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UNDERSTANDING THE ROLE OF THE PRINCIPAL IN MANAGING CULTURAL DIVERSITY AMONG EDUCATORS

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ABSTRACT

The first democratic elections in South Africa in 1994 gave birth to a 'new' nation which changed every sector of the country. The separate education systems and departments created under apartheid were dismantled and integrated into a single national education framework. This meant that people from different races, cultures and backgrounds began working together in an attempt to bring about a single, unified nation. The new democratic government introduced legislation such as the South African Schools Act of 1996 (SASA) and the Employment Equity Act of 1998. These acts were to introduce transformation and ensure that institutions employed an equitable distribution of staff which reflected the demographics of the community and the nation as a whole. The issues and challenges arising from this meant that school leaders needed additional skills in managing a diverse workforce made up of a melting pot of cultures.

This study examines the role of school principals in managing educators in a culturally diverse school environment. It explores the different leadership styles adopted by principals. In South Africa schools have become increasingly diverse in terms of race, language and religion. School principals are therefore faced with huge challenges in dealing with these differences among their staff. The research focuses on a few of the areas of contestation in schools whilst acknowledging that diversity involves a wide range of issues in schools.

This is inevitable when there is a melting pot of cultures, races, languages and religions. In order to ensure that a high standard of education is maintained in their institutions, school principals need to understand how people from the diverse cultures present in the school interact, and how they, as managers and leaders, could achieve integration or synergy amongst all staff members. An attempt is also made to provide clarity on the meanings of the concepts of culture and diversity, how it influences an individual, and also how an understanding of these concepts could affect principals' leadership and management styles.

The qualitative research methods that were used involved a small scale case study which included questionnaires and structured interviews to follow up and probe responses from the principal and educators of a school in Johannesburg. A school, which reflects diversity amongst their staff members, was selected for this research. The school selected had initially been an advantaged, whites-only suburban school. The changes in demographics in recent years, and the affordability of homes in the southern suburbs of Johannesburg, gave rise to an increase in the social movement of the black middleclass into the area around the school. This resulted in an influx of black, coloured and Indian families from outlying townships and informal settlements, making this community a prime example of diverse cultures living together. After South Africa's democratisation in the mid nineties, recruitment of staff and learners from different race, language and religious groups began rapidly to increase and be accepted at this school.

The school's profile is illustrated in the form of graphs (see chapter 5), which shows its staff composition prior to 1994 and the changes experienced since then. The responses of the principal and educators have also been analysed with regard to their understanding of diversity; the integration of staff; the benefits to the school in becoming diverse; and the role and competencies of the principal in managing a diverse cultural environment. The research methodology used was interpretive and endeavoured to make sense of the principal's management style in managing cultural diversity.

The research was also based on a study of the literature, which attempted to show the extent to which effective management of cultural diversity by principals was taking place. The literature review and the research into this area highlight the issues affecting diverse, multicultural environments as well as some practices and beliefs of the different cultural groups themselves.

An attempt was also made to find out to what extent schools were successful with positive racial integration and relations (including language and religion). How the literature supports or provides alternate views to this case study forms a critical component of the research. The findings of this research, as demonstrated through the

case study and corroborated through the literature study, show that a democratic, participatory and consultative management style by school principals, as opposed to an autocratic/bureaucratic management style, is crucial in managing staff diversity.

DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this research report is my own unaided work. It is submitted in partial fulfilment for the Degree of Master of Education at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. It has not been submitted before for any degree or examination at any other university.

_____

Lawrence Philips Kistadoo

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GLOSSARY OF KEY TERMS

Affirmative Action – employing people in the work place who were previously disadvantaged or discriminated against.

Culture – the customs, traditions, beliefs, morals, etc of a particular society or group of people.

Democracy – government of a country by representatives elected freely and fairly by the people of the country.

Department of Education – part of the organisational structure of the national public service which seeks to ensure that all the people of South Africa receive life long education and training of high quality.

Diversity – the physical differences between different individuals or groups of individuals.

Employment Equity – employing people in the work place with an equal distribution in terms of race, culture, language and religion.

Leadership – the capability and capacity of the principal and his/her leadership teams to guide the school and those associated with it in the agreed strategic and developmental direction with regard to context; to ensure a culture of high expectation, continuous improvement and accountability to all stakeholders.

Management – the capability and capacity to plan, operationalise and monitor management structures to ensure the efficiency and effectiveness of the school in terms of managing cultural diversity.

School Management Team – individuals within a school who are responsible for the provision of professional management and leadership of that school. The team usually comprises of the principal, deputy principal and heads of department.

School Governing Body – a democratically elected body charged with the governance of a public school on all matters other than those relating to the professional administration and management of the school. The SGB's role in this area is to support the principal and the SMT in leading and managing the school effectively and efficiently.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AA – Affirmative Action

DoE – Department of Education

HR – Human Resource

HRM – Human Resource Management

LOLT – Language of Learning and Teaching

PGCE – Postgraduate Certificate in Education

RSA – Republic of South Africa

SASA – South African Schools Act

SASP – South African Standard for Principalship

SMT – School Management Team

SGB – School Governing Body