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SUCCESSFUL SCHOOL LEADERSHIP PRACTICES IN CHALLENGING CONTEXTS: CASE STUDIES OF THREE TOWNSHIP SECONDARY SCHOOLS

By

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SUPERVISOR

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15 FEBRUARY 2013

DECLARATION BY CANDIDATE

I hereby declare that this thesis is my own work and effort and that it has not been submitted anywhere for any award. Where other sources of information have been used, they have been acknowledged.

Signature: …….

Date: …….

DEDICATION

to

My late wife, Lassie Rebecca Mbokazi

May her soul rest in peace and I know she would have been very proud of my work,

and

my two wonderful children

Nompumelelo and Ntokozo

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For any errors or inadequacies that may remain in this work, of course, the responsibility is entirely my own.

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ACRONYMS/ABBREVIATIONS

DBE	Department of Basic Education
DfES	Department for Education and Skills
DoE	Department of Education
DSP	Disadvantaged Schools Programme
EiC	Excellence in Cities
ELRC	Education Labour Relations Council
FET	Further Education and Training
FSM	Free Schools Meals
GDE	Gauteng Department of Education
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
HoD	Head of Department
HSRC	Human Sciences Research Council
IJR	Institute of Justice and Reconciliation
IRIN	Integrated Regional Information Networks
ISSPP	International Successful School Principalship Project
IQMS	Integrated Quality Management System
LISA	Longitudinal Immigrant Student Adaptation
NDPB	Non-Departmental Public Body
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization

ACRONYMS/ABBREVIATIONS (continued)

PTAs	Parent-Teacher Associations
SACMEQ	Southern African Consortium for Monitoring Education Quality
SADTU	South African Democratic Teachers' Union
SASA	South African Schools Act
SASVO	Southern African Student Volunteers Organization
SAT	School Assessment Team
SFCC	Schools Facing Challenging Circumstances
SGB	School Governing Body
SMT	School Management Team
SOWETO	South Western Townships
SRNS	School Register of Needs Survey
TIMMS	Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to explore successful leadership practices in challenging circumstances. The case studies were three Soweto township secondary schools and the study looked at the ways in which principals and other leaders achieved results, despite the socio-economic difficulties facing their schools.

The study used a case study method and it was situated in the conceptual framework of Leithwood et al's (2009) which proposes four core practices of successful principals. The framework formed the basis for understanding whether successful school principals applied these core practices in responding to their learners' challenging contexts. Data sources included interviews, informal discussions and focus groups. The participants included principals, other members of the school management teams, teachers and parents. Using thematic content analysis, the following recurrent themes emerged: (a) A central focus on managing teaching and learning (b) the creation of a positive school culture of high-performance and (c) development and sustenance of relationships within (and outside) the school community.

The successful school leadership practices explored in this study revealed that there were three discernible ways to characterise leadership practices in the case schools: Principal-driven success; participative leadership, driven by senior management, and teacher-led success.

CHAPTER ONE

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT OF STUDY

Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to set the scene for the study, and to highlight the national, local and theoretical context within which the study has been conducted. It introduces the reader to the statement of the problem, research assumptions, aims of the study and the research questions. Then, a general background is given that covers the contexts of the study. The chapter also states the motivation for the study. Lastly, the chapter outlines the structure of the thesis.

Statement of the Problem

Taylor (2008) reported that the majority of educationally and socio-economically disadvantaged schools in South Africa are in the country's densely inhabited black urban residential areas of the country, the so-called townships which are dilapidated and crime ridden, with the vast majority of its students struggling to pass their exams. Taylor's report confirms a report of 2006 by the Institute of Justice and Reconciliation (IJR) that about nearly 80 percent of schools in South African townships were "essentially dysfunctional" (2006: 23) and provided an education "of such poor quality that they constitute a very significant obstacle to social and economic development" (ibid). These reports, whilst focusing on the South African context, are consistent with other studies, both national and international. Fleisch

(2008: 53) for instance, noted that “South African studies of academic achievement consistently find strong and positive correlation between socio-economic background and academic performance”. Meanwhile, an international study by Harris and Thomson (2006) showed that schools located in challenging circumstances suffer a myriad of socio-economic problems, including low educational achievement.

However, despite these socio-economic setbacks, some South African township schools, based on the national and provincial norms, are still able to produce above average Grade 12 pass rates. In South Africa, the Grade 12 examination, also known as matric, marks the culmination of twelve years of schooling. The report by the Institute of Justice and Reconciliation (2006) acknowledges that "a tiny band of schools" situated in some of the South Africa’s poorest communities provide some of the highest quality of education. Although it may be a logical presumption, what is not certain is whether the positive effect achieved by this “tiny band of schools” is attributable solely to school leadership and the principal in particular. While there is much contemporary interest in schools facing challenging circumstances, Harris (2002) points put that few research studies have focused exclusively upon leadership practices. This study, therefore, seeks to explore the achievements of these few township secondary schools facing challenging circumstances and specifically, to understand the role of leadership and leadership practices in these schools.

Research Assumptions

The study is based on the following assumptions:

1. School leadership, especially the principal, has a significant role to play in the successful functioning of a school, and the student learning outcomes the school produces.
2. There are certain features of leadership which enable successful academic performance in the township secondary schools.
3. Successful academic performance in township schools is achieved through the ability of the principals to negotiate the school's specific socio-economic and educational conditions.

Aims

Based on the research assumptions stated above, the aims of the study, therefore, were to:

- Identify successful practices of school leadership in the challenging contexts of township secondary schools in South Africa.
- Establish features of leadership which enable successful academic performance in the township secondary schools.
- Determine how successful school principals negotiate their schools' specific socio-economic and educational conditions.

Research Questions

The aims of the study translated into the following research questions:

1. What are the practices of successful principals in the selected Soweto secondary schools?
2. What features of leadership enable successful academic performance in the township secondary schools?
3. How do successful school principals negotiate their schools' specific socio-economic and educational conditions?

1. What are the practices of successful principals in the selected Soweto secondary schools?

   The first question looks at a descriptive exploration of successful school leadership practices under unfavourable socio-economic conditions, providing a picture of the schools and their principals. Soweto has 64 Secondary schools. Given that only six secondary schools produce above average Grade 12 results, the study hopes to provide evidence of the practices of the successful principals in township secondary schools.

2. What features of leadership are potentially enabling with respect to academic performance in disadvantaged township secondary schools?

   The second question assumes that there are features of leadership which enable successful academic performance and this will hopefully inform the development of a model for successful leadership for schools in challenging circumstances within the South African township context.

3. How do successful school principals negotiate their schools' specific socio-economic and educational conditions?

   This question focuses on how the principals negotiated the township's socio-economic and educational challenges, specific to their own context. The question recognizes that successful leadership practices are contingent on context. This relates to the needs to understand the social, demographic and historical dimensions of school leadership within the South African context.

National Context of the Study

Post-apartheid South Africa saw the promulgation of several policies. Amongst these policies was the South African Schools Act (SASA) of 1996 which set the framework for school governance and the management of schools. SASA was designed based on the principle of self-managing schools, where school principals were arguably given more powers and responsibilities (Bush and Heystek, 2003; Prew, 2009). However, as Bhengu (2000: 2-5) noted, the implementation of these new education

policies puts pressure on schools to change and this has placed extreme demands on the school principals to adapt and manage change. Against this backdrop, both local and international researchers (Caldwell, 1994; Giles, 1998a, Sackney & Dibski, 1994; Christie et al, 2007) have argued that education has come to reflect concerns about the role of school principals towards school performance.

Despite the policy changes in South Africa, Taylor, Muller & Vinjevold (2003) and Fleisch (2008) have respectively observed that the widely published poor academic performances at a large number of primary and secondary schools in the country indicate that these changes are not having the desired effect. Howie (2001) noted that in the testing of mathematics and science proficiency at Grade 8 level conducted under the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) in 2003, South Africa came last amongst 50 participating countries (See also, Mullis et al, 2004). Furthermore, research shows that South African primary school children perform poorly in mathematics and reading when compared to those in both developed and developing countries (Moloi and Strauss, 2005). Taylor, Fleisch and Shindler (2008a) also noted the poor performance of South African schools at secondary level.

Taylor (2008: 2) further observed that South Africa is outperformed by eight surrounding countries, “many of which, including Mozambique, Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania, are much poorer, with gross domestic products (GDPs) in the order of one-tenth to one-fifth of South Africa’s GDP”. He concluded that while in general

“poverty is strongly associated with performance, many school systems achieve higher quality education with fewer resources than South Africa does” (ibid). Resonating with Taylor’s observation, Soudien (2007) and Christie (2008) reported that in 2005, South Africa scored ninth out of 14 countries on tests administered by the Southern African Consortium for Monitoring Education Quality (SACMEQ).

While South Africa’s performance may seem dismal compared to other South African states, Hoadley and Ward (2008) contend that the consideration of schooling in the South African context has an important historical dimension that ought to remain in view. The authors argue that the legacy of apartheid in South Africa has manifested itself most evidently in education. The historical context of South African schooling was also noted by Unterhalter et al (1991), who argued that education in South Africa has been contested terrain since the Soweto revolt of 1976 and, in particular, since 1985 when ‘People’s Education’ was considered as an element of the liberation struggle. They add that during the last twenty years of apartheid in South Africa, a large number of black secondary schools in urban townships practically ceased to function.

Fleisch (1993) suggested that more than ten years of resistance to apartheid has damaged certain education practices and that the culture of opposition has undermined the legitimate role of the educational manager. Fleisch (2002) adds that it is useful to understand the ‘crisis’ facing urban (and rural) South African schools as relating to management issues which have contributed to the collapse of teaching

and learning. Fleisch and Christie (2004: 102) further inform us that in three core functions apartheid undermined the authority and activity of principals, giving them "no budgetary authority or influence over the flow of resources such as textbooks, little or no influence over the hiring or firing of staff and almost no curriculum decision-making powers". This was further compounded by the lack of experience of many principals in leadership and educational management (ibid).

South African secondary schools seem to undergo scrutiny from authorities and society at large when it comes to learner outcomes, especially when it comes to the Grade 12 Certificate. Christie (2008) suggests that problems in the school education system tend to manifest themselves more clearly at the secondary level of education, because this is where the outputs of 12 years of schooling are displayed to the nation. However, this study argues that these high-stake examinations do not take specific conditions of schools into account, and with the acute focus on the Grade 12 results, the challenges facing individual principals working under difficult circumstances may go unnoticed.

Local Context of the Study

This study focuses on school principals in disadvantaged communities and it is located particularly within a low socio-economic geographic context of schooling. It looks at selected principals' work within the context of secondary schooling in the township communities of Soweto. Straker (1992) and Straker et al (1996) provided detailed descriptions of South African township communities and schools. Straker et

al (1996: 3), for instance, painted a gloomy account of township life where “the communities and their schools suffer socio-economic deprivation, general poverty and poor health”. This resonates with Christie’s (1998) observation that township schools are characterised by irregular attendance of both staff and students; discontinuous learning and poor results; violence, criminality, rape and substance abuse within and around schools.

Despite the challenges facing South African township communities and their schools, scholars such as Fataar (2002) and Christie (2010) have noted that there are schools in disadvantaged social settings which are performing well. Taylor (2006: 73) observed that “some schools situated in the poorest communities provide some of the highest quality education. He adds that these schools are “performing heroic deeds under difficult conditions, and serve as role models for the rest of the system” (ibid). Three of these schools are the focus of this study. These are the high-performing secondary schools situated in the township of Soweto. Soweto has many advantages for the study, that of being ‘typical’ of many townships. For purposes of this study, typicality denotes Soweto as a township which has all or most of the characteristics shared by other townships in South Africa. Therefore, Soweto was suitable for selection as a prototype of the kind of socio-economic and educational challenges facing schools in township communities.

Geographically, Soweto is an urban area in the province of Gauteng, South Africa. Located 24km south-west of Johannesburg, it was established in the 1940s as a

residential centre for blacks who worked in the gold mines. The growth of Soweto was driven by the increasing eviction of Africans by city and state authorities from geographic areas closer to the burgeoning town of Johannesburg (Straker, 1993). In 1963, the name Soweto (an acronym for South Western Townships) was officially adopted for the sprawling settlement. Soweto came to the world's attention on 16 June 1976, through the events that took place during the Soweto student uprising, when mass protests erupted over government's policy to enforce education in Afrikaans rather than English. The impact of the Soweto's student protests had far-reaching consequences throughout the country and across the world (Wilson and Ramphele, 1989; Christie, 1997).

Economically, many parts of Soweto still rank among the poorest in Johannesburg, although individual townships within Soweto tend to have a mix of wealthier and poorer residents. In general, households in the outlying areas to the north-west and south-east have lower incomes, while those in south-western areas tend to have higher incomes. In 1994, Sowetans earned on average almost six and a half times less than their counterparts in the wealthier areas of Johannesburg. Recently, however, there have been signs indicating economic improvement (Statistics South Africa, 2004).

Fleisch (1998) reported that after the initial student uprising of 1976, continued violence in the townships between 1984 and 1986 was accompanied by an almost total school boycott in Soweto. Christie (1998: 283) added that many schools in the

township have broken down and this can be “traced to the years of opposition to apartheid and the resistance waged within schooling from 1976 onwards”. However, some schools in the township, facing the same set of socio-economic circumstances, are still able to produce good and even excellent academic results. Soweto has 64 secondary schools, of which fewer than 10% obtain above average Grade 12 pass rates, based on national and provincial norms (Education Statistics, 2004). Since 1994, one of the major challenges has been to address the enormous historical imbalances that existed as a result of Apartheid and the huge disparity in investment per learner that exists between the schools in previously white suburbs in other parts of the city, when compared with that in previously Black townships such as Soweto (Education Statistics, 2004).

To curb the disparities between schools, the National Norms and Standards for School Funding of 1998 were introduced as an equity measure (Education Statistics, 2004). This equity policy, known as the quintile system, was aimed at redirecting a small part of the budget from rich schools towards poor schools (see Christie, 2008). Christie adds that provinces were required to rank their schools according to a poverty index. This resulted in more allocation of funds by the government to the poorest schools, with those schools that were better equipped receiving less funding (2008: 139). Despite its good intentions, the quintile system did not seem to achieve the desired effect in addressing the problem of equity by making adequate funding available for schools, especially in rural and township schools (Christie, 2008).

In addition, the South African Monitoring and Evaluation Report (2006) noted that parents were still expected to pay fees. However, many poor children cannot afford fees given the levels of poverty in most township communities. The South African Monitoring and Evaluation Report (2006: 39) added that whilst school fees may be seen as a necessary source of funding to augment what the South African government provides to schools, the township school families seem to be constrained by the levels of income of most township income-earners. The report by Statistics South Africa (2005) further shows that around 62 percent of learners in township schools were required to pay no more than R100 annually in school fees while a further 16.2 percent paid between R101 and R200 annually. Thus, just over one-fifth of learners paid more than R200 per year. However, 17.5 percent of learners reported school fees to be too high.

Furthermore, a report by the Monitoring and Evaluation Report (2006) shows that 22 percent of black learners lack books at school. This was true of just over eight percent of coloured and asian learners and a mere 1.6 percent of white learners. A similar pattern was found for school facilities which were in poor condition in township schools (Monitoring and Evaluation Report, 2006). From these statistics, it is evident that African learners are generally significantly more often exposed to socio-economic and educational problems at school than learners from other South African race groups. The way in which principals negotiate these socio-economic and educational circumstances, is the main point of interest in this study.

