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An exploration of the principal's role on learner achievement : a case study of two Soweto secondary schools.

Ginya, Lindiwe Angel

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ABSTRACT

The poor matric results currently in the Soweto Township Secondary Schools are a cause for concern. This study aims to explore and understand the role of the principal on learner achievement. It transpired from the reviewed literature that the instructional leadership theory was helpful in providing insights into understanding issues of principals leading or supporting learner achievement efforts within the school context. This study relied on in-depth taped interviews with school principals, curriculum deputy principals and focus group discussions with the Representative Council of Learners (RCL), together with the documentary analysis to answer the research question and sub–questions. The sample schools were selected purely on the previous, "academic excellence."

This study also investigated what students, teachers and deputy principals perceive principals to do to influence learner achievement. The study discovered that the scope of principals' influence on learner achievement varies from one school to the next. The influence was both direct and at times mediated. The findings were that instructional leadership was a dominant style of leadership in the schools studied, as students identified direct and highly influential instructional leadership behaviours. It also transpired that the critical role of the principal to influence and enhance learner achievement was to manage teaching and learning, which is the core business of the school.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

ACE: Advanced Certificate in Education

AIDS: Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome

DoE: Department Of Education

DBE: Department of Basic Education

FET: Further Education and Training

GA: General Assistant

GDE: Gauteng Department of Education

GET: General Education and Training

HIV: Human Immune Virus

HOD: Head of Department

IDSO: Institutional Development and Support Officer

LTSM: Learner Teacher Support Material

MEC: Member of the Executive Council

NCLB: No Child Left Behind

RCL: Representative Council of Learners

RTT: Resource Targeting Table

SA: South Africa

SASA: South African School Act

SASSL: South African Standard for School leadership

SAT: School Assessment Team

SGB: School Governing Body

SBST: School Based Assessment Team

SMT: School Management Team

SOWETO: South Western Township

SSIP: Secondary School Intervention Programme

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 BACKGROUND

The role of the principal in learner achievement is a subject of international interest. Researchers, such asLeithwood(2005 and 2006), as well as Bush and Glover (2009), agree that the principal is an important partner in the success of the school. While attempts have been made by the South African government to transform education, there has not been a significant improvement in the students' academic results.

Poor learner achievement in South African township schools remains a major concern, thus this study sets out to explore the role of the principal in learner achievement.

Statistics provided by the Department of Education (DoE) indicate the constant drop in matric results.In 2008, for example, there was a -62,5% drop,and in 2009,a 60% drop,The 2010 results presented an improvement of 7,2% whencompared to 2009. However, the 2010 results are as alarming, as only 23, 5% of those who wrote complied with the requirements for admission to a bachelor's degree (Umalusi, 2010). This suggests that the government is not achieving its ambition of eradicating poverty through quality education, as the purpose of school is to provide quality education and equal opportunities (Christie, 2008).

This study is based on the claim that the principal is the catalyst for change and learner achievement. The principal is particularly singled out and will be the unit of analysis in the study. This is precisely because a school's academic performance is highly correlated with the abilities and commitment of the principal (DoE, 2010), making the principal the key delivery agent, as well as the biggest driver of better education outcomes.

The Minister of Education (2010) argued that matric results serve as a yardstick of performance of the education system as a whole. Furthermore, South Africa is a well-resourced country in the regional context and still performs poorly in relation to test scores when compared to other poor

African states (van der Berg & Louw, 2008). In the Ministerial Report on schools that work, compiled by Christie (2007), it was found that school leadership was one of the reasons that effective schools succeeded and consequently achieved high test scores.

The primary responsibility of the principal is to provide effective leadership and management in the school in order to create support for conditions under which high quality teaching and learning can take place, and where the highest possible standards of learner achievement are promoted (Bush & Glover, 2004). The aim of this study is to explore different paths that successful principals in two Soweto secondary schools implement to influence learner achievement. The principal's influence in learner achievement will be explored in this study, even though Leithwood et al (2006) in Bush and Glover (2008) claim that leadership explains about five to seven percent of the difference in learner achievement across schools. This is contrary to the claims by leading researchers, such as Hallinger and Heck (1996), who indicate that the affects that principals have in learner achievement is vast, whether mediated or direct. I align myself with Hallinger and Heck on this statement. This, however, suggests that it is difficult to show how exactly leadership affects learner achievement.

1.2 PROBLEM STATEMENT

The problem that the study aimed to explore was the high proportion of poor learner achievement in secondary schools, focusing on matric results that are being used as the yardstick. The DoE has over the years issued resources to schools so as to try to balance the inequalities of the past and positively influence academic results. The management and leadership of both human and artificial resources seems to be the problem in schools and thus the study attempts to explore the role that principals play in affecting learner achievement in schools.

The concern is raised because the findings by Bush and Heystek (2006) show that South African principals are mainly concerned with financial management, human resource management and policy issues. The management of teaching and learning, which in my view is the key responsibility for principals to affect learner achievement, was ranked only asnumber seven of ten leadership activities in a survey of more than 500 Gauteng principals. This study explores the role of the relationship between effective principalship and learner achievement.

1.3 AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

The study aimed to explore the extent to which principals are the biggest drivers of better education outcomes and how they contribute to learner achievement (DoE, 2009),.

In order to achieve this general aim, the following objectives needed to be achieved, namely:

- To identify the different paths that principals use to effect learner achievement, if any;
- To explore the perceptions of deputy principals, teachers and learners regarding the role of the principal in learner achievement;
- To explore how the challenges faced by the principals affect learner achievement; and
- To explore the roles played by principals in ensuring learner achievement within schools.

1.4 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

In the light of the above discussion, the research attempted to answer the following main question and sub- questions.

***Main question*:**

What is the role played by principals in promoting or supporting learner achievement in the selected Soweto township secondary schools?

Sub questions:

a)Which paths do principals use to effect learner achievement?

b) What are the perceptions of the deputy principal, teachers and learners with regard to the role of the principal in learner achievement?

c) What are the challenges that principals face regarding learner achievement?

1.5 MOTIVATION FOR THE STUDY

The South African government clearly views education as an important element to bridge the socio-economic gaps created by the apartheid regime. Education is one of the tools that can be used to eradicate poverty. Therefore, it is vital that schools achieve their purpose of providing quality teaching and learning. It was important to choose Soweto as the prototype for township schooling, given the challenging conditions of poor socio-economic status in South African township secondary schools. These include the level of drug abuse, teenage pregnancy, poverty, high unemployment rate and the Human Immune Virus (HIV).

This research sets out to explore the role of the principal in managing teaching and learning to achieve better results. The study is relevant to the South African context as the situation is exacerbated by the introduction of a new curriculum. Furthermore, the study provided a basis for improving the practice of school leadership. The focus will be on managing teaching and learning, as this, in my view, is instrumental to improving learner achievement.

In order to achieve the objectives of the study, I reviewed the relevant literature in order to have an understanding of what local and international scholars say about the principal's role and learner achievement. The literature reviewed included both the dated and recent literature, which will be shown in the next section of the research report.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter provides an overview of the literature concerning the principal's role on learner achievement. It comprises a review of local and international research on school leadership in challenging contexts, highlighting the importance of planning and pointing to successful leadership strategies in schools with a positive principal's effects on learner achievement.

The chapter includes theoretical literature to show how a principals'effect on learner achievement has been conceptualised, as well as empirical evidence to demonstrate whether this evidence supports conceptions of the principal's role in contributing to learner achievement.

More specifically, this chapter reviews literature specific to township schools, with a particular focus on the limited sources directly relevant to South African township settings. While articles in peer-reviewed journals form a major part of reviewed materials in this literature review, conference papers, books and research reports are also included as source materials. A literature search revealed an excess of 159 sources on the role of the principal on learner achievement.

The reviewed literature revealed that not enough research has been conducted on the role of the principal in learner achievement in South Africa. However, there seem to be a consensus between the international and local literature that managing teaching and learning is viewed as one of the indirect methods used to achieve high learner outcomes. Bush, Joubert, Kiggundu and van Rooyen (2009) contend that there is very limited research and literature on managing teaching and learning in South Africa.

2.1.1 THE INTERNATIONAL PERSPECTIVE

The literature review started from the premise that it is possible to see learner achievement through effective leadership of the principal. It is believed that school leadership has an effect on students' academic performance (Glasman, 1984; Spade Vanfossen & Jones, 1985). The claim is that the principal, either directly or through mediation, is able to influence learner achievement.

Internationally, school principals are held accountable for educational quality in the belief that the students' success or failure is determined by the way the school is run (Fullan & Watson, 2000; Leithwood & Menzies). The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB,) places the burden for improved academic achievement on the shoulders of the principal, along with subject teachers. Therefore, in influencing learner achievement, the principal should be able to recruit quality teachers.

The NCLB Act was established in 2001 by the United States president, George Walker Bush. It is based on the belief that setting high standards and establishing measurable goals can improve learner outcomes. This belief is in accordance with the study's assumptions. As the responsibilities of a school principal become more complicated, hiring qualified teachers becomes one of the most important administrative practices in order to achieve higher learner achievement. The NCLB Act also requires the state to provide, 'highly qualified teachers,' to all students of different backgrounds. The Act seeks to hold public schools accountable for achieving standards of proficiency, sets standards of excellence for every child, and seeks to place a qualified teacher in every classroom. This NCLB notion is in accordance with the results that the study aims to achieve in improving the learner achievement. Research identifying the relationship between principal and learner achievement raise much debate with some researchers, educationists and practitioners, indicating that influence is indirect, if not difficult to measure (Hallinger & Heck, 1996, 1998; Leithwood & Jantzi, 2000).

International literature, such as the National Assembly for Wales,, stresses the role of the principal in effecting learner achievement and that leading learning and teaching as one of the main functions of the principal. In this context, school heads are directly responsible for thequality of teaching and learning, and pupils' achievement.

2.1.2 LOCAL CONTEXT (South Africa)

A systematic review of the literature on school management in South Africa, Bush and Glover (2005) found very few sources on this topic and none that offered a comprehensive view based on empirical work. Hoadley (2007) also acknowledges the limited literature base. The problem of meagre literature is also stressed by Moloi (2007), however, she adds that there is developing awareness of its significance in South Africa. The fact thatthere is little research on the role of

the principal and high learner achievement in the South African township schools is another reason for the focus on township schools in this study.

In the South African context, the authority of the principal to manage teaching and learning was fast tracked through the formation of the School Management Teams (SMT) in the 1996 South African School's Act. The principal is an accounting officer for the school, accountable mainly for learner achievement irrespective of her/him teaching the curriculum or not. In this context, this might imply that in influencing learner achievement, the principal should have the ability to recruit quality teachers even for disadvantaged learners in Soweto in order to achieve higher academic results. The principal is also given powers as the *ex officio* of the School Governing Body (SGB), which has the mandate to recommend the employment of quality educators to the Head of Department (HOD). Teachers are the key role players in turning schools around and implementing curriculum delivery and thus achieving higher academic results. Therefore, it becomes imperative for the principal to be able to recruit the best teachers through the SMT and recommend their employment through the SGB in order to effect higher learner achievement. This notion of recruiting best teachers is endorsed by the NCLB policy.

The traditional role of the principal in the new dispensation has moved from that of being an instructor to that of being a leader. The leadership role will enhance the principal's goal and ability of influencing learner achievement. Bennis (1999) defines leadership as the ability to influence others towards achievement of goals.

The focus of the literature in this study is on the different ways that principals' effect learner achievement. The theories cited in this study are important as they raise questions and debates addressed by researchers, practitioners and theorists on the role of the principal in learner achievement.

Ross & Gray (2006) state thatearly researchers focused on querying whether principals make a difference. Recent researchers look at the paths through which such effects are achieved (Hallinger and Heck, 1998). In their findings, Hallinger and Heck (1998) highlighted the different approaches in which principals exercise influence on the school and ultimately on learner achievement. These approaches are classified as direct, antecedent, mediated, reciprocal and moderated effects. They are relevant in this particular study, as they highlight different paths

that the principal can use. Moreover, the study is not concerned with whether the paths are mediated or direct. Recent research has shown that the principal, as the leader of the school, is responsible and accountable for learner achievement (Bush and Glover, 2004). Therefore, it becomes the responsibility of the principal to make a difference in learner achievement.

Recent international and local studies have shown that managing teaching and learning, which Bush (2005), refers to as instructional leadership, is influential in achieving high academic results. However, Hoadley (2007), notes that South African principals have little or no experience of instructional leadership. To eradicate this problem, and in an attempt to empower the principals to achieve high academic results and improve the instructional core, an Advanced Certificate in Education (ACE) programme for principals and aspiring principals was designed (Bush and Glover 2008). Managing teaching and learning is one of the core modules in the ACE programme.

2.2 ROLE OF THE PRINCIPAL

The notion of the principal being responsible for everything that is done in the school, which eventually effects learner achievement, is well encapsulated by Bush and Glover (2004). Theyindicate that, ‘the core 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,’ (Buch & Glover, 2004, p.7). The principal should create an enabling structure and environment.

Eberts and Stone (1988) found that principals makea difference on student achievement in public schools by setting clear priorities and working with teachers to achieve a consensus on objectives, methods and staff development programmes.

There is empirical evidence in the research to show that the principal is regarded as critical to the success of a school and learner achievement (Gentilucci & Muto, 2007; Henry & Jonathan, 2011;

Mullican & Ainsworth, 2001 and Nettles & Herrington 2007). Most studies that address the issue of effective principal behaviour focus on the principal as an instructional leader. For example, Wellisch (1978), in evaluating the effect of the principal on learner achievement, suggests that three characteristics of principal behaviour are important, namely how strongly the principal feels about instruction, whether they communicate their ideas concerning instruction and the extent to which they assume responsibility for instruction.

In concert with the debate, Bush and Glover (2009), when referring to the South African context, claim that a principal who focussed strongly on managing teaching and learning would undertake the following activities to influence learner achievement:

- Oversee the curriculum across the school;
- Ensure that the lesson takes place;
- Evaluate the learners' performances through scrutiny of examination results and internal assessment;
- Monitor the work of the HOD's through scrutiny of their work plans and portfolios;
- Ensure that the HODss monitor the work of educators within their learning areas;
- Arrange a programme of class visits followed up by feedback to educators; and
- Ensure the availability of appropriate learning and teaching support material.

This confirms that in the South African context, the responsibility for managing teaching and learning is shared among the deputy principals, HODs, the principal, as well as the class teachers. Even though the buck stops with the principal as an accounting officer, he is not the sole role player. This is in accordance with Fullan (2005), who advocates that the principal cannot do it alone. Having alluded to the above statement, principals have a direct responsibility for the quality of teaching and learning, and for high learner achievement. This could be interpreted as setting high expectations, monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of learning outcomes (Bush & Glover, 2009).

According to Moloi (2007), in assisting with the principal's role to effect learner achievement, the National Development of Education responded to this evident need for leadership by developing documents linked to the South African Standard for School Leadership (SASSL). These documents clearly stipulate that school management and leadership are primarily about making sure that teaching and learning takes place effectively, which will result in high learner achievement. To ensure that this is achieved, the standard identifies six key areas of principalship:

- Leading and managing the learning school;
- Shaping the direction and development of the school;
- Assuring quality and securing accountability;
- Developing and empowering self and others;
- Managing the school as an organisation; and
- Working with the community.

The impact on the student's outcome is likely to be great where there is direct leader involvement in the oversight of and anticipation in curriculum planning and co-ordination (Robinson, 2007).The notion of direct involvement is endorsed by Gentilucci and Muto (2007). They conducted a study to investigate high school students' perspectives on the influence of their current and previous principals on their academic achievement. Their findings were that a majority of students felt that the principal, who is directly involved in the oversight of their learning, influences their achievement. In order for the principal to be directly involved, it is important that they are in touch with the base, namely that they know exactly what is happening. Of importance is that the principal be informed, highly skilled and knowledgeable. An informed leader will not be reluctant to distribute leadership and power to capable people within the organisation.

In recent research, May and Supovitz (2011), state that there is a move from what principals do to studies that address who instructional leaders work with, how principals allocate time across the entire faculty, and how instructional leaders work with different types of teachers.

Time allocation is one of the most important skills that the principals should be able to use in order to enhance learner achievement. Regrettably, according to research conducted by Bush and Heystek (2003), in South African schools, principals do not use most of their time managing teaching and learning, which is the core business of the school. Instead, most of the time is used on administrative work. Horng and Loeb (2010) suggests that principals who spend most of their time on administration work and less time on management activities, such as instructional leadership, have less of an impact on high learner achievement. Time correctly used will enable the principal to put more energy into the academic responsibility of their work.

Contributing to the debate, the studies conducted by scholars agree that the regulation of time in terms of management showed improvement in student outcomes (Fleisch & Christie, 2004; Gustaffon, 2005; van der Berg *et. al*., 2005)

Hoadley, Christie and Ward (2009) conclude that although there are detailed normative frameworks on what principals should do in the form of policy,there is little consideration of the reality of the work of principals in particular contexts and what they actually do. Although the relation is indirect, both the international and South African research literature has identified the role of the principal as key in contributing to better student outcomes (Bush & Glover, 2006). According to Marsh (2002), Spillane (2004) and Taylor (2007), there is consensus in the American and European literature, and increasingly in the South African research that school managers play a crucial role in creating the conditions for improved instruction.

