

The role of deputy principals: Perspectives of South African primary school principals and their deputies

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Abstract

Education leadership literature indicates that relatively little attention has been given to the specific duties and responsibilities of South African deputy principals in comparison with other leadership and management positions in schools. As a result, their roles and responsibilities remain vague. The purpose of this study was, therefore, to explore the roles of deputy principals in selected well-resourced fee-paying primary schools. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with the principal and two deputy principals of each of the five participating schools. The participating schools were selected for having a reputation of being high-performing schools and being most likely to provide rich data. The findings suggest that the sub-context of a school is an important factor influencing the role of a deputy principal. In addition, principals play a key role in determining the job description of individual deputy principals. This is often accompanied by purposeful leadership distribution and a reconfiguration of conventional management structures. In addition, deputy principals were generally viewed as ‘principals-in-training’ and their relationship with their principals characterised by shared leadership practices.

Keywords

Deputy principals, deputy principalship, duties of deputy principals, distributed leadership, school leadership, school management

Introduction

Literature specifically aimed at primary school deputy principals is limited and many aspects related to deputy principalship are still unexplored by academics and policymakers (Khumalo et al., 2018: 190; Khumalo et al., 2018: 193; Marshall and Hooley, 2006: 3). The few studies that have been conducted on the topic reveal little difference between high school and primary school deputies or urban, sub-urban and rural schools (Khumalo et al., 2018: 196–198; Khumalo et al.,

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2018: 200–207; Mafora, 2013: 690–693). However, the size of a school matters. In this regard Jones (2015: 47) argues that ‘the dynamics of the job’ change ‘dramatically’ when the workload of the deputy principal can be divided.

The traditional hierarchical arrangement in a South African public primary school consists of the principal, deputy principal, departmental head (HOD) and teacher (RSA, 2016a: B93). Despite many educational reforms in South Africa since 1994, no substantive policy amendments have been made with regard to the job description of the deputy principal, as evident in both the 1996 and 2016 versions of the Personnel Administrative Measures (PAM) (RSA, 1999: C64–C65; RSA, 2016a: A30–A31) which was published in terms of the Employment of Educators Act, 76, of 1998. PAM describes the duties and responsibilities of a deputy principal’s job as being ‘individual and varied, depending on the approaches and needs of the particular school’ which include, but are not limited to, the following: ‘general/administrative tasks, teaching, extra and co-curricular activities, personnel-related issues, interaction with stake-holders and communication’ (RSA, 2016a: A30–A31). As second-in-command of public schools, it would be justified to assume that deputy principals would have received more prominence in the education literature. A 69-page report on a study for the Mathew Goniwe School of Leadership and Governance conducted by Pat Sullivan and Associates entitled *School Leadership Development Framework for the Gauteng Department of Education* had only one page dedicated to the role of deputy principals (Sullivan and Associates, 2013: 41–42). In another 103-page report to the Minister of Education, *Schools that Work* (Christie et al., 2007 :54), specific reference to the deputy principal occurred only once. Significantly, both these documents make more reference to the HOD than to the deputy principal, despite the fact that the deputy principal holds a more senior position than the HOD.

Resulting from his extensive study on deputy principalship, Kerry (2000: 40) raises concern regarding the vague job description of the primary school deputy principal. He revealed that many primary school deputy principals experience their job descriptions as less than adequate. Similarly, Jubilee (2013: 8) describes the role of the deputy principal as being a ‘nebulous position’ and Weller and Weller (2002: 13) and Nieuwenhuizen (2011: 10) regard the deputy principal as a ‘jack of all trades’.

Deputy principals are described as disciplinarian, controller of learner attendance (Gregg, 2007: 3, 5), ‘timetabler’ (Kerry, 2000: 33) and ‘administrative assistant of the principal’ (Beycioglu et al., 2012: 637). According to Johnson (2015: 29) the core duties of deputy principals relate to learner discipline, learner attendance and school safety. Kerry (2000: 40) highlights the concern of deputy principals who label their job descriptions as vague, containing phrases like ‘supporting the principal or overseeing non-teaching staff’ and it seems as if there is a lack of understanding regarding the complexities and difficulties within the role of the deputy principal (Marshall and Hooley, 2006: 3).

The role of the deputy principal has also changed over time. Nieuwenhuizen (2011: 13–14) states that deputy principals were mostly engaged with clerical duties rather than performing duties associated with a well-functioning school management team. This implies that deputy principalship should be recognised as a leadership role ‘in its own right’ and be defined clearly (Cooke, 2015: 37). In her study on deputy principalship, Kwan (2009: 193) found that principals often follow their own discretion to determine the role of their deputy principals. She reports that principals often allocate duties to deputy principals they themselves are not keen to do. This view is supported by Sharp and Walter (2012: 153).

