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**An exploration of successful school leadership practices
in challenging school context : case studies of two
secondary schools in Soweto.**

Ramatseba, Linda

2012-09-21

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AN EXPLORATION OF SUCCESSFUL SCHOOL LEADERSHIP
PRACTICES IN CHALLENGING SCHOOL CONTEXT: CASE
STUDIES OF TWO SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN SOWETO.

BY

LINDA RAMATSEBA

9812680W

A dissertation submitted to the wits school of education, faculty of
humanities, University of the Witwatersrand in fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of master of education

JOHANNESBURG, 2012

Supervisor: ZAKHELE MBOKAZI

UNIVERSITY OF WITWATERSRAND, SCHOOL OF EDUCATION

DECLARATION

I declare that this dissertation is my own unaided work. It is being submitted for the degree of Master of Education at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. It has not been submitted before for any degree or examination at any other University.

.....

.....February 2012

Linda Ramatseba

Student Number 9812680w

ABSTRACT

The study explored successful school leadership practices in challenging contexts: A case study of two secondary schools in Soweto.

The study involved two secondary schools in Soweto Township, Gauteng, South Africa. It focused on the roles and responsibilities of principals as leaders of schools in challenging contexts. It aimed to gain insight into how these principals led and managed their schools in order to understand why other township schools consistently performed well, despite the socio-economic status that existed in the township, where other schools failed; how these principals managed to stay on top, their leadership practices and why they made the choices they did.

The primary research focus was to explore leadership that contributed to the success of the school. There were three objectives and these were to explore how leaders led and managed their schools. Secondly, the study sought to understand leadership practices of successful school principals and thirdly, to understand if there were special leadership qualities that successful leaders demonstrated.

The study adopted a qualitative approach and it used interviews, focus group discussions, documents and observation schedules to gather data. The sample consisted of a mixed gender group of 16 participants. The research findings revealed that principals of the case study schools played an indirect but powerful role towards the school's success. Further, in the case study schools, leadership was a shared entity. The findings also revealed that the schools succeeded by building and managing relationships, inside and outside the schools. .

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I wish to express my sincere gratitude to the two schools in this study for allowing me to invade their privacy and assisting me in pursuing my dreams to become a better person. I know it would not have been possible had you decided to shut me out. I have a few individuals that I would like to honour by name:

- Mr Zakhele Mbokazi, as I conceptualise this study you have been so influential in making me believe in my own ability when no one did. Thank you for being the humble and down-to earth person that you are. You were always like a father, approachable and ready to help. Your input in the type of study is greatly appreciated.
- Mrs Caroline Faulkner, I cannot thank you enough for the role you played in my academic life. Your guidance and support was always valuable to me and I am so fortunate to have found a patient lecturer like you.
- My team in Education Leadership and policy studies, the class of seven students that I have had contact with in my two years of study at Wits. You were a wonderful bunch. I wish our journey could be endless.
- My loving and humble husband Joel Thobile Mphaki, I am at a loss of the appropriate words to describe how you have always supported me unconditionally, in whatever I do. You have always put your time and happiness aside to make sure that my dreams are fulfilled. I really thank God for having you in my life.
- My 15-year-old daughter Paballo Nicollette Mphaki, your immense understanding and support you have always shown and given to me since I started studying at Wits. I know it has never been easy for you. Thank you for understanding and accepting the challenge of helping out.
- As a Christian, I want to believe that God has a great plan for us all. It is through His strength that I came thus far. Thank you Father for the gift bestowed upon me. This would not have been possible without your divine power and wisdom.

DEDICATION

I wish to dedicate my dissertation to my mother, Beauty Ramatseba, and my daughter, Paballo Mphaki.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

DBE	Department of Basic Education
DET	Department of Education and Training
G.D.E	Gauteng Department of Education
G.P	Gauteng Province
HoD	Head of Department
HIV/Aids	Human Immune Virus/ Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
SA	South Africa
SMT	School Management Team
SOWETO	South Western Townships
SGB	School Governing Body
SSIP	Secondary Schools Improvement Programme

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CHAPTER ONE

BACKGROUND AND ORIENTATION

Introduction

Changes in education have placed school principals in the forefront of social transformation in all South African schools, Bhengu (2005). Bhengu adds that these changes that schools in South Africa are currently undergoing are a result of forces from within and outside the school. Further, the implementation of new education policies, for instance, is putting pressure on schools to change and stay dynamic and this has placed extreme demands on the school principals to adapt and manage change (p. 37).

One of the major challenges identified by McLennan and Thurlow (2003, p.16) is the increasing need for schools to become self-managing in response to new policies. Legislation and policy documents, for instance, all point the South African education system firmly toward a school-based system of education management (Department of Education, 2000: Mosoge and Van der Westhuizen, 1998, p.84, cited in Botha (2004). Another critical challenge relates to the difficulties facing township schools and other poorly performing schools to provide quality education to keep their schools sustainable (Naidu, Joubert, Mestry, Mosoge, and Ngcobo (2008). The challenges mentioned by McLennan and Thurlow (2003) may be listed along with others, such as disparities in socio-economic conditions, at the same time demanding efficiency in the management of schools (Taylor, Muller and Vinjevold, 2003; Thurlow, Bush, and Coleman, 2003).

However, the process of change is far from easy, and implementing it successfully makes considerable demands on schools and school principals. Faced with these dynamics of changes, the role of the school principal in a new era of democratic schooling in South Africa needs to be explored. It is imperative that we understand current practices in school leadership within the South African context (Bhengu, 2005).

South African schools are faced with many challenges, with rural and township schools mostly affected by socio-economic factors such as poverty,

unemployment and the HIV/AIDS pandemic. Also, schools are affected by psychosocial issues such as violence, substance abuse and gangsterism. Criminal violence as a result of the above issues is exceptionally high; more often than not, secondary schools find themselves at the centre of this violent behaviour. Township schools are also faced with vandalism and theft as the worst type of behaviour that further makes the situation unbearable. Vandalism and theft specifically not only paralyse the schools, but also leaves schools without resources, and teachers and learners are unsafe.

However, despite these challenges, there are schools that achieve against all odds. The two schools in the study are amongst the few schools of the sixty four secondary schools in Soweto that are said to be successful. These successful schools have all endured the same challenges with the same learner type, but chose to do better irrespective of all the challenges. According to educational authorities, schools are judged to be successful due to their matric pass rate of 70% and above Grant (2009). Research has proven that leadership is crucial for school success.

Sammons (1999), cited in Fullan (2010), asserts that almost every single study of school effectiveness has shown both primary and secondary leadership to be a key factor (p.160). Fullan further says that he knows of no improving school that doesn't have a principal who is good at leading improvement.

Bush and Glover (2007) assert that the core purpose of principalship is to provide leadership and management in all areas of the school and enable the creation and support of conditions under which high quality teaching and learning takes place. Bush, Joubert, Kiggundu and Rooyen (2010) elucidate further when they say that the core purpose of principalship is to provide leadership and management in all areas of the school. This enables the creation and support of conditions under which high quality teaching and learning can take place and which promotes the highest possible standard of learner achievement.

Given the understanding of principals as key role players in school development and success, and given the understanding that the two schools in the study have achieved against the odds, it becomes imperative: to have a clear understanding of the leadership practices of principals in a challenging environment; to explore the leadership role in the new era; understand leadership in an African context;

as well as understand what these principals do. Principals in challenging contexts have never been heard. Not much is known about leadership practices in South African schools in challenging areas. This study aims to understand the existing leadership patterns in selected performing schools in Soweto.

RATIONALE

As I conducted the study, I am working full time as a middle manager in a school in Soweto. This placed me in close and frequent contact with my principal. I became aware of the issues that affect principals on a daily basis, understanding what they do, and why they do what they do. My position also allowed me to impact on some teachers through supervision. Serving on two education departments, namely the Department of Education and Training and the Gauteng Department of Education, has also made me aware of the different practices. It was my intention to understand the leadership practices of township secondary school principals, why they manage their schools the way they do, and what they do in order to achieve good results.

South African school leadership principals are expected to carry pre-determined roles as expected by the education minister, an instructional role as well as to transform the school culture. Also, the school leader should administer the funds of the school, hold all aspects of the school together, as well as work with the community and the stakeholders Heystek (2007).

Research shows that most South African principals are not capacitated to lead. Sackey and Dibski (1994) argue that many principals do not possess the complex skills they need in order to cope and successfully run their schools. Christie (2010) also points out that before 1994 there were no formal qualifications for principals and even the new government did not prioritise professionalisation of school principals, instead focusing on governance in schools.

The study sought to explore leadership practices that contribute to the success of the schools. The study also sought to understand their success stories as a result of the experience. I hold the view that success in schools lies in good quality leadership. McLaughlin and Talbert (2006), cited in Fullan (2010),

endorse the claim when they say that the principal is central for success and that they are in a strategic position to promote or inhibit the development of a successful teacher/ learning community. Leithwood, Aitken and Jantzi (2006a) further say: "There is not a single documented case of a school successfully turning around its pupil achievement trajectory in the absence of talented leadership."

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

South Western Township (SOWETO) is at the heart of Gauteng Province and the largest township in South Africa. The influx to the city from rural and other parts of the continent further contribute towards overcrowding in many of the Soweto classrooms. As a result of the influx, Soweto schools are further faced with the challenge of multilingualism. The central significance of my study came as a result of Soweto being the biggest township in South Africa, yet little is known about leadership practices of these principals. Each secondary school has approximately one thousand two hundred learners, giving the township about sixty four thousand learners. The secondary schools serve a large proportion of the population of South Africa. Not much is known about these principals and how, why or what they do. It is important to hear their stories of success and learn from them. They need to be heard as this reflects their practices and experiences.

Township principals interact with different structures in their community, policy teachers, learners and school governing bodies. Their experience can have a positive contribution towards policy formulation and the body of knowledge, as well as that of other principals. Principals of these schools need to be heard, especially because they are beating the odds in an environment that is challenged. I was interested in hearing their success story, how they negotiated their time. The study will contribute to the body of knowledge that will inform principals who want to turn their schools around and the policy makers, as well as educational researchers. It was the study that sought to find answers for the community of Soweto.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

In spite of all the challenges that township schools are faced with, there are schools in the township which consistently perform well despite the poor socio-economic status of the township. Not much is known about these schools that beat the odds; how these principals manage to stay on top; their leadership practices; and why they make choices they make. School principals are faced with the challenge of changing their school, impacting on the community as well as leading their schools towards success. More so, South African leaders have received little or no capacity or training to lead their schools. Christie et al (2010) argue that there were no formal qualifications for leaders before 1994 and neither did the democratic government prioritise the professionalization of school principals, but focused on governance in schools.

AIMS AND OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study was to explore leadership practices that contribute towards the success of a school.

The objectives, therefore, were to:

- Explore how leaders lead and manage their schools.
- Understand leadership practices of successful school principals.
- Understand how principals negotiate their professional identity in the school.

MAIN RESEARCH QUESTION

The following research question guided the study:

What are the leadership practices that contribute towards the success of a school?

CRITICAL QUESTIONS

The sub-questions include the following:

- How does the principal lead and manage the school, and why do they manage the way they do?
- What leadership practices contribute to the success of the well-performing schools?
- How do the principals negotiate their professional identity in the school?

STRUCTURE OF THE REPORT

Chapter 1: Background and orientation

The current chapter gives the introduction to the study by looking at changes in the South Africa education system as a result of the end of apartheid. The chapter further looks at the rationale of the study, its significance, statement of the problem, aims and objectives, main research question and critical questions.

Chapter 2: Literature Review and the Theoretical Framework

This chapter reviews local and international literature on successful school leadership. Operational terms are defined. Further, the study presents the theoretical framework.

Chapter 3: Research design and methodology

This chapter provides a description of the research process, the research design, research methods and methodology, as well as criteria and justification for selection and description of the instrument.

Chapter 4: Data analysis and presentation

The chapter analyses the results of the study and provides the research findings.

Chapter 5: Emerging themes from the data

This chapter discusses conclusions of the study in relation to the findings. The chapter identifies patterns and trends as well as interprets the study in terms of research questions and literature review.

Chapter 6: Summary, conclusions and recommendations

This chapter presents the summary and concluding remarks, as well as limitations and recommendations of the study.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Introduction

This chapter comprises a review of local and international research on school leadership, given the “growing interest and the international perspectives on school leadership practices”, Hillinger & Heck (1996). More specifically, the chapter examines the contribution made by the body of research on existing patterns of school leadership practices in disadvantaged communities. It begins by defining the concepts leadership and management as the central issue of this study, followed by the literature on successful school leadership. The study aimed at understanding the leadership practice of two performing schools in Soweto Township.

The chapter makes two claims: Firstly, that “Schools that make a difference are led by a principal who makes a significant and measureable contribution.” Secondly, “Schools that work against the odds exhibit inner capacities in terms of teaching and learning which are supported by quality leadership and management as well as commitment and collaboration of staff.”

The former claim is supported by Sammons (1999) who says there is no improving school that does not have a principal who is good at leading improvement. While Bush and Glover (2009); Fullan (2007), Research in Education Leadership (2003) and Chi-Kin Lee & Dimmock (1999), all assert that successful school leaders exhibits good quality skills that contribute towards making the school a success. While Bush and Heystek (2006) support the latter claim, they further argue that the effect on student outcomes is achieved through direct impact on instructional organisation and culture.

The ultimate goal of schools as organisations is to provide teaching and learning. Schools therefore need strong leadership to achieve the set goals. The core purpose of principalship, according to the South African Standard for School Leadership, is to provide leadership and management in all areas of the school to enable the creation and support of the conditions under which high quality

teaching and learning takes place and which promotes the highest possible standards of learner achievements.

It is argued that principals have a direct responsibility to ensure that teaching and learning does occur in the school and that there is learner achievement (see Bush et al, 2007). Principals can only effect this by being involved in curriculum planning, classroom teaching and by becoming instructional leaders. This implies that learning is prioritised while monitoring and evaluating its effectiveness is done. The view is further supported by Robinson (2007: 21) when he stresses that the impact on student outcomes is likely to be greater where there is direct leader involvement in the oversight of, and participation in, curriculum planning and co-ordination and teacher learning and professional development.

The Ministerial Report (2007), entitled "Schools that work points towards leadership as a shared entity and that schools in challenging contexts exhibit inner capacities in terms of teaching and learning which are supported by quality leadership and management, as well as the commitment and collaboration of staff. According to Harris and Thomson (2006), more recent evidence highlights, however, that not all schools in challenging circumstances have the internal capacity to support leadership in this form. In this regard, the literature was reviewed with the purpose of exploring what makes the two secondary schools in this study to achieve. The literature explored both the empirical studies and theoretical literature.

In order to establish a foundation for the study, the first section of the empirical studies was informed by Harris and Chapman (2002)'s eight strategies found in effective principals: (1) Improving the environment; (2) Generating positive relationships; (3) Providing a clear vision and high expectations; (4) Collaboration; (5) Teaching and Learning; (6) Dispersing leadership; (7) Engaging the community; (8) Evaluating innovation. The last section will unveil the following leadership theories: (a) Transformational/ Transactional leadership; (b) Instructional/ Pedagogical leadership; (c) Distributed leadership. This chapter takes Harris and Chapman's work (2002) on the eight strategies further. The strategies are discussed to understand whether principals in the selected Soweto schools did employ these strategies.

THE CONCEPT OF LEADERSHIP

The study focused on principals as leaders and put emphasis on their leadership practices that contribute towards a school's success. Even though there is no clear definition of the concept, the following definition was used for the purpose of the study. Bush (2007); Leithwood and Jantzi (1999); and Cuban (1998), define leadership as a way of influencing others' actions to achieve the desired ends. They go on to say: 'Leaders shape the goals, motivation and actions of others.' This definition suggests that influence plays a key role in leadership. This implies that a leader that is not able to exert influence over subordinates is not a leader. The definition suggests that leaders need others to achieve their purpose and goals.

Stoll and Fink (1996) used the concept of 'invitational leadership'. To the authors, leadership is about communicating invitational messages to individuals and a group and interact in order to build and act on a shared and involving vision of enhanced educational experiences of pupils (p.109). The leadership definition is relevant to the study in that principals need to influence staff positively to produce desired outcomes. Some principals do not teach, but use influence and give support to get the required results.

Heystek (2007) states that the concepts of leadership and management are used interchangeably in South African school leadership literature. Management is a mechanism for achieving a hands-on approach. According to Bush (2007), management is maintaining efficient and effective current organisational arrangements. The author stresses the importance of both dimensions and attaches no special value to either, since different contexts call for varied responses. School principals are key figures in both functions. They are supposed to exhibit both the roles of bringing change as well as maintaining efficiency and effectiveness in the organisation. In addition, South African principals are supposed to carry administration duties, such as financial, manage resources, learners, parents and the community. Fullan (2010) sees this role as overloading, making it impossible to fulfil the promise of widespread sustained reform (p.156).

Excellent leadership is key to creating excellent schools. Research has proved that in excellent schools you are likely to find an excellent principal. These principals lead by influencing others to achieve set goals and visions. As leaders, principals support teachers and help students succeed. Research acknowledges that there is little effect of leadership on student learning. This effect is believed to be educationally significant since principals promote vision and goals, ensuring that resources and processes are in place to enable teachers to teach. Leithwood and Riehl (2003) advance five major claims about successful leadership:

- Leadership has significant effects on student learning, second only to the effects of the quality of curriculum and teachers' instruction.
- Currently, administrators and teacher leaders provide most of the leadership in schools, but other potential sources of leadership exist.
- A core set of leadership practices form the basis of successful leadership and are valuable in almost all educational contexts.
- Successful school leaders respond productively to challenges and opportunities created by the accountability-oriented policy context in which they work.
- Successful school leaders respond productively to the opportunities and challenges of educating diverse groups of students.

The five claims provide a lens that can be used to understand the work of the three Soweto secondary school principals on how they lead and manage their schools towards learner achievement.

MacLaughlin and Talbert (2006) cited in Fullan (2010), advocate principals as crucial role players towards school success. The role of managing teaching and learning is evident in curriculum delivery. The researcher claims that it was still not clear in many township schools: how and by whom the curriculum was led and managed. Leithwood and Jantzi (1999), cited in Chi-Kin Lee et al (1999), argue that the original belief concerning principals as the primary or most important instructional leader requires rethinking, while Morrison (1995) in the same book, argues that deputy principals in primary schools are desirable for curriculum leadership. O'Neill and Kitson (1996) emphasise heads of department or subject heads as responsible for managing quality teaching and learning.

Bush and Glover (2009) acknowledge this role as being the core responsibility of the principal, but they further argue that principals should not carry this role alone; the school management team should work as a team with the principal. Though the principal could be assisted in curriculum leadership and management, Glickman (1989) in Chi-Kin Lee (1999) argues that a principal should be a leader of teachers in the curriculum, not the sole curriculum leader.

The role of principals is not only crucial towards curriculum leadership and management, but they are key role players who are invested with power. Through power, principals are able to acquire a leadership style deemed appropriate for leading the organisation. Blase and Anderson (1995) describe the two styles of leadership as closed or open. 'Closed' is characterised by an unwillingness to share power. The closed leaders are inaccessible, less supportive, more egocentric and more insecure, while open leaders are described as willing to share power. The open leaders are honest, communicative, participative and collegial.

Blase and Anderson (1995) point out that leadership style is often adopted by achieving larger goals and how they perceive their social role as leaders. A principal could either adopt a transactional, transformational or a distributed approach, depending on the leader's vision, the school's culture and where he intends to take the school.

Burns (1978) cited in Blase and Anderson (1995), defines 'transactional' as a type of leadership that relies heavily on contractual conditions of employment, disciplinary codes and reward structures, while 'transformational' leadership is oriented towards fundamental change.

INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP

According to the South Africa Standard for School Leadership, the core purpose of principalship is to provide leadership and management in all areas of the school. This enables the creation and support of conditions under which high quality teaching and learning takes place and which promote the highest possible standards of learner achievement. However, school principals can only achieve their core purpose by exhibiting the leadership model that will help achieve the

required outcomes. The following models are instructional, distributive and transformational model.

Although instructional leadership is a model, not a theory, it became a popular and acknowledged model in the early '80s. Bush (2003), Southworth (2002) and Bush and Glover (2002) inform us that the instructional leadership model is important because it targets the school's central activities, i.e. teaching and learning. Southworth (2002) elucidates further when he says that the instructional model is not only concerned with the supervision of teachers in classroom teaching but also includes their professional growth and that of the learners.

Although principals are the main accountable figures in learner outcomes, some of the work should be delegated to other team players and teachers. Grant (2006) supports this argument by saying that leading teaching and learning is also a responsibility of the teacher in every classroom. She identifies three factors that are likely to promote teacher leadership:

- A collaborative culture with participatory decision-making and vision sharing.
- A set of values, which assists in developing this collaborative culture.
- Distributed leadership on the part of the principal and formal management teams.