2.3 THE STRATEGIC POSITION OF THE PRINCIPAL

The school principal serves as the convergence point and a very important link to all stakeholders involved in the education fraternity. S/he is the, 'playmaker,' and therefore, the main role player in effecting learner achievement. Some researchers, such as Witziers, Bosker & Kruger (2003), raised a debate about whether school principals matter. They concluded that the context and intermediated factors, such as socio-economic status and the different school cultures, should be taken into account to determine if the principal does matter. They move from the premise that every school is unique. In certain early research, one does find the literature

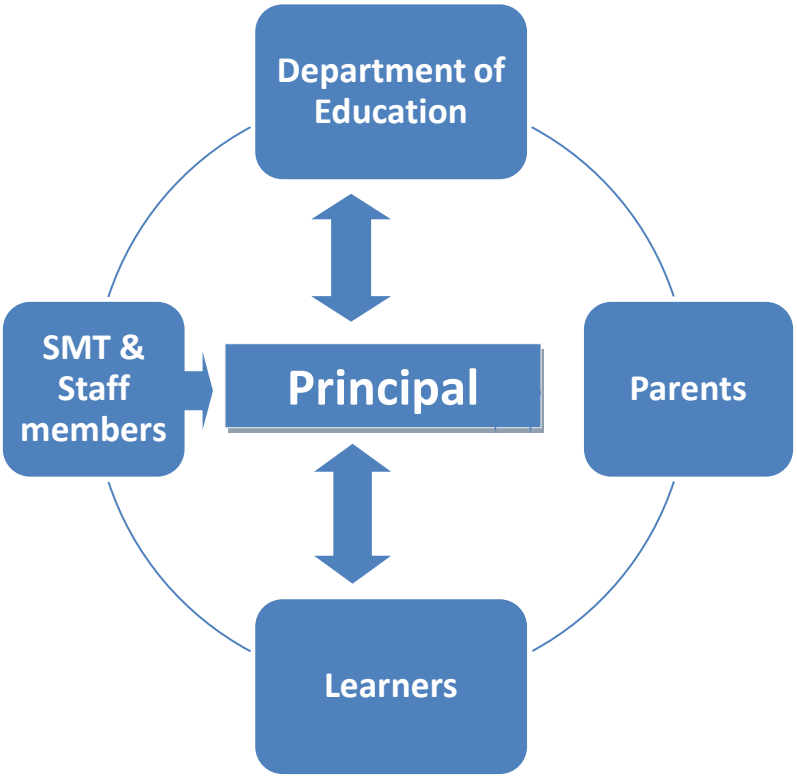
defending the viewpoint that the principal really matters in influencing learner achievement. In an early review of school leadership studies by Leithwood and Montgomery (1982), it is shown that an effective principal is an instructional leader, who affects the school climate and student achievement.

Contributing to the scholarly debate, Sergiovanni argues that principals are the foundation for instructional leadership at school level and that they matter (Sergiovanni, 1998, as cited in O'Donell and White, 2005). O'Donell and White (2005) maintain that, over time, the instructional leadership provided by the principal has been identified as a contributing factor to higher student achievement.

Most of the studies, which investigate the role of the principal in learner achievement, were conducted in Western countries and there is not much research conducted in South Africa. The South African government gives the principal the mandate to effect learner achievement by, among other things, decentralising the management power to the School Management Team led by the principal, as mentioned earlier in the study. During the apartheid era, most school principals had very limited authority over finance, staffing and curriculum (Fleisch & Christie, 2004). The new dispensation gave considerable responsibility to schools for all these, as well as management and leadership.

The principal is held accountable for producing high learner achievement, both internally and externally by all stakeholders, such as parents, the DoE), staff and learners. The principal is therefore strategically positioned to make sure that all stakeholders interact with in each other to effect learner achievement, and it thus the most important and valuable link. The principal plays a paramount role in the SGB, which conducts the governance within the school. The principal is, therefore, strategically positioned to influence both the management and governance spheres of the school. This implies that the principal can, if empowered, achieve high learner achievement through mediated and direct efforts.

The diagram below best illustrates the strategic position of the principal:



The principal is the accounting officer of the school. He/she is the school executive officer who is the link between all stakeholders. For school effectiveness, the principal should be a good communicator of the school's vision so as to allow all stakeholders to contribute positively towards the improvement of the school, thus effecting learner achievement. To effect learner achievement, the principal should have the capacity to interpret and communicate the policies from the department of education, which as the external factor, fosters a high learner achievement. The principal is strategically positioned to be the mouthpiece for the DoE.

The decentralisation of power to schools has seen the principal having an influence on the recruitment of teachers. It becomes imperative for the principal to therefore have the competency to recruit quality teachers to influence learner achievement. Principals' instructional behaviour affects student achievement through communication and visible presence in the school (Andrews

& Soder, 1987). This statement gives an impression that students who see their principal in the school premises, and have open communication with her/him, view her/him as caring about their studies, thus affecting their performance.

One of the performance indicators that demonstrate effective principal leadership is the principal who collaborates with stakeholders in the school improvement process and shares student achievement data with stakeholders (Persell, Cookson & Lyons, 1982). Principals should continuously involve stakeholders in the issues that could affect high academic results for them to be able to influence learner achievement.

2.4 EFFECTS OF LEADERSHIP ON LEARNER ACHIEVEMENT

Researchers define leadership in different ways. Bennis (1999) defined leadership as the ability to know oneself, to have a vision that is well communicated, to build trust amongst colleagues, and take effective action to realise one's own leadership potential. Maxwell (1998) adds that leadership is the ability to influence others. Rost (1991) assumes that leadership is an influence force of relationship among leaders and followers who intend to make real changes that reflect their collective purposes. Weihrich and Koontzis(1993) concludes that leadership is the art or process of influencing other people's activities in the organisation toward goal setting and goal achievement. These definitions seem to give the view that, through effective leadership skills, the principal will be able to influence learner achievement.

Various authors, such as Edmonds (2009), Brookover, Beady, Schwitzer & Wisenbaket (1979), and several others consider research into school effectiveness the starting point for examining educational leadership and the impact on student outcomes. (The results of the research conducted by Witzier, Bosker and Kruger (2003) suggest that educational leadership is an important characteristic of effective schools. According to their findings, the principal should have high expectations of teachers and student achievement.

There seems to be unanimity between the international literature and South African research that the principal plays a crucial role in creating the conditions for improved instruction, which will result in high learner achievement (Marsh, 2002; Spillane, 2004; Taylor, 2007). What is less understood is how the principal directly contributes (Hoadley et al,. 2009). Hallinger and Heck

(1998) add that the researchers' questions have shifted from whether the principals do make a difference to the paths through which such are achieved.

The reviewed literature indicated that the principal would have to employ different leadership styles in order to influence high learner achievement. For the purpose and scope of this research, instructional leadership, distributed leadership and transformational leadership will be explored to investigate their effect on learner achievement.

2.4.1 Instructional Leadership

Bush and Glover (2003) maintain that instructional leadership is a paramount dimension of leadership, because it targets the school's core activities, such as teaching and learning. This type of leadership style is defined and explained in the next chapter, which discusses the theoretical framework. This is precisely because it forms the framework of this study and is used as the lens to view the managing of teaching and learning in the two secondary schools studied in this research.

2.4.2 Distributed Leadership

Distributed leadership overlaps substantially with shared, collaborative and participative leadership concepts. Distributed leadership assumes a set of practices that are, "enacted by people at all levels rather than at a set of personal characteristics and attributes located in people on top" (Fletcher & Kaufer, 2003, as cited in in Leithwood et al., 2004, p.28). This definition implies that this type of leadership style is more relevant and prevalent in the South African context, as the management and leadership of curriculum is effected through the SMT at different levels.

Recent research findings agree with this notion and have shown that effective leadership need not be located in one leader, but can be distributed within the school (MacBeath, 1998; Day, Harris et al., 2000; Harris, 2002; Harris and Mujis, 2002).

2.4.5 Transformational Leadership

This type of leadership is defined in terms of the leader's influence over their followers or colleagues. Kim (2002) argues that this type of leadership portrays such behaviours as communicating a compelling vision, conveying high performance expectations, projecting self-confidence, role modelling, expressing confidence in followers' abilities to achieve goals and emphasising collective purpose and identity. Due to the imbalance of the past,it is clear that principals in township schools will have to master this type of leadership style in order to transform the schools to institutions of excellence and achieve high academic results.

Roberts (1985) claims that transformational leadership is a leadership that facilitates the redefinition of people's vision and mission, a renewal of their commitment and the restructuring of their systems for goal accomplishment.

2.5 PLANNING AS A TOOL FOR EFFECTING LEARNER ACHIEVEMENT

I argue that planning is one of the most important skills that the principal should have to enhance learner achievement. Planning is the ability to study the future and arrange the plan of operations. It helps to identify, clarify, and achieve the school's goals. The principal's planning skills have an impact on students' achievement. Shahzad, Ali, Hukamdad and Khan (2011) recently conducted a study to explore the impact of planning skill of school heads on student achievement. They concluded that a head that is highly competent in managerial skills is a very important factor for better student academic achievement. They also found that the managerial skills of planning of principals are directly related to student achievement. The principal who plans will be able to choose the organisation's vision, mission and overall short-term and long-term goals.

Gonzalez, Glasman and Glasman (2002) suggest that there is a link between planning, or preparation programmes, and student achievement. Their paper is anchored on the assumption that the preparation of the school principal has, as one of other several factors and however indirectly, an impact on student achievement in schools. They found 60 studies that provide evidence and/or arguments of effects that principal practices have on student achievement and in

these studies 140 specific examples of principal practices, which had such an effect. They concluded that there are links in principal practices and student achievement.

This concludes that there is empirical evidence in the research that planning by principals has an impact on learner achievement.

2.6 CHAPTER O VERVIEW

This chapter discussed in detail the views articulated by different educationists and scholars, both internationally and locally, regarding the role of the principal in learner achievement. The findings from the literature strongly supported the view that the principal does matter in learners' achievement. The strongly over-riding theory emerging from the literature was that the principal's instructional leadership was key to learner achievement. The National College of Schools and Children's' Services (2009) concluded their research by making a strong claim that school heads contribute to student learning and achievement through a combination of strategies. The theoretical and conceptual framework is developed in the next chapter with reference to the literature review that informed the study. This enabled the researcher to explore the concepts, themes and theories developed by early researchers and framed the approach of the study.

CHAPTER 3

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

3.1 INTRODUCTION

In the previous chapter, a review of literature on principals' effects on learner achievement was conducted. Firstly, the chapter looked at the conceptions of leadership by reviewing local and international research on a principal's effects. Secondly, literature presented enough evidence that suggests the strong relationship between instructional leadership and learner achievement (Hallinger & Heck, 1998). The reviewed literature pointed to instructional leadership as an important vehicle in managing an instructional programme to effect learner outcomes. Therefore,instructional leadership will be used as the lens to view the role the principal plays in learner achievement.

This chapter aims to develop a theoretical framework for exploring the role of the principal on learner achievement and it is informed by Hallinger's work (2000) on instructional leadership. The aim of the theoretical framework is to assess whether the use of instructional leadership in the successful Soweto township high schools have anything to do with the high learner achievement, as claimed by the reviewed literature. In order to answer the question, we need to know what successful leaders do and how they do it (Walhstrom, Louis, Leithwood & Anderson, 2010). The framework for this study represents the researcher's assumption about the importance of effective leadership in influencing high learner outcomes. It therefore becomes important to better understand the link between the principal's leadership and high learner achievement, as this is the basis for this project.

The chapter is structured into three sections, and these will be discussed below.

The first section looks at the Hallinger's model on instructional leadership, as the model will frame the study. Hallinger and Heck (1998) investigated the relationship between the principal and learner achievement and found that the principal exercises, indirectly, a measurable role, which affects student achievement. Hopkins (2001) endorses the relationship between

instructional leadership and learner achievement by indicating that the domain of instructional leadership is the focus on learner achievement.

The second section attempts to define and discuss in detail instructional leadership and its effect on learner achievement. The study claims that effective leadership is key in achieving high learner outcome. It is for this reason that the last section of this chapter will look into the broader landscape of leadership in an effort to make the reader aware of the concepts. This claim is supported by four core practices of successful school leadership as summarised by Leithwood et.al (2006) Successful leadership: What Is It and How It Influences Pupil Learning the core practices are: setting directions; developing people, redesigning the organisation and managing the instructional programme.

According to this framework, effective instructional leadership is largely responsible for high learning, which results in high learner achievement. It is also viewed as central in addressing effective learning, conducive teaching and learning environment, raising high expectations among both teachers and learners, and promoting a general positive school climate.

3.2 HALLINGER'S MODEL ON INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP

Hallinger's (2000) model on instructional leadership is used to frame the study. The researcher is of the view that this model can successfully be applied in township schools, and will be demonstrated. This model is not meant to be used as the comparative analysis between the township schools in South Africa and the United States, as the socio- political context for the countries have marked differences. However, the model is used as a lens to study the effect of instructional leadership in township schools. The researcher is of the view that the model could work within the South African context, as the ultimate goal is common, namely the achievement of high academic results.

In his model, Hallinger (2000) proposed three dimensions for instructional leadership, and these include three categories of practices, namely:

- Defining the school's mission;
- Managing the instructional programme; and
- Promoting a positive school learning climate.

The points of the model will be discussed below, as well as how these will frame the study.

3.2.1 DEFINING THE SCHOOL MISSION

This includes framing and then communicating school goals. The role of the principal has changed from that of being just a manager or administrator (Steyn, 2003). In the new dispensation, as previously discussed, the principal is responsible for high learner achievement, and this could be achieved through mediated and direct effects. Defining the school's mission could be one of such effects. While in the South African context, the SGB is responsible for drawing the school's mission and vision (SASA, 1996),it is the prerogative of the principal to define, interpret, analyse and communicate the school's mission and vision to all stakeholders with a view to achieve the school's goals. The mission should be clear and its focus should be on students' academic progress.

Leithwood and Rhiel (2003) identified a number of practices that seem to be consistent with the practices suggested by Hallinger (2000). One of the core practices refers to setting directions, which includes identifying and articulating a vision, fostering the acceptance of group goals and creating high performance expectations. According to Leithwood et.al. (2006), leaders must develop a purpose for the organisation by setting directions.

Communication is an undeniably important skill and behaviour for people from many walks of life and certainly for those in leadership roles (Leithwood, Day, Sammons, Hopkins & Harris, 2006). It is for this reason that the principal should be a good communicator of vision and mission in order to achieve high academic results.

An effective principal, who is an instructional leader, keeps teachers focused on the mission of the school and supplies the necessary time, resources and technical assistance necessary to promote an effective classroom and learning. Defining the mission of the school, the principal will be setting a direction, pace and tone. Principals must develop a purpose for the school by setting directions (Leithwood et.al., 2006). Effective principals provide the capacity for building a shared vision and mission, and they actively facilitate the process. The principal should have the capacity to promote and help acceptance of school goals and set expectations for high performance within the school.

3.2.2 MANAGING THE INSTRUCTIONAL PROGRAMME

This includes supervising and evaluating instruction, co-ordinating the curriculum and monitoring student progress. The important role played by the instructional leader is being actively involved in all phases of the school's instructional programme. This is achieved by consistently evaluating the effectiveness of the curriculum and learner progress in achieving the goals and objectives of the instructional programme. Leithwood et al. (2004) found the impact of the school principal is second to classroom instruction on student achievement. Successful principals are able to effectively manage the instructional programme, including being able to staff the school with a high-quality faculty, supporting the teaching and learning environment through supervision, curriculum co-ordination and helping staff focus on learner achievement (Crum, Sherman & Myran, 2009).

3.2.3 PROMOTING A POSITIVE SCHOOL LEARNING CLIMATE

This category encompasses protecting instructional time, promoting professional development, maintaining high visibility, providing incentives for both teachers and learning.

Promoting a positive school climate will enable the learners to understand what is expected of them in order to take charge of their learning. It will also help the stakeholders to put more emphasis on academic success.

The next section attempts to define and discuss instructional Leadership, as it will be used to study the effect of leadership on learner achievement.

3.3 INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP DEFINED

Instructional leadership differs from other leadership models that will be discussed later in this chapter.Instructional leadership focuses on the direction of influence, rather than its nature and source. The researcher views instructional leadership as a very important dimension, because it deals with the school's core business, which is teaching and learning. The principal, as an instructional leader, has a pivotal role to manage teaching and learning in order to influence high

learner outcomes. According to this framework, instructional leadership is directly linked to high learner outcome. This section aims to define and explain the role of the principal, as an instructional leader.

