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Leedy and Ormrod (2005:101) caution that before embarking on any research in which human subjects are the focus of the investigation, it is imperative to look closely at the ethical implications of the research. De Vos (2000:23) stresses that it is important to consider ethical guidelines in the social sciences, and notes that possible unique ethical problems may materialise in this field. He subsequently points out several pitfalls that should be avoided and offers necessary guidelines that can be consulted. Attention would be given to the following:

- Informed consent should be obtained from all participants. The goal of the investigation, procedures, advantages, disadvantages, the dangers to which they may be exposed and the credibility of the researcher will be discussed with the participants.
- Harm to the participant must be minimised as far as possible. Dane (in De Vos, 2000:25) emphasises the ethical obligation towards participants to protect them against any form of physical or emotional harm. Emotional harm may often hold far-reaching consequences for participants.

- Participants may in no way be misled. Deception of participants involves disguising the real goal of the study, hiding the real function of the actions of the participants and hiding the experiences that the participant will have to go through (Judd et al. in De Vos, 2000:27).

McMillan and Schumacher (2010:122) also suggest the following cautionary ethical guidelines that should be adhered to:

- Respecting the participant's privacy
- Making every effort to minimise the inaccurate interpretation of the data
- Making known the results of the research to the participants

The participants in the current research were provided with letters describing the study and how its findings would be used. This was reaffirmed on a face-to-face level once consent had been granted. The participants were informed that the information that they divulged in the interviews would be held in the strictest of confidence by the researcher and that their anonymity and that of their institutions would be ensured. Participants were reassured that pseudonyms would be used when reporting the findings so as to protect their identity. Participants who consented to participate were encouraged to collaborate and cooperate. They were assured that their participation would be voluntary and that they could withdraw at any time should they feel uncomfortable, without fear of penalty.

The researcher also negotiated access and acceptance to the research site before starting the study. Letters of permission to the Department of Education and school principal were written, seeking access to the sample schools. It was important for the researcher to respect the site where the research would be conducted, in this case the school. The researcher undertook to honour the research site by not disturbing and disrupting the daily activities of the principal, teachers or learners, as well to treat the principal, teachers and others with the utmost respect (Cresswell, 2008:14).

My role in this study was of particular significance as I fulfilled a dual role, i.e. that of both researcher and senior education specialist. As a senior education specialist in the component Teacher Development, I regularly visit schools in the Uthukela district to advocate and support the implementation of education policy and professional teacher development. My core function entails individual consultations with educators and the planning and delivery of workshops/training sessions on pedagogy and education policy to groups of educators. This

could well present a conflict of interest as the participants were aware of my affiliation with the Department of Basic Education and the expectations that my professional interactions with them had created. I therefore addressed this matter by reassuring participants that the research process was conducted in my personal capacity and would not influence the Department's perception of them as employees and that they were under no obligation whatsoever to participate in the research.

According to Cohen et al. (2005:49), ethical issues could arise from problems that are investigated by social scientists and the methods employed to obtain valid and reliable data. The implications are that each stage in the research process could present with ethical problems or dilemmas. Acknowledging these variables I applied for and received ethical clearance from the University of Pretoria before the commencement of this study (Appendix D). I also acknowledged the sentiments of Mouton (2001:243) and took care to secure the rights, dignity, interests and well-being of the research participants since the data was collected on the basis of mutual trust. Participants were reassured that the information gained from them via the interviews and observations would be secured as stipulated by the University's ethics policy. The findings of the study would also be made available to all participants for their information and interest.

4.7 SUMMARY

This chapter elucidated the research design and methodology that would be executed during the empirical study. Embracing an interpretive paradigm, a qualitative, naturalistic research approach would be employed to obtain new insights about the innovative leadership practices of successful school principals. It was found that case studies present an ideal choice of research design to facilitate the desired in-depth study and unearth rich, robust data that responds to the research questions. In implementing the case study, a purposive sample was determined and individual interviews were used as the primary data collection method. The use of focus group interviews and participant observation served the critical function of triangulating the data captured, hence enhancing the credibility and trustworthiness (validity and reliability) of the findings. Procedures for data analysis, and measures of reliability and validity were explained. The chapter concluded with a description of the ethical measures adhered to throughout the duration of the research.

CHAPTER 5: FINDINGS ON SCHOOL PRINCIPALS' LEADERSHIP PRACTICES – DATA PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

5.1 INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this chapter is to present, explain and analyse the empirical data in respect of the leadership practices of the key participants (successful primary school principals). Data was collected in response to the main research question that guided this enquiry, namely: *How do principals of successful primary schools exercise leadership practices?*

The primary data-gathering strategy employed was face-to-face interviews with principals from the three successful schools in the sample. To triangulate the data gathered from the interviews with the principals, two focus group interviews were operationalised. Focus Group 1 comprised the senior management team (deputy principal and heads of departments) from each of the schools, whilst Focus Group 2 engaged a cross-section of Post Level 1 educators from each of the schools. Participant observation was also enacted in each of the sample schools where the researcher shadowed the principal and carefully observed all his/her interactions with learners, educators, parents and other stakeholders within the schools.

The Uthukela district is one of eleven district municipalities in the province of KwaZulu-Natal. According to the most recent information (2014) which was extracted from the district Education Management and Information Systems (EMIS) sub-directorate, the Uthukela Department of Basic Education District Office is responsible for the management of 274 primary schools, 120 secondary schools, 51 combined schools and 2 schools for learners with special educational needs (LSEN). The 447 schools are distributed amongst fifteen circuits and may be categorised as urban, township (peri-urban) and rural schools. Whilst attempts have been made by the Department of Basic Education to provide equal access to quality education at all schools, many township and rural schools still remain under-resourced and struggle to produce the desired learner outputs.

5.2 SCHOOL PROFILE

The ensuing section highlights the profile of the various schools in the sample. Three successful schools were identified based on the information presented in Tables 5.1 to 5.6. The first table (5.1) highlights the history, context and various components of the school. The second table (5.2) illustrates the profile of the school principal.

5.2.1 School A

Table 5.1: General school data for school A

Year established	1921
Age of school	93 years
Type	Urban
Context	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Offers Grade RR to Grade 7 • Grade R accommodated in a stand-alone building located a kilometre away from the main school • Buildings well established and immaculately maintained • Easy access to the school. • Safety and security measures in place • Grounds for the various codes of sport available • Fresh running water and electricity
Learner information	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1137 learners enrolled • Multicultural* learners • Many learners live away from the school and commute over large distances • Many of the learners are English second language speakers
Educator information	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • State-employed: 24 • SGB-employed: 19 • Student teachers: 6 • Multicultural* staff • All educators are qualified to teach
SMT information	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1 deputy principal • 3 heads of department

* The concept multicultural refers to individuals from diverse race (Black, White, Indian and Coloured) and ethnic (Hindu, Muslim, Zulu, Xhosa, Southern Ndebele, English and Afrikaans) backgrounds.

Table 5.2: Principal's profile (school A)

Age	59
Gender	Male
Qualifications	B.Mus HDE
Experience as Level 1 educator	20 years
Experience as head of department	9 years
Experience as deputy principal	Nil
Experience as principal	9 years
Total number of years of experience in education	38 years
Experience as principal in current school	5 years
Number of schools worked in	13

5.2.2 School B

Table 5.3: General school data for school B

Year established	1960
Age of school	54 years
Type	Urban
Context	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Offers Grade R to Grade 7 • Buildings well established and immaculately maintained • Easy access to the school • Safety and security measures in place • Grounds for the various codes of sport available • Fresh running water and electricity
Learner information	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1066 learners enrolled • Multicultural learners • Many learners live away from the school and commute over large distances

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Many of the learners are English second language speakers
Educator information	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • State-employed: 27 • SGB-employed: 2 • Multicultural staff • All educators are qualified to teach
SMT information	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1 deputy principal • 3 heads of department

Table 5.4: Principal's profile (school B)

Age	61
Gender	Male
Qualifications	LSTD Diploma in RCM BA
Experience as Level 1 educator	13 years
Experience as head of department	10 years
Experience as deputy principal	1 year
Experience as principal	16 years
Total number of years of experience in education	40
Experience as principal in current school	16 years
Number of schools worked in	6

5.2.3 School C

Table 5.5: General school data for school C

Year established	1905
Age of school	109 years
Type	Semi-rural
Context	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Offers Grade R to Grade 7 • Buildings well established and immaculately maintained • Easy access to the school

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Safety and security measures in place • Grounds for the various codes of sport available • Fresh running water and electricity
Learner information	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 375 learners enrolled • Multicultural learners • Many learners live away from the school and commute over large distances • Many of the learners are English second language speakers
Educator information	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • State employed: 7 • SGB employed: 12 • Student teachers: 5 • Multicultural staff • All educators are qualified to teach
SMT information	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No deputy principals • 1 head of department • 2 internally appointed phase heads

Table 5.6: Principal's profile (school C)

Age	59
Gender	Male
Qualifications	M+4 HDE
Experience as Level 1 educator	12 years
Experience as head of department	2 years
Experience as deputy principal	3 years
Experience as principal	13 years
Total number of years of experience in education	30
Experience as principal in current school	13 years
Number of schools worked in	3

5.3 CODING OF PARTICIPANTS

In order to protect the anonymity and confidentiality of the participants, their names are not disclosed and they are referred to by codes as depicted in the table below:

Table 5.7: Participant codes

SCHOOL (Type of interview)	PRINCIPAL (Direct)	SMT (Focus Group 1)	PL 1 EDUCATORS (Focus Group 2)
A	AP	AH1 AH2 AH3	AT1 AT2 AT3 AT4 AT5
B	BP	BH1 BH2 BH3 BH4	BT1 BT2 BT3 BT4
C	CP	CHI CH2 CH3	CT1 CT2 CT3 CT4
TOTAL NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS	3	10	13

A total of 26 individuals were involved in the interview process, which generated rich, robust information. The sections that follow outline the various findings by analysing and interpreting the data captured from the participants.

5.4 FINDINGS: RESEARCH SUB-QUESTION 1

What practices do principals of successful schools engage in to set direction and continuously develop their professional staff?

In identifying the findings that respond to this question, I used the two leadership categories namely setting direction and developing people as alluded to in the conceptual framework that defines this study.

5.4.1 Setting direction

Knowing where you are going and what you require to reach your destination may appear to require quite simple logic, but setting direction is a leadership category that – if not contemplated seriously – can determine the difference between success and failure of an organisation. All the participants interviewed were strong proponents of this leadership practice and their responses alluded to the following themes of practice:

- Knowing and aligning your people
- Providing a vision and a purpose
- Sustaining high expectations
- Managing change
- Motivation

Each of these five themes will be discussed next by analysing the relevant data. Verbatim quotations from the replies offered by participants during their interviews will be presented to support the findings of my research.

5.4.1.1 *Knowing and aligning your people*

It is clear from the data that successful principals realise that they need a particular profile of staff and allied stakeholders to realise the vision of their school. In the opinion of Riches and Morgan (1994:33) it “all boils down to one thing: people, people, people”. I believe that you can only have a quality institution if you have quality people. Furthermore, individuals need to identify strongly with the school and its vision, mission and values. Knowing their people is a hence a critical leadership imperative, as spelled out by the principals of schools B and A:

Bottom line, bottom line, if I were to use the colloquial term bottom line ... know your staff. I told this to my management the other day “you know I sit here in one of the biggest advantageous positions in terms of my leadership and managing of this school and that is I know my staff. You must know them. And it works on a one to one basis.”
(BP)

I found that the teachers have to actually say “that’s my school, I belong, I want to be there”. And in order to do that you have to know your staff, you have to know each

individual – what makes them tick – what drives them... ur.. what are their life experiences. How can you build on those to recognise the value that every teacher brings in different ways. (AP)

The latter part of the above statement implies that principals need to be aware of the personal ambitions of their staff and use these as starting points. In this way the school is viewed as an “instrument of self-realisation instead of a machine to which they are enslaved”. (Rampersad, 2003:29). It is only when people feel valued that they truly identify with the organisation and operate at their peak. It promotes a culture of loyalty and commitment.

The principal of school A further remarked that

[s]taff ... all who are totally different, bring totally different characters to the school and you've got to work with those characters to build that into the ethos of the school, we really do and that can be incredibly difficult, it really can. (AP)

Hence there was acknowledgement of the diversity that individuals bring to institutions and the need to align personal paradigms with organisational paradigms. The principals recognised the potential value of diversity in creating and sustaining success at their schools and worked hard to align individual beliefs and understanding with the school culture. It was also made abundantly clear that

[t]hese teachers must have an understanding of the school – what it's about, what we are looking for ...work with them and work around them, and if you know your staff well enough... get them to understand where you are going, to see the greater good and to move towards that. (AP)

To this effect, a principal stated that there is a need to take everybody on board.

We have to have a good look at our staff, not only staff but I'm afraid parents and pupils as well, if I might mention that, they have to purchase into an organisation. We have to make this organisation theirs. It's not my school, it's our school. It's a parental school, it's a children's school. (AP)

Here again the issue of a sense of belonging was emphasised, and we should take note of the principal referring to the school as ‘our school’ as opposed to ‘my school’. This indicates a capacity to collaborate with others rather than to work as a ‘lone figure at the top of a hierarchy’. The statement by AP clearly reflects the need to also consider parents in the

teaching and learning process and more especially their role in school governance as members of the School Governing Body (SGB). Since parents in the SGB play a significant role in crafting a vision for the school, alignment of their beliefs and assumptions with the school culture also becomes a variable that these principals consider important. It obviously requires conscious effort on the path of school leadership and may be accomplished in the following way as suggested by a participant:

You are dealing with the other staff and you also got to [understand that] everybody's different and sometimes they won't think the same as you but fortunately we are able to discuss and sit down and laugh about it and work around it and usually we come up with a common understanding and work together. (AH1)

Another principal suggested that all stakeholders should be involved:

as a teacher or a parent [...] it's obvious to empower those people, to bring them in, to give them a shared understanding of the organisation. (BP)

It was observed that in most of their interactions, principals addressed staff on a first name basis. There was no indication of a bureaucratic environment and open, healthy communication prevailed. Staff appeared happy and freely communicated with the principal. Taken out of context, the scene resembled one of bosom buddies, but a great amount of respect for the principal prevailed. From the type of relationship observed, it was inferred that principals knew their staff well.

The interviews revealed that principals deemed it critical not only to know their staff and other stakeholders such as parents, but also to embrace their differences and align their personal affiliations towards the organisational goals.

5.4.1.2 Providing a vision and a purpose

All three principals who were interviewed emphasised the importance of providing a vision and a purpose for their organisations. A strong and endearing focus of their vision was the learner. The following are some of the sentiments echoed by participants:

... the central – the core of the entire thing is the learner. And developing a vision and developing a mission, whether it's now the extra-curricular or the resources of the school or improving the infra-structure of the school, it all comes down to how does it benefit the learner? (BP)

I have a huge vision for the school but it is very broad and it is all encompassing – it takes into account everybody from special class to G7s and right down to three and a half year olds and the staff. (AP)

Also important is to keep in mind at all times that the child is the most important at the end of the day. We are doing a service. (BT2)

Everything comes down to what is good for the child and every individual, because every child is different, every one of us is different and so our mission is very much looking at the individual and getting the best potential out of that individual. (AH1)

I think these teachers are doing a phenomenal job. But there again they're not in it for the money, they're not in it for themselves – they're in it for the children. (AP)

The utterances above acknowledge the core purpose of schooling and auger well for the transmission of knowledge and skills and the bringing forth of values that lie dormant in learners. Principals also take an inclusive stance in their vision to enable equal access for all learners. One of the principals was so strongly focused on the well-being of the learners that he shared the following when some of his staff complained to him of learners playing ball games on the ground posing the threat of knocking their tea-cups over:

Now those teachers all demanded that I stop ball games. And I will not do that. That's a decision that I will make unilaterally and say "if you can't take the heat, get out of the kitchen!" You can retire. You're welcome to leave. I will replace you tomorrow. We are here for the children! (AP)

One can almost feel the passion in this principal's words and it is this kind of passion that all of these principals use to drive their respective organisation's vision and mission. Every single fibre of these principals seemed to resonate with passion in catering for the well-being of the child. Another principal indicated that:

In terms of the staff itself, they must see you as a passionate person who is convinced about the practice of sound teaching and learning taking place in the class, or sound educational leadership on the grounds when sport is being played. (BP)

The crafting of the vision and purpose of these successful schools was not a unilateral process but involved and engaged various stakeholders. Some of the schools tasked a committee to steer this process and one of the principals explained the process as follows:

That committee looked for input from the rest of the staff and then also from the wider community. So that there was again ownership in terms of the vision and mission statement. ... when you have a new GB [School Governing Body] they either have the choice of adopting the status quo or saying ‘a hang on a bit ..times have changed; we need to relook at it and therefore have new input into it and do it again’. (CP)

One of the teachers made the following comment:

You know we each had sort of committees where we drew up the... [mission and vision statements]...we were involved in the compiling of the whole thing .. yah. (AT1)

Principals recognised the need to engage key stakeholders in providing a vision and a purpose for their schools because they realised that these individuals would only contribute meaningfully to the well-being of the school if they were involved in this critical process – hence reference to the concept of ‘ownership’. Another key element that emerges from the statement above is that the vision is not cast in stone. It was heartening to note that principals recognised education to be a dynamic process and hence provided the leverage for the vision and mission of their schools to be reviewed and adapted in accordance to the changing needs of the communities they served. This was ratified by one of the SMT members:

[Y]ou’ve got your vision statements, your mission statements but it’s ... you’ve got to realise the school’s a dynamic environment and you have to be able to adapt and to incorporate everyone in that environment to take, to get the best out of them, to make them, to make them get to the top – to achieve and ... er ... and so you can’t just say that’s what’s written down and we’re sticking to that. (AH2)

However, a vision on its own is grossly inadequate. Principals realised the need to create and sustain a shared understanding of their organisations’ reason for being. Information needs to filter through to the various components of the organisation and to all who in one way or another are associated with the school.

I think to ... to be able to have a shared understanding there’s got to be communication ... for them to perform I’ve got to keep them informed of what is necessary, what is required, what the requirements are. (CP)

Wide communication of the vision is hence a vital leadership practice that the various principals give attention to. Communicating and sharing the vision effectively spurs people into action as the following participants indicated:

The vision of the school is definitely one which everyone connected with the school can share. Everyone feels a sense of ownership of the vision and therefore are able to participate enthusiastically and with commitment with a sense of accomplishment.
(BT4)

... and I think the fact we are all still here despite the fact that we complain about being overworked and underpaid, we are still here ... we will still be on the sports field every day ... that just proves that we do have that common understanding of where we are going ... what we are working towards. (AT1)

Another principal remarked:

So it ... it starts at the beginning of the year, although your planning would take place prior to that, where at your first staff meeting you share the year with your staff. And you tell your staff this is what we have in mind. (BP)

This principal further elaborated and added:

If you have a successful year-plan in place then it takes care of the role functions of the SMT, your teachers and your learners. This is structured now, a hand-out. So you know exactly when the school involving the management team or the teachers or the learners would be involved in your academic programme and your non-academic programme. (BP)

Staff meetings scheduled at strategic stages of the academic year were found to be used as a vehicle to communicate the vision. Principals also recognised the need to enshrine the vision in some form of tangible format and it was often incorporated into comprehensive strategic documents to which all staff members have access and need to honour. The researcher observed that hard copies of the vision, mission and value statements were displayed in school entrance halls, the staffroom, classrooms and in each principal's office.

It appeared that all principals employed the principle of direct or hierarchical communication in the form of meetings with staff to ensure that the vision was widely communicated.

Although formal meetings with parents and SGB were regular occurrences where issues pertaining to the vision and mission of the school were constantly revisited, the principal of school C employed the following strategy to communicate and reinforce the vision of his school:

We have a system at school where we ask them to ... I want to almost say re-register their children every year and for the next year. And in that re-registration form are our vision, our mission statement as well as the policy in terms of sport etc. etc. etc.
(CP)

This principal also stressed the importance of communicating shared values in an attempt to create excellence in schools. The following statement gives a good indication of how he feels about this component:

It is trust and encouragement that they [learners] are responding to... er... I believe that basically a school should have, should be able to cope with one rule only... that is respect. And out of respect come self-control and self-discipline. Those are the three pillars which we try to instil in the children in this school. (CP)

Basic values such as trust, respect, self-control and discipline were encouraged among learners and could be construed as vital catalysts in the quest to realise the vision of these schools.

