

CHAPTER 5

SUMMARY, DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Introduction

This chapter concludes the research report with a reflection of the research purpose and method. In addition the chapter provides a re-conceptualisation of teacher leadership in light of both the literature and the findings from the study. Next, a summary of the major findings are presented. This is followed by the limitations of the study, conclusions and recommendations for furthering the development of teacher leadership in School A and for further research.

5.2 Research purpose and method: a reflection

The purpose of this study was to investigate the way in which teacher leadership is developed in schools. The study also aimed to investigate teachers' and SMTs understanding of the concept of teacher leadership. The reason for this was twofold, where: (1) teachers' understanding of the concept could impact on their uptake of teacher leadership roles; and (2) the SMTs understanding of the concept has a direct and significant effect on whether teacher leadership is actually developed in a school. This study also investigated the barriers that hinder teacher leadership, and the way in which teacher leadership programmes are developed, implemented and evaluated.

The methodology adopted was a qualitative case study. I chose my own school to conduct my research on teacher leadership development. The study used a multi-method approach using questionnaires, semi-structured interviews and documents analysis to collect the data. The multi-method approach allowed for triangulation and crystallisation of data. For the purpose of this study, all forty staff were chosen to answer the questionnaire, and ten staff were chosen to participate in the interview. Lastly, when choosing the participants for the interviews, further selection criteria was applied. Participants had to be from both the teaching and management staff. This was an essential criterion, as the study aimed to

investigate teachers' and SMTs understanding of the concept of teacher leadership. The interview sample comprised of five teachers (PL1), three Heads of Department (PL2), one Deputy Principal (PL3) and the Principal (PL4).

5.3 Re-conceptualising teacher leadership

As York-Barr & Duke (2004) have asserted, the construct of teacher leadership is not well defined conceptually or operationally. Furthermore, the definitions of teacher leadership can sometimes overlap and compete (Harris, 2003). Two of the definitions that informed this study were taken from Katzenmeyer and Moller (2001, 2009) as well as Grant (2006). Katzenmeyer and Moller (2001; 2009) describes teacher leadership, as one of the manifestations of distributed leadership, and refers to teachers who are “leaders within and outside the classroom; identify with and contribute to a community of teacher learners and teacher leaders; influence others to improve their teaching practice; and accept responsibility for realising the goals of their leadership”

Developing on the definition of Katzenmeyer and Moller (2001), Grant (2006) argued that in the South African context, teacher leadership can be understood as: a form of leadership beyond headship or formal position. It refers to teachers becoming aware of and taking up informal and formal leadership roles, both in the classroom and beyond. It includes teachers working collaboratively with all stakeholders towards a shared and dynamic vision of their school, within a culture of fairness, inclusion, mutual respect and trust. As a result of the findings from my research, I offer the following definition of teacher leadership. Teacher leadership refers to teachers who are leaders in the classroom and beyond. They are capable of recognising the expertise of other teachers, and are knowledgeable and enthusiastic about their own development as teacher leaders. Furthermore, they express a significant interest in being able to develop teacher leadership in their colleagues.

5.4 Major findings

In School A, the definition of teacher leadership is moving in a positive direction. This conclusion was reached by observing that the majority of the staff indicated that teacher

leadership was an activity that should encompass roles within and beyond the classroom. This is in line with Katzenmeyer and Moller's (2001) definition of teacher leaders as: "teachers who are leaders within and beyond the classroom". The evidence also suggests that School A is engaged in the development of teacher leadership, and is displaying a move towards engaging staff in their own development. Furthermore, the needs of the teachers are prioritised and there is a formal plan. In School A, collaboration is a strong component in the implementation of teacher leadership programmes. However, this is not the case when it comes to the development and evaluation of the programmes.

While some evidence from the study suggests that while the SMT is perceived as a barrier to teacher leadership, in some instances it would be unfair to say that the SMT in School A is a major barrier to the development of teacher leadership. This is due to the fact that data from the questionnaire (68%) indicated that the SMT did not hinder their development as a teacher leader. This could, further, be interpreted as the SMT relinquishing power to teacher leaders. Data collected from the questionnaires provided a significant finding for School A, where the principal and deputy principal as members of senior management were identified as the most significant barriers to the development of teacher leadership. HODs who are also part of the SMT (but not of senior management) were to a lesser extent identified as a barrier in this regard.

It is therefore possible that teacher leadership development programmes are being facilitated to a greater extent by HODs within their various departments rather than as a whole school initiative. This explanation supports the findings from the questionnaire that SMTs do have a formal plan and consider the needs of the educator in the development of teacher leadership. This is also in line with the literature that highlights the role of people in formal management positions as critical in enabling teacher leadership and creating opportunities for teachers to lead. However, the missing piece would be that teachers do not feel motivated and supported by the principal and deputy principal. As Katzenmeyer and Moller (2001) have stated, teacher leaders need to be supported by the principal and other teachers.