Deputy principals thus perform a large variety of tasks within a school and their role is universally perceived as very important (Johnson, 2015: 30; Sharp and Walter, 2012: 153), yet complex

(Marshall and Hooley, 2006: 3), and there has been little understanding on deputy principals' contribution toward school effectiveness (Harvey and Sheridan, 1995: 82). However, Johnson (2015: 31) suggests that the deputy principal, depending on their role, can play a significant role in school improvement and development. Consequently, there should be a deliberate, conscious move toward using the knowledge and skills of the deputy principal to the benefit of the school (Hilliard and Newsome, 2013: 153). This view is supported by Sharp and Walter (2012: 153) who consider the role of the deputy principal as exceptionally important, although often overlooked by educationalists and academics. Beycioglu, et al. (2012: 637) describe the deputy principal's role as 'vital to a successful school' but conclude that it remains unclear what roles and responsibilities deputies have.

Problem statement

According to the job description of South African deputy principals as contained in PAM (RSA, 2016a: A30–A31), the core duties and responsibilities of deputy principals are varied and in accordance to the needs of the specific school. A more specific indication of what is expected of South African public school deputy principals is, however, found in the evaluation instrument of the Integrated Quality Management System (IQMS) (ELRC, 2003). In this evaluation, instrument deputy principals are evaluated in terms of the same performance standards applicable to principals. Particularly noteworthy are Performance Standards 9 to 12 pertaining to the management and development of personnel, the establishment of procedures that enable democratic decision-making and accountability, the development and demonstration of leadership qualities, and competence in strategic planning and management development, respectively. The criteria for Performance Standard 9 include pastoral care, staff development, the provision of leadership, and building commitment and confidence (ELRC, 2003: 27). Performance Standard 10 includes criteria related to stakeholder involvement, decision-making, accountability and responsibility, and motivation and fairness. (ELRC, 2003: 29). Performance Standard 11 contains criteria applicable to the demonstration of leadership, initiative and support to staff (ELRC, 2003: 32). Specific criteria applicable to Performance Standard 12 include strategic planning, financial planning, project management and communication (ELRC, 2003: 35).

Notwithstanding the above, in their study on school leadership development, Sullivan and Associates (2013: 3) report that the leadership roles and responsibilities of deputy principals 'are not clearly defined or understood'. This view is supported by Jubilee (2013: 8) who argues that if the role of the deputy principal is not clearly defined, it can cause a negative impact on the school's leadership and success. Hence the questions: What are the roles and duties of deputy principals in South African primary schools? How do deputy principals perceive their role and how do principals perceive the roles of their deputy principals?

Perspectives from literature

Older literature not only confirms a lack of research on deputy principalship, it agrees that deputy principals should receive more recognition (Harvey and Sheridan, 1995: 83). Incidentally, Sharp and Walter (2012: 153) claim that it is the deputy principal's job to support the principal 'and make the principal look good'. Studies as early as 1923 reveal the major responsibilities of the deputy principal as being limited to classroom teaching, administration and supervision (Madden, 2008: 17). Similarly, Johnson (2015: 29) concedes that, traditionally, the core duties of deputy principals relate to learner discipline, learner attendance and school safety. Attempting to highlight the

concern of underutilising the deputy principal, he simultaneously directs the attention to the increased workload experienced by school principals.

Due to the vaguely defined position of the deputy principal, the responsibilities associated with the post remain largely undetermined (Muijs and Harris, 2003: 6; Scott, 2011: 47). Although no universal definition exists for deputy principalship, Sharp and Walter (2012: 155) identify the following:

- assisting with supervising and evaluating classroom teachers, instructional aides, noon duty supervisors and clerical personnel;
- assisting in the monitoring and the administration of the school budget;
- assisting in communicating with peers, parents and the public regarding the goals and objectives of the school;
- assisting the principal and staff in improving the instructional program[me];
- the provision of staff development support: implementation of school and district policies pertaining to student discipline and [learner] activities; and
- the assumption of other duties and responsibilities as assigned by the principal.

In historic retrospect, it must be recognised that current literature recognises the role of the deputy principal as growing and multi-faceted (Nieuwenhuizen, 2011: 10). In practice, a general concern amongst deputy principals is the balancing of teaching time with the demands of their duties (Kerry, 2000: 26) and that deputy principals are often tasked with supervisory tasks such as attendance and discipline (Muijs and Harris, 2003: 6). Ultimately, the deputy principal's position can be stressful and filled with numerous negative aspects (Sharp and Walter, 2012: 157). Nevertheless, Muijs and Harris (2003: 6) contend that deputy principals promote stability and order in a school. Deputy principals carry out a large variety of tasks within the school and need to be competent in all aspects of school management (Johnson, 2015: 30; Sharp and Walter, 2012: 153). The principal, therefore, must take responsibility for developing and empowering the deputy principal in various leadership responsibilities.

Theoretical framework

The study on which this article reports was conducted through a distributed leadership lens for the following reasons: Firstly, as indicated earlier in this article, IQMS requires deputy principals of South African public schools to be evaluated against the same performance standards as principals, in which the expectation for leadership actions feature prominently. Secondly, the Policy on the South African Standard for Principals has an explicit expectation that leadership must be 'shared' (RSA, 2016b: 8) which, according to Du Plessis and Heystek (2020: 843), 'is connected to the more generally used concept of distributed leadership'.