DISTRIBUTED LEADERSHIP

Scholars such as Spillane (2005) argue that leadership involves multiple people rather than individual attributes. Spillane (2005) defines distributed leadership as the interaction between a leader, people and their situation. Spillane further states that the model involves multiple of people in the organisation, some in formal leadership positions while others are not. In the author's view, leadership is not something done to followers, but the interaction between them that is critical to leadership practice. Spillane's view is supported by Fullan (2010) when he says that effective leaders share and develop leadership among teachers (p. 156).

Harris and Muijs (2003) support Spillane when they point out that there is a need to broker and mediate relationships between colleagues, for some surrender of power by senior leaders, who should imbued with a collaborative philosophy, and for a transformation of schools into professional learning communities. Grant (2006) adds that schools can no longer be led by a lone figure at the top of the hierarchy. The only way that schools can meet the challenges is to tap into the potential of all staff members and allow teachers to experience a sense of ownership and inclusivity and to lead aspects of the change process. The scope is broad and may include leadership around curriculum issues, assessment, teaching and learning, community and parent participation, school vision building, networking, the development of partnerships and so on (p. 514).

TRANSFORMATIONAL AND TRANSACTIONAL LEADERSHIP

Blase and Anderson (1995) argue that leadership style is adopted as a means of achieving organisational goals. The goals represent the leader's vision and values. Transformational leaders advocate moving the organisation towards changing the status quo. They are relationship-oriented towards change, and concerned with the end product. On the other hand, transactional leaders advocate maintaining the status quo. The latter leaders view themselves as public servants who are supposed to maintain and improve selected aspects that may need urgent improvement. They are largely oriented towards exchange relationships between leaders and followers, and their major concern is loyalty and productivity to the organisation (p. 16). Transformational leaders not only manage structure, but purposefully impact on it in order to change it. Harris et al (2003) view transformational leaders as culture builders (p. 16-17).

SITUATIONAL LEADERSHIP

Leadership requires one to be pro-active and dynamic. Effective leaders have no fixed leadership approach, but switch styles to suit situations. Situational leadership is an approach that leaders adopt in order to match a situation or circumstances facing the school at different times. Davidoff and Lazarus (1997) argue that the challenge is to develop the sensitivity and wisdom to use the right

style of leadership at the right time. They further say that at times you become directive, at times negotiating within a consultative framework, and at times delegating control and responsibility to others (p. 38). There is a significant body of published work that describes the way in which principals have run schools that have formerly failed and restored them to become successful schools.

2.1 PROVIDING A CLEAR VISION AND HIGH EXPECTATIONS

First, they ensure that as effective leaders they are highly driven by the dream and personal conviction that they see beyond the naked eye. These leaders lead through their vision, which they impact on stakeholders as common organisational goals and which shape the school's programme of teaching and learning. Beare, Caldwell & Millikan (1989) argue that a vision should be communicated in such a manner that it becomes part of the day-to-day activities of the school. Kotter (1996.p5) says effective business vision regularly has an almost mundane quality, usually consisting of ideas that are already well known. Bush (2003) indicates that a vision is increasingly regarded as a necessary component of effective leadership. Harris (2009) goes on to say leadership that lacks a vision or common purpose can be a contributory factor to a downward spiral of performance amongst staff in schools in a high poverty context (p.6). To the author, re-establishing direction and regaining staff confidence is essential if subsequent changes are to be successfully implemented.

Muijs, Harris, Chapman, Stoll and Russ (2004) assert that school culture is one of the most widely cited elements in improving schools, but they also acknowledge that it is the most problematic (p.159). What is crucial for school leaders to understand is the existing culture of the school in order to have a clear vision of the direction you intend to take. Failure to understand the culture often creates problems in turning the school around, especially in economically deprived areas. While Harris (2009) believes that by putting a well-defined vision and established values in place, can raise staff morale and pupil expectations and communicate a sense of direction for the school.

2.2 A FOCUS ON TEACHING AND LEARNING

The study of principals that changed their schools from a list of poorly performing schools found that the common denominator was the focus on student academic achievements as their first priority: Muijs et al (2004); Day (2005); Harris (2009); Mazzeo (2003). Harris (2009) further highlights that the quality of leadership is a major contributory factor of this success. These leaders are committed to the belief that every child can learn and succeed. While Mazzeo (2003), elucidates further that school leaders provide focus and direction to curriculum and teaching and manage the organisation efficiently to support student and adult learning. The said focus, according to the study conducted in Poland, is aimed at building a student's sense of responsibility for appropriate behaviour and creating an environment in which students are likely to behave well (a safe and orderly environment).

According to the South African Standard for Leadership, the purpose of principalship is to provide leadership and management in all areas of the school to enable the creation and support of conditions under which high quality teaching and learning takes place and which promotes the highest possible standards of learner achievement. However, school principals can only achieve their core purpose through exhibiting an instructional leadership model. As instructional leaders, they should ensure that learning and teaching does take place and that teachers are in class, on time, teaching, while learners do their part. Harris (2009) states that the quality of leadership determines the motivation of teachers and the quality of teaching in the classroom.

2.3 LEADERSHIP

Research advocates leadership as key towards school success: Sammons (1999). As part of bringing success to their schools, these leaders realise that they play a vital role in driving the school change. First, they moved towards a participative form of leadership where they involved everyone to come on board. Donald et al maintain that an effective school is one in which both leadership and management capacities are developed in all members of the school community through ongoing personal and professional development and support.

Neuman and Simmon (2000), on the other hand, call for everyone associated with schools should take responsibility for student achievement and assume leadership roles in all areas in which they are skilled. The participative form of leadership was seen by these successful school leaders as a powerful tool to facilitate change in education. Leithwood and Menzies (1998), David (1989) and Cotton (1992), all argue that the distributive model will impact directly on teaching and learning while the involvement will create an environment that could lead to effective student learning. According to the authors, the involvement of teachers will result in them making informed decisions while working towards understanding student needs better.

Participative leadership, according to successful schools, played a significant role in developing a democratic society where staff interacts with learners and the situation. They find that teachers were willing to co-operate and commit to a decision that affects them. Through the distribution of power, the school became more effective while the spirit of collegiality, teamwork and respect for each other's views and trust amongst staff increase. In the same vein, Ortiz and Ogawa (2000), Leithwood and Menzies (1998) and David (1989), all state that the participative model reduces tension, raises teacher morale and enthusiasm and creates a sense of ownership and accountability for performance among stakeholders.

2.4 CHARACTER OF A LEADER

A study by Sidhu (2009) conducted in Malaysia on leadership characteristics of an excellent principal, shows that a leader's character plays a major role towards school success. The study shows characteristics such as loyalty, humility, confidence, warmth and caring as key in enabling the leader to maintain a cool and calm disposition at all times. The study is further supported by Harris and Hadfield (2001) in their study on twelve schools in England. They concluded that good leaders are informed; they communicate a clear set of personal and educational values which represent their moral purposes for the school (p. 53).

2.5 LEADERSHIP APPROACHES AND STRATEGIES

The study of successful principals reveals that leadership requires a number of approaches. It shows that effective leaders exercise distributive, transformational or instructional leadership practices (Harris & Chapman, 2002; Harris, 2002 and Prew, 2007). Other studies point to situational leadership as a means to bring about school success. They base their argument on the fact that situations in the institution differ every day; that requires a skilled and flexible leader who is willing to adapt to the changes.

Harris (2002) views the people-centred approach as investing in the staff. This he says works better in an environment where staff morale is low and individual self-esteem had been eroded. The leader promotes staff development that does not focus on educational needs, but on the needs of the individual. The development needs are inclusive of the non-teaching staff. While all approaches are important, the people-centred approach appeals to me as people become loyal to a leader who takes interest in them.

2.6 RELATIONSHIPS

Fullan (2002) states that the single factor common to successful change is that relationships improve (p.18). To the author, if relationships improve, the school becomes better. Findings in studies conducted by Prew (2007); Harris and Chapman (2002) and Harris (2002), all show that creating space for stakeholders to participate in educational affairs not only improves relationships but increases learner performance. Prew (2007) further extends relationships to the district and education ministry. The development of relationships is crucial, especially in schools in challenging environments where crime and burglary is rife. The involvement of the community in school affairs and projects promote ownership and, as a result, promote safety in the school and ends vandalism outside the school. Prew (2007) also says that the involvement of parents in schools should not be always educational, but in school projects and committees, as this will not make parents feel threatened due to their lack of literacy skills.

Other researchers stressed that the focus on teaching and learning can be encouraged by training staff in specific teaching methods, Muijs et al (2004). According to Harris (2009), staff development should be consistently and vigorously promoted, whether through in-service training, visits to other schools or peer support schemes. Harris further suggests that development should not focus only on school needs but individual needs as well. Gurr (2005) suggests the way of promoting staff development is when the principal becomes a curriculum leader and a resource person on curriculum issues. The knowledge of curriculum is key in giving the leader credibility because he walks the talk. Instructional leadership practice was one of the models practised that contributed to school success (Day 2005; Jacobson, Johnson, Ylimak and Giles 2005).

Jacobson and his colleagues further suggest sharing teaching experiences by observing and discussing each other's teaching methods and philosophies, the principal's participation in workshops alongside teachers, read and discuss professional journal articles and research ways of improving learning as part of teacher development. Day (2005) argues that teamwork is a means of drawing upon and building a fund of social capital, in order to create a store of shared experiences and to foster individual and collective capacity to respond to change. This emphasises mutual responsibility, while feedback is essential in monitoring progress.

Jacobson et al (2005) believe that mentoring is crucial in building morale, where teachers assume leadership responsibilities for committee work and faculty meetings. This can go as far as encouraging selected teachers to pursue leadership preparation programmes.

Effective leadership is about capacity building. Harris (2009), Muijs et al (2004), Gurr (2006), and Day (2005), all cite capacity building as the intervention aimed at improving teaching and learning. They further suggest that capacity building should be personal, professional, and organisational, as well as community focused, and it should be continuous or long-term. While Bush and Heystek's (2006) survey of principals shows that the aspect of human resources in South African schools was perceived as a major training need. Lumby (2003) argues that teacher motivation can be effected by the multiple changes and by the

“wretched physical conditions “in many schools (p. 161). Lumby adds that “if motivation and morale are low, then teaching and learning suffer”.

Muijs et al (2004) argue that the ‘teacher as a learner’ is central to school capacity, teachers’ practices being the key to school improvement and school effectiveness. Teachers are, however, not working in isolation, but are influenced by their interactions with others, their pupils, the school culture and its management (p.161). Jacobson et al (2005) took it further when they spoke about an ‘enabling principle’. In their view, accountability is a way to focus teachers, parents, and students, and also to raise expectations for improved student achievement (p.612).

2.7 COMMUNITY BUILDING

Research reinforced the importance of schools connecting with the community. Successful leaders in the study revealed the importance of community building as a factor towards school improvement. Fullan (2007) is cited pointing out that “Nowhere is the two-way street of learning more in disrepair, in need of social reconstruction, than in the relationship among parents, communities, and their schools” (p.56). Fullan further suggests that teachers and the principals need to reach out to parents and the communities, especially when initial conditions do not support such efforts. The view is supported by the studies conducted by Alma (2009) and Muijs et al (2004) who mentioned parental involvement as crucial to school improvement.

These studies found the most successful schools were the ones with very strong community outreach programmes, including links with local business and parents. The interaction with parents and the community engenders trust while making the school understand the external forces that impact on the school. ‘Family school’, as Harris (2009) calls it, and the community relationships directly affect student outcomes, hence the need to connect with the community is of paramount importance to the success of the school. Coleman (1998) widens the discussion by saying, “When the development of student responsibility occurs it is a function of the attitudes and practices of all the three triad members. According to the author, the vital elements are: (a) for teachers, beliefs about parental involvement, student capacities, and the importance of deliberate

teaching of responsibility in classrooms; (b) for students, communication with parents about school, confidence in the ability to do work, valuing school for its importance for the future, and collaboration with teachers; (c) for parents, valuing school, an 'invitational' teacher attitude, and communication with students about school (p.14).

WHAT STRATEGIES THESE LEADERS USE THAT LEAD TO SUCCESS

Harris (2002) asserts that, in most studies, the core message about successful leadership in schools shows that most principals were relationship-orientated. These school leaders believed that good relationships are crucial for the school's success and will do everything in their power to ensure that relationships are maintained. The focus on student achievement is a clear indication that school success relies on principals being instructional leaders at the initial stage of the reform. Jacobson et al (2005) point out that principals in their study went as far as de-privatising the practice by using peer coaching as a way of encouraging teachers to share experiences by observing and discussing each other's teaching methods and philosophies.

Modelling and mentoring is one of the key principles of instructional leadership. In the study by Jacobson and colleagues, leading by example was seen as a way of modelling instructional leadership. For these leaders, building capacity was seen as critical to school improvement and effectiveness. Their point of departure therefore was to create the conditions that would lead to higher performance for students, as well as improving the quality of teaching and learning to their staff. Harris and Chapman (2002) assert that where a school is faced with under-performance, teachers feel de-valued and de-skilled and become the prime focus of blame. Their self-esteem becomes low and their morale is eroded by successive criticism of the school (p.9). They therefore suggest that a focus should be on maintaining, as well as motivating, staff by setting high expectations. Consistent and vigorous staff development and focus on development is of direct benefit to the individual.

Their view is evident in the various studies of schools in challenging circumstances in Europe where most school leaders used a people orientation approach to bring functionality (NCSL 2002; Muijs et al 2004). Harris and

Chapman (2002) refer to the above approach as an 'emotionally intelligent school'. It is when a school places a premium on the quality of relationships and invests in individuals, rather than systems or structures. Their view on relationships was an endorsement that teachers were their most important asset and that, particularly in difficult times, it is important to maintain their self-worth by valuing them: Harris and Chapman (2002).

The second step was adopting a leadership style that was inclusive in a way that includes people. The distributive approach was used as a leadership style that invests in others. Harris and Chapman (2002) state that "if schools are to become better at providing learning for students, then they must be better at providing opportunities for teachers to innovate, develop and learn together. Through the distributive leadership approach, tasks are not the sole responsibility of one person but are shared entirely among the staff: Harris (2008); Harris and Chapman (2002); Gurr (2005). Muijs et al (2005) confirmed that they did not find one particular leadership style in improving schools in disadvantaged circumstances, but noted that there was shared decision-making and collegiality. Harris and Chapman (2001) reported that leaders adapt their style to particular circumstances and external pressures, with heads being able to adopt different styles to suit their circumstances. Harris and Colleague acknowledge the recent move towards the realisation of distributed and democratic forms of leadership as has occasionally been found to be the factor that has led towards school success.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The aim of this section was to develop a theoretical framework for successful school leadership practices and it was informed by what Leithwood & Riehl (2003) identified as the four core practices of successful school leaders: (1) Setting direction, i.e. helping to develop a set of shared goals that encourage a sense of common purpose; (2) Developing people, i.e. influencing behaviour towards the achievement of shared goals through the provision of intellectual stimulation, individual and collective support; and (3) Redesigning the organisation, i.e. facilitating the work of the school community in achieving shared goals; and (4) managing the instructional programme. Leithwood and

Riehl (2005) go further to state that these core practices are necessary, but insufficient, for success, regardless of context. These practices were discussed to understand whether successful principals in the selected Soweto secondary schools do exhibit these practices.

3.1 PROVIDING A CLEAR VISION AND SETTING DIRECTION

Since leadership is about change, setting a direction is fundamental for the leader. The leader creates a vision and strategies for the organisation and shares it with school community. The vision is aimed at shaping the programme of the school, while bringing a culture of teaching and learning. In order to achieve set goals, the vision must first be clear and then communicated to all the stakeholders to share. Expectations and timelines should be set, i.e. having a clear plan on when the school wants to achieve set goals. Kotter (1996) says effective business vision regularly has an almost mundane quality, usually consisting of ideas that are already well known (p.5). Harris (2009, .p6) believes that lack of direction or common purpose can be a contributory factor to a downward spiral of performance amongst staff in schools in a high poverty context. Harris further asserts that re-establishing direction and regaining staff confidence is essential if subsequent changes are to be successfully implemented.

The importance of a visionary leadership is further endorsed by Minister Motshega in her statement in 2010 when she says that a good school has a good principal who has a vision for the school and gets others to buy into that vision. She further says, this leader leads by example and encourages learners to always strive to do better.

Fullan (1992b) is more critical about visionary leaders. According to the author, a vision may damage rather than improve the school as it may be misleading. To the author, a high-powered, charismatic principal who radically transforms a school in four to five years can be blinding and misleading as a role model. Fullan claims that such schools decline when a leader leaves the organisation (p.19). I argue that visionary leaders plan the direction which they want their school to take. I draw from Sterling and Davidoff (2002) who in their view believe that leaders need to be able to dream, to imagine different solutions to problems

and different possibilities for the school's future (p.16). While Bush (2003) indicates that a vision is increasingly regarded as a necessary component of effective leadership.

3.2 DEVELOPING PEOPLE

Human resource is crucial to school effectiveness. Davidoff and Lazarus (2002.p.144) highlight their importance in effective schools and further indicate that all human resource of the school, together with parents and community, plays a crucial role in the school's development. They further suggest that the schools should utilise these resources to their full potential for optimum results. Effective leaders have adopted a people-centred approach. These leaders have acknowledged the role of teachers in improving in the school and also realised that influence can only be achieved if relationships are good. A leader should spend a great deal of time creating opportunities to develop and maintain good relationships.

Harris and Chapman (2002) believe that poor relationships result in a negative culture which is characterised by low expectations and a high degree of mistrust. While Fullan (2000) says that powerful teaching and learning depends on a range of internal relationships that need to be engaged with in schools and successful change cannot simply be mandated. Leadership is important; a teacher's capacity to carry out desired changes is a factor to consider. Positive relationships promote collaboration, openness and honesty in the school. A good leader shows high respect for staff and has a genuine concern for their needs, while holding a strong belief in their ability to succeed. Opportunities to encourage participation and involvement, whereby teachers work in teams and across teams, are crucial.

Mark and Louis (1999) claim that building capacity for the organisational learning calls for change of structure within the school. Structures do not refer to the formal buildings only, but also to formal relationships and authority. They say the two have an influence in shaping the school culture since bureaucratic structures are not empowering: they do not allow participation, innovation and creativity by other members of the organisation.

Harris and Chapman (2002) assert that where a school faces under-performance, teachers feel de-valued and de-skilled as they become the focus of blame. Continuous development and motivation of staff and learners is crucial for leadership. This development is promoted through in-service training, networking, peer support, and even encouraging teachers to register for further learning. Good leaders create leaders amongst the staff. Donald, Lazarus & Lolwana (2002) say: "An effective school is one which both leadership and management capacities are developed in all members of the school community through ongoing personal and professional development and support." While Kotter (1996) maintains that more people are needed to provide leadership in the complex organisations that dominate our world today, he further suggests that we need more people to develop the cultures that will create that leadership.

District is one of the essential components that contributes towards school improvement and effectiveness. Creating good relationships with high authority often helps the principal to request subject specialists for assistance and giving support to staff. Prew (2003) argues that the education system in developing countries is often weak and fractured. He advocates that the district should serve the schools effectively. However, there should be trust between the parties, with the district coming to offer support and development, not as critics who bully and threaten teachers.

3.3 MANAGING TEACHING AND LEARNING

Effective leaders understand the crucial role they play towards school success. They also know that they are responsible for their school's achievements. Fullan (2002) and Sergiovanni (2001) assert that school leaders are held responsible for how well teachers teach and how much students learn. These leaders therefore will ensure that they promote a vision that is aimed at improving both the teacher's ability to teach as well as motivating learners to learn. Successful principals adopt the instructional core as their leadership strategy. As instructional leaders, they hold high expectations for both teachers and learners and will ensure that the learners' progress is monitored, while supporting, mentoring and modelling staff.

Research by Yukl (1994), Bass (1990) and Hopkins (2002) all reveal that school leadership is most successful when it is focused on teaching and learning, and that it is necessary, though not sufficient, for school improvement, that leadership should take different forms in different contexts and should use various mechanisms through which school leadership achieves its effects.

Managing teaching and learning is the best strategy that could help improve a school faced with challenges. Teaching and learning, or the instructional model, is based on the premise that principals are in the driving seat of the curriculum instruction in the school. The principal is to be involved in all curriculum issues of their school, including assessment, mentoring, modelling and monitoring: Chi-Kin Lee and Dimmock (1999); Blase & Blase (1999). The instructional concept is linked to the managerial role, whereby the principal deals with the day-to-day running of the school. The model is concerned with teaching and learning and professional learning of teachers and student growth. Southworth (2002) believes that the model will bring school success, but further advice that it be implemented at the initial stage of the educational change, as putting pressure on ineffective teachers can make the situation worse.

Teaching and learning are the core purpose of the school. As such, principals are entrusted with the major role of bringing effectiveness to the school. Since schools in challenging circumstance are ineffective, the principal should first improve a situational factor which ensures that teaching and learning does take place. Research evidence constantly proves that quality leadership determines the motivation of teachers and the quality of teaching in the classroom (Harris 2009, p4).