It was evident that principals convinced staff that the vision was more than a piece of paper that lay in full display in the principal's office, in the staffroom or in classrooms. As a participant enunciated on the vision:

Yah, that's a very fluid concept, that's why I said it's not exactly what's on paper – the paper's there, it's drawn up. You've got your vision statements, your mission statements but it's ... it's the application of that! (AH2)

Here again, what became evident was that successful principals succeeded in convincing their staff to internalise the vision, own it and execute it.

5.4.1.3 Sustaining high expectations

All the schools in the sample had a reputation of producing excellent learner outputs. These principals prided themselves on creating high expectations from both the learners and adults they worked with. As one principal proudly exclaimed:

I was recently at [the high school] prize-giving, ... where at least 78% of the matric[Grade 12] prize winners were ex School A pupils. Those who were prefect ... of the 36 prefects 26 had come through my school ... those children have come through this system and they are performing ... many of my product is going off to

private schools in City X and City Y ... to still have that sort of sway and influence at that school means that we are doing something right. (AP)

This implies that principals were continually appraising data on learner outputs. Whilst they modestly acknowledged their accolades, they didn't just rest on their laurels but conducted whole-school audits to identify the possible variables that precipitated that success and replicate it. This was done in order to sustain their good performance. What was pretty evident was that they shun mediocrity. A member of the SMT of this school, demonstrating awareness of high learner attainment and expectations, expressed the following belief:

[I]t is not only the waiting list of children trying to get into this school ... it's how many schools out there [that] want our children in G8 ... [we] are ... the number one for applications at other schools ... and when also if you look at how our children excel no matter which school they go to. (AH3)

Another SMT member further remarked as follows:

But of course we are our own [worst] enemy ... heh! ... because once you become successful you've got to maintain it. And that is actually more difficult sometimes than actually getting there but we don't scare away from that. We're always trying to start something new and continue being the leader. (AH2)

This statement strongly defines the high expectations principals had of staff members to sustain the level of learner attainment and instruction. Rising to these expectations seemed to be ingrained in staff who approached challenges optimistically. The principals appeared to have created a didactic atmosphere that oozed with innovation, perseverance and determination.

During my observation of staff meetings it was noted that the principals regularly referred to the high standards of learner outputs achieved during the previous years. Specific benchmarks were in place and staff members were constantly challenged to exceed these. The principals also addressed their learners on past accolades during assemblies with the intention of motivating them to perform similarly.

The principal of school C remarked that

... we are a spoken of school, and therefore we need to maintain that ... um ... In my address to the parents at the AGM [Annual General Meeting] I mentioned there that certainly one of our goals is "never to remain static, never to take a step backwards,

but always to strive to move forward”. It is hard work. And it’s team work as well.

(CP)

Principals seemed to be constantly seeking new ways to improve learner attainment and they took every opportunity to communicate this to the vital stakeholders. It was clear that principals conceptualised the need for parents and the School Governing Body to be aligned with and support the goals and aspirations of the school. Principals recognised and acknowledged that the success that their schools had attained was a product of a continued positive work ethic and a spirit of collaboration among staff. Staff members were aware of the sentiments of their leader and this inspired them to sustain their effort towards ensuring quality learner attainment. A teacher commented:

I feel honoured to be part of an institution that does always endeavour to set the benchmark for excellence. It is from the time I have been here – we have always been at the top. (BT1)

Principals were constantly aware of the quality of learner outputs and instruction at their schools and used this as a benchmark to forge ahead. What was profound was their determination to improve continuously and this character trait was passed on to all in the organisation.

5.4.1.4 Managing change

The interview data revealed that principals and other staff members were aware that change was an innate component of 21st century schooling. Managing change was therefore strategically factored into how leaders set the direction for their organisations. For instance, the principal of school A mentioned:

I think the very first thing is a great deal of reflection, a great deal of questioning and a great deal of willingness to change. I for instance have never been a man who said I’m right. I’m the first one to put up my hand and say ‘sorry I’m wrong’ and I think any good leader will do that. (AP)

It was evident that this principal – whilst being responsive to change – did not change for the sake of changing or satisfying a norm. It may be inferred that intense reflection, introspection and questioning were engaged in to ensure that change would enhance the learner outputs which constituted the central focus and guided the coalition at successful schools. Such principals seemed to realise that there might be a need to migrate from their comfort zones if

they wanted to shift their schools to being world-class organisations. Hence the following utterance:

... change is implemented continually here, I mean anything ... it's all accepted and it's all done provided you are able to justify it and say the reasoning is the following...
(AP)

Reinforcing the above statement another participant made the following comment:

You always look for something new again to upgrade what you have already done and to get rid of what doesn't work. Why hold on to things if they're just not applicable or they are not working – change them and move ahead. (AH1)

Many change initiatives are initiated by the Department of Basic Education and filtered down to schools in the form of policy and guidelines. Hence there is a need for compliance. Heystek (2007:494) refers to this phenomenon as the “framework of performativity and control”. Whilst respecting these policies, principals in the current study would only implement change if it was justifiable. As a principal commented:

Provided I know and my staff are able to justify what we're doing is within the bounds of responsibility, ... we [are] prepared to work with it [departmental policy]. And often we will spend hours arguing here over departmental policy ... er ... it often doesn't work for our system but now you've got to actually say that this doesn't apply to us. But please have empathy and look [at] why they are saying it ... what the broad implications are. Why have these people issued this directive – let's call it that. (AP)

To emphasise this, the following remark made by the principal of school C applies:

I believe there has to be merit in them wanting to implement it [new policy] within our education system. I don't expect my teachers to follow it to the 'T' ... the teacher must utilise what she can to best advantage of children ... if a teacher finds, no this is not working for me – I need to do something else ... they have my blessing ... [It is a] whole process of adapting. (CP)

The above indicates that the principals did not blindly implement departmental policy which of late has introduced an array of new approaches. Neither did they reject them, for they realised that there was a great wealth of thinking and research that resulted in their formulation and propagation. The principals once again adopted a collaborative approach by involving all layers of their schools to analyse the prescribed policies in an attempt to reach consensus on how (if implemented) they would add value to their organisations. Adapting

and then adopting what works in creating high learner outputs and quality instruction for the particular core of learners and teachers in these schools proved to be the strategy enforced by the principals. Hence the following retort by a principal:

They [policy and departmental circulars] are shared in staff meetings ... well those that do come through that might have an impact on us, we will discuss at management level. I would give my ... um ... input on the matter, my thoughts on it. Let the teachers, the senior management express their either satisfaction or dissatisfaction with it. You've got to get them to buy into that change first. Once they've bought into it they will take it back to their phases and classes and implement change. (AP)

This statement was corroborated by another principal who had been interviewed:

So whether it's ... the old or whatever may come in as another change, if you don't take ownership of it and all the other systems that you've been privileged to be part of, and from there evolve that into who you are as a person – to teach these children who are in your class, it's worthless. Adapt and change. (CP)

A Post Level 1 educator stated that

... what I like about the management is if there are changes taking place, he [the principal] will sit with the entire staff and discuss what's the way forward and take into account what we have to say. So it's not necessarily that CAPS says you have to do this, then whether you like it or not you have to. He gives us clear directions on how we should embrace the change and move forward. (BT2)

Principals seemed to realise that there was a dire need to thoroughly analyse and understand, as a school collective, the thinking behind change initiatives and hence the reference they made to the concept 'buy-in'. The interviews revealed that these principals encouraged open communication in order to lower staff resistance and garner support. This is critical for harmonious implementation of change. The above utterances may be misconstrued for arrogance and are compounded by the following:

... even if you have to blatantly deny some of the policies ... if it is for the benefit of the children, I will do it. I will not have my school damaged by any outside influence ... I will not have my standard lowered by any of those directives. (AP)

An analysis of the data above indicates the profound self-confidence that this principal has in leading and managing his school. It also confirms his tenacity to challenge the status quo, driven solely by the strong focus of providing his learners and staff with the best. The

principals adopted this potent stance for they were aware of the comparatively high standards benchmarked and exceeded by their organisations and they were not prepared to compromise on these, come what may! One can easily detect the intense belief by which these principals operate, as is evidenced by one of them making the following remark:

I am passionate about what I do and I know that I am doing a reasonable job. (AP)

This stance employed by principals in embracing change augured well with staff. It engendered increased confidence in classroom practice and educators were conscious of the support provided by their school leadership. A Post Level 1 educator's response effectively summarises this:

You know when OBE was first brought in and this is where your principals play a huge role ... those of us with experience looked at this and thought this is not going to work and we were told that we were going to try. Choose [an] aspect that will work ... and we took the good out of OBE ... we were never forced to do what we believed wouldn't work. It's no good just changing for the sake of changing. You've got to be sure that you are changing for the good, otherwise there's no good in changing.

(AT1)

5.4.1.5 Motivation

An analysis of the data indicates that motivation is a vital catalyst to spur people into action and move the organisation in the desired direction. Principals took the lead when it came to driving initiatives rather than adopting an autocratic stance and forcing the desired behaviour by educators. Principals acted as role models and this served as a powerful source of motivation. As one of the SMT members indicated:

What at School A has always fascinated me is this concept of ... it's never been enforced ... it's never you will ... it is [because] your leaders do it so you feel I must do it as well. (AH2)

Another SMT member corroborated this statement by echoing the following sentiments:

... if someone is passionate about it [reference to the principal] everybody else will follow, because it's just motivating. (AH1)

A principal agreed and added:

... I just feel that if you set the tone and you set the expectations and you work harder than anybody else, if you [are] here before anybody and you leave last in the school.

(AP)

The above statements reinforce the inspiring influence of principals when they exude with passion and lead by example. An ambience of humility existed in the school, and because staff members were able to recognise the authenticity in their leaders, they were subconsciously goaded to execute patterns of behaviour that were aligned with the vision of the school. There was also that element of transparency with staff knowing that there were no hidden agendas – a perception that is reinforced by the following comment:

Er ... I personally believe that educators are professionals. I treat my educators as professionals. I do not see them as anything else but professionals. I'm a professional ... But again for them to perform I've got to keep them informed of what is necessary, what is required. (CP)

Principals also relied on their management teams to ensure that staff members were continuously inspired. An SMT member commented that:

I know there's been things that I've been very sceptical of ... but because I have to get the other people to do it I've said: "right come on guys it's gonna be fun, let's do this, let's do that – let's try" ... once you get them going it actually become a success.

(AH2)

It is evident that the subsequent layers of leadership at schools have also imbibed and embraced the philosophy of their principal, namely to lead by example. When educators needed to accomplish seemingly daunting activities or tasks, they were strategically accompanied and supported by their supervisors and this stimulated staff to persevere and see all tasks to completion. By the very nature of their being, these principals communicated to their management teams and educators that they were a united front and they approached challenges as a collective with tenacity and zeal.

A principal exclaimed:

We recognise each teacher for what they are and recognise them for the skills that they bring. They must be acknowledged ... ur ... and they become sustainable. A tiny word of "thank you" – that's all you got to do. Most teachers then feel that the school is actually part of them as well ... You have to value people for what they do and be sincere about it. (AP)

An educator from the very same school corroborated this by exclaiming:

... if you're doing something well, people are very quick to praise you. (AT5)

Another educator indicated:

If he [the principal] does notice you have done something well – he would come and tell you. I think just those small gestures make such a difference. (BT2)

The above data reflects on direct and extrinsic methods of motivation that principals should employ. Here principals emphatically expressed their appreciation to educators for tasks that were executed effectively and they were made to feel important components of the organisation. Another principal used a formal meeting to conduct a motivation session with his staff. Inspirational dialogue was probably employed at this forum. He articulated the following:

So at the meeting we'll motivate the educators – believe in yourselves. Be a confident person. (BP)

During my interaction with the various staff, I noticed that the principals walked freely into the staffroom and mingled with all staff. It was not unusual to see principals congratulating staff members for their support to learners who excelled in either academic, cultural or sporting events. The principals also used assemblies to present learners with certificates and congratulate their teachers. These principals also catered for the personal well-being of their staff by providing comfortable seating, a fridge, a microwave, desk-top computers, access to the Internet and controlled ventilation in staffrooms. Each teacher was also allocated sheltered parking. In one of the schools, inspirational messages were written on a daily basis on a whiteboard in the staffroom. This served as the 'thought for the day'.

My research hence reveals that in order for principals to establish successful schools, they deliberately contemplated setting the direction for their organisations. They purposefully used a leadership compass that embraced the following themes: knowing and aligning people; providing a vision and a purpose; sustaining high expectations; and managing change and motivation.

5.4.2 Developing people

All three principals interviewed recognised the need to continuously develop the capacity and capabilities of their people, for they realised the importance of having a critical mass of

competencies devoted to attaining the organisational goals alluded to in the previous section. Hence the following utterance by a principal:

There's that little saying 'Knowledge is Power'. The more you know and the more you understand the better you can perform. (CP)

Better teacher performance is a product of advanced knowledge and skills and the possession of positive attitudes. Better teacher performance also implies improved classroom instructional practices, which in turn result in higher learner attainment. The following themes of practice emerged from the data obtained by means of the interviews conducted with the three principals.

5.4.2.1 Training and developing people

Principals advocated three streams of training and development:

- Internal staff development
- External staff development
- Self-development

5.4.2.1.1 Internal staff development

The Department of Basic Education's mandated Integrated Quality Management System (IQMS) was used as one of the ways in which developmental needs were identified. As a participant indicated,

... all of us have to go through the IQMS and that is a very, very stringent and very strict way of going through every single aspect of your teaching. We are encouraged to improve every year. (CH2)

Another participant remarked:

We do have with the IQMS and ... er, with ... er, where we do our evaluation on the staff. You do ask for personal growth plans. You do identify there as well, as management members and as grade heads and as HOD's, er ... needs in their grades or in their departments. (AH2)

Whilst valuing the diagnostic nature of IQMS, the principals concerned did not place implicit faith in this model but rather relied on the prowess of their SMTs as educational specialists. Principals mandated their SMTs, more specifically the Heads of Departments (HODs)

(bearing in mind their expertise in the various subjects), to take charge of this critical process. This reflected positively on the SMT for it indicated the intense trust and confidence that the principal placed in them. To this effect a principal stated:

You've got to rely on senior staff who are appointed in positions there to oversee that ... and they've got to be given your absolute trust that they are doing a job and doing it correctly. I have 4 very senior teachers who I have basically appointed, who have bought into my vision for the school and they [are] the ones who actually build the capacity and make sure the things actually happen in the classroom as far as education goes. (AP)

It is interesting to note the principal's perception of his SMT regarding their orientation towards the common organisational vision. His statement profoundly displays his trust and faith in his people, and this has been a key discerning element that led him to distributing this vital leadership function to his HODs. His direct involvement in appointing the SMT has obviously augmented this confidence in his management team – he knows the calibre of his people. The latter part of his statement is indicative of the SMT playing a pivotal role in and continuously developing the subject content and pedagogic acumen of teachers to ensure quality teaching and learning in each classroom.

Staff members were also encouraged to take charge of their own professional growth and development and to utilise their supervisors to support their development needs, as indicated by the following interviewee:

the management team don't [only] go around identifying needs and say you have a problem, lets sort this out ... we expect the staff to be proactive in that matter as well, to identify their own needs ... it might be that its subject knowledge, it might be that's ... it's an extra-mural event that they need to be developed, uh ... it could be sport, it could be culture ... so we do periodically have workshops that they can attend. (AH2)

The above indicates that teachers are encouraged to embrace a culture of working collaboratively with their supervisors to craft and refine pedagogic strategies aimed at improving the impact they have on the holistic development of the learner. It is also assumed that these individuals are nurtured and encouraged by the principal and SMT to continuously reflect on their teaching practices. If this is the scenario, then such individuals can realistically identify their own training needs. The timely response from supervisors in implementing school-based workshops has led to the success of this strategy.

School-based workshops have a significant role to play in teacher development. As one of the principals stated:

the [development of] competence and skills would obviously come from internally ... us holding workshops coming from ... a person has gone and attended [e.g.] a CAPS workshop and now cascades the information to the rest. (BP)

This statement was corroborated by Post Level 1 educators:

Our management goes on a lot of courses ... er ... with the department or with the unions. They always come back and report back to us. (AT2)

... and there is always feedback from those meetings too .. when they go on the meetings ... they pass what they've learnt ... and all the handouts are passed on. (AT3)

These statements highlight the strategy that principals employed to ensure that their management staff accessed Department of Education workshops before Post Level 1 educators were allowed to attend. It is clear that feedback from workshops to all staff members was an expectation in all three schools.

This prompted a principal to state:

So we get that information and it's about getting that back to the staff and getting them involved and getting them motivated to attend those lectures, those courses, those workshops etc. (CP)

The implied rationale behind this reasoning was the sharing of new knowledge and skills within the school context. This was much more meaningful than just a generic knowledge of change processes. Furthermore, it resulted in a support system being in place when implementation was in progress. Professional development managed in this way generated an enormous school focus and hence great value to that unique school.

It was not just school management members who were tasked with the responsibility of planning and delivering internal professional development workshops. Principal also deemed it necessary to utilise teachers who had been on significant development workshops to capacitate their staff. This action was clear evidence of principals distributing leadership and promoting teacher leadership. As a participant remarked,

... some of our educators belong to different societies and associations as well ... there's a History society and ... er ... all the unions have all these ... the Language

society. As members they do get regular feedback [training and development] and they will then come and present to the staff. (AH2)

Here the principals exploited the new knowledge and skills that their teachers acquired by virtue of their affiliation to other co-organisations for the benefit and well-being of other staff. For example, one of the principals mentioned the following:

I just happened to be involved in the Science expo ... and that's where I had the opportunity through them to go to many courses and they keep me updated with what's available world-wide ... whatever I found out I pass onto AH3 and she does [implements] it and we pass it on to the Grade 7 and the Grade 6s and it filters through and to other schools. We not [don't] just develop ourselves, we develop the wider community as well. (AH1)

If there is something to be work-shopped we get work-shopped. Mr Principal will tap on our colleagues who have experience on that matter. So it's not someone new coming and giving us information. (BT4)

Principals also crafted working environments for their educators where they could engage with each other during their normal day-to-day activities and learn from their colleagues. There existed a spirit that allowed for collaboration, as one teacher mentioned:

I think we learn from other ... we like ... er, in G3, if one of us is like a better maths teacher we will watch each other... you know and consult with each other so as to improve our teaching as well. (AT5)

One can clearly detect that peer observation is being promoted in this school. This could be a powerful means of stimulating staff to engage in quality teaching and learning. This approach to professional development adopted by principals not only enhanced knowledge and skills in individuals, but also contributed to teachers becoming more confident – which in turn clearly contributed to teacher self-efficacy.

Principals often took the lead in engaging their staff in workshops to promote team spirit and keep staff focused on the attainment of quality learner outputs and organisational goals. These principals found it necessary to focus on the affective domain of their staff. A principal remarked:

We do have fairly regular staff development ... We often do a little slide show at the beginning of the year, with either religious [spiritual] or value driven slides which

encompass what this school is all about ... just to ... just to bolster it up, to refresh our memories. (AP)

An HOD elaborated on some of the workshops initiated by her principal as follows:

... we have like workshops where he puts us into groups to strengthen staff building, team unity, ...what is our perspective on issues in terms of staff relations ... er... parent and community relations... all these current aspects. (BH1)

During my observations I detected enormous amounts of collaboration among the entire staff team. Very often during their non-contact time, teachers from a particular grade were seen huddling together, engaging in enthusiastic conversation about their classroom practices. A lot of healthy comparison ensued. It was not unusual to see the sharing of learner teacher support materials (LTSMs) and the frantic use of the Internet to acquire new information.