Review of Research in Challenging Circumstances

This section provides an initial review of the literature related to this study (a more detailed discussion of the literature review is in Chapter two). In so doing, the section will provide a framework for understanding successful school leadership practices and it is informed by what Leithwood et al (2006) identified as four core practices of successful school leaders:

(1) Creating Vision and Setting Directions, i.e. helping develop a set of shared goals that encourage a sense of common purpose.

(2) Developing people, i.e. influencing behaviour towards the achievement of shared goals through the provision of intellectual stimulation, individual and collective support.

(3) Restructuring the Organisation and Redesigning Roles and Responsibilities, i.e. facilitating the work of the school community in achieving shared goals and

(4) Managing Teaching and Learning.

Broadly speaking, it should be noted that Leithwood and colleagues studied successful school leadership practices in a context different to that of South Africa. Nonetheless, these practices are significant for the study in that they will throw light on how success may be achieved by the township school principals. Leithwood and colleagues further maintain that these core practices are necessary, but insufficient, for success regardless of context. The significance of understanding these practices

within the South African township context is that there is little work published on successful principals that details the kinds of everyday challenges they face in their disadvantaged township communities.

An important aspect in this study is the acknowledgement of the “breakdown of the culture of teaching and learning in many township schools” (Christie, 1998: 283). Whilst Christie (1998) commented nearly two decades ago at the time of conducting this study, the complex realities and challenges facing township school principals are still evident in many township schools. Recent work of Christie and her colleagues (2007) bears testimony to the challenges still facing township schools. This resonates with Van der Berg’s work (2007, 2008) that many South African schools still provide poor quality education. Therefore, the use of Leithwood et al’s framework to explore leadership practices is against the backdrop of the consideration of the specific context of the township secondary schooling in South Africa. However, Christie (2010: 694) warns that constructions of principals’ work that “over-generalize, and that do not engage seriously with local conditions and the day-to-day experiences of principals, are likely to provide distorted depictions of principals’ work”.

In support of Leithwood et al’s work, Day et al (2009) maintain that the core practices provide a powerful new source of guidance for practising leaders, as well as a framework for initial and continuing leadership development. Schools in disadvantaged communities may have developed survival strategies and certain

practices may prevail, suggesting that principals in these communities may be subject to different and possibly conflicting expectations – expectations framed by educational and socio-economic needs of the communities and by the education department (expectations of learner achievements based on national and provincial norms). This study aims to verify and to substantiate evidence of Leithwood et al's core practices through providing a contextualised understanding of successful leadership in three carefully selected township secondary schools as sites for the study.

Motivation for the Study

This research is informed by my extensive involvement at various levels of the South African education system, including being an education administrator at the national Ministry of Education. During my numerous visits to schools, I observed that the school principals were faced with the unenviable task of leading and managing their schools, in most instances, under challenging conditions, within the South African context. Further, with the advent of the changing education landscape in South Africa, principals are expected to be at the forefront of education reforms in their schools. A shift in thinking is required in order to better understand school leadership practices in South Africa. This study aims to contribute towards the debates regarding the context of South African township schooling. The debate pertains to the current conceptions of school leadership as the critical element of the required shift to an understanding of school leadership.

Structure of the Thesis

This study will be reported in eight chapters. The following is the structure of the thesis:

Chapter 1 is an introductory chapter containing a background to the study; motivation; statement of the problem; aims and objectives of the study; the national, local and theoretical context of the study.

Chapter 2 locates school leadership practices by examining how related literature on school leadership addressed the phenomenon of successful school leadership practices in challenging contexts. Given the study's main focus, notions of school leadership will receive particular attention in the course of the literature review in order to provide for a sound conceptualization of the study. The first part of the literature review examines existing studies and educational debates on school leadership practices both locally and internationally.

Chapter 3 introduces methodology. This includes specifying the target group, sample, sampling methods, the research instruments, research paradigms, research design, data analysis, reliability, validity and triangulation.

Chapters 4, 5 and 6 present the research findings of the three case schools.

Chapter 7 provides cross-case analysis, linked to the empirical and theoretical literature, and will be determined primarily by the main themes emerging from the literature and from the case studies, providing a grounded-approach.

Chapter 8 comprises the conclusion and recommendations. The chapter also shows how the research questions have been answered and addresses the significance of the study. The chapter also develops a model of successful leadership in disadvantaged township schools.

Chapter Overview

This chapter introduces the study and provides the background to the context of the study. In so doing, the chapter highlighted the national, local and theoretical contexts within which the study will be conducted. Further, it has explained the aims and research questions linking these to school leadership practices in challenging contexts. Existing literature on schools facing difficult or challenging circumstances also shows that leadership is a major contributing factor to raising achievement levels in schools (Reynolds et al., 2004; Harris, 2006). Furthermore, research evidence consistently demonstrates that the quality of leadership determines the quality of teaching and learning in the school (Hallinger & Heck, 1998). Other studies point to the situational and contextual nature of leadership as they seek to bring light to various interpretations of the nature of school leadership (Oduro & MacBeath, 2003).

The next chapter will consider concepts of successful school leadership. The chapter will also attempt to define the concepts challenging circumstances and disadvantage. In particular, the chapter will provide a review of theoretical and empirical literature.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW: SUCCESSFUL SCHOOL LEADERSHIP IN CHALLENGING CONTEXTS

Introduction

This chapter provides an overview of the literature concerning successful secondary school leadership. It comprises a review of local and international research on school leadership in challenging contexts, drawing out sources of disadvantage and pointing to successful leadership strategies in such schools. The chapter includes a review of theoretical literature in order to show how leadership has been conceptualized, and of empirical evidence, to demonstrate whether and how research evidence supports conceptions of successful school leadership in challenging contexts.

The selection of the literature was informed by a systematic review linked to the three central themes of the research questions: successful practices of school leadership, features of leadership which enable successful academic performance, and an understanding of socio-economic and educational conditions, with their impact on academic achievement. The selection strategy involved examining electronic databases using a combination of keywords around leadership practices (leaders, principal, teacher-leadership) and challenging circumstances

(disadvantage, poverty). Further, the strategy involved hand or electronic searches of the tables of contents and abstracts of educational leadership journals. While articles in peer-reviewed journals form a major part of materials reviewed here, conference papers, books, dissertations, theses, and a variety of research reports were also included as source materials. More specifically, the chapter reviewed the literature specific to disadvantaged schools, with a particular focus on those limited sources that directly pertain to South African township settings.

The study starts from the position that existing theories of successful school leadership do not adequately explain successful leadership practices in challenging contexts (see Day et al. 2000; Day, 2005). Some researchers in the field of school leadership posit that contextual realities influence leadership practices. This view is supported by Leithwood et al. (2006) who have pointed out that successful school leadership practices take place within a particular context. For this reason, this chapter aims to illustrate the extent to which contextual issues require a new frame of understanding school leadership practices, particularly within the context of South African township secondary schools. In the section to follow, the review begins with an examination of how leadership has been conceptualized.

Concepts of Leadership

Day et al. (2000: 237) state that “in recent years, a voluminous literature on leadership has developed which offers a bewildering array of approaches, theories, models, principles and strategies”. The authors’ observation extends from Yulk’s

(1989b: 275) work, where it is noted that a number of major controversies and debates become evident in literature on leadership during the 1980's. These debates have raised fundamental questions about the conceptions of leadership, the importance of leadership and the appropriate methods to use in studying leadership. In addition to this, recent research has indicated that current leadership models may well be inadequate in explaining the practices of successful school leaders facing the challenges of today's schools (Day et al., 2000; Kouzes & Posner, 1995).

Leithwood et al. (1999) contend that there is no agreed upon definition of the concept of leadership. This view resonates with that of Yukl (2002: 4-5), who suggested that "the definition of leadership is arbitrary and notably subjective and that "some definitions are more useful than others, but there is no correct definition". In this regard, Christie and Lingard (2001: 2) warn that "leadership is not a simple concept", and that education theorists would be wise to work with a more complex concept of leadership, which allows for the interplay of different forces and fields". These authors propose that leadership involves the complex interplay of the personal/biographical with the institutional/organisational in the broader social, political and economic context. Therefore, in discussing leadership practices, a point should be made that we cannot homogenize contexts, or assume that leadership practices prevail in the same ways across schools.

In a review of the literature on conceptions of leadership, Bush & Glover (2003: 4) teased out three elements in the many definitions of leadership. The first is "leadership as influence" and the second being "leadership and values". They argue further that whilst "leadership may be understood as 'influence', this notion is neutral and it does not explain or recommend what goals or actions should be sought through this process" (ibid). Harris and Chapman (2002), and Harris (2009), emphasise that, of central importance to leaders in all schools, but particularly in schools in poor communities, is the co-operation and alignment of others to a shared set of values and vision. The third element identified by Bush & Glover (2003: 5) is "leadership and vision". They state that "vision is increasingly regarded as an important component of leadership" (ibid). However, the understanding of vision as a concept is not without its complexities. Bush and Glover (2003: 5) maintain that there are different views about whether vision is an essential aspect of school leadership, or a feature which distinguishes successful from less successful leaders.

Leithwood et al. (2006) suggest that successful school leaders create a compelling sense of purpose in the organizations they lead by developing a shared vision of the future, helping build consensus about relevant short-term goals and demonstrating high expectations for colleagues' work. Harris (2009) further argued that establishing a clear vision and communicating a sense of direction for the school is a critical task for leaders in schools in difficult circumstances. She adds that, with a well-defined vision and established values in place, the possibility of raising staff and pupil

expectations of performance is enhanced in all schools but particularly those in high poverty contexts

The three elements are useful in understanding successful school leadership behaviour and practices and in determining how successful leaders may negotiate specific social and educational conditions towards the success of the school. However, what is not clear about schools facing challenging circumstances, especially within the South African context, is whether visionary leadership is required or whether managerial forms of leadership are more common and/or appropriate. Given the history of the collapse of teaching and learning (Christie, 2007; Fleisch, 2004), it would seem that some schools need strong administration rather than visionary leadership.

An important point of discussion is the efficacy of leadership models and how these models are described in literature. Various authors on school leadership have described the different models using adjectives such as “instructional” (Hallinger and Murphy, 1989; Southworth, 2002); “distributed” (Spillane, 2005); “participative” (Neuman and Simmons, 2000); “managerial” (Bush, 1986; 1995) and “transformational” (Leithwood et al. 1999). These adjectives are argued to have the primary aim of distinguishing between different approaches to leadership. Whilst the distinction between the models is important, Leithwood et al. (2004: 6) caution against what they call ‘leadership by adjective literature’. They add that all too often these adjectives disguise the important underlying objectives of what these models

are trying to accomplish, namely helping the organization to achieve its set objectives.

Another important point of engagement in discussion of the concepts of leadership is the centrality of the leader in relation to the social context in which school leaders find themselves. A view held by authors Knights and Willmott (1992) is that there has been a strong tendency to put the leader at centre-stage, thus disregarding the context and the dynamics of leadership practices. Resonating with this view of the relationship between leadership and context, Christie and Lingard (2001: 2) warned that there is always a danger of assuming leadership as the domain of the individual in charge of the school. They added that leadership should be understood in terms of "social relations rather than attributes of persons or positions" (ibid). Following on from this view of the importance of context, researchers began to turn to the contexts in which leadership is exercised, and to the idea that leadership cannot be viewed outside of the context in which the leader practices. What this implies is that particular contexts would demand particular forms of leadership.

A theory that comes close to explaining the relationship between the situated nature of leadership practices and context is found in contingency or situational theories. Christie and Lingard (2001: 7) see contingency and situational approaches as important in that they bring consideration of context to the fore. This view seems to resonate with Bush (2003: 162), who stated that, in situational leadership, "leaders may exhibit different styles and aspects of leadership depending on the specific

context within which they are operating". However, these views of situational leadership do not seem to take into account the cultural aspect of context. This suggests that the application of current theories of leadership, developed in one context, may not necessarily be helpful towards an understanding of leadership in a different culture. Further, the dilemma in applying situational leadership in different contexts is further compounded by practices or behaviour patterns that may possibly be found within the same cultural group. In this regard, Lord and Brown (2004) argue that the same leadership action or behaviour may not be viewed in the same way by different leaders or followers within the same culture.

As scholars grapple with such issues as the usefulness of leadership models, one model that has gained prominence over the years is that of instructional leadership. Hallinger (2003) traced the emergence of instructional leadership models to the early 1980s from early research on effective schools. Research by Edmonds (1979) and later Leithwood & Montgomery (1982) identified strong, directive leadership focused on curriculum and instruction. These studies on instructional leadership models suggested that school leaders, usually principals, have the formal authority to exert influence on teachers and the studies seem to emphasize the principal's role in coordinating, controlling, supervising and developing the curriculum and instruction (Leithwood et al. 1999: 8).

The value of instructional leadership has seen authors such as Spillane (2005; 2006) painting a picture of the school principal as someone who spends a great deal of time solving instructional problems in the school. Bush et al. (2009) added that the instructional leader's primary focus is on managing teaching and learning towards improving learner achievement. However, Bush and Heystek (2003) found that in South African schools, principals are not able to dedicate the majority of their time to managing teaching and learning. The authors observed that in most instances, principals in South African schools were distracted from a focus on the core business of schooling by their administrative work.

Horng and Loeb (2010) suggested that principals who spend most of their time on administration and less time on management activities e.g. instructional leadership, have less of an impact on high learner achievement. Nonetheless, it could be argued that an exclusive focus on solving instructional problems may not demonstrate the extent to which successful leaders have to set direction and model values and practices consistent with the contextual variables of the school, so that, as Sergiovanni (1995: 119) put it, "purposes which may have initially seemed to be separate become fused". Leithwood et al's view (2004: 10) is that whilst there is support for a focus on managing teaching and learning, research on the forms and effects of leadership is becoming increasingly sensitive to the contexts in which leaders work and how, in order to be successful, leaders need to respond flexibly to their contexts. For Leithwood and his colleagues, the common belief in habitual

leadership “styles” and the search for a single best model or style, ought to be questioned. Instead, the focus should be on developing leaders who have a large repertoire of practices and on the capacity to choose appropriately from this repertoire when appropriate.

Transformational leadership is another theory that has had considerable impact on studies of educational leadership (see Gronn, 1996; Leithwood, Jantzi & Steinbach, 1999). Christie and Lingard (2001: 7-8) captured the essence of this model thus:

> The idea of transformational leadership was a response to the rapidity of change surrounding any organisation today. Interest in transformational leadership may be understood as part of a broader set of concerns about the emotional and symbolic aspects of leadership influences, which emerged in leadership theories during the 1980s.

Leithwood et al (1999: 9) characterise transformational leadership as leading to “higher levels of personal commitment to organizational goals and greater capacities for accomplishing those goals”, which is “assumed to result in extra effort and greater productivity” (ibid). Whilst there seems to be merit in this characterization of transformational leadership, there has not been evidence that it contributes to learner achievement.