Bush and Glover (2002), Bush (2003) and Southworth (2002) inform us that the model is important because it targets the school's central activities – teaching and learning. Fullan (2007) refers to the model as the theory of action. To the author, the model is a critical resource in the professional guidance and instructional direction of a school, as it gives more opportunity to spend more time in classrooms, engaging teachers in conversations about instructions, and to spend less time on administrative, logistics and financial matters (p.167). However Leithwood and his colleagues (1999) argue that the instructional model

assumes that leaders have both expert knowledge and formal authority to exert influence on teachers. They further argue that the model underestimates other aspects of the school life, which they refer as second order change. Hill (2001) denies the assumptions and points out that school leaders may lack sufficient knowledge of teaching and learning and advocates including it in leadership development programmes.

Due to the criticism the instructional model received, some of which claimed that it impedes the principles of democracy for equal participation of teachers in curriculum issues, Marks and Printy (2003) designed a new model called the instructional-transformational model. They further maintained that shared instructional leadership entails the collaboration of principals and teachers in curriculum, instruction and assessment (p.371). The integrated model sees both the leaders and teachers as partners in the curriculum issues; they should share responsibilities for staff development, curriculum development and supervision of instructions. In this model, the principal becomes a leader of instruction but not the sole leader. According to the authors, transformational is seen as the pre-requisite for instructional leadership, but shared instructional leadership is not transformational leadership.

Earley and Weindling (2004.p.15) further indicate that in the integrated model the transformational approach to leadership has been complemented by the instructional leadership model. The new model assumes equal participation and involvement of teachers in the affairs that concern them. The model accord teachers space in order to become innovative and make meaningful contributions. An effective leader will utilise the model as a way of encouraging the principle of democracy in the school, while using his/her emotional intelligence to hold teachers accountable for their actions, also instilling an atmosphere of trust amongst the staff.

Leithwood and Mascall (2008) support the view of collaboration when they point out that collective leadership influences high student achievement and teacher motivation. According to Leithwood and his colleagues, leadership is not for a few on top of the organisational hierarchy, but for every person in every level. The same view is held by Fullan (2002) when he says that no organisation will

flourish for long on the actions of the top leaders alone (p.20). While MacNeil and McClannahan (2005) add that single individuals cannot lead schools to success; other members can take on the responsibility for leadership (p.1).

3.4 REDESIGNING THE ORGANISATION

Schools in challenging circumstances are victims of socio-economic factors. As a result, contextual factors seem to be the major challenge that affects these schools. Retention of good quality staff is another challenge as principals of these schools fail to provide good staff with incentives to retain them.

An effective leader starts by creating the structure of the school and ensures a conducive environment where order and safety prevail. Hargreaves and Fink (2000) believe that structure and culture are interdependent, and therefore inseparable. They further say that separating the two is like putting new wine in an old bottle. Changing the structure of the organisation, whereby the immediate environment improves, symbolises real purpose and demonstrates to staff, learners and parents that the school is taking a new direction. Fidler (1997) asserts that the organisational structure is at the heart of every organisation, and as thus, contributes to organisational effectiveness. Heneveld and Graig (1996) argue that high achieving schools have a safe and orderly environment that is conducive to learning. Structure, within a school context, consists of ways in which individual and team contributions are combined within organisational units, such as departments and committees; how these relate to one another; and lines of responsibility and accountability within and between these units; while procedures refers to the rules, regulations and methods whereby these structures relate to one another: Davidoffs and Lazarus (1997.p.26).

Changing the structure of the school will also mean putting policies in place and ensuring that they are followed and there are repercussions for offenders. This means that teachers adhere to the core purpose of schooling and, as a result, they are in class on time, i.e. time on task. The school follows rules and regulations set by the employer and ensures that the school operates on a set of values and principles set by the school. Discipline is reinforced to both teachers and learners while the school ensures that teachers and learners attend their classes regularly. Communication and decision-making are some of the crucial

aspects that lead to school outcomes. South African schools, as a result of the country's reform, have advocated democracy in the schooling system. The values and principles of democracy are founded on the primacy of transparency, equity, efficiency, equality and transformation. Effective principals adopt a democratic leadership approach and distribute power and authority to the rest of the staff members.

Participation increases communication and transparency amongst the group as they share ideas as well as create healthy relationships in the school. Teachers feel part of the change and own the process as their input is considered and welcomed. Neuman and Simmons (2000) call for everyone associated with schools to take leadership responsibility for student achievement and to assume leadership roles in areas in which they are competent and skilled. While Donald et al maintain that an effective school is one where both leadership and management capacities are developed in all members of the school community through ongoing personal and professional development and support.

According to Davidoff and Lazarus (1997.p.30), technical support is one aspect of school life which is often ignored, to the detriment of the school's development. To ensure effective learning and teaching, it is the principal's responsibility to make sure that the school has resources and that both learners and teachers have access to its utilities. Heneveld and Graig (1996) maintain that school heads are expected to see to it that resources are available to provide sufficient support to teachers, adequate learning materials, and well maintained facilities. Davidoff and Lazarus (1997) say that technical support is important because the teaching and learning function of the school, which constitutes its core purpose, is dependent on the teachers having access to teaching materials and equipment (p.30). Davidoff and her colleague further advise that precautions should be taken that school facilities promote, rather than hinder, the teaching and learning process (p.130).

According to Sarason (1971) culture is central to educational change. He suggests that, before any changes take place, the school culture should be considered. Foskett and Lumby (2008) see the engagement with culture as a facet of the work of schools and colleges that has been evident since the early

'50s. According to Foskett and his colleagues, leaders should constantly engage on culture for it to reach its core purpose. But Hargreaves argues (2002) that the motive for exploring a culture in a school is to enhance effectiveness while using the culture as an element of improvement.

In order to interact with school culture, effective leaders employ the three major tasks, namely, diagnosing, directing and managing the culture towards a chosen direction. The leader first diagnoses the method or technique of the present culture. He/She then decides the way the present culture should change and implements a strategy for moving the school's culture towards a chosen direction Hargreaves (2002.p.48). Managing school culture is the most difficult task of the three tasks as it requires clear and stable ground.

Lumby (2003) maintains that when motivation and morale are low, learning and teaching suffer. He further says that motivation is a result of the multiple educational changes and the 'wretched physical conditions' many teachers find themselves in. An effective leader creates enabling relations with staff while dispersing leadership and delegating tasks. Fullan (2008a) developed six secrets of change that could assist leaders in managing change: (1) Loving your employees; (2) Connecting peer with purpose; (3) Capacity building; (4) Learning in the workplace; (5) Transparency rule; (6) System learning. The six secrets by Fullan promote collaboration of staff and encourage the principle of democracy.

This chapter has managed to develop a theoretical framework based on Riehl and Leithwood's (2005) four core practices that frame successful school principals. Although these practices are found in successful schools, they should be seen as guidelines, not a blueprint. Transformational leaders should know that schools are different and as thus a one-size-fits-all approach to improve a school will not work Slavin (2005).

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

Introduction

This chapter focused on the research design and methods used in the study. It was a qualitative case study of two secondary schools in Soweto Township. A qualitative approach was adopted due to its concern with understanding the social phenomenon from the participant's perspective, MacMillan & Schumacher (2010. p.11).

Patton (2001. p. 39) maintains that a qualitative study seeks to understand phenomena in a certain setting, where they unfold naturally. Patton describes qualitative research as any kind of research that produces findings not arrived at by means of statistical procedures or other means of quantification. I involved myself as much as possible in the process in order to obtain meaning as to what principals do what they do. Patton (2003. p. 42), cited in Galafshani (2003), supports the notion of the researcher's involvement and immersion in the research when he says that "Real worlds are subject to change, as thus the qualitative researcher should be present during the changes to record an event after and before the change occurs."

Merriam (1998) defined a qualitative case study as "an intensive, holistic description and analysis of a single instance phenomenon, or a social unit" (p. 36). Merriam further notes that a case study researcher gathers as much information as possible with the intention of analysing, interpreting or theorising about the phenomenon. A qualitative method was preferred for its bounded system. Yin (1989) also quantifies a case study as typically involving investigation of a phenomenon for which the boundaries between the phenomenon and its context are not clearly evident. The study purposefully selected two secondary schools in the Soweto Township due to the good performance of the schools.

I believe that the case study method was suitable for capturing the participants' viewpoints, as well as allowing them to have their own perspective. Gall et al, cited in Chi-Kin Lee et al (1999), noted further that the purpose of a case study is to yield a thick description of the phenomenon in a holistic setting by revealing complex relational patterns of data.

The aim of the study was to understand leadership practices that contribute to school success. It was an interpretative strategy suitable for principals to interpret the leadership practices. As a theory-seeking approach, the study sought to understand the context of leadership, the leadership style and approach that was suitable for school leadership.

As the study focused on school principals in previously disadvantaged communities in South Africa, it was specifically located within a low socio-economic, geographic context of secondary schooling in the township. Soweto has sixty four secondary schools and the characteristic features of most of the schools include: irregular attendance by both staff and students; conflictual relationships within schools between principals and teachers and students; discontinuous learning and poor results; and violence, criminality, rape and substance abuse within and around the schools. Yet in the same difficult circumstances, a number of schools managed to survive, Christie & Lingard (2001).

A qualitative approach was preferred because it allowed me to participate in the participant's life; it allowed exploration into the participant's life experiences and what they go through on a daily basis. The strategy allowed me to acquire knowledge of participants which could only be obtained after gaining entry to the participant's life experiences. I found the strategy appropriate in that it allowed me to probe, clarify and see the sincerity of the issues discussed through the facial expression in their responses.

SAMPLING

The sample was a purposeful selection of two secondary schools. Purposive sampling is defined by Scott & Morrison (2007) as sampling to refer to the activities involved in selecting a subset of persons or things from a larger population. Purposive sampling is commonly associated with qualitative

approaches and aims to be both principled and systematic, Scott & Morrison (2007. p.220).

The selection criterion was purposeful to ensure that participants were in the school management team (SMT) and thus in leadership of the school. Selection of teachers was based on their experience in school and the learning area they offer and their highest qualifications. The latter criterion was to ensure whether teachers have subject knowledge, since lack of subject knowledge has been proven by many studies as one of the challenges that contribute towards poor performance in many township schools.

The reason for the focus was based on the fact that it would yield thick descriptions that would provide adequate data for the study, thus getting the thickness of the phenomenon: Yin (1989). As a small sample, it allowed exploration and thus reliable information. The two schools in the study were purposefully selected due to good performance, and they are within the radius of 2 kilometres of each other. Transport constraints and availability were also taken into consideration when choosing the two schools.

They both attract the same learner type and were both established in the '80s. These schools are both in a low socio-economic background, with most parents unemployed. Learner enrolment exceeds one thousand students, with approximately forty teaching staff, one principal, two deputies and eight heads of department. The two school principals happen to both be female, one in her late 60s and the other in her late 40s, and both have postgraduate qualifications.

The purpose was to identify the leadership practices of the two principals that contribute towards school success. Due to the small sample of the study, results would be limited to describing the phenomenon rather than to be generalised to the South African population. The findings may be transferred to schools with a similar context and experiencing poor performance. Transferability refers to applying the findings of my study to contexts similar to the contexts in which they were derived, Scott and Morrison (2007).

DATA COLLECTION

The following people participated in the data collection in both schools, namely the two principals, two deputy principals, four heads of department. All management staff were interviewed with the aim of obtaining rich information since they are in the decision group. The interviews were semi-structured and these were designed with some open-ended questions guiding the process, though this guide was not followed to the letter. Four teachers from each school participated in focus group discussions. The criterion for selection was purposive, and I purposefully chose both the old and the new staff members. The reason for the choice was to have mixed views from both the new and experienced teachers. The focus groups were informally selected, with members sharing similar interests but with different teaching experiences. I believe that the participants in the study were representative of the population. Observations and document analysis were also done.

RESEARCH METHODS

It was qualitative methods of study that sought to explore good leadership practices in challenging contexts. Even though Merriam (2002) states that the characteristic of all forms of qualitative research is to put the researcher as the primary instrument for data collection and analysis, Maxwell (1996) emphasises the coherence of the research in that the method should be a means of answering the research question. The study utilised four data gathering techniques: (a) interviews, (b) focus groups, (c) document analyses, and (d) observations.

INTERVIEWS

The study used a semi-structured interview because it allowed access to where the study was conducted, allowing me to engage with the participants. Semi-structured interviews encourage interviewees to respond open-endedly and 'to a question in his or her own terms' (ibid.). This ensured that adequate information was gathered and questions were clarified. Scott and Morrison (2007. p.133)

state that “Through interviews, participants could yield different kinds of data and explain in detail what they wanted the researcher to capture, while allowing the researcher to probe further and ask for clarification”. As a face-to-face method, it allowed me to see their facial expressions, the sincerity in their response. Note-taking and tape-recording were used to keep records. Tape recordings were used with the participants’ sanction, and for the purpose of analysing the study. The interviews were scheduled for 45 minutes at the school premises, from 14h30 to 15h15.

I chose an interview as a method of gathering data due to its adaptability and the voice that it gives to the participants. Though the method was time-consuming and highly subjective, thus posing a danger of bias, the method, if used by a skilled interviewer who could follow up ideas, probe responses, could provide rich data that no other method could do. Cohen (1976) describes interviews like fishing. It is an activity requiring careful preparation, much patience and considerable practice if the eventual reward is to be a worthwhile ‘catch’.

The interviews were intended for the school management team, namely, the principal, deputy and the head of department (HoDs) as they met the criteria for “information-rich participants”. The two schools were chosen on the basis that they met the criteria for “challenging contexts” (see background and school context Chapter 5 & 6). Further, the interviews took place in the school’s boardroom. This was done to ensure that participants feel comfortable in their own environment while at the same time was time-consuming for the participants who were on duty at the time of the interviews. For the purpose of gathering the correct data for analysis, I provided a voice recorder in the interview room and further took notes. This was done to ensure accuracy in the collection of data.

FOCUS GROUP

Focus group discussions were intended with four teachers in each secondary schools in the study. This was done to get the views of the group as well to validate the individual views in order to understand successful leadership practices in challenging contexts. Focus groups have the potential to ‘reach’ the research ‘parts’ that individualised responses from questionnaire surveys or one-to-one interviews cannot ‘reach’, and, indeed, such responses may not be

required for research purposes that preclude individualised attention to the minutia of deeply personal moments, Scott and Morrison (2007. p.112). The purpose was to focus discussion on a particular issue of school leadership and management. Questions were semi-structured and prepared prior to the meeting. It was an informal gathering of a group of people who were familiar with each other and have similar interests. The individuals in the group differed with their teaching experience as well as the subjects they offered. This allowed comparisons to be drawn. Scott and Morrison (2007) define a focus group as a group of individuals gathered together in a group interview (p. 112). Bell (2010) notes that focus groups are undoubtedly valuable when in-depth information is needed, about how people think about an issue – their reasoning about why things are as they are, why they hold the view they do.

Focus groups were used with participants about issues on school leadership. The group studies took place in the school boardroom from 14 hours to 15 hours. This was done to ensure that participants felt comfortable in their own environment. Participants were identified by the deputy principal. The group consisted of two experienced staff and two new members in the school. The reason for a mixed group was to acquire rich information about school leadership from different generations. The aim was to understand how different groups perceive good leadership.

OBSERVATIONS SCHEDULE

Observations were utilised as one of the research methods in the study. As a technique for gathering information, the method relied on what I saw and heard and recorded as observations, rather than relying only on a subject's self-report responses to questions and statements: Macmillan & Schumacher (2010. p. 209). I wanted to know if there was consistency or reliability in the statements or views of the participants with what I had personally observed. I wanted to observe how the principals lead and manage their schools. Observations highlight detailed and specific information about educational activities and practices that would be difficult to ascertain in other circumstances: Scott & Morrison (2007. p.168). They further say observations enable the researcher to

sample educational experience firsthand, rather than depend on what participants say they do.

DOCUMENTS ANALYSIS

Apart from interviews as a qualitative method, documents are an extremely valuable source of data. Documents are regarded as non-reactive due to their limitation of the researcher's intervention in the context. As a useful source of gathering data, documents could do the following:

- They reveal aspects of a text content that are usually difficult to see.
- They provide the source of data that is available.
- They contain abundant information.

McCulloch and Richardson (2000), cited in Bell (2010), cautioned that we should never assume that because documents exist they will be available for research. They further say that some sources may be regarded as too confidential to be released, so enquiries would have to be made about access and availability.

The documents that helped gain more insight about the study were the following: minutes of meetings of both SMT and staff, school policies and school vision, as well as records of school results for a period of five years. Document analysis ensures triangulation as well as verification of the findings.

ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS AND ACCESS

Ethics have become a serious issue for researchers in higher institutions. An ethical consideration binds the researcher to respecting human dignity, thereby respecting confidentiality, anonymity and the privacy of the participants. It ensures that the researcher sticks to the purpose of the study. MacMillan and Schumacher (2010) highlight that ethics are concerned with belief about what is right and wrong from a moral perspective when engaging with participants or assessing archival data.

The following letters were hand-delivered to the two schools: (a) A permission letter by the Gauteng Department; (b) A letter of explanation and information about the study; (c) Copies of these to those concerned with participating. (d) Letters of request to use a tape recorder. In return, the deputy principal selected teachers to be interviewed. An agreement was reached about the use of data, its analysis and dissemination and I ensured that she kept to the agreement. The ethics clearance was granted and the permission to undertake research was given by the ethical committee. The permission to conduct the study in the Gauteng central district was hand-delivered, together with the research proposal, and permission was granted. Data was collected and transcription done.

VALIDITY, RELIABILITY AND TRIANGULATION

Bell (2010) defines reliability as the extent to which a test or procedure produces similar results under constant conditions on all occasions. Interviews and focus groups were selected as one of the tools of gathering data. Although in qualitative study reliability is not guaranteed, I piloted the questions to ascertain similar results. Piloting questions provided the opportunity for the researcher to gain experience and confidence while giving the opportunity to clarify unclear questions (Bell, 2010). I avoided questions based on personal opinion. Buckingham and Saunders (2004) say that the pilot studies may be particularly crucial in relation to research based on self-completion questionnaires, since there will not be an interviewer present to clear up any confusion. They further pointed out that this is equally so with interviews, as persistent problems may emerge after a few interviews have been carried out and these can then be addressed.

MacMillan and Schumacher (2010) define validity as the degree to which scientific explanations of phenomena match reality. It refers to the truthfulness of findings and conclusions. Patton (2001) asserts that the two factors are important and that any qualitative researcher should be concerned about while designing the study, analysing results and judging the quality of the study. The study has identified interviews, focus groups and document analysis as methods for

gathering data. The three methods ensure the credibility and validity of results and thus triangulate. In addressing consistency and accuracy I cross-checked existing evidence with the participants to verify the authenticity of the results.

CHAPTER FOUR

PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS OF DATA

INTRODUCTION

The aim of the chapter was to present data using the respondent's interview and focus group discussions. For the purpose of this research, the findings are presented in two sections as school A and school B. The sections are presented as follows:

- Document analysis is followed by the background and the context of school A.
- Observations and data presentation.
- Interviews and focus group discussions: the school management team will be interviewed individually while a focus group discussion with teachers takes place.
- The last part of each section focuses on the chapter's overview.

Members of the school management team comprise the principal, the deputy and two Heads of Department. I interviewed members of the SMT individually. The focus group discussion consisted of a group of four teachers from different departments. Two teachers were purposively selected by the deputy in terms of their experience in the school, while the other two were selected on the basis that they were new in the field and therefore inexperienced. Since the focus of the study is on successful school leadership practices in challenging contexts, these schools were purposively selected on the basis that they met the criteria.

This study was informed by the following assumptions: (1) "That schools that make a difference are led by principals who make significant and measureable contributions." (2) There are practices that are prevalent in successful principals." The claims are supported by the following scholars: Bush and Glover (2009), Research in Education Leadership (2003), and Chi-Kin Lee et al (1999). The two claims suggest that principals are placed in a strategic position to initiate or inhibit change in the school. Through their positional power they should influence the development of the teacher learning community in their schools. To achieve this, principals should adopt an instructional role and impact positively on student

learning. Principals do not have to be the sole role players towards school development, but should develop leadership in others by delegating some responsibilities to the SMT and senior staff.

Apart from understanding how these principals achieve against the odds, the study also aimed to establish whether the following claims were true, and if so, how then these principals achieved their success. I wanted to find out whether South African principals are instrumental towards school success, more so because township schools are politicised. Heystek (2007) says that South African teachers are unintentionally protected by what amounts to an unwritten social and political contract with the government.

In presenting the findings and analysing the case schools, I began by determining whether the principal exhibited four core leadership practices that Leithwood et al (2006) contend are necessary conditions for school success, regardless of the context. The four core leadership practices are: (1) Setting direction, i.e. helping develop a set of shared goals that encourage a sense of common purpose; (2) Developing people, i.e. influencing behaviour towards the achievement of shared goals through the provision of intellectual stimulation, individual and collective support; (3) Redesigning the organisation, i.e. facilitating the work of the school community in achieving shared goals; and (4) managing teaching and learning.

Even though the core practices are deemed necessary for achieving success in schools, I argue that they are not the only factors that contribute towards success but there are other factors that are also involved. This study aims to understand the factors behind the school success of school A. The documentary analysis was conducted to understand how the principal in school A leads her school towards success.