Distributed leadership refers back to the 1960s but has only increased in prominence after 2000. According to Williams (2011: 190–192) 'a number of features suggest that distributed leadership is a form of leadership that should be seriously considered as a means of addressing the leadership crisis in many South African schools'. More specifically, Bahadur (2012: 10) defines distributed leadership as

leadership that is dispersed rather than concentrated. It is a leadership which is shared amongst a number of colleagues or peers. Distributed leadership is a kind of leadership which is reshaped through the interactions of multiple leaders in the school context.

Distributed leadership means a shift from a single individual to other individuals who are regarded as partners or group members and who share the responsibility for leadership (Duignan and Bezzina, 2006: 4; Du Plessis, 2014: 47; Hughes and Pickeral, 2013: 1; Triegaardt, 2013: 38). Williams (2011: 1) explains that 'theory on leadership has recently undergone a major paradigm shift: from the traditional view of leadership as centred in individual role or responsibility to alternative leadership theories which place the focus on multiple sources of leadership'. Adding to this perspective, Bierly et al. (2016: 6) argue that there is no alternative for a well-designed school leadership model that distributes the responsibilities amongst the stakeholders. They claim that the responsibility for the improvement of teaching and learning typically lies in the hands of the principal and the deputy principal, but that principals find themselves overwhelmed with all their responsibilities. Against this backdrop Timperley (2005: 395) argues that there is an increasing demand in practice and theory to think of educational leadership in terms of activities and interactions that are distributed amongst numerous stakeholders and situations.

In a distributed leadership context, the school's decision-making is no longer entrusted to a single leader (where the principal takes virtually all the decisions), but moved to a shared approach where individuals are organised and developed in all levels of the school management (Heystek, 2013: 169). Primarily, a distributive leadership acknowledges that there are various leaders and that their leadership activities are shared in and among organisations (Harris, 2010: 60; Harris and Spillane, 2008: 31). In other words, distributed leadership can be described as a cluster of individuals who combine their leadership expertise and skills to improve the school they serve (Grant, et al., 2010: 403). This is what Jubilee (2013: 37) refers to as a cooperative partnership in terms of leadership.

As a theoretical framework, distributed leadership can be helpful to develop a better understanding of the leadership practices at schools and also be of assistance to gain a better understanding how the school's leadership practice influences (or does not influence) the role of the primary school deputy principal. Distributed leadership has become progressively more imperative in practice, recognising that the school principal as sole leader does not produce the maximum benefits for the school (DBE, 2008: 19).

Methodology and research design

This study made use of a qualitative study in order to capture the subjective perspectives of the participants in the 'real world setting' or social environment they represent in everyday practice (Golafshani, 2003: 600). A case study design provided the liberty to determine beforehand what evidence needed to be collected (Mills and Gay, 2016: 419). This study examined and described the participants' individual and communal professional social actions, beliefs, thoughts and perceptions and delved into the underlying conventions, motives, reasons, aims and beliefs transpiring in the professional relationship between the principal and their deputy principals, as well as the distribution of leadership roles and duties (Fraenkel and Wallen, 2006: 431).

Sampling

The study was conducted at five well-resourced fee-paying public primary schools that are regarded as having a reputation of being highly functional and well-performing schools, all situated within a 10 km radius in the east of Pretoria. These criteria were motivated by Williams' (2011: 196) contention that many South African schools are regarded as dysfunctional schools and that this has a very negative impact on the likelihood of schools executing a form of distributed

leadership. Hence, participants from schools in an advantaged context were regarded as most likely to provide rich data. In addition, the study focused on primary schools only because, in the South African context, primary schools enroll learners from grade R (reception) to grade 7, catering for eight grades, whereas secondary schools only cater for five grades (grades 8 to 12). These grades include the early childhood development, foundation, intermediate and senior phases of the curriculum. South African primary schools are therefore generally larger than secondary schools and the likelihood of principals of primary schools relying on the leadership capacities of their deputy principals is therefore higher than in secondary schools.

Furthermore, each participating school needed to have two or more deputy principals. In addition to the principal, two deputy principals from each of the five selected primary schools participated in the study. In order to maximise the richness of the data, the two longest-serving deputy principals were selected in cases where there were more than two deputy principals.

Data collection and data analysis

Data was collected by means of semi-structured interviews during which the participants were requested to answer a set of predetermined questions. They were given the opportunity to discuss issues beyond the scope of the specific questions. During the interviews, participants were probed to add additional information and to seek clarification of some of the answers provided. The interviews were audio recorded and transcribed. To improve the trustworthiness of the data, member checking was used to confirm the accuracy of the transcriptions and to allow participants the opportunity to add additional information if they wished to do so.