5.4.2.1.2 External staff development

Principals notified and encouraged staff to attend professional development workshops organised by the DoE, teacher unions and other credible external providers such as professional organisations. This was done with the expectation that the newly found knowledge and skill would be shared with those staff members who could not attend the workshops. A principal stated:

I sent my staff on as many courses as I could possibly ... able for them to go to. FEDSAS courses, they've been on a lot of those. The values-driven schools. A lot of the teachers go off [...] to the NAPTOSA, SAOU courses and they bring all of that knowledge back again. (AP)

Staff who participated in these externally organised professional development courses normally attended them outside teaching and learning time. Principals were staunch protectors of the notional teaching time. As one teacher observed:

A lot of unions as well are also offering various courses ... we're always told about it. They're put up on the bulletin board and if you ever want to attend ... you're always more than welcome to. They're normally just a couple hours in the afternoon or on a Saturday. (AT2)

One of the principals indicated:

We are targeted by many institutions that do offer courses etc. ... private institutions and they send us information. We have got one now already which is for the ... er ...

Friday and Saturday before we come back to school ... um and some of my staff members will be going to that. So during the holidays they'll be going to a course ... er ... at Clifton, Nottingham Road ... er... it's on Learning Identity... it's about how a child's brain works. (CP)

The above reaffirms that many teachers attended professional development courses outside the notional time. Here again it is interesting to note that the three principals continuously looked for avenues to give their school a competitive edge and embraced programmes that went beyond the scope of departmental workshops. As is evident, the content of these workshops enhanced the application of departmental directives and principals did not hesitate to support participation in these courses even though it required from their teachers to travel great distances to access them during their personal time. This practice was further corroborated by an HOD:

I attend meetings in Durban. That's my way of being updated of what's happening in terms of policies and implementation of policies. I am keeping abreast of what is happening with the current issues and how they affect you and how you transform your methods, your paradigm. (BH1)

The principals also realised the need for their SMTs to be capacitated on the various changes in the current educational landscape. Furthermore, they acknowledged the need for management staff to be trained and developed first, prior to the general teaching staff being exposed to similar workshops. To this effect, SMT members were continuously encouraged to attend developmental workshops. As one HOD remarked:

... whenever there are any changes that happen within the education structure and the school structure then if there is any workshops that we can attend to assist us then we go – we attend them. (AH3)

She further added that

... AH1 and myself have been on a heck of [numerous] CAPS workshops ... if you don't know what's going on how do you expect to help your staff? Uh ... you need to keep [up] or to stay ahead of the developments ... you go on these workshops so that if anybody turns to you, then obviously you can assist, you can guide, you can mentor. You got to be one step ahead. That's the big thing. (AH3)

Her statement also confirms that principals recognised the responsibility of Heads of Departments to capacitate the teachers that they supervised and the dire need for them to be

familiar with new developments in the subjects and phases that they managed. The principals' expectations served to spur Heads of Departments into action. As one HOD mentioned:

I've just done a course through Intel and which is really incredibly good which I want to push because every teacher can do it – it's on the Internet and for Science and Technology in the future. (AH1)

Principals were found to be very strategic in keeping current of the various professional development courses presented by credible external providers. These courses were normally offered on a large scale in the more densely populated regions but providers tended to neglect the smaller towns. As a participant reflected, this problem was addressed in the following manner:

... if we are aware if there's a CAPS course presented by the union, we would make our facilities at school available to them, to come to town and present a course here to the wider community. (AH2)

Hence a win-win situation would be created – the providers had a venue to deliver their programme and teachers from various schools in the greater vicinity had the opportunity to access current, cutting-edge information.

My observations at grade, phase and subject committee meetings revealed that there was always discussion on teacher development. It appeared as if this was a standing item on the agenda during these collaborations. The chairpersons engaged the teams on the value and possible methodologies to implement the curriculum. In some instances micro-teaching was implemented. The information that was shared normally filtered down from developmental programmes that teachers had accessed by participating in programmes delivered by external providers.

5.4.2.1.3 Self-development

Principals displayed an understanding of the fact that teachers need to keep abreast of new developments or else they will spiral into a phenomenon which Smith (2003:204) refers to as 'professional fossilisation'. The danger of this phenomenon is that an educator may retreat into a comfort zone where he/she teaches the same content in the same way over prolonged periods of time. This is a common phenomenon in many a school. One of the principals hence countered this view and stated that

[w]e encourage them to study because the professional study through the various books they are going to engage in obviously is current. (BP)

A teacher corroborated this and indicated:

Yah you also allowed to ... you can study independently as well. You [are] given exam ... um ... you given study leave and all of that ... so they're [principal and SMT] very accommodating. (AT3)

An HOD from one of the schools agreed but continued as follows:

But I think even beyond that, many of us do our self-professional development as well and you don't have to rely on the school, the department or the unions. (AH1)

The above statements reveal that principals managed to create an awareness of the importance of self-development. They supported educators engaging in their personal studies – not to the detriment of teaching and learning, but rather as a precursor to enhance it. It's good for the morale of the school – everybody learns!

5.4.2.2 Networking and individual support

Principals strongly affiliated to the idea of learning from the best practices of other schools in the province, region or district, which they perceived to be producing excellent learner outputs. A principal modestly remarked:

We do interact also with other schools. Um ... we swop ... we go to e.g. School T a private school and I have my staff members go down there ... spend a day with their staff members with their respective grades, the same grades ... see how they're doing things ... what are they doing. Is there something that we can learn from that and therefore bring it back here. They come here too ... so we interact and we've done it with a few schools. Just to broaden the ... let's say the base from which we work. (CP)

This principal created a positive network with a private school and facilitated a healthy interactive process with their staff. It was akin to enabling his staff to engage in a format of action research with the intention of his educators replicating (if not improving on) the sound educational practices they witness. What was also profound was his inviting the other school's staff to engage in the activities of his school with the intention of improving the quality of teaching and learning at his school. It was evident that this principal thrives on the principle of continuous improvement.

A SMT member articulated the same notion:

Looking at progressive schools, like neighbouring primary school (M) – what is making them successful. So I look at their ... curriculum structure. [I] look at the progressive functioning schools and ...draw from their strengths. (BH1)

Here again a link was created with a progressive school and the intention was to identify good practices and, in all likelihood, execute a similar mode of curriculum delivery within the confines of the existing context.

The principals regularly contemplated the practice of developing their staff on a one-to-one basis, in other words by providing individualised support. This, more often than not, assumed the form of mentorship with the principals themselves in many instances playing the role of a mentor. The principals realised the need for educators to first understand new concepts or practices so that sustained implementation would be effected and this was evidenced by one of the principals making the following remark:

Often those teachers have to be nurtured and guided on a virtually word for word let me teach you method. You've got to actually go and sit with those people and ... [retrain] their thought processes to get them to understand ... and then to perform it. (AP)

In support of the practice of mentoring, a PL1 educator stated:

The mentorship of senior management especially Mr [Principal] as well as my current HOD over the years has inculcated in me a passion and a drive. (BT1)

My observations of the interaction between the different levels of staff revealed that HODs and subject heads at the various schools shared a close bond with the teachers they supervised. They regularly communicated with each other on a face-to-face level on matters regarding learning and teaching.

5.4.2.3 Succession planning

Principals were found to be acutely aware of the significance of succession planning. In view of the context of an ageing generation of teachers and the high prevalence of HIV and AIDS in the teaching and learning environment, there is always a need to create a pool of educators who can operate effectively and efficiently at all levels of the organisation to ensure sustained quality education.

A strategy that principals implemented to address this need was to establish an in-school teacher training academy. One of the principals mentioned:

We've got a number of student teachers ... er ... on a programme with UNISA studying to be educators. (CP)

Another principal was more explicit and indicated the following:

... since there's absolutely no teacher training taking place at the moment ... what we've actually done is have our own student body that we've set up with students that are trained in the functions of the school, the history of the school, the way we do things, perpetuating the good, bringing their ... er ... knowledge and their expertise into the system. But basing it on what has been here for the last 60, 70, 80 years. (AP)

The principal of school A expressed his concern over the absence of teacher training colleges and hence rationalised his actions regarding an in-house training academy that would produce skilled teachers. His statement abundantly indicates that the new generation of educators who in all likelihood would teach at the school would inherently do so and thus perpetuate the culture of the school. This indeed would be an ideal situation in that teachers would already be aligned with the organisation's values and goals, as is indicated in the following statement:

They [student teachers] studied here and were placed with exceptional teachers where they could gather all the knowledge that they needed, the teaching practices, how to deal with the children and so teachers here were actually training youngsters [student teachers] to take over the reins once they retired. (AP)

It is evident that these student teachers were exposed to a stringent practice-based programme that enhanced their study towards a teaching qualification. Here again the principal alluded to a strong mentorship programme that formed the backbone of such an initiative.

The observations revealed the presence of young student teachers who were enthusiastically engaged in the academic, sporting and cultural programmes of their schools. There was healthy interaction between student teachers and permanent staff, and the students were continually advised on their practices.

5.5 FINDINGS: RESEARCH SUB-QUESTION 2

How do principals of successful schools create and nurture a constructive working milieu?

The data gathered emphatically revealed that principals were knowledgeable about the impact of organisational structure, climate and culture on the daily performance of their staff.

Principals therefore appeared to devote much attention to enhancing the working conditions of their staff in their quest to establish and foster high learner attainment and quality instruction. The data reveals that in an attempt to create and nurture constructive working milieus, principals resorted to leadership practices that may be captured by the following themes:

- Constructing, nurturing and sustaining relationships
- Collaboration
- Leadership distribution
- Decision making
- Communication and rapport

5.5.1 Constructing, nurturing and sustaining relationships

The principals in this study appeared to thrive on healthy relationships. Whilst they spent much energy and time focusing on building and sustaining within-school relationships, they also realised the need to forge external relationships.

5.5.1.1 Relationships within the school

This section analyses the relationships that the principals established with their teachers and learners.

5.5.1.1.1 Relationship with teachers

School leaders related strongly to creating organisations that harmonised and galvanised people towards attaining agreed-upon goals as a united front. It was all about building relationships and not breaking them down. It was therefore not surprising that the metaphor of a family emerged, as enunciated by the following participant:

I think everything hinges around this family field. That this buying into the structures, buying into the school itself ... every teacher is proud enough to say “I am a member of school A, that’s my school”. (AP)

He further mentioned:

This is a family... that's what I consider the whole staff to be – family. It's an identity with the school, an identity with the values, an identity with the culture. (AP)

It was evident that principals tried their level best to create a sense of belonging among their staff and a sense of working together as a tightly knit unit. The principal therefore aptly used the terminology 'buying into' to emphasise the understanding of a common goal among his staff. Principals strove to create a supportive environment to facilitate staff experiencing a sense of strong identity with the school and a spirit of unity. The principal further explained that

... most people stand together and realise the value of the school and what they're doing ... er ... I think that's why we have such a very low staff change [turn] over[rate]. Some of the teachers actually went through this school as pupils, and they're teaching and HODs now. (AP)

One may infer that the principals instilled in their staff a strong sense of loyalty and commitment that resulted in the high retention rate. The very nature of these relationships led to many a learner at the school not only choosing a career in education, but even choosing to practise it at this school.

This perception was corroborated by a participant commenting on relationships as follows:

School A is one big family... and I think that, that's what our core is... we all feel free to communicate with each other, to speak to each other...to share fears or to share triumphs. We do take care of each other, we do take care of our own. We look after each other. (AH2)

The above very much epitomises the calibre of relationships that characterised these successful schools namely, one based on care and support and promoting free communication and collaboration. A Post Level 1 educator confirmed this view by commenting that:

We are a family! We work and support each other. We are a family and like any family you get your little squabbles but you move on and it's corrected and it's not a problem. So um ... and that I think the headmaster there has a ... you know he knows what's going ... he does guide us in the right directions there too. (AT1)

The latter part of this statement signifies that the principal was aware of differences that might erupt among staff members but had the capacity to skilfully manage conflict. On the issue of addressing conflict and other staff behavioural problems that could arise, principals

tended to find the balance between a hard approach and a soft approach as intimated by the following principal:

[on addressing individuals] And I do not do it in my office. More often I do it out there because it is more comfortable to talk to the person informally than formally ... on a one to one basis. There are times now when you apply the rule of law. You apply the rule of policy because you need to obviate the problem. So you [are] no longer talking informally to the person concerned. You have to do it formally. And it cures it. (BP)

Principals were found to devote an enormous amount of care and support to the relationships they were instrumental in establishing as is evidenced by the following statements:

Support everybody. Support them in their mistakes, support them in their success. (CP)

I wander into their offices and go and have chats with them. How's things going, what's happening at home, how's the car going, How's your children moved on at [high school]. Um ... just giving them the support and the guidance. I think if you build relationships with those people they are prepared to open up to you. (AP)

Whenever the need is there you go out and help and it's not only in the teaching situation because if you don't look after your staff in their personal, private or emotional affairs ... and that also helps because if you are a healthy, happy emotionally stable person, obviously you're going to be a better teacher, a better leader. (AH1)

The data above indicates that the principals were also concerned about the psycho-social well-being of their staff. They recognised the importance of knowing about the personal milieu of their staff and used this to build sound professional relationships.

Supporting this view, a principal declared the necessity to consider the human element when leading and managing people. As a result, his leadership style was adapted accordingly. He remarked:

So I've understood the process of people and their needs and their values and their emotions, remembering that we are looking at the human factor here. We are not dealing with objects. So if we don't understand the human factor, no communication is possible ... And through democracy there's a better rapport between leaders irrespective of who they are and the staff. (BP)

This statement also confirms the dire need for communication and rapport, which will be elaborated upon a little later. The principal above further believed:

I need to respect [my people], I need not to hurt people but if they are wrong I will tell it to them in such a manner that they will understand why I'm telling it to them. (BP)

Apart from injecting the variable of respect into the relationships that he established with his staff, the principal also emphasised the need to understand people in their totality. He therefore commented as follows:

... understand ... not only the component of the teaching but also ... the home situation ... or something that is troubling the educator because that teacher is not going to be productive for that day if he continues to be a troubled teacher. We share grief, we share happiness and in that way we are together as a staff. (BP)

The above deliberations are ample evidence of the fact that the three principals operated at their schools with a high degree of pastoral care and that they continuously supported their people. They viewed their staff with the utmost amount of respect and overtly acknowledged the value of their people. Every educator was continuously recognised and made to feel that he/she was an important link in the functioning of the school. As one of the principals stated:

I personally believe that educators are professionals. I treat my educators as professionals. I do not see them as anything else but professionals. I'm a professional. (CP)

He further remarked:

I'm blessed with a wonderful staff here. They don't shirk away from duties, they don't shirk away from hard work. I really believe in them. They put in the extra mile. (CP)

This view was reinforced by a participant who confirmed the need to support staff:

I know the value of my staff and what they give to the school ... how are you going to get the best out of anybody if you are not supporting them and guiding them and helping them. (AP)

The caring and supporting nature of these principals was also evident in the manner in which they allowed their staff to take calculated risks in their pedagogic practices. On dealing with a relationship involving one of his newly appointed HODs, a principal commented:

I've had to give her the leeway to make mistakes, to make errors and it's only on that basis that I can call her in and say Mrs AH3, these are my findings ... I'm not

condemning you, I'm not criticising you but however, what about ... give them alternatives. (AP)

The above supportive actions created a safe environment, certainly inspired creativity and innovation, and displayed the principal's commitment to continuous improvement. It almost seemed as if these principals functioned as safety nets, bringing out the best from their staff.

The relationships created by these principals were firmly built on trust. A principal commented:

If people cannot trust you, you are not going to get anywhere. I think parents have to trust you, number one. The children have to trust you and the staff has to trust you implicitly. (AP)

The evidence indicates that the principals realised that trustworthiness was an essential characteristic to influence the teaching and learning process. One of them acknowledged that he needed to earn the trust from the three vital components in education namely the learner, the teacher and the parents.

It can also be established from the evidence that the trust that these principals had earned created such tight bonds between them and their educators that the demarcation between professional and personal issues became insignificant. It emphasised the faith and confidence teachers had in their principals. The statement below confirms this:

My staff trusts me implicitly. They bring every single thing ... many things come across this table to me. From their divorce proceedings to the financial problems at home, to social problems they might be having. (AP)

An SMT member who emphasised that trust was indeed the glue that holds successful organisations together, mentioned:

We trust him [the principal] and he has to trust us as well, otherwise things would fall apart. (AH1)

From my observations of staff interactions, it appears that the majority of teachers simply loved being at school. They arrived well before the starting time and were not in a hurry to leave in the afternoons. There was a constant buzz in the staffroom during non-contact times and it was evident that people were happy. The principals moved freely in and out of their staffrooms and mingled with their staff. Teachers were not uncertain of their behaviour and

everyone addressed each other on a first name basis. It was apparent that the principals had managed to establish a healthy relationship with their staff.

5.5.1.1.2 Relationships with learners

Establishing and nurturing relationships with learners also appeared high on these principals' list of priorities. Such relationships may not be instructional in nature but they play a major role in focusing the learner towards effective learning. One of the principals remarked:

... there's a wonderful rapport between the children and myself. There are children in grades 1, 2 and 3 ... especially the little guys. They run up to me and put their arms around me ... it's out of a rapport that has been established. One of trust and one of encouragement that they feel they can do that. (CP)

Similarly, an HOD defined her principal's relation with learners as follows:

They [learners] all know who he is and if they have a problem they'll come to him as well ... openly without being afraid of the principal ... and you'll actually see the children approach him and ... you know, they'll give him a hug. (AH1)

Principals created the time to be amidst their learners and their very presence served as a source of encouragement to the learners. In this trusting environment, learners felt comfortable to communicate with their principals and show them a little affection. This was indicative of the sense of pride and belonging that these leaders had engendered in their learners.

On establishing relationships with learners, a principal elaborated on a strategy that he used:

We have systems in place in our school where recognition is given. Children bring their books to me ... I try to look at excellence and reward excellence. I have a little chat with them, and I have a thing going with them. (CP)

The above indicates that principals endeavour to establish relationships with their learners that motivate all learners, not just those who have the tendency of scoring high marks but all learners who make the effort to improve. This initiative also provided a wonderful forum for the principal to engage in a one-to-one conversation with learners and develop their self-confidence.

My observations on the interactions between principals and learners revealed that learners ran up to the principals when they walked around the school premises during break times. They

did not shy away from them. It was not unusual for the children to display affection towards their principals. The principals were able to communicate with many of the learners on a first name basis. The learners scrambled to talk to their principals or to show them something, and they simply wallowed in the positive comments they received.

5.5.1.2 Building external relationships

The primary external relationship of school leaders have to be with parents. Parents are considered equal partners in the education of children and principals make every endeavour to involve parents in their children's education. One of the principals stated:

We invite parents to come into the classes ... the class visits for interviews to discuss child or children's progress etc. And then our open-door policy ... anybody [who] needs to come and discuss something or is unhappy about something ...we're here.
(CP)

The use of the word 'open-door policy' implies that there are no barriers for preventing access to the school or the principal and his/her staff. This stance taken by principals promoted the building and sustenance of healthy relationships with external stakeholders. Principals deemed it essential to network with the secondary schools that received their learners. A participant reflected that:

Also G7 links up with the senior [secondary] school ... What are the requirements for G8 ... what are they looking for? What are the weaknesses? Where can we build? So those HODs as such and those senior members of staff are really in control of all of that. (AP)

The principal was concerned not only with the current academic progress of the learners who would be exiting his school at the end of the academic year, but also with whether the learners would have the essential or basic knowledge, skills and values to ensure a smooth transition to secondary school. Emphasis was placed on ensuring that learners were ready for the secondary school and task of doing this was incorporated into the role and responsibilities of the school management team. The establishment of healthy working relationships with the receiving high schools was therefore considered critical. This type of forward thinking proved to be a norm among the three principals in the study.

On networking with schools, another principal highlighted:

Staying abreast with what's happening in other schools is important ... whenever we go to other schools or host other schools, there's always a session [of] questioning... how is it at you school ... what is happening with this ... what do you do about [that]... where are you ... how many in your school? (CP)

It is obvious that these principals did not have their heads buried in the ground as they were continually seeking affirmation regarding the standards that determined their outputs. The principal in question alluded to gleaning information from other schools with the intention of identifying their own position on the continuum of high performance. It is clear that there was no malice intended in this behaviour, but merely healthy competition. Here again, this was indicative of the specific principal's determination to improve continuously.