The efficacy of the models has also been compared by some authors. For example, Hallinger (2003: 343) describes similarities between both instructional and transformational leadership. In both models the principal's focus is on creating a shared sense of purpose, a climate of high expectations and culture of hard work, encouraging staff professional development whilst visibly living out the values fostered by the school. Hallinger adds that the concepts differ in their target of change, which may alternatively be instruction versus developing the capacity of others, the extent to which the principal co-ordinates and controls versus empowering others (transformational) or the degree to which leadership is located in an individual or is shared (ibid).

In an attempt to provide an alternative model of school leadership, Stoll and Fink (1996) propose invitational leadership. They maintain that invitational leadership provides a framework for making schools a more exciting, satisfying and enriching experience for all stakeholders at the school. They add that the goal of invitational leadership is to transform the fundamental character of the school by focusing on four guiding principles of respect, trust, optimism, and intentionality. Stoll & Fink (1996) argue that by focusing on these principles, invitational leadership provides a common language of transformation and a consistent theory of practice.

Leithwood et al. (1999) see the notion of managerial leadership as operating on the assumption that the focus of leaders ought to be on functions, task and behaviours and that if these functions are carried out competently the work of others in the organization will be facilitated. They add that moral leadership it is an essential component of successful leadership, ensuring the implementation of the school's vision and strategy.

While much of the earlier research on leadership associates core leadership practices with individuals, recent interest in distributed forms of leadership suggests that such practices might well be shared or distributed amongst individuals or performed by teams (Leithwood, 2005). Gronn (2002) posited that distributed leadership has become the object of recent research and it overlaps substantially with shared, collaborative and participative leadership concepts (see Spillane, 2005). Fletcher and Kaufer (2003: 39) assume distributed leadership to be a set of practices that "are enacted by people at all levels rather than a set of personal characteristics and attributes located in people at the top". However, the concept of distributed leadership has not gone without criticism. For instance, Leithwood et al. (2004: 7) warn that "the practical application of leadership distribution may easily be confounded with the mere distribution of management responsibilities". However, Day (2005) maintains that successful principals have shown that they recognize the need for the school to have many leaders at various levels of the school. He adds that leadership at various levels of the school would imply that even middle

managers, such as the heads of department, are responsible for some aspects of running the school (2005: 533).

Beyond the discourse of middle management and the role of heads of department in leading and managing a school, a new concept has emerged in leadership issues. York-Barr and Duke (2204) see the concept (and practice) of teacher leadership as having gained momentum in the past two decades. They add that teachers are assuming more leadership functions at both instructional and organizational levels of practice. However, the notion of teacher leadership has not escaped scrutiny. For instance, Harris (2003: 315) points to the evidence in international literature of "overlapping and competing definitions of the term 'teacher leadership'". Whilst the study recognises definitional of teacher leadership, an important point to mention in this study is Harris' (2003:316) view that "teacher leadership essentially refers to the exercise of leadership by teachers, regardless of position or designation". This is important in that the many difficulties that school leaders face in challenging contexts would appear to reveal that a sole focus on the principal's practices is not likely to offer a broader view of the challenges that township secondary school principals face, nor of how they surmount these challenges towards success. Therefore, the notion of distributed leadership and its associations to teacher leadership provides a new lens to understanding the benefits of what Sergiovanni (2001) calls "leadership density". Sergiovanni's view of leadership density suggests that when more people are involved in leadership roles and responsibilities at the school, the denser is the leadership in the school.

It could be argued that useful models should also be able to take into account the socio-economic context of the school, and its impact. Hallinger (2003) theoretically proposes a model of integrated leadership for organizations to learn and perform at the highest levels and for change to be sustainable. He advocates that strong transformational leadership is needed by the principal in underpinning the commitment of teachers and that substantial participation is required by the teachers in sharing leadership functions, thereby taking on the role of strong instructional leaders themselves.

Hallinger's view of an integrated approach resonates with Bush and Glover (2003: 32). They recommend adopting an integrated model of leadership types, starting with a contingent approach (taking into account the context of the school). The transformational model will provide the basis for the articulation and working the school vision. Instructional leadership will indicate the main priority of the learning organization. Managerial leadership is likewise important as it is necessary to ensure effective implementation of policies arising from the outcomes of the transformational approach. The integrated approach proposed by Bush and Glover (2003) may provide a means for understanding successful leadership within the context of South African township schooling. What is also worth noting is an observation made by Day et al (2005: 537) that "successful leadership will never be easy to define precisely as it does not consist of one or even a series of values, qualities or skills held or applied, but rather a combination of these through which principals are able

to ‘make a difference’ in their schools and communities”. The next section examines leadership in disadvantaged schools, with a particular focus on an international perspective.

Leadership in Challenging Circumstances: The International Perspective

This section reviews the international literature on schools facing challenging circumstances, drawing out sources of the challenges and pointing to successful leadership practices in such schools. The section starts off by exploring the concept of ‘challenging circumstances’. It focuses on what the term means and it seeks to establish patterns of “challenging circumstances”. Alongside the notion of “challenging circumstances”, the related terms “disadvantaged schools” and “schools at risk” will be also explored. MacBeath et al. (2007: 37) argue that terms such as “disadvantaged”, “challenging circumstances”, and “schools at risk” are open to varied interpretations. There is thus the need for this section of the literature review to explore the meaning of these terms in relation to successful school leadership in township schools.

Challenging circumstances

The British government applied the concept of ‘challenging circumstances’ to English schools with “attainment below what is deemed to be an acceptable threshold” (see MacBeath et al., 2007: 40). Accompanying the discourse on challenging circumstances, is the notion of disadvantage. Whelan (1995) offered the view of

disadvantage as a multi-dimensional concept. Gore and Smith (2001) suggested that schools located in disadvantaged areas suffer a myriad of socio-economic problems, such as high levels of unemployment, physical and mental challenges and low educational achievement. However, as noted by MacBeath, et al. (1986) and Wolfendale, 1992), “disadvantage” can also be the result of other factors such as relationship-building (or lack of it) between home and school. Clarke’s (2003) view is that there are other factors impacting on the link between socio-economic factors and school performance that. He suggested that schools in disadvantaged areas often face other pressures such as challenging pupil behaviour, a poor physical environment and lack of resources.

Further, Ofsted (2002) reports that within the UK context, the notion of schools in challenging circumstances includes all schools with 35 per cent or more pupils on free school meals. In this regard, MacBeath and colleagues (2007: 51) noted that eligibility for free school meals (FSM) is one measure that has been used for describing schools facing ‘challenging circumstances’ in the UK. An understanding of the indicators such as disadvantaged communities and provision of free school meals is likewise important for the study of schools serving disadvantaged communities in the South African township context. For instance, a South African report of 2010 by the Department of Basic Education (DBE) reports that between April 2010 to March 2011, the programme provided daily nutritious meals to 8 281 927 learners in 20 815 public primary and secondary schools. The report further

highlights the success of this programme with its expansion to secondary schools, initially focused on primary school learners.

It is evident from the South African report on the National School Nutrition Programme that many schools in challenging contexts also serve communities with high levels of social and economic deprivation. Dickes et al. (2010: 78) draw on the European Union's definition of the poor as "individuals or families whose resources are so small as to exclude them from the minimum acceptable way of life". The authors (2010: 146) add that this widely quoted definition leaves room for discussion about what can be considered a "minimum acceptable way of life in different countries and thus also whether national perceptions of minimum standards vary from one country to the next".

A useful way of understanding challenging circumstances and the notion of disadvantage is given by the DfES (2004b) as key indicators for disadvantage. These key indicators were drawn up as specific to England. However, parallels can be found within the South African context of township secondary schooling. Among the circumstances that can be deemed challenging include schools:

- Serving areas with severe socio-economic challenges.
- Whose pupils have low prior attainment, poor motivation and low self-esteem, and,
- With a high proportion of transient pupils.

Schools serving areas with severe socio-economic challenges

While the need to understand schools in challenging circumstances has been widely recognised, the explanation for their poor performance is contested. Zill, Morrison & Coiro (1993) posited that students from low socio-economic backgrounds can be at risk of school failure for a variety of reasons. The authors cite major factors that put students at risk as, including poverty, teenage pregnancy, low self-esteem, truancy, child abuse and neglect, alcohol & drug abuse, and gang violence. This corroborates the research with Drazen (1992) and Brueckner (1996), who suggested that student performance in the classroom is highly correlated with family and other environmental factors. Thompson et al. (1999: 68) add that "the complicated interplay between poverty, family and community conditions has yet to be fully understood"

Lupton (2004) suggested that, while schools in disadvantaged areas are much more likely than others to fail, by no means all of them offer a poor quality education. It could be argued that schools in poor areas can indeed deliver a high quality education, even in difficult circumstances. Lupton (2004) added that a socio-economic context of deprivation does not in itself determine school failure, and that the low quality problem in many schools in deprived areas lies within the schools themselves, accounted for more directly by poor management and professional practice.

MacBeath et al. (2007: 39) locate issues of social, economic and educational inequalities within the discourse of ‘disadvantaged schools’, ‘schools in challenging circumstances’ and ‘schools at risk’. In this regard, Hess (1989) suggests that there is overwhelming evidence that socio-economic status (SES) has been, and continues to be, the best single predictor of how much schooling students will obtain, how well they will do at their studies, and what their life prospects beyond school are. Hess adds that the consequences of poverty are behavioural problems in school, low self-esteem, lower motivation, lower achievement, less extra-curricular participation, lower educational aspirations, interrupted attendance, and illiteracy (ibid).

Schools whose pupils have low prior attainment, poor motivation and low self-esteem

The adverse effects of frequent hunger among children on behavioural, emotional, academic, and health outcomes have been documented in several reports in various countries (Wehler, et al. 1995; Murphy, et al. 1998; Kleinman, et al. 1998; Alaimo, et al. 2001). Levin (1995) suggested that concerns about poverty should be an important educational issue. Further, the work of Alaimo et al. (2001: 37) found a significant relationship between hunger and academic performance among school-going children. They add that child health and nutrition status is also important in determining educational attainment (ibid). This has seen countries such as the

United Kingdom and the United States of America introducing “Free Schools Meals” (FSM) programmes and the National School Lunch Program respectively for schools that are eligible for such programmes to alleviate hunger at school for the disadvantaged children. In South Africa, the National School Nutrition Programme (NSNP) is seen to safeguard the health of the poorest learners and is seen to be making an important contribution to the education of the disadvantaged learners (DBE, 2011: 17). MacBeath et al. (2007: 51), however, have argued that using “eligibility for free school meals as a proxy for social disadvantage is too simplistic and inadequate”. Pollitt’s (1990) view is that children’s attainment levels are also affected by levels of motivation, aspiration and behaviour.

Wachs (2000) argued that children’s academic performance is affected by three main areas of influence. The first is the quality of the school, the so-called in-school factors (for example, facilities, quality of teaching and allocated teaching time).The second area of influence is family characteristics such as socio-economic status and parents’ educational level. The third area identified by Wachs is attitudes toward school. What is missing from Wach’s areas of influence is the influence of the community on the child. MacBeath et al. (2007: 40) maintain that “what happens outside schools is more telling than what happens within them”. This is an important claim as it relates to the importance of home background and the ‘arguable’ inability of school to counteract social disadvantage. As Bernstein (1970) commented, “schools cannot compensate for society”. In support of Bernstein’s claim, some authors (Hilliard, 1989; Letgers, McDill, & McPartland, 1993) have argued that

students who are placed at risk due to poverty, race, ethnicity, language, or other factors are rarely well served by their schools. However, Thompson et al. (1999: 68) noted that “the complicated interplay between poverty, family and community conditions has yet to be fully understood”. Therefore, an important area that cannot be ignored in seeking a better understanding of schools in challenging circumstances is that of community factors.

Whilst it may be easy to link family and community factors to poverty and subsequent low educational attainment levels, Pallas et al (1989: 17) warned that “not all socio-economically disadvantaged children are educationally disadvantaged”. The authors added that some children may be classified as educationally disadvantaged on the basis of lack of support from the family and the community (ibid). Natriello (1990) observed that educationally disadvantaged children share one or more of the following characteristics:

- Poverty;
- Single-parent families;
- A poorly educated mother/father; and
- They speak a language other than the language used as the medium of instruction at school.

Whilst the characteristics mentioned by Natriello here may be useful in explaining disadvantage, it may not necessarily be a case of a poor family. Children who come from advantaged backgrounds without family support may be deemed to be

educationally disadvantaged (Hanafin and Lynch, 2002). This is an important claim as it relates to the importance of home background and the 'arguable' inability of school to counteract social disadvantage. It could be argued that successful school leaders faced with educational disadvantage may have the necessary attributes, both personal and professional, to overcome the particular challenge of the 'divide' between home and school.

Schools with a high proportion of transient learners

DfES (2004b) reported that another challenge faced by schools in difficult contexts is that of transient learners. This is a challenge faced by many schools in South Africa as a result of learner migration, especially from the phenomenon of learners moving from rural provinces to urbanized provinces, such as Gauteng. Further, Sanderson (2003) observed that the problem of transiency is compounded by the fact that on many occasions, students' records from schools that they previously attended never materialize, and thus, invaluable information that assists with the tracking learner performance and appropriate placement of learners at their new schools is lost. The school is then pushed to admit new learners without the added benefit of knowing the learners' educational history. It is a challenge for the school to place a new student without knowing his/her educational competencies, leaving the school with the difficulty of not knowing whether the child might have also been experiencing behavioural problems.

Schools with multiple disadvantages

Hillman (1996) stated that many students face multiple disadvantage which, when combined, place them at a distinct disadvantage against educational success in certain schools. One might also consider Maden's (2001: 33) commentary useful in understanding the context of disadvantage when she stated that "schools facing challenging circumstances have to go beyond normal efforts because of the challenges that their children bring with them to school".

A significant literature has emerged on the particular case of schools operating under difficult conditions, or in disadvantaged communities. These schools struggle "against the odds" (Christie, 2007: 26), and some of them manage to survive or thrive where others fail (Hopkins, et al. 2002). While there is much 'contemporary' interest in schools facing challenging circumstances, or as they are sometimes referred to as schools in difficulty, Harris (2002) observed that few research studies in the UK have focused exclusively upon leadership practices in these schools. However, there are some programmes and initiatives to support the work of leaders in schools facing difficulties. For example, the National College for Leadership of Schools and Children's Services (formerly known as the National College for School Leadership) is a British government-funded non-departmental public body (NDPB) which offers head teachers and school leaders support on working with and leading schools in challenging circumstances. Of interest to this study then, would be the extent to which township secondary schools are supported in their work.

Reynolds et al. (2004) noted that initiatives such as Excellence in Cities (EiC), also in the UK, aimed at supporting schools in disadvantaged areas have enjoyed some success and there is recent evidence to suggest that targeted programmes of support can make a difference even in the most disadvantaged school contexts. Christie et al. (2007) further noted the strong tradition of research on disadvantaged schools in Australia. McKenzie (1990) looked at the Disadvantaged Schools Program (DSP) in Australia, which was designed to reduce the effects of poverty on children. The programme had a particular focus on "schools serving student populations disadvantaged by socio-economic circumstances". Gow, et al. (1988: 24) show that a school is declared disadvantaged on the basis of the "social and economic circumstances of the community from which it draws its students". In the USA, there have been large-scale reform programmes aimed at high poverty schools (e.g. Herman and Aladjem et al., 1999). Harris (2002) states that "a great deal of the research evidence concerning improving schools in challenging circumstances is derived from the American literature (e.g. Elmore, 2000; Louis and Marks, 1996; Louis and Miles, 1990). The strength of this study lies in filling the knowledge gap regarding studies of school leadership in disadvantaged contexts in South Africa.