McEwan (2003) perceives the instructional leader as the principal who performs high levels in four areas, one of them being a communicator. He further maintains that, as the communicator, the principal models commitment to school goals, articulates a vision towards instructional goals and the means of integrating the instructional planning and goal attainment, and adheres to clear performance standards for instruction and teacher behaviour. Murphy and Louis (1998) refer to high performance expectations as a climate where the instructional leader influences staff to:

1. Expect all learners to do well;
2. Believe that all learners have the potential to do well; and
3. Accepts responsibility and accountability for learner achievement.

Research shows that the instructional leader, who masters the model, is likely to influence learner achievement. The principal, who manages the instructional programme, will be able to distribute and share leadership, as he acknowledges that the principal cannot do it alone (Fullan, 2002). In the literature review chapter, I alluded to the fact that recent studies address, 'with whom do principals work?' The principal will understand the mission of the school, which cascades its interpretation down to all school community members, including the learners.

Understanding instructional leadership as a model is central to how principals influence learner achievement. According to Van der Grift (1993, p.41), "Instructional leadership encompasses those actions that the principal takes or delegates to promote growth in student learning." Van der Grift (1993) adds that instructional leadership comprises the following tasks:

- Defining the purpose of schooling;
- Setting school goals;
- Providing the resources needed for learning to occur;
- Supervising and evaluating teachers;
- Co-ordinating staff developments programmes; and
- Creating collegial relationships with and among teachers.

Seyfarth (1999, p.7) sees instructional leadership as an, "electric merging of instructional supervision, curriculum development and staff development." The view is endorsed by Blase and Blase (1999), who contend that instructional leadership is a blend of tasks, such as shaping and communicating goals, supervising and evaluating instructional practices, developing and co-ordinating the curriculum, developing staff and evaluating progress in learner achievement.

According to Leithwood (1994), instructional leadership is a series of behaviour that is designed to affect classroom instruction. In this context, principals are responsible for informing teachers about new strategies that will influence teaching. It is viewed by Weller (1999) as the high visibility and involvement of the principal in every phase of the school programme.

Various researchers have best defined instructional leadership in terms of observable critical behaviour of the school principal. The twine that runs through all the definitions suggests that instructional leadership behaviours are fundamental aspects to achieve high learner achievement.

As mentioned above, Blase and Blase (1999) define instructional leadership as a blend of tasks, such as supervision of classroom instruction, staff development and curriculum development. Hallinger and Heck (1998) analysed studies conducted between 1980 and 1995, and found that 31 of 41 studies conceptualised the principal's role in school effectiveness in terms of instructional leadership.

The researcher employed the theoretical models developed by Hallinger and Heck (1998), and this is explained below:

- Direct effects- Principals' actions influence the students' outcome;

- Mediated effects- Principals' actions affect outcomes indirectly through other variables, such as teacher commitment, climate and school culture. The more vigorous research on principal leadership suggest the effects of principal leadership tend to occur indirectly through principals' efforts to influence others who are more directly involved with students on a daily basis (Boyan, 1988; Hallinger and Heck, 1996, 1998; Heck et.al., 1990; Leithwood et.al., 1990);

- Reciprocal effects- Principals influence teachers, teachers influence principals and through these processes, outcomes are affected. Teachers play an important role in this effect as principals exert influence on teachers, who in turn affect student achievement;

- There is an on-going debate about the direct effects of principals on learner achievement. According to Heck and Hallinger (1998) various researchers adopting this model have not provided evidence of the effect on student outcomes. The study did not attempt to prove whether the influence of the principal on learner achievement is direct or indirect. However, it delved into the role of the principal and the paths through which the effects are achieved.

Waters, Marzana and Nutty (2004) analysed the results of 70 principal leadership studies and found certain direct leadership practices that improve student achievement. These included visiting classrooms, frequently interacting with students, publicly celebrating accomplishments of students and maintaining visibility around the school. They also established a significant relationship between student achievement and building leadership.

The concept of academic optimism also framed this study. Academic optimism is defined by McGurgan and Hoy (2006) as instructional leadership being achieved through academic emphasis to influence achievement. It is also defined as characteristic of schools that are academically successful. Through academic optimism, the principal will be able to raise high expectations from the learners. The principal is a leader and therefore obliged to create a positive learning climate that encourages the school community to be academically optimistic. The study explored how optimistic the principal was towards academic achievement, as well as how this concept was translated to the school stakeholders, especially the learners.

One of the great leadership skills is to be able to influence others. In other words, the principal should influence learner achievement in various ways. May and Supovitz (2011) argue that the scope of the principals' leadership activities vary from school to school depending on the culture and type of leadership in schools. I find conceptual alignment with their argument, as the context

should be considered when addressing the problems of the school. My argument is that although the type of leadership in the school can differ, the academic results should always be the focus.

Mullican and Ainsworth (2001) argue that whether the principal is an instructional leader or not depends on many factors, such as choice of definition of instructional leadership, whose views are accepted, which research is given the greater credibility and whether the construct is of an ideal or of a real world entity. I think they should have added the culture and the type of leadership of the school to their argument. This argument will be explored in this study.

3.4 The Broader Landscape of Leadership

The conceptualisation of leadership in this study merely referred to individuals' ability to influence others attitudes and activities towards achieving a common goal (Owens, 2002). For the purpose of this study, the word, 'individual,' refers to the principal. Having studied different definitions of leadership, leadership styles, and theories, this study defines leadership as the ability to apply skills to influence others towards achieving a unified vision and common goal by working with people and through people at all levels of the organisation, and in this instance, the school.

Wahlstrom et al. (2010) argues that a critical understanding of leadership recognises two functions.Firstlyirstly, to provide direction.Secondly, to exercise influence. The study examined the evidence of leadership and its effects, especially on high learner achievement by looking through the following three lenses:

3.4.1 Transformational Leadership:

In the South African context, this type of leadership has a special meaning attached to it, namely the need to transform the previous education system, and its effects to a new framework, which eradicates and redresses the inequalities caused by the Apartheid government. A transformational leadership has the potential to engage all stakeholders in the achievement of educational objectives (Bush, 2007).

3.4.2 Distributed Leadership:

Leadership practice is viewed as a product of the interactions of school leaders, followers and their situation (Spillane, 2005). This definition suggests that leadership practice should not be viewed as a product of a leader's knowledge and skills, butrather as the interactions between the people and the situation. Therefore, the principal of the school should be able to influence people to set directions and use the situation to achieve high learner outcomes. Spillane (2005) warns that what matters for instructional improvement and student achievement is not that leadership is distributed, but *how* it is distributed. In distributed leadership, the principal has the responsibility to develop people in the organisation (Leithwood et. al., 2006), use the skills and knowledge developed to create a common culture of expectations, holding the organisation together in a productive relationship with each other (Elmore, 2000).

3.4.3 Shared Leadership:

Shared leadership is more like a partnership. Moxley (2002) argues that for the partnership model to work, there are five requirements needed, namely Balance of power, shared purpose or goal, shared responsibility for the work of the group, respect for the person and partnering in the nitty-gritty, which means working together in complex, real world situations. Shared leadership ensures that the school community take responsibility and pride in the success of the school. Principals can develop their teachers by articulating goals, setting direction and then relinquishing some decision-making authority to teachers and engaging teachers before decisions are made. When teachers are included in the decision-making processes ahead of time, they are more likely to implement change (MacNeil & McClanahan, 2005).

3.5 CHAPTER OVERVIEW

This chapter developed the theoretical framework for the study and was informed by Hallinger's model. Hallinger's model proposed three dimensions of looking at the role of the principal (Hallinger, 1998). The three dimensions in Hallinger's model are:

(1) defining the school mission;

(2) managing the instructional programme; and

(3) promoting a positive school learning climate.

It proposed a model for theories found in the reviewed literature that were discussed in this chapter. The instructional leadership theory seems to provide insight into how principals can promote or support learner achievement. The theory of academic optimism was also discussed in this chapter, as instructional leadership puts emphasis on academic results in order to improve high learner achievement. Henceforth, the theories, concepts and models discussed in this chapter framed the structure of the study, as the researcher went on research sites with these theories in mind.

CHAPTER 4

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

4.1 INTRODUCTION

The previous chapter provided the theoretical framework for understanding the role of the principal in learner achievement. This chapter describes and analyses the type of research design and research methods that were used to explore how principals influence learner achievement. The methodology employed in this study was informed by the reviewed literature. The notion is encouraged by De Vos (1998a), who advocates that the researcher should start by examining the relevant literature, filing her knowledge of the subject and learning what other scholars say about the subject when she intends compiling a research design. In order to understand what international and local academics and educationisthad established in relation to the phenomenon being explored, an intensive literature study was conducted.

The researcher used the research design to explain and justify tools and key strategies in explaining the research approach, research methods, samples selected, research instruments, ethics, validity and reliability. According to Fouche and De Vos (1998), a research design is a detailed plan of how a research project will be undertaken. It provides the basis according to which the data are to be collected to investigate the research question. It is important that the method selected to capture and process data is chosen according to the needs of the research question and the concomitant unit of inquiry or of analysis (Henning, 2004). A research approach should be selected after considering the aim of the research, the nature of the research questions and the resources available (Shrunik, 1998b, p. 253). In this study, the researcher used the qualitative approach in order to get the views and perceptions of the staff, learners, deputy principals and principals, on the role the principal played in achieving learner outcomes.

4.2 QUALITATIVE RESEARCH APPROACH

According to Frogatt (2001),the aim of qualitative research is to explore underlying social processes and values in their particular social context, to lay open the individual's experiences and inferred meanings. Adding to the debate, Hittleman (1997) states that the main purpose of

qualitative research is to describe, interpret, explore, verify and assess. According to Merriam (1998), the qualitative study can be defined in terms of the process of actually carrying out the investigation, the unit of analysis, which in this case is the principal, or the end product, such as learner achievement. In this study, the researcher collected the data in an attempt to explore, interpret and analyse different paths that the principals use to achieve high learner outcomes in two academically successful Soweto secondary schools. The researcher discussed the themes that emanated from words and meanings that formed the data and then reported the findings. A qualitative case study helped the researcher interpret the collected data, as it is an intensive and holistic description of a single instance (Merriam, 1998). The case study approach, schools to be studied was anticipated, planned and carefully selected.

The study is interpretive in nature. Hittleman (1997) indicates that the term interpretative analysis denotes that from insights given, the researcher develops concepts or elaborates on existing ones. Bassey (1999) states that the function of a qualitative researcher during data collection is to maintain vigorous interpretation. The study drew its conclusions on the basis of observation and data collection, which included interviews with carefully selected subjects, such as the deputy principal and the principal, documentary analysis and focus group discussion with teachers and the RCL. This was done with the understanding that the subjects would provide, "rich, contextual and detailed data."The researcher intended to gather as much information as possible about the research problem with the intent of analysing and interpreting it, and not describing what is being observed. The purpose of employing the case study design was to gain in-depth understanding of the situations and meaning for those involved in the research and interpret it. According to Mouton and Marais (1996), a qualitative approach requires that the researcher interpret the real world from the perspective of the participants in his or her investigation. This notion is supported by Mason (1997), who states that qualitative research is concerned with how the social world is interpreted, understood, and produced.

Yin (1994) views a case study as an empirical enquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between the phenomenon and the context are not clearly defined. The researcher was concerned with understanding people's perceptions and experiences in context. According to Hittleman (1997), the issue of context is at the core of qualitative research. The natural setting is where the

researcher is likely to reveal what is known about the phenomenon of interests from the perspectives of those studied. In this study, the context was about two secondary township schools that were excelling academically according to the MEC of Education (2010), with conditions in the environment not generally viewed as being conducive for learning due to the legacy of the Apartheid system. The informative participants were the principals, deputy principals, educators and learner representatives.

Smith (1998) is of the notion that a case is a bounded system. He advocates that the researcher could set a limit to the number of people involved who could be interviewed versus interviewing all stakeholders to assess the boundaries of the topic. This technique of a bounded system was applied when designing the research design and research methods for this study. While it is known that all stakeholders, such as parents, external school factors, Department of Education, and so forth, should take part in learner achievement, the unit of analysis was the principal and this constituted the boundaries in the study. To collect data, the study included interviews with the principals and deputy principals, and focus group discussions with the teachers and theRCL as the participants. The analysis of documents relevant to learner achievement was also used for data collection. Three main sources of qualitative data are derived from experience (through observation), enquiry (in interviews) or examination (of documentation and material produced by others) (Froggatt, 2001).

The data collected through the sources was coded. Coding is a generic term that entails the assigning of labels to bits of data, so all text under that label can be retrieved and brought together (Froggatt, 2001). In order to code the data, the researcher had to read and re-read the data, transcribe the data and listen to the tapes of interviews and focus group discussions in order to familiarise herself with the data.

The principal was interviewed as the unit of analysis. The aim was to get a clear understanding of the role the principal played in influencing learner achievement, as well as the challenges they encountered as principals that prevented them from achieving 100% pass rates.

The deputy principal was also interviewed. The purpose of interviewing the deputy principal was to understand the perception of the role that they thought the principal played, as well as for triangulation purposes. Teachers are the main drivers of the curriculum and central for the school

to achieve its high learner achievement.It is for this reason that they were included in the study and get their perception on the role of the principal in helping achieve the high learner outcomes. Teachers were interviewed in focus groups, with three to four members in each group.

As the RCL is the representative body of democratically elected learners, the researcher assumed that the RCLs, as the leaders of the student body, would shed some light on the influence that the principal has on learner achievement. Due to time limitations, they were therefore interviewed in focus group discussions. The RCL, which comprised of the seven executive members, were purely decided upon as they are elected from Grade 10 to 12. This implies that they at least know and understand what is going on within the school that affects their learner achievement. However, the researcher was wary of the fact that including learners in the focus group discussion could come with its own challenges, such as reluctance of the learners to release sensitive information in the presence of others and being afraid of victimisation.

The study was also explorative in nature. Exploratory research gains insight into a situation or phenomenon (Mouton & Marais, 1992). A qualitative exploratory approach enables the researcher to share in the understanding and perceptions of others, and to explore how people structure and give answers to their daily lives (Berg, 1995). This study is explorative in the sense that it attempts to explore the paths that principals use to effect learner achievement. Even though the questions were semi-structured, the qualitative explorative research allowed the researcher to change or rephrase questions, as well as ask probing questions so that the results are truly drawn from the respondents as the research develops (Olve, Roy & Welter, 1999). The researcher entered the research site, collected and analysed data so that she understood and interpreted the participants' experiences and perceptions about the phenomenon.

4.3 SAMPLE

According to Burgess (1982), sampling in field research involves the selection of a research site, time, people and events. Mulder (1989) adds that a sample consists of a group of respondents selected from the population, and thus smaller in number than the population. This enables the researcher to have a more manageable group for the purpose of research. Henry (1990) concludes that the concept sample means a subset of population that is used to gain information about the entire population. The study intended to select two secondary township schools that

were academically excelling and achieving above 80% in their matric results for the past three years. The schools had to be succeeding under challenging circumstances and context, with a low socio-economic status. The schools were to be selected on the basis of their academic excellence under the same principal's leadership for three years. The selection was to be based only on excellent learner achievement, particularly on the matric results.

The challenge was that only one school, namely school A, could meet the first requirement of achieving above 80% for the past three years under the same principal's leadership. School B was then only selected because it was the second-best performing school in Soweto, even though they had not consistently achieved above 80% for the past three years. However, they were constantly above the district average. For instance, in 2010, the district achieved 67.1%, while school B obtained 88.89, and they were thus selected on these bases.

The sample used was purposive or purposeful. The researcher wanted to explore, understand and gain insight into the role of the principal in learner achievement in the schools that achieve good results according to the Gauteng Department of Education (GDE) standards. The sample selected could be the sample from which most schools that are underperforming in Soweto can learn something. The study assumed that the principal, as the leader and accounting officer of the school, has an influence, whether direct or mediated, on learner achievement.

4.4 RESEARCH METHODS

Multiple data collection methods were employed to collect rich data in this study. The source of data collection was:

- Interviews (semi-structured, and guided by an interview schedule);
- Focus groups; and
- Document analysis.

4.5 INTERVIEWS

The interview schedules were prepared, and presented in Appendix I and J. Probing questions followed, which emanated from the answers given by the principals and the deputy principals. The interviews were audio taped and thereafter transcribed. Merriam (1998) depicts that the purpose of interviewing is to find out what is on someone else's mind and since it cannot be directly observed or measured, the researcher has to ask questions in order to obtain meaningful information. Seidman (1998) defines interviewing as understanding the experiences of other people and the meaningsthey take from those experiences.

The study used semi-structured, face-to-face, and in-depth interviews. Direct interviews with the principals of the selected case study schools were conducted. Direct interviews with the deputy principals were also used. Interviewing the deputy principals, as individuals, allowed confidentiality and anonymity, as they were free to speak under those conditions. The interviews were conducted within the premises of the school. This was due to time constraints and the fact that it was easier to collect data within the school premises. Each interview with the principal was planned for a one-hour period per day over a period of three separate days.Interviews with the deputy principals were planned for a one-hour period per day for two separate days. This was done so as to get a clear perception from the different levels of the school on how the principal effects learner achievement. The focus was on describing and understanding experiences as lived by the principals and deputy principals (Simelane, 1998).