Content analysis was employed to analyse similarities and differences in the transcribed responses of the participants (Nieuwenhuis, 2013: 101). The assumptions, motives, goals, values and reasoning of principals and deputy principals with regard to the role of the deputy principal were sought (Fraenkel and Wallen, 2006: 431).

Ethical considerations

Official approval to conduct research was granted by the Gauteng Department of Education and the governing bodies and principals of each participating school. None of the participants were forced to participate in this study. All participants were informed about their right to withdraw from the study should they wish to do so. The participants were assured of their anonymity and confidentiality and that the data collected for this study would be used for research and academic purposes only. Pseudonyms were allocated to each of the participating schools and individual participants.

Limitations of the study

As mentioned earlier, this study was only conducted in well-resourced fee-paying primary schools with two or more deputy principals. This context must be considered, as the findings may be different in schools that only have one deputy principal, similarly in non-fee-paying schools and secondary schools.

Discussion of findings

It seems as if differences in sub-context influence the leadership role of every deputy principal. In addition, this study confirms that large schools cannot be managed without the leadership input of

Table 1. Profiles of participating schools.

Language of learning and teaching	Number of learners	Staff profile	Employed by education department	Employed by school governing body	Total
School V					
Afrikaans	1705	Principal	1	0	1
		Deputy principal	2	0	2
		Departmental heads	5	0	5
		Teachers	31	39	70
		Total	39	39	78
School W					
English	815	Principal	1	0	1
		Deputy principal	1	1	2
		Departmental heads	3	0	3
		Teachers	18	7	25
		Total	23	8	31
School X					
Afrikaans	1937	Principal	1	0	1
		Deputy principal	2	0	2
		Departmental heads	5	0	5
		Teachers	35	34	69
		Total	43	34	77
School Y					
English	1462	Principal	1	0	1
		Deputy principal	2	1	3
		Departmental heads	5	2	7
		Teachers	28	25	53
		Total	36	28	64
School Z					
Afrikaans	952	Principal	1	0	1
		Deputy principal	1	3	4
		Departmental heads	3	25	28
		Teachers	19	28	47
		Total	24	56	80

deputy principals and other teachers. As indicated in Table 1, the governing bodies of three of the five participating schools have employed one or more additional deputy principals and, as a result, purposeful restructuring and redesign of management structures and leadership functions were necessary at these schools. Given the importance placed on academic performance by each of the participating schools, all five participating schools have dedicated one deputy principal the school's academic programmes.

The role of the principal in determining the role of deputy principals

The participating principals value their own knowledge of school leadership and management and there was substantial evidence that the participating principals take the initiative in determining the broader leadership direction in their respective schools. For example, Principal X implied that his knowledge transcends that of the rest of his management team. He claimed that a principal is in the

best position to have access to the ‘broader picture’ of the entire school. He clarified this point as follows:

I obviously share my thoughts with the management team, one has to do that. But during this week I realised that teachers don’t see the bigger picture. Not the picture of: what the school looks like. So, to be honest, I determine it [leadership roles – own insertion] and then I share it [the vision – own insertion] and I listen to their input

The data indicates that principals who adopt a distributed leadership approach are considered successful leaders and that none of the participating principals in this study attempted to lead their school on their own. This is illustrated by the following responses:

But you know what, I absolutely believe in empowerment. How can the principal otherwise carry out class visits, walk on the terrain, and meet parents, that type of thing? (Principal X)

But in general, we discuss everything, and we enjoy a sound relationship of sharing and understanding and division [of duties – own insertion]. So, the support that I offer, is that I allow them to do things [on their own – own insertion] and we work together. (Principal Y)

So, he [Principal Z – own insertion] saw the needs in the school where there are three lanes – actually four if you split sport and culture. So, we sat together and [determined the different roles – own insertion]. (Deputy 9)

None of the participating principals expected their deputy principals to do all the work on their own either: ‘You must look at the workload of that person [deputy principal – own insertion] . . .’. (Principal W)

To a large extent, this study illuminated the combined professional effort of leaders at different levels in various echelons of the participating schools. It is noteworthy that, according to Jubilee (2013: 37), such a cooperative leadership partnership between the deputy principal and the principal will most likely influence and determine the relationships and work methods among the whole staff. Two deputy principals explained this aspect as follows:

A school of excellence can absolutely not, may not, revolve around one person; there is no way that it can/should happen. In other words, the principal cannot be involved in everything. (Deputy 1)

You are an extension of him [the principal – own insertion]. If you work against each other, you throw yourself to the wolves. (Deputy 5)

All the participating principals indicated that they are responsible for drafting a detailed job description for each of the multiple deputy principals in their schools. They also determine how the leadership roles are divided between/among the deputy principals and encourage inputs by deputy principals and involve them in decision-making. This corresponds with the view of Harris (2008: 176) who asserts that organisational change and development are boosted when leadership is broad based and where educators are afforded the opportunities to collaborate and actively participate in change innovation. The data seem to confirm Sibanda’s (2017: 569) views that ‘the interdependence between people and their context’ is important where leadership is distributed.