DOCUMENTARY ANALYSIS

Documents were requested from the principal in order to answer the research question. The following documents were provided: the school profile, vision and mission statement and the minutes. The school's profile was also related by one of the HoDs who had been at the school since its establishment. MacMillan and Schumacher (2010) suggest that official documents in organisations may take

various forms (p.361), and that these documents may also “provide clues about leadership styles and values” (ibid). Results were accessed from the website of the Gauteng Department of Education.

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT OF SCHOOL A

School A is situated in the far northern part of Soweto township and was established in 1974. It first operated with one language due to the Group Areas Act of the apartheid regime that classified people in terms of language. It is a public school that is classified as a quintile three school, hence the students do not pay fees. The school is provided with textbooks, though insufficient, and stationery. Even though the school is a quintile three school, learners are not provided with meals.

The school yard is quite small and fenced. The property is not properly maintained due to insufficient manpower and neither does it have sporting facilities. The buildings are modern and have two storeys but are in urgent need of repair. The school has a library that consists of old material and a laboratory with no apparatus or chemicals. School A has an administration block that consists of a staff room and several offices and a boardroom where meetings are held. In 2011 school A had an enrolment of 1250 learners and 41 teaching staff, including a female principal. The principal was appointed four years previously and held a deputy position in her former school. The school has eight managing staff, two deputies and one principal.

Even though the school played a significant role in the 1976 riots, not much is said about the school in the books. As early as the year 2000 the school was identified as an achieving school, and received an award, followed by incentives for the teaching staff. Although the area was notorious during the 1976 riots, learning has always taken place. The school is well known for its good performance and as a result, prominent dignitaries have visited the school often. The school has also enjoyed publicity and as such, some local universities send their students to the school to conduct practical work.

Although the school is named after a prominent author that will not be mentioned for ethical reasons, like many schools in the township, the school is in a

challenging socio-economic context. The school up to now is still a victim of burglary, crime, pregnancy and HIV/AIDS. Even though there are such challenges, the school has been amongst the top schools around Soweto Township with a 79,8 % pass rate in 2011.

The school profile states that there have been several principals that led the school since its establishment, but the school started to have direction in the late '80s under the leadership of the retired principal. The current principal was appointed in 2007. She holds a teachers Diploma and an Honours qualification. She started off as an English teacher and was promoted as an HoD. She became a Deputy Principal before her promotion at the present school. The principal has 20 years' teaching experience in secondary schools. This has been her first school as a principal.

In her first year as the school principal, the results dropped. According to the participants, the decline in the result was because of a classroom-based approach and equality of learners that the new principal introduced. The classroom-based approach requires teachers to be stable in their respective classrooms while learners move from class to class. The learner equality was based on the state of the furniture and bringing the Grade 12 learners near the administration block, as well as receiving better treatment and prioritising their needs. According to participants, this impacted on results as there was no proper monitoring on either learners or teachers, since Grade 12 learners were very far from the administration block. The following year they went back to the old approach and the results have been stable ever since.

The profile states that in order to achieve good performance, the former principal developed a vision and communicated it to the staff, learners and parents.

The vision statement reads thus:

To make the school, through a holistic involvement of all its educational stakeholders, a cradle towards the eradication of poverty, crime and disease and produce responsible citizens who are compatible, interactive assets in their community, the South African public and the international world, to enhance the quality of life, good ethics, morals, entrepreneurship and Democratic Governance.

In order to achieve the set goals, the school came up with the mission clearly stating how the school intends to achieve its vision and this is what they said:

The school hopes to achieve through instilling discipline, dedication and commitment to all its stakeholders. It is through the achievement of these values that the learners will acquire skills that are required in the modern world.

(School profile, School A)

While teaching and learning were the core purpose of the school, the school also developed the learners in totality through extra curricula activities, such as sports and debate. The following are the school's achievements:

- Nominated the best Secondary School of the year in soccer (D14) 2005
- Corobrick winners in Netball 2001
- Netball provincial championship in 3 teams U14, U15, U18, Provincial Level 2009
- Region 6 winners - soccer 2006 MTN silver medallist. One learner represented the school in Sweden
- Ladies' soccer - second position at Provincial Level in 2009

As part of document analysis, minutes were requested from the school. The reason for the request was to understand the role played by the principal in managing teaching and learning. I observed minutes from 29.04.2009 until 28.09. 2011.

Evidence from the minutes shows that managing teaching and learning are not discussed by either the principal or the SMT, but are discussed in the HoD meetings. Curriculum appears in the minutes as a report from the district as workshop dates.

The minutes further shows the principal engaged in analysing results and motivating teachers to give their best while praising a learner who achieved 100% in both Maths and Science. This is how the minutes are captured:

The headmaster did a word of welcome and gave overall information about 2010 matric results which were outstanding. She commented to educators for the job well done. The school had an 80% pass rate. Well done class of 2010.

Although the principal has delegated her responsibilities to the SMT, she does follow up to ensure that teaching and learning occur. Managing teaching and learning is done through class monitors who keep registers to ensure that teachers honour their periods. The minutes also show the principal motivating and encouraging staff right at the beginning of the year.

While evidence shows that the principal plays a small role towards managing teaching and learning, school A seem to be one of the achieving schools in a challenging context. It is not known how the school achieves good performance or the role she played in managing teaching and learning. The principal has acknowledged herself that the school has committed staff.

SCHOOL PERFORMANCE

The table below shows the Grade 12 results of school A from 2005 to 2010.

YEAR	TOTAL ENTERED	TOTAL WROTE	TOTAL PASSED	% PASS
2005	94	93	68	73,1%
2006	77	75	60	80%
2007	170	167	122	52,6%
2008	209	154	81	84%
2009	177	173	149	86, 1%
2010	217	213	170	79,8%

TABLE 5.1: Shows the learner enrolment and Grade 12 pass rate since 2005.

What is of note from the table is that the school showed good performance over the past years. It is still not clear whether the principal contributed towards the success; a point to note is that school A experienced a decline in results in 2007, the year the principal was appointed. The table also shows that prior to the appointment of the principal in 2007, the school was performing. In 2005 the school obtained 73, 1% pass rate, while in 2006 it obtained 80%. Even though there was a decline in results for a year, the enrolment continues to rise with learners moving from nearby schools. As a result of the enrolment figure, the school qualified for a second deputy. The table further shows a high number of learners who sat for examination since 2007.

While the table above shows good performance before the current principal, it should be noted that during her first year of leadership the school results dropped drastically. The reason behind that is not known, but there are speculations that the classroom-based approach and equality of learners was the result of poor performance. According to participants, this new approach by the principal put Grade 12 learners away from the administration block, while they were given the old furniture that is normally given to Grade 8s. It should be noted that the current principal found the school on a high note, and as a result, all the awards were received during the former principal's leadership. Suffice to say that the school is experiencing growth, with learners coming from as far as 3 to 5km away.

As part of the documentation, I also received the SMT minutes that suggested that the school used a top-down approach that excluded the majority of the staff in decision-making processes. Critical issues that pertain to learning and teaching were not discussed with the staff. For example, the issue on assessment, result analysis and portfolios were issues that concerned teachers yet it was discussed without their involvement. What is of note from these minutes is the fact that the principal is not only autocratic and non-negotiable but autocracy prevails in issues that also involve the staff.

SITE OBSERVATIONS

Observation was used as part of the methods in the study. During my visits to the school I had the opportunity to observe the activities of the principal. Part of my observations was to see how the principal led and managed the school, and why she managed the way she did. This includes leadership practices the principal utilised and to understand if there are special leadership qualities that successful school leaders demonstrate. Observation took place from 7h30 to 16h30 in the afternoon. On my arrival at school I noted that the school gate was closed, but unlike other schools, there were no security guards. I noted that the electric gate was slowly opening. Whilst waiting in the reception area I could hear learners singing in the assembly and there were only administration clerks in the admin block.

During my interview with the principal I noticed a monitoring system installed in her office. The principal informed me that the system was bought to monitor late coming and burglary in the school. She also told me that during her first year as the head of the school there were challenges of learners who were bunking school in the school yard. The school saw the need to monitor that and thus the system was bought. Immediately after assembly, teachers came hastily to the staff room, while there were learners who were coming with the principal to her office and back to their classrooms.

After about 10 minutes there was silence in the school yard with the staff room empty. The school generally seemed to have order and discipline and, as a result, teaching and learning did take place. I also observed a number of parents who were in the administration block submitting admission forms for their learners. This confirmed that the school is productive and the community is aware so they are coming in large numbers. The principal was in her office attending to parents. I realised that parental involvement was prevailing. The administration block had been quiet for some time when the bell rang for lunch. I managed to take rounds in the school yard and observed learners. The gates were still locked and lunch was bought from the tuck shop and some from the school vendors. Keeping the school gates locked is departmental policy and school A is adhering to that. This in turn prevents learners from bunking school while protecting them against criminal activities.

While looking at the learners I observed the unity and discipline that prevailed amongst them due to the full uniform they were wearing. I was told that uniform plays an important role in keeping discipline in the school. According to the school, the uniform policy was drawn up by the school and the parents. The policy states that girls should wear long skirts and maintain plain hair and short socks and no panty hose. Boys wear long trousers while they keep their hair short. This according to the school has minimised competition and helped create unity and sameness among the learners, and helps them to concentrate on their studies rather than petty things.

When the bell rang after lunch I observed teachers and learners hastily going back to class. The practice suggests that the school had successfully managed to instil discipline and structure so policies were in place and thus followed. During the first period after break I observed the principal taking instructional

rounds to monitor teaching and learning. The deputy was also assisting her on the other block. After spending about an hour in the classes she went straight in the office where she did administration work.

It was evident from these observations that teaching and learning was a priority in this school and that the principal played a significant role to ensure that it did occur. This was evident when she took instructional rounds to ensure that teaching and learning did take place. The structure and systems were in place. This is evident when teachers know what to do and when to do it. Teachers were in their classes in the morning and after break, while learners were complying by wearing the required uniform.

Discipline was also one of the key strategies that drive the school. Teacher's honour time and learners follow suit. The school also ensured that the maintenance of order and discipline by the security system whereby late coming and non-attendance is minimised. The school was also seen as taking the issue of parental involvement seriously. The principal was seen spending part of her time addressing parents and advising them on how to deal with their children. I also observed the principal attending to a learner who had drug problems. The deduction that I made about the principal was that she demonstrated a high amount of commitment to learner development and their wellbeing. Wellbeing is extended to teachers. On one occasion I observed her giving one teacher transport money for her to attend a workshop.

INTERVIEWS

It was a purposive sampling and the focus was on successful school leadership practices in challenging contexts. It was therefore important for the study to select participants who would provide in-depth and reliable information so as to address the purpose of the research. All participants were carefully selected according to their age group and experience within the career. This was done in view of how the two groups view leadership. School A's management team consisted of the principal, two deputies and eight heads of department. The principal, deputy curriculum and two heads of department were selected for this study as immediate participants who met the criteria for my focus. Further, the school met the criteria for challenging contexts (see school background).

INTERVIEW WITH THE PRINCIPAL

This interview took place in the school's boardroom. Prior to the interview I went to the school and made an appointment with the principal. During my first visit I presented all the documentation that explained the purpose of my visit to the school. The deputy principal for curriculum was called, who was delegated the responsibility of ensuring that I received the relevant participants for the study. The interviews took place over a period of three days with the principal being the last person to be interviewed. All interviews were audio-taped.

During the interview, it became evident that the principal employed a number of strategies to run the school and that also helped her to stay on top. The principal acknowledged that the school consisted of dedicated, self-motivated and self-disciplined staff. She also explained that the reason for their commitment was the fact that most of the teachers were members of the same community and that some teachers were learners in the same school, and therefore felt they owed the school and were thus loyal. Her plan was to sustain and strive for excellency. Her first priority was restoring order and discipline to learners.

In order to achieve her goals, she had to first become visible everywhere, at the gates in the morning for late comers, at the toilets for learners who bunk school. A security system was installed to help the school instil discipline, while the policy on school uniforms was introduced. She had this to say about discipline:

People do not like disorder, but how you bring order is important."

As part of the plan to restore discipline, the principal further took on the dress code to encourage equality as well as to minimise competition amongst learners.

This is how she commented on dress code:

We encourage equality in all our learners and as a result they do not wear panty hose and short skirts to look sexy, but skirts should be on the knee and no hair styles but short hair or plain braids.

This was done so that learners could concentrate on their studies rather than petty things.

Her second priority was to make her stand firm as a leader and clearly demonstrate her leadership style.

This is clearly stated when she said: *"It depends on the issue at hand, but I must tell you that I am autocratic for the non-negotiables and deadlines."*

Realising that class visits were a sensitive issue that involved the unions, she introduced a classroom monitoring tool that aimed at identifying teachers who fail to honour their periods. This is how her monitoring worked: she gave class representatives each a book to monitor teacher attendance and to submit it to the office by the end of each day. Learners also had their own class attendance registers that were kept by subject teachers.

This is what the principal said about period registers for teachers:

This will help teachers when a parent can come and claim that my child was never taught.

Her third strategy that she saw as crucial for the school was ensuring that healthy relationships prevailed. The principal used her voice and her psychological knowledge to win over both her staff and learners. Her personal attributes also helped her to create and maintain good relationships as well as to keep unity. She took the relationship further when she took interest in their personal lives and supported them when they experienced difficulties and became their confidante. She explained that:

My voice, you know I have a male voice and I thank God for that. I taught English for 18 years and that has helped me to speak with conviction. I am talkative and a humorous, easygoing person. I do not hold grudges and always try to understand why things happen the way they do. I am considerate and able to see through people and understand if things are not going as planned. I am a motivator and like to see everyone achieve.

To achieve unity, she revealed that they operated as a team within the school and outside school. More importantly, the relationship was taken further when she supported them when they lost their loved ones.

In her response she said:

Relationships are most definitely important; how you relate to everyone determines what you will get from them. It is very important that people should laugh and cry together as this brings unity. You should see us when one of our members has lost a

loved one, by 4 am we are all here with our hired transport ready to take a journey to a far-away funeral.

Relationships, insofar as the principal was concerned, were not limited to the staff but to all stakeholders. This was evident from the abstract when the principal said:

I am a good listener, good at relationships and treat everyone equal, especially the cleaners; this is to avoid an 'us' and 'them' mentality.

And she said she believed in learners and pulled them closer, especially the addicted victims.

The fourth strategy that the principal used was motivation. According to the principal, motivation was crucial for the success of the school. Even though she realised that her teachers were self-motivated she further ensured that they stayed motivated. Firstly, she communicated with them about the curriculum to keep them motivated. She also acknowledged that her eloquence enabled her to speak with conviction. Finally, she gave incentives for good performance.

The final strategy that the principal used was teacher development, which she thought as important for the success of the school. Even though she acknowledged that she had a great staff, as a visionary leader she had set her own limits and so would not be satisfied until her goals were realised. This was evident when she said that her school was a successful school but her goals would be to achieve quality results in subjects such as Maths and Science. She said:

Most definitely we are an achieving school, but the day when we receive quality passes with most learners getting university entrance, the day when this time of the year we are sure of a 100% pass rate and the day when the staff look forward to come to work, I will know that I have done my part. Good results are the only hope for our learners and a ticket to better life.

Development was crucial for the principal in that although her staff may be good today, they constantly need development to stay relevant. In her own words she said:

Time and people change and things change too, that is why we should constantly stay relevant.

Further, the principal revealed that she was aware of the importance of class visits as contributing towards learner improvement and, as a result, school improvement, but due to the unions' defiance campaign, she therefore came up with a tool to ensure that teachers are in class. Nevertheless, she indicated that the tool was not an excuse for her not to take rounds and see if teaching did occur, but took them every morning and even went to toilets to check learners who were bunking school.

In responding to the question of how she saw her role in the school, the principal responded by saying:

I play a leadership and a management role. As a leader, my role is to be a person that people rely on for direction. I am willing to learn new things. I should make sure that I know the curriculum so that I am able to support my teachers. Ensuring that at all times I lead by example, I am willing to learn new things and I consider myself a life-long learner and capacitate myself before others. Curriculum is my passion and as a result the reason for us being here. I take it seriously and ensure that everyone is at the same level.

As a manager, I am people-centred, not a know-all, but I strive to be ahead of my teachers. I ensure that the systems are in place and planning is done and followed. I ensure that policies are implemented and everything goes according to the employer's plans.

It was evident from the principal's response that she knew and held a clear understanding of her role in the school and that curriculum was taken seriously. As such, she wanted to first acquire a clear understanding herself so that she was able to monitor, model and support teachers. Her response suggests that she does not want to lead from behind, and neither does she want to lead something she does not know, therefore capacitating others. As a manager, she was a people-centred type of leader who took interest in the wellbeing of her subordinates. She was a type of a leader who understood that personal issues could affect one's performance. Further, the principal was concerned with putting systems and policies in place and this is what she said;

Though I am autocratic for the non-negotiable and deadlines, as a mother I have that warmer side that people see and come to me with their personal issues.

INTERVIEW WITH THE DEPUTY PRINCIPAL

The interview with the deputy principal took place as planned and the deputy acknowledged that not much had been done by the principal to turn it around as the former principal had paved the way. The deputy stated that, though much had been done, the principal never stopped in setting her vision for the school and ensuring that she communicated it to the staff. Her major vision for the school was producing quality results. According to the deputy principal, although the school had been sustaining good performance for the past years, her vision was for the learners to obtain quality results in crucial subjects.

The deputy said:

As a school we are still not satisfied about the quality of our results in terms of the subject choice. As a school we are still faced with a challenge of learners who are afraid of science subjects even though we have good quality staff.

It was evident from the deputy's response that the principal used the following strategies to sustain the school. The principal focused on setting the direction by demonstrating clearly her situational approach. According to the deputy, situational leadership style was controlled by the situation and the issue at hand. Under her plan she put systems and policies in place. Teachers and learners were to report to school on time. To ensure that she achieved set goals, she monitored by standing at the gates every morning. She then informed teachers of the non-negotiables that teachers had to adhere to.

Her second strategy was to ensure that discipline prevailed. Fortunately, the school, according to the deputy, never experienced major disciplinary issues, except for learners who were addicts. In that case, the police forum assisted in their unannounced search visits. Her ability to identify and refer them also minimised discipline challenges. In his words, the deputy responded on discipline:

As you can see the school bought a security system to monitor discipline and class attendance.

Her third strategy was based on the principal being a good communicator and a good listener, which are the important attributes for good quality leadership. The principal encouraged an open door policy while she established and maintained good relationships with her staff. In his words, that is what the deputy thinks of her leadership:

Our school has excellent leadership which is based on good communications, personal involvement and discipline of both staff and learners.

It was evident from the deputy's response that although the school had good quality leadership, the principal might not be behind good results. This was supported by her response that the school was blessed with good quality and experienced teachers that are not only self-motivated but willing to do the job. According to the deputy, the school could achieve for a long time without a principal.

INTERVIEW WITH THE HEAD OF DEPARTMENT (ONE)

The interview with the HoD took place in the school's boardroom during contact time. The HoD was in her late thirties and was a focused, dedicated teacher who spoke with conviction. Although the message of my request to conduct interviews in the school was not communicated well to all the staff, she had no problem in participating in the interview.

When the interview was carried out with the HoD, she wanted to make the following issues clear:

- *That their school was not an ailing school.*
- *That no transformation that subsequently led to good results was done by the current principal.*

When asked how the principal lead and manage the school, she responded by saying:

She manages the school averagely ok, she is above water. Alone without the help of the SMT, I do not think she would be successful.

During the interview the HoD revealed that their school performed well, even during the apartheid era. According to her, the former principal who was once a teacher at the same school was responsible for the success the school had achieved. This, according to the HoD, was because the former principal understood the culture of the school and the needs of the community. The former principal put systems in place and as a result even when he left it was on a high note, with the school having obtained the highest percentage ever.

Insofar as transforming the school, the HoD revealed that much of the spade work was done by the former principal and the current principal maintained by following policies to the letter. She responded by saying:

Our principal knows that we are more than capable of driving ourselves.

It was evident from the extract that school A relied on good quality staff that was not only experienced but also best in their fields. These teachers started the school with a vision of putting the school in a map:

Together we are driven to make sure that the school stays there. They do not want to be deemed a failure. They are self-motivated, dedicated and co-operative, especially the Grade12s, they are the passionate lot. Many of these teachers come from the same community so they do not want to let it down.

In response to the question of whether leadership played a vital role towards the school success, she responded by saying it does, only if she led by example.

Unfortunately, this was not the case with their school and, she said,

It will destroy the school if teachers were to live 'in numbers' by getting promotions or retire. Unfortunately these good teachers will be retiring in the next five years and they are the teachers who started the school and have the same vision.

INTERVIEW WITH THE HEAD OF DEPARTMENT (TWO)

The interview with the HoD took place in the boardroom. Before the interview, the HoD told me that he started his career in this school and as a result participated actively towards building the school afresh after its destruction during the riots. He revealed to me that the school was named after the

prominent person and as thus vowed to work to make him proud. Further, he revealed that the school initiated the 1976 riots, though the historians say otherwise. According to him, it was through this history that the vision was created. The vision was that they will work hard to develop the black child into a full potential human being. He also revealed to me that their school had been the best performing school as early as the year 2000 and they had awards to prove that.