An advantage of face-to-face interviews, as compared to the questionnaires, was its adaptability. The researcher was able to conduct follow-up questions, probe further if the need arose, while investigating motives and feelings of the research participants. The purpose of the interview was to gather the perceptions of the participants with regard to the principal's influence on learner achievement.

The disadvantage of a direct interview is that, at times, it can become difficult to get hold of the participants, especially the principals, for the follow-up appointment. This could lead to postponements of planned interviews. In comparison, they could complete a questionnaire whenever they are free.

4.6 FOCUS GROUPS

Schrunik, Schrunik and Poggenpoel (1983) describe the focus group discussion as an open, purposive conversation where the researcher asks questions on a particular topic and where each participant may answer and make comments, either on the question or views of other participants or the interviewer. Furthermore, they indicate that in the focus group discussion, the researcher introduces the topic and then guides the discussion by means of general, yet probing, questions. Holstein and Gabrium (1997) add that the focus group discussion is a qualitative interview, which aims at finding out what other people feel and think about the topic under investigation.

In this study, focus groups were conducted with the RCL and the teachers. The RCL groups were used to gather the perceptions of the RCL on the role that the principal played towards their academic achievement. The teachers' focus group discussion purpose was used to get an understanding of the perception of the teachers concerning the role that the principal play in achieving learner achievement. The focus group discussion was particularly chosen as it is flexible and open (Merriam, 1998). The researcher acknowledges that the use of focus group does not come without its problems. For instance, some voices were hardly audible on the audio tape, transcription was lengthy, the process of discerning between the voices could be frustrating and the language and the people could be a problem, (Scott & Morrison, 2007).

The RCL consists of seven executive members. The researcher initially intended to group the learners in three or four members per group, but due to time constraints, and the fact that most of the RCL members were in Grade 12 and writing their Preliminary Exams, it was difficult to have two separate sessions. The whole RCL was then in one group discussion for a period of one and a half hours. The permission and consent to use tape recording for transcribing and direct quoting was obtained and confidentiality maintained. O'Kane (2000) supports the use of focus groups as an appropriate method for conducting research with children and young adults. The researcher is also of the opinion that it is appropriate, as if interviewed as individuals, learners could be intimidated by an adult researcher. Steps were taken to reduce threatening and intimidating inferences in the focus group discussion (Robson & Foster, 1989).

A relationship of trust and confidence was established with the educators by the researcher. This was done through assuring them that they did not necessarily have to agree with the researcher, and that whatever was discussed in the focus group will remain confidential. The researcher also explained to the educators that they did not necessarily have to disclose their real names. The purpose of the research and the topic was then given to the educators and the researcher explained the purpose, so as to get their perception on the role of the principal in achieving high learner outcomes. The researcher controlled the discussion during the interview to ensure that it did not deviate from the main topic investigated (Wilson, 1989). The responses were audio taped with the intention to read, transcribe and code the data, as mentioned earlier in the chapter (Wilson, 1989).

4.7 DOCUMENTARY ANALYSIS

The purpose of document analysis, as another method for research, was used to explore how monitoring and support is given to the educators who deliver the curriculum. Secondly, the method was used to verify information provided in the interviews and focus group discussions. Scott (2007) advocates that documents can be analysed to provide a source of data in its own right. This is an alternative to primary data sources, and in the case of multiple sources, to provide a means of comparing similarities and differences among the sources or to draw a larger data set. The school documents reflected what is being done and recorded, versus what is said in the interview(s).

4.8 ETHICS

The study involved human beings, and therefore consent was needed. Permission was asked and obtained from the GDE, who suggested that the collection of data be done during the third term.

Secondly, permission and consent to conduct interviews and focus groups discussions was obtained from the principals of the schools, as well as from the participants. The informed consent was a written contract. Please see Appendix B for a copy of the consent form. Participants were told in advance that they would be free to withdraw from the research at any

given time, should they feel uncomfortable or otherwise with the process (Henning, 2007). Prior the research process,participants were informed about the study and its intentions. Confidentiality was adhered to, and confirmation was made that the raw data would be stored in a safe place and be destroyed three to five years after the research. The identities of the subjects were disguised by the use of pseudonyms.

4.9 VALIDITY, RELIABILITY AND TRIANGULATION

To enhance the credibility of the case study research, the researcher ensured that the study tests employ multiple data collection. Instruments used were carefully selected. Bell (1999) defines reliability as the extent to which a test or procedure produces similar results under constant conditions on all occasions. It was important for this research to be reliable, if it were to improve the test scores and enhance teaching and learning.

According to Mouton & Marais (1992), triangulation, which involves multiple methods of data collection (), was used to ensure validity and reliability. The methods of collecting data included interviews, document analysis and focus groups. These methods were used in an attempt to answer the research questions. Triangulation was then used by crosschecking the evidence by collecting different kinds of data about the same phenomenon.This made validation possible, as advocated by Scott and Morrison (2007).

4.10 CHAPTER OVERVIEW

This chapter discussed in detail the methods used in the research in an attempt to answer the research questions. In-depth interviews, focus group discussions with the RCL and the documentary analysis were used as a research tool to conduct the study. Ethical considerations were taken into account, as the study was conducted through human beings.

CHAPTER 5:

CASE STUDY FINDINGS: SCHOOL A

5.1 INTRODUCTION

The aim of this chapter is to provide a detailed description and analysis of School A by presenting the findings of the data collection process. The chapter first presents the background and context of the first school, School A. It also presents data from interviews with the principal and the curriculum deputy principal. The researcher conducted focus group discussion with the teachers the RCLseparately. The initial aim was to get the entire seven RCL members. However, the focus group discussions took place during the third term, as preferred by the GDE. The drawback was that not all learners could be present, as some were writing exams. The researchers then managed to include only five of the seven RCL executive members in the focus group discussion. This could have had a slightly negative impact on the study, as some views, which could have enhanced the study, were not heard.

Since the focus of the study was on the role of the principal on learner achievement, the case school was purposively selected on the basis of the evidence of maintaining high academic performance. The statistics of the high performing schools were obtained from the Gauteng GDE. The study aimed to establish whether, in fact, the success of the school could be attributed to the role of the principal.

5.2. BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT TO SCHOOL A

School A is situated in the heart of the south-western part of Johannesburg in Soweto. In 2011, the school had an overall enrolment of 1423 learners, with 220 learners enrolled in grade 12.. This large number of learners in the school is rare in this township, as most parents prefer to take their children to the former Model C schools.The general assumption is that this is due to poor results in the previously disadvantaged schools. The school attracts learners from economically deprived settings. In spite of these challenges, the school manages to get high results under the challenging factors of its socio-economic status, that of poverty, being previously disadvantaged, high teenage pregnancy, substance abuse, lack of parental involvement and inequalities.

5.2.1 SCHOOL PERFOMANCE HISTORY

In the researcher's informal discussion with the second deputy, who was not part of the formal study, it emerged that the school had a history of being a notorious high school in Soweto with extremely poor learner achievement. However, this changed significantly in 1997 when the current principal was promoted into the post, as their turn-around strategies were implemented. So far, the school has managed to sustain its high academic results, compared to the results of 1996, which were 25.5%. In 1997,when principal A took over, they moved to 70% and have been above that ever since.

It is important to note that when the school was previously underperforming, the current principal was a deputy principal in the same school and therefore in senior management. However, he claims it was difficult to effect learner achievement as, "the buck stopped," with the principal. At that time, the original principal was not results driven and did therefore not implement any given advice. When asked why the school performed poorly when he was the deputy principal and thus a senior management team member, the principal's response was:

> "*The principal plays a vital role because, you know as the management of the school, the deputies, the HODs you can talk about the very nice things of trying to improve the results of the school, things that must be implemented but the buck stops with the principal. If the principal is not going to be able to do something about that, nothing will happen."*

This school is currently the leading school in Soweto in terms of the high academic results for grade 12, which are mostly used as a yardstick for school effectiveness.

The table below reflects the performance of the school, as obtained from the Johannesburg Central District.

5.2.1 a) SCHOOL PERFOMANCE TABLE

YEAR	PASS PERCENTAGE	NUMBER OF LEARNERS WROTE GRADE 12
2010	95.81	138
2009	94.00	144
2008	98.31	118
2007	95.34	127
2006	97.66	165

The pass percentage could be the result of the parents gaining confidence in the school and thus enrolling their children. This is not the trend with the other high schools in this township. Parents prefer to bus their children to former Model C schools, causing numbers to dwindle resulting in the GDE merging certain high schools.

5.2.2 STAFF COMPOSITION IN SCHOOL A

School A was established in 1979. The school has a teaching staff complement of 40 teaching staff and 12 non-teaching staff. The school has a system that they use to ensure that everybody takes part in the learner achievement, however small the contribution. The DoE mandates the school to have two deputy principals, depending on the number of learners in the school. School A's principal felt that one deputy principal should deal specifically with the curriculum, so as to influence high learner achievement.

5.2.1 b) There are various levels of hierarchy within the school:

THE PRINCIPAL The accounting officer
TWO DEPUTY PRINCIPALS Deputy 1: Administration Deputy2: Curriculum
HEADS OF DEPARTMENT Subject experts, who are responsible for department efficiency and effectiveness
GRADE HEADS Responsible for efficiency and effectiveness in different grades
ADMINISTRATIVE STAFF Work in collaboration with the deputy admin for the smooth running of administration
GROUNDS STAFF Responsible for maintaining school building, security and a healthy environment for the school community
REPRESENTATIVE COUNCIL OF LEARNERS Democratically elected structure that represents the views and interest of the student body
LEARNERS

5.2.3 THE SOCIO- ECONOMIC CONDITIONS OF THE SCHOOL

The school is classified as a quintile 3 school, which means it is a no-fee paying school. It relies heavily on the grant provided by the GDE. The fact that it is a quintile 3 school means that the GDE is paying R838 for each learner per year. This is to be distributed among three categories, namely 55% for Learner Teacher Support Material (LTSM), 12% for Maintenance and 33% for Services.

The school also has a computer laboratory that was recently installed and is run and maintained by the Gauteng Online. The school is under-resourced as, among other things, there is no fully equipped library. However, the principal is adamant that if the few resources provided by the GDE are optimally used, a lot can be accomplished.

In May 2011, the GDE decided to extend the nutrition programme to the quintile 3 schools (GDE, 2011). This is viewed as a great achievement by the principal,since the school can now offer quality teaching and learning to a nutritionally-fed learner. Learners in this school are drawn from the same community where the school is located.

5.3 INTERVIEW WITH THE PRINCIPAL

The principal was the unit of analysis, as the study aimed to establish the role of the principal in learner achievement. Therefore, the first interviews were conducted with the principal, who answered the research questions. The principal of School A managed to achieve consistency of high academic results over a period of more than three years under his leadership. The interviews took place in the principal's office, as planned prior to the day. The principal insisted that the interviews be conducted after school, as he did not want them to interfere with the running of the school, and he also wanted to give the interview his outmost attention.

The principal takes his role of influencing learner achievement earnestly. According to the principal of the school, the school's core business is for teachers to teach and assess, and learners must learn. However, he is of the view that all this cannot happen if the principal is not passionate about the results and is not result-driven. His response to the question on the role of the principal in influencing learner achievement was:

> "*Ey, with me there's a huge role that I play as the principal because I strongly believe that that you know the leadership that the principal bring to the whole picture cannot be over emphasised, if the principal is result driven if he is committed and have a lot of passion about achieving results, then good results will surely come"*

In responding to the question that sought clarity on his role in learner achievement, the principal emphasised the fact that he visits classes and talks to learners to get an understanding of what exactly is happening in classrooms.

> "*Those classes which are not doing well the principal must go visit those classes talk to those learners, motivate those learners...*"

The principal further explained that:

> "*It depends on the principal, how much energy, how much effort you put into the whole picture of achieving not only good results in Grade 12 but you know the whole school.*"

The explanation leads to a debate of whether the results of the school should somehow be attributed to the principal as the accounting officer, and that an aspiring principal seeking to become an effective instructional leader needs to have a personal vision that focuses on high learner achievement.

To support his statement, the principal gave an explanation of the turnaround strategies he implemented as the new principal in 1997, taking over from a 25% pass rate for Grade 12 the previous year. In that particular year, he improved the results from 25.5% to 70% and never went down.The school has been achieving 94%+ for the past three years under his leadership.

It is evident from the interview extracts that the principal also seemed to be passionate about the results, as he indicates that his role in effecting academic results is also to implement strategies and to manage teaching and learning:

> "*...so it depends how passionate the principal is about implementing all factors that will make sure that good results are achieved...they are there, just need to be implemented. For example, the school may not get good results if the school does not start on time. If teachers do not attend classes on time and if learners are not there... you will not get results.*"

It is the principal's passionate commitment to the learner's academic achievement that will make a difference between a highly successful school and one that is ineffective.

The researcher found that the school does not compromise true learning experience at the expense of getting high academic results in the end. While the school is passionate about achieving high results, they are equally determined about the time and quality spent on teaching and learning. The school also encourages the learner to buy into the vision of high academic results by deliberately raising their expectations.

The researcher wanted to find out from the principal the strategies he employs to raise high expectations from the learners, and his response was :

> "*Yes, I raise high expectations, motivate them, constant motivation. You know, I don't know how many meetings we had with grade 12 learners this year, I can't count them."*

This response intrigued the researcher, who then wanted to know if he calls meetings with the learners in his capacity as a principal. This was confirmed by the learners, when one of them indicated that, "*He callsmeeting in different grade*s."

The principal views his second role as being a visionary leader. His vision for the school helps him to stay focused on a particular goal. His vision or dream, as he calls it, is to see a 100% pass rate in one year, not only for the grade 12s, but from grade 8, and furthermore, to enable learners to compete in the economy of the country after grade 12 and sustain that dream. Research by Reynolds and Cuttence (1996) supports the view that the school, which is performing well, has a visionary principal who ensures that educators execute their responsibilities in a competent manner. In fact, the principal of this school appreciates that it is his responsibility to ensure that educators and learners execute their responsibility, because he is being visionary and is interpreting, as well as communicating the vision to all stakeholders.

Prawat (1993) advocates that if a school is to be instructionally successful as a learning community, it will be because of the instructional leadership of the principal. Therefore, the role of the principal to achieve high academic results can never be over-emphasised. The principal of School A emphasised the fact that he employs different leadership styles in the school, although the dominant leadership style is instructional leadership. He also maintains this by being present and visible within the school premises. He is the first one to arrive and the last to leave, unless there is a dire need to do so. He thinks this helps him be a credible leader, as people like to

emulate what their leader does and the staff members find it easy to work with and trust a credible leader.

The visible principal has the opportunity to model his or her beliefs and promote a positive instructional climate (Krug, 1993). McEwan (2003) also views a visible presence as the second area in a high-level performing principal. In this school, the principal is visiting classrooms, attending departmental meetings, walking the hallways and holding spontaneous conversation with staff and students.

The principal implemented certain strategies to enhance learner achievement. These come across as being able to influence and mediate learner achievement, even if he is not directly involved. The first strategy was teamwork. This enabled the school community to take charge, take ownership, and feel like everybody was contributing in some way to high academic results, though not equally. It was interesting to find that the principal believes that the non-teaching staff is equally as important, as they contribute to the high academic results no matter how small the contribution.

The principal explained ownership as:

> "*People will always say so and so is giving good results in Maths grade12 and we glorify that person, only it doesn't work like that. Remember the results start from grade 8 and everybody has contributed including the general assistant who will go to class every morning and open the door... I emphasise that it's not grade 12 teachers only... remember the administration clerks, they type the question papers and do all that, they also contributed."*

The principal's focus on ownershipimplied that even the clerk would make sure that when she typed question papers, they were without spelling mistakes, as she understood and bought into the ultimate goal, which is to contribute to high academic results. The general assistants will be punctual so as to open doors on time and allow teaching and learning to take place. In this way, the principal is mediating results through the non-teaching staff that is motivated by acknowledgement and made to feel equally important by just being mentioned at the assembly. Christie and Potterton, (1997) contend that creating a sense of responsibility in the school makes

everyone realise the importance of good learner achievement. This visionary instructional leadership provides the school community with an overall sense and purpose of what is expected of them.

There is a high element of trust that is evident between the principal and his staff. The principal believes that this enables him to do his work easily, and people perform their duties willingly. It is found in this study that trust is one of the strategies used to influence high learner achievement.

When the principal was asked why he keeps on referring to the word, 'trust,' and if he thinks trust is the emotional glue that binds his team together. His response was:

> "*That's the only way, you know if you don't trust your deputies then some of the things that they could do, you are not going to allow them to do because you don't trust them, and you don't give them tasks. Because if you don't trust your HODs, then you would try as much as possible to hide some other information, to try and do things on your own and you will fail."*

High performance expectations and trust are motivational, and assist the staff to see the challenging nature of the goals that the principal, as the instructional leader, is pursuing.

The principal also views trusting your staff members as an investment. The principal says to "... *invest in your staff, that is very important. How do you invest? Trust your staff members that they will do the job and keep on motivating, trust that they'll do it and motivate."*

By showing an element of trust to the staff members, the principal is indirectly raising high performance expectations. Hallinger and Leithwood (1996) maintain that high performance expectations refer to the behaviour that demonstrates the instructional leadership's expectations for excellence, quality and high performance on the part of educators.