5.5.2 Collaboration and decision making

When one acknowledges the trust, care and support that characterised the relationships discussed in the previous section, it is not surprising that successful schools thrived on collaboration. This was profoundly captured by a participant when he remarked as follows:

I could never run this school by myself. That's the way I look at it. I need my staff. I need their input and I think they realise too that if they were in my situation they couldn't do it themselves. They need each other. (CP)

Principals seemed to realise that they were not the isolated figures occupying the tip of the hierarchy but that they were charged with the unique opportunity of orchestrating a mass of individuals to reach a common goal. These principals therefore exploited every opportunity to engage in constructive collaboration.

Principals engaged their staff in continuous planning implying that planning is not an event but rather a strategic process. Staff met at least on a weekly basis as strategic groups, namely grade groups and phase groups to reflect on their classroom practice and then craft appropriate action plans for the week ahead. Plans incorporated remedial work to be effected in the areas of poor performance and enrichment exercises for the high-flyers. Working together in smaller groups created the specialisation that was required for effectiveness. It was touching to note the principals' focus on revision and remedial work.

Principals also engaged their staff on a more informal level as is confirmed by the following comments:

Now I do have a staff meeting [briefing] every day of the week ... er ... first thing in the morning. We have a cup of tea together, talk over the problems, talk over the issues. Look at where we going, what we're doing. (AP)

The relaxed environment that the above principal created facilitated the free and easy flow of information. It is evident that the principals cherished the various perspectives of their people. Inputs from staff regarding the functionality of the school were therefore continuously encouraged from the staff as a collective. One of the principals stated:

I don't dictate and say 'that is how you will do it'. That's also not really democratic. (CP)

The above remark indicates that the principal's democratic leadership style created an avenue for collaboration. The principal expressed confidence in his staff. The very same principal commented as follows on the inputs received by means of staff collaboration:

To negatively respond to suggestions ... er ... I find that all you are doing is you [are] clamming up that educator. But you listen to them to value what they have to say... encourages them to want to be part of it. (CP)

A teacher commented:

We are given the opportunity to give our own input ... and why it should work this way and not that way. If you are involved with it you will be given the opportunity to discuss it. And if you've got a query you're always welcome to go and find out. (AT5)

The principals hence encouraged teachers to engage in creative thought about their practices and to be part of the modus operandi of the school. Open discussion was promoted. In this way teachers were made to feel valued and important components of the school and this contributed to an escalation in their self-efficacy.

In their attempts to promote collaboration, principals placed an enormous value on team work. As a principal indicated, reflecting on the quality of the learner attainment:

It is hard work. And it's team work as well. Even if it comes from [the bottom up], it's still got to be a team effort to make it work. And that's why I say I am blessed with the staff that I do have. Everybody is on board. (CP)

Another participant emphasised that:

The whole thing is a team ... team effort. If you don't have a team you're going to [struggle]...and you got smaller teams within the bigger teams so it's all about supporting each other and helping each other. (AH3)

The following participant captured the very essence of cohesiveness according to which these teams operated:

... the team in itself...there's a lot of unity amongst us. You know... none of us are out to compete against each other. It's not we are here to look better than the next person. And what we found also with the SMT is that ... uh... the strength of unity promotes strong leadership. (BH1)

She further mentioned that:

You know we are always sharing with each other. We are always working together... we really work as a team. It's not about whether you in the Foundation Phase or the Senior Phase. It's ... we always see it as a collective effort. (BH1)

Principals were hence found to exploit the synergy that team work generates in order to enhance learner outputs. It was precisely the creation of this type of team dynamics that allowed for effective collaboration, as remarked by a participant:

As an SMT team what makes us successful is that we are not scared to ask questions ...we get input from each other - you can fall back on one of the others and they will be able to help you or guide you through the things that you don't know... Whether you are in management or PL1, everybody supports each other. (AH3)

The statement above indicates the willingness of staff to engage with each other so as to learn continuously. It appears that the particular principal engendered a spirit of selfless sharing of knowledge and skills among all staff members to advance learner attainment.

Principals rejected teacher isolation and silo mentalities as emerges from the following:

So what we have at this school is a culture of sharing and adapting ... er ... nobody here wants to stagnate and say I'm happy in my little hole ... er ... everybody is constantly looking at what his neighbour is doing. They're all talking and they're all sharing ideas. (AH2)

The statement indicates that collaboration is an ongoing process at these schools and exceeds the parameters of formal structures. It is part and parcel of the day-to-day activities of staff members. This is corroborated by the following statements by Post Level 1 educators:

And its openness too. I can say to AT5 “don’t try this method – I tried to teach it [like] this and it was a terrible failure or you know, on the other hand ... listen I did this with my class ... it was brilliant ... try this.” You know it’s this whole process of sharing. When someone sets a worksheet, it’s photocopied for everybody – it’s not just for my class. (AT4)

If I’ve got something good that I’m doing with my class, I will share it with the others because it’s the children that must benefit from it. It’s not about us. (CT1)

The network system here is very strong. There is no selfishness. If I have come across something or he has come across something we share. Even when it comes to setting of papers we take advice from each other. You [are] never too experienced to learn. (BT1)

Principals were found to encourage this mentality and format of transparent selfless interaction among teachers. In fact, principals encouraged this type of behaviour at all levels of their organisation as is evident from the preceding deliberations. All three principals cultivated a strong sense of community in their organisations. The following participants aptly summed this up as follows:

Everybody is willing to listen and learn from one another which are very important and work together for the good of the child. (AH1)

You can’t survive on your own ... you can’t do things on your own. Um ... if you want to be successful at what you do, you have to incorporate others. (AH2)

The nature and extent of collaboration reflected in the comments above shaped the decision-making process at these successful schools. Reflecting on this process, one of the principals commented:

So you are at all stages a decision maker and this is now told to them [the staff] at the outset. Be decision makers because it creates leadership in you. It shows that you are a sound manager. I also tell them ‘think on your feet’. (BP)

The principals encouraged staff to be decisive as they considered this quality to be essential in leadership and management scenarios. Teachers had to take a stand and be not be easily swayed; if they had a strong opinion, this would only enhance the collaboration process. It also implies a democratic stance by the principals since they did not impose decisions upon their teachers. Another principal remarked:

There's a certain amount of autocratic decision making to get things to flow. But certainly as I have progressed within this school it has become far more democratic ... er ... down to, there are very few autocratic decisions taken ... um, that's [only] when there are time constraints or pressure situations. (CP)

The statement clarifies that the principal – as he got to know his people and as the trust and confidence in his staff developed – preferred to engage in democratic, consultative decision making as opposed to a hierarchical enactment, which initially was his modus operandi. It is evident that this principal avoided unilateral decision making and promoted transparency:

I believe that when you get to know your staff, you get to know how they think and ... on those few occasions you have to make a decision [on your own], you do manage to get back to the staff and say 'this is the decision I have made', they would have supported that decision. (CP)

Another principal viewed the decision-making process as follows:

If you're any wise in any case and you thought about it [a decision] a great deal beforehand, you [are] able to get your own way no matter with who you are dealing with. I mean it's just... it's a matter of words, it's a matter of empathy, it's a matter of getting them to buy into the ... the situation. (AP)

Whilst this principal advocated democratic decision making, he admitted to occasionally using his influence as a leader to intimidate a decision. It is inferred that he resorted to this stance when the attainment of organisational goals were threatened. This may be viewed in a positive light in the sense that it challenged conventional thinking – as the principal alluded to in the following response:

I don't buy into things very easily, I've got to see the value of them. I've got to see the morality in it, I've got to see the ethics in it. ...they've [staff] got their chances to get me to buy into what they want. (AP)

The above indicates that an enormous amount of collaboration went into making decisions at the three schools in the study. As a leader, the principal of school A quite clearly questioned the validity of decisions made and would only consent to the implementation of actions if he was sufficiently convinced of their value.

My observations of staff interactions indicated that staff members were always engaged in collaboration, be it at their formal meetings or in the staffroom. Principals encouraged participation in a controlled and professional manner. People were not afraid to challenge each other and often there were debates about issues. The principals often took the stance of playing devil's advocate, especially in school A. People were always asked to express their views, even the student teachers. In this healthy collaborative environment, principals ensured that democratic, consultative decision making was engaged in.

5.5.3 Leadership distribution

A synthesis of the organisational milieu thus far reveals that an abundance of collaboration, support and trust prevailed at these schools predisposing the school leaders to vigorously engage in leadership distribution. This is evident by the following sentiment:

As a principal at a school like this you can set the tone but you don't have a tremendous amount of input into what is actually happening within the classroom , or within a phase or within a grade. You've got to rely on senior staff who have bought into my vision for the school and they [are] the ones who actually build the capacity.
(AP)

This principal acknowledged the enormity of the task he was charged with and the need to distribute leadership. Leadership was not distributed in a haphazard manner as he ensured that those entrusted with this function were aligned with the common vision and had the capacity and competence to perform certain leadership roles and responsibilities. This was supported by a principal expressing the following belief:

Although we are all teachers not one of us are the same. We are professionals but we are all different and we all have different talents and abilities. (CP)

This principal distributed leadership tasks based on talents and abilities:

I think the way that I motivate them [staff] is to use their expertise. We are different, we have talents in different fields. I don't only use their expertise, I acknowledge their expertise. I involve them in their capacities. I value their input. (CP)

It is evident from this and earlier statements that the principals strategically placed individuals in positions where their passion and skills lay, for they knew that specific individuals would create value in that space. And when staff enjoyed what they did, performance and the sense of belonging were accentuated.

It was also mentioned that:

It [leadership] has to be handed across to people. We've got to realise that we're actually executive officers of a structure. And you've got to empower those people, hand it across to them, support them, guide them, let them make their own decisions and let them learn by their mistakes. And when they do make mistakes, don't slam them down ... move on and build bridges. (AP)

It is evident that those entrusted with leadership positions were prepared for the anticipated roles and responsibilities, and the principal ensured that they were mentored and supported in the execution of their duties. Principals also created safe environments for individuals who assumed leadership functions and facilitated for them the process of decision making and risk taking.

All I can do is to build the main people in charge [and] give them the tools necessary to ensure they're doing their job correctly. (AP)

An SMT member and a Post Level 1 staff corroborated this view:

He [the principal] gives and he guides ... and he gives everybody a chance to prove themselves. He's leading without controlling. (CH1)

... and you [are] often offered a chance to take leadership in anything you know. They [principal and SMT] will say would you like to ... and you'll say no not me but they'll get somewhere with this ... yes, I'd like to do this. So it's very democratic. (BT3)

A principal explained his practice of leadership distribution as follows:

I distribute leadership ... those people are empowered to work with that [different leadership functions] and to run with that and I give them every tool that they need to deal with those issues. (AP)

The above evidence indicates a wide spectrum of leadership distribution and points to the great confidence and trust that the principal had in his people. The principal of school A distributed the responsibility of academics, culture, sports, finance and quality assurance to a variety of individuals on his staff, who were then empowered and nurtured, and were accountable to him. Another principal remarked:

I believe that part of my job here is also to try to prepare staff members for leadership positions in their future. They should be looking at wanting to ... um ... achieve HOD status, Deputy status and Principal status at various schools wherever it may be. (CP)

In this instance it appears that the pastoral role of the principal motivated him to distribute leadership in order to capacitate staff for future promotion posts. The following indicates how he achieved this:

I give them ownership – they must share in the school ... the last 2 days of every year we schedule staff meetings and we set up what I call event co-ordinators and almost every aspect of our school is controlled by a staff member. (CP)

Here again, leadership distribution was planned and consensus reached because the principal devoted time to collaborating on these issues. Leadership distribution was not based on a ‘gut feeling’ or intuition. It was an informed process.

The principals used specific strategies to build confidence in and prepare their teachers for leadership roles. For instance, the principal of school C adopted the following approach:

Every Monday when we have a formal assembly, I have the staff members involved in the presentations ... which involves their classes as well. So they have to take on that leadership role as well. And I think for both children and staff members to be on stage in front of the whole school is another stepping stone in terms of developing leadership. (CP)

Once leadership was distributed, the principals engaged in an extensive amount of continuous monitoring to ensure leadership quality, as is evident in the following remark:

So all leadership roles are given out, but then those people report back to me directly ... I'm the sort of person who ... can put my fingers on any problems before they actually rise. I'm around, up and down every corridor at least 2 or 3 times a day. They are accountable directly to me. (AP)

The use of the word 'accountable' on numerous occasions in the statements made by the principal of school A is of extreme significance. It indicates and emphasises the principal's expectations of excellence from those who assumed leadership positions. This also implies that the principal is not relinquishing his leadership responsibilities by distributing leadership. As the principal indicated, he had his finger on the pulse of the school. He also acknowledged that overall accountability was in his domain and once again demonstrated his passion by remarking:

Accountability rests fully with me and I've told my staff that continually ... 'I will take the flak for whatever happens'. And that's fine for me, provided we are able to justify ourselves. As I said that we know that we are doing the correct thing for the children, for the standards, for education, for the country. (AP)

The principal of school C reinforced the notion of monitoring and evaluating leadership distribution:

So yes we democratically elected staff members to become phase leaders and [they] have to report back in every staff meeting as to how it is ...what progress is being made in the phase ... are there any issues in the phase ... does something need to be looked at. So yes the leadership is certainly spread into the school. (CP)

In the sample schools where I made my observations, I noticed varying degrees of leadership distribution. From an academic perspective, phase heads and grade heads were appointed and tasked with monitoring and support functions. They worked closely with and were guided by the SMT. In the sporting and cultural arenas, teachers were given the responsibility to manage the different codes and activities. They all appeared comfortable and engaged actively in their duties. Teachers who had these responsibilities were observed planning fixtures and other logistic matters such as transport, venues, duty allocations, meals and attire when engaging in inter-school activities. These teachers also handed in written reports of their activities to their supervisors. This whole process was characterised by continued collaboration. It was evident that people never felt isolated and indeed worked as a collective.

5.5.4 Communication and rapport

Communication is certainly the golden thread that links and gives meaning to relationships, collaboration, decision making and distributing leadership. Principals realised the need to communicate clearly and honestly and to develop a positive rapport with all individuals associated with the school in their quest to sustain success in their organisations.

A principal reflecting on his transformational leadership style indicated:

But I'm more of the open door democratic person. Then my communication with whoever becomes an easier one. Um ... my teachers, my staff find it very easy to talk to me because I allow for communication to take place. I don't shut them down. (BP)

This principal encouraged free communication by implementing an 'open-door' policy. This approach eliminated barriers to communication as he alluded to in the following statement:

So the teacher will sit down ... and communicate with me on various aspects. It could be personal, it could be academic related, it could be extra-curricular related, whatever. But immediately I've broken down all barriers to communication. And that is the leadership style that I firmly believe that has allowed me to create a modicum of success in this school. (BP)

The principal encouraged communication by not just solely focusing on business matters, but also on personal issues that affect the individual's well-being and hence impact on his/her teaching and learning. When staff detected this element of sincere care, they felt at ease to speak their minds. However, such a line of communication requires the basic ethical and moral standards to be maintained. The principal therefore stated:

It's firm but fair! You cannot walk in here and take advantage of the situation because I allow for democracy and communication to [prevail] ... We still put into place the basics – respect, communicate along proper acceptable norms and standards of a classroom, of an office, of a society. You'll not be vulgar in the way that you talk. So communication still has its precepts put into place but it allows for persons to feel free to communicate. (BP)

It is evident from the above expression that this principal encouraged inter-personal communication that was aligned with the professionalism and ethics demanded by the organisation. Dignity and decorum had to be maintained at all times.

A principal – in illustrating the importance of healthy and effective communication – shared the following:

I have to talk about communication. I think to ... to be able to have a shared understanding there's got to be communication. (CP)

He further explained how a tangible system of communication was effected at his school:

We start of everyday at 7:30 in the morning before school with a 15 min staff meeting [briefing] and at that meeting we set our day. All the points that need to be discussed, all matters that need attention or anything that ... needs to go to the learners themselves individually or as a school is discussed at that meeting. (CP)

The principal further elaborated on the weekly staff meetings, SMT meetings and SGB meetings which are all forums for constructive communication. All the schools observed used a similar strategy to varying degrees to effect communication at the formal level. Regular communication with parents was perceived by these principals as important, and prompted a participant to state:

We have an extensive letter programme – we inform the parents constantly about whatever [is] happening at the school. We have a communicator system ... which comes up on the parents' screen as soon as they switch on their computers, so they're informed. We have a web-site. (CP)

My observation regarding the manner in which communication was effected at the sample schools revealed that Information and Communication Technology (ICT) was also used as a means to communicate with parents. These schools used the mass SMS system to communicate with parents – this over and above the conventional letter system and the communication book that each learner possessed.

The discussion above clearly reveals the structures and systems that the three principals employed to sustain the smooth and harmonious functioning of their schools. The importance of keeping all stakeholders informed of the strategic intentions and functioning of the school, together with its open-door policy, facilitated greater involvement and support by parents in

the school. Living in a digital era, the principals made effective use of ICT to engage all stakeholders in the activities of the school.

The principals made every effort to communicate directly with all the learners on a daily basis. This might not always have been possible but it could well be achieved, as a principal indicated:

I address my school every day. After our staff meeting we have a short assembly ... I chat to everybody ... we talk to them all. Whether it be ... hairstyles, haircuts, school dress, the behaviour at the last cricket match or what our expectation is in terms of their behaviour. (CP)

Listening is an essential communication skill that these principals practised continuously. A principal stated:

... listen to them [staff] ... recognise their point of view as well. I am not always right. And then you have a meeting and you hear what they have to say and you realise – “Hm ... restructure here my friend!” and recognise them ... praise them. (CP)

This particular skill conveyed to teachers that they were recognised and valued in the system. The principal's ability to listen was a catalyst for promoting innovation in these schools.

5.6 FINDINGS: RESEARCH SUB-QUESTION 3

How do principals of successful schools implement instructional leadership practices to create and sustain high levels of learner attainment and instructional excellence?

To respond to this question I considered the leadership practices of principals as they led and managed the teaching and learning programme at their organisations. An analysis of the data in this category yielded the following themes of leadership practice:

- Curriculum planning and coordination
- Monitoring and evaluation
- Enriching the curriculum
- The physical didactic environment
- Personnel matters

At this juncture I deem it necessary to deeply reflect on the phenomenon of Instructional Leadership. The comprehensive and systematic review of the literature on school leadership in chapter two and three clearly reveal that instructional leadership focuses on teaching and learning (which is core) and on the pedagogic behaviour of teachers (Bush & Glover, 2002:10; Leithwood, Jantzi & Steinbach, 1999:8; Southworth, 2002:79). The findings that prevail indicate that principals need to institute structures and processes to critically assess and improve on the behaviour of teachers as they interact with learners. This is a leadership practice and in order to attain the agreed upon learning/organisational goals, management tasks need to be engineered and implemented. Management tasks, from the evidence gathered, include the planning, organising, coordinating, monitoring and control of processes strategically designed to yield high learner outputs. The evidence clearly indicates that management tasks are delegated and entrusted to school management teams that comprise of Heads of Department who as curriculum specialists are accountable to the principal. The exposition and analysis of the findings indicate the leadership prowess of principals to catalyse the identified management tasks in SMT to effectively navigate the teaching and learning programme.

5.6.1 Curriculum planning and coordination

The evidence indicates that all the principals devoted much energy and time towards engaging in this practice. The quality of planning and preparation for curriculum implementation or delivery played a significant role in the success of the school. A principal confidently indicated:

I also believe that preparation and planning is vital. If you don't prepare and plan ... things are just haphazard. People also become disillusioned ... But if there is planning and purpose then things flow naturally. (CP)

The principal further alluded to planning that resulted in well-crafted term programmes that clearly demarcated expectations from both learners and teachers. This principal ensured that programmes or actions were meaningfully and strategically designed and implemented to address the holistic development of the learner.