Purposeful leadership distribution

The majority participants regard their annual planning meeting as an important and ideal opportunity to assess and refine the school's overall management and leadership affairs. This includes reviewing teachers' duties at all levels. This was explained by Principal W as follows: 'We used the school leaders . . . the SMT, the heads of grades, the heads of the learning areas, the subject heads. We all sat together to ask: What will be the best [for the school – own insertion]?'

It appears that the individual portfolios of the deputy principals will influence the specific leadership role they perform. In line with a distributed leadership approach, all the participating deputy principals indicated that they are supported by their principals and that they receive ample opportunity and time to deputise.

Evidently, the principals and deputy principals of the participating schools form a collaborative and supportive team and the leadership is viewed as a collective endeavour rather than an action performed by the principal on their own. This corresponds to the findings and views of a number of authors (Fitzsimons et al., 2011: 313; Harris, 2004: 15; Muijs and Harris, 2007: 111, 132; Naicker and Mestry, 2011: 101, 105; Southworth, 2008: 417; Spillane et al., 2004: 5).

Significantly, the majority of the participating deputy principals expressed their concern that principals do not have time for all the work they are expected to do, and that the workload is too much for one person to handle on their own. For example, Deputy 1 makes this point by stating that 'he [the principal – own insertion] simply won't survive'.

The findings attest that school leaders ought to think strategically and progressively if they want to succeed. For example, Principal Z explained that teachers do not study to become strategic thinkers, but to become classroom teachers. He therefore insisted that all the deputy principals at his school attended a year-long strategic thinking training course. Although the participants feel that it is important to manage a school according to its organogram, this must involve, as expressed by Harris (2010: 65), 'both the vertical and lateral dimensions of leadership practice'.

One participating principal remarked that he finds it very useful to not only have a sound work relationship with his deputy principals, but a healthy personal relationship as well. This aligns with the establishment of an environment wherein distributed leadership, as articulated by Harris (2010: 58), 'depends upon the school itself, the purpose of the distribution and most importantly, how leadership is distributed'. Yet, as argued by Williams (2011: 192), a distributed leadership perspective is not meant to 'displace the crucial role of the school principal'. In a nutshell, principals play the most important role in establishing distributed leadership practice at schools (Day and Sammons, 2016: 54; Harris, 2012: 8; Naicker and Mestry, 2011: 101). The general consensus among the participants reminds us that principals ought to share their responsibilities with the deputy principals in a planned, structured way (Aaron and Du Plessis, 2014: 1446; Lambert, 2002: 40).

Reconfiguration of conventional management structures

A key aspect which emerged from the data is a willingness to move away from bureaucratic to more distributive leadership practices and redesign the organisational structure in the participating schools. Similarly, it appears as if the multiple deputy principals are continuously training and mentoring HODs. This seems to form part of a strategy to provide continuous in-house leadership training to all teachers, irrespective of their post levels.

Related to the above, it is noted that variances occur regarding the application of the job descriptions of deputy principals as contained in PAM (RSA, 2016a: A30–A31) and that the needs

of the school are considered when determining the duties and responsibilities of deputy principals. This corresponds to what Marishane (2016) calls being 'contextually intelligent' in school leadership. One principal even remarked that he has never used PAM as a guideline to determine the duties and responsibilities his deputy principals.

A notable characteristic of one of the participating schools is their broad management model which provides valuable opportunities for three additional internally appointed deputy principals to take on leadership roles. This corresponds with the perspective of Harris (2013: 546) who argues that distributed leadership focuses on the distribution of leadership among formal and informal leaders and, more specifically, taking full advantage of the leadership abilities within the school. Furthermore, Bush and Glover (2014: 560) support the claim that distributed leadership integrates the expertise of a group, which would not be the case with a single leader.

Deputy principalship as principal-in-training

A connection was found between the overall changed landscapes in education and the changed role of the school principal. Consistent with a distributed leadership approach, the data indicated that principalship has evolved to a role which has intensified and developed to such an extent that principals cannot function without the input of expert stakeholders. The data supports the findings of Harris (2004: 13), who pointed out that distributed leadership focuses on engaging the expertise that exists within the school, rather than focusing only on the formal position or role of the individual principal. In congruence with a distributed leadership practice (Bush and Glover, 2014: 560; Grant, 2008: 88; Grant, et al., 2010: 403; Harris, 2010: 65; Hartley, 2007: 208; Muijs and Harris, 2007: 111), the participants shared numerous experiences in confirmation that there appears to be a general movement away from the single, heroic leader to an emphasis on shared leadership participation (Bush and Glover, 2014: 566; Harris, 2012: 8; Hartley, 2007: 206, 211). This was articulated by both Principal X and Principal V as follows:

When DP 6 became the deputy principal, I told her: You are the boss of your farm . . . and I think this demonstrates trust in them. The principal must not try to keep everything to himself. I believe that they [the deputy principals – own insertion] must be empowered. (Principal X)

. . . what do you struggle with? I will pay, come and talk to me. (Principal V)

All the principals in this study seem to adopt a supportive leadership style that encourages inputs by their deputy principals and involves them in decision-making. Likewise, all the principals in this study are seemingly engaged in developing each of their multiple deputy principals. It was found, though, that the approaches followed by the participating principals with regard to the functions of and tasks performed by deputy principals vary from school to school. For example, Principal W indicated that a school's location, its size and the type of learners will influence the role of the deputy principal. The well-experienced DP 5 lends support to this view: 'What works for a small school, does not work for our macro-schools.'