Maden (2001) argued that there is still a need for a better understanding of schools facing difficult contexts that will provide richer descriptions of leadership practices within such schools. As a consequence, a research project commissioned by the

National College, focused upon leadership in schools facing challenging circumstances. The prime aim of the project was to “explore how far leaders in Schools Facing Challenging Circumstances (SFCC) shared similar approaches to leadership and the extent to which the particular demands of the school context shaped or influenced their leadership style” (Harris, 2002: 6). In this study, Harris found that, while headteachers’ responses to problems varied, depending on the circumstance or situation, “their value position remained consistently one of empowering pupils, staff and parents” (ibid).

Michalak (2007) reported on a case study of schools in challenging urban communities in Poland. She explored elements of perceived successful school leadership in challenging contexts, focusing on the efforts of schools and their leaders to develop inclusive ways of working: (i) across the school; (ii) seeking to apply their values to their educational work; (iii) in the curricula offered; (iv) with parents and the local community; and (v) with families of schools and partner agencies. The main research question for her study was “What is perceived to be successful school leadership practice in highly disadvantaged urban contexts?” The other areas of inquiry in the study were (i) what are perceived to be fruitful conditions for achieving success in these contexts? (ii) what are the major values and motivations that sustain school leaders in achieving success? (iii) how do school leaders view their role generally, including towards their surrounding community? These questions are significant to this study as they seek to provide insights into South African township secondary schools.

Day (2005: 581) reports on multiperspective research that focused on ten successful, experienced headteachers in English-medium schools working in a range of urban and suburban schools of different sizes. The research revealed that the headteachers sustained their success by the application of a combination of essential leadership values, qualities and skills and that these enabled them to manage a number of tensions and dilemmas associated with the management of change. Day's (2005: 587) study illustrated that successful headteachers are those who place as much emphasis on people and processes as they do upon product, "all had raised the levels of measurable pupil attainments in their schools and all were highly regarded by their peers". Further, according to Day (2005), a key characteristic among the heads was that all revealed a passion for education, for pupils and for the communities in which they worked and that this was recognised and appreciated by them, "that they had translated their passion into practice, and that pupils' achievements had increased over a sustained period of time" (ibid).

Leadership in Disadvantaged Schools: The South African Perspective

This section of the review focuses on research in South Africa, notably that specific to township secondary schools. Whilst the challenge of improving schools in the most disadvantaged contexts is currently high on the political agenda in many countries, Bush (2010: 162) observed that research and literature on school management in South Africa is limited. As many township schools face acute levels

of socio-economic deprivation compounded by external factors that adversely affect their ability to perform, it is important to have an understanding of the context within which these school principals operate. Incidences of crime, drug abuse and violence tend to be significantly higher within areas of urban deprivation and social disadvantage. In Harris' view (2009: 1), the socio-economic challenges facing schools in the poorest communities are acute and the task of school improvement is a particularly difficult one for those principals and teachers committed to working within these contexts

Within the South African context, the notion of 'disadvantage" has been linked to socio-economic factors. For Kamper, (2008: 81), this "conjures up images of poverty-related odds (e.g. hunger, homelessness, illiteracy, unemployment) facing schools in poor communities". Du Plooy & Westraad (2004: 17) add that schools in poor communities, specifically in the South African context, suffer a myriad of challenges. These include, amongst others, poor resources for effective teaching and learning; limited and/or problematic parental and community involvement and support and numerous social problems; learner discipline at school, crime, drugs, child abuse, poverty, hunger, alcoholism, AIDS and unemployment (ibid).

Taylor (2006: 73) observed the conditions of schools in many South African poor communities, stating that "nearly 80% of schools provide education of such poor quality that they constitute a very significant obstacle to social and economic development". Principals of the majority of South African schools face a daunting challenge. This being the case, principals in developing countries such as South

Africa face problems that differ greatly from developed countries such as USA, UK and Australia (see Bush and Oduro, 2006: 1). Some authors (e.g Fleisch, 2008) have reported that the most serious problems facing principals in developing countries include: students who cannot pay school fees and buy books; shortage of school equipment; shortage of physical facilities and the use of English as a medium of instruction.

In South Africa, government efforts are focused on trying to deal with the resource challenges facing schools. Most state schools are state-aided to some extent: the government provides the minimum, and parents contribute to basics such as uniform and school fees (www.southafrica.info – accessed 10 October 2009). However, in South Africa, the government is much more dependent on parents' ability to pay school fees. For instance, state funding is organised on a quintile system, in which schools are divided into five categories according to the poverty levels in the areas they serve. Poorer schools are given larger state subsidies, and so have lower schools fees, while wealthier schools are given smaller subsidies, and so have higher fees (Education Relations Council, 2003: 52). In the poorest schools (those in quintiles one and two), parents are completely exempt from paying school fees. Kamper (2008: 11) found that the successful schools in the disadvantaged South African township communities succeed because they "managed to successfully beat poverty-related odds through an unshakable belief in the possibility of success and sheer determination".

Leadership in disadvantaged township schools

This section focuses on sources that directly concern school leadership in township settings. There has been considerable research on the role that school principals play in leading their schools and on learner achievement (Harris and Chapman, 2002). Oduro & MacBeath (2003: 446) assert that "it is now widely accepted that effective leadership is the key to successful organisations and to successful schools". Further, Leithwood et al (2006: 4) maintain that "leadership is the second most important factor influencing what students learn at school, after the quality of the curriculum and teachers' classroom practices". Despite the prolific studies done on successful leadership practices internationally, this study is the first to focus on an in-depth exploration of successful school leadership in township secondary schools.

The central significance of the study is that township secondary schools serve a large proportion of the South African population, in communities quite different from rural, inner-city or urban schools, but little is known of what principals do in practical terms, or the 'how?' and 'why?' of what they do. Many township communities are battling with HIV and AIDS, child-headed households and general poverty. These issues frame the conditions under which township secondary school principals operate and this study provides insights into how some of the schools "effectively overcome severe poverty-related odds, such as hunger, homelessness, illiteracy, unemployment, gangsterism, drug abuse, and a fatalistic mindset" (Taylor, 2006:

73). Fataar (2008: 9-10) observes that township "inhabitants daily cultivate tactics of survival by *putting together* [original emphasis] different types of social practices, encounters and experiences which require the use of all available capital, and human and symbolic resources."

Natriello (1990) argues that pupils in schools facing challenging circumstances are insufficiently exposed to educational opportunity within at least one of the following areas: school; family or community. This part of the literature review considers each of these factors in order to analyse the South African township context, and how these factors contribute to the challenges faced by school principals in leading and managing township secondary schools.

School-based factors

The Department of Education (2007) commissioned a study on "Learner absenteeism in the South African schooling system". Whilst this study focused on absenteeism in schools, it cited several factors that contribute to absenteeism. These factors were inadequate transport systems; illness; lack of parental involvement; food insecurity; disintegration of family units; drug abuse; teenage pregnancy; classroom overcrowding; violence and bullying at schools; lack of basic services at schools; negative attitudes among learners; poor academic performance and negative relationships between learners and educators (2007: 90). Moleya (2006: 11) stated that the school is important to the emotional development and self-

esteem of children. She adds that any attempt to reduce absenteeism should take account of the fact that it is generally a symptom of much broader socio-economic problems in South Africa. The discussion of the issue of learner absenteeism is important in this study because it throws light on the kinds of challenges facing South African school principals and to inform our understanding of how they negotiate socio-economic and educational conditions.

Furthermore, South Africa has seen a surge in the movement of learners, which is prevalent in the township schools. The Human Sciences Research Council analysed demographic trends in learner enrolments following the end of formal racial segregation in schools, and paid particular attention to ways in which racially integrated schools respond to issues of race, language, religion and culture (Sekete et al. 2003). The phenomenon of learner migration has seen learners move from the township into former racially disintegrated schools. On the other hand, learners have migrated from rural into urban areas, settling in the so-called informal settlements. Sekete (2003: 1) added that this trend has seen an influx of learners from informal settlements into neighbouring township schools. The significance of this issue is the instability that is caused by the migration, where principals are required to deal with the state of influx and still manage to produce positive learner outcomes.

Whilst some factors may be ‘external’ to the locus of influence of the school, such as the influence of family and community, many other factors, such as leadership, have a direct influence on issues such as teaching and learning. However, when

conducting a systematic review of the literature on school management in South Africa, Bush et al. (2005: 162) found very few sources on this topic. The limited literature base (Hoadley, 2007) is something worth noting given that South African school principals are subjected to pressure to perform. Bush et al. (2009: 162) examined the significance of leadership and management in enhancing classroom practice and improving learner outcomes in two provinces of South Africa, "given the increased recognition, internationally and in South Africa, that managing teaching and learning is one of the most important activities for principals and other school leaders". Drawing on case studies of eight schools in disadvantaged contexts, Bush et al (2009) showed that managing teaching and learning are often inadequate, and largely fail to compensate for the social and educational problems facing learners and their communities.

Another aspect that impacts upon principals' work is the relationship between learning outcomes and the provision and use of learning resources and this is well-documented in the School Register of Needs Survey (SRNS). Chisholm, Motala and Vally (2003: 392) pointed out that the SRNS 'provides a frightening picture of neglect and deprivation. Whilst arguments may be raised for the importance of resources in teaching and learning, Hanushek (2004) points out that schools and classrooms with access to superior resources do not necessarily provide the best quality education. According to Van der Berg & Louw (2006: 5-13), "at the heart of this problem lies an issue of efficiency". Taylor, Muller and Vinjevold (2003: 112-113) maintain that

schools that are performing reasonably well in terms of leadership, will most likely use their limited resources favourably even when in a poverty-stricken context

Family factors

There is an influential body of literature regarding the impact of family background on schooling outcomes (Rumberger, 1983; Rumberger & Palardy, 2005; Corvo, 1997). Corvo (1997: 295) for instance, noted that family factors appear to be most prominent contributors to learner behaviour. Studies conducted by Leithwood and Jantzi (2006) point to the important influence on children's academic success of family work habits, academic guidance and support provided to children. But the picture of poverty, as experienced by a majority of South African school-going children, does not adequately explain the successes achieved by the few schools in challenging circumstances. In this regard, a different lens is required to show how principals in successful schools negotiate the socio-economic conditions.

Burns (2001: 179) cites "two channels of family background influence which can be identified: Parents' education and private household resources". One area of interest is the role that parents play in their children's education. It is argued that parents who are better educated may rank education more highly as a household priority, and thus be willing to devote more money, time and other resources to their children's schooling. Van der Berg & Louw (2006: 5-18) add that this may include choosing schools attended by their children, thus providing their children with

superior schooling opportunities (Van der Berg & Louw, 2006: 18). Behrman et al's view (1999) is that parents may complement the teaching received by their children more effectively, for example through providing better help with homework. For township schools, it is unlikely that parents will be involved in the education of their children to an extent of assisting with homework.

Scholars such as Kamper (2008) have noted that in poverty contexts, many parents are illiterate and this makes it difficult for them to reinforce learning at home. Even worse is the situation facing those many learners who have no parents and whose families are headed by grandparents or older siblings. Fleisch (2008) noted that there are also few, if any, books at home to help learners to master the basics of literacy and numeracy. Fleisch (2008) also noted that there are other challenges, such as teenage pregnancy, which impede the education of secondary school girls, while hunger - which is widespread despite the well-functioning feeding schemes in the primary schools, is known to have a serious impact on learners' ability to concentrate.

Community factors

Steinberg (1989) states that the influence of the community or neighbourhood on learner achievement has not been studied as much as family influence. Whilst writing from an international perspective, Steinberg's comment warrants a discussion within the South African context and Prew (2007) provides insights into the issue of

community. He argues that community involvement is central to the success of the school. In his later work, Prew (2009) adds that schools should invest time in developing and maintaining good relationships and to creating space for students, parents and the community to participate in educational affairs. This resonates with Christie's (2009) view that "social contexts are more significant than school effects in influencing student outcomes".

May & Govender (1998: 9) maintain that "poverty essentially concerns the inability of individuals, households or communities to reach and maintain a socially acceptable minimum standard of living due to a lack of resources". What further compounds the challenge in high-poverty communities are social problems such as gangsterism, drug abuse and a fatalistic mindset (Day, 2005; Harris, 20002, Jacobson, Johnson, Ylimaki & Giles, 2005). Within the South African context, alcohol abuse remains a major problem among school going adolescents (Moleya, 2007: 3). The high rate of substance abuse in particular, has devastating consequences such as ill health, crime, delinquency, unemployment and violence, all of which lead to the destruction of individuals, families and communities (ibid, p5). These seemingly insurmountable circumstances beg the question, what are the features of successful principals in township secondary schools that enable them to negotiate their specific social conditions?

Community and parental involvement is about the importance of what Leithwood (2010) calls the family pathway and it denotes ways that schools can tap into their social capital through encouraging community and parental involvement. MacBeath et al. (2007: 46) maintain that, in trying to understand school leadership within a particular context, the social capital theory is also a useful theory to explain “patterns and intensity of networks among people”. They add that the social capital theory helps us to gain a better understanding of issues about the community, family life and their inter-relationship with schools (ibid). Research has shown that higher levels of social capital are associated with higher educational achievement (Putnam, 2000).

In the context of this study, the social capital theory should be seen from the viewpoint of the principals’ life experiences, how they position the school within the community, and how they maintain the intricate boundary between the school and the community. For Field (2003: 1-2), the central proposition of social capital theory is that 'relationships matter'. Interaction enables people to build communities and to commit themselves to each other. Field adds that a sense of belonging, and the concrete experience of social networks (and the relationships of trust and tolerance that can be involved), can bring great benefits to people. This view of social networks is supported by Harris (2008), who contends that of central importance to school leaders in poor communities is the cooperation and alignment of others to a set of values.

Fataar (2007: 5) uses the lenses of ‘space’ and ‘performance’ to analyse what he calls “the pedagogical practices” of three principals in a South African township. He suggests that the successes of the principals resulted from the way in which they were drawn by community members into their domestic affairs, where the principals quickly became familiar with the social dynamics in the community. The principals struck up strategic alliances with the different networks in the community. They were able to win over the trust of various religious, sport and cultural groupings based on making the school premises available for cultural shows, sport, and religious services (Fataar, 2007: 17). These relationships allowed the principals to consolidate their acceptance in the area, and provided them with a ready network to access community assistance in school fundraising, protecting the school from vandals, and in cultivating loyalty to the school among families to ensure sustainability of the school environment (ibid).

The relationship between the school, its context and the practices of the principal is a dynamic relationship between people and their environment. South African township schools are faced with a myriad of socio-economic challenges. These include crime, violence in and around the school, and substance abuse. Bell (1983); Bell, Caplan & Karin (1991), and Moore’s (1986) views are that people histories, social space and values are key social constructs that cannot be divorced in learning about social existence and the dynamic relationship between people and their environment (ibid).