The third strategy that the principal uses to influence high academic results is the managing of teaching and learning. Bush and Glover (2006) refer to this task as the instructional leadership. The principal sees his primary responsibility as facilitating effective teaching and learning with the overall mission of enhancing learner achievement. Instructional leadership provided by the

principal has been identified as a contributing factor to higher student achievement (Hallinger& Heck, 2000; Lezotte, 1994; Waters, Marzano & McNutty, 2003).

The principal said "*...for example, the school may not get good results if the school does not start on time. If teachers do not attend classes on time and if learners are not there, you will not get results. So you must be there on time and teaching, so that is the first point."*

There seems to be much teamwork and unity towards managing of teaching and learning. The principal constantly monitors the learners' work to see if there is teaching and learning taking place. The HODs, who are subject experts, go into detail to check the quality of work versus the work schedule given by the Department of Basic Education (DBE). The HOD then writes a report to the deputy curriculum, which makes recommendations and forwards the report to the principal. The principal scrutinises the report and then it is openly discussed in an SMT meeting that is held every Monday of the school calendar.

There is a School Assessment Team (SAT), which is led and co-ordinated by the administration deputy. The SAT helps the school to identify problems with regard to learner achievement. The SAT team meets every first Monday of the month and scrutinises all the assessments given to the learners. The same team analyses the results of every formal task given to the learners. The school views the SAT as the, 'heart,' of their high results, as it is evident that the principal is results driven.

The principal explained the activity that takes place in the SAT meetings:

> *"We discuss reports, progress report and we know exactly what is taking place in the EMS department what is taking place in the languages department and so on. So we discuss these reports, we talk about the actual role that should be played by the SAT co-ordinator, so that unit in the school must play a major role in trying to enhance good results in the school."*

5.4 INTERVIEW WITH THE DEPUTY PRINCIPAL

There are two deputy principals at the school. One deputy principal is mandated to take care of the administration and to see to it that policies are in place and ultimately implemented.

However,the researcher thought the deputy principal who heads the curriculum would be able to assist with the study, as he is the one commissioned with the task of managing teaching and learning, which eventually affects learner achievement. The interview with the deputy principal was conducted in his office, which he shares with the other deputy principal. This proved to be a challenging exercise, as the interview was constantly disrupted by the ins and outs of the office from the other deputy.

The curriculum deputy principal also asked for the interviews to be conducted after school hours, so as not to disturb the teaching and learning time. When asked of his task, the response of the deputy principal was:

> *"...basically is to ensure that teaching and learning takes place, for instance, a few expectations as the president of South Africa has said...and being in class again is not enough, but teaching and learning must be taking place. So I make sure that when they are in class, teachers teach and learners, learn so that both teachers and learners are expected to be at school 7 hours a day and doing something."*

It emerged that teaching and learning is taken seriously and it is believed to be non-negotiable, which is one of the reasons for the high academic results. The deputy principal alluded to the fact that the principal is sometimes an autocratic leader, who does not negotiate when it comes to attending classes on time, for the duration dedicated to the period and arriving on time at school. In fact, the principal had summoned one of the educators to a meeting for always being late. Also involved in this meeting were the two deputy principals, and the departmental head of the wayward teacher.

The principal expressed that in implementing teamwork effort, he made sure that everybody clearly understood the role they are expected to play.The principal believes that the people should be empowered to lead and be trusted and that way they would want to prove themselves. However, if there is a problem, he intervenes so it is not a laissez-faire type of leadership. The intervention process is evident in the deputy principal's response in explaining how the principal gives people space to do what they are expected to do:

> "*...the other thing maybe in terms of leadership, he leaves people to play their roles. Like me, it's not like he will always tell you what to do. Eh, he'll leave me to do things the way I should be doing them. In cases where I have problems, he is always supportive...He will never turn you down and say well it is your baby deal with it, he knows that now it's him, it's his responsibility to intervene then in that case he is going to really support you. For instance, this morning I was telling teachers hey, let's honour our classes... when I was telling teachers to do that he came in to add, it's true let's honour our classes, let's do it. So he is always supportive.*

The meetings that the principal holds with his school management team every Monday enables him to make the team work effectively. This ensures that every team member is given a chance to report on their respective departments. The principal uses the grade heads, who are always post level 1 educators, to be part of the team and takes what they say seriously. The staff participation is high as the principal encourages it. He values individual contributions and involves educators in the decision-making process.

The prevalence of the climate that is participatory and trusting contributes to the quality of teaching and learning (Dimmock, 1995). In the researcher's view, this will encourage staff to be part of, and buy into the vision of the school, and make them feel important, even though they are not part of the school management team. Teamwork implies increased co-operation, interaction, sharing of vital information among educators, commitment and being loyal to colleagues and their set goals.

Whitaker and Moses (1994) found that the instructional leader builds teamwork by modelling and making it a core part of the organisational structure and culture. This is highly visible in this school, as even learners attest to it.

5.5 FOCUS GROUP WITH TEACHERS

Teachers are the main drivers of the curriculum. They form an integral part of the school community and are pivotal points of the school. Among the many people who work hard to improve learners' academic results, teachers are well positioned to achieve this goal. It is for this

reason that the researcher conducted a focus group discussion to obtain as much information on their perception about the role of the principal in high learner outcomes. Ideally, an interview with individual teachers would have seen that more information is gathered as the teachers would have been free to talk openly without fear of being reported to the principal, if any negative points were mentioned. However, due to time constraints, this was not possible.

The focus group discussion with teachers was conducted in the deputy's office. The principal insisted that this should take place after school, so teaching and learning would not be disturbed. The teachers agreed to the instruction without any reluctance. In this particular school, only three teachers were available for the focus group.

It emerged from the discussion that the teachers felt that their principal was extremely supportive and willing to develop the staff in order to achieve the high academic results:

"...The principal lets us lead and manage our classroom, he does not interfere. He took an extra effort and ensured that we are able to conduct discipline within our classrooms by outsourcing a certain gentleman to capacitate us with different disciplinary measures that will replace corporal punishment..." (Teacher 1)

This assured them that they spent more time teaching, as compared to before the training where most of the time was spent on disciplining learners, and fighting with learners to submit their work.

The discussion also revealed that there is a high level of distributed leadership that is given to teachers at the post 1 level.Teachers were grateful to their principal for this and it encouraged them to want to go an extra mile and take ownership of academic results. However, the distributed leadership is accompanied by a strong level of accountability.

"Only post level 1 educators can be grade leaders. Our principal introduced the notion in a staff meeting and it was discussed and unanimously agreed upon. The post level one teachers feel that the principal takes their contribution to learning seriously..." (Teacher 3)

In engaging with the teachers on this notion of leadership and accountability, the study found the following:

- Teachers took some form of ownership of the high academic results;
- Grade leaders interacted more with the parents, which they view as the most important element of learner achievement. Involving parents is a good strategy, as in the study conducted by Wahlstrom et.al.(2010), found a good deal of evidence that supports the popular view that parental involvement has a strong bearing on student achievement;
- Teachers took turns in chairing staff meetings, and this made them feel like the principal is developing leaders within them;
- Teachers are accountable to middle and senior management, as they have to discuss progress and challenges with the management; and
- While there are many sources in this school, the principal remained the central source.

The success of the school is also attributed to some non-negotiables known by staff members. These includes emphasis on learner and teacher punctuality, among others.

"There are some things that our principal will never negotiate, for instance, teachers are expected to be in class on time teaching..." (Teacher2)

The study revealed that if teachers are punctual and teaching from 8 o'clock until 3 o'clock, as stipulated by Department of Education, learners will know that they have to be at school in time to be taught. *Teacher 1* indicated that if learners see that their teachers are committed, they do the same. The committed teachers do so because the leadership in the school is effective.It also transpired that the principal lead from example on this discipline, as one teacher indicated that:

"*...We even joke sometimes and ask ourselves if the principal ever get sick or have a car problem as he is literally here every day on time and the first one to arrive and the last to leave." (Teacher 3)*

"This makes you to want to be here early because you won't have an excuse if he is always here as a leader why wouldn't you." (Teacher 1)

When asked to state their level of motivation and whether their principal's leadership behaviour affected this positive attitude towards work,teachers clearly stated that their principal's commitment on its own is motivational and believed that their level of motivation is affected by the way the principal leads the school. Lethoko, Heystek & Maree (2001) argue that a motivated principal is likely to be able to motivate teachers and students. In the study they conducted, teachers are highly motivated by principals who are seen as committed to their work. One of the principal's most important jobs is to motivate their teachers. Moon and Mayes (1994) emphasise the fact that motivation is a powerful dominant of what happens in class. Therefore, this implies that for the principal to influence high learner achievement, they should be able to motivate the teachers, and that teacher motivation has the strongest relationship with learner achievement.

Focus group discussion revealed that teachers were impressed with the way the principal led the school. Visits to their classrooms were welcomed and appreciated, mostly so because the principal invites them to his classroom as well to observe him teach.

"I was surprised one day when the principal asked me to come and observe him teach. He teaches Maths, so he asked me to take notes so that we can have a discussion after." (Teacher 2)

The practice created an open-door culture, where teachers were free to invite others to their classroom. This is the type of effective and collective leadership Wahlstrom et.al. (2010) refers to. They indicate that when teachers and principals share leadership, teachers' working relationships are stronger, and student achievement is higher. When asked about the union perspective on this, the response was:

"nions are not here when we have to account to the district and the parents for the learners' failure. This works for us and we do not need an outsider to dictate our terms." (Teacher 3)

There is a strong collaboration between the principal and his staff. The teachers trust their principal.The study found that the principal has worked so hard to develop a certain level of trust between him and the teachers. The focus group discussion also revealed that there are on-going formal and informal discussions with effect to teaching and learning among the staff members and with their principal.

When asked about the expectation the principal has of them, one teacher indicated that:

"...as a teacher, you cannot keep quiet about the problem you encounter in class and raise it when you have to account for the results to the HOD." (Teacher 2)

The response indicates that there is a level of teamwork, and discussions confirmed that, as a member of the team, if your learners' fail, you should scream for help or you might end up letting the team down. The study revealed that teachers in this school clearly understand what the principal expects from them. Expectations go hand in hand with accountability. Teachers also have some expectations from the principal as they indicated that they expect him to deliver certain thing for them to achieve high learner achievement. Among the expectations, effective leadership was mentioned. Wahlstrom (2010) warns that expectations are effective only when they are paired with accountability measures. This enables the observers to determine whether expected outcomes are reasonable and attained.

5.6 FOCUS GROUP WITH LEARNERS

The South African School Act of 1996 (SASA) stipulates that every public high school should have a RCLdemocratically elected by the student body. The RCL forms an integral part of the school community. Three or more of the RCL members, depending on the number of learners in the school, are involved in SGB matters in order to express their views in how best the school could be governed.

The researcher conducted a focus group with four members of the RCL to assist in answering the research question on the learners' perceptions on the role of the principal on learner achievement. The learners were selected based on them taking part in the leadership of the school as the RCL. Only four of the seven expected RCL members arrived for the focus group discussion. This was because others were writing exams on the date scheduled by the school for the focus group discussion.

The discussion took place in the computer lab of the school, which seemed to be fully functional. There were no disturbances, as learners were instructed by the deputy principal not to use the centre for the duration of the discussion.

It emerged from the discussion with the learners that they view the principal as the key role player in their high achievement. The principal is seen as a great leader and somebody who cares about their education.

One of the grade 10 learners explained that the principal visits their classrooms, even at that level, and takes their books to monitor and sign. She interprets it as an indication that the principal's focus is not only on the grade 12s, but that the grade 10s also matter.

" ...because, if he was only focused on grade 12, everything will be for grade 12. He will only be moderating them, but he is able to moderate us, the grade 10 as well check and sign our books."(learner1)

It again transpired from the discussions that the principal does not compromise the true learning experience for the sake of results. Neither does he ignore his other role for the sake of results. Learners felt that they matter more to the principal than him being spoken about everywhere for producing good results:

> "*...But I always think that he puts the students first. He always thinks about the students and not only that this school will be discussed badly. Well, he thinks about that, but in order for the school to progress well, he thinks about his students, like he does not makes us think that we only have to produce good results for the school..."(learner2)*

The study found that the learners feel they can only make their principal proud of them by achieving good results, in return for his caring for them and being a great man, father figure and a great leader.

The other strategy implemented by the principal in influencing learner achievement is constant communication with them. In his capacity as principal, he has informal and formal discussions with the learners.

The principal masterfully uses the communication cycle. This expedites the learners in understanding exactly what is expected of them and helps the principal achieve his goal of high learner achievement.The principal regularly meets with the learners and encourages and motivates them to get a 100% pass rate. The learners see this as the principal's direct

involvement in their education. While they think it is a way of motivating them, they also think it is encouraging them to do and achieve more.

Another learner confirmed that the principal holds meetings with different grades to motivate and raise their expectations:

> "*Particularly, let's say for example he wants to send a particular message to the grade 12s, he'll just call the entire grade 12s...and motivate them and to the whole school he goes during assembly... he always has something to say so in such a way he does motivates us." (Learner5)*

Motivation and constant encouragement seem to be the working tools that the principal uses to drive and achieve his goal. Everybody is aware and talks about this as an encouragement for them to do their best. The learners, as well as the deputy principal, agreed that the principal motivates them and the staff. The learners went on to indicate that he even uses strategies that indirectly motivate them, even if he doesnot say so himself.

The principal of the school seems to be extending the expectations in practice to the learners, as when asked about the principal's expectations from them, the president of the RCL's response was:

"Yes, we know exactly, the first time he spoke to me... he said as the president I should somehow enlighten the learners about the 100% pass goal that the school has..."(learner2)

Another learner added:

" *He does expect us to achieve high marks so as to be able to pass, have good marks and move on with our lives." (learner5)*

Learners who achieve are expected, first by the principal and secondly by the educators to achieve (Blase, Blase, Anderson and Dungan, 1995).

The principal clearly indicates that every learner in the mainstream school is, "educable," and has the ability to pass. The fact that the learner passed in primary school means that, if all the opportunities are made available and accessible, the learner is bound to pass. The principal's dream is to have every learner in his school pass.

One of the grade 12s indicated that the principal has spontaneous conversations with learners if he sees them doing something wrong, he talks to them:

"...Let's say there is something that I'm doing and he has never seen me doing it before. He calls you very nicely and tells you that there is something that you are doing that he doesn't like and shows you the way, in such a way he juggles everything... that is why I say he is a great leader."(learner2)

5.7 DOCUMENTARY ANALYSIS

For triangulation, validity and reliability purposes, the researcher had asked for certain documents to analyse. The principal asked the deputy principal to forward the researcher any documents needed on condition that the researcher would use them only for the research purpose and destroy them immediately afterwards. The deputy principal then photocopied the following documents for the researcher: academic year plan, school year plan, curriculum delivery management plan, the curriculum-monitoring tool, and the minutes of the SMT meeting, where curriculum delivery was discussed.

Firstly, the minutes of the meetings confirmed what the principal had alluded to about making sure that everybody is involved and giving everyone a chance to chair the meeting so as to develop other leaders. The SMT meetings are chaired by different individuals. The researcher also found that the SMT meeting were indeed held every Monday of the week, according to the management plan and the first Monday of the month dedicated specifically for assessment deliberations and developments.

There is also the development of the RCL leadership, which is taken seriously and acknowledged by important stakeholders, as required by the SASA (1996). In the management plan, there is a date set aside for the elections of the RCL, after which there is a date for their induction. This implies that the learners' leadership will know exactly what is expected of them, as alluded to by the president of the RCL in the discussion.

The academic plan also indicated that learners are given their assessment plans the very first week of re-opening in the first term. This confirmed that the school takes assessment seriously and that learners are aware of the expectations that the school has of them. In the minutes of one of the meetings with teachers, there was a discussion on what should happen to learners who do not adhere to assessment plans, such as not submitting the required assignments on the stipulated date.The curriculum deputy principal advised on parental involvement and the importance of adhering to those set dates.

Parental involvement is taken seriously in this school. It is also stipulated in the academic plan where there is a date specifically set aside for the involvement of parents, firstly through general parents' meetings and secondly, specifically for parents who have learners struggling academically. In these meetings, parents and teachers discuss how to help with the struggling learners and support forms are given to parents. Interestingly, there is a date set aside in the academic plan where teachers come together and identify struggling learners, and plan the support to be given thereafter.

The school has its main focus on teaching and learning. The emphasis in the minutes of the meetings by the principal and the deputy principal attest to this. In one meeting, the principal instructed that HODs give textbooks, which were delivered to learners. The instruction was clear that this should be done within three days so as to adhere to their policy of one-learner-one textbook. The times indicated in the minutes also revealed that the meetings are pre-planned and held after school so as to not disturb teaching and learning times.

While teaching and learning are the core businesses, these are not done at the expense of other activities, such as extracurricular activities. The year plan indicated which sporting codes are presented in the school, whereas the minutes revealed that the principal encouraged learners to participate in these activities to develop the learners holistically.