During the interview, the HoD revealed a number of strategies that contributed towards the school's success but he also made it clear that the principal never played any role towards the afore-mentioned strategies.

The first strategy they employed in transforming the school after the riots was to bring discipline to learners, teachers and parents. They first had to ensure that they themselves as staff were disciplined and live by example, i.e. that they were at school on time teaching. In disciplining learners, parents and community were involved. Firstly, the policy on uniform was drawn up whereby learners were to wear long skirts with no panty hose and have plain hairstyles.

This is how he responded on discipline:

Our policy on uniform helps us with discipline as we discourage hairstyles and dress codes. This is done to encourage equality and thus learners concentrate on their studies.

The issue of drugs was addressed by involving the police forum to search for the drugs in the school, while addicts were referred for rehabilitation. To ensure discipline prevailed, parents were called often for school affairs to encourage participation and involvement in their children's education. The curriculum is explained to parents and they are told the part they are to play to stay involved. Slowly parents began to buy into the bigger picture of building the community and playing their part.

The second strategy that helped in building the school was the strong leadership. He also revealed that building a school after riots was not an easy task but the advantage was the participatory leadership style that ensured that everything was communicated and teachers were involved in the decision-making of the school.

He explained:

When everyone takes part, they end up owning the issue.

Whereas, with the current leadership, decision-making did not involve the staff and neither did the principal stand by her word. The HoD commented that the principal relied much on delegation and according to him she did this because she was running away from her duties.

The second strategy that was employed was working on relationships. The process started by understanding the learner type as well as the community they were serving. He revealed that the participatory approach helps the school to work in teams while improving relationships.

The last strategy that was used was to motivate staff, which he saw as crucial for the success of the school. This he did by encouraging every teacher to do better and uphold the standards and offer his support. To achieve this, he talked to everyone to find out the challenges they faced while ensuring that he organised developmental workshops and becomes a father figure when they needed support in their personal issues.

FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION WITH TEACHERS

In addition to the semi-structured interviews and site observations, a focus group discussion was held with teachers. The choice of a focus group discussion as one of the data collecting methods was to “create a social environment in which group members are stimulated by one another’s perceptions and ideas, thereby increasing the quality and richness of data”: MacMillan and Schumacher (2010. p. 363). However, the study acknowledges the limitations of focus group discussions MacMillan and Schumacher (2010. p. 364). Firstly, opinions are gathered from a small number of people and secondly, opinions can be influenced by others in the group (ibid). Despite these reservations, it is clear that the focus group discussions also assisted in determining how the school principal promotes best practices and whether the success of the school can be attributed to her.

The focus group discussion took place in the boardroom. The discussion group consisted of two experienced and two inexperienced teachers. The reason for the request was to explore different approaches experienced by the two and to see how different groups perceive leadership. Prior to the interview, I asked

these teachers if they were informed about the purpose of my visit to the school. After realising that the information about my visit was kept between the principal and her deputy, I then explained my purpose and assured their anonymity and confidentiality. I became very careful not to undermine my participants by not depriving them of their choice not to participate in this study. I then asked their permission to use an audio-recorder.

During the focus group discussions, I realised that these teachers were unsettled. One teacher even asked me whether I wanted them to give me the positives only. According to my observations, these teachers were not sure whether they should tell me the truth about their school leadership or what they thought I wanted to hear. I also had the feeling that the participants were afraid of telling the truth for fear of victimisation. I further explained that the purpose of the study was to find the most accurate and reliable information possible. I further guaranteed the confidentiality of the study and their anonymity. When the interviews were carried out, the teachers revealed to me that even though the principal was bringing good ideas to the school, it would have been better if she consulted them and become transparent. In their response this is what all thought of her leadership:

She is an autocrat who lacks consultation and transparency. Neither does she involve stakeholders in matters that involve them. One teacher even says that this could be the fact that she does not get support from the SMT as they did not want her appointment as the principal, and neither does she want to win them. They all say that she brings good ideas to the school, but it would have been better if she consulted than a one-man show she runs.

The participants felt that running this school for anyone would be easy after transformation had been done already by the former principal. This is how they responded:

Spade work was done already by the former principal (Teacher B)
She never experienced any problems leading this school because everything was in order (Teacher C)
The former principal paved the way for her. He was strict but with fatherly love at the same time (Teacher D)

The teachers told me that as a result of the foundation laid by the former principal, the new principal's first strategy to reform the school was to instil discipline on learners. This she did by working closely with the police forum and rehabilitation centres and referring learners for help. Discipline was also instilled in learners who bunked classes. Here is what each teacher said about discipline:

Our principal is a good disciplinarian and a good motivator. She is passionate about teacher development, supportive and does not hide information that will develop teachers and take the school further. A good example of her good leadership is the systems she introduced about learners who bunk school and classes. Where the culprit is give a book to be signed by the class teacher as proof that she attended the class. (Teacher A)

She is very good at time management. She invites our former learners to come and motivate our learners, and the police forum to conduct a search for drugs. (Teacher B)

She does share information (Teacher C)

When she has attended a workshop she does share information with us and motivates us. She liaises with principals from other schools (Teacher D)

What was of note is that this principal studied the culture of the school and worked towards closing the gaps. Firstly, she realised that she needed to work harder on learner discipline in order to maintain good performance. Secondly, in order to keep the staff focused, motivated and loyal, she constantly developed them, motivated and shared information in order to keep them loyal, committed and dedicated to their careers. Further, she supported them even in their personal lives. The following are some of the comments from the teachers:

To me the principal is a role model and a confidante. Unfortunately I do not aspire to become a principal but intend leaving the career soon. I am able to go to her about anything that is not school-related, I mean my own personal life (Teacher A)

She is very good at motivation (Teacher D)

Insofar as maintaining the status quo and restoring learner discipline was concerned, it was evident that participants were happy on how the principal approached the strategies. However, most felt that the principal failed to employ

a strategy on how decisions were made in the school. In response to how the principal took decisions, this is what they say:

Decisions are made by the SMT and the information is disseminated to all teachers. This is what I hate about this school.

In fact we are just told what to do, no consultation (Teacher A)

Decisions are done by the principal and the information is disseminated to the staff. Even if we are not happy with the decision taken they implement it. (Teachers B & C)

I think is the principal. Sometimes we do not challenge but stick to what we have been doing. (Teacher D)

Insofar as the teachers are concerned, one of the strategies that the principal worked on was to try to improve relationships with all stakeholders. Firstly, she showed them her warmer side and started listening to their problems and giving them support while becoming their confidante. She then drew problematic learners close, telling them that she believed in them. This alone improved relationships with both teachers and learners. Although teamwork was used often as a way of giving each other support in curriculum issues, the principal took the issue of teamwork further by supporting staff when they lost their loved ones. This not only improved relationships but brought unity to the school as a whole.

She does take care of our needs and ensures that we are on speaking terms. (Teacher A)

She is a good confidante and has a way with children. (Teacher B)

Using the same approach, she tried to negotiate her identity by pulling the parents closer. Firstly, she involved them in all school matters by calling them in for curriculum meetings, involving them in school discipline and participating in Grade 12 examination by issuing two time-tables, one for the learner and one for the parent. This was to involve the parent in their children's education. Secondly, she encouraged parents to sell at school, help with cleaning classrooms and even plough in the garden. This made parents buy into the vision of the school and have ownership of the school. This was evident by some of the comments by teachers when they said:

The relationship with the community is based on mutual respect and the school is taken seriously. They know the track record of the

school and are happy about how the school instils discipline. If you can look in the reception area it is full of parents seeking space for their kids, removing them from their neighbouring schools (Teacher A)

Our parents sell food in the school yard and they also help with cleaning the classes and toilets. (Teacher B)

The community is supportive, even the police forum here is co-operative (Teacher C)

The community has offered to keep the school clean by planting a garden. (Teacher D)

It was evident from the extract that from the initial stage the principal knew what she was doing. From the outset she has studied the culture of the school, the stage of the reform and brought the appropriate strategy to turn the school around. In her four years as the principal of a transformed school she worked averagely well to restore learner discipline, improve relations and give motivation and support. This in my view further gave the stakeholders the view that the school has a leader who has their interests at heart.

What also emerged was that the principal managed and led the school through learners who monitored teacher attendance through a book system. The principal was seen here as doing a management role by applying policies rather than leading the school.

This was evident when most participants acknowledged that their leader knew policies and followed them to the letter. It was evident that systems were put in place, though most participants liked to believe that the previous leader was responsible for that. Evidence proved that school A was performing well, even before the current principal.

What emerged was the comparison between the current principal and the former, proving that change is painful and therefore unwelcome. Lastly, the politicisation of the school seemed to all participants to be emerging, whereby they cited the reason why class visits were not done in schools was a mandate from the unions.

DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS OF SCHOOL B

INTRODUCTION

This section presents data from the interviews with the school management team and a separate focus group discussion with teachers. Members of the school management team comprise the principal, the deputy and two heads of department. I interviewed members of the SMT individually. The focus group discussion consisted of a group of four teachers from different departments. The two teachers were purposively selected in terms of their experience in the school, while the other two were selected on the basis that they were new in the field and therefore inexperienced. Since the focus of the study is on successful leadership practices in challenging contexts, this school was purposively selected on the basis that it met the criteria.

The section shows that participants refuted the claims of the study that says that principals are instrumental towards the school success. It also shows that as a result of delegation without follow-up by the principal, teachers are left disillusioned. This tells us that teachers had faith in their leadership and they wanted her visibility and support.

The documentary analysis will follow to understand how the principal in school B leads her school towards success.

DOCUMENTARY ANALYSIS

For the purpose of document analysis, I requested the school to provide me with the documents that may be useful in understanding the unique character of the school and innovative practices implemented by the principal. MacMillan and Schumacher (2010) suggest that official documents may take various forms (p.361), and that these documents may also “provide clues about leadership styles and values” (ibid). The school was able to provide the following documents: school’s profile, staff and SMT minutes and the school’s vision and mission statements. Unfortunately the school did not have results at their

disposal. I was able to access documents about results from the Gauteng Department of Education's website.

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT OF SCHOOL A

The school is situated in the western part of Soweto; the area is popularly known as deep Soweto. It is notorious for crime, domestic violence and substance abuse. Crime was further perpetrated by the political situation in the country during the late '80s and the early '90s. Unemployment is rife and this causes bitterness in the hungry youth who find themselves jobless after matric.

Due to the unsettled situation in the country, many schools became victims of violence and were vandalised. Gangsterism also played a crucial role in this community; young women and children became victims of rape and abuse. The profile stated that learners united in fighting criminal violence on school children and mob justice was applied on perpetrators. Due to the high unemployment rate and poverty, the community experienced an increase in HIV/AIDS. School B was established in 1979. In 2011, like any public school, it was sponsored by the government. It is a quintile 3 school hence learners do not pay fees but are provided with learning material. Meals are also provided during lunch. The infrastructure of the school is old and in need of repair. In 2011 school B had an enrolment of 1300 learners and 43 teaching staff, including the principal. Female teachers are in the majority. The management consists of one principal, two deputies and eight heads of department.

Since its inception, the school has had three principals. The current principal succeeded the principal who retired in 2000. The profile stated that the current principal was appointed in September 2000 and the matric pass rate for that year was 38%. She holds a Masters degree and she specialised in Geography and Setswana and she moderated both subjects while still a teacher. She did not previously hold any management position. In June 2011, the school B principal was among the Soweto principals who were elected to represent South African schools at Harvard.

The profile further stated that one high school was established near school B. The school B deputy principal was appointed as the principal of the new school.

The district further mandated the promoted principal to take six teachers from the school in order to help establish the new high school. This further disarmed the school, while leaving the current principal with a mammoth task of recruiting new staff for the school. The principal, with the help of her committed staff, slowly started building the school and providing good quality education. Fortunately the school never stopped its popularity in sport and music and as a result, enrolment was never compromised as many still regarded it as a good school.

The profile states that when the principal took over, the school was at 38% matric pass rate and had moved to 70% in the last five years. Also stated in the profile is what the school aimed to achieve. The vision statement states that:

School B is aimed at creating a caring and warm environment which gives learners a sense of belonging and provide them with high standards of education. To develop a responsible nation, which is culturally, spiritually, socially, academically as well as emotionally sound. (School profile, School B)

It was evident that school B was aware of the challenges that the community was faced with and as such, developed a warm and caring environment that would provide a sense of belonging while, on the other hand, developing them to become good responsible citizens.

In order for the school to achieve the vision, the profile states in the mission statement how the school will function:

Through relevant and meaningful education, learners will be encouraged to be responsible to the community and the environment. Through mutual respect and dignity, and other important values instilled at this institution they are helped to become the best they can be. (School profile, School B)

It was evident from the mission statement that the school wanted to instil values such as tolerance, responsibility, respect and dignity in their learners. The school, as the centre for knowledge, would gradually influence the community to change its way of life.

The profile also stated that the school had seen three different principals leading the school since its establishment. The first principal led the school from 1979 to 1983. The second principal took over from 1984 to 2000. The current principal

was appointed in September 2000. She started as a teacher and was then appointed as principal in the same school. She had currently had 11 years as a school principal.

Part of the documents requested from the school was minutes. The reason for the request was to see the role played by the principal in managing teaching and learning. I observed the minutes from the 17.01 2011 to 27.08.2011. According to the minutes, curriculum issues were discussed as a form of monitoring files and moderation of tests by HDs.

(School minutes, dated 17/24.01 2011)

It was evident from the minutes that the school B principal had delegated her management duties to the SMT. Bush and Heystek's (2006) baseline research for MGSLG shows that South African principals do not conceptualise their role as instructional leaders. They are much more concerned with financial management, human resource management and policy issues. Bush (2003a) comments that the instructional model is very important because it targets the school's central activities, teaching and learning. According to Bush (2003a) the instructional model differs from other leadership approaches because it focuses on the direction of influence, rather than its nature and source.

The minutes further showed the principal engaged in results analysis with the staff and gave overall praise for a job well done, while giving praise to the Geography department for obtaining distinctions. This is how it was captured in the minutes:

The principal appreciated the distinctions from the Geography department, while commenting on the overall good performance of the school. (School minutes, dated 14.01 2011)

Although the principal had delegated her instructional responsibilities to the SMT, she did make a follow-up to ensure that teaching and learning occurred. The extract showed the principal motivating and encouraging teachers' rights at the beginning of the year, while the HoDs monitor and moderate teachers' work to ensure curriculum delivery.

While the evidence of the minutes showed little participation of the principal, school B seemed to be one of the achieving schools in a challenging context. It was still not clear whether the principal contributed to good performance.

Evidence from the minutes showed that the school had good teachers. This was evidenced by Geography learners who obtained distinctions. The principal herself had admitted that the school was blessed with good quality staff. Suffice to say that the school B principal played a significant role in school leadership in Soweto and, as a result, represented South African leadership in Harvard in June 2011.

SCHOOL PERFORMANCE

The table below shows the Grade 12 results of school B from 2005 to 2010

YEAR	TOTAL ENTERED	TOTAL WROTE	TOTAL PASSED	% PASS
2005	126	121	60	49,59%
2006	142	138	113	81,88%
2007	151	145	125	86,21%
2008	200	185	125	67,57%
2009	222	214	126	58,9%
2010	165	156	119	76,3%

TABLE 5.1: Shows the learner enrolment and Grade 12 pass rates since 2005

What was of note was that school B showed a great improvement in results from 2000 when the results were 38%. The second point to note was that the school had a high enrolment of learners for matric. This suggested that the dropout rate as a result of failure was very low. On the other hand, a few learners failed to write exams and this, according to the principal, was due to high pregnancy rate that was still a challenge in the school. Inconsistency was also one of the issues noted in the school results. The inconsistency in the school is due to the inability to retain good quality teachers. According to the principal, in 2008 her deputy principal was appointed as the principal in another area and that left a gap in a subject for which the school used to obtain a 100% pass. In 2010, her second deputy had also been promoted as a principal in another school.

SITE OBSERVATIONS

As part of the methods use for the study I observed the daily activities of the principal. I was interested in understanding what the principal does when she runs the school, whether there were any leadership practices that she used and if there were leadership qualities that one possesses in running the school. I went to the school on several occasions, since interviews with my participants were spread over a period of time.

During observations, I noted that teachers in the school arrived an hour before the starting time for morning devotions and as a result are already at school when learners arrive. This alone makes them lead by example and to be able to instil discipline. At the gates I was welcomed by two security guards who let me sign their control book. Going towards the staff room the noise level was low and no learners were seen outside. This suggested to me that there was order and discipline in the school and thus effective learning and teaching was taking place. In the administration block were the school clerks and a few teachers in the staffroom who were free. The deputy was moving around the school monitoring classes. This suggested that the principal had delegated some of her duties to the most senior members of the SMT. I observed the principal in the meeting with the School Governing Body.

I noted that on every site visit I would find the principal in a meeting, either with parents, some of the staff members or district officials who, during my visits, came to school twice. I then came to the conclusion that the principal had delegated the monitoring duties to her deputies. Although it was not evident from the observations how the principal played a significant role in giving direction and setting the school tone, the school did achieve good results.

I could hear the noise level in the school yard and the staffroom, and I noticed that it was break. When I made rounds I also noticed that the gates were locked and learners were buying food from the vendors and the tuckshop, while some formed a queue at the kitchen for lunch. On one occasion while I was in the principal's office, two learners were brought to the attention of the principal by the school prefects. The two were caught red-handed buying food through the school fence. The principal told me that she felt that it was her duty to monitor what

these children ate as they could get food poisoning and the school would be held accountable.

I observed that learners were in their full school uniform and Grade 12 learners wore a different uniform with jackets printed matric on the back. When the bell rang at the end of break I saw the principal making instructional rounds in the yard. I could see that even though the principal had delegated managing teaching and learning to the SMT, she still ensured that everything was in order.

Part of my observations occurred during my interview with the principal. One teacher arrived in the principal's office asking for the principal to sign a transfer letter for the learner. The principal asked for the parent who was standing outside with her daughter. When the mother was asked where she was taking the child in September, she told the principal that the child was pregnant and therefore afraid to come to school. The principal advised the parent to let the learner write before she took a transfer. It was evident that the principal had the wellbeing of the learners at heart by ensuring that they stayed healthy and that they received education, no matter their situation.

During my observations I noticed that the principal was always with the parents. The deduction that I made was that the principal did take an interest in the community and so involved them in matters of the school.

INTERVIEWS

It was a purposive sampling which focused on successful school leadership practices in challenging circumstances. It was very crucial for this study to select participants who would provide in-depth and reliable information so as to address the purpose of the research. The participants were chosen according to their experience in the school, while others were chosen as a result of them being new in the career and thus inexperienced. The reason for mixing participants was to understand how different age groups viewed leadership and taking into cognisance that new teachers will view leadership objectively.

The School Management Team was also involved in semi-structured interviews. Their involvement was based on the fact that policy required leaders to run schools as a team and therefore was relevant in the study. The study consisted

of the principal, one deputy principal, and two heads of department. A semi-structured interview was prepared for the four participants, while the four teachers would be involved in a focus group discussion. In order to present and analyse the findings of the participants, key issues that spoke to the research problem would be extracted.

INTERVIEW WITH THE PRINCIPAL

The interview with the principal took place in her office long after the scheduled date. Prior to the interview we spoke on the phone and she invited me to the school on the scheduled date. On our appointment date I provided her with the written request to participate in her school which she promised to communicate to the staff. Before the interview I explained the purpose of the study. The project was then delegated to a senior teacher who selected participants according to experience in the field. On the day of the interview we then discussed how the process would unfold and the principal agreed to be recorded.

During the interviews she revealed that transforming this school was a difficult task because it occurred when the school was stripped of seven teachers to start a new school in the neighbourhood. Lack of experience in leadership was also a challenge. She realised that the process of transforming the school was going to take time. Her first step was to plan strategically. First she had to identify issues that needed short-term resolution compared to ones that were long term. This is what she says:

Part of my strategy was to have a clear plan that shows my long or continuous goals and my short goals. I find it so crucial to me because I knew I had to start from scratch. In my top long-term list was discipline, setting direction, relationships and bringing the culture of teaching and learning in the school. My short term was recruitment, putting policies in place and leading by example. I realised that I would not achieve this alone so I had to delegate some of my responsibility to the SMT.

Her first strategy was to recruit good quality staff and she recruited three teachers in promotional posts, one as a deputy and two Heads of Department.

This is what she said:

Good teachers are the most important assets in every school.

The principal revealed that she called the departments in which the six teachers had left and motivated them to prove to the school that they did not rely on the teachers who had left the school but that they could produce good results.

Her second plan to transform the school was to instil discipline with both teachers and learners in the school. She reminded teachers of the policies and what was expected of them. She also made it clear that she would not debate non-negotiables, i.e. time on task. She commented on her stance by saying that:

As a leader I have realised that I cannot please everyone. There are non-negotiables where I become autocratic to ensure that teaching and learning does take place.