Chapter Overview

This chapter provided a review of literature on successful school leadership in challenging context. The chapter began from a premise that existing theories of successful school leadership do not adequately represent the practice of successful principals in challenging contexts. Firstly, the chapter looked at the conceptions of leadership by reviewing local and international research on school leadership in challenging contexts. Further, the chapter drew out sources of disadvantage and pointed to successful leadership strategies in such schools. Harber (1999) and Prew (2001) argue that we should focus on the fundamentals of the school within its political and social context. It is difficult to ignore leadership influences on the school. Equally, it is difficult to disregard the impact of contextual factors on the success of the school. The understanding of leadership practices, and the social interactions within which leadership occur, is important to an understanding of successful leadership in challenging contexts. The next chapter looks at the methodology for the study.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Introduction

This chapter begins by explaining the positivist and the interpretive paradigms, and justifying the location of the study within the interpretive paradigm. Further, the chapter discusses various approaches to research, situating the study within the case-study method. The chapter also discusses the instruments to be used, the sample of schools, participants selected and the criteria for the sample selection. The chapter then includes an account of data collection and triangulation procedures and of data processing and analysis. The chapter concludes by discussing issues related to research ethics.

Research Paradigms

This was a qualitative, interpretive study that focused on the practices of principals in three selected secondary schools in the township of Soweto. An interpretive, qualitative approach was adopted for this study because it was suited to the detailed exploration that the study warranted. An interpretive paradigm was adopted for this study with the underlying belief that human beings do not have knowledge of the world independently of how they interact with the world. As the study focused on meaning-making and people's life-experiences, it was better suited to qualitative

approaches, based on the need for complex in-depth information about the phenomenon under scrutiny (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010: 314-337).

The interpretivist tradition has exerted a strong influence on educational research over the past 30 years. However, it is has not escaped certain criticism. Scott and Morrison (2007: 131) noted that one of the problems of the interpretive approach to research is that it presumes that “social actors engage in deliberative activity about their actions”. Giddens (1984) argues that “routine is the most common form of human behaviour, and as a result, continuous reflection or reinterpretation occurs infrequently”. This implies that without the researcher inviting social engagement through interviews for instance, the social actors will have no will to reflect on their actions. Therefore, it assumes that the individual is unlikely to be in a position to understand fully the conditions for the own actions (Scott and Morrison, 2007: 132).

Bryman et al. (1996: 619-620) have explored the strengths and limitations of qualitative methods for studying leadership. They argue for the potential of qualitative research to “reveal how leadership may be hindered or helped by circumstances confronting the leaders” (1996: 620). They add that among the “unique contributions of qualitative studies were greater sensitivity to variations in both organizational context and leadership styles” (ibid).

A quantitative approach was not suitable for the in-depth information required for the analysis of the case study schools and the principals' practices. Quantitative approaches use numerical data, facts and universal laws to perform research. However, these methods of science used to study the natural world, are seen by social researchers as not being feasible for the study of human experiences. One of the criticisms levelled at positivist research is that "it fails to take account of our unique ability to interpret our experiences and represent them to ourselves" (Cohen & Manion, 1995: 25). Therefore, quantitative research methods were not suitable for this study because of their "reliance on instruments and procedures which would have hindered the connection between research and everyday life" (Bryman, 2004: 79).

Research Approaches

The study adopted a case-study method. According to Cohen and Manion (1997), the interpretive, subjective dimensions of educational phenomena are best explored by case study methods. Further, Merriam (1998: 27) describes a case study as "an intensive, holistic description and analysis of a single instance, phenomenon, or social unit". Merriam's (1998) description of a case study is consistent with Yin (1994: 97), who defined the case study method in terms of the research process as "an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context".

Yin (2003) further stated that a case study method is a preferred strategy when the researcher focuses on a contemporary phenomenon within a real life context and, for this research, a case study entailed descriptions and analysis of individual school principals' practices. Case study research surpasses other research methods, such as surveys, in bringing out an understanding of a complex issue, in this case, the practices of the principals in challenging contexts. Bryman (2004: 79) notes that surveys are not suitable for this study due to their "reliance on instruments and procedures which hinders the connection between research and everyday life".

The primary aim of the study was to contribute to the knowledge and understanding of successful leadership in challenging contexts. The study aimed to achieve this through a synthesis of theoretical perspectives derived from both literature and new evidence obtained by means of empirical enquiry into the practices of the school principals (see Day et al., 2000). The researcher assumed that this aim could not be achieved through a research design based on a either a large-scale quantitative survey or a study of a single school. Therefore, three case schools were involved in this study. Multiple case studies provided the potential for analytical generalization, unlike single case studies. The sample of schools selected provided insights into the context of the three case schools and the successes of leadership.

However, Scott and Morrison (2007) have noted that the term case study is not without its complexities. One of the challenges facing case study research is that researchers seem to emphasise different features of case studies. For instance, Stake's (1998) view is that what is crucial to case study research are not the methods of investigation, but the focus should be on trying to pinpoint the unit of study. Other researchers, such as (Yin 1994; Merriam 1994; Miles & Huberman 1994) seem to place more emphasis on the method and the techniques that constitute a case study. In this study, one major feature of using the case study approach was that different methods were combined with the purpose of illuminating the three cases from different angles. This was aimed at triangulating the data by combining various methodologies.

The study adopted a grounded theory approach to allow, as far as possible, various dimensions of successful school leadership practices to emerge from the data itself (Strauss and Corbin, 2007). Strauss (1987) acknowledged that grounded theory can be used to extend existing theory. Denzin (1997) described grounded theory as "the most influential paradigm for qualitative research in the social sciences today". Whilst the grounded theory approach has been widely used in qualitative research (Charmaz, 2000 and Bryant, 2002), there have been several debates concerning its merits and shortcomings. For example, Bryant (2002) and Charmaz (2000) provide critical analyses of grounded theory.

Whilst this study purports to be based on Leithwood et al's (2006) conceptual framework, the use of Leithwood et al's framework was purely to put into perspective successful leadership practices. In this regard, it is important to note Goldkuhl and Cronholm's (2010: 191) commentary that "if one ignores existing theory, there is a risk of reinventing the wheel". They add that "as researchers we often build new knowledge on existing knowledge" (ibid). Therefore, to provide for what Strauss and Corbin (1990) call "theoretical sensitivity", Leithwood et al's core practices were taken into account in the design of the study. However, as discussed previously, these core practices were developed in a different context from South African schools facing challenging circumstances. As a result, a grounded approach seemed most appropriate in order to focus on what was emerging from the data itself.

Research Methods

The study uses a multi-method approach to collecting data in the case study schools. The decision to use a multi-method approach is informed by the researcher's belief that the social world, consisting of humans within changing contexts and situations, can be examined through a variety of methods that seek to understand the structure of the social world and the institutions and human relationships within it. Further, the use of a variety of methods was to triangulate the data (see Bryman, 1989; Whitfield & Strauss, 1998). In addition, Creswell argues

that multiple data sources should be used to effectively generate a case study (Creswell, 1998: 62). For example, he proposes that a thorough case study would employ numerous techniques of data acquisition – e.g., interviews, observations, focus groups and documents (Creswell, 1998: 62). Therefore, by conducting interviews with individual principals, deputy principals, heads of department, holding focus groups discussions involving teachers and parents, and studying documents such as school profiles, it became possible to provide comprehensive descriptions of the successes of the case schools.

All three case schools were studied using in-depth, semi-structured interviews; focus groups; observations, and documentary analysis. These methods of data collection are now discussed in turn below.

Interviews

In-depth, semi-structured interviews were chosen as one of the primary data collection method. The use of semi-structured interviews related to the interpretivist stance taken within this research, whereby people are the actors in their social world. Therefore, it was essential to see the social world through their eyes and to understand the meanings they apply to it and their experiences. Further, this also related to acquiring information concerning participants' personal beliefs, considered opinions and insights about their practices. These would have been difficult to obtain through structured interviews where rigid questioning may have prevented

opportunities to pursue a certain line, or allow the participant to elaborate on any aspect in their practice.

McMillan and Schumacher (2006: 350-353) see the value of in-depth interviews as being useful “to obtain data of participant meanings – how individuals conceive of their world and how they explain or make sense of the important events in their lives”. They add that “In-depth interviews are noted for their probes”. Further, I considered that semi-structured interviews would be better suited to obtaining detailed information through probing questions. Neuman (2000: 272) points out that whilst “face-to-face interviews are costly, and the potential for bias is high, they also have a high rate of response, and they allow for flexible probing”. In this study, individual interviews were conducted with the school principals, the deputy principals and the heads of departments. Initially, I had planned on one interview lasting for about an hour and thirty minutes. However, times varied according to the information provided by the participants.

The choice of a semi-structured interview for this study was also influenced by Oduro’s work (2003), who argued that semi-structured interviews made clearer the meanings people attributed to their given situation and helped the researcher see situations through the eyes of the participants. He adds that the interviews were a very convenient strategy for data collection even though he felt that interviews on their own were not sufficient as some participants, in his study, tended to talk about general notions of good practice in a way that seemed to presume that this represented actual events. Macmillan and Schumacher (2010) point out the

importance of other research methods such as observation, focus groups and documentary analysis as part of data collection in a case-study.

The interviews were carried out in conjunction with observation and documentary analysis of the schools. Keeping in mind that my objective as the researcher was to understand how successful school leaders negotiate socio-economic and educational conditions at their schools, this type of data gathering was chosen as appropriate (see Fataar, 2008: 238). With the permission of the participants, audio-tapes were used to record the interviews. Transcriptions were then made of the recordings and used as the sources of direct quotations (see also Day et al., 2000).

Focus groups

While in-depth interviews were employed for the school principals and the deputy principal, focus group interviews were used for the teachers and parents. The justification for using focus group is captured in Krueger and Casey's (2000: 360) view that "by creating a social environment in which group members are stimulated by one another's perceptions and ideas, the researcher can increase the quality and richness of data through a more efficient strategy than one-on-one interviewing". They add that the strength of the focus group interview is that it "brings an improved depth of understanding" (ibid) and "it allows one to probe certain claims and obtain additional data (ibid). Kitzinger (1995) saw the uniqueness of a focus group in its ability to generate data based on the synergy of group interaction.

Four teachers were selected for the focus group interviews, lasting for about an hour and thirty minutes. The principals, deputy principals and the heads of departments were requested to identify teachers who would be part of the interview panel. It is important to note that the three case schools have an average of thirty teachers. Therefore, it was possible that there was an element of bias on the part of principals, deputy principals and the heads of department in the selection of the four teachers who participated in the study. It was noted previously in this study that leaders exert influence on their followers. This is related to what Yulk (2006) refers to as “Position Power”. Further to this discussion, Hatcher (2005) maintained that power and leadership can operate independently. However, teachers were told that participation in the study was voluntary. In this regard, the researcher also emphasised to school leadership that the selection criteria should include both new and senior teachers. The criteria were aimed at reducing bias.

Observation

McMillan and Schumacher (2010: 350) stated that “observation is a way for the researcher to see and hear what is occurring naturally in the research site”. They added that “it is the mainstay of qualitative research” (ibid). Through observation, it was possible to gain insight into the existing practices of the successful school principals in the township. Furthermore, observations allowed me to explain how the principals negotiate the township’s specific socio-economic and educational

conditions. Field observations took place for a period of one week per case study school. To this end, I spent time in the principal's office, in the staff rooms as well as on the playgrounds, chatting with members of staff. Informal discussions about day-to-day occurrences helped to fill any possible gaps in the data for the study. As the research was based on the interpretivist approach, the study did not collect data to answer a specific hypothesis; rather the explanations were inductively derived from the observation field notes (Lichtman, 2006: 137-138).

As the researcher, my role in field observation was that of a non-participant-observer. I chose this form of observation, instead of that of participant observer, because it allowed me to closely document participants in each case school. The role of participant observer would have engaged me in activities which may have distracted me from my data collection, or otherwise limited my objectivity in field observation (see Hall, 2007). In my capacity as a non-participant observer, I did not offer any advice to the principal, deputy principal or heads of departments, neither did I participate in staff meetings. During and immediately after the observations, I took field notes to record not only what I saw and heard, but also reflections on what had occurred. (McMillan and Schumacher, 2010: 351). As five days was spent in each case school studied, sixty percent of the time on each day was focused on observing the principal. As the principals were units of analysis in this study, a greater portion of observation was therefore dedicated to observing the school principal. An observation schedule was designed for this purpose (see Appendix 5).

Documentary analysis

Bush (2012: 7) sees documentary analysis as “an indispensable element” of case studies. However, some researchers have noted problems with documents as sources of evidence. Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2011: 253) question “the reliability of documentary evidence”. Nonetheless, documents were important in this research data because they provided valuable documentary data sources of challenges facing the case school principals. Scott (1994) establishes criteria for evaluating the quality of the evidence available through an analysis of documentary sources. The criteria include authenticity, credibility, representativeness and importantly the establishment of the meaning of the document and its contribution to the issues researchers are hoping to illuminate.

For the purposes of analysis, the documents selected were grouped into two categories and the categories were inspired by Nsibande’s work (2005). The first were the Grade 12 learner track records for the past four to five years. Grade 12 results (also known as matric results), were important for the study in that Grade 12 is the final Grade in the South African education system and thus an exit point for learners. These records were important to show how the schools had monitored Grade 12 learner achievements over the years (Tables 4.1; 5.1 and 6.1 in chapters 4, 5 and 6 show how the documents were used to provide information on school performance). The second category was about documents that were informative

about the school principals' everyday practices in the case study schools. This second category included school profile, reports to parents and circulars from the Department of Education. Documentary analysis was done through thematic content analysis. This meant that patterns and emerging themes from the documents were analysed in relation to what was emerging from the other data collecting methods.

Instrument design

In this study, two instruments were used to collect data: semi-structured interview guides (Appendix 1-4) and an observation schedule (Appendix 5). The semi-structured interview schedules were designed to establish how participants perceived leadership at the school and what contributes to the success of the school. A structured interview schedule was not suitable for the interpretive approach adopted in this study because it did not allow for probes. All interviews were tape-recorded and the participants gave consent to the recordings.

Further, the observation schedule aimed to establish features of leadership which contribute to the success of the school. The following were the key themes explored through observation:

- The role of principal in the running of the school.
- Management of teaching and learning
- Evaluation and monitoring of learner progress

Piloting

I selected one of the schools as a pilot school from the three case schools. In this regard, the first case school was a ‘de facto’ pilot. Polit et al. (2001: 467) state that a pilot study can be also referred to as a feasibility study which is a “small scale version, done in preparation for the major study”. Another important advantage of the pilot for the study was to establish the usefulness and validity of the data-collecting instruments. In this study, fieldwork went exceptionally well in the first case study school. Given that the data collecting methods (and their concomitant instruments), were designed with a view to probe whenever the researcher deemed it fit, it was therefore not necessary to make any changes to the design, methodology and instrumentation of the study from the pilot.

Baker (1994: 182-3) maintains that a pilot study can also be the pre-testing or ‘trying out’ of a particular research instrument. The pilot involved using in-depth interviews, observation and focus group interviews in order to establish the issues to be addressed in the case study schools. Also, the pilot involved checking the range of questions to be used in the main study. The pilot was also used to focus on the integrity of the research process. This took into account such issues as what would be the appropriate length, for instance, of interviews and observation in the other case study schools.