I still expect my teachers to draw up a 3-tiered system of planning ... there's got to be long term planning ... for the year ... Secondly short term planning ... specific for that

particular term. And then their daily forecast ... planning and preparation is important for success. (CP)

Every teacher in the school was expected to have a detailed plan of action that effectively steered teaching and learning on a daily basis. Provision had to be made on formal planning documents to indicate progress, i.e. curriculum coverage.

Another principal reflected thus on the significance of plans that were generated:

It's a structured component where the management team would know, yes we will have to involve ourselves in meetings at this point here, ... teaching and learning, ... here comes our controlled test plus we also have a composite year plan and assessment plan. (BP)

The principals in this study ensured that the crafting of plans was a collaborative and cooperative process. This is evidenced by the comments of the following SMT member:

First thing is the year plan which he draws up via us the HODs. We get it from the teachers in terms of their subject allocation. The year plan is made up of the academic and non-academic. Then, when we go into phase meetings, then we go into subject meetings, then obviously from there into SMT meetings. Back and forth that's how he manages it. (BH1)

There appeared to be a great deal of healthy interaction among the different layers of staff in formulating and assessing strategies for successful teaching and learning. Principals met on a regular basis with the different levels of staff as corroborated by the following participant:

... on a weekly basis we have ... a grade meeting. So they also form their little team within their bigger phase meeting. We have management meetings too ... where once a week at least, we get together and look at the whole week ... so everybody is aware what's go on so if there is a need we can say I'm short here. (AH3)

Principals also placed their faith and trust in the expertise of their management teams to coordinate the teaching and learning process. As a principal indicated:

So they [SMT] will set into place the profiles that they have and at my management level I will tell them that "the teaching and learning is so dependent on you".

Because, whilst I overall manage the school, you are the specialists. So in order to improve the specific learning and teaching in the classroom ...you need to be very knowledgeable. (BP)

The principal placed much emphasis on the competence of his SMT to execute their roles and responsibilities and clearly expressed the high expectations he had of them. He also alluded to the SMT members equipping themselves with content and pedagogy so that they could address their subordinates from a point of authority.

The data indicates that the principals were sensitive to policy and legislation meant to direct and standardise curriculum implementation. Given the numerous policy changes that pervaded the educational landscape since 1994 and the contexts within which they lead, these principals tended to interrogate policy and question its validity and credibility. One of the principals remarked:

... legislation and policies ... er... have expectations, and you as a professional need to respond in the most positive way to that legislation or to the policy and bear in mind at all times to the advantage of the child. Also I believe we need to set standards. It's no good just following. Yes, I think we need to be ... yes innovative. (CP)

The principals were fond of challenging the status quo. The following statements reflect how a principal responded to the curriculum implementation guidelines provided by the Department of Basic Education:

It doesn't matter whether you call it NCS, RNCS or you call it CAPS [or] whether you are teaching through the media of the medieval castle even, to which we've got no reference whatsoever – that's not important. As long the skills and the attitudes, the knowledge, the values – the competent reading skills, the comprehension ability, the empathy – those sort of things that come into education are vital. (AP)

... even the CAPS system some teachers are saying that following is not going to work for the following reasons. If they can justify it and bring it up ... fine, change it – adapt it. Make it suite you. I don't think we can take an education system as such and enforce on teachers to enforce on children. (AP)

... and I adapted that system to suite my school and my children and I'm still producing the top learners in the town. So ... by saying let's adapt it to ourselves – there was nothing wrong with that ... because the proof of the pudding is in the eating.
(AP)

The above statements indicate the confidence and passion with which the particular principal led and managed his school. It is evident that he was acutely aware the context of his school and used this information when analysing policy and devising strategic plans. He was understandably knowledgeable about the curriculum and pedagogic intricacies and had a strong focus on and commitment to the goals and vision of his school. As a result, he strategically made informed adaptations to the curriculum in consultation with his staff, which were then adopted and implemented with the explicit purpose of yielding excellent learner outputs.

With regard to the observations that were made, principals had the school's organogram and strategic plans in full display on their bulletin boards. These were also displayed in the staffroom. The plans incorporated academic, sporting and cultural activities. Co-curricular activities were also outlined with their respective expectations. SMT and committee meetings were a regular occurrence and curriculum coverage was a standing item for discussion. At these meetings it was not unusual for contingency plans to be verified and put into action so as to address challenges that were encountered – hence there was a continuous planning. At the staff meetings in which I sat in, there was always a report on progress and alternative strategies that had to be implemented. The principals ensured that a thorough process of curriculum planning and coordination prevailed at their schools.

5.6.2 Monitoring and evaluation of teaching and learning

Principals continuously engaged in monitoring and evaluation to ensure that expectations and standards regarding learner attainment and instruction were not only met, but actually exceeded. The evidence suggests that a variety of techniques were employed by principals to nurture success at their schools.

5.6.2.1 Effectively utilising SMT

Principals had the utmost confidence and trust in the abilities of the SMT and others in leadership positions to monitor and evaluate the teaching and learning process. A principal mentioned:

I don't call in books [from teachers] and say I now require proof of what you have done. That to me is a pointless exercise. I should know what is happening within my school. I should know what the children are doing, what the staff are doing, what sport is going on and as I said you've got to be involved in all of that, not in a checking structure but a supportive structure. (AP)

It was evident that this principal was not office bound but thrived in the middle of the teaching and learning action. He therefore made the following comment:

I would consider it very wrong of me to walk into any classroom in this school, it's a false situation to sit down and say now I am going to observe a lesson. I simply know by walking past a classroom what is going on – is education taking place, are the children under control, is the standard of behaviour up to my expectancy, what is the teacher doing? I am not office bound. From the time I arrive at school at 6:30 I'm out and about. I'm in every classroom virtually every day. I walk around the school continually. I'm with my staff at break times. (AP)

He experienced first-hand and knew with what and how his people were engaged. This principal blended in with his staff and walked by their side. He did not duplicate the monitoring and evaluation which his SMT was doing as a basic management function. He substantiated his actions as follows:

Regarding observation, I engage in it continually. I don't want to be seen to be a policeman, at all. There are regular book inspections by the HODs who then bring through any problems to me. Er ... any academic problems, any childhood problems, any problems of children who have been dysfunctional are brought across to my table via the HODs and via the grade heads. So they are overseeing the entire quality of the education within the school. (AP)

It was clear that the principal trusted his management team and expected them to adhere to the common goal of continually providing quality instruction, which would result in high learner attainment.

The principal however expected regular feedback or reports on this process, to which he responded appropriately, as he explained in the following statement:

They [HODs] would have a meeting every week and those minute books come through to me. All of their problems or their findings ... are read very thoroughly by me. And you can then go back to the teachers and say right let's have a look at this little issue, lets discuss it – where are the weaknesses, what are you doing, why haven't the children grasped that concept, are there any other ways, lets link up to teachers who are able to teach that concept – who have had success. (AP)

The above is reinforced by an SMT participant who stated:

He [principal] calls for our books and he checks. We attend [SMT] meetings almost weekly. He always asks for our inputs. Asks us about departments, our phases. We give him feedback as to what is taking place in our departments. What problems we encounter and we find solutions to the problems if there are any. (BH4)

On receiving this type of feedback from the SMT, the principal analysed it, acted immediately and engaged teachers on issues pertaining to challenges being encountered in the classroom. It is evident that this leadership practice promoted teacher reflection that allowed for the constructive appraisal of classroom practice and the seeking of avenues to enhance teaching and learning. Corroborating this practice, another participant reported:

The phase leaders reporting back to me keeps me pretty much in touch with what is happening and where there are areas of problems, problem areas and so on. (CP)

A Post Level 1 educator mentioned:

We keep minutes of it [weekly grade meetings] and everyone is kept up to date and at that meeting ... well for our grade, AH1 will always ask how far are you? Are you up to date – have you done this ... and then remember exam papers are due in 3 weeks time. I think that is how ... everyone is saying check-up! And the learners' books get taken and they're checked and moderated. (AT3)

The above discussion highlights the actions that SMT and other appointed leaders in a phase were entrusted with. The principals clearly expected their SMT to diligently perform these management functions, namely planning, organising and controlling (Robbins, 1980).

5.6.2.2 Direct monitoring and evaluation

Quite on the other extreme, the principal of school C indicated:

Teachers send their books to me. I look at the books – I call for books. And they come to my desk – I go through the books and I have a look and see what is happening in the classes. So that’s the check to see that things are being done. Otherwise through the phase leaders as well ... that must be checked as well. (CP)

It may be inferred from the above statement that this principal directly monitored and evaluated the quality of teachers’ lesson planning, written work, homework, assessment, and curriculum coverage as prescribed by the teaching plan or work schedule. This perception is reinforced by his further remark:

So every class has a mark book or a mark system. And it must match your teaching programme. That, you say in your planning and preparation that you did a certain topic ... er ... where did you assess it. There ... the date corresponds. And it is my task to check those things and see to it that those things are done. (CP)

This principal had in place a system of checks and balances to confirm the authenticity of curriculum coverage. This is vital, for learners simply cannot progress to higher grades when there are gaps in their curriculum content knowledge. The principal further stated:

Every single exam that was written I moderate. I check every exam paper that is set ... check to see that the content is correct, check ... the layout of the exams must be correct, the font that is used must be correct. There’s a standard and it needs to be followed. (CP)

The above indicates that this particular principal was very thorough on the learner assessment process as it determines the promotion of learners to higher grades. This is a critical practice in that it ensures that minimum standards are adhered to and reassures the principal that learners are sufficiently developed to cope with the demands of the new curriculum that they will be exposed to in the next grade/phase.

Supporting the above view, an SMT member made the following comment:

He moderates as well, especially the examinations. He [principal] is hands on in terms of that. And then in terms of continuous assessment it's via our records that he knows exactly what is going on. If there is a need for him to intervene, then it's at that point. (BH1)

5.6.2.3 Encouraging external stakeholder monitoring and evaluation

One of the principals also encouraged parents as external stakeholders to be active proponents of a monitoring and evaluation process. He stated:

We send books home to the parents together with a standard form in which the parents [are] asked to comment on the quality of work done and teachers responses ... and then all those forms ... they come back to me and end up on my desk. I go through every single one. It carries my signature and [I] see what the parents have said. (CP)

This is a strategy that this principal employed to gain an unbiased impression of the quality of teaching and learning at his school. It furthermore reinforced the idea of parents being equal partners in the education of their children and subconsciously stimulated greater involvement from this important stakeholder component.

5.6.2.4 Analysing learner attainment data

The principals were also found to focus their attention on analysing and acting upon learner data. A participant reported:

Then of course I monitor everything through every single report throughout the school. It comes across my table. And every single report in the school is read by me. I do take cognisance of any problem areas ... um ... you can pick up whether there's a maths problem at any particular phase or a particular grade or just individual children even ... and pick up and have a look into that. (AP)

The above evidence indicates that this principal effectively analysed data on learner attainment and utilised the findings to meaningfully engage with teachers and learners. Another participant corroborated this by interjecting that:

Coming to the learners, the support and sustenance would come in from ... er ... the feedback of the assessment programme. Your report card, your test results, your assessment results. The ANA results clearly indicate that. Our internal results are clearly showing that. When we do analysis of each term's schedules it is so obvious that children are failing in Mathematics because they don't understand the problem-solving aspect of it. (BP)

It is clear from the above evidence that analysing learner attainment data culminates in a diagnostic report which then directs the leader towards using the findings and charting an informed course of action. The principals were acutely aware of the significance of learner attainment data.

From my observations of the principals' movements, it was evident that they were not bound to their office. They continuously moved around and were highly visible throughout the school. HODs were observed conducting lesson observations and examining learners' written work. Feedback and recommendations were also provided by writing to the teachers concerned. In most of the schools, the SMT members wrote reports on their classroom observations and submitted these to the principal. At SMT meetings there was always a discussion of teacher performance. All three school principals also examined learner assessment data and used SMT and staff meetings as a forum to discuss such analyses and devise ways forward.

5.6.3 Enriching the curriculum

An analysis of the data revealed that the principals made every effort to create expanded opportunities for all their learners by providing a rich curriculum. The following is an interesting comment from a principal:

When you do an assessment the most important aspect of that is not what the child got right, it's what the child's got wrong. What he got right he knows – why bother about that?... But corrections as I call it is vitally important. [If] generally everybody's got this wrong ... then it's a general revision but otherwise you've got to go back to the individual child and say: 'Why did you get this wrong? Let us look at it' and make that thing part of his knowledge because he's got to get it right. (CP)

The statement above indicates that this principal was concerned with aspects of the curriculum not attained by learners and focused serious attention on this. It is inferred that the principal would mobilise his staff to give attention to aspects such as corrective and remedial work, and possibly re-teaching if non-attainment occurred frequently. A similar scenario was portrayed by another participant:

The intervention programme that was based on the analysis of the ANA and first term results ... The principal ... allocated time within the time table for us [HODs] to create that intervention ... We looked at the poorest performing learners and a programme was designed for them in conjunction with the English and Maths educators. Then we got the reading programme on Wednesdays and Thursdays that allows educators to engage with the learners. (BH1)

The above corroborates how this principal used data to enrich the curriculum for underperforming learners by introducing a remediation and support programme which he described as follows:

We have dropped their [HOD's] loads and I said ok, 10 periods go towards pulling out those learners who are having difficulty, say in Mathematics or essentially literacy. (BP)

On the topic of learners experiencing barriers to mainstream education, one of the principals stated:

Our vision is to cater to the needs of individual children and that brings me to a whole new group of children as well ... children who experience barriers to learning. There again we set a policy to try and cater to those children's needs, as well. And here we need outside expertise to assist us. (CP)

Although this principal aligned himself towards accommodating learners with special educational needs in mainstream classes, this was not done to the detriment of his teachers engaging the other learners. To ensure quality instruction and learning for this designated group of learners, the principal engaged in this matter as is explained below:

You know we have an occupational therapist who is attached to the school and children who have difficulties [in mainstream] are allowed to go to her during class

times. It's not just after school. So we sort of facilitated her to teach during school hours. We also have a speech therapist. (CH3)

The evidence above indicates that the principal of school C found it necessary to employ individuals with the required specialisation to meaningfully manage learners with special education needs. It may be inferred that he placed emphasis on early intervention, which resulted in these learners progressing to the latter stages of their schooling.

A HOD corroborated that expanded opportunities for their diverse group of learners were pursued in the following manner:

We don't just do the basics or the bare minimum, ... we always go a step further. So we'll cover what we have to but we will also look at the needs of individuals ... and you may believe in remediation for those who need it but there's a lot of children who need not remediation but extension ... and I think that's one of our strengths as well ... we extend those that need extension so that they really do reach their potential and that they step in confident and independent when they go into high school. (AH1)

Introducing programmes into the curriculum to extend high-performing learners was also deemed essential by the principal of this school. Principals were evidently aware of the need to expand the critical and creative thinking abilities of their learners.

Teaching and learning in the 21st century requires the use of new and fresh pedagogic approaches. The data indicates that all principals embraced Information and Communication Technology (ICT) to enhance the teaching and learning experience. One of them explained:

I think information is one of the most important things again ... every staff member has a laptop connected to the Internet in the class. We took all our chalkboards out and we put whiteboards in, and we bought projectors for every single classroom. The child asks a question, we can look it up immediately and give him whatever we can find on the internet. (CP)

The above remark indicates that the principal recognised the power of the world-wide web and exposed learners to current international literature. Furthermore, the use of audio-visual technology in the form of moving images simply elevated teaching and learning into a whole new dimension. He further stated:

They [teachers] ... look at it ... start researching, start planning. They can look up any information that they want to. They got it all right there. It's open to them to use in the school continuously ... either as a teaching aid or as a research ... um ... system so they can look up anything anytime they want to. (CP)

This view was strengthened by a principal indicating:

The school has internet. So they [teachers] are told that if you want to programme your lesson and you feel that you want to enhance fractions that you are teaching via the internet, download – [use the] data projector – teach the lesson. (BP)

Staff members were also supported to use this technology as an administrative tool. The principal of school C stated:

There are some of our staff members who have wonderful computer skills, and if they can do it on a computer ... why should it be in a book on paper? So some of my staff members have got everything in the computer. Everything is backed up. (CP)

The following statements made by PL1 educators are further evidence of principals encouraging the use of ICT to enhance teaching and learning:

... we've got network cable into our classrooms so we can always print and we can have access to the internet. We got the computer centre so we are ... we're very privileged. (AT3)

We are lucky at School B we have access to the internet. We have been offered a chance to attend computer lessons free of charge to get us in tune with the changes in technology. (BT2)

All the principals encouraged the ethical use of ICT to optimise the quality of instruction and learner attainment. These principals laid the foundations for e-learning long before this initiative was first propagated by the provincial department of education.

From my observations, it is evident that correction and remedial work received a high priority. I often heard the principals remind the HODs to make sure that teachers engage in this practice. There was also mention of this to varying degrees at the meetings I sat in. In one of the schools a designated remedial intervention programme for Literacy and Numeracy was observed being managed by the SMT. All of the schools had Wi-Fi and most teachers were

observed doing their planning using laptop computers. Some used a data projector as a tool to present their lessons. One of the schools had an electronic whiteboard installed in every classroom and lesson presentations were effected using this medium.

5.6.4 Personnel matters

Principals continuously engaged in human resource planning, contemplating staff dynamics and the possible recruitment and selection of staff who could add value to their operations. Due to the numerous changes in curriculum policy over the past two decades, recruiting, selecting and placing a suitable candidate was quite a challenge. The data reveals that apart from the in-house student-teacher training academy, principals would resort to the following actions:

Bringing in people who know what they are doing with CAPS ... in grade R for instance with a venture that I did. I brought in a young lady from Town E who has only ever dealt with the CAPS and she's shown the value of that in grade R and she has brought that into that system so the grade R's are now more aware of the whole CAPS system and moving towards that. (AP)

The above indicates the sheer determination of the principal to employ a particular profile of person who was aligned with the school's culture and vision and who had the required skill and knowledge to make an impact on this crucial phase of teaching and learning.

Supporting the previous view, another principal indicated:

Really, I have some fantastic young educators which we have recruited. They didn't just arrive here ... we've looked for them! There's been a process to get them but they bring a whole new freshness to our institution here ... with their ideas and their enthusiasm. (CP)

It is evident that this principal thrived on transformation and hence actively sought staff members who were catalysts for change. His recruitment and selection process was one that was carefully planned – it could basically be equated to 'head-hunting' personnel.

An SMT member corroborated this action by stating that:

Getting new blood in I think is a good thing as well at times. We've had some new teachers coming in now with new idea, new slides in technology and I see it's rubbed

off in some others as well. Some of the older ones [teachers] are now starting with technology. (AH3)

5.6.5 The physical didactic environment

Some of the principals evidently factored in the physical environment as being a determinant towards quality instruction and learner attainment. A principal indicated:

I believe that class numbers play a role. I think that a teacher is able to and feels a lot better teaching ... um a smaller group because of the responses that she gets. When you have groups of 25. I think that motivates my teachers. (CP)

This principal realised the significance of keeping the class size as small as possible and was prepared to employ more (competent) staff at the expense of the school's personnel budget. This was clearly a practice that enhanced the quality of learner-centred teaching and learning.

A clean and tidy environment was also found to help create a climate that encourages effective teaching and learning. Keeping your surroundings clean is a basic human value and this principal who viewed it as an important factor in structuring the learning environment of his school, hence commented:

I believe that if you have a neat school, a clean school ... places where litter can be put. It's no good telling children 'don't litter' and there's no place to put their litter. So all those things I believe are very important to create an atmosphere of encouragement of wanting to be here, of wanting to teach here, wanting to learn here. (CP)

The principal also believed that safety was a basic need and that a sense of security was a prerequisite to effective education. He therefore aided in creating a safe school environment and ambiance where both his learners and teachers would feel safe and secure:

Safety as well, the children need to know that they are safe, staff need to know that they are safe ... Therefore we do have a safety plan in place. For the children's sake as well we always have teachers on duty, during their breaks, before school etc. Children should never be left unattended ... we have a prefect system. (CP)

Whilst the above statements emerged from the interview with the principal of a specific school, similar practices were observed at both the other schools. My observations revealed

that the principals of all the schools tried to keep the teacher-pupil ratio to a minimum. This therefore resulted in their schools employing staff remunerated by the school governing body. All the schools presented with infrastructure that was neat, professional and well secured. Classrooms were large enough to accommodate learners and designed to create healthy didactic environments. There was an abundance of LTSMs strategically displayed for learners to use and reflect upon. Each school's perimeter was fenced and teachers were always on ground duty during break.