In the same breath, she called meetings with the community organisations to form a kind of relationship with them, as well as asking them to become security for her girl learners. Parent meetings were also called to assure them of their children's safety and to commitment.

The third strategy that the principal used was to set the direction the school was to take. She called several meetings for the staff, and the community was called to improve the vision and mission of the school. This is what she says:

I am a dreamer and like to take risks. I have realised that if you do things the same you are going to get the same results, so I like trying new things. Besides, developing the vision helped a lot as everybody felt part of the bigger picture and gave their all to make the school succeed.

The evidence from the extract indicates that the principal from the onset was focused on setting the direction for the school. This she achieved by putting policies and plans in place. Minister of Basic Education in Christie et al (2010) argues that good schools do the basics right. The school starts and ends on time every school day. Teachers and learners arrive on time. Teachers are well prepared for their lessons, are in class and teach every day. The good school also has a good principal. The principal has a vision for his/her school and gets others to buy into that vision. He or She leads by example and encourages learners to always strive to do better.

Her fourth strategy was to lead by example. She introduced morning devotion for the staff. This was to ensure that everyone comes to school prepared and late arrivals are minimised.

She responds that:

As teachers it is very important to lead by example, and I had to ensure that teachers do just that. I knew that if we could all arrive on time our learners will follow suit.

She revealed that it was not part of her plan to become autocratic but she had to compromise her preferred style of leadership in order to transform the school and bring back the culture of teaching and learning in the school. She also revealed that she was aware of how the approach would compromise the relationships as people do not want to be told what to do.

She then set targets for the school that year. She revealed that when setting targets they should be achievable and realistic so as to avoid disappointment and discouragement. That year the school slowly improved beyond set targets.

Her fifth strategy was giving support and motivation to both teachers and learners. She said that to ensure that teaching and learning was taking place she made instructional rounds in the school while motivating and supporting teachers. Through the instructional rounds she was able to identify teachers who needed support and encourage team teaching in the school. She also motivated learners in the assembly and helped them to choose careers as early as possible. The principal also revealed that her element of 'womeness' also played a role in that she is able to be multi-skilled and has a warmer side of her that makes people come to her with their problems.

In her own words, she said:

I give advice and support to teachers even in their personal lives and most of the time results improve.

Her last strategy was to build relationships. The principal revealed that after putting her plans and policies into place and she was sure that they were followed, she slowly used a situational approach and a 'change method', as she called it. She started bringing teachers on board to debate issues and sometimes sacrificed to win their trust while building relationships. She also said that her characteristic of being able to socialise with everyone and come down to their level helped her to understand teachers at every level.

These were her words about building relationships:

Relationships are crucial; you cannot do anything without them. They are the core of everything in the school and yet they are costly. They are like oxygen in the blood.

She also revealed that she built the same relationship with the school governing body who, she said, were the decision makers of the school and as a result helped her to achieve her goals. Part of her long-term plan was to continuously work on relationships and parental involvement which she saw as important in bringing improvement to the school. According to her, parents and the community should be constantly involved in all activities of the school.

The principal further explained that she would not have achieved all this if it was not through her dedicated and committed staff. According to her, they were not only experienced but have the interest of the black child at heart:

In her own words she said:

You know what; I must say God has blessed me with good quality staff. These young men and women are dedicated, committed and are truthful to their careers.

It was evident from the extract that the principal employed many strategies to turn the ailing school around. Also, to turn any organisation around, one needs to work, collaborate and be collegial with others. Also of paramount importance was the fact that every stakeholder should know about her intentions so that they bought in to the vision for the future.

INTERVIEW WITH THE DEPUTY PRINCIPAL

The interview with the deputy principal took place at his office on the scheduled date. What I could not help noting was the fact that both his office and the principal's were labelled as Director and Deputy Director. Even though the deputy knew about my intentions at the school, I explained everything in detail ensuring that we are on the same page. I also requested the use of the tape recorder which he gladly agreed to.

When the interview was carried out, the deputy principal revealed to me that personally he was happy about how the principal led and managed the school,

though sometimes her style of leadership created problems to those who did not understand her style. He told me that transforming an ailing school requires many strategies and a democratic leadership style was not one of them.

He commented that:

Too much democracy leads to laissez-faire, so the principal uses both democracy and autocracy, depending on the situation.

The deputy principal further revealed that under her plan to transform the school the principal first had to ensure that there was discipline. Morning briefings were introduced. This ensured that teachers were at school on time every day. Learners followed suit as teachers walked the talk and late arrivals were minimised while strict monitoring of uniforms was observed.

During the morning briefings, the principal ensured that she went through departmental policies while inviting motivational speakers and pastors to motivate staff. Important and crucial issues were only discussed during those sessions. The non-negotiables were written down for everyone to see. Teachers who failed to attend remained uninformed. Things began to shape up while the school was changing.

It was evident that ensuring order and discipline was important for the school to ensure that the culture of teaching and learning did take place. He also revealed that when the principal insisted on policy implementation, a sense of urgency and the principle of batho pele were revived and issues were addressed after non-contact time.

What was of note was that the principal had a vision from the onset and as a result worked on targeting the important issues in the school. In the school profile it was evident that the environment impacted mostly on learner morale. However, with the focus on these goals, they slowly began to see that the school was transforming. The deputy also revealed that in the principal's plan to transform the school, there was to be a schedule to repair and maintain the school. She started with the repairs and enlisted the help of parents of the learners. According to the deputy, the repairs gave a clear message that the school was taking another direction and thus transforming.

He said:

When our school was renovated it clearly encouraged us that we are getting somewhere as a school and therefore changing.

The deputy revealed that the second strategy that the principal implemented in transforming the school was to ensure that teaching and learning did occur. For that the principal delegated her duties to the SMT who, according to the deputy, made instructional rounds, checked files and supervised and moderated tests.

The deputy commented that:

“The curriculum responsibility is done by the SMT who give reports to the principal.

This interview extract revealed that the principal led the school through her school management team. It is evident that team teaching is encouraged to help improve poor results.

Furthermore, the deputy revealed that every term the staff analysed results and developed an improvement plan. Team teaching is then encouraged to help improve poor results.

The deputy principal said that the principal constantly used motivation as the strategy to improve the results of the school. Further, he revealed that although the principal was very strict on the non-negotiables, she had a way of communicating with teachers on a personal level. This, according to the deputy, she did through her open door policy that she had established in the school.

More importantly, he told me that:

She can come to everyone’s level and prefers not to argue in front of everyone in order to minimise conflict.

It was evident from the extract that the principal was a people-oriented type of a leader who had the interest of her staff at heart. As a leader, she did not want to see them achieve good results only, but also ensured that they are happy and achieved in their personal lives.

The deputy further explained that teamwork and team teaching was what had mainly put their school on the map.

In every subject we know teachers who are strong at certain parts of the chapters. When you reach that part of the chapter you call that teacher to present it for you while you are present in class. This way both the teacher and learners have gained.

In response to the question as to whom would they give credit to for the school’s success, the deputy responded by saying:

Our school stood out because of dedicated staff who love their careers in that they take an extra mile. The same teachers are sharing their salaries with vulnerable learners and buy them food and sometimes clothes. Some teachers have gone as far as adopting needy kids and staying with them until they finish school.

What was of note from this response was that even though the principal had worked so hard to turn the school around, she would not have achieved it if she did not have dedicated, committed staff that were self-motivated. The issue of dedicated staff was also acknowledged by the principal herself in her interview.

The fourth strategy that the principal was seen employing was relationships. The deputy revealed that the principal spent part of her time with the parents, and the community. In his view she wanted them to understand what the school was about by communicating her vision. I was also told that to ensure that the SGB came to meetings they were given a stipend for attending. This he thought ensured that they participated and involved themselves in education issues.

When responding to the question of relationships, he said:

As a school we believe in the principle of batho pele whereby we put parents first. We encourage them by calling meetings, signing their children's books and calling them on curriculum meetings. In extreme cases where a learner is bunking school we visit their homes. Parents are also involved in choosing subjects for their learners.

INTERVIEW WITH THE HEAD OF DEPARTMENT (ONE)

The interview with the HoD took place in his office during non-contact time at the scheduled time. The HoD was a male teacher in his early forties and was well-known for producing good results in the school. He participated in the School Improvement Plan where all Grade 12 learners from different schools were taught during the June holidays. Even though the message was not communicated well he still agreed to participate in my project. Prior to the interview, we discussed how the interview would take place, the purpose of the study and the HoD agreed that I record the interview.

During the interview, the HoD revealed that he was totally unhappy with the way the principal led and managed the school. According to him, the principal was inconsistent and led through favouritism, as a result creating problems for the SMT who sometimes have to relay the message to teachers at the eleventh hour.

He commented on her leadership by stating that:

Her channels of communication are poor though she sometimes sticks to policy and ensures its delivery.

When asked how does she led and managed the school, he responded by saying:

She relies mostly on her SMT whom she had delegated her duties to. Without the help of the strong management she would not succeed.

The HoD revealed that the SMT ran the school on behalf of the principal to ensure that teaching and learning did take place. He also revealed that when the allocation was done, he took over to ensure that the school had a composite time- table and that it did not clash. After that, the SMT drew a monitoring and supervision time-table. Further, they also ensured that they gave each teacher support by encouraging team teaching.

Insofar as transforming the school was concerned, the HoD revealed that the principal played a vital role in that regard. This in his opinion was achieved because of her strong disciplinarian character and her knowledge of policy and record-keeping. Through discipline, the principal ensured that everyone knew and understood her role and they adhere to policy. According to the HoD, creating order for self-motivated, self-disciplined and dedicated staff made it easy for them to perform their duty.

What is of note is that school B was an ailing school when the school principal was appointed as the head. Further, in her appointment, there were challenges ranging from within and outside the school which she succeeded in overcoming, namely, bringing back the culture of teaching and learning, discipline as well as filling vacant posts. The extract further notes that the principal put the systems and policies in place. This laid a good foundation for good quality staff to operate and bring the school to what it is today.

INTERVIEW OF THE HEAD OF DEPARTMENT (TWO)

The interview with the HoD took place in the school library on the scheduled date. Like all staff members, although the information was wrongly conveyed, they were prepared to participate in the study. Prior to the interview, we discussed how the interview would take place, and my intention to audio record the interview.

When the interview was carried out with the HoD, it was revealed that it was difficult to say that the principal was good at managing the school since she was fortunate to have a very strong and dedicated SMT that ran the school on her behalf. According to the HoD, she did not understand the leadership styles practised by the principal as she did not stick to any style.

She said:

The principal is far away and yet is near, most of the time she is behind closed doors with the parents. Sometimes teachers take a word that comes from the leader.

In this regard, Petterson, Murphy and Hallinger (1987) state that people become empowered when they can count on the support of the 'boss', can make or influence decisions affecting them and have access to information and resources, enabling them to implement decisions (p.75-6). They further discuss the dilemma of leadership versus delegation. Too much freedom often results in a vague sense of direction and wasted time.

During the interview, the HoD revealed that she was aware that the principal took all the credit for good performance yet they all played a role. According to her, the principal had delegated all the duties to the SMT.

In her response, she said:

As HoD, although we should play our role as managers, it sometimes becomes stressful when were to supervise classes that are in different blocks especially when we have classes ourselves. She does make rounds but I think she should do it more often because people take instructions from the leader.

The HoD further revealed that the principal as a teacher used to be an examiner and a moderator in Geography and Setswana but now she was teaching lower Grades.

The principal as a leader she is suppose to lead by example and teach Grade 12s but instead she is teaching Grade 8s; yet she used to moderate both subjects.

As far as decision-making was concerned, the HoD revealed that although the principal called the meetings in pretence that she was consulting the staff, she did not stick to the consensus reached and sometimes information came at the last minute and in that case she would leave everything to the SMT to disseminate information further to the teaching staff. She became autocratic as a way of defending herself.

This is what she said:

Our principal is autocratic even when we engage in discussions; sometimes she has taken a final decision.

As the interview unfolded she revealed that the school was fortunate to have quality staff that was dedicated and committed. She said that teachers worked as a unit and were passionate about their jobs.

She said:

I have never seen such a dedicated, committed people. Even when they are not happy with management they put their differences aside and put the children's needs first.

It was evident from the extract that school B relied on the strong SMT and staff for the school's success. Neither did the principal manage the curriculum matters in the school but her delegation of power to the SMT helped her school to achieve. The HoD revealed that although the principal was not visible in school matters she was very strong in discipline and as a result, both teachers and learners knew their place, and order and discipline were maintained.

In response to the question on how the principal relates to the staff and the community, the HoD responded by saying:

The principal is trying so hard to build relationships with the parents and community and as such parents take this school seriously. After all, they are always here at school and she takes decisions with them. As a school our relationship is based on mutual respect, and team teaching is what unites us most.

What was of note from the response on relationships was that the principal spent more time building relationships with the staff and parents. Though relationships

cannot be fixed overnight, her constant engagement with staff and parents was a clear indication that she was aware of the role relationships play towards school success.

FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSIONS WITH TEACHERS

In addition to the semi-structured interviews and site observations, a focus group discussion was held with teachers. The choice of a group discussion as one of the data collection methods was to “create a social environment in which group members are stimulated by one another’s perceptions and ideas, thereby increasing the quality and richness of data”: MacMillan and Schumacher (2010. p. 363).

However, the study acknowledges the limitations of the focus group discussions, MacMillan and Schumacher (2010. p. 364). Firstly, opinions are gathered from a small number of people and secondly, opinions can be influenced by others in the group (ibid). Despite these reservations, it is clear that the focus group discussions also assisted in determining how the school principal promotes best practices and whether the success of the school can be attributed to her.

The interview with the focus group discussion took place in the school’s library a day after our scheduled day. This was as a result of finishing the interviews with the first HoD late the previous day. Two teachers in the group were in their early fifties while another two were in their early forties. The two older teachers started at the school in 1979. Prior to the interview, I explained to teachers the purpose of my visits to the school. I was very careful not to undermine my participants by not depriving them of their choice not to participate in the study. I then asked their permission to use an audio-recorder.

During the focus group discussion, teachers revealed that they were not happy about how the principal was leading the school. Amongst other reasons for dissatisfaction were (1) leadership (2) decision making (3) support. These issues had convinced them that the principal was not the type of a leader they would personally want to lead them since, according to them, she did not have leadership qualities or skills. I then revised my interview questions to address the three issues of concern. The following were the comments on the three issues raised by the focus group discussions.

LEADERSHIP

On the issue of leadership, the participants saw the principal as having delegated her duties to the SMT and believed that this resulted in her not having any responsibility in the school.

All participants responded:

The school survives because of the strong SMT who believe in team work from all angles. (Teacher A)

She is not a hands-on leader who leads by example. (Teacher B)

Leading the school depends on the qualities and skills for the school to succeed. (Teacher C and D)

The focus group discussion revealed that they were aware that the leader was suppose to delegate some of her duties, but according to them, delegation should have a follow-up which, according to them, was not done.

When asked why she led the way she did, they all responded by saying:

That the principal is lazy and lacks leadership skills and that she was appointed to window dress.

According to the group, monitoring and motivation is the core duty of the principal. The group felt that class monitoring was a burden, especially for the HoDs who themselves had classes to teach.

It was evident from the extract that participants wanted a leader who was visible, participating and involved in making the school a success. This statement was relevant when teacher C commented on special characteristics of the leader and she said:

I see the principal so far yet she is so near.

In this instance, when they saw their leader delegating without any follow-up they thought that she delegated due to lack of knowledge. Teacher C commented by saying:

Our principal likes to delegate but does not follow up and as a result leaves many issues hanging.

The principal herself was aware of the visibility of a leader because when responding to the question of the school achieving in spite of a leader, this was how she responded:

Subordinates have common sense but need constant reminder and reinforcement from the leader. (Teacher C)

DECISION MAKING

During the focus group discussions, the teachers revealed that the principal, though she sometimes calls the staff to deliberate issues, implementation on the consensus reached was not done. The following were their responses:

Decisions are made with parents and the principal manipulates them. (Teacher A)

The school has committees which divides the school as there are committees that are more important than others, especially where there is money involved. (Teacher B)

Sometimes teachers are involved in decision making, but that does not guarantee implementation of the consensus reached; this leaves us demoralised. (Teacher C)

Just look at the example of lack of consultation and poor decision making; the principal and her parents bought irrelevant material as she prefers working with parents. (Teacher D)

It was evident from the extract that the principal failed to use a contingency approach but instead used the autocratic approach to revive an ailing school. Even though the approach used brought desirable results, it lacked consultation and transparency and as a result teachers were left out. As a result of lack of participation and involvement, people felt alienated from their own school instead of becoming part of a bigger plan.

One teacher, when asked about how decisions are made, said:

I do not know because we are not consulted; as I say there is no transparency here at school. We see people come and go. Like the people in the yard right now, I do not know who are they and how they came in the school. We are not even called into budget meetings to prioritise the school's needs.

SUPPORT

The focus group discussion revealed that the teachers believed the principal lacked leadership skills and she did not support them. They cited several incidents:

In 2010 the school was nominated as one of the schools that were to host foreign visitors. This left the school with no accommodation for the winter school for their Grade 12s. According to the participants no initiatives were made by the principal to ensure that learners were accommodated and taught during the holidays.

They also revealed that every year when they come during holidays they used their money for fares and their time but the principal was never available to give them support or even acknowledged their performance.

Further, they also revealed that the school was very popular in sports and every year they won trophies for the school, but the principal had never in a single event availed herself to support them. Sometimes they had to travel far to play and as a result arrived late at school only to find that everyone had left. This put a burden on teachers who do not have cars to ensure that the children arrive home safe. Suffice to say the schools they played against, had principals who were both the former deputies of the school; to their surprise these principals were there to give their teams support.

The evidence from the extract clearly showed that teachers do receive motivation and support from the SMT as delegates of the principal, but the principal as a leader does not do follow-ups to reinforce what the SMT did. This clearly showed that people were confident in taking orders from a leader.

What is of note is the fact that although the participants clearly stated that there were no positive things about their leader, they mentioned the following (1) engaging the community, (2) relationships, (3) and discipline.

(1) ENGAGE THE COMMUNITY

During the focus group discussions, the teachers revealed that the principal did not only relate well with the community but also attended community events and funerals. Further, they revealed that she spent most of the time in the office with the parents. According to teacher A, as a result of good relations,

The community in return guard the school against burglary, rape and other criminal activities that may victimise our girls. Relations are very good; as a result Shoprite as our neighbour donates food for the needy. (Teacher B)

The relations are good and the community hire classrooms when they have events (Teachers C and D)

The profile of the school clearly showed the socio-economic environment that surrounds the school and how it impacts on the school and the challenges thereof. To survive in that environment, the principal needed to negotiate her identity by clearly stating her intentions for the community and where she wanted to see the school in the future. As a result of community involvement, they soon bought in to the vision of the school and protected all its stakeholders.

(2) RELATIONSHIPS

Although teachers perceived her differently with regard to the relationships with staff, most seemed to believe that she shared a very good relationship with SGB, the community and learners. This is evident when the group said:

She is always sitting in the office with the SGB and she listens to learner problems and gives them advice. (Teacher C & D)

During my visit to the school I also witnessed the principal on two occasions giving advice to learners. First it was when the parent came to request a transfer because the learner had fallen pregnant. She advised the parent let the child write her final exams before she could take her elsewhere as there was no school that will admit her during September.

Secondly, it was when the learners were buying food through the fence. She educated them about the dangers of eating food that was not inspected. In return she gave them the responsibility to bring other culprits to the office every day.

(3) DISCIPLINE

What was of note was that even though participants perceived discipline negatively, it played a vital role in turning the school around, more so that the environment itself was well-disciplined. This was evident when teachers were asked to identify the personal qualities of the principal. This was what they said:

She is extremely strong in discipline and stands by her word, and neither does she compromise. (Teacher A)

The principal is firm, but sometimes has her casualties whom she victimises. (Teacher B)

It depends on the situation as she does have ubuntu, especially when one is bereaved. (Teacher C)

I have seen a good side of the principal whereby she has shown her warmth and care and acted as a confidante. (Teacher D)

These extracts proved that transforming a school was a long journey that requires collective responsibility. It also showed that everyone had a role to play towards bringing the school to success, not just the principal. Also worth noting, was that although the route is slow and uneven, it is very sensitive; as a result all issues were crucial and important.

CHAPTER OVERVIEW

School A seemed to have discipline as the overriding principle that was holding it together. This discipline was informed by the policy of the school which was formulated by the stakeholders of the school. School A achieved its discipline through eliminating competition between learners and encouraging sameness and equality. The second principle that emerged was loyalty and ownership. It became evident from the study that the majority of the staff were members of the same community and were themselves learners in the same school. Thus the school is their pride and as a result they own it and do not want to see it fail.

The third principle was the existence of good relationships between staff members. As a result, teamwork, collegiality and commitment prevailed. Teachers in this school were self-motivated, dedicated and a healthy competition was practised.