Aligned with literature (Coleman, 2003: 174), the data indicates that the leadership roles of deputy principals are, as indicated by Deputy 10, 'not cast in stone' and may change if and when required. The majority of the participants regard the annual planning meeting as an important and ideal opportunity to assess and refine the school's overall management and leadership affairs. This includes reviewing the individual portfolios of the deputy principals. This annual revision of portfolios is important as it will allow deputy principals to develop a broader set of competencies.

The viewpoints, enthusiasm and determination of Principal Z in particular to personally empower his deputy principals had not escaped attention. The personal interaction at their official weekly management meetings incorporates training and discussions on how to take the school forward. Apart from reporting that these meetings lead to equipping his multiple deputy principals, he contends that his deputy principals receive outstanding training – something he personally never received. Hence, he believes he is taking his deputy principals to a level where they are equipped to become strategic thinkers. This links to the view of Harris (2008: 176), who recognises that organisational change and development are boosted when leadership is broad based and where educators are afforded the opportunities to collaborate and actively participate in change innovation. Not only was the deputy principals' functional participation observed in their verbal communication, but an overall recognition of their contributing leadership role was detected. Aspects such as the deputy principals' knowledge, talents, experience, interests, proficiencies and qualities seem to influence the division of duties and responsibilities between the multiple deputy principals.

Principal Z elaborated on his personal involvement in developing and equipping the deputy principals for promotional purposes as follows:

... I deliver a product. If any of my four or three deputy principals that I currently have, become a principal within the following year, he will be on a total different level than another person [from another school – own insertion] who will become the principal, because he is really empowered ... he was really part of strategy, of staff development, staff appointments.

One principal explained that principals play an important role in preparing deputy principals for their wide-ranging position. In other words, deputy principals who don't get the necessary experience and exposure are deprived of opportunities to grow and be developed, and, without it, they are likely to find it difficult to be successful principals. One principal expressed his views regarding principals who do not assist and develop their deputy principals as follows:

So, that is basically what you [the principal – own insertion] do. You limit that person [deputy principal – own insertion] to grow and to develop. Because that deputy principal must be able to, no matter where, walk into any school and be able to do the work.

A few participants view principalship and deputy principalship as being alike in many aspects, whilst others indicate a clear distinction between the two positions in that the principal remains the ultimately accountable person.

Leadership functions of deputy principals

It is noteworthy that a number of participants suggested that a deputy principal's leadership role is an extension of that of the principal. What is clear from the data is that deputy principals are expected to demonstrate leadership abilities and take full accountability and responsibility for a wide variety of duties assigned to them. Corresponding to a distributed leadership approach, the research of Bush and Glover (2014: 561) recognises 'that distributed leadership has the potential to expand the scope of leadership, leading to enhanced student outcomes while developing the formal leaders of the future'. As an illustration, Deputy 10 clarifies his leadership role as follows:

I carry the responsibility, I sit in the hot seat with regards to decision-making, not only in lieu of what sport and which activity we do, but also [with regards to – own insertion] the conflict which may take place. That mentorship part where you teach the team how to handle parents, how to conduct information sessions, what communication [must take place – own insertion] . . . I try to explain the role of what a parent ought to know [what information must be shared with the parents – own insertion]. That's how they buy into it.

This deputy principal takes the lead in coordinating the sport programme but has requested to be more involved in the management of the academic programme of the school. In addition, his involvement in the school governing body (SGB) varies from sharing the vision of the sport and cultural activities of every new school year with all relevant stakeholders, to giving feedback to the sport coaches regarding decisions made by the SGB. The findings remind us that deputy principals perform diverse roles which differ from school to school (Kerry, 2000: 26, 40). It furthermore turns out that all participating deputy principals are expected to perform leadership functions by, *inter alia*, conducting various meetings, such as HOD meetings. Apart from principals who serve as *ex officio* members on the SGBs of their schools, participating deputy principals also serve the respective SGBs of their schools, either as elected or co-opted members. This varies from serving on the finance committee or giving feedback on the sport, cultural or academic programmes of the school. One deputy principal also serves as a secretary of the SGB.

Although each of the participating deputy principals has a unique job description and varying leadership functions according to their respective schools' unique circumstances, it is noted that some of the deputy principals seem to fill similar leadership roles. For instance, five of the deputy principals (one at each participating school) are primarily responsible for the academic programme of their schools. Two of the participating deputy principals are responsible for managing co-curricular activities, whereas the majority of the participating deputy principals are not expected to be involved in any co-curricular activities.