Van Teijlingen & Hundley **(**2001) maintain that pilot studies may also try to identify potential practical problems in following the research procedure. However, they warn that a pilot study may also have number of limitations, such as that of advancing incorrect explanations or making inaccurate assumptions for the main study on the basis of pilot data.

Sampling

Purposive sampling, as against probability sampling, was adopted for the selection of the three secondary township schools. As its name suggests, Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2011: 156) see a purposive sample as that which is "chosen for a specific purpose". In the case of this study, the purpose was to understand successful school leadership practices in challenging contexts. According to Patton (1990), purposive sampling is done to increase the utility of the information obtained from small samples. Patton (2002: 242) adds that purposive sampling is "selecting information-rich cases for study in-depth". It is also argued that the power and logic of purposive sampling is that a few cases studied in-depth yield significant insights about the topic (Cohen and Manion, 1995; Brown and Dowling, 1998; Lichtman, 2006; McMillan & Schumacher, 2006). McMillan & Schumacher (2006: 319) also noted that probability sampling procedures are not appropriate when "generalizability of the findings is not the purpose"

Two purposive sampling strategies were employed in the study and these were ‘extreme’ and ‘typical’ cases (see Schumacher and McMillan, 2008: 319-320). The case schools represented ‘extreme’ cases of highly-performing Soweto secondary schools. This was based on the average school performance of high schools in Soweto. Also, these schools were extreme cases in that whilst Soweto has a total of sixty-four (64) secondary schools, less than ten percent of schools have consistently performed above the national average in Grade 12 results. The second purposive sampling strategy used was that of ‘typicality’. The cases were chosen on the basis of ‘typicality’ of the socio-economic and educational context. This is consistent with Cohen, Manion and Morrison’s (2011: 156) view that “the cases to be included in the purposive samples are handpicked on the basis of judgement of their typicality or possession of the particular characteristics being sought”. The sixty-four secondary schools in Soweto constituted the population for the study. However, given that only ten percent of these schools are highly-performing schools, it was necessary to consider both ‘extreme’ and ‘typicality’ strategies for sampling. Therefore, the ten percent of highly-performing schools in Soweto formed the sampling frame for the study, from which the three case schools were ultimately drawn from.

Two essential dimensions were also used in the selection of the sample schools: Grade 12 results and socio-economic and educational conditions of the township. These dimensions further provided the basis for the selection of the sample schools. The dimension of Grade 12 results was useful in exploring the impact of principals’ practices on learner outcomes. The selected schools are schools that have principals who were able to maximise learner achievement irrespective of how they

were stretched by a challenging socio-economic and educational context. The selected schools consistently managed to obtain results above national and provincial norms for Grade 12 pass rates. Given these dimensions, and the rationale for constructing them, the schools were chosen on the basis of Grade 12 results over the past three years.

For purposes of this study, the Grade 12 results appeared to be the most objective factor. Other criteria might have been chosen, such as principals being widely known and acknowledged as being ‘successful’ by their peers, the provincial and the district office. However, such criteria would not have been as objective as the Grade 12 results. A list of all secondary schools in Soweto was requested from the Gauteng Department of Education. The list constituted the sampling frame for the selection of the three case schools under scrutiny of the study. Two important considerations were the number and means of selecting the cases to be studied. The small number of cases selected facilitated an in-depth and more nuanced analysis of the pertinent issues, although claims for the 'representativeness' of the findings from the three case studies cannot be made. Nonetheless, the choice of cases was clearly more important than the number of cases as the study was concerned with understanding ‘typical’ cases. For practical reasons, accessibility and proximity of the schools was also taken into account in designing the study.

Data Analysis

In order to address the research questions, the study utilized a qualitative approach to the analysis of data. In the qualitative approach, various methods of data analysis are employed. This study adopted a thematic content analysis strategy to develop tentative and preliminary ideas during the analysis (see McMillan and Schumacher, 2006). Rogers et al (2005) add that social researchers use the term thematic content analysis to encompass an even wider sphere that includes all of the social practices, individuals, and institutions that make it possible or legitimate to understand a phenomenon in a particular way.

The adoption of thematic content analysis as a method of analyzing qualitative data meant going through a process of summarizing, categorizing and identifying patterns or themes emerging from the data. These elements have been regarded by a number of authors as the main elements of thematic content analysis in qualitative data (Miles and Huberman, 1994; MacMillan and Schumacher, 2010; Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2011). The approach to analyzing qualitative data was based on synthesis. This meant that as the researcher, I drew together different themes and concepts from the research and formed them into new, integrated patterns. Therefore, individual data from the face-to-face, in-depth, interviews with the principals, deputy principals and heads of department, data from the focus group interviews and the observation field-notes, were reduced and sifted to give a general explanation of the research taking place (see Morse, 1994).

The analysis entailed looking for patterns in recurring concepts, words and phrases. For example, in the interviews in the three case schools, the word DISCIPLINE was expressed by most participants. Discipline then, pointed to a recurring pattern for the emerging theme - DISCIPLINE. The recurring patterns were then colour-coded according to emerging frequencies. The framework for analysis (APPENDIX 1) shows the colour-coded themes as they emerged.

Strategies used for ensuring trustworthiness

This study has positioned itself within the qualitative approach to research. This positioning brings to the fore what has been noted as challenges of trustworthiness in qualitative studies, where for instance, notions of validity and reliability are viewed differently by positivists (see Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2011).

The consideration of issues of validity and reliability are related to the data collection methods and tools employed in the research. More importantly, these issues were taken into account in an attempt to limit any bias in data collection processes and in order to enhance trustworthiness of the data. Maxwell (2005: 279) argues that, “in qualitative research, issues of validity and reliability are difficult to determine in totality. Nonetheless, Onwuegbuzie and Leech (2006b: 239-246) outline several ways that researchers should consider in order to ensure trustworthiness in qualitative research. Two of these ways are the focus of this study and they are

triangulation and using extreme cases (discussed earlier in this chapter as one of the purposive sampling strategy used in the study).

Cohen and Manion (1994: 233) define triangulation as an "attempt to map out, or explain more fully, the richness and complexity of human behavior by studying it from more than one standpoint". This also means comparing sources of evidence to determine the accuracy of information (see Bush, 2012). Therefore, the purpose of triangulation in this study was to increase the credibility and validity of the results. In this regard, through observation, interviews and the analysis of documents, the practices of the school principals were explored in relation to what the deputy school principals, heads of departments and teachers had to say. The use of triangulation in this study allowed for information to be obtained from different sources and this enabled the comparison of results towards establishing similarity of information (Merriam, 1998). The study used both methodological and respondent triangulation.

Methodological triangulation is linked to a multi-methods approach (Bush, 2012). Therefore, the use of a multi-methods approach in this study allowed for the corroboration of the methods (Scott, 2007: 11) in exploring the principals' practices. Respondent triangulation was also used in the study. This was done by collecting different data sets at different times (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2011). Respondent triangulation was aimed at strengthening the credibility and validity of the results. Within each case school, interviews were held with the principals, the deputy principals and the heads of department. Also, focus group discussions were conducted with teachers and parents. Further, documentary analysis was done on

the documents provided by the schools. Whilst the study used various methods and involved various participants to allow for both methodological and respondent triangulation, it also had consideration for the issue of trustworthiness. Mauthner & Doucet (2003) saw trustworthiness as being dependent on how the data was interpreted, but also to demonstrate how the findings were reached.

Ethical considerations

McMillan and Schumacher (2006: 333) state that qualitative research is often personally intrusive, which is why ethical considerations have to be taken into account. For this study, the research project only began after receiving the ethics clearance permission letter. Furthermore, permission to collect data from the township secondary schools was obtained from the Gauteng Department of Education in the form a letter. This followed ethical considerations as laid down by the University of the Witwatersrand for research circumstances that take humans as objects of academic research. Key ethical variables, such as 'informed consent', 'confidentiality' and 'anonymity', were considered.

The research sites were identified and participants for the study were informed of the nature and purpose of the study and they were asked to sign a consent form. Informed consent has been defined by Diener and Crandall (1978: 57) as allowing participation through "procedures in which individuals choose whether to participate

in an investigation after being informed of facts that would be likely to influence their decisions". The researcher explained every clause of the consent form. The participants were told that their participation in the study was voluntary and that they were free to withdraw from the study at anytime. Thus, informed consent was obtained from the case study schools involved in terms of the university's code of ethics. Meetings were set up with the schools identified in order to prepare for data gathering in the schools. The principals were requested to grant access to the schools and to individual participants at the school. Each individual participant was also invited to indicate their willingness to participate in the study.

As the researcher, I also ensured that I protected the participants' rights to privacy through confidentiality and anonymity. This meant that I declared not to disclose information which may identify the participating individuals or that might enable the individual to be traced. Walford (2010: 84) argued that whilst confidentiality and anonymity may be acceptable or desirable norms of educational research, these norms may not apply or be achievable. Oliver (2003: 77) suggested that some participants or institutions may wish, or have a right, to be identified as it might advance their cause or institutions. Given that these were successful schools, the participants did not feel that there was a need for their participation to remain confidential or that they wished to remain anonymous. However, I still respected key ethical procedures of confidentiality and anonymity.

Chapter Overview

The research focuses on successful school leadership in challenging contexts. This chapter on methodology began by explaining the positivist and the interpretive paradigms, and by justifying the location of the study within the interpretive paradigm. In addition, the chapter discussed various approaches to research, situating the study within the case-study method. The chapter also discussed the instruments to be used in the study, the sample of schools, participants selected and the criteria for the sample selection. The chapter also included an account of data collection and triangulation procedures and of data processing and analysis. The chapter concluded by discussing issues related to research ethics, reliability, validity and triangulation.

The next three chapters present the findings of the three case study schools, focusing on their individual and collective characteristics. The chapters also give a profile of the case study schools.

CHAPTER FOUR

CASE STUDY FINDINGS: SCHOOL A

Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to provide a detailed description of case school A, through a presentation of findings. The introduction, as set out in this chapter, applies to all three case study chapters. The chapter first presents the background and context of School A and this is done through documentary analysis and observation. The chapter also presents data from interviews with the school management team (SMT) and separate focus group discussions with teachers and parents. Members of the school management team comprise the principal, two deputy principals and the heads of departments (HoDs). I interviewed members of the SMT individually and held a focus group discussion with four teachers from the same departments as the HoDs who participated in the interviews. I also held a separate focus group discussion with six ‘local’ parents. These are parents who come to school daily to assist in the School Nutrition Programme. The four HoDs who participated in the study were selected by one of the deputy principals. Since the focus of our study is on leadership in challenging environments, the case school was purposively selected on the basis of evidence of maintaining high academic performance and being in a low socio-economic area.

An important assumption in the study is that the success of the case school is attributed to the principal and one purpose of the research is to establish whether this assumption can be taken to be true and, if so, to determine precisely in what way the success was achieved. Research evidence consistently demonstrates that the quality of leadership determines the quality of teaching and learning in schools (Hallinger & Heck, 1998). Further, research shows that effective leaders exercise an indirect but powerful influence on the achievement of students (Leithwood and Riehl, 2003). Spillane et al. (2001: 23) add that “an in-depth analysis of the practices of school leaders is necessary in order to render an account of how school leadership works”.

The presentation of findings and the analysis of the school began by determining whether the principal exhibited the four core leadership practices that Leithwood et al. (2006) say are necessary conditions for school success, regardless of context. Specifically, these core practices include: (1) setting directions, i.e. helping develop a set of shared goals that encourage a sense of common purpose. (2) developing people, i.e. influencing behaviour towards the achievement of shared goals through the provision of intellectual stimulation, individual and collective support and (3) redesigning the organization, i.e. facilitating the work of the school community in achieving shared goals and (4) managing teaching and learning.

Although these core practices are useful in understanding the conditions for school success, Leithwood et al. (2006) maintain that they are insufficient for explaining

what strategies successful principals employ to improve teaching and learning, and to achieve high academic performance against the odds. I argue, therefore, that there is a myriad of factors influencing the decisions that the principal makes, as informed by their unpromising contexts. This meant that as the researcher, I had to constantly reflect on what the data was telling me. This chapter now presents documentary data in order to understand what appear to be the successful practices of the principal in School A.

Documentary Analysis

For the purposes of documentary analysis, I requested the principal to provide me with documents that may be useful in understanding the unique character of the school and innovative practices implemented by the principal. McMillan and Schumacher (2010: 361) suggest that official documents in organizations may take various forms, and that these documents may also "provide clues about leadership styles and values". I also accessed documents about the school from the website of the Gauteng Department of Education. Documents obtained included the school profile, overall district performance and the Grade 12 analysis of results. The school profile provides the background and contextual material about School A, since its inception. The school profile also contains the school's Vision and Mission statements. The biographical details about the principal are also contained in the school profile.

Background and context of School A

School A is situated in the north-western part of Soweto, and it was established in 1979. In 2011, school A had an enrolment figure of 1425 learners and a teaching staff of 43. Initially established as a Commercial High School, Natural & Social Sciences were later introduced in 1998 (Section 3 of the school profile). The school is classified as a quintile 3 school. Quintile 3 schools are known as no fee paying schools – they do not charge learners any school fees. The school greatly relies on the grant provided by the GDE. The school also has a computer laboratory which was installed recently and it is run and maintained by the Gauteng Online. The school is under-resourced, as amongst other things, there is no fully-equipped library.

Learners in this school are drawn from the same community where the school is located. This area is notorious for high rates of crime and violence is so prevalent that this part of Soweto has even earned the label “Wild West”. The school profile states that the school experienced serious disciplinary problems (especially from the learners) during the early 1990s. This was compounded by the changing political situation in the country. The school was severely vandalized and was on the verge of closure at that time (Section 8). The buildings had no window panes or doors and the classrooms were sparsely equipped with broken chalkboards and too few desks.

Evidence of the struggle the school went through is well-documented in the school profile. This includes disturbing accounts of rampant crime on school grounds. The provincial education department was even considering converting the school into a police station, to better respond to the area's crime problem. However, the principal negotiated with the Education Department and the then Parent Teacher Association (PTA), in conjunction with the Southern African Student Volunteers Organization (SASVO), who assisted with painting the school and replacing vandalized/stolen materials (doors, window-panes, chalkboards).

The school profile further states that the staff (and school governance) are determined to continue working hard in providing quality education at the school (Section 8). Also stated in the school profile are values such as high commitment and ambition. The vision statement as captured in the document state that:

> All stakeholders of School [A] commit themselves to making School [A] the ultimate [sic]. By this they mean that School [A] must be one of the Best Schools in Soweto.
>
> (School Profile, School A – Accessed 12 May 2011)

In order to implement the vision, the school profile mentions that the school has committed itself to the mission of upholding good discipline at the school through maximum participation of all stakeholders. Further, the school commits itself to expanding the curriculum such that it addresses the needs of the community, as well

as to continue improving the student results so as to produce economically active members of the society.