The principal of School B instilled discipline in both learners and teachers. She introduced morning devotions that encouraged teachers to come to meetings in the mornings. Crucial issues were discussed in the morning briefings. As a result of the briefings, teachers came early and late coming was controlled. Discipline was further emphasised by the involvement of the parents and the community. As a result of discipline, the school was able to achieve set goals. As part of strategic planning, the school set targets that were achievable each year and results were analysed and teachers motivated. What emerged from the participants was that the principal used a shared leadership approach and delegated some of her duties to the deputy and heads of departments. Sharing leadership suggested that the principal was involved in managing the teaching and learning in conjunction with other members of the SMT.

The other principle that also emerged was that the principal successfully recruited good teachers who, as the SMT, helped in running the school. Positive behaviour was influenced through team teaching and the results improved. What also emerged was that the SMT did take their delegated duties seriously by making instructional rounds. The school had dedicated and committed staff. Good relationships were another principle that held the school together. The principal's personality traits helped, in that as a social being she was able to communicate with everyone and meet them at their level.

What also emerged was that the School B principal demonstrated good management skills. Evidence showed that the principal was a good administrator and good at financial management. This was evident when participants responded that the principal was very good at financial management. There was a global trend of under-led and over-managed organisations. Bush (2008) argues that both leadership and management is an important dimension and attaches no special value to either, since different settings and times require varied responses.

The politicisation of schools seemed to be emerging to all participants. Union interference was understood to be dominant in crucial education issues that were key to making the school a success. As a result of union involvement, school leaders were not managing teaching and learning. What was of note from school

B was the conflicts over appointments in leadership positions. This came as a result of the principal's recruitment strategy of appointing teachers from other institutions to occupy senior positions.

CHAPTER FIVE

EMERGING THEMES FROM THE DATA

INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents a cross-case analysis of the data presented in the two previous chapters. The analysis is linked to the research questions, the findings and the literature. The structure of the chapter identifies patterns and trends as well as interpreting findings of the study in terms of research questions and literature review. The chapter focuses on the principals in the two case studies.

The study was informed by the following claims: (1) “That schools that make a difference are led by principals who make significant and measureable contributions.” (2) “There are practices that are prevalent in successful principals.” The claims suggest that for a school to succeed leadership is crucial and that the leader should exhibit certain practices that contribute towards the school’s success. The findings aimed at establishing whether Leithwood et al’s (2006) four core leadership practices were found as the necessary conditions for school success. I argue that these are not the only practices that make a school successful, especially in South African township schools where the militancy of the unions impacts much on the learning and teaching.

Working through the data, I was able to establish important themes that attempted to answer the main research question: What are the leadership practices that contribute towards the success of a school? In analysing the findings of the two schools, I was able to find common patterns that are aimed at answering the research question. The themes that were established were found common to all case study schools and helped in understanding successful leadership practices of principals in challenging contexts.

EMERGING THEMES FROM SITES

7.1 SETTING DIRECTION AS A PRIORITY FOR SCHOOL SUCCESS

The findings revealed that both principals had similar priorities when they took over the position of principalship. They realised that they had to plan strategically in order to meet the demands of their schools. The school A principal acknowledged that she realised that the school did not have much to change except for sustaining and striving for excellency. Part of her plan in setting direction was to restore order and discipline in the school. She realised that in order to achieve set goals she had to lead by example. She became visible in the morning at the gates for late arrivals. She organised the police forum to search for drugs, while sending addicts for rehabilitation. She also realised that she was not going to achieve discipline alone, thus she involved parents. Through the help of the School Governing Body (SGB) the school installed a monitoring tool in her office that aimed at assisting the school with discipline and truancy. The school then developed a uniform policy that aimed at encouraging equality in learners. The principal made it clear that order and discipline in the school was achieved by the learners wearing uniforms because:

Dress code encourages equality in all learners and makes them concentrate on their studies rather than competing.

Contrary to School A, setting direction for school B meant developing a vision for the school. The profile stated that the principal took over the school at 38% matric pass rate. Further, the school was left to fill the gap of seven teachers who received a mandate from the district to help start another school. This meant that the school was in crisis and thus needed urgent attention. The findings revealed that school B's principal's first strategy in setting direction was recruitment. According to the principal, recruitment gave her the opportunity to select good quality teachers and SMT members whom she considered crucial in bringing school success. The principal said:

Good teachers are the most important asset in every school.

Elmore (2003) believes that knowing the right thing to do is the central issue of school improvement. Holding schools accountable for their performance depends

on having people in schools with knowledge, skill, and judgement to make the improvements that will increase student performance (p. 9).

The second strategy employed by the principal in school B supported that of school A. Both principals set directions through instilling discipline in the school. What was of note was that both leaders viewed discipline as key to school success, while the principal in school B further developed a vision for her school. The vision supported the study by Bush (2003) when he argues that the vision is increasingly regarded as a necessary component of effective leadership. Harris (2009.p6) believes that leadership that lacks a vision or common purpose can be a contributory factor to a downward spiral of performance amongst staff in a school in a high poverty context. School principals as leaders should know exactly where they want to take their school.

The main argument here was that both school principals understood their purpose as leaders, that of setting direction. What was of note was that these principals were not at the same level of development in their schools. The principal in school A found systems in place and a school on a high note, while school B was in crisis. The findings support Hopkins, Harris and Jackson's (1997) view that differential school improvement strategies are required for schools at different stages of their development. It was clear that both principals understood the culture of their schools before they could bring any kind of reform in their schools. Principals should recognise that schools are not the same and acknowledge that school culture has the power to promote or inhibit organisational growth. Slavin (2005) asserts that schools are different as a one-size-fits-all change strategy will not work.

The findings of the study support the view of Hallinger and Leithwood (1998) because they also identify aspects such as the school mission, teachers' expectations and opportunities for learning as elements of a school's culture that shape the behaviour of teachers and students towards instruction and teaching.

The findings showed that good results in both schools were realised because of committed teachers and the SMT. It emerged as the most important aspect that contributes towards the success of their schools. According to school B participants, it was through their commitment, dedication and enthusiasm and the strong and passionate SMT that the school was able to achieve good results,

while school A pulled its strength from good quality staff, who were experienced and the best in their fields. The findings also showed that ownership was what held the school together. Most teachers in school A belonged to the same community and were learners in the same school. As a result they had ownership of the community.

Through commitment and dedication, the school made sure that the work was done efficiently and effectively so that positive results were achieved. The findings supported the “schools that works” findings (2007) when they found a set of highly motivated schools, with dedicated teachers and busy learners doing all they could to focus on achievement in the senior certificate exams.

Teamwork and team teaching was another aspect that was found crucial towards the school reaching desired goals. School A showed that dedicated as they were, they relied on each other through planning and supporting each other, while school B supported each other through team teaching. Teachers in school B were specialists in certain parts (chapters) of their subjects where they assisted each other by teaching for their peers while they in return observed. According to participants, through team teaching teachers were able to give one another support while they mentored and modelled each other’s learning. Through team teaching both a teacher and learners gained knowledge and skills. Little (1990) in support of collegiality, believes that something is gained when teachers work together and something is lost when they do not. In effect, the perceived benefits must be great enough that the time teachers spend together can compete with time spent in other ways, on other priorities that are equally compelling or more immediate.

7.2 LEADERSHIP PLAYS AN INDIRECT BUT POWERFUL ROLE TOWARDS CURRICULUM MANAGEMENT

The findings from the study on both schools revealed that the principal played a powerful but indirect role towards ensuring curriculum management in their schools. This was evident in the findings where school A principal was making instructional rounds to ensure that teachers were in class. School A principal had further designed a monitoring tool that she utilised through class monitors to keep period registers to ensure that teachers honoured their periods. The

principal supervises the register and calls teachers who fail to honour periods and together planned to cover lost time. School B principal was also making instructional rounds but relied on results analysis to ensure that the school achieved set goals. In both schools, principals delegated responsibility to the SMT who monitored files and schedules, moderated tests and exams and supervised the daily activities of the school. The principals followed up and oversaw the business of teaching and learning and ensured that intended outcomes were achieved. The principal supported, encouraged and motivated both staff and learners to do better.

Fullan et al (1987a) say effective managerial power includes, by definition, the ability to empower sometimes by freeing up, and oftentimes by propelling others within the organisation. Fullan (2010) also says that the effective principal shares, in fact develops, leadership among teachers, so we are talking about assistant principals, HoDs grade level co-ordinators, and teacher leaders of all types in the school. The study of principals that changed their schools all found principals as contributory factors towards success in the quality of leadership: (Muijs, 2004; Day, 2005 & Harris, 2009). Leithwood et al (2006a) support the study when they say “there is not a single documented case of a school successfully turning around its pupil achievement trajectory in the absence of a talented leadership” (p.5).

The findings of school A refuted the above notion that the success of the school rested entirely on the quality of leadership. The principal of school A had only four years’ experience as principal in the same institution and had never been a principal elsewhere. The success of her school was through mutual co-operation between the principal and staff. The findings revealed that even though she found the school successful she made contributions by ensuring that order and discipline prevailed and teachers honoured their periods, while learners did their part. Both principals delegated some of their responsibilities to the SMT. Fullan (1992) assert that delegation is the third aspect of time management, is an orientation and skill that only a minority of middle managers have mastered. The author advises that managers should try not to do anything that someone else in

the building can do so that they spend their time on what others in the building are not in the position to do.

The findings of the study conducted by Mortimore (1998) on effective schools found that in schools in which the deputy heads were actively involved in programme issues, there was greater student achievement and teacher effectiveness than in schools in which the head acted as a more autonomous figure.

In supporting the views above, I argue that it is not easy or possible for the principal to fulfil all the aspects of instructional leadership alone; to succeed, the principal must delegate. Both schools A and B revealed that conducting class visits was against the mandate of the unions. The principals, finding themselves in a unionised environment, had to negotiate their identity in order to make the school successful. School A's principal developed a monitoring tool where she used learners, while school B depended on team teaching and analysing results to ensure curriculum management.

7.3 LEADERSHIP IS A SHARED ENTITY AS TEACHER EMPOWERMENT

The findings revealed that both school A and B principals have delegated their responsibilities to the SMT who drive and manage the curriculum. The HoDs are specialists in their subjects and lead departments in the subject they teach. Each HoD holds meetings in his/her department with teachers as a team, policies are formulated while they plan and share teaching strategies. School B findings revealed that shared teaching is what helps the school to achieve.

According to HoDs, teachers helped one another by teaching areas which they were good at, while the class teacher observed the teaching strategy. One HoD had this to say about teamwork:

My role is to ensure good results are realised. I achieve that by ensuring that teamwork and team teaching is encouraged, that learners are not left behind and teachers honour their periods while learners do their part.

In that manner, both the learners and the teachers had benefited. Teachers were supervised, monitored and their work was moderated. The principals of both schools did follow-ups quarterly through checking learners' books and comparing

the lesson plans or work schedules which the work learners did in class. In that way, the principal was able to see work covered in each class. In a case where learners failed a particular subject, the principal called the teacher concerned to find out the problem. The principal of school B even went to the extent of interviewing the learners to find out if there were challenges.

According to Fullan (1992) successful schools were characterised by heads who supported and stimulated initiative-taking by others, who set up cross-hierarchical steering groups consisting of teachers, administrators, and sometimes parents and students and who delegated authority and resources to the steering group, while maintaining active involvement in or liaison with the groups.

According to Grant (2006) leading teaching and learning is not the sole responsibility of the school head, but of every teacher in every classroom. Grant (2006) further asserts that schools can no longer be led by a lone figure at the top of the hierarchy. The only way that schools will be able to meet the challenges is to tap the potential of all staff members and allow teachers to experience a sense of ownership and inclusivity and lead aspects of the change process. She further says that the scope is broad and may include leadership around curriculum issues, assessment, teaching and learning, community and parental participation, school vision building, networking, the development of partnerships, and so on.

It was worth noting that the principals of both schools had delegated most of their duties and responsibilities to the SMT. Through delegation, the work was shared among everyone rather than being vested in one individual. This promoted leaders among leaders.

Although development was one of the crucial areas in instructional leadership, the principals of both schools in the study did not seem to be involved in ensuring that teachers received adequate training that was aimed at the betterment of their subjects. Both schools in the study revealed that the role of staff development was managed by the district. Teacher development was a crucial matter in South African schools, more so as research showed a lack of knowledge of subject content as the cause of poor performance.

The studies by Fleisch (2007) and Hoadley (2007) revealed teacher incompetence or lack of content and pedagogic knowledge as the root cause of poor performance in the country. In order for schools to increase performance continuous learning is essential, and principals as leaders are placed in the strategic position to ensure that development does occur. School A principal indicated that she gave her staff feedback about workshops attended, while she encouraged teachers to seek knowledge and study so that they kept abreast of developments. Hill (2001) asserts that school leaders may lack sufficient knowledge of teaching and learning to provide adequate, let alone successful, instructional leadership (p.87).

The study showed that these principals did not have a clear understanding of the instructional role and if they did they were not empowered adequately to be able to develop others. According to the principals, instructional leadership was taking instructional rounds in the school to ensure that both teachers and learners were in class on time (time on task).

This takes us to Bush and Heystek's (2006) findings that South African principals do not conceptualise their role as instructional leaders.

7.4 LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT ARE KEY TO IMPROVEMENT

Both school A and B findings revealed that principals used the contingency theory, or situational approach, to lead and manage their schools. The situational approach leader is proactive and dynamic in his/her style of leadership. The leader had no inherent style but switched styles to suit the situation. Schools as organisations are guided by policies and guidelines from the education minister; as such they are accountable to her and the public. Accomplishing the departmental aims sometimes required them to become autocratic and adhere to instructions without question. Situations such as time on task, submission and implementation of policies and circulars, caused the principals to become autocratic, whereas they become democratic in issues that involve staff to come on board. This is how they responded to how they led and managed their schools:

My style of leadership depends on the issue at hand, but I must tell you that I am autocratic for the non-negotiables. (Principal of school A) dated (11.10 2011).

It was not part of my plan to become autocratic but I realised that I had to compromise my preferred style of leadership in order to transform the school and bring back the culture of teaching and learning. I was aware of how the approach will compromise the relationships as people do not want to be told what to do. Now that everything is in place I am situational. (Principal of school B) dated (20.09 2011).

The findings were advocated by scholars such as Marzano, Water and McNulty (2005) who state that the essence of the contingency theory is that different situations, environments and cultures call for different leadership styles in order for change to occur. Davidoff and Lazarus (1997) say the challenge is to develop the sensitivity and wisdom to use the right style of leadership at the right time (p.38).

The findings of both schools in the study showed that communication or professional dialogue contributed towards learner achievement. The school A principal revealed that one of her strategies was to ensure that the school had healthy relationships. For that the principal used her personal attributes. Firstly, she exercised an open door policy to everyone while taking interest in their personal lives and keeping them motivated. Support was not limited to school work but she had become a confidante to many. This was how one teacher responded about the school A principal:

To me the principal is a role model and a confidante. Unfortunately I do not aspire to become a principal but intend leaving the career soon. I am able to go to her about anything that is not school related, I mean my personal life.

School B also shares the same sentiments. This is evident when some teachers and a deputy say:

It depends on the situation as she does have ubuntu, especially when one is bereaved. (Teacher C)14. 09. 2011.

I have seen a good side of the principal whereby she has shown her warmth and care and acted as a confidante. (Teacher D)14. 09. 2011.

Our principal can come to everyone's level and prefers not to argue in front of everyone in order to minimise conflicts. (Deputy Principal) 20. 09. 2011.

The findings are supported by Little (1993) who suggests talking openly and frequently with teachers about how instruction could improve the school (p. 129). As a result of good communication, participants of both schools in the study acknowledged that they could confide in their leader. Trust was the first step towards building good communication.

The findings also revealed that in order to achieve, both schools had to make a lot of sacrifices. The visibility of the principal in school A played a critical role in ensuring that both teachers and learners arrived on time. The school realised that they would not achieve this alone. First, they call parents and explain the curriculum, assessment and their role. Parents were advised to participate in subject choice while learner progress was discussed with the parent. When the time tables were issued, parents received a copy as well. This was to ensure that the parent participated fully towards ensuring that his/her child succeeded. To ensure that learners were monitored, school A had located the Grade 12 classes next to the administration block. Learners were motivated and supported, while teachers went the extra mile by conducting morning and afternoon classes, as well as the School Improvement Plan (SIP) which took place during the holidays. Contrary to school A, school B findings revealed that to ensure good results, morning devotions were introduced and the school used them for planning strategically. According to the principal, the morning devotions helped in ensuring that the school led by example. The deputy monitored attendance of the School Improvement Plan (SIP) during the holidays while the school also held morning and afternoon classes. What was worth noting was that even though the schools went the extra mile to ensure that good results were realised, both schools consisted of good teachers who had the subject knowledge.

7.5 BUILDING AND MANAGING RELATIONSHIPS AS A WAY OF SUSTAINING SUCCESS

The findings of the study showed that principals communicated their vision through establishing relationships with the staff, parents and learners. Relationships were established around the core values of their schools. Principals of both schools A and B worked towards winning trust, respect, loyalty, equality and the principle of ubuntu as a way of developing and maintaining relationship in their schools. These principals understood that they cannot get the job done unless they joined forces and partnered with all stakeholders. They both said that they were relationship-oriented and therefore they put human needs before that of the organisation.

These findings are advocated by scholars such as Fullan (2002) who view improvement of relationships as one of the roles of the principal and a single factor common to successful change (p.18). If relationships are good the school is likely to succeed. Prew (2007) Harris and Chapman (2002) and Harris (2002) all argue that leaders should invest time in developing and maintaining good relationships and create space for the students, parents and the community to participate in educational affairs.

Schools in challenging contexts are often faced with crime and burglary as a result of poor socio-economic factors. Developing good relationships and involving the community in the school affairs and projects often decreases crime as it promotes ownership. As a result, everyone will be on guard for the school against any criminal activities. Prew (2007) advises us that the involvement of parents in schools should not be always educational, but in school projects and committees, as this will not make them feel threatened due to lack of literacy skill. As part of building relationships, both principals revealed that they had started to become visible to parents and the community. Both principals indicated that they held parents meetings whereby they teach parents about the curriculum and assessment and the part they should play in ensuring that their children succeed.

School B principal's relationships were ongoing with the SGB and community members came to school regularly, while the school ensured that they get first priority for any service rendered in the school. According to her it was very important to establish ongoing relationships, especially with the SGB as they were decision makers of the school and helped the school to achieve its goals.

As part of building relationships with learners and staff, both principals revealed that they opened their communication channels, while their relationships were established around the values of trust, respect and equality. Knowing their staff capabilities, commitment and loyalty to their careers, they developed trust and respect towards them. They in return required trust from them. They also indicated that to ensure trust and respect prevails, they treated everyone equally while they extended the value of caring and fairness.

CHAPTER OVERVIEW

This chapter has dealt with the findings of schools A and B. It has identified patterns that were found to be common in both schools. Five key themes were identified that aimed to answer the research questions. What emerged from the findings was that both school leaders played an indirect role in their schools' success, as opposed to the claim by many scholars that the success of the school was determined by good leadership. The findings also refuted Leithwood et al's four core practices as the only practices that contribute towards school success but have shown other practices were seen to have played a vital role towards the success of the school.

CHAPTER SIX

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

This study attempted to give insights into successful leadership practices in challenging township schools in Soweto. The study was about two performing secondary schools. The findings were informed by the following claims: (1) that schools that make a difference are led by principals who make significant and measurable contributions; (2) there are practices that are prevalent in successful principals.

The findings refuted the first claim but instead revealed that principals in the study played a relatively low level of indirect influence towards managing teaching and learning in their schools. The curriculum role was a delegated entity which the school management team should ensure that it occurred, while the principal oversaw to its occurrence. In other words, the findings failed to support the claim by the prominent scholars that say schools that make a difference are led by principals who make significant and measureable contributions (Bush & Glover 2009; Research in Education Leadership 2003; Chi-Kin et al 1999).

The findings instead supported Chi-Kin Lee and Dimmock's (1999) findings that principals exert an indirect influence on curriculum leadership and management. What is depicted in both schools is that principals manage the curriculum from above while they rely mostly on the SMT. Principals oversee the curriculum matters by checking learners' books, schedules and results analysis.

Bush and Glover (2009), Botha and his colleagues (2006) and Bush et al (2008) remind us that middle managers also have the responsibility of curriculum delivery. They also note that if teaching and learning are to improve significantly, HoDs will have to spend much more time in supervising the teaching and learning activities that occur daily in their subjects and learning area. Grant (2006) argues that leading teaching and learning is also the responsibility of every teacher in every classroom. According to Grant, schools can no longer be led by a lone figure at the top of the hierarchy. She says that the only way that schools will be able to meet the challenges is to tap the potential of all staff members and allow teachers to experience a sense of ownership and inclusivity

and to lead aspects of the change process. The scope is broad and may include leadership around curriculum issues, assessment, teaching and learning, community and parent participation, school vision building, networking, the development of partnerships, and so on (p. 514).

Giving teachers the autonomy to manage their own teaching and learning motivates them to do their best. Through sharing of power and support, leaders are developed while accountability is collective. Even though managing teaching and learning is a shared responsibility, the principal should lead learning by ensuring that structures that support teaching and learning are in place.