Additional functions performed by participating deputy principals are the coordination of the IQMS, the management of learning and teaching support materials, learner discipline, being head of subject, the submission of the annual statistics to the district offices, and the screening, identification, assessment and support of learners who are in need of additional assistance. The participants in general seem to agree that the participating deputy principals' workload is more or less equitably distributed, despite the fact that the duties vary so much.

Factors such as a participant's knowledge, talents, expertise, interests, proficiencies, experience and the school's unique circumstances will influence how the division of duties and responsibilities among the multiple deputy principals are determined. The majority of the participating deputy principals agreed that deputy principals are generally experiencing an overall increase in their workload. It furthermore appears as if the District Office of the Department of Basic Education (DBE) is now also requiring more administrative duties to be performed by deputy principals.

Aligned with the requirements of Performance Standard 9 of IQMS, numerous examples in the data demonstrate how deputy principals are involved in staff development and training. The participating deputy principals often practice mentorship, especially in terms of novice teachers. Two participating deputy principals indicated that they manage the placement of student teachers. This includes being responsible for their induction programme, and mentorship and monitoring of their performance. There is evidence in the data that deputy principals regularly hold or arrange professional development talks, according to the needs of the school and the educators. It is further

evident that the participating deputy principals do not only focus on their own portfolios, they also assist others (including peer deputy principals) as the need arises. One deputy principal explained that deputy principals need to take the lead and handle a variety of 'typical situations' associated with a school. Importantly, it was found that the participating principals expect their deputy principals to function independently. This corresponds with the findings of Day and Sammons (2016: 52) who argue that distributed leadership plays an important role in allocating leadership responsibility to other leaders beyond the principal.

It seems that in larger schools, because of the workload and the variety of duties that must be performed, the size of the school does not only influence the roles performed by the school management team, but also results in the involvement of other educators in the professional management of the school. While the inclusion of more teachers on the school management team can possibly give the impression that deputy principals delegate their duties to their subordinates, there is sufficient evidence in the data to suggest that individual deputy principals remain responsible and accountable for their portfolios, for example:

As I have said, they take full responsibility. At SGB meetings and at financial committee meetings my deputy principals are given a turn to speak. It's on the agenda. They each get a turn to explain, justify and defend their budgets. This happens at each financial committee meeting. He [or she – own insertion] must explain what has happened, where they have overspent, why they have overspent or where they plan to overspend, and why. So, they must take full responsibility and I don't stand in the gap for them. (Principal Z)

Generally, the data indicate that, in order for schools to function optimally, the participating schools generally regard deputy principalship as being essential in extending the leadership in the school. Likewise, deputy principals must be seen as adaptable individuals who simultaneously lead and follow. In other words, a deputy principal ought to be regarded as a leader in their own right.

The deputy principals' relationship with the principal

The majority of deputy principals in this study confirmed that they experience a positive professional relationship with their principal. Some of the deputy principals described their relationship with their principal as 'using the principal as a sounding board', that the deputy principal and the principal are 'partners who think alike' and that 'it is a happy partnership'. This indicates that healthy interpersonal and professional relationships exist.

The participating principals generally indicated that their schools rely on team efforts to manage the school. For example, one principal regards each person's role as important and views each stakeholder as an ambassador of the school. Principal V mentioned that he nurtures his relationship with his two deputy principals and expects them to 'steer the ship' with him. He expects his deputy principals to demonstrate exemplary conduct at all times.

The evidence suggests that regular professional interaction takes place between the participating principals and their deputy principals. This confirms that distributed cognition transpires through interactions and across various teams (Gronn, 2002: 428) and that distributed leadership implies that the practice of leadership is shared and realised within extended groupings and networks.

Most participants confirmed the important role principals play in offering professional support and assistance. Accordingly, words like 'training' and 'empowerment' (of deputy principals)

regularly occur in the data. Relying on his personal experience, one principal emphasised that, at first, he did not know what the role and duties of a deputy principal entailed when he was appointed in that position. He thus gained first-hand experience of what it felt like to be unprepared for the deputy principalship.

Generally, the participating deputy principals described their principals as good mentors and expressed their appreciation toward their respective principals for the guidance they provide. Conversely, the participating principals appeared appreciative of the overall involvement of their deputy principals in their respective schools. There seems to be general agreement among the participants that regular professional interaction is a requirement and that principals play a prominent role in orchestrating and implementing a type of shared leadership. Principal Y explained as follows:

... in general, we discuss everything, and we enjoy a sound relationship of sharing and understanding and division [of duties – own insertion]. So, the support that I offer, is that I allow them to do things [on their own – own insertion] and we work together.

Similarly, Principal X expressed his willingness to support a novice deputy principal in the following manner: ‘And the other thing I told her was, “Do you know what, I support you in whatever you do. If you make a mistake, I will also support you.”’