In addition to the SMT; support, collaboration and communication emerged as important factors in the development of teacher leadership. In particular, the staff in school A

expressed a strong desire for additional support from the SMT, either through the creation of opportunities for teachers to take on leadership roles, or through the guidance and mentoring of those teachers that have. While the evidence showed a high level of collaboration, particularly in the implementation of teacher leadership programmes, the staff still felt that they were able to contribute in many other areas if they were given the opportunity and if the SMT engaged in teamwork and collaboration. To a lesser extent, School A also identified the following factors as effective in developing teacher leadership programmes; remuneration, planning, consistency, leadership and willingness.

The staff in School A were interested in teamwork and expressed a desire to be involved as facilitators in the development of teacher leadership. It is also important to note that teachers expect other teachers to play an active role in developing teacher leadership in School A. This is evidence that teachers are willing to learn from other teachers that they consider to be experts in certain areas. Furthermore, teachers recognise that expertise exists at all levels of the school and not just with those in formal positions of leadership. Lastly, communication was identified as equally important as collaboration in the development of teacher leadership. In School A, teachers exhibited an understanding that communication needs to be between peers, between teachers and senior management as well as between teachers and all stakeholders.

5.5 Limitations

According to Best and Kahn (2006), limitations are those conditions beyond the control of the researcher that may place restrictions on the conclusion of the study and their application to other situations. One of the limitations of my study was that I chose to conduct this research at the school at which I worked. Another possible limitation of the study was the possible conflict of interest as a researcher, as I was a member of the SMT and as such, my personal experiences at the school may have influenced the outcome of the study. It was therefore important for me to take on the position of researcher and to remain as detached as possible, enabling the research findings and data to speak for itself.

During this study, I also felt that members of the SMT spoke to me and revealed their thoughts more openly than did the teachers. This was particularly evident when a number of teachers refused to participate in answering the questionnaire, even with anonymity being assured. Lastly, I am also aware of the fact that with the participants knowing me and having questioned me about my research, there is the possibility that they could have given me answers that they thought I expected or wanted to hear. However, it is my belief, that those that did choose to participate in the study did so with integrity.

5.6 Conclusions

School A can be regarded as progressive in its understanding of the concept of teacher leadership. Evidence from the data strongly suggests that the staff and SMT believe teacher leadership to be an activity that teachers engage in in the classroom and beyond. In addition, the teachers in School A have explicitly indicated their interest in taking up teacher leadership positions and to be involved in developing teacher leaders. These findings correlate with that of De Villiers and Pretorius (2011), who have noted that as preliminary leadership perceptions of educators improve or strengthen, readiness for teacher leadership is also likely to improve or strengthen. However, this understanding has not directly translated into the SMT providing teacher leadership opportunities, nor has it resulted in teachers taking up informal teacher leader roles where they saw opportunities themselves.

To some extent, the uptake of teacher leadership roles is still restricted in the face of a strong desire for many teachers to be challenged and recognised. From the data it would appear that there is a cautious sharing of power. Teachers are encouraged and supported to be leaders in the classrooms and when working with teachers and learners outside the classroom in extra-curricular activities. However, this encouragement and support is lacking when teachers express an interest in teacher leadership roles that involve whole school development or working with the community. At this stage of involvement and at this level of power-sharing, teacher leadership is restricted. The responsibility of whole school development and interactions with stakeholders outside the school appears to be reserved for those in management. When this happens, the SMT is perceived as a barrier to teacher leadership.

5.7 Recommendations

As mentioned in the literature, teacher leadership can emerge if the school puts in place the appropriate support mechanisms and creates the necessary internal conditions. In School A, the teachers have identified the SMT, in particular the senior management (the Principal and Deputy Principal), as being barriers to the development of teacher leadership. It is therefore recommended that the senior management collaborate and communicate with teachers so that their needs for professional development at a whole school level and beyond are understood and addressed. In this way, teachers will be able to take on teacher leadership roles that extend beyond extra-curricular activities and thus give them the “challenges” and “opportunities” they seek.

In addition, School A needs to utilise the expertise that exists within its walls. School A has the privileged of a highly educated and very experience staff, who are interested and enthusiastic about participating in the development of teacher leadership for themselves and in assisting others. Their under-utilisation in the development and evaluation of teacher leadership programmes needs to be rectified. Lastly, School A (HODs and in particular senior management) need to put a greater emphasis on supporting its staff in the teacher leader roles in which they engage. The findings from this study have led me to suggest two recommendations for further research.

Firstly, this study has revealed the senior management (principal and deputy principal) as a significantly greater barrier to the development of teacher leadership than HODs. This correlates with York-Barr and Duke (2004), who assert that principal support of teacher leadership is more readily espoused than enacted. It is therefore suggest that in trying to establish how SMTs conceptualise and develop teacher leadership programmes, the focus should be on the role of the principal and deputy principal, and ought to include the way in which they conceptualise and develop teacher leadership in a school. Secondly, teacher leadership is fundamentally about the development of collaborative relationships across the spectrum of educators at a specific school. Research should focus on how principals create opportunities within the school to facilitate the development of collaborative relationships and professional learning communities.