In fact, it would be understandable to say that shared instructional leadership, with the principal playing a central role and being a lead learner, combined with a collegial team that is willing to go the extra mile in a school where structures are in place with a relationship-oriented leadership, is a recipe for success.

The findings also refute Leithwood, Aitken and Jantzi's (2006a) four core leadership practices that principals exhibit as necessary conditions for school success. In other words, leadership practices that the principal should exhibit are not limited to four as Leithwood and colleagues suggest, but there are other practices that are important for school success as well. The two principals in the study were not in the same stage of development in their organisation and neither did their schools share a similar culture. As a result, each principal exhibited leadership practices that suited the stage of development in her school. The study also depicted that principals relied on collegiality and team teaching for the school's success. Both principals proclaimed that the success of their schools was attributed to great teaching staff that were not only committed and dedicated but relied on each other through teamwork and team teaching. The reliance of teachers on each other was due to lack of professional development in many schools.

Many teachers had learned to discover things for themselves while they learned from others. Through collegiality, both learners and teachers benefited while teachers took responsibility for their own development. Carter (2004. p.30) reminds us that school leadership is second only to teacher quality, among school related factors that have an effect on student learning. The findings also supported Marks and Printy's (2003) theory that says that instructional leadership

and management must not be principal-centred but be distributed amongst all the staff members to promote teacher development.

It would then be fair to say that the findings concluded that teachers had the ability to initiate, drive and sustain the change process. Team teaching was introduced by teachers as a way of supporting one another. These teachers saw the values as it impacted on teacher class performance while improving learner achievements.

In this study, the leadership practices of both principals affected achievement. The findings of the study pointed to differences in the use of leadership practices that could indirectly increase achievement for students. Both principals changed leadership styles according to needs at the time. Tomlinson and Allan (2000) say that as principals increase their knowledge, this is followed by increased academic achievement for all students.

Another important lesson revealed by the study is that relationships could make or break the school. Principals, through their relationship-oriented approach, were able to communicate their vision and drive the schools in the required direction. Through building relationship around the core values of trust, respect, ubuntu, equality and caring for each other, teachers in the school were able to learn new things knowing that they had the support of everyone in the school. The findings of my study supported the findings of the International Education Studies (2009) about excellent principals in Malaysia that found relationships as key towards effective schools. What is clear from the study was that successful leaders relied on relationships to drive their vision and set direction for their school. While Motshana's findings (2004), in Bush and Glover (2002), on a survey conducted in Mpumalanga province concluded that effectiveness depends on a positive school climate and school culture.

CONCLUSIONS

School leadership is mostly successful when it is focused on teaching and learning. This indicates that managing teaching and learning is necessary for school improvement. This study left the following gaps in the education leadership that requires further research.

The following questions call for further inquiry for scholars, researchers and policy makers about the instructional model:

- Since principals should take both a leadership and a management role, how do they balance the two and ensure that they both receive equal attention?
- When leadership distributes or shares power to everyone in the school, who manages who?
- How does the principal support and model the subject in which she/he has no expertise? Should leaders have all answers to all questions?

RECOMMENDATIONS

Given the fact that the case study was limited to only two schools it would be pretty unfair to generalise the results but this study showed that it is possible for schools in Soweto to achieve and perform at the required level. The achievement could be through teamwork, dedication and commitment by all stakeholders. It also showed that the essential part of performance in schools is capacity, i.e. competent and committed teachers with the supportive leadership was what drove the schools to success.

From the discussions above it has become evident that leading a school is a challenge, and requires skills and knowledge. It is clear that the education ministry should establish leadership programmes for aspiring and on-the-job principals in order to build and improve management and leadership capacity and skills for principals. Alongside this, should be the interpersonal skills development programme for principals. The programme should be such that it gives the participants the opportunity to apply the skills and knowledge in their own school while it is regarded as the entry level for principals.

What is of note is that there is a lack of support, monitoring and supervision from principals. This is due to the fact that leaders do not conceptualise their role as instructional leaders. Bush and Heystek (2006) in their study in Gauteng also found similar findings. According to the authors, principals focus more on management functions. Developing principals professionally would enhance their professional skills while creating a platform for them to support teachers.

The findings of the study indicated a lack of accountability measures by the government. In order for schools to increase performance, the education ministry should increase its accountability measures for teachers and design policies that will hold both primary and secondary schools accountable for poor performance. In order to increase performance, the government should capacitate subject advisors and teachers in continuous professional development and develop subject knowledge to ensure that they close the gap between qualification and competency.

Even though learners in poor communities achieve, their schools are not at the required level of learning and as such does not influence learners positively. The government should recognise the need and act towards closing the gap between equity and equality where each citizen enjoys their birthright.

Teachers in the study developed their own support system through team teaching. This showed that teachers were in need of external support in order to broaden their understanding and impact in a way that would benefit them and their learners. Teachers meeting in clusters would encourage networking.

Finally, education is never the responsibility of the government alone but that of every citizen, such as the NGOs, professional bodies and trade unions, who should join forces in helping capacitate teachers to be the best they can be. Further in-depth research in the study is required.

LIMITATION OF THE STUDY

This study was conducted within certain limitations and it is important for the reader to read with these limitations in mind.

The availability of South African literature on successful school leadership was the first limitation, while the same literature is over-represented in European countries. This alone suggests that not much has been done in this area of study in this country, especially township schools.

The second limitation was finding schools that met the criteria of successful schools. This suggests that township schools are under-performing and supports Heytek's (2007) findings that South African schools are under-performing. As a result of the scarcity of such schools, I was affected by financial constraints as the performing schools were far away.

Time constraints were another factor that limited this study. The study was conducted within a short period of time; this led me to conduct some interviews during contact time.

Lastly, organising participants for the study was a limitation as teachers were either reluctant or very busy with preparation for the matric examinations.

APPENDICES

RESEARCH TOOLS

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL FOR THE PRINCIPAL (Semi-structured interviews)

PLEASE TICK AS APPROPRIATE

BIOGRAPHICAL DATA ON PRINCIPAL

A. Gender:

MALE	FEMALE
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B. Age group

25-34	35-49	50-64
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C. Years of service as a teacher

D. Years of service as a principal of present school

E. Number of principalships

F. Level of study

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BACKGROUND INFORMATION ON THE SCHOOL

G. School quintile

H. Student enrolment

Male	Female

I. Age range of students

PROVISIONAL INTERVIEW QUESTIONS (PRINCIPAL)

Questions about how the principal leads and manages the school, and why do they manage the way they do.

- How do you see your role as the principal of a school?
- How do you ensure that teaching and learning takes place in your school?
- How are decisions made in the school?
- How does the principal classify the school in terms of performance?
- The leadership style adopted by the principal
- Credit for good performance
- Time management

SECTION 2

Questions about the existing leadership practices of township schools.

- Personal attributes that are critical for success
- About the role played by leadership towards success
- Whether a school would achieve in spite of leadership

SECTION 3

Questions about how the leader negotiates his/her identity in the school

- How the principal relates with stakeholders and the community
- The role played by the community in education

INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR DEPUTY PRINCIPAL/ Heads of Department (Semi-structured interviews)

Biographical Data on Deputy Principal

1. Gender

Male Female

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2. Age group

25-34 35-49 50-64

--	--	--

3. Years of experience as a teacher

--

4. Years of service as the Deputy principal

--

5. Level of study

Certificate Diploma Degree Post degree

--	--	--	--

SECTION A

Questions about leadership and management in the school:

- How does the principal lead and manage the school?
- The critical experiences that are key to leadership?
- Your role as the Deputy principal of the school?
- How are learning and teaching managed?
- How is learner progress evaluated?

SECTION B

Questions about how the school negotiates identity with the community:

- How does the school relate to the stakeholders and the community?
- How does the school involve parents in school matters?
- Does the school have a school governing body?
- What would the school do differently?

SECTION C

Questions about the existing leadership practices in the township schools:

- What are the leadership practices that are commonly found in township schools?
- What is the personal view in terms of the challenges faced by principals in township schools?

BIOGRAPHICAL DATA ON FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSIONS

1. Gender

Male Female

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2. Age group

25-34 35-49 50-64

--	--	--

3. Years of service as teachers

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4. Level of study

Certificate Diploma Degree Post degree

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SECTION A

Questions about leadership and management in the school:

- How does the principal lead and manage the school?
- Do they agree with the statement that says leadership plays a vital role towards the school success?
- Does the principal have specific leadership style?
- Could the school achieve without leadership?
- The personal qualities of the principal observed.
- Who gets the credit for school performance?
- The special characteristics of the principal that are seen?
- How teaching and learning is managed.
- How decisions are made.
- How relationships are in the school.
- How parents and community are involved.

Participant information sheet. (For the Focus Group Discussion)

Exploring good leadership practices in a challenging context.

The study aimed to explore successful school leadership practices of principals in challenging contexts. I wanted to understand how these principals led and managed their schools, what leadership practices they used and how did they negotiate their identity in the school. The new dispensation had put principals at the centre of leading improvement. As agents of change, they were expected to impact on the school, the community and transform the nation at large. As the change expectation heightens, the role of the principal had become overloaded and thus impossible to fulfil the expected reform. It was against this background that the study would be conducted. Two Soweto secondary schools had been selected as case studies for the research. The criteria for selection were their outstanding performance they displayed in their Senior Certificate over the past five years.

Research had shown that effective leadership contributed towards the success of the organisation. This study set out to explore school leadership and the role that principals played towards making their school a success. Even though much has been written about leadership development internationally, little is known about school leadership within the South African context, more so leadership in challenging contexts.

As one of the methods of collecting data, teachers were chosen to participate in a Focus Group Discussion. The sessions took only thirty minutes after non-contact time in the school premises. The principal was requested to grant access as well as select participants for the interviews. The focus group discussions would only focus on the leadership that teachers experience in their school. All participants in the focus group discussion were informed that the discussions would be held under conditions of anonymity and the right to withdraw from the session at any given period were accepted with no penalty. The participants in the group were ensured that no information would leave the room and neither would it be divulged to their seniors or interfere with their careers or future employment. The confidentiality of the information was emphasised, as well as the safety of the information before it would be destroyed.

The results of this report would be presented to the University of Witwatersrand for examination. A copy of the research report would be sent to the Gauteng Department of Education.

For more information please do not hesitate to contact me.

Miss Linda Ramatseba

0723314967 or (lindaramatseba@gmail.com)

Participant information sheet

Exploring good leadership practices in a challenging context.

The study aimed to explore successful school leadership practices of principals in challenging contexts. I wanted to know how these principals led and managed their schools, what leadership practices they used and how they negotiated their identity in the school. The new dispensation had put principals at the centre of leading improvement. As agents of change, they were expected to impact on the school, community and transform the nation at large. As the change expectation heightens, the role of the principal had become overloaded and thus impossible to fulfil the expected reform. It was against this background that the study would be conducted. Two Soweto secondary schools were selected as case studies for the research. The criteria for selection were their outstanding performance they displayed in their Senior Certificate over the past five years.

Research had shown that effective leadership contributed towards the success of the organisation. This study set out to explore school leadership and the role that principals played towards making their school a success. Even though much had been written about leadership development internationally, little was known about school leadership within the South African context, more so leadership in a challenging context.

The following individuals had been targeted, namely: the principal, deputy, head of department and teachers for the study. A one-on-one interview was scheduled for the school management team while the focus group was scheduled for the teachers. The sessions only took thirty minutes after non-contact time at the school premises. The principal was requested to grant access as well as to select participants for the interviews. The interviews would only focus on the leadership they all experienced in their school. All participants were informed that they would remain anonymous and had the right to withdraw from the session at any given period were accepted. The confidentiality of the information was emphasised, as well as the safety of the information before being destroyed. The results of this report were presented to the University of Witwatersrand for the examination, together with the research report, a copy being sent to the Gauteng Department of Education.

For more information please do not hesitate to contact me.

Miss Linda Ramatseba

0723314967

lindaramatseba@gmail.com

PARTICIPANT'S CONSENT FORM

I am Linda Ramatseba, a Master of Education student at the University of Witwatersrand. I am doing research on Leadership titled: *"An exploration of successful school leadership practices in challenging context: A case study of two schools in Soweto township"*. Here I am looking at how the principal leads and manages the school, and why he/she manages the school. I kindly request your participation in this study. The purpose of this study is purely academic. Participation in this study is voluntary, and can only occur if you agree to the following:

That you read and understand the information sheet provided by me regarding the study and that you are aware that the information you give will be treated with confidence and neither are your names or that of the school will appear in the research. I understand and agree that the data collected will be kept in a safe and destroyed within a period of three to five years.

That you may at any stage withdraw your participation without prejudice.

I provide my detailed contacts should you at any time need to contact me.

0723314967, lindaramatseba@gmail.com

PARTICIPANT'S

SIGNATURE.....DATE.....

RESEARCHER'S

SIGNATURE.....DATE.....

PARTICIPANT CONSENT TO USE A TAPE RECORDER

472 Phakoe Street
Emndeni Ext 2
P.O Kwa-Xuma
1867

Dear participant

My name is **Linda Ramatseba**, I am currently studying towards my Masters Degree at the University of Witwatersrand. My focus area is **An exploration of successful school leadership practices in challenging contexts: A case study of two secondary schools in Soweto**. One of the requirements for the degree is to conduct research. This research will enable me to write a paper for my practice as research project.

In order to gather the most accurate and honest information, I request to use a tape recorder as a device which will assist me in transcribing data. The recordings will be for my own benefit, and not for the benefit of the public. These recordings will be kept in a safe and thereafter destroyed in a period of three to five years.

I am providing my contact details should you wish to know more about my study. Please do not hesitate to contact me at these numbers:
cell.072 3314967 (h) 011 934 0569

I look forward to hearing back from the school.

Kind regards
Linda Ramatseba

CONSENT SLIP

I/We.....am/are willing/ not willing to give Linda Ramatseba permission to use the audio tape recorder during the interview. We understand that:

- Participation is voluntary.
- That as a school we may withdraw from the study at any time.
- No information that may identify the school will be included in the study, and the response will remain confidential.
- The information on the tape is for the purpose of the study only.
- That after use will be kept in a safe for a period of three to five years then destroyed.

Signature.....

Date.....

PARTICIPANT'S CONSENT TO USE A TAPE RECORDER

472 Phakoe Street
Emndeni Ext 2
P.O Kwa-Xuma
1867

Dear participant

My name is **Linda Ramatseba**, I am currently studying towards my Masters Degree at the University of Witwatersrand. My focus area is **An exploration of successful school leadership practices in challenging context: A case study of two secondary schools in Soweto**. One of the requirements for the degree is to conduct a research. This research will enable me to write a paper for my practice as research project.

In order to gather the most accurate and honest information, I am requesting to use a tape recorder as a device which will assist me in transcribing data. The recordings will be for my own benefit, and not for the benefit of the public. These recordings will be kept in a safe and thereafter destroyed in a period of three to five years.

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I look forward in hearing back from the school.

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- No information that may identify the school will be included in the study, and the response will remain confidential.
- The information on the tape is for the purpose of the study only.
- That after use will be kept in a safe for a period of three to five years then destroyed.

Signature.....

Date.....

CONSENT TO INTERVIEW THE PRINCIPAL

472 Phakoe Street
Emndeni Ext 2
P.O Kwa-Xuma
1867

Dear Principal

My name is **Linda Ramatseba**, I am a student at Wits school of Education in Johannesburg, Parktown, doing my Masters Degree in Education Leadership and Management. Part of the study includes conducting a research project. Your school has been selected on the basis of your good performance in Matric results in the past five years.

My research topic is: **An exploration of successful school leadership practices in challenging context: A case study of two schools in Soweto.** I promise that I will abide by the rules and regulations of your school and my institution. This includes ensuring confidentiality and anonymity of the information received. The information will be kept in my safe and later destroyed after a period of three to five years.

The interview will take only 30 minutes of your time and will take place in your school after non-contact time. The interviews will be audio recorded. This is done in order to gather the most accurate and honest information possible. Every effort will be made to exclude any comments that may compromise your standing in the school when transcribing an audio tape.

You have the right to refuse to participate in the sessions and the right to withdraw at any given time without penalty, should you wish to do so. Your individual privacy will be maintained at all time.

Should you wish to know more about the study kindly feel free to contact me on the following numbers. Cell Number 072 3314967/ (H) 011 934- 0569/ (W) 011 934 -8230

Please indicate your willingness to participate in this study by filling in the slip below.

Thanking you in anticipation

Yours sincerely
Linda Ramatseba

CONSENT SLIP

I.....am willing/ not willing to participate in the research study conducted by **Linda Ramatseba** for her study on **An exploration of successful school leadership practices in challenging context: A case studies of two schools in Soweto**. I understand that:

- Participation is voluntary.
- That I may refuse to answer any questions I would prefer not to.
- I may withdraw from the study at any time.
- No information that may identify me will be included in the research report, and my responses will remain confidential.

Signature.....

Date.....

CONSENT TO INTERVIEW THE DEPUTY PRINCIPAL

472 Phakoe Street
Emndeni Extension 2
P.O Kwa-Xuma
Soweto

Dear Deputy Principal.

My name is Linda Ramatseba, and I am currently studying towards my Masters degree at the University of Witwatersrand. I would like to invite you to participate in my research project. My focus area is: **An exploration of successful school leadership in challenging context. A case study of two secondary schools in Soweto.**

Participation in this research will entail interviewing you. The interview is scheduled for non-contact time and will only take 30 minutes of your time in your school. The interview will be audio-taped; this is done in order to gather the most accurate and honest opinion possible. Every effort will be made to exclude any comments made by you when transcribing an audio tape.

Participation is voluntary, and you are not obliged to answer all the questions and you are at liberty to withdraw at any time. Your names and identity will be kept completely confidential and your privacy will be maintained. All information including notes and audio recording collected from the session will be kept in a safe and thereafter destroyed after three to five years. There are no risks in participating in the study.

Should you wish to know more about this project please do not hesitate to contact me in the following numbers: Cell Number 0723314967/ (h) 011 934-0569/ (w) 011 934-8230 or email me at lindaramatseba@gmail.com

Please indicate your willingness to participate in this study by filling in the slip below.

Thanking you in anticipation

Kind regards
Linda Ramatseba

CONSENT SLIP

I..... consent/do not
consent to participate in an interview to be conducted by Linda Ramatseba for
her study on “**An exploration of successful school leadership practices in
challenging context: A case study of two schools in Soweto.**” I understand
that:

- Participation is voluntary.
- That I may refuse to answer any questions I would prefer not to.
- I may withdraw from the study at any time.
- No information that may identify me will be included in the research report,
and my responses will remain confidential.

Signature.....

Date.....

CONSENT TO INTERVIEW THE HoDs

472 Phakoe Street
Emndeni Extension 2
P.O Kwa-Xuma
Soweto

Dear Head of Department

My name is **Linda Ramatseba**, and I am currently studying towards my Masters degree at the University of Witwatersrand. I would like to invite you to participate in my research project. My focus area is: **An exploration of successful school leadership in a challenging context: A case study of two schools in Soweto.**

Participation in this research will entail interviewing you as a group of four to six teachers. Focus group is done purposely as one of the methods selected in this study. The interview is scheduled for non-contact time and will only take 30 minutes of your time in your school. The interview will be audio taped, this is done in order to gather the most accurate and honest opinion possible.

Your names and identity will be kept completely confidential and your privacy will be maintained. All information including notes and audio recording collected from the session will be kept in a safe and will be destroyed after three to five years. You have the right to refuse to participate in these sessions or to withdraw at any given time with no penalty.

Should you wish to know more about this project please do not hesitate to contact me in the following numbers: Cell Number 0723314967/ (h) 011 934-0569/ (w) 011 934-8230 or email me at lindaramatseba@gmail.com

Please indicate your willingness to participate in this study by filling in the slip below.

Thanking you in anticipation

Kind regards
Linda Ramatseba

CONSENT SLIP

I..... consent/do not consent to participate in an interview to be conducted by Linda Ramatseba for her study on '**An exploration of successful school leadership practices in challenging context: A case study of two schools in Soweto.**' I understand that:

- Participation is voluntary.
- That I may refuse to answer any questions I would prefer not to.
- I may withdraw from the study at any time.
- No information that may identify me will be included in the research report, and my responses will remain confidential.

Signature.....

Date.....

PARTICIPANT'S CONSENT FORM

I am Linda Ramatseba, a Master of Education student at the University of Witwatersrand. I am doing a research on Leadership titled:” **An exploration of successful school leadership practices in challenging context: A case study of two schools in Soweto township.**” Where I am looking at how the principal lead and manage the school, and why he/she manages the school. I kindly request your participation in this study. The purpose of this study is purely academic.

Participation in this study is voluntary, and can only occur if you agree to the following:

That you read and understand the information sheet provided by me regarding the study and that you are aware the information you give will be treated with confidence and neither your names nor that of the school will appear in the research. I understand and agree that the data collected will be kept in a safe and destroyed within a period of three to five years.

That you may at any stage withdraw your participation without prejudice.
I provide my detailed contacts should you at any time need to contact me.
0723314967,
lindaramatseba@gmail.com

PARTICIPANT'S

SIGNATURE.....DATE.....

RESEARCHER'S

SIGNATURE.....DATE

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