The researcher found that the principal does share information and encourages teachers to read circulars and information from the district,in order to keep abreast of the changing information and any developments, especially within the education sector. The documents revealed that the principal also encourages staff development.

To influence learner achievement and improve results, the documents revealed that focus is given to learners who partially achieve and for those who do not achieve at all. There is a specialcurriculum delivery management plan, which talks to this. In this plan, educators are expected to submit their subject targets and improvement plans and thereafter,they sit and discuss how best these improvement plans can be implemented. To assist the process, there is then constant feedback given to the learners and their parents.

In ensuring quality teaching and learning across all grades and all subjects, the curriculum deputy is expected to monitor and visit HODs in their classrooms. This is a strategy to monitor HODs as subject heads, and also to verify if they monitor the delivery of the curriculum by their sub-ordinates.

The documents revealed that to ensure that teaching and learning take place effectively, learners are issued with stationery on the first day one of the school. The documents are in accordance with what the principal alluded to when he indicated that the stationery is distributed on the first day of school. These documents given to the researcher indicate that there is constant monitoring and feedback. The monitoring tools used talk to managing teaching and learning.

The school uses a number of committees to achieve its core purpose. One of the committees is the School Based Support Team (SBST). This team is effectively used to combat challenges like teenage pregnancy and substance abuse. The year plan indicated that the SBST has days dedicated to engage the learners on these challenging issues, as well as having awareness campaigns. Intriguingly, the awareness campaigns include the boy child as well who is mostly left behind when discussing teenage pregnancy.

5. 8 CHAPTER OVERVIEW

The findings revealed that there is a high level of teamwork. Teamwork enabled the school to function, as every school community understands that his or her role is vital in contributing to high learner achievement. There was a lot of collaboration within the school. What was said by the principal in the interview regarding his role and the paths he uses to influence learner achievement was confirmed by the deputy principal, teachers and the learners. The principal uses high level of instructional leadership, as well as distributed leadership.

CHAPTER 6:

CASE STUDY FINDINGS: SCHOOL B

6.1 INTRODUCTION

The aim of this chapter was to provide a detailed description and analysis of case B by presenting findings of the data collection process. The chapter first presents the background and context of School B. The chapter also presents data from interviews with the principal, and the curriculum deputy principal. The researcher conducted a focus group discussion with the RCL. The focus group discussion was conducted with six of the seven RCL members.

6.2. BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT OF SCHOOL B

Like School A, School B is situated in the south-western part of Soweto. In 2011, it had an enrolment of 1500 learners, with 171 learners enrolled in grade. The school is surrounded by informal settlements, and attracts learners from economically deprived settings. School B was established in 1969. It has a staff of 35 teachers, eightHODs, and two deputy principals. One deputy principal is responsible for the General Education and Training (GET) phase, and the second deputy principal responsible for the Further Education and Training (FET) phase. Both the deputy principals cover both the curriculum and the administration in their phase. The school employs six General Assistants (GA) and four administration clerks. The principal has recently been appointed.She was acting principal from May 2010. However, she was the deputy principal before the promotion within the same school and claims this enabled her to understand the systems taking place

6.2.1 SCHOOL PERFOMANCE HISTORY

Although the school has not been achieving above 80% in the years prior to 2010, it has, however, been achieving above average in the district. For instance, the Johannesburg Central District obtained 67.1% in the year 2010. Previously, the school had a high number of learners enrolled in grade 12, as compared to 2010.

The table below shows the performance of the school as obtained from the Johannesburg Central District:

6.2.1 a) SCHOOL PERFOMANCE TABLE

YEAR	PASS PERCENTAGE	NUMBER OF LEARNERS WROTE GRADE 12
2010	88.89	72
2009	64.58	98
2008	50.91	242
2007	63.18	272
2006	76.47	268

The table shows that in 2010, School B obtained an 88.89% overall pass rate in Grade 12. This was the highest pass rate that the school obtained in five years, when compared to pass rates for 2006 to 2010. It should also be noted that in 2010, the school had the lowest number of learners registered to write grade 12 compared to the figures for the previous five years. It would seem that the school may have achieved the highest pass rate for the five year period, 2006 to 2010, as a result of fewer learners registered to write grade 12 in 2010. The figures also indicate declining numbers in learners registered to write grade 12 at the school. In 2009, there were 98 learners registered towrite Grade 12 and the figure dropped to 72 in 2010. It is possible that the trend with the GDE is that when statistics are released, the number of learners who wrote the grade 12 examinations is not considered, but only the pass percentage versus whatever number wrote. The assumption is that the pass percentage could be influenced by the number of learners who enrolled in that particular year, as seen in the table above.

6.2.2 THE SOCIO-ECONOMIC CONDITIONS OF THE SCHOOL

According to the principal, the school is under-resourced. Most of the parents are unemployed and cannot help with the school fees.Thus, the school depends entirely on the DoE for funding. The principal also alluded to the fact that some of the learners come from child-headed homes.

To bring about social justice, the government introduced the National Norms and Standards of Funding (1998), which was aimed at redressing the past differences in the education system.. The current state of school education is that schools are classified into five different quintiles. The Resource Targeting Table (RTT) is then used, based on the poverty of communities around the school, which is dependent on the household advantage or disadvantage with regard to income. This will qualify the school to be ranked between quintile 1, the poorest, and quintile 5, the most affluent, respectively.

School B is classified as a quintile three, meaning it is a no fee-paying school, as dictated by the GDE circular 79/2007. The school relies heavily on the grant provided by the GDE. The fact that it is a quintile 3 school means that the GDE is paying R838 for each learner for the year. The grant is to be distributed among three categories, namely 55% for Learner Teacher Support Material (LTSM), 12% for Maintenance and 33% for Service, as was the case in School A.

The school also has a computer laboratory that is run and maintained by the Gauteng Online. Relatively speaking, the school is under-resourced, with dilapidated buildings and poorly maintained classes. In May 2011, the GDE decided to extend the nutrition programme to the quintile 3 schools (GDE, 2011). This is viewed as a great achievement by the principal, as the staff members used to help with their own money for the nutritional programme. Learners in this school are drawn from the same community where the school is situated, as well as from neighbouring informal settlements.

6.3 INTERVIEW WITH THE PRINCIPAL

The principal is the unit of analysis, as the study aimed to find the role of the principal in learner achievement. Therefore, the first interviews were conducted with the principal to assist in answering the research questions. This particular principal was selected on the basis that under

her leadership, the academic results had shown a great improvement and the school was thus referred to as the most improved with 24.31% improvement, when compared to the 2009 grade 12 academic results. The interviews took place in the principal's office, as planned prior to the day.

The principal asked that the researcher to make time during school hours, as she could not be available after school. It was difficult to get hold of the principal for the follow-up interview, as scheduled. On the scheduled date, the researcher contacted the principal to remind her of their session and the principal then asked for a postponement. This proved to be a challenge, as she was constantly not available in the school or if the researcher did find her, she was busy with something. She did not answer her calls, nor replied to messages. However, after the deputy principal's intervention, the researcher managed to finally have the follow-up interview with the principal.

When asked about the role she plays in promoting and supporting learner achievement, the principal's response was:

> *"There should always be monitoring, you have to lead and leading means much, as there are work schedules, there are whatever, but see to it that executing takes place, that there is quality teaching in classes and that quality teaching not only appears at face value, but also through monitoring and support, starting from your learners, you know get in class, you check that yes, learners are being taught, that's fine but still on that there is assessment taking place..."*

It emerged from the interview with the principal that she believes that for quality teaching and learning to take place, there should be constant feedback to both learners and teachers. If there is a problem realised by the senior management, there should be intervention strategies implemented and the HODs should be driving the intervention strategies, as they provide subject expertise.

According to the principal, there is management of teaching and learning, because she indicated that she checks the learners' books against the work schedule, which indicates what should be covered at that particular time. When asked if teaching and learning, which ultimately result in high academic results, do take place in the school, the principal responded:

> *"...but now normally when I have a question in that Geography that I don't know you see. Checking visa vie what I have been given as the School Based Assessment (SBA) to say this is the SBA and the Geography work schedule here I'm confused I don't see something that speaks to this and they'll tell me, for instance, they'll say this one you won't see in the learners' books because it is the portfolio or it is a fieldwork thing, you see. You just observe the learners doing that. But then somebody has got to take me through so that I become clued up."*

The extract gives an impression that the principal aptly manages teaching and learning, as she knows exactly what is happening in class and in the learners' books. However, a different view was given by a learner, who indicated that not once did the principal visit their class to check what is happening, neither does she check their books.

In monitoring teaching and learning, the principal uses a monitoring tool in the form of a register that is given to learners.Learners have to submit it to her office every Friday, in order for her to check who attended the classes and who didnot, and then presumably take action. The teacher has to sign the register at the end of the period. However, the principal thinks it is difficult for her to tell if effective and quality teaching and learning occurs during the period. The register is purely to make sure that the teacher comes to class.

In answering how she then make sure that teaching and learning takes place, the principal said:

> *"That is why we have the RCL, we have class reps, it's not just for window dressing, those are leaders chosen in class... We normally say things as adults we like to decorate things and say I do go to class... and we know from the union perspective I can't just impose and spy on the person. I can't put a CCTV camera to make sure that teaching and learning takes place in that class, so we don't know."*

It became evident from the interview extracts that the principal regards the assistance from the GDE, in terms of resources, as an important factor, which contributes to the academic results.

> "*They know I always fight with people, the triple T's that my director always alludes to; time, teach and textbooks. Time and teaching must take precedence at all times. We have no excuse here. We are a quintile 3 school. We don't pay school fees. The Department of Education empower us with resources. We areSection 21, therefore we have to buy everything that is needed for learners so strictly I adhere to those things."*

The principal uses different paths and strategies to enhance learner achievement. There is analysis of results done through teamwork of the principal and deputy principals. The senior management of the school analyses results and draws graphs to see which departments were doing well and which departments were improving in terms of term results. Then the respective HODs are called to account for the failure in the department and the commitment to the interventions strategies to be implemented.

The researcher found that the exercise is more for statistical purposes than an analysis for the enhancement of results. This is because there is no evidence of intervention programmes after the analysis of results is done. The principal promised to provide the researcher with the documents and later claimed that they got lost when she was changing offices earlier in the year. To enhance learner achievement, the diagnostic analysis of results should help in identifying the specific questions mostly failed by learners in order to effect the required intervention programmes.

The principal used external support as a second strategy to enhance learner achievement. In this regard, the best people from the external support are called upon to give extra lessons to the learners, especially in the commerce department which seems to be a challenge in the school. These teachers are paid from the government's grant. The school also makes use of the Secondary School Intervention Programme (SSIP). The SSIP programme was designed by the GDE to have Saturday classes for schools achieving below 80%, which is deemed as underperforming, according to the MEC of education. The principal thinks the programme contributed a lot to the improvement of last year's matric results, as the best teachers were employed by the state for the programme.

The interview with the principal revealed that she was passionate about the academic results and high learner achievement. There is a lot of distributed leadership within the school, according to our interview. Instructional leadership was somehow practised within the school.

6.4 INTERVIEW WITH THE DEPUTY PRINCIPAL

The school operates with two deputy principals. The first deputy is responsible for the GET phase, which is from grade 8 to 12, taking care of both the administration and the curriculum in the phase. The second deputy is in charge of the FET phase, being grade 10 to 12, for both administration and curriculum. For the purpose of this study, the researcher asked to interview the FET deputy, as it was thought that he would give the researcher a better insight into the role of the principal, since the schools in the study were chosen purely on their grade 12 academic results. The interview with the deputy principal was conducted in his office.

The curriculum deputy also asked for the interviews to be conducted during school hours, although he did check with his timetable prior to set a date to make sure that the interview would not clash with his teaching time prior to the set date. When asked of his role, the deputy's response was:

> *"...The role is to see to it that there is this we call where we check on key basis if do people attend classes or not... but sometimes I check the analysis because usually after the term there is analysis of results. And then one may check that for example presently we saw that the commerce department is the cause of poor results then... if it comes to a push, we call the whole department and say, people this is the situation, so they can see for themselves..."*

From the extract, it is not exactly clear what the purpose of the analysis of results is. It emerged from the interviews with the principal and with the deputy principal, respectively, that the analysis of results is done merely because the district demands that they should be submitted every term end. There is no indication of how they deliberate on the analysis to enhance the results. The danger about this process is that the teacher can avoid being called to account by merely indicating that no learner failed. In response to the question about the action taken to see if the analysis from the teachers was the true reflection of what transpired in class, he indicated

that they could not confirm that as not even the scripts were moderated to check how the questions were asked and if they were indeed marked. He indicated that there was a lack of hands-on commitment by the HODs in monitoring their departments. The only department that conducted monitoring was the Physical Science and Mathematics HOD.

"You see, what I believe can improve the results is if the management can be hand-on. By management, I don't mean the principal and the deputy only, I mean from the principal to the HODs, if those people can be hands–on, I believe we can produce more results."

The findings revealed that there was a problem with teachers attending classes. The deputy principal indicated that they have a problem in making sure that teachers attend classes.

> *"...actually that is our main challenge, you know... now that the ex-principal is not here anymore, it is really difficult; you have to fight people to attend class."*

Throughout the interview, the deputy principal kept on referring to the former principal, especially in terms of discipline and the leadership style, which he thinks are the contributing factors to the previous year's results. In fact, the deputy principal is adamant that the ex-principal had a huge role in the 2010 results and the fact that the number of grade 12 learners were fewer compared to other years is a boost to the results.

In answering the question on his perception with regard to the role of the principal on learner achievement, the deputy principal spoke about the previous principal.When asked to talk about the role of the current principal, he said he had nothing much to say and asked if it was permissible to pass that question. The deputy principal did not want to commit to certain questions and asked not to respond. At one stage, he wanted to know how the researcher wanted him to respond.

Teamwork between the principal and the deputy principals is evident. However, there is no indication of the feedback after the decisions were taken and there is no evidence of the actions taken that was provided by both the deputy and the principal. This was revealed after the researcher asked for evidence of feedback and the deputy said he could not produce any. In fact, on numerous occasions, the deputy principal indicated that he was not aware if the principal did take action after he had made any recommendation.One of his duties is to monitor different

HODs' departments, write his findings and recommendations, then submit the report to the principal.

> *"Now I take the report to the principal. I would maybe say in the report the Social Science department in the written work the HOD did not indicate what happened or the findings in his department. And then the principal will take that up with the HOD and then I don't know from there what happens; if maybe she goes to the extent of asking for the learners' books, I don't know."*

The reports are used to monitor what transpires in the various departments in terms of learning and teaching. They are to be written by the HOD, who has to submit it to the deputy principal, who makes recommendations and then forwards it to the principal. The teaching and learning monitoring systems are in place, however, the study failed to reveal the extent to which the principal is involved in the monitoring systems so as to enhance learner achievement.

The deputy principal agreed that the monitoring of teacher attendance is done by the learners, but did not know if it is effective, as some teachers refuse to sign the attendance register, and he further does not know what action the principal takes on those teachers. He also thinks the system works by checking if the teacher attended the class, but as to knowing if teaching and learning took place, there is no evidence.

"…You see, this only indicates that I was in class, but what exactly happened, then that becomes a problem."

The findings revealed that the school has a problem of highly active union members who refuse to be observed in class. The deputy principal is of the view that other mechanism could be used to monitor the teaching and learning, for instance, if the HOD's regularly checked the learners' books versus the work schedules and management took action on the teachers who donot do their work.

> "*Management can compare the written work as well as the questioning. Like I said, we can succeed if the managers are hands-on. So even there you find that these HODs don't check... In order for you to do that, you must control the learners' books... You must give the names of the learners' books checked. So that*

when I go to verify, as the deputy, it corresponds. The HODs just indicate that written work is ok and you see that it was just for submission purposes. In reality, you'll find that the written work is not attended to."

The deputy principal was asked about the role of the principal in high academic results.He didnot want to commit and asked to pass the question.

When asked about his perception on the leadership style that he thinks the principal uses to influence learner achievement, the response was:

"I don't really know how to explain this butshould I say weak. There are instances where I could say weak, but I can't be like be specific on whether she is autocratic or democratic."

The deputy principal was then asked to explain what he meant and he gave examples where the principal would address learners and they would not pay attention. He indicated that there was no degree of authority, even with teachers, as they are now doing as they please. An example of a teacher who was absent for more than a month was given where the Institutional Development and Support Officer (IDSO) from the district had to intervene.

The interview with the deputy principal revealed that there is a high level of favouritism imposed by the principal, which resulted in teachers being defiant. However, the deputy principal is optimistic, as he indicates that the school is fortunate, because it has elements of good and committed teachers as well as learners. What he does not know is how long it will take before the developing culture spreads among the staff members and ultimately the learners. His concern is mostly on the level of discipline, as the previous principal was at times more of an autocrat, which kept the level of discipline high among teachers and learners.