5.7 SYNTHESIS OF THE FINDINGS

This section highlights the findings that were obtained by analysing the various interviews that were conducted and the observations that were made.

5.7.1 Findings: Research sub-question 1

What practices do principals of successful schools engage in to set direction and continuously develop their professional staff?

In responding to this question, the relevant findings will be presented under the following two headings:

- Setting direction
- Professional development

5.7.1.1 Setting direction

The following themes of leadership practice adopted by the principals in this study emerged from the data:

5.7.1.1.1 Knowing and aligning their people towards a vision

- The principals made an effort to gain knowledge about their people, and they did their utmost to fulfil their staff members' personal ambitions.
- They worked hard to align individual ambitions, beliefs and understanding with the school culture and vision.
- They recognised and embraced diversity in all their people.
- They created a sense of identity and belonging among all stakeholders.

5.7.1.1.2 *Providing a vision and a purpose*

- The principals used the learner as a focal point in crafting the school's vision and purpose.
- They engaged all stakeholders in crafting the vision in order to ensure 'buy-in'.
- They passionately modelled the vision.
- They continually revisited the vision and adapted it according to changing circumstances and needs.
- They endeavoured to generate and sustain a shared or common understanding of the school's vision, values and purpose among all stakeholders by engaging in widespread communication.

5.7.1.1.3 *Sustaining high expectations*

- The principals continuously appraised learner attainment data and communicated success to all stakeholders.
- They created a didactic environment that encouraged innovation.
- They continuously urged stakeholders, especially parents, to support the goals and aspirations of the school.

5.7.1.1.4 *Managing change*

- The principals embraced change only if it would enhance learner outputs.
- They confidently and tenaciously challenged the change processes advocated by DoE and implemented them only if they were justifiable.
- They collaborated transparently with all stakeholders and encouraged open communication when engaging in the adoption of change.

5.7.1.1.5 *Motivating staff*

- The principals displayed passion and led by example.
- They were humble and engaged authentically with staff.
- They treated all staff members as professionals.
- They engaged their SMT as the immediate layer of leadership and management to keep teachers continually inspired and supported.
- They recognised their teachers for who they were and for what they brought to the school.

- They engaged in inspirational dialogue with staff.

5.7.1.2 Professional development

The following themes of leadership practice emerged from these findings:

5.7.1.2.1 Training and developing people

Principals advocated three main streams of training and development, each comprising several subtasks:

- Internal staff development
 - Identifying developmental needs using the departmental IQMS and findings from the SMT
 - Mobilising the SMT as subject specialists to take charge of and oversee this process.
 - Encouraging staff to take charge of their own professional growth and development and to collaboratively utilise their supervisors to support their development needs.
 - Prioritising the implementation of school-based professional development workshops and emphasising that the SMT should access DoE workshops prior to PL1 educators and then cascade to PL1 within the context of the school.
 - Tasking PL1 educators who acquired new knowledge and skills in their personal capacity to plan and conduct professional development workshops.
 - Promoting informal professional development on a daily basis by encouraging staff collaboration and peer observation.
- External staff development
 - Encouraging staff to participate in professional development programmes organised by the DoE, teacher unions and other credible external providers.
 - Protecting the notional time by ensuring that participation in these programmes occurs outside learner contact time.
 - Screening the content of external workshops and encouraging attendance and participation only if such workshops are deemed value adding.

- Prioritising the participation of HODs at these workshops.
- Strategically offering their school as a venue for external professional development providers to deliver their programmes.
- Self-development
 - Encouraging and supporting teachers to engage in private study.

5.7.1.2.2 Networking and individual support

- Establishing networks with other high-performing schools in the district and learning from their best practices.
- Acting as mentors when necessary.

5.7.1.2.3 Succession planning

- Establishing and managing an in-school teacher training academy.

5.7.2 Findings: Research sub-question 2

How do principals of successful schools create and nurture a constructive working milieu?

The following themes of leadership practice were captured:

5.7.2.1 Constructing, nurturing and sustaining relationships

- Relationships within the school
 - Creating a sense of belonging and identity among their staff.
 - Instilling in the staff a strong sense of loyalty and commitment.
 - Engaging staff with care, respect and support.
 - Acting to resolve conflicts that may arise.
 - Recognising the human element in staff and engaging with them on an inter-personal level.
 - Valuing staff members for who they are and creating safe environments for educators to take calculated risks.
 - Building strong relationships based on trust (social capital).

- Devoting time to interaction with learners and generating pastoral care.
- Building external relationships
 - Engaging and supporting parents as equal partners in the child's education.
 - Networking with high schools that receive their learners.
 - Networking with other successful primary schools.

5.7.2.2 Collaboration

- Ensuring that staff members meet regularly as strategic groups to plan and reflect.
- Conducting daily morning briefings in a rather informal atmosphere.
- Encouraging inputs from staff and open discussions on school functionality.
- Encouraging cohesive team work and rejecting teacher isolation.
- Promoting transparent interactions and a sense of community within teams.
- Engendering a spirit of selfless sharing of knowledge and skills among all staff members to advance learner attainment.
- Engaging staff in democratic, consultative decision making.

5.7.2.3 Leadership distribution

- Ensuring that this is not a haphazard process but planned and based on the competence and capacity of individuals.
- Preparing, mentoring and guiding individuals for leadership roles.
- Continually monitoring and evaluating distributed leadership, and accepting accountability.

5.7.2.4 Communication and rapport

- Encouraging free communication by implementing an 'open-door' policy and breaking down barriers to communication.
- Engaging in interpersonal communication on professional and personal matters.

- Ensuring that the basic ethical and moral standards of communication are adhered to.
- Effectively using Information and Communication Technology (ICT).
- Listening to the inputs made by staff.

5.7.3 Findings: Research sub-question 3

How do principals of successful schools implement instructional leadership practices to create and sustain high levels of learner attainment and instructional excellence?

The evidence yielded the following themes of leadership practice:

5.7.3.1 Curriculum planning and coordination

- Ensuring that programmes or actions are meaningfully and strategically designed and implemented.
- Ensuring that all educators have a detailed action plan accounting for daily teaching and learning.
- Ensuring that the crafting of plans is a collaborative and cooperative process by involving the various layers of people at the school.
- Engaging and entrusting the SMT as subject specialists to aid in coordinating the teaching and learning process.
- Often challenging the status quo and making context-informed adaptations to the curriculum.

5.7.3.2 Monitoring and evaluation of teaching and learning

- Effectively utilising the expertise of the SMT.
- Not remaining office bound, but continuously moving around the school to make observations – hence highly visible.
- Requesting feedback or reports from the SMT on a regular basis, and subsequently analysing and responding appropriately to these by engaging educators.
- Examining teaching, learning and assessment records.

- Checking on and moderating examination question papers.
- Encouraging parents to be involved in monitoring the quality of teaching and learning.
- Analysing learner attainment data and engaging educators on the findings.

5.7.3.3 Enriching the curriculum

- Mobilising staff to give attention to corrective work, remedial work and re-teaching.
- Engaging teachers to introduce programmes into the curriculum to extend high-performing learners.
- Effectively using ICT to enhance the quality of teaching and learning.

5.7.3.4 Personnel matters

- Planning the recruitment and selection process.
- Ensuring that teachers who are aligned with the school culture and vision are employed.
- Actively seeking staff members who are catalysts for change.

5.7.3.5 The physical didactic environment

- Trying to keep class sizes as small as possible.
- Ensuring that the learning environment is neat and tidy.
- Ensuring that the school is a safe and secure environment.

5.8 DISCUSSION

5.8.1 Findings

The empirical investigation executed clearly reveals that successful schools are a product of how principals think and act in their leadership capacity. All of the principals in the purposive sample have demonstrated as their core leadership practices a common repertoire that include a shared understanding of the vision, purpose and values of their organisations; transforming their schools into learning organisations; creating and sustaining structures and processes that

yield desired organisational goals; and being effective instructional leaders in the management of the critical teaching and learning programmes that unfold at their schools. These findings strongly correlate with the postulations of Leithwood, Day, Sammons and Hopkins (2006) that serve as the lens that frames my study.

It was furthermore discovered that principals of successful schools do not operate in isolation but endeavour to mobilise teams towards the realisation of shared organisational objectives that are directed specifically towards instructional excellence and high learner attainment. They did not consider themselves as heroic individuals at the top of a bureaucratic administration system and wield power by virtue of their position and authority, but rather encouraged independent and creative thought by distributing leadership and influencing teacher behaviour - a phenomenon that is widely advocated by Spillane(2004) and Harris(2008). This also coincides with the view that "schools can no longer be led by a lone figure at the top of the hierarchy" (Grant,2006:514). It is for this reason that the principals endeavoured to align the personal vision of their SMT and staff to their own vision which ultimately translated into the organisational vision, a phenomenon that is associated with the theory of transformation (Burns,2010:257).

To ensure that there was gravitation towards the shared vision, principals were careful in appointing personnel that were aligned to the culture of the school. Knowing their people was hence an important variable and this knowledge empowered the principals to engage in meaningful staff development and growth activities that were informed by specific needs to enhance learner output. In this way staff were continuously developed to advance individual functionality enabling them to respond to the changing needs and reform initiatives that are inherent in the current education system. This strongly correlates with the view of Rampersad (2003:20) that "learning is a continuous personal transformation in an attempt to alter behaviour". In this way principals paid attention to quality of teaching which Chapman et al. (2012:149) aver is the primary focus of school improvement. The principals of successful schools were keenly aware of the good practices of their "competition" and capitalised on the practices of other successful schools in the province as a benchmark to refine their functionality. Whilst every effort was made to retain staff principals planned for staff turnover resulting from natural attrition.

Principals of successful schools were acutely aware of the impact of the didactic milieu on the quality of instruction and learner attainment. Careful thought was therefore devoted to

aligning their schools towards success. This entailed building collaborative cultures which hinged around teamwork, communication and trust and correlates with the belief of Printy (2010:113) that in order to realise quality teaching, solid collaboration focused on improvement is a necessity. Clear, honest and free communication was encouraged amongst all staff and this practice strongly links to the empirical postulations of Blase and Blase (2000:133) when they aver that principals engaged in "talking with teachers to promote reflection" enabling teachers to critically reflect on their learning and professional practice. By virtue of the effort these principals made to know the strengths and challenges encountered by their people, they ably distributed leadership to their SMT and other staff and those entrusted with leadership roles were prepared, mentored and guided. This is in keeping with the view of Day et al. (2011:235).

The principals in the study placed enormous emphasis in the management of teaching and learning and this supports the view of Christie (2005) that learning is the central purpose of schooling. In alignment with Resolution 1 of 2008 (DOE:2008a) principals were able to provide professional leadership that was based on sound curriculum management that enhanced the quality of teaching and learning. These principals effectively utilised their SMT as subject specialists to attain this end. In strong correlation to the findings of Wilcox et al. (2011:22) high expectations were made explicit to both staff and learners in the endeavour to roll-out an enriched curriculum. It is hence evident that these principals function as effective instructional leaders who focus keenly on teaching and learning and the behaviour of teachers in their interaction with learners. This is congruent to the view of Bush and Glover (2002:10) when they contemplate on the phenomenon of Instructional Leadership.

5.8.2 Emergent themes

Reflecting on the findings on how principals of successful schools set direction and continuously develop their professional staff, the following critical themes of leadership practice emerged:

- Providing a vision and a purpose

This leadership practice was prioritised by all of the successful principals who vehemently placed the overall well-being of the learner as the focal point when crafting the vision and the purpose of the organisation. A principal indicated:

... the central – the core of the entire thing is the learner.(BP)

This was corroborated by an HOD who averred that:

Everything comes down to what is good for the child and every individual, because every child is different...(AH1)

and a level one educator who believed that:

Also important is to keep in mind at all times that the child is the most important at the end of the day.(BT2)

It was also apparent that principals do not unilaterally engineer a vision but strategically engage the other stakeholders such as the different layers of staff and the parent component so that there is a holistic "purchase-in". In this way there is a greater probability of the different proponents of the school community engaging in activity that would lead to the realisation of agreed upon organisational goals. Principals hence endeavour to ensure that the vision is commonly understood by indulging in widespread communication. A teacher bears testimony to this when she utters that:

The vision of the school is definitely one which everyone connected with the school can share. Everyone feels a sense of ownership... (BT4)

As leaders the principals acknowledged the need to be susceptible to change and hence propagated that the vision should not be cast in stone but rather periodically be re-visited to respond to the changing needs of the wider society. This was apparent during the staff meetings I observed.

- Knowing and aligning your people

It is evident that principals value the potential inherent in their staff and strive to determine the strengths and areas requiring development in them. This prompted a principal to indicate that:

...one of the biggest advantageous positions in terms of my leadership and managing of this school [is] that is I know my staff.(BP)

Having knowledge of their staff provides valuable information on personal ambitions that these principals endeavour to align to the culture and vision of the school. Furthermore these

principals seek to identify the nature of diversity that staff presents in an attempt to exploit these differences towards enhancing learner outputs.

- Sustaining high expectations

Learner attainment data was continuously appraised by principals and new benchmarks were communicated to create expectations that defied mediocrity. Innovation, perseverance and determination to improve both teaching and learning were strongly advocated by these principals. My observations of principals interacting with staff revealed principals making frequent reference to high learner attainment during prior academic periods and addressing both educators and learners to surpass these. Principals spoke of SGB and parents aligning themselves to support the goals and aspirations of their schools.

- Managing change

Principals realised the need for change in the current century and encouraged the entire school community to migrate from their comfort zones into developmental zones. This was corroborated by a HOD as follows:

Why hold on to things if they're just not applicable or they are not working – change them and move ahead. (AH1)

The past two decades have been characterised by a number of new reform initiatives and these principals confidently and tactfully challenged the status quo and implemented change which they in consultation with their staff deemed justifiable. This is evidenced by a principal stating:

Provided I know and my staff are able to justify what we're doing is within the bounds of responsibility, ... we [are] prepared to work with it [departmental policy].(AP)

Principals did not force change on their staff by virtue of their leadership position but used their influence to coax all stakeholders via open communication to adapt and then adopt new initiatives that precipitate in improved learner performance. Hence a principal retorts:

Once they've bought into it they will take it back to their phases and classes and implement change. (AP)

- Motivating and inspiring staff

Principals have realised that their actions communicate expectations and hence consciously model desired behaviour. This serves as a potent motivator as articulated by a HOD:

... it is [because] your leaders do it so you feel I must do it as well. (AH2)

These principals were authentic and my observation of them in action revealed congruence between their thoughts, words and deeds. The principals acknowledged all staff members as professionals and recognised the endeavours of teachers and their contribution towards attaining the schools vision and this served as inspiration for enhancing performance in the classroom. Principals also used staff meetings to engage in inspirational dialogue with teachers and provided modern facilities that catered for their personal well-being which they could utilise during their non-teaching time.

Principals valued teacher quality and paid careful attention towards continuously developing the content and pedagogic knowledge and capacity of their staff. Pertinent themes that emerged under the core practice of developing people included:

- Training and developing people

This prerogative was realised by executing three formats, namely internal staff development, external staff development and self-development. Principals, by virtue of the trust and faith in their SMT, strategically deployed them as subject specialists to manage this process. Senior personnel often used the department of education's designated IQMS to identify needs peculiar to individual teachers and their schools and subsequently design meaningful development plans and programmes. To this effect a principal enunciated:

I have 4 very senior teachers who I have basically appointed, who have bought into my vision for the school and they [are] the ones who actually build the capacity and make sure the things actually happen in the classroom as far as education goes. (AP)

Principals encourage teachers to work collaboratively with SMT and to take control of their own professional aspirations. Whilst school-based training is prioritised principals screen the plethora of external professional development programmes and encourage staff to attend these outside notional time. Professional development was not always a formalised, structured activity but was enacted on a daily basis as evidenced by my observation of groups of teachers in common phases or subjects engaging in meaningful collaboration and reflective

dialogue during their non-contact time. Principals made every endeavour to have a highly capacitated and competent SMT component so that teachers are continuously exposed to relevant in-house staff development.

Included in the array of practices that principals of successful schools exhibited to promote growth and development was the formation of partnerships with other schools and learning from their best practices. Mentorship programmes were also cherished often with principals themselves assuming the role of a mentor, as contemplated by an educator as follows:

The mentorship of senior management especially Mr [Principal] as well as my current HOD over the years has inculcated in me a passion and a drive. (BT1)

Principals were aware of the shortage of skilled and value-driven teachers that the culture of their institution warranted and hence engaged in establishing a format of in-school teacher training academies to effectively address the issue of succession planning.

Contemplating on the leadership practices that create and nurture constructive working milieu, the following themes were isolated:

- The establishment, fostering and sustaining of healthy relationships

Principals placed value in primarily establishing healthy didactically sound relationships within the school and also were aware of the importance of relationships with parents, feeder schools and as already alluded to, other successful primary schools. Relationships were based on trust and entailed engaging with others with the utmost amount of care, respect and support in order to establish a sense of belonging. This is profoundly captured by a principal when he articulates:

I know the value of my staff and what they give to the school ... how are you going to get the best out of anybody if you are not supporting them and guiding them and helping them. (AP)

My observations of staff dynamics revealed a content, enthusiastic collective of educators who mingled as one large happy family.

- Collaboration

The nature and quality of relationships which principals established firmly embedded a spirit and culture of collaboration amongst all staff members that almost always resulted in staff

functioning as cohesive teams characterised by transparent interactions and a sense of community. A principal reflected thus:

It is hard work. And it's team work as well. Even if it comes from [the bottom up], it's still got to be a team effort to make it work.(CP)

Staff were also encouraged to engage in democratic, consultative decision making. Free communication was promoted and all the principals adopted an open door policy placing value on listening as a skill. A principal indicated:

... listen to them [staff] ... recognise their point of view as well. I am not always right.(CP)

- Leadership distribution

Acknowledging the enormity of the role and responsibilities expected of twenty first century school leaders, principals engaged in planned leadership distribution. A principal indicated:

You've got to rely on senior staff who have bought into my vision for the school. (AP)

It is evident that principals distribute leadership based on the knowledge that there is a common understanding of the organisational goals and values. Furthermore individuals to whom leadership is distributed must display the relevant competencies to successfully accomplish certain tasks. A principal hence retorted:

...we have talents in different fields. I don't only use their expertise, I acknowledge their expertise. I involve them in their capacities. I value their input. (CP)

Whilst leadership is distributed principals realise that ultimate accountability still lies with them and they therefore deem it essential monitor and assure quality of the implementation of distributed mandates. SMT and senior teachers at the sample schools were observed reporting back to the principal on allotted leadership tasks both verbally and in writing.

Fathoming how principals implement instructional leadership practices to optimise learner attainment unearthed the following themes:

- Planning and coordinating the curriculum

Principals conceptualise curriculum delivery as their core responsibility and mobilise their staff to cooperatively resort to devising strategic plans which inform programmes and actions to implement the curriculum effectively. Every educator is expected to have a detailed annual teaching plan and records of daily lesson planning and preparation. A principal vehemently indicated:

I still expect my teachers to draw up a 3-tiered system of planning ... there's got to be long term planning ... for the year ... Secondly short term planning ... specific for that particular term. And then their daily forecast. (CP)

School organograms and strategic plans are totally transparent and were on display on bulletin boards. SMT and phase and grade meetings were a regular feature in the functionality of these successful schools and curriculum coverage and contingency planning always featured on the agenda for these meetings.

Principals often challenged the orthodoxy and made context informed adaptations to the curriculum leading a principal to articulate:

... and I adapted that system to suite my school and my children and I'm still producing the top learners in the town. (AP)

Curriculum was strategically adapted in consultation with the staff and adopted for the express purpose of enhancing learner outputs.