It is evident from the mission statement that the school places a particular emphasis upon generating positive relationships within the community and promoting a view of the school as being a part of the community. The school is seen as a centre of excellence, and a place for cultivating resource for knowledge, rather than merely an institution where children have to be sent. The vision of the school also embraces a bigger goal of learning, and this is captured thus:

> The school wants learners to enjoy a meaningful and worthwhile experience and it is committed to producing learners that will contribute meaningfully to the economy and development of our beautiful country.
>
> (School Profile, Accessed 12 May 2011)

The school profile states that whilst teaching and learning is high on the school's agenda, the school also develops its learners through other activities such as sport, debate, music, arts & culture. Learners are afforded the opportunity to participate and excel in soccer, netball, athletics and volleyball (Section 12). There is a very strong choir that regularly wins trophies and is also utilized by the district office for various functions and events. The school specializes in soccer, producing learners that have played competitive soccer professionally as well as in the amateur ranks. The school profile states that it has adopted a multi-denominational approach to

religion, always trying to expose learners to various religions for educational purposes (Section 12).

The website of the Gauteng Department refers to the success of the school, where the consistently outstanding results obtained by the school led to the then MEC for Education proclaiming that:

> ...the school is the pride of Soweto because it has proved that schools in the townships could work just as hard to produce excellent results.
>
> (GDE website – accessed 04 August 2011)

The school profile states that school has seen four different principals leading the school since its establishment (Section 6). The first principal led from 1979 to 1981; the second principal took over and led the school from 1982 to 1988; the third principal led the school from 1989 to 1997; whilst the current principal was appointed in 1998. He holds a Bachelor of Science degree and a teaching diploma. He started off as a temporary teacher at the school during study breaks from his university studies. On completion of his university studies, he returned to the school and was appointed permanently by the then headmaster. He went on to become the head of the Maths and Science department and deputy principal before leaving on a study break to finish his PhD. The principal has 18 years of experience in teaching at secondary schools. This was his first appointment as a school principal.

Under the guidance of the new principal, the school has won a number of coveted awards. Since 2006, the school has received awards from one of the biggest churches in Soweto for producing excellent results. In 2008 and 2009, the school received donations from organisations such as Learning and Teaching Support Materials (LTSM), from renowned businesses for producing excellent results. In 2010, the school was selected as the Secondary School of the Year in its district in Sport (GDE website – accessed 04 August 2011). The GDE website further states that the principal of School A has won acclaim for his achievements amongst his peers and in his district office.

School performance

The table below shows the Grade 12 results of school A from 1997 to 2011. Enrolment figures are also highlighted in the table.

Year	Enrolment	Results	Year	Enrolment	Results
1997	611	21, 50%	2005	1208	89, 86%
1998	802	70, 00%	2006	1284	97, 66%
1999	990	68, 09%	2007	1279	95, 34%
2000	1007	85, 91%	2008	1290	98, 31%
2001	1198	80, 49%	2009	1345	94, 00%
2002	1090	77, 35%	2010	1280	94, 12%
2003	1165	84, 03%	2011	1425	84,6%
2004	1218	82, 21%			

Table 4.1: Shows learner enrolment and Grade 12 pass rates from 1997 to 2011

Table 4.1 shows outstanding results and the consistent positive performance of the school. Whilst this may not show whether the success is attributable to the principal, a point to note in the table is the turn-around of results between 1997 and 1998. This is the period where the incumbent principal took over the running of the school. The table also shows that prior to the appointment of the incumbent principal in 1998, the school obtained 21.5 percent overall Grade 12 results. Under the guidance of the new principal, school results improved significantly to 70 percent. Whilst enrolment rates at the school continue to rise, the results bolster the demand in the community to have their children enrolled at the school. This is in contrast to the year 1997 when the enrolment figure stood at 611. In 2008, School A obtained an overall pass rate of 98.31 percent. Out of 118 learners who sat for the examination in that year, 116 passed, with 73 of them qualifying to pursue tertiary education.

Site Observations

As part of the fieldwork, and during the course of my visits to school A, I observed the activities of the school principal during the normal school working hours. Observations in the school took place from 7:00 a.m.in the morning to 3:30 p.m. in the afternoons. During observations, I noted that the school was surrounded by a fence and that the gates remain closed and locked during school hours. Keeping the gates locked during school hours is required by departmental policies, and it denoted the attention that the school gives to maintaining a boundary between itself and the surrounding community. It was also noted that the noise level was low

during lessons. Generally, there seemed to be a fair amount of order at the school. It would seem that this optimised teaching and learning time. Time on task and careful use of time seemed to be essential features of the school. I also observed that teachers hastily moved learners back to classes after lunch and the afternoon break. None of the teachers were observed to be in the staffroom long after the bell rang to resume lessons. This was obviously an ingrained practice of the school.

On my second site visit to the school, I observed that the principal, working together with one of the deputy principals, spent different amounts of time visiting teachers in their classes. This was at the start of the day, until the first break. At the start of the first period after the first break, one again the principal visited classes to monitor that teaching and learning is taking place. After taking his round of monitoring teaching and learning, he then went to his office where he mostly worked on administrative tasks. These tasks included going through documents and directives issued by the Department of Education.

It is evident from these observations that the principal plays a significant role in setting the tone for teaching and learning. This is seen in his daily class visits which ensure that teachers and learners stay focused on the core business of schooling, namely teaching and learning. For example, during the School Assessment Team meeting I was invited to, he urged the teachers to keep in my mind that “the children come first”. This observation was confirmed during the School Assessment Team (SAT) meeting. The principal had invited me to this SAT meeting as a non-

participant observer. The meeting was chaired by one of the deputy principals, who was appointed as the SAT coordinator.

Whist the meeting was in progress, the principal received a call on his mobile phone. He left the meeting for a brief moment and returned to ask for his deputy principal who was also present at the meeting. They both left the meeting because the call was from a member of the community who had earlier called to inform the principal about some learners from the school who were seen at a neighbouring recreational park, intoxicated. These learners had just returned from an extra-tuition programme arranged by the school. The principal, first of all demonstrated high commitment to the success of the learners by sending learners for extra classes. Further, what was of note about this incident was that the principal left the meeting to attend to a matter of concern to the well-being of the learners, signifying concern that the principal has for the welfare of the learners when outside or after school.

The principal also invited me to one of the School Management Team (SMT) meetings, which they hold every Tuesday and Thursday morning. At this SMT meeting, which included the principal, the two deputy principals and the eight heads of departments, the discussions were about learners that have been reported to have difficulties in learning. There was a brief discussion about what was required in terms of intervention strategies. The principal arranged to have one-on-one meetings with the learners. In these meetings discussions about the issues of the day are also held. Issues of the day include absenteeism of teachers and learners,

and matters brought to the attention of the school, by a member of the community. The principal, the two deputy principals and all eight heads of department report on matters that may have taken place the previous day or early on before the meeting.

The observation data presented in this chapter allowed for reflection on the data from the interviews and focus groups that were to follow observations. It is evident from this observation data that the principal has a central focus on managing teaching and learning and he demonstrated a particular focus on the welfare and success of individual learners in his care. Interviews with various participants, including the principal, were also held in order to triangulate findings from documents and the observations at the school.

Interviews

This study uses purposive sampling as the sampling technique. As the study focuses on “successful school leadership practices in challenging contexts”, it was imperative that I make “a judgement about which subjects should be selected to provide the best information to address the purpose of the research” (McMillan and Schumacher, 2010: 138), and “to select participants that are information-rich” (ibid). Given the outstanding track record of the school, as published in the Gauteng Department of Education report on Grade 12 – Analysis of Results (2010), the principal, the deputy principal and the heads of departments (HoDs) of School A met the criteria for information-rich participants. Further, the school meets the criterion for challenging contexts as it is in a low socio-economic area (see Chapter 2).

To present and analyse the material from the interviews with the principal, the deputy principal and the HoDs, I abstracted key issues that appear to be significant in the way the principal perceived the role he plays in the success of the school. In this discussion of the interviews, I treated participants' responses as descriptions of their actual lived experience of school leadership and management in their school, and their views about whether the success of the school can be attributed to the principal.

Interview with the principal

The interview with the principal took place in his office on the day that we had previously arranged and agreed upon. Prior to the interview, the principal had requested that I provide him with my plan for data collection at the school. Based on the plan, he had then scheduled the interview for a day that suited his schedule. Prior to the interview, we had discussed how the interview would take place and the principal had agreed to the interview being recorded.

Interviews carried out with the principal revealed that he employed a number of specific strategies that helped him 'turn around' what was once an ailing school. Under his plan to transform the school, the principal stated that his first priority as principal was to restore discipline for teachers and learners. Both teachers and learners were told that coming to school on time was "non-negotiable," and slowly

things began to change. The principal emphasized that lateness has been completely eliminated through a non-negotiable stance against truants. The principal commented on his firm stance by stating that:

> ...if there is a lack of discipline among educators,
> then it spills over to the learners.

It is evident from the interview extract above that, from the outset, the principal focused on setting direction for the school and he did this by targeting an important goal, in this case, the restoration of discipline. In this school, the principal walked into a difficult environment with problems ranging from student discipline, to low teacher morale to general apathy. However, with the focus on this one goal that he had identified, the principal gave a clear message that the school was transforming.

As far as the principal was concerned, restoring order and discipline at the school was so important during his first year at the helm, that he set himself to getting rid of the “bad elements” at the school with offences ranging from fighting and vandalism, to rape charges and drug possession. He explains, "If there is no discipline, there is anarchy”. As part of the plan to restore discipline at the school, he also spent time talking to various people in the local community and he carried out informal interviews with both his teaching and administrative staff. This included both teachers and learners, and he focused on getting to know what they expected of their school environment.

The principal maintains that whilst restoring discipline was important, his main focus was on “restoring the culture of teaching and learning”. His second strategy was to ensure the involvement of the entire school community in all decision-making processes at the school. The process started by setting up workshops to develop the school vision and mission statements. More importantly, he revealed that he “participated as a team member and not the boss when decisions were to be made” at the school. Besides that, he took every opportunity he could to highlight the achievements of individual teachers and learners at the school. In this way:

> …everyone felt that whatever little contribution they made to the school was acknowledged.

The third strategy that the principal used was teacher motivation, which he saw as important for the success of the school. The principal always worked on increasing and maintaining the motivation levels of the teachers. To achieve the motivation levels of the teachers required towards the vision of high academic achievements, the principal stated that he held sessions with teachers where, in his words, “it was only about “pepping them up”. In this regard, Fullan (1991) maintains that the principal is the person likely to be in a position to shape the organisational conditions necessary for success, such as the development of shared goals, collaborative work structures and teacher support. The principal further explains that,

> ...team-work is always promoted and encouraged at the school. Compassion, empathy and feeling for one another [sic] are the things that are bringing the educators, parents and learners closer to one another.

In response to the question on the perception of his role at the school, the principal responded by saying:

> My role, first of all, I am responsible for implementing the policies of the school. Secondly, I have to ensure that there is curriculum delivery. Thirdly, I have to ensure that everybody is for the vision and mission of the school.

It is evident from this response on the perception of his role that the principal is concerned with compliance to school policies and promotion of teaching and learning. Also, he is concerned with a “collective responsibility” towards the implementation of the vision and mission of the school. Further, the principal saw his work as highly focused on monitoring teaching and learning:

> I spend [the] better part of my day visiting classes and ensuring that teaching and learning takes place. Every morning I take rounds to ensure that there is

> “meaningful education”. I spend 60% of my time ensuring that teachers teach and learners learn. The other 40% I spend in the office doing administrative work.

From the two extracts above, the principal recognises the need for a greater focus on managing teaching and learning, with less time spent on administrative responsibilities. Bush et al. (2010: 162) state that “it is increasingly recognised, internationally and in South Africa, that managing teaching and learning is one of the most important activities for principals and other school leaders”. Bush et al. (2010) further acknowledge the significance of leadership and management in enhancing classroom practice and improving learner outcomes (ibid). Robinson (2007: 21) stressed that “the impact on student outcomes is likely to be greater where there is direct leader involvement in the oversight of, and participation in, curriculum planning and co-ordination”. The participants’ responses corroborate these views and it provides some insights into what makes the principal successful at the school.

In response to questions on how decisions are made at the school, the principal responded by stating that at the school, should it happen that the educator feels that the matter is beyond his or her means, then the subject educator (the teacher in the classroom), refers the matter to the Grade heads. The heads of departments ensure that there is curriculum delivery. If all else fails, he is then called upon to intervene in resolving issues that could not be resolved further down the structure. I asked the

principal to elaborate on how and why he thinks the structure he had outlined worked for his school and he responded by saying:

> The key is [the] monitoring and supervision of learner work. I also need to point out that what makes the school successful is that we are results-driven. Whatever we do, we check whether what we do will give us the desired results at the end of the year.

The principal emphasised that all members of the school, especially [the] teaching staff cannot be busy with other things when it is time for teaching and learning. He believes that, if schools experiencing difficulty spent their time focusing on the core business of schooling, then they would simply begin to see change in terms of academic achievement. The principal's view is that leadership plays a key role in the success of the school:

> It is a question of leadership. I make sure that nothing should ever interfere with the learning space.

He stated, "I always come to the point where I say, 'Colleagues, we have to think about the child'. In response to the question as to why why he thinks his school is doing well, the principal stated that "there is a lot of sacrifice done by teachers,

learners and the community". The principal further mentioned that they start at 7 am with Grade 12 learners and they end the day at 4 pm and they do this right from the beginning of the year. In other schools, school lessons start at 8 and end at 2.45. However at his school, Grade 12s are back in class from 3 pm until 4 pm. This is either supervised self-study by the learners, or learners continue with formal classes.

The principal also mentioned that there are some positive values at the school which he considers to be the cornerstone of success at the school. Other than commitment, sacrifice, and being results-driven, the principal seemed also humble about the results that have been consistently outstanding:

> It is the way we handle our challenges. This school is not a special school. We have learners who have drug problems. We have learners who fall pregnant. The only difference between us and other schools is that we do something about those challenges. What makes this critical for us is that these social issues should not impact on the academic results.

The principal commented that each time he analysed the school results, he had observed that those learners that have failed, are those learners with social problems such as drug abuse or teenage pregnancy, and that this impacts negatively on the overall school results. The principal further stated that if he is informed by one of the staff members about something they do not understand

about the performance of one of the learners, they try to find out from the individual learner if there is anything they can assist with:

> [We] even go out together with my deputy principals
> and visit the learner's parents in their homes.

With respect to the quality of teachers that the school employs, the principal emphasised that when they do their screening, they make sure that they get the right person. The principal believes that most schools fail because the wrong people are appointed. According to the principal, if the school requires a teacher to teach a particular subject, that teacher ought to studied the subject at university level:

> We do thorough screening and we follow references.
> It is not easy for people to be appointed in our school
> because of our strict selection processes.

The freedom to select the desired staff was considered by the principal as being critical to the creation of an environment for success. However, the principal acknowledged that the Gauteng Department of Education is ultimately responsible for making the final appointment of teachers.

The principal describes the relationship that the school has with the community as "a very close relationship". He further mentioned that:

> The community looks well after the school because of the excellent record of results that we have. We have instilled public confidence at our school.

According to the principal, the school experiences its challenges. For instance, the school would love to have a school hall. Parents do attend meetings but they cannot be accommodated in the two classrooms that are used for the meetings. Consequently, parents do not often get first-hand information. Administration of Grade 12 examinations is also a challenge owing to lack of a hall where all the learners could be accommodated to write their examinations.