6.5 FOCUS GROUP WITH LEARNERS

The South African School Act of 1996 (SASA) stipulates that every public high school should have a Representative Council of Learners democratically elected by the student body. The RCL forms an integral part of the school community. Three or more of the RCL members, depending on the number of learners within the school, involved in the SGB matters, which air the learners' views in how best the school should be governed.

The researcher conducted a focus group with six members of the RCL so as to assist in answering a research question about the learners' perception on the role of the principal on learner achievement. The learners were selected on the basis of taking part in the leadership of the school as the RCL. Only six of the expected seven RCL members turned up for the focus group discussion and it was explained to me that a seventh RCL member was less active.

The discussion took place in the deputy principal's office. After numerous attempts at asking and being promised to secure the focus discussion group by the principal, the deputy principal finally intervened and the researcher had a focus group discussion with the learners.

When asked about their perception with regard to the role of the principal on learner achievement, the learners' response initially was that their principal was involved and they felt that she had a huge role to play with regard to their academic results.

> *"Well, according to last year's results, I can say I agree, because last year she would make sure that every learner and every teacher is in class. Sometimes she would give us extra hours after school, maybe from 2pm-3pm in order for us to achieve like to improve results." (learner1*

The second learner further explained:

> *"She is playing a big role like she would sacrifice and stay longer to make sure that everybody has quality time and she used to like encourage one-on-one basis. For instance, if the learner is not performing well, she would encourage that sometimes the teacher and the learner would use her office for that one-on-one lecture, so basically she contributed." (learner2)*

The findings were different after one learner explained that the principal was less supportive and did not take her responsibilities seriously. The learner explained that, according to her, the principal talks more with less action.

> *"She often dodges her responsibilities in terms of learners having enough in terms of schoolwork, enough furniture, because we have to run after her telling*

her that the ceiling is falling... We have shortage of chairs, and desks. Sometimes we get opportunities where we need to have like... But we had to follow her around in order for that thing to happen. That is why I say she dodges her responsibility and leaves everything to everyone and then she comes having that creamed on top, claiming that the school is getting far whereas we don't see her involvement."(learner6)

The extract is contradictory to the principal's perception, who explained that the school is a quintile 3 school that getsa grant from the district, so they have no excuse, but to buy all the necessary resources needed by teachers and learners to enhance teaching and learning. The focus group discussion revealed that the principal had an element of favouritism imposed among learners too. This came after the learners were complaining that the principal is not supportive and that only the FET deputy principal in senior management cares about them. However, she is always the first one to claim credit after their achievement.

"...ehm, I don't know how to put it, but all I can say in terms of if I could make an example about the extra mural activities happening in the school e.g. debate. Like you get to know about when there is success happening like maybe the debate team has won. She is the first one to brag at the assembly and say the learners did well. But she doesn't know what happens behind the scenes as she is never supportive."(learner6)

A different view was expressed by another learner, who indicated that the principal was supportive and sometimes came to watch them play soccer.

"Sure, I don't think it's not like she is not supportive, sometimes she is disturbed by other responsibilities... If we play soccer, she comes and sometimes leaves because maybe there is something to do at the district, you see. But the fact that she was there means a lot. She leaves somebody in charge and leaves the money behind if there is a need. I can say there are things that she must do, she balances issues."(learner4)

The extract raised various of emotions, as the learners explained the level of favouritism the principal portrayed when it came to soccer, as compared to other extramural activities in the school.

> "*You see, if they are to leave now, she will give them money now. I am a dancer, I have been here for four years dancing for all those years. We don't have a costume, we don't have music, we struggle on our own. Every time we go to ask her or give proposal, and she'll just look at it and make empty promises. We win every time, we never lost; we bring back trophies to the school. Like she said she goes to the assembly happy and smiling saying we thank the kids. She doesn't even know where we started and that we won up to the district level. But when it comes to soccer, she will even come to soccer grounds with drinks happy. But as for us we have to struggle see our way through. You know this really disturbs me."(learner3)*

It transpired from the discussion that the learners knew what the principal expected of them when it came to learner achievement. However, they felt that she is mostly concerned about them passing so as to give her a good name. They claim that she could even go to the extra mile by hiring extra teachers to make sure that they pass. But when they explain to her about the everyday issues, such as teachers not attending classes, lack of textbooks, dangerous ceilings falling, shortage of chairs and desks, she seems to not care and just makes empty promises. The focus group discussion revealed that the learners felt the FET deputy was mostly the one who was supportive when it came to their welfare and them passing. This is purely because, unless he is made aware of their problem, nothing will be done.

When asked about what they would like the principal to do to make them feel that she cared about their learning, learners explained that it would make them motivated if she were to listen to them when they complained about teacher absenteeism in class, monitored their books, be at school on time and lead by example. They would also appreciate some form of motherly care like attending to the falling ceiling.

"First of all, she must be disciplined, she is forever late, she should understand what a leader is. You know, when you are a leader, you lead by example, and she should be that example. Firstly, she must sort herself out; she is a mess on her own and then knows what her purpose here is and start acting like a principal. She should do her job; she knows her priorities and responsibilities. She should do her jo,b that is all we are asking her and not to be running after her." (learner6)

> *"Even when she leaves her house, she should have a vision about some difference for a day, one day at a time. Like, we alluded to her checking our books make us feel that wow mam today did something to show she cares. She should come to classes, take her time the whole day and check our books, ask us about our learning problems and how she can help with our learning. Give us that mind to see that we are heading somewhere, right now I feel like we are lost."(learner3)*
>
> *"You know, the principal, if she and her staff can communicate and be committed to love what they are doing, we can succeed. Some of our teachers, it seemed like they don't like teaching, it's like they are forced."(learner5)*
>
> *"The other thing is that she must take every stream seriously. I don't think she takes the general stream seriously. Secondly, we realised about her is that she gets information and keeps it to herself. She should share information."(learner4)*
>
> *"She should encourage her staff to stop fighting infront of us. They should show a united front and stop these cliques. Right now, we know who is in the principal's camp and who is not, as the principal and other teachers call each other 'tshomis'."(learner1)*

The focus group discussion revealed that learners were not happy for being used to monitor teachers who attend and who do not attend classes. One of the reasons is that they are then victimised by the teachers who do not attend, and they think their marks are then tampered

withas a means of retribution. They report this to the principal and nothing is done. They think this is purely the job of the principal and that she is shifting her responsibility.

6.6 DOCUMENTARY ANALYSIS

For triangulation, validity and reliability purposes, the researcher had asked for certain documents in order to analyse them.

The documents analysed also included minutes of the meetings, especially where curriculum is discussed, the analysis of results throughout the year, as well as minutes of those analyses, the school year plan to see how much time is given to curriculum delivery, the assessment plans, as well as the monitoring and evaluation tools for curriculum delivery. The researcher took notes andrecorded them in the diary to reflect for data analysis purposes. Observations were recorded in the diary.

The deputy principal gave the researcher the year plan for his visits to the HODs and the tool he uses to monitor the curriculum delivery. It emerged from the documents provided that monitoring was not done regularly or at least according to the management plan. He claimed that the minutes of the meetings were with the principal, as well as the recommendations made by him, as discussed in the interview with him. This posed a challenge for the study to confirm validity and reliability of the findings until the documents were provided.

6.7 CHAPTER OVERVIEW

The data in this chapter could not really confirm the level of influence the principal has on learner achievement. There is a low level of professionalism within the school. The principal seemed to be doing more when she was acting principal than what she is doing now that she is the principal. This is evident by the fact that the learners and the deputy referred to the principal as doing more the previous year.Even the principal herself alluded to the fact that last year she was more hands-on, as there was no power struggle as in the current year. The data revealed that outsourcing or consultancy was helping to achieve high learner achievement. The principal

mediated learner achievement through the involvement of external support, such as the SSIP programme.

The study revealed that although the principal was optimistic about 2011's academic results, both the deputy principal and the learners were pessimistic. They attributed the failure of the learners to the principal's style of leadership, lack of involvement, not being visible in the school, lack of support, being indecisive, not taking charge of her responsibilities and creating a laissez-faire type of institution.

CHAPTER: 7

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

7.1 INTRODUCTION

The previous two chapters provided the findings of the two case schools. This particular chapter provides cross-case analysis, which is linked to the research questions, findings and the literature. The main themes that emerged from the reviewed literature, as well as from the case studies determined the structure of this chapter. To make sense of the data, these themes were then interpreted. The main aim of analysing the data was to understand the various constitutive elements through an inspection of the relationships between them. Data analysis also helped the researcher to answer the research question in a systematic way (Mouton, 2001).

The statistics presented by theGDE indicated that only one school met the initial criterion, that being consistently achieving above 80% for the past three years under the same leadership, which is School A. Since the focus of the study was on the role of the principal on learner achievement, the case school, which was the second option, was then selected, as it had achieved 88.5% in the previous year, thus making it the second best school in terms of results in Soweto, according to the Johannesburg Central District analysis of results. The study aimed to establish the role of the principal on learner achievement.

After the researcher collected the data, the researcher then used data-coding based on the strategy specified by Merriam (2001). Scott and Morrison (2007) argue that fundamental to data analysis is a two-stage process: the sifting and selecting of information collected into, ‘data bits,’ and assigning to them a label or category that is usually called a ‘code.’ The codes were then categorised, although not all categories had the same level of importance (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). Different themes emerged from the interviews, focus groups and analysed documents, which will be discussed in detail. For the purpose of this research, it was assumed that effective instructional leadership is an aspect that influences the high learner achievement in schools.

The study moved from the premise that the management of teaching and learning is an important feature in accomplishing the purpose of a school, which is quality teaching and learning and so producing high learner achievement.

7.2 DISCUSSION OF THEMES EMERGING FROM THE FINDINGS

Different themes emerged from the analysed data, as mentioned earlier in the discussion chapter. The themes were all linked in answering the research questions and therefore could not be separated, even though they could be differentiated. The themes that emerged from the findings will be discussed in detail, which are as follows:

7.2.1 Theme 1: Managing Teaching and Learning

The principals in both schools viewed their primary responsibility as making sure that effective teaching and learning takes place in order to enhance learner achievement. The emphasis on teaching, time and textbooks, as advocated by the President of South Africa (2010) was identified by the principals as one of the most important domains that enhance learner achievement. To enhance effective teaching and thus influence academic results, there is constant monitoring done in both schools. However, the methods used differ in the schools.

The study revealed that principal A was more of a, ‘hands-on,’ principal, who made sure that teaching and learning disturbance is minimal, if not avoided at all costs. Teaching and learning in this school is extensively monitored by the SMT. School A made use of the SAT and the SMT to ensure that teaching, learning and assessment continuouslytakes place.

The HOD writes a report and submits it to the curriculum deputy, who interrogates it and forwards it to the principal. The report is then discussed thoroughly by the SAT, which determines the intervention necessary, if the need arises.

Assessment is a serious issue in this school, as every first Monday of the month, the SMT holds a meeting to discuss assessment issues. In these meetings, the HODs discuss what actually happens in the classrooms, as they also conduct classroom visits to observe the delivery of the curriculum. O’Donnell and White (2005) contend that the primary responsibility of the principal

is to facilitate effective teaching and learning with the overall mission of enhancing student achievement.

Principal B involves the RCL to monitor effective teaching and learning by marking attendance register to indicate the teachers who attend and those that are absent from classes. The learners are averse to this practice, as they feel that the principal is, "passing the buck," and complained that nothing is done to the teachers who do not attend classes. The learners also stated that the convention of attendance registers led to them being victimised by the teachers. The marking of the attendance register does not address the issue of determining if effective teaching and learning takes place in the classrooms.

To determine if effective teaching and learning takes place, the analysis of results is done in these schools. Principal A analyses and interprets results himself and then discusses it with the SAT. The HODs who are subject experts are expected to do a diagnostic analysis by analysing the question papers set by individual educators in their departments. The principal in this school indicates that this helps them to identify the types of questions asked by teachers and also predicts the pass percentage before the results are even announced by the DoE, as they give an indication of what is happening in the classroom. School B's analysis is done by the deputy principal that hands it to the principal and does not exactly know what the principal does with the analysis.

The principal of school A attributed the school's academic success to three factors:

(1) The focus on the learner;

(2) The continuous assessment;

(3) The non-negotiable emphasis on learner and teacher punctuality to make sure that effective teaching does take place.

In both school, there is an element of teachers willing to go the extra mile in order to achieve high academic results, for example giving extra classes on Saturdays, as well as morning and afternoon classes.

The teachers' labour union in School B hinders the effective monitoring of teaching and learning, as it is opposing SMT members in observing the curriculum delivery in classrooms. However, the principal in School A is of the opinion that unless there is constant monitoring, there is no telling if quality teaching and learning takes place. Monitoring, evaluation and feedback is the order of the day in this school, and assists in effecting learner achievement. The rule of thumb in the school is that the union cannot dictate what is to happen in class. International literature is silent on the issue of unions and classroom monitoring by the principal and the SMT.

The findings in these schools were in accordance with Botha (2004), who advocates that the professional school principal is the educational leader and manager of a school, and is therefore responsible for the work performance of all people in the school. The work performance, in the researchers view, can only be measured and analysed through the academic results. This is endorsed by principal A, as he indicated that the buck stops with the principal, and the principal is the main character in high learner achievement.

The schools in the study engage external support to enhance teaching and learning. The DoE offers SSIPs every Saturday for grade 12 learners in Soweto, andlearners are encouraged to attend the programmes. School A is also involved with the Zenex foundation that is sponsored by Eskom. The principal thinks the programme is helpful, as the foundation does not only concentrate on grade 12, but also empowers teachers with workshops and teaching material.

7.2.2 Theme 2: Teamwork

It emerged from the findings that the schools view teamwork as an important instrument in achieving high academic results. Teamwork is used by the principal to mediate learner achievement. Principal A insists that without teamwork, it becomes impossible to influence learner achievement, as the principal cannot do it alone (Fullan, 2001).

In achieving successful teamwork, trust is used as the emotional glue in this school and binds together the leader and the followers. Since the staff and the learners know that the principal trusts that they can, 'do it,' they always go an extra mile to prove him right. O'Donell and White (2005) articulate that for teachers to feel appreciated and become followers, principals must

spend time and effort developing trust. This notion is endorsed by Kamper (2008) when stating that trust is the cornerstone of civil society within a school.

In the case of School A, it was clear that more of the teamworkcould be seen. Whitaker and Moses (1994)advocated that working together produces better results than working alone. To successfully implement teamwork, it becomes imperative for the principal, as the leader of the school, to articulate, communicate and interpret the school's vision of academic success in a manner that the school community, including most importantly the parents, understand and buy into. With a clear vision and commitment, the school community will focus its energies around a common purpose and shared belief in the learning standards that will guide teaching, high levels of student learning, parental understanding and community support for high quality education standards and accountability (Cross & Rice, 2000).

Portin, Shen, and Williams (1998) are of the view that leadership deals with areas such as supervising the curriculum, improving instructional programme of the school, working with staff to identify the vision and mission of the school, and building close relationships with the school community.

School A is in accordance with the view of these authors, as the principal sees building relationships with the school community as the motivational tool to make sure that everybody buys into the vision and the mission of the school. Not only that, but that they take ownership as they feel they contribute to the learner achievement, no matter how small the contribution. Kamper (2008) refers to this type of leadership as invitational leadership. He states that in this leadership style, "invitations are messages communicated to people which informs them that they are able, responsible and worthwhile."

Principal B endorses the notion and thinks collective leadership is the driving force towards achieving high academic results. Dean (1993) points out that being a successful principal depends largely on the relationship with teachers, as well as on sound relationships and effective communication in the school.

In school A, teamwork is escalated through ownership down to post level 1 educators, who are appointed on a yearly basis as the grade heads. The grade heads are an important link, as they make sure that every grade achieves high academic results. They are the playmakers within the school and are thus vital instruments in learner achievement. The grade heads work closely with the parents and are responsible for parents' meetings, especially those which deal mainly with academic results.

Research by Whitaker and Moses (1994) specify four elements that can enhance high performance expectations. Teamwork is mentioned as one of the four elements. These researchers stipulate that teamwork implies increased co-operation, interaction, sharing of vital information among educators, and being loyal to the set goals and to colleagues. The instructional leader builds teamwork by modelling and making it a core part of the organisational structure and culture. Teamwork influences academic results, as team members know their strengths. The principal can then allocate workloads to the educators according to their strengths.

7.2.3 Theme 3: Leadership Influence

The study revealed that the principals of these schools did not employ one type of leadership style to influence learner achievement, as different leadership styles emerged. For example, shared leadership, such as staff members taking turns in sharing staff meetings, as well as theRCL being given a platform to motivate learners on the 100% pass percentage at the assembly. There is also transformational leadership, such as principals motivating, inspiring and uniting educators on common goals. There is also visionary leadership, such as principals having a vision for their school.Invitational leadership is also evident, such as the ability to communicate messages to people that they are able, responsible and worthwhileand also distributed leadership, where the principal is not afraid to distribute leadership at all levels of the school community. However, it is important to note that the most dominant leadership style in effecting high academic results in the schools studied was instructional leadership.