- Monitoring and evaluation of teaching and learning

In order to ensure that teaching and learning expectations are not only satisfied but exceeded, principals continuously monitored and evaluated the teaching and learning programme. Apart from personally engaging in this practice via observation and the scrutiny of reports and records, principals once again entrusted and capacitated their SMT to manage this process from their prowess as subject specialists. A principal indicated that:

There are regular book inspections by the HODs who then bring through any problems to me. Er ... any academic problems, any childhood problems, any problems of children who have been dysfunctional are brought across to my table via the HODs and via the grade heads. (AP)

To further emphasise this role of SMT the principal elaborated:

They [HODs] would have a meeting every week and those minute books come through to me. All of their problems or their findings ... are read very thoroughly by me. And you can then go back to the teachers... (AP)

Principals were also observed examining teaching, learning and assessment records which served as valuable data in engaging with staff and decision making concerning the continuous improvement of instruction and learner attainment. In an attempt to move towards 360 degree feedback parents were also encouraged to monitor the quality of teaching and learning as indicated by the following principal:

We send books home to the parents together with a standard form in which the parents [are] asked to comment on the quality of work done... (CP)

- Enriching the curriculum

Principals continuously engaged staff on the provision of a rich curriculum to accommodate the diverse spectrum of learners at their schools. They placed much emphasis on corrective work, remedial work and re-teaching for low performing learners and insisted that enrichment programmes be crafted and implemented to extend high performing learners. A principal indicated that:

... but corrections as I call it is vitally important (CP)

and a teacher corroborated that:

... We looked at the poorest performing learners and a programme was designed for them in conjunction with the English and Maths educators. (BH1)

Principals also embraced the effective use of ICT to enhance the quality of teaching and learning. A principal articulated:

I think information is one of the most important things again ... every staff member has a laptop connected to the Internet in the class. We took all our chalkboards out and we put whiteboards in, and we bought projectors for every single classroom. (CP)

A move towards an investment of this nature places learners and their teachers at the frontier of twenty first teaching and learning opportunities.

5.9 SUMMARY

This chapter focused on the analysis and interpretation of the data collected during face-to-face interviews with successful principals, focus group interviews with the SMT, focus group interviews with Post Level 1 educators and participant observations that were made at the sample schools. Various themes and sub-themes were discussed to determine the practices of successful primary school principals. These themes were thoroughly analysed and interpreted. Where necessary, findings from the participant observation were integrated into the discussion. From these findings it was evident that to lead a primary school can be an intricate and challenging business. For these schools to attain and sustain success, a strategic mix of the identified practices was an absolute necessity.

CHAPTER 6: OVERVIEW, RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

6.1 INTRODUCTION AND PURPOSE

The recent report on the 2013 Annual National Assessment (DBE, 2013) indicates that a vast majority of South African primary schools are producing results that raise serious questions about the quality of learning and teaching in these schools. This is of grave concern, bearing in mind that basic skills in communication, problem solving and analytical thinking take root at the primary school level and an inadequate or haphazard foundation during these critical formative years in the academic life cycle of learners is bound to spell disaster in the later schooling phase. In the context of the South African Schools Act, Section 16A (RSA), the responsibility for school performance and its ally, learner attainment, falls squarely on the shoulders of the principal. There is a general perception that South African schools are plagued by ineffective and inefficient management and leadership practices (Spillane, 2009:70; CDE Round Table, 2011:2; Mathibe, 2007:523; Harris, 2004:11; SAIRR, 2008; Mestry & Grobler, 2007:127).

The purpose of this study was to investigate and unravel the leadership practices of principals of successful public primary schools as they lead in environments that are increasingly characterised by accountability and standards. In so doing, valuable insight was gained and a rich and robust understanding was generated of how successful primary school principals create, nurture and sustain the conditions and processes necessary for high levels of learner attainment and instructional improvement.

This final chapter presents an overview of the study, the findings, recommendations and conclusion regarding the effective leadership practices of principals in successful primary schools. The main research question for the study was formulated as follows:

How do principals of successful primary schools exercise leadership practices?

The secondary or sub-questions which guided the study were:

1. What practices do principals of successful schools engage in to set direction and continuously develop their professional staff?
2. How do principals of successful schools create and nurture a constructive working milieu?

3. How do principals of successful schools implement instructional leadership practices to create and sustain high levels of learner attainment and instructional excellence?

6.2 OVERVIEW

The Annual National Assessment (ANA) has given primary schools a rude wake-up call. The 2011, 2012 and 2013 results of these standardised assessments consistently indicate that the majority of primary schools are not performing according to expectations and this is causing immense distress in education circles. However, amidst a large array of poorly performing schools, there exists a small population of schools that thrive on high learner outputs, schools which this research refers to as successful schools. It is precisely in these schools that the study was placed with the express intention of discovering how these successful principals engaged in the day-to-day operations of their schools. An inductive exploratory study was implemented to investigate and analyse principal leadership practices that result in instructional improvement and its concomitant optimal learner attainment.

The main research question and sub-questions were structured from the perspective of an interpretive paradigm, and a descriptive case study research design was used within the parameters of qualitative research methods. The primary data collection method was the direct or face-to-face interviews with principals from three successful schools. Focus group interviews with school management teams, focus group interviews with Post Level 1 educators and participant observations (which entailed the researcher shadowing the principal) were employed as the means of triangulating the data that had been captured.

This thesis consists of six chapters that are briefly summarised below.

Chapter 1

Chapter 1 provides some background to the study and discusses the problem that initiated this study. It also argues why the study of leadership practices is a critical variable in determining the success of schools. The chapter clarifies the research topic and the initial research processes within relevant contextual frameworks. The working assumption and demarcation placed the study within a specific gap in the literature on the effective leadership practices of successful primary school principals.

Chapter 2

Chapter 2 reviews the literature on leadership and management and places the principals of schools as leaders who exhibit a strategic mix of practices that have their origins in theory of transformational leadership, instructional leadership, distributed leadership and situational leadership. The issues of accountability and principal standards are explored within the framework of leadership roles and responsibilities. The chapter also explores the literature on leading and managing teaching and learning in schools and concludes with a brief discussion on the embedding of ‘ideal’ cultures as an important leadership practice to ensure school improvement.

Chapter 3

Chapter 3 endeavours to diminish the chasm that exists between rhetoric and reality by articulating the literature on how successful leaders put into practice their leadership knowledge, skills and values. It argues the need to identify variables that have an impact on teacher performance and to hence adopt and implement leadership practices that optimise these variables.

A literature study was undertaken to elaborate on the conceptual framework comprising of the four core leadership practices namely setting direction, developing people, redesigning the organisation and managing the instructional programme. The literature identified the vital composition of the more specific categories of leadership practices and explored how these were executed at school level to gravitate towards high learner outputs.

The chapter concludes by indicating that principals cannot lead successful schools without sharing a compelling vision, developing people in alignment with that vision, redesigning the organisation to exude collaboration and collegiality, and diligently engaging in instructional leadership to ensure that there is high-quality curriculum implementation and delivery.

Chapter 4

This chapter discusses the research design and methodology that was implemented during the empirical study. Embracing an interpretive paradigm, a qualitative, naturalistic research approach was employed and obtained new insights about the effective leadership practices of successful school principals. A case study with multiple perspectives was utilised as the research design to facilitate the desired in-depth study that would unearth rich, robust data in

response to the research questions. In implementing the case study, a purposive sample was determined and individual interviews were used as the primary data collection method. The use of focus group interviews and participant observation served the critical function of triangulating the data captured, hence enhancing credibility and trustworthiness (validity and reliability) of the findings. The data analysis strategy and the ethical guidelines adhered to are also discussed in Chapter 4.

Chapter 5

Chapter 5 outlines the process of analysing and interpreting the data collected on the effective leadership practices of successful primary school principals. The data collected by means of the various data collection strategies was presented simultaneously to address the various themes of leadership practice of successful primary school principals and to corroborate the findings. The chapter also presents an interpretation of the data for the research sub-questions, which assisted with formulating a response to the main research question.

Chapter 6

This chapter contains conclusions and the final recommendations for further research, but also reflects on the purpose of the research and states how the research questions have been addressed. Conclusions are drawn and findings reached in respect of the innovative leadership practices of successful primary school principals.

6.3 RESPONDING TO THE RESEARCH QUESTIONS

In uncovering the leadership practices of successful primary school leaders, I align my responses with the research questions in accordance with the following categories of leadership practice that framed this study and facilitated a clear focus for analysing the findings:

- Setting direction
- Developing people
- Aligning the organisation for success
- Leading and managing the instructional programme

The findings of the study affirm that all three leaders of successful primary schools used the above repertoire of core leadership practices – albeit to varying extents – as a point of departure to engineer more specific leadership practices that create and sustain instructional excellence and high learner attainment. This correlates with the claim made by Leithwood, Harris and Hopkins (2008:27) that “almost all successful leaders draw on the same repertoire of basic leadership practices”. The discussion below clarifies how each of these practices is executed by the principals of three successful primary schools in the Uthukela district of KwaZulu-Natal.

6.3.1 Setting direction

Principals of successful schools pay careful attention to providing a clear vision and purpose of their schools and ensure that these are widely communicated. The holistic well-being of the learner is the stimulus or cardinal variable that focuses the school leader’s vision and its crafting is a largely integrated process that accommodates all stakeholders. In keeping with the sentiments of Harris (2002:18) that “heads walk-the-talk through the consistency and integrity of their actions”, the three principals all modelled the aspirations enshrined in the vision. They also encouraged the various stakeholders to periodically revisit and adapt the vision in accordance with changing circumstances and needs.

Principals of successful schools endeavour to know their staff and align individual ambitions, beliefs and understanding with the school vision, which is an extension of their personal vision. They acknowledge the diversity in their staff and value their people for who they are and what they have to offer to the school. This serves as a source of motivation to staff and inspires them to move towards common organisational goals.

Principals embrace change and engage staff vigorously by means of collaboration and open communication when debating the validity and credibility of change initiatives. This enhances transparency and promotes trust. High expectations of both staff and learners are created by principals who engage in regular dialogue with the various stakeholders at meetings and assemblies where successes are shared and benchmarked.

6.3.2 Developing people

Principals realise the importance of professional development and expose staff to three types of training and development, namely internal staff development, external staff development and self-development. The SMT is strategically deployed by principals to oversee this

process and its members are tasked to identify developmental needs with the aid of the IQMS process. Principals recognise the value of school-based professional development and the SMT is deployed to coordinate this process. The principals therefore encourage the SMT to access external developmental workshops before their Post Level 1 educators so that they can disseminate new knowledge and skills to their subordinates and support them in its implementation.

Principals encourage staff to be responsible for their own professional development and keep them informed of the variety of credible development and training programmes that they could access. The notional time for teaching and learning is protected by allowing attendance of workshops outside the academic school day. Professional development on a daily basis is facilitated by the principals creating the conditions for collaborative working relationships and peer observation. Teachers are also persuaded to enrol at institutes of higher education to further their qualifications – principals place a high value on teacher qualifications.

The principals find it necessary to create networks with other high-performing schools and learn from their best practices. The inter-visitation of educators from different schools is supported. Due to the discontinuation of colleges of education, which dealt specifically with the training of teachers, some of the principals have instituted their own training academies on site, where student teachers receive mentorship and coaching from experienced educators while they learn.

6.3.3 Aligning the organisation for success

All of the principals establish, nurture and sustain healthy relationships within their school as well as in the external environment. In establishing relationships with staff, principals give attention to the following elements: creating a sense of belonging and identity; instilling a strong sense of loyalty and commitment among staff; engaging staff and learners with care, respect and support; resolving conflict; creating safe environments where staff are encouraged to take calculated risks; recognising the human element and engaging with staff on an inter-personal level. Trust and transparency serve to cement these relationships.

The primary external relationship is conceived with parents who are part of a 360-degree feedback programme. Apart from networking with other successful primary schools, principals also create links with the secondary schools that receive their learners for the later phases of schooling. They make a deliberate effort to align their learners with the

expectations of secondary schools, thus improving learner attainment prognosis at secondary school.

Principals focus attention on collaboration and decision making by ensuring that staff meet frequently as strategic groups to plan and reflect openly on learning and teaching conditions and processes. They reject teacher isolation and encourage cohesive team work where transparent interactions and a sense of community are promoted. Principals engage staff in democratic, consultative decision making where a spirit of selfless sharing is advanced.

Principals also engage in planned leadership distribution that takes into consideration the capacities of individuals. Very often the principals prepare, guide and mentor individuals for leadership roles that are continually monitored and evaluated.

Communication and rapport are also important features of the principals' leadership profiles. They engage in interpersonal communication on a professional and personal level. The principals in all three schools were able to break down the hierarchical structures and have an open-door policy with their teachers. This open and casual relationship ensures trust between the management and staff and hence keeps problems from festering. Principals also exploit the increased introduction of ICT and listen carefully to inputs that staff members are encouraged to make.

6.3.4 Leading and managing the instructional programme

Principals recognise that leading and managing the instructional programme constitutes the core of their leadership functions and hence they place great emphasis on the effective implementation and delivery of the curriculum. In dealing with issues related to curriculum planning and coordination, principals ensure that programmes or actions are meaningfully and strategically designed in a collaborative and cooperative manner and then implemented. All educators are required to have a detailed action plan, which the SMT as curriculum specialists are tasked to oversee. Principals often challenge the status quo and make context-informed adaptations to the curriculum.

Principals engage rigorously in monitoring and evaluating both instruction and learner attainment. Though office-based, none of the principals is office-bound and they are a constant presence throughout the entire school where they engage in observation, and immediately discuss this with the staff concerned. They rely heavily on their SMT, as subject specialists, to perform the basic monitoring and evaluation of teacher performance. They do,

however, interrogate SMT reports, which they frequently seek, and engage staff on the findings. Principals also directly examine teaching, learning and assessment records.

Principals ensure that the curriculum is enriched by mobilising staff to give attention to corrective or remedial work and engage in re-teaching where the need arises. At the other end of the continuum, they engage teachers to introduce programmes into the curriculum so as to extend high-performing learners. These principals also make effective use of ICT to enhance the quality of teaching and learning.

Principals continuously engage in human resource planning, contemplating on staff dynamics and the possible recruitment and selection of staff who could add value to their operations. They are particular about who they employ, and ensure that new staff members are aligned with the culture and vision of the school. They also seek staff who are catalysts for change.

The physical didactic environment is furthermore of concern to these principals. They endeavour to minimise learner-teacher ratios and ensure that the learning environment is neat and tidy at all times. Great emphasis is also placed on issues relating to school safety and security.

6.4 RECOMMENDATIONS

Having responded to the research question and sub-questions, pertinent recommendations regarding the leadership practices will be offered.

6.4.1 Setting direction

My observations as well as the interviews revealed that the principal participants had interlinking personal and professional visions. Their camaraderie, motivation and passion for excellence assisted in aligning all staff members towards a common vision and purpose. It is recommended that leaders at the district office level use this key leadership trait to benchmark leadership practices among their school principals. The leaders at the district, in collaboration with the circuit managers, could promote the strategies involved in cementing a common vision by not only affording successful principals a platform to share their knowledge, but also by utilising these principals as mentors. This necessitates the formation of communities of practice between school leaders.

Whilst principals allude to the importance of a vision, they fail to clarify other significant factors that synergistically define the school and mobilise it in a particular direction. It is

recommended that principals take heed of and clearly delineate the following to all stakeholders: critical success factors; core values; school objectives; school performance measures; school targets; and school improvement actions (Rampersad, 2003:26-27). This knowledge could be internalised via the establishment of communities of practice among all school principals in the district or by exposing principals to planned leadership training, coordinated by circuit management.

6.4.2 Developing people

Whilst principals promote continuing professional development as mandated by the SA Council for Educators Act, Act 31 of 2000 (RSA, 2000) and Section 53 of the National Policy Framework on Teacher Education and Development (NPFTED) (DoE, 2007), they do not present adequately as leading learners. It is recommended that principals take the lead role in learning at schools and vigorously pursue new knowledge and skills in leadership practices. Principals are encouraged to learn together with the rest of their staff and professional development must become a deeply embedded school culture. A leader's attempts to promote a learning culture among the teachers greatly improve learner achievement, more especially when leaders themselves participate in that learning with their staff (Robinson et al., 2009).

Principals are advised to be familiar with adult learning theories and, as argued by Glickman et al. (2007) in Crum et al. (2008:568), principals should engage in authentic developmental practices that realise the full potential of teachers and prevent them from being wasted as "valuable 'in-house' resources". It is recommended that principals restructure the academic schedule and strategise to accommodate professional development in the daily operations of their schools, however, never at the expense of compromising the notional time allocated for teaching and learning.

The findings reveal that principals and their SMTs should have a thorough knowledge of human resource management as it is a function of line management. It is recommended that human resource management courses be taught to the entire line management staff. In this way the new knowledge and skills acquired by principals and SMTs would result in schools where cordial, collaborative relationships prevail and where people are employed because of their passion and commitment to teaching as well as the notion that they share the same values as the principal and management staff. It is only when the right people are chosen for the job is there ease in the setting of direction and the attainment of school goals.

6.4.3 Aligning the organisation for success

Successful school leaders should diligently engage in building relationships that are based on trust, collaboration, democratic decision making and open communication. Cohesive team work must be advocated and leadership be progressively distributed. This will augur well for the effective transmission of knowledge and skills. However, the impact of these practices can be reinforced if principals contemplate to enhance teacher leadership and to structure and support autonomous professional learning communities that set their own goals and thrive on high expectations. It is recommended that principals familiarise themselves with the precepts of teacher leadership and professional learning communities (PLCs), create the necessary structures and processes, and capacitate their people to meaningfully engage as a school community in the interest of optimising quality instruction and learner attainment.

6.4.4 Leading and managing the instructional programme

Principals of successful schools prioritise the effective and efficient delivery of the curriculum by investing much of their energy and time in matters related to staffing, monitoring and evaluation, curriculum planning and coordination, and transforming the physical didactic milieu. There is however inadequate dialogue about the strategic targeting of resources as a strategy that has the potential to enhance learner outputs.

It is therefore recommended that principals consciously determine what success means to them and the school, and that they should then contemplate how to strategically use the resources they have at their disposal to enhance success. This implies principals being totally cognisant of the contextual factors of their school. By carefully analysing and interpreting data – not just learner attainment data, but also what is seen and heard through interaction with other stakeholders – principals need to communicate strategies that focus on the targeting of resources where they will have the greatest positive impact on learner outputs (Wilcox et al., 2011:88).

The characteristics of the successful schools in this study show that these schools are child centred and that they thrive on high-quality teaching and learning that is sustained by good leadership practices. It is recommended that all principals and SMTs be sensitised to and trained in the practices of sound leadership, the management of mainstream instructional programmes, and the implementation and management of remedial programmes for learners encountering barriers to mainstream learning.

6.5 SIGNIFICANCE AND CONTRIBUTION OF STUDY

This research proves that principals of successful primary schools are bona fide leaders of learning and teaching despite the criticism that “in practice school principals are expected to perform within a framework of control systems, performativity, and assessment which are the core functions of managerialism” (Heystek, 2007:491). Principals of successful schools are not moulded leaders who design their practices based on ‘check-lists’. Instead, they exude passion and inspire their people to move their schools across dynamic new frontiers that enhance quality instruction and holistic learner growth and development. Whilst adhering to a government mandate, successful primary school principals are most certainly not mere obedient functionaries of the state.

This study clearly shows that principals of successful schools are visionary leaders who collaborate with their staff, challenge the status quo and have personal visions aligned with their professional visions. They understand their roles and responsibilities and consider themselves accountable for the performance of learners in their schools. They motivate their staff by giving them the opportunities and resources for development. They are experienced and aware of all the necessary policies that ensure success and school improvement. They have the knowledge, shared values and emotional and moral intelligence that enhance their task of principalship. They set high expectations and continually empower staff and learners.

Figure 6.1 shows the four newer core leadership practices that this study adds to Leithwood’s framework for successful schools. The added practices are also discussed below.