By and large, it appears that all the participating deputy principals and their principals enjoy a healthy trust relationship. As a practical token of their trust in their deputy principals, two principals indicated that they do not ‘peep over the shoulders’ of the deputy principals and that they have deliberately taken a decision not to attend all the meetings conducted by the deputy principals. Deputy 1 pointed out that her principal not only managed to expand her role as deputy principal, but that he also demonstrated his trust in her and, consequently, she had reached new heights. Similarly, most participating principals highlighted that they expect their deputy principals to demonstrate trust in the HODs and other educators. In support of his deputy principals, Principal V shared the following experience from his earlier career as deputy principal: ‘I have learnt to trust my heads of departments. I have trained them and trusted them, made them strong. That is how I have managed to survive.’

In addition, the data also revealed that mutual trust between the multiple deputy principals was evident at all the participating schools.

Conclusion

Contrary to the findings of Bush and Glover (2016: 217) who found that there is ‘little evidence’ of the practice of distributed leadership in South African schools, the data indicates the exhibition of a purposeful, redesigned leadership structure in the participating schools which suggests a change in leadership roles of those in senior leadership positions, as well as a general commitment among the participants to grow and develop school leaders.

Even though this study was not primarily directed at the role of principals, there is consensus among the participants that the role of the school principal has intensified and developed to such a degree that schools increasingly need to allocate more leadership responsibilities to their deputy principals. A general inclusion of deputy principals in the active participation of shared or distributed leadership and management responsibilities was observed, coupled with a recognition of the leadership contribution of the participating deputy principals – to such an extent that the

schools would find it difficult to function without their leadership contribution. Teamwork and collaborative partnerships among the principals and their multiple deputy principals are illustrative of the positive influence of the participating principals in the way they determine the relational conditions in their schools. This includes having an impact on the roles performed by the respective schools' management teams (SMTs).

The study presented sufficient evidence to conclude that the greater the number of educators employed at a school, the greater the number of leadership roles and opportunities likely to be created. This is not intended to displace the crucial role of the school principal – it rather suggests a change in the overall leadership approach of the individual schools where the principal takes the lead in creating opportunities to establish an environment conducive for the distribution of leadership (Harris and DeFlaminis, 2016: 142). The participating principals place great value on the functional involvement and leadership participation of their multiple deputy principals in the overall decision-making process, and the deputy principals are included in visionary thinking processes.

It can be accepted that a school's size and circumstances play a determining role in the distribution of leadership responsibilities and duties (RSA, 2016a: A11). While examples of delegation are noticeable, it is evident that individual deputy principals take responsibility for their portfolios. In view of the complexity of leading and managing a primary school successfully, it is found that all the participating schools focus on harnessing and incorporating the expertise and qualities of their deputy principals. As such, all the participating schools adopted a distributed leadership approach which displays a move away from focusing only on the formal position/role of the principal toward planned and purposeful shared participation and development of deputy principals. Evidence suggests that this is an ongoing process led by the principal whereby adaptations in roles and job descriptions are continuously made according to the school's changed circumstances – to the benefit of the school at a given time.

The establishment of an empowerment culture plays a prominent role in the participating schools. Apart from implementing strategies and opportunities to develop their deputy principals, the participating principals generally displayed a dedicated commitment to training their deputy principals, not only for their current roles, but for future principalship as well. This corresponds with the views of Coleman (2003: 182) who regards appropriate professional training as of vital importance in clarifying a deputy principal's role. The participants shared their experiences of regular, planned and personal interaction which form the basis of the effective, purposeful leadership development of deputy principals. However, it was observed that none of the deputy principals were expected to work in isolation. Rather, it was evident that the participating deputy principals worked interdependently across various teams and within extended groups and networks. Thus, collaborative practices seem to be strongly entrenched in the culture of the participating schools. Despite their varying job descriptions, the participating deputy principals generally appeared comfortable to offer their expertise to the benefit of the school and seemed proud of the responsibilities entrusted to them.

The official policy prescriptions contained in PAM (RSA, 2016a: A30) includes a general description of the duties and responsibilities of deputy principals and are generally interpreted and applied in the context of a singular deputy principal. All the participating schools, however, enjoyed the luxury of two or more deputy principals, which implies that their role must be framed from a multiple deputy principal perspective, rather from a singular perspective. This brings additional complexities to the fore, for example, how do multiple deputy principals manage

overlapping or grey areas in their job descriptions and how do multiple deputy principals professionally interact with one another?

As principals cannot be expected to lead all aspects of a school successfully, awareness is being generated in the participating schools that deputy principals are ‘principals-in-training’ and that this is likely to influence what they do. As a rule, it was found that principals play an essential role in preparing deputy principals for their wide-ranging functions, which includes deputising. It is therefore questionable whether the minimum requirements of 5 or 7 years’ teaching experience to be appointed as a deputy principal or principal (RSA, 2016a: B46) is sufficient for being appointed a deputy principal or principal in South African public schools.


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