The lack of high quality instructional leadership on the part of the principal, who is an instructional leader, is one of the most important aspects that results in poor learner achievement (Weller, 1999). Boyd (2002) endorses this statement when he contends that the principal, who is an instructional leader, helps to shape and create a school where learners continue to learn and

continuous progress in learner achievement is experienced. This suggests that instructional leadership could be the most contributing feature in achieving high academic results in the schools studied, as both the principals view effective teaching and learning as vital in achieving results.

Principal B even went to the extent of collaborating with external sources to make sure that there is teaching and learning taking place. The only peril is that the focus seems to be more on grade 12, than other any other grade. There is empirical evidence in the literature that supports the influence of instructional leadership on learner achievement. The research on effective schools identifies the importance of principals' instructional leadership behaviours in promoting high levels of student achievement(Andrews & Solder, 1987; Edmonds, 1979; Hallinger, Bickman, & Davis, 1996; Hallinger & Heck, 2000). Over time, the instructional leadership provided by the principal has been identified as a contributing factor to higher learner achievement.

The principals, who achieve high academic results, are transformational leaders who motivate, inspire and unite educators on common goals. They have the ability to persuade their followers to buy into the vision and articulate their ideas.Principal A masters this notion and even extends it to the learners. The learners were very clear on the vision of the school and understood the role they had to play in order to achieve the school's goal, which is to obtain a 100% pass rate.

The learners in School B were of the view that the principal had a vision, but was not directing resources to achieve the goal.The lack of textbooks and stationery, as well as the environment that was not conducive for learning, were mentioned as examples. Good principals value vision. Botha (2004) articulates that a vision is a blend of our experiences from the past and our hopes and aspirations for the future: a statement of possibilities; a broad picture of where a school might be going. According to Bennis (1989) a, "vision is a waking dream," which becomes the basis for daily decisions and actions. A vision is an important factor that contributes to learner achievement, if it is understood and owned by every school community member.

One of the principal's jobs is to help the school achieve a high level of performance through the utilisation of its entire human and material resources.This is done through effective and ultimately, excellent leadership (Botha, 2004). This statement gives an impression that the school's academic results should somehow be attributed to the school principal. If a school is to

be instructionally successful as a learning community, it will be because of the instructional leadership of the principal (Prawat, 1939). Internationally, school principals are increasingly being held accountable for educational quality in the belief that students' success or failure is determined by the way the school is run (Fullan & Watson, 2000; Leithwood& Menzies, 1998; Wieldy & Louden, 2000).

7.2.4 Theme 4: Motivation and Encouragement

The principal in School A believes that by being visible in the school and being passionate about the academic results of the learner, he is able to somehow motivate the learners and the staff to put in more effort. He believes that it makes him a credible leader and he leads by example.The learners in School B think that their principal is unable to create a conducive learning environment, as compared to the former principal. In his description of the principal's instructional leadership behaviours, which relate to promoting the school learning climate, Hallinger (1987) advocates that the principal should protect instructional time and maintain high visibility.

Motivation in these schools is also obtained by raising high expectations from both the staff and the learners. The learners know that the principal has high expectations of their achievement, and the level of support he gives, makes them want to do him proud. Teachers believed that their level of motivation was affected by their principal's leadership behaviour. The research conducted by Witziers, Bosker and Kruger (2003) concluded that principals should have high expectations of teachers and student achievement in order to achieve high learner achievement. Furthermore, Jantzi and Leithwood (1996) highlight six dimensions that are critical in the practice of instructional leadership, one of them being high expectations. High performance expectations and trust are motivational and assist educators and staff to see the challenging nature of goals that the instructional leadership is pursuing. High performance expectations should be the norm for the principal, teachers, students and parents (Leithwood, 1994).

Teachers are encouraged to set their pass percentage targets in order to work towards a clear, realistic, and attainable goal. In School A, educators are encouraged to finish the grade 12 syllabus as early as August so as to allow learners to practise writing the preliminary exams, and allow time to revise for the final examination. Principals who use motivation to encourage

learner achievement turn to achieve high outcomes. It becomes obvious that students who are not academically motivated will not work hard to achieve high outcomes. In fact, several researchers have suggested that only motivation directly effects academic achievement and all other factors affect achievement through their effect on motivation (Tucker et.al., 2002). Academic motivation is defined by Francis et.al., (2004) as academic drive, attitude towards school and learning, and enthusiasm for academic achievement.

Several international studies have investigated student motivation. Tucker, Zayco and Herman, (2002) studied the motivation of 117 African American students mostly from low-income families in first through tothe 12th grade. They found that teacher involvement was the strongest predictor of student motivation.

7.3 PERCEPTION OF THE STAFF AND LEARNERS OF THE PRINCIPAL

To answer the research question on the role of the principal on learner achievement, the deputy principal, teachers and the learners were asked about their perceptions with regard to the role of the principal on learner achievement. In answering the question, the deputy principal in School A explained that their principal had a huge role to play. He stated that the principal was exemplary and led by example. He was the first to come and the last to leave. The principal had a Maths class he was teaching and always honoured his teaching period, which made it difficult for other teachers not to honour theirs, as the leader was leading by example.

The fact that the principal was managing teaching and learning well, according to the deputy principal, made him believe that the principal played a huge role in achieving the high academic results. The principal is viewed by the staff as a credible leader, visionary, passionate about the school's results, goal-orientated and the implementer of the decisions taken collectively. The principal initiates and encourages staff development so as to influence academic results. The deputy principal alluded to the fact that the principal of the school is a disciplinarian and had some no-negotiable issues within the school. The issue of teaching, being on time and every learner having a textbook was mentioned. The study revealed that the staff members understood and bought into the vision of the school and believed that their principal is committed to the school's excellence.

For reliability and validity purposes, the learners were asked the same question. Their responses were in accordance with the deputy principal's views. They viewed their principal as a man of integrity, who cared very much about them. The learners indicated that the principal was always there within the premises, the first to come and the last to leave. They thought he cared about their well-being and their achievement, as he took time to visit them in classes, ask for their books, which he checked and signed. The principal was also viewed as a disciplinarian and a father figure.

The learners mentioned that the principal's was willing to listen to them and act on any matters relating to their learning. This was an important factor, indicating to them how much he cared, which influenced their achievement.

The deputy principal in School B asked to refrain from answering the research question, as he had nothing he could think of that the principal did in order to influence learner achievement. Contrary to the learners in School A, the learners in this school felt that the principal was never visible at school. The fact that the principal was always late and left early according to them, contributed to the teachers relaxing and not coming to class. Learners in this school kept on comparing the current principal to the former principal who was a disciplinarian and maintained a certain order and discipline in the school.

In answering the research question, the learner thought the principal was not playing much of a role in their achievement. They thought that the fact that she was never there and didnot know much about what was happening in their learning could not allow them to give her credit for the role she plays in their learner achievement. They felt that the academic results could be attributed to the teachers and the external support they obtained from the DoE. The learners felt the school had a clear and excellent vision, although the principal was not doing justice in channelling resources to achieve it. The learners mentioned the fact that there were not enough textbooks in the school, even though the DoE supplied the school with a grant to buy textbooks. Teaching and learning was not taking place every day for the required time. They reported the issue to the principal on many occasions, but felt she still did nothing. For these reasons, the learners felt the principal played no role in their academic results.

7.4 CHALLENGES FACED BY PRINCIPALS IN LEARNER ACHIEVEMENT

The study revealed that the schools had almost similar challenges that could hinder learner achievement. Teenage pregnancy, substance abuse and lack of parental support were mentioned by the principals. School B had a problem of teacher and learner absenteeism and late arrival. While principal A alluded to the problem of teachers arriving late, he also noted that the school was doing all it could to ensure that it is minimal. The mechanisms to deal with teachers arriving late at school included asking the teacher who missed class to organise extra hours after school or on Saturday. This way, the principal is making sure that he addresses challenges head-on and not does shy away from them.

While School B has the same problem, they do not have a mechanism yet to ensure that they combat learner and teacher absenteeism. The deputy principal revealed that at some stage, the IDSO had to intervene as teachers would absent themselves without a reason given to the authorities.

The high failure rate of Mathematics also weakens the quality of results. Principal A thinks this is due to primary education, which according to him is in crisis (Fleisch, 2008). He recommends that the solution to the crisis would be for principals from neighbouring schools to work collectively on the quality of teaching and learning. This would allow the primary and secondary school principals to work together and identify problems that hinder learner achievement in grade 12. Those problems could be addressed as early as primary level. The DBE)has lowered the pass rate to 30%, which is seen as a problem by the principals, as it allows learners to set a very low bar for themselves, making it difficult for them to achieve university exemptions and thus weakens the quality of academic results.

7.5 CHAPTER OVERVIEW

The critical role of the principal in a school is to manage teaching and learning, which are the core business and the main purpose of the school.

In this chapter the analysis and interpretation of the data was undertaken. This was done through the interpretation and data coding of the findings from the interview that was transcribed and analysed.

Themes that emerged from the two schools studies were then discussed in detail. The themes that were prevalent in the findings were issues such as managing teaching and learning, teamwork, leadership influence, and motivation and encouragement. The study found that instructional leadership prevailed in both schools. The study set out to get the learners, teachers and deputy principal's perception on leadership influence in achieving high learner achievement. The results showed that the majority believed that the principals, who were firm, decisive, visionary and instructional leaders, could be regarded as effective in the school context. After having analysed and interpreted the data in Chapter Seven, Chapter eight will provide a summary and conclusion of findings and consequently make recommendations.

CHAPTER 8

SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

8.1 INTRODUCTION

The aim of this research study was to explore the role of the principal in learner achievement. In order to accomplish this general aim, the specific objectives were:

- To identify the different paths, if any, principals use to effect learner achievement;
- To explore the perceptions of deputy principals and learners regarding the role of the principal on learner achievement;
- To explore the challenges faced by principals towards learner achievement; and
- To explore the roles played by principals in promoting learner achievement in secondary schools.

This final chapter summarises the salient points revealed by the study. The summary section will present a global overview of the entire research report. The important findings drawn from the literature and the response from the research sites in attempting to answer the research question will be presented in the summary of the important findings section. Recommendation will then flow from the important findings, which emerged from both the literature and the participants. Lastly, the chapter will present the conclusion, which will attempt to highlight the relationship between the role of the principal and learner achievement.

8.2 SUMMARY

8.2.1 GLOBAL VIEW OF THE RESEARCH REPORT

Chapter 1 of the research study was concerned with defining the problem statement. In this chapter, the researcher sets out the general and specific aim of this project. The study was initiated by the concern of poor performance, especially in secondary township schools. The background was then clearly defined and discussed. The chapter then gave a rationale of the study. The study hoped to add to the body of knowledge, and the focus was on learner

achievement. The rationale also clearly stipulated that the Soweto secondary schools stand to benefit from the study, if the project results are appropriately used.

Chapter 2 discussed the literature reviewed and in trying to answer the main question on the role of the principal on learner achievement, international and local literatures were examined. The literature reviewed started from the premise that it is possible to see learner achievement through the effective leadership of the principal. The reviewed literature then helped to develop the theories that were discussed in the theoretical framework chapter.

Chapter 3 dealt with the theoretical framework, which was developed from the literature reviewed, as mentioned above. This chapter was instrumental in finding the different theories, as explained by international and local scholars that helped to answer the research questions.

Chapter 4 explained in detail the methods that were used in exploring the study, as well as the empirical investigation. The research design was used to explain and justify tools and key strategies in explaining the research methods, samples selected, research instruments, ethics, validity and reliability.

Chapter 5 and Chapter 6 presented the findings in School A and School B respectively. The findings were in accordance with the research question and sub-questions in relation to the role of the principal on learner achievement. The RCL, deputy principals and principals were interviewed in order to reach the findings presented in these chapters.

Chapter 7 dealt with the discussion of the findings in both schools and a cross-case analysis was done. Literature reviewed was discussed in the discussion chapter.

8.2.2 SUMMARY OF THE IMPORTANT FINDINGS

In this section of the research report, the findings that emanate from both the literature review and cross-case analysis of the research, are discussed respectively.

a) Findings from the literature review

The reviewed literature revealed that there is a strong relationship between high learner achievement and an effective principal, notwithstanding the on-going debate among scholars

whether the roles of the principal is mediated or direct (Hallinger & Heck, 2006). This study aimed to just explore the role of the principal on learner achievement, whether mediated or direct. The literature indicates that there is a strong relation between instructional leadership and learner achievement. Hopkins (2001) contends that the domain of instructional leadership is the focus of student learning and outcome. Instructional leadership is defined in detail in Chapter 8 of this research. The thread that runs through the definitions suggests that instructional leadership could be one of the panaceas for improving poor learner achievement in schools.

Walter and Hartley (1999) identified the lack of high quality instructional leadership on the part of the principal as the most important aspect that results in poor learner achievement. The assumption is that, for schools to improve learner achievement, there should be visible instructional leadership from the principal. It is supposed that both primary and secondary township schools especially still lack the instructional leadership practices that will help shape and create schools where learners can continue to learn, and where continuous progress in learner achievement is gained (Boyd, 2002).

Dimmock (1995) advocates that improvements in learner achievement are most likely to be gained in schools where effective instructional leadership, particularly by the principal, is a characteristic.

b) Summary of findings from both research sites

The findings in both School A and School B confirmed the research question that the principal indeed has a significant role to play in learner achievement. The deputy principal's response to the perception of the staff on the role of the principal on learner achievement in School A indicated that the principal was an instructional leader. However, School B's deputy principal indicated that with more instructional leadership from the principal, the school could develop even better results.

Findings in these schools revealed that the principals practised different forms of leadership styles. There was an element of collective leadership, distributed leadership and instructional leadership portrayed in the schools.

The study also revealed that the principals in these schools use several of internal, as well as external, support to enhance learner achievement. Internal support was in the form of trust displayed towards both learners and staff that they can achieve high academic results. This created ownership of the academic results by all staff members involved in the school. The

principal had high expectations from both the staff and the learners. Learners in the school were made aware of the high expectations and raised the bar high enough for them to reach.

The external support was mainly received from the DBE through the SSIP programmes. However, the private sector was also involved in offering support to achieve high academic results, especially in School A.

8.3 RECOMMENDATIONS

Since this research dealt with the role of the principal on learner achievement, further studies would be required in the following aspects:

1. **Instructional leadership as an aspect to improve learner achievement**: The literature revealed that instructional leadership is instrumental in influencing learner achievement. It would then be imperative to look, in detail, at which aspects of instructional leadership are vital in achieving high academic results.

2. **School vision as an aspect of instructional leadership and its impact on learner achievement**: It transpired from the research's findings that the success of the schools could partly be attributed to the principal's vision that was communicated to the school community. The researcher thinks it would then be instrumental to study the school vision and see if it has any impact on instructional leadership, which could influence learner achievement.

8.4 CONCLUSION

This research project has evidentially reflected that the principal plays an important role in learner achievement. The achievement of learners can be affected by the type of leadership the principal employs in the school. Communication is undoubtedly an important aspect that could

make or break the school. The study has revealed that the principal of the school should be at the heart of the formal and informal conversations that take place regarding learner achievement, which is the core business of the school.

The literature review has shown that instructional leadership is the, 'bonding agent,' for effective teaching and time. The findings from the schools have also indicated that teamwork is an integral aspect needed if the school is to achieve high academic results. Furthermore, it has been pointed out that the quality of the effectiveness of the principal determines the quality of the learners' performance.

This study concludes by answering the research questions on the role of the principal on learner achievement. The main research question was what role theprincipals play in promoting or supporting learner achievement in secondary schools. The research question was answered in that, in both School A and School B, we saw that the principal played a leading and important role in learner achievement. The roles could either be direct or mediated, but the study revealed that the principal was an important feature in the achievement of high academic results.

Further, the sub-questions investigated the perceptions of learners and deputy principals with regard to the role of the principal on learner achievement, as well as the challenges faced by the principals towards learner achievement. The sub-questions were answered, as it transpired that the participants viewed the role of the principal as being extensive, especially in School A, whereas School B thought the former principal did a remarkable job in instructional leadership and therefore his systems were still in place and thus effecting high learner achievement. The principals did express a whole range of challenges, including, among others, absenteeism, drugs and teenage pregnancy, and so forth.

8.5 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The qualitative data was collected from two secondary schools out of 64 secondary schools in the Soweto township. This makes the findings non-replicable or non-generalisable. Furthermore, this case study was conducted during the third term as per the Gauteng Department of Education requirements, and therefore it made it difficult to conduct focus group discussions with the whole RCL executive, as some of them were writing their preliminary examinations. This proved to

limit the study, as the response of those learners could not be captured, which might have contributed to the findings of the study. In addition, due to time constraints, this study could not conductface-to-face interviews with the teachers to investigate their perceptions of the role of the principal on learner achievement, as initially planned.Instead, the researcher had to opt for focus group discussion.

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An Exploration Of the principal's role on learner achievement

A case study of two Soweto Secondary Schools

Lindiwe Angel Ginya

Student No: 509207

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I declare that the dissertation is my own unaided work.

It has not been submitted before for any degree at any other University.

Name: Ginya L.A. Date: 15 September 2012

Signature