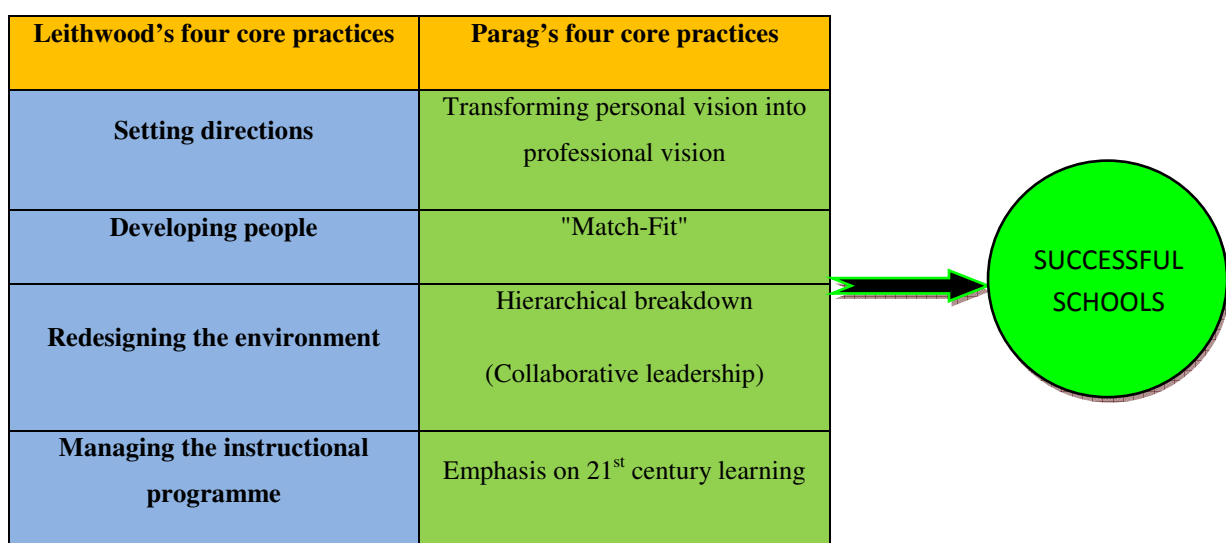


Figure 6.1: From Leithwood to Parag – a model for successful school leadership practices

Of particular significance and the unique contribution of this study is the inside-out approach on which all three successful school principals thrived. It is premised on personal identity being the point of departure for leadership practices and translates to personal vision being transformed into organisational vision. The organisational vision is actually an extension of these leaders personal vision. This is when individual aspirations become organisational aspirations and the school functions as an instrument of self-realisation. When this happens, the passion erupts and principalship ceases to be a vocation. Principals focus like a laser on leading learning and teaching. They are not distracted by the noise in the system, nor are they fascinated by external material seductions. They live to lead! As individuals who navigate successful schools, these leaders continuously model behaviour that define critical success factors; core values; school objectives; school performance measures; school targets; and school improvement actions that are collaboratively crafted and clearly understood by all stakeholders.

Once the vision is framed, successful leaders pursue ‘match-fit’ as an appointment and leadership strategy and in doing so, align their SMT with the school’s needs and vision. This results in the team effectively and efficiently fulfilling their management responsibilities. Match-fit also entails principals appointing competent Post Level 1 educators who match the needs of the school and fit the vision, goals and culture of the school. Knowing their people and understanding their capabilities is of primary importance in creating and sustaining successful schools. Personnel are often hired for their attitudes and subsequently trained for the sought-after skills and knowledge if they are discovered to be lacking. Principals strategically train and develop their people to perpetuate a strategy of match-fit and in this way ensure success. Principals of successful schools are lead learners, continuously learning and improving and this inspires other staff to follow suite with the net impact being improved instruction and learner outputs.

Successful school leaders break down the hierarchy and engender harmonious working conditions that are characterised by open communication, intense collaboration and cooperation, and where everyone is encouraged to be a decision maker. This approach may be termed collaborative leadership. Every staff member is valued by the principal who encourages reflective professional dialogue and acts immediately upon challenges that educators may experience providing the necessary support. Trust and transparency characterises the relationship between principal and staff. Principals unleash the potential that lies dormant in staff members by engaging in planned and informed leadership distribution.

Principals of successful schools create and nurture the conditions, structures and processes for quality teacher leadership and professional learning communities.

The model proposed in Figure 6.1 also indicates that principals of successful schools embrace 21st century learning and teaching strategies that do not only provide unconventional stimulation for teachers and learners alike, but also result in school success. This entails principals promoting the following learning and innovation skills amongst teachers and learners namely, creativity and innovation, critical thinking and problem solving, communication and collaboration. Assessment for Learning (AFL) processes, where the first priority is to promote learning, are incorporated into classroom practice and data is intelligently used by the principal and staff to set realistic targets. The strategic targeting of available resources where they will have the optimal impact on learner attainment is also implemented. Principals also embrace the tools of the digital era in the guise of ICT, provide access to these and empower educators and learners to use them proficiently.

6.6 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE STUDIES

This study prompts further research in areas of principal leadership to mitigate the poor learner attainment in public primary schools. Some pertinent domains for further research that hones in on leadership practices include the following:

Topic 1: How do successful school leaders sustain effective schools?

(Sample schools to be revisited after three to five years)

- Perceptions of the various stakeholders as to what variables ensure sustained success in instruction and learner attainment.
- Revisiting what constitutes effective leadership practices.
- The patterns and impact of leadership distribution on the quality of learning and teaching.
- Strategising for the enhancement of learning and teaching in 21st century schools.

Topic 2: How do principals draw up a personal vision that progresses to a professional vision?

- What are the essential elements of a personal vision?
- How do principals convert a personal vision into a professional vision?
- Building capacity for professionalism in principals
- Ensuring teamwork and collaboration in achieving the vision of the school

Topic 3: How can the South African education crisis be mitigated via leadership?

- Identification and management of risk factors associated with quality learning and teaching.
- Establishing environments that support innovation in leading teaching and learning.
- Leading and managing curriculum delivery to ensure learner and school success.
- The value of professional learning communities in enhancing learning and teaching.

Topic 4: How can leadership development programmes lead to school improvement?

- What is the link between leadership development and learner attainment?
- What are the perceptions of principals and SMT on the value of leadership development programmes?
- The choice and design of modules to be included in the programme
- How can leadership development programmes be strategically delivered?
- What are the challenges encountered during the modes of delivery?

6.7 CONCLUSION

Considering the conundrum of poor performing schools, one detects sporadic bright rays of hope permeating and illuminating the seemingly bleak educational landscape in South Africa.

This research proves that these beams of hope are principals who resort to exercising innovative leadership practices that result in their schools acquiring and sustaining success. Successful school principals are individuals who are passionate about what they do and they orchestrate the minds and hearts of teachers and learners, resulting in the school functioning as a harmonious unit. One can almost feel the synergy that resonates throughout these successful schools.

The aim of this study was to investigate and reveal the leadership practices of principals of successful public primary schools in the Uthukela district of KwaZulu-Natal, as they lead in environments that are increasingly characterised by accountability and standards. The findings emphasise that successful primary school leaders exercise an array of innovative leadership practices that drive the school towards excellence in instruction and learner attainment.

The current investigation has led to the unique finding that principals of successful schools adopt an inside-out approach in respect of their leadership practices. This implies principals synchronising their personal vision and the school's vision, resulting in these individuals thinking and acting with sheer passion. The principals also placed great value on a match-fit strategy and effectively aligned the SMT and teachers with the school's vision and goals. Principals also resorted to a hierarchical breakdown, which promoted a collaborative and cooperative work environment where everyone was free to make inputs.

In the final analysis, successful schools are a hard-earned product of the innovative leadership practices of principals. This research highlights the importance of getting a person who is competent at the leadership practices required to lead the school. A good teacher is not necessarily a good leader. The recommendations confirm the need for intervention by the Department of Basic Education to proactively train existing and prospective principals in the basic leadership practices and to perhaps have a pool of prospective principals who have the competence and will to execute the leadership practices identified in this study. A necessary pre-requisite for principalship should be implemented in the form of a minimum qualification that capacitates prospective principals in the leadership practices unearthed in this research and reduces the high volumes of schools that underperform. It is anticipated that this study will draw wide interest and raise awareness among practitioners and policy makers regarding the importance of leadership practices in successful primary schools.

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APPENDIX A

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

PRINCIPALS

- (1) Explain how you establish and sustain a shared understanding of your organisation?
- (2) How do you motivate and inspire your staff to continuously produce excellent learner outputs?
- (3) Explain how you build capacity within your organisation in order to create and sustain a high quality learning and teaching environment.
- (4) Explain how you structure your organisation to support and sustain the optimal performance of:
 - Senior Management Team
 - teachers
 - learners
- (5) Twenty first century schooling demands new and novel pedagogic initiatives.

CHANGE is an innate component of education. How do you influence your staff to understand and implement change?
- (6) How do you engage with your staff to ensure that they understand the implications of legislation and policies that guide the operations at your school?
- (7) What do you do to ensure that your school has a sustainable competitive advantage?
- (8) Do you engage in any form of leadership distribution? Explain.
- (9) How is the process of decision making implemented at you school?
- (10) How do you lead and manage teaching and learning within your organisation in your quest for academic excellence? (aspects not alluded to in prior questions).

APPENDIX B

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

SCHOOL MANAGEMENT TEAM

- (1) Do you believe that you have a common understanding of your organizations Vision, Mission and Values? Kindly explain.
- (2) How do you feel about being a member of the school's management team and indicate what spurs you into action? What keeps you motivated and inspired?
- (3) How is the quality of your teaching and management practices measured and continuously improved? Think of the various Professional Development initiatives that you may have engaged in.
- (4) Is your school appropriately structured to support and sustain your optimal performance in your core function? If so, explain how this is achieved.
- (5) Twenty first century schooling demands new pedagogic initiatives. Education is dynamic. How are you influenced to embrace and implement change?
- (6) Legislation and policy guides the operation of your school. Kindly describe any initiative that exist to ensure that you understand the implications and the implementation of these.
- (7) Do you believe that your school has a sustainable competitive advantage? Explain.
- (8) To what extent is leadership distributed in your school. Explain.
- (9) How are you empowered to make decisions?
- (10) How does your principal manage and lead the teaching and learning programme at your school? Explain fully.
- (11) Please elaborate on any other initiatives that you and/or others engage in to enhance learner attainment and the quality of instruction.

APPENDIX C

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

POST LEVEL 1 EDUCATORS

- (1) Do you believe that you have a common understanding of your organizations Vision, Mission and Values? Kindly explain.
- (2) How do you feel about being a member of staff at this school and indicate what spurs you into action? What keeps you motivated and inspired?
- (3) How is the quality of your teaching practice measured and continuously improved? Think of the various Professional Development initiatives that you may have engaged in.
- (4) Is your school appropriately structured to support and sustain your optimal performance in your core function? If so, explain how this is achieved.
- (5) Twenty first century schooling demands new pedagogic initiatives. Education is dynamic. How are you influenced to embrace and implement change?
- (6) Legislation and policy guides the operation of your school. Kindly describe any initiative that exist to ensure that you understand the implications and the implementation of these.
- (7) Do you believe that your school has a sustainable competitive advantage? Explain.
- (8) Are you given any leadership responsibility or do you believe that leadership is distributed in your school. Explain.
- (9) How are you empowered to make decisions?
- (10) How does your principal manage and lead the teaching and learning programme at your school? Explain fully.
- (11) Please elaborate on any other initiatives that you and/or others engage in to enhance learner attainment and the quality of instruction.

APPENDIX D

OBSERVATION GUIDE

QUESTION	OBSERVATION/EVIDENCE	THEME:LEADERSHIP PRACTICE
<p>1. How does the principal lead and manage the teaching and learning programme? Comment on the ffg.:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Planning, co-ordination and the delivery of the curriculum -Organisational structure -Expectations of HOD's and educators -Distribution of leadership -Collaboration -Decision making -Monitoring and evaluation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Lesson planning/preparation -Written Work -Assessment -learner attendance -teacher attendance -Remediation -Visibility 		
<p>2. How does the principal Conduct formal interactions/meetings/briefings with:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -SMT 		

-Staff -Learners -Parents/SGB/Community		
3. How does the principal inspire and motivate staff and learners?		
4. How does the principal engage in staff development initiatives?		
5. How does the principal encourage and manage extra- and co-curricular activities?		
6. How does the principal manage LTSM's, ICT and other resources?		

APPENDIX E

APPLICATION FOR PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH IN KWAZULU-NATAL



Application_for_Permission_to_Conduct

APPENDIX F

PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH IN KWAZULU-NATAL

25. Feb. 2013 17:03

No. 1974 P. 1



kzn education

Department:
Education
KWAZULU-NATAL

Enquiries: Sibusiso Alwar

Tel: 033 341 8610

Ref.:214/8/363

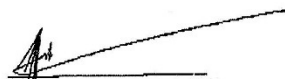
Bishum Dasarathlal Parag
17 Platrand Avenue
LADYSMITH
3370

Dear Bishum

PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH IN THE KZN DoE INSTITUTIONS

Your application to conduct research entitled: **Unraveling Innovative Leadership of Successful Primary School Principals, in the KwaZulu-Natal Department of Education Institutions** has been approved. The conditions of the approval are as follows:

1. The researcher will make all the arrangements concerning the research and interviews.
2. The researcher must ensure that Educator and learning programmes are not interrupted.
3. Interviews are not conducted during the time of writing examinations in schools.
4. Learners, Educators, Schools and Institutions are not identifiable in any way from the results of the research.
5. A copy of this letter is submitted to District Managers, Principals and Heads of Institutions where the intended research and interviews are to be conducted.
6. The period of investigation is limited to the period from 01 February 2013 to 31 January 2015.
7. Your research and interviews will be limited to the schools you have proposed and approved by the Head of Department. Please note that Principals, Educators, Departmental Officials and Learners are under no obligation to participate or assist you in your investigation.
8. Should you wish to extend the period of your survey at the school(s), please contact Mr. Alwar at the contact numbers below.
9. Upon completion of the research, a brief summary of the findings, recommendations or a full report / dissertation / thesis must be submitted to the research office of the Department. Please address it to The Director-Resources Planning, Private Bag X9137, Pietermaritzburg, 3200. Please note that your research and interviews will be limited to the Schools and Institutions in the Othukela District.
- 10.


Nkosinathi S.P. Sishi, PhD
Head of Department: Education

20-02-2013
Date

...dedicated to service and performance
beyond the call of duty.

KWAZULU-NATAL DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
POSTAL: Private Bag X9137, Pietermaritzburg, 3200, KwaZulu-Natal, Republic of South Africa
PHYSICAL: Office G 25, 188 Pietermaritz Street, Metropolitan Building, Pietermaritzburg 3201
TEL: Tel: +27 33 341 8610 | Fax: +27 33 341 8612 | E-mail: sibusiso.alwar@kzndoe.gov.za | Web: www.kzndoe.gov.za

APPENDIX G

APPLICATION FOR PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH IN SCHOOLS:

PRINCIPALS



UNIVERSITEIT VAN PRETORIA
UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA
YUNIBESITHI YA PRETORIA

Principal

Uthukela District

P O Box 446

Ladysmith

3370

Sir

RE. REQUEST FOR INFORMED CONSENT TO CONDUCT RESEARCH IN EDUCATION LEADERSHIP AT YOUR SCHOOL

I am currently engaged in a PhD study at the University of Pretoria and I envisage conducting research at your school. My study title is: Unravelling Leadership Practices of Successful Primary School Principals. It is hoped that the study unearths leadership best practices that foster and sustain high levels of learner attainment and instructional excellence in an accountability and standards driven educational environment. The findings of this study should generate a framework on which current and aspiring principals could model leadership practice to ensure high levels of learner attainment and instructional improvement.

The research method entails interviews with the principal, members of the School Management Teams and Level one educators. Unobtrusive observation will be conducted and vital documents that allude to leadership practices will also be analysed. For the interviews with level one educators, one educator from each phase/learning area/subject will be engaged. You are kindly requested to allow the researcher to audio-tape all interviews. All of these data gathering initiatives will be operationalised at suitable times so as not to compromise curriculum delivery at any stage. A convenient schedule will be negotiated with you.

The information gathered will be strictly private and confidential, and under no circumstances will the participants wilfully be placed at risk. The findings from this study may be presented at meetings or published in papers, but names and other identifying characteristics will never be used. Furthermore, only summary results of the study will be reported.

Participation in this study is purely voluntary. Should the school wish to withdraw at any time, it may do so without any fear of penalty.

For any further information regarding this research or issues that you may wish to clarify, please contact:

Supervisor: Professor Rika Joubert (PhD)
Department of Education Management and Policy Studies
University of Pretoria.
Director: Interuniversity Centre for Education Law and Policy (CELP)

Researcher: B D Parag
17 Platrand Avenue
Ladysmith
3370
Mobile: 082 857 5484

Attached please find a consent form which you are kindly requested to complete and return to me.

Thank you for your kind cooperation.

Yours faithfully

B D Parag

Prof Rika Joubert

CONSENT

I have read this consent form and I fully understand the information about this study. I am willing to participate in this study.

PARTICIPANT NAME (print) _____

PARTICIPANT SIGNATURE _____

DATE _____

NAME OF PERSON CONDUCTING CONSENT (print) _____

SIGNATURE OF PERSON CONDUCTING CONSENT _____

DATE _____

NAME OF SUPERVISOR (print) _____

SIGNATURE OF SUPERVISOR _____

DATE _____

APPENDIX H

APPLICATION FOR PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH IN SCHOOLS:

SCHOOL MANAGEMENT TEAM/ POST LEVEL ONE EDUCATORS



UNIVERSITEIT VAN PRETORIA
UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA
YUNIBESITHI YA PRETORIA

School Management Team member/ Post Level One educator

Uthukela District

P O Box 446

Ladysmith

3370

Madam

RE. REQUEST FOR INFORMED CONSENT TO CONDUCT RESEARCH IN EDUCATION LEADERSHIP AT YOUR SCHOOL

I am currently a PhD student with the University of Pretoria and I envisage conducting research at your school. My study title is: Unravelling Leadership Practices of Successful Primary School Principals. It is hoped that the study unearths leadership best practices that foster and sustain high levels of learner attainment and instructional excellence in an accountability and standards driven educational environment. The findings of this study should generate a framework on which current and aspiring principals could model leadership practice to ensure high levels of learner attainment and instructional improvement.

The research method entails interviews with the principal, members of the School Management Teams and Level one educators. You are kindly requested to allow the researcher to audio-tape all interviews. Unobtrusive observation will be conducted and vital documents that allude to leadership practices will also be analysed. All of these will be operationalised at suitable times so as not to compromise curriculum delivery at any stage. You will be involved in focus group interviews and your honest responses will be grossly appreciated. A convenient schedule will be negotiated with you.

The information gathered will be strictly private and confidential, and under no circumstances will the participants wilfully be placed at risk. The findings from this study may be presented at meetings or published in papers, but names and other identifying characteristics will never be used. Furthermore, only summary results of the study will be reported.

Participation in this study is purely voluntary. Should you wish to withdraw at any time, you may do so without any fear of penalty.

For any further information regarding this research or issues that you may wish to clarify, please contact:

Supervisor: Professor Rika Joubert (PhD)

Department of Education Management and Policy Studies
University of Pretoria.

Director: Interuniversity Centre for Education Law and Policy (CELP)

Researcher: B D Parag

17 Platrand Avenue

Ladysmith

3370

Mobile: 082 857 5484

Attached please find a consent form which you are kindly requested to complete and return to me.

Thank you for your kind cooperation.

Yours faithfully

B D Parag

Prof Rika Joubert

CONSENT

I have read this consent form and I fully understand the information about this study. I am willing to participate in this study.

PARTICIPANT NAME (print) _____

PARTICIPANT SIGNATURE _____

DATE _____

NAME OF PERSON CONDUCTING CONSENT (print) _____

SIGNATURE OF PERSON CONDUCTING CONSENT _____

DATE _____

NAME OF SUPERVISOR (print) _____

SIGNATURE OF SUPERVISOR _____

DATE _____

APPENDIX I



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