Poverty is a big problem faced by the school and the principal sees a feeding scheme as a solution to this problem. This feeding scheme will cater for learners that do not have anything to eat during lunch. In his view, this can do wonders for progress (in terms of results) at the school. The principal stated that he had submitted an application to the Department of Education, and that he was told that the school is on the waiting list of schools to be provided with a feeding scheme. The principal says he accepted this challenging position because he is committed to the African child, especially where the school is, because that is “where he grew up".

The interview provided by the principal highlights his capacity for hard work. What characterizes the principal of School A is his loyalty to the vision for the kind of

school that would provide the best opportunities for learning and academic achievement of all learners in his care. Data from the interview with the principal showed that his practices and strategies focused mainly on four areas of influence. Firstly, it was about setting direction for the school. Secondly, he focused on managing teaching and learning. Thirdly, his focus was on developing people. Lastly, his focus was on redesigning the school.

Interview with the deputy principal

Given the increasing research evidence concerning the pivotal role of the senior management in maintaining an effective school (Day et al., 2000), it was also essential to obtain the views of the deputy principal on leadership at the school. The perspective of the deputy principal provided an important point of cross-reference for data obtained from the principal's interview.

When the deputy principal was asked to comment on what he perceives to be the role of the principal in the success of the school, he stated that the principal is a 'visionary' leader:

> The principal has made the school to be what it is by being visionary. We all know where the school is heading in terms of its vision.

Commenting on practices and strategies adopted by the leadership and management of the school, the deputy principal said:

> We basically have a vision that says we want our learners to succeed. Whatever we do, it is clearly communicated to all stakeholders – teachers, learners, parents. They need to know where the school is heading to [sic].

The data shows that the principal's visionary leadership clearly extends to the support that he provides to his staff. The support for staff is observed through constant praise and encouragement. When asked to comment specifically on the principal's leadership, the deputy principal had this to say:

> I would say he is the main reason we are where we are. He plays an important role in being exemplary. He doesn't say to us do A [sic], when in fact, he doesn't do the same.

An essential element for the success of the school, as seen through the eyes of the deputy principal, is this interview extract which is testimony to the principal's commitment to professional values, based on integrity and dependability:

> He is really committed to his job. Without him, we wouldn't be where we are. If I were to give my

> personal view, he is the reason the school is successful.

When describing significant experiences that have made the school a success, the deputy principal was unambiguous in his views of the strict monitoring of teaching and learning:

> We go round checking if both teacher and learner are in class when they are supposed to be in class. To be at school on time is non-negotiable and to be in class is non-negotiable.

In the interview with the principal, he had mentioned that the success of the school was as a result of a committed school community, especially the hard-working teachers. The deputy principal echoed this view when he explained that the success of the school was a result of “a committed, hardworking and result-driven staff”.

According to the deputy principal, the principal was convinced that for the school to change from what it was when he took over, he had to change people’s behaviours and attitudes as well as the school’s norms. This meant changing the culture of the school. The deputy principal believes the principal is ‘a motivator’ and that positive reinforcement gives the teachers motivation to do better, underscoring that “the principal rewards excellence at the school”.

According to the deputy principal, school management also holds strategic planning meetings to assist 'learners at risk'. The deputy principal further mentioned that these meetings also include looking at the challenges facing teachers regarding classroom practice issues:

> We come up with intervention strategies to help both teachers and learners so as to improve school results.

The deputy principal's response to the question on decision-making processes at the school is as follows:

> What we emphasise is that suggestions have to be for the good of the school. When we have the SMT meeting, it is chaired by different people. It is not the principal's agenda.

In this extract, the deputy principal shows that there is appreciation in the way their opinions were valued and incorporated into the decision-making process. The principal is seen as someone who is able to maintain open lines of communication, and respond to the suggestions of others. This helps to foster trust and loyalty and it assists the rest of the staff in putting into practice the school vision.

The deputy principal believes that the school has “a very good relationship with the surrounding community”. When it comes to parents meetings, the deputy principal stated that:

> The way our parents respond, it shows that they really have the interest of the school at heart. When we have a problem with a learner, parents do really support the school in solving whatever problems need to be solved.

An interesting point that was made by the deputy principal is that the school is fortunate in that the principal comes from the same community in which the school is located and that he is, as it were, “[a] son of the soil”. The deputy principal saw this as a benefit to the school due to the fact that the principal knows many people around the school. According to the deputy principal, when the community sees something happening, it is easy for them to call the school and inform the principal about it. The deputy principal believes that “the community is really part of the school”. It is clear from this statement that the school has gained the confidence of the community, what may be seen as ‘public confidence’ in the school when parents demand that their children be admitted at this ‘special institution’. This is in contrast with trends in other township schools where learners have migrated in large numbers to the nearby former model-C schools.

The deputy principal believes that the cornerstone of success at the school is that the school puts learners first. Further, the deputy principal believes that:

> The school has teachers who are highly committed to what they are doing.

The deputy principal also mentioned that some of the teachers at the school are working on their studies. The deputy principal attributes the motivation that teachers have to study to the principal, thus:

> Our principal has laid a solid foundation, in just being exemplary. I think we are fortunate to have a principal who has a PhD, because our teachers get the influence from him to study further.

The ability to handle the relationship that the school has with the community, especially parental involvement at the school, was considered an important element of maintaining order:

> Our parents do know that they can only come [to school] when we have called them to discuss an issue about their children. When we invite them, definitely they know what time they should come so that there shouldn't be chaos at school.

It is evident from this interview that the relationship the school has with the community is aimed at structuring community activity away from interfering with the core business of the school, which is teaching and learning. This suggests that, while parents still have to interact with the school, they are made to understand the school's mandate. However, there is a demonstration of flexibility whereby the school also makes provision for the unforeseeable:

> There are instances where parents will come and demand to see the principal. In such cases, we have to try and slot them in.

Overall, the deputy principal presented a view of the principal as someone who is committed, caring and supportive in the role he fulfils as the school leader. The principal was seen as someone who was always willing to transform the school. In many respects, it would seem that leadership in this school was driven by the principal's core personal set of values and beliefs, whereby these values translated into professional integrity and caring for teachers and the learners at his school.

Interviews with the heads of departments

To present and analyse the material from the interviews with the heads of department (HoDs), I abstracted key issues that appear to be significant in the way the HoDs perceived the role the principal plays at the school. Four HoDs at School A were interviewed individually, and this section presents the findings of these

interviews. Initially, a focus group discussion was held with the four heads of department. However, in the course of data gathering at the school, it became evident that a more differentiated approach in the form of in-depth individual interviews would yield even richer information about the experiences of HoDs as members of the School Management Team (SMT).

In the discussion of the individual interviews and the focus group discussion with the heads of department, I treated the responses of the HoDs as descriptions of their actual lived experiences of school leadership and management in their school, and their views about whether the success of the school can be attributed to leadership. The HoDs had been at the school for different lengths of time. One HoD had been with the school for five years as an HoD, whilst another HoD had been with the school for a period of twenty-nine years. What emerged from the data is that the school principal was seen as someone who is firm, but caring:

> ...we have a very strong principal. He will support every move that actually is producing good results and is going to build the school better.
>
> (School A – HoD1)

Literature on successful school leadership further shows that principals in challenging circumstances, in particular, seem to be aware of the need to nurture staff, pupils, parents and others in order to build successful learning communities (e.g McLaughlin and Talbert, 2001). The interview extracts seem resonant with

literature on the role that successful principals play in nurturing the school community:

> I have seen the leadership of the school transforming teachers, you know [sic], from reluctant participants to willing participants, for example late coming.
>
> (School A – HoD2)

> He will always acknowledge achievement at all times, so then people feel like really, you know, they are not just part of a group, that they belong to the school community.
>
> (School A – HoD3)

A common theme emerging from the interview data with the deputy principal and the HoDs was that of the school principal being ‘exemplary’:

> I would say actually the leadership of our institution leads by example.
>
> (School A – HoD3)

Data from the focus group discussion with the HoDs was in line with the HoDs individual views, when interviewed individually:

> The school principal leads by example". When he says that everybody must be in school on time, he is the first one to do so.
>
> (School A – FGHoD1)

There was also acknowledgement by the heads of departments of the key role that the principal plays in supporting and developing people:

> ...most importantly we are made to take leadership of our own departments so that we can apply our own leadership skills or leadership styles.
>
> (School A – HoD1)
>
> ...he gives us leverage to do things on our own, to experience being leaders in individual departments.
>
> (School A – HoD4)

Literature on successful principals shows that they recognize the need for the school to have many leaders at various levels of the school (Day, 2005: 533):

> ...I am an HOD, but I have acted as a deputy principal which then gives me exposure to things: issues related to managing and leading the curriculum implementation.
>
> (School A – HoD2)

Whilst support may not have been geared towards leadership in various levels of the organization, this interview extract shows the extent of the principal's influence on his staff:

> ...I'm one of those people who would not even think of registering because to me it wasn't worth it, you know. But today I have gone up to [sic] my Masters degree. And it's also quite an achievement being inspired by a person who wants everybody to aim for, you know, the sky.
>
> (School A – HoD3)

One consistent theme that emerged from the data concerned a view held by all heads of departments who were participating in the study, was that "the child comes first". This shared view held by the HoDs seems to be the core value that has contributed directly to the success of the school. For the heads of department, they looked at the children as children belonging to the school community, that the children are their own children:

> ...we have developed a culture, a very strong culture that the child comes first no matter what. And a child who comes from [Name of School] must be a child who actually can make a difference.
>
> (School A – HoD4)

Interview data from the HoDs indicates that the principal achieved success at the school by building collaboration amongst members of staff:

> ...team work is of the utmost because without working as a team and working as individuals there wouldn't be the cohesion that you see happening here because nobody does things on their own, we work as a team.
>
> (School A – HoD4)

It is also clear that team work has been internalized as a value by staff members at the school:

> ...you know one of the values we have is working together.
>
> (School A – HoD3)

> ...you come on board as a team player, that's what is important. If it is our school like against the rest of the world, then we stand united.
>
> (School A – HoD2)

It is evident from these interview extracts above that there is also a sense of strong collegiality amongst staff members and it is clear from the data that the heads of

departments shared a common view about the importance of teamwork in the school.

The HoDs were unanimous in their view of the level of parental participation at the school:

> ...even the grannies and the guardians do come... to a point that we have a problem, you know, making them understand that there's a difference between dealing with academic issues and issues that happen outside the school.

(School A – HoD1)

The HoDs saw parental participation in the education of the children at the school as essential to the success of the school:

> We invite the parents because we believe that a parent should not be called only at the end, to say your child does not perform well…So we try as much as we can to involve the parents of the learners who are actually giving us problems.

(School A – HoD4)

Generally, parents are kept informed of the school's expectations. In addition, members of the school community saw themselves as being in partnership with the community and with the parents. However, the HoDs acknowledged the difficulties

faced by the school in involving parents in educational matters of their children. One HoD commented that:

> ...but then we need to be sensitive to the fact that most children in this school don't stay with their parents. They are with grandparents, they are with guardians.
>
> (School A – HoD2)

Discipline is emphasized and this is seen in the way the values of the school are cultivated amongst the learners:

> Here we groom learners to know that a teacher is a teacher and this is the way you relate as a child to the teacher and the teacher to the child.
>
> (School A – HoD3)

Life at the school is considered by the HoDs to be about ensuring that learners learn. The HoDs were strong in their views when stating that:

> ...teaching and learning cannot be compromised at any stage, no matter who feels how, you have to go to class, you have to teach the children, you have to

> meet the deadlines, you have to mark your work, you have to give feedback to the learners.
>
> (School A – HoD1)
>
> ...as we look around learners will be outside when it's break, they'll be in their classes when it's not break. There is no in-between, you see.
>
> (School A – HoD4)

The HoD believed that the principal is highly dedicated to his work. There was also a sense of the principal being transparent and not taking sides:

> He is not that type of a dictator who tells people what to do without any discussion on top of that [sic].
>
> (School A – HoD2)

The HoDs were clear about the values that contributed to the success of the school and were upheld by the school community:

> Punctuality is one of the things because, I mean, if we have to be in class at a particular time and you're not in class, how would we expect learners to do the same? And in being punctual we are able to sort of cover up most of the aspects that need to be covered in the different learning areas.
>
> (School A – HoD3)

From these interview extracts, it seems that the principal resisted what Day (2005: 282) sees as “post-modern views of the fragmented self”, but the principal seems to have worked on constructing over time, a sense of common purpose which unified rather than fragmented all those with a stake in the school community” (ibid). The relationship between the school and their communities (Gelshorpe and West-Burham, 2003) emerges in educational leadership literature as one of the significant themes:

> ...the relationship we have with the community is quite good in the sense that we find members of the community would come to school and report of disorderly behaviour by our learners.
>
> (School A – HoD3)

The comments by the HoDs show that the relationship between the school and the community is strong. However, set in the context of challenging circumstances, it is evident that the achievements of the school exert pressure on it to maintain its excellent record:

> ...We ensure that we keep, maintain or improve the standard [sic]. That in itself, is pressure. It is positive pressure though because good things come out of it.
>
> (School A – HoD4)

Staff morale is high at school. This is seen in the high commitment and sacrifices many teachers make towards the success of the learners, especially Grade 11 and 12 teachers, and one HoD summed it up by saying:

> Our teachers come to school early in the morning and leave late in the afternoon. The same teachers also come to school during weekends to assist learners with their work.

(School A – FGHoD2)

This high-level of commitment, is a result of high expectations set by the school towards the success of the learners. However, the HoDs in the focus group discussion believed that this can be improved in order to ensure that the school achieves the desired result. As one HoD stated:

> …at the beginning of the year we set targets with teachers and work around those targets. We don't get these results from heaven - we work hard.

(School A –FGHoD3)

The HoDs explained that overcrowding is a serious problem at the school and hundreds of parents are turned away. Many parents demand that their children be admitted to the school but this is just not possible. One HoD further stated that the school is in dire need of more classrooms:

> This will enable us to admit more learners who demand that they be part of this special institution.

(School A – FGHoD2)

Poverty is a serious challenge for many children at the school and the HoDs commented that it requires urgent attention:

> Challenges within the community include households with high unemployment, houses with large numbers of people; some households with no parents and households with large numbers of health issues.

(School A – FGHoD1)

The very close relationship the school has with the learners is described in this statement:

> We know these children's families because the principal encourages that we work closely with the community, even to an extent of visiting the children in their homes.

(School A – FGHoD4)

The extracts from the focus group discussions, as well as the individual interviews, show a high level of commitment and an unquestionable determination that the

school has towards the success of the learners. This statement attests to the high-level of commitment held by the school towards its learners:

> …you see, we are only able to achieve the results we achieve because our hearts are in the right place.

(School A – FGHoD3)

There was a high degree of consensus amongst the heads of department about their perception of leadership at the school and that success of the school is attributable to the principal. The complexity facing the school in terms of overcrowding was raised as an issue by one of the HoDs, who expressed that “we are dealing with big numbers”. Despite the challenge of numbers, the school achieved its results through a systematic monitoring of learner performance. This was done through monitoring teacher’s work and it was expressed by an HoD as doing “a thorough analysis of the results”. The heads of departments maintained that there are constant attempts to establish from the educators what challenges they are faced with, and interventions are then put in place to deal with potential obstacles.

HoDs at the school see the principal as someone with a clear vision of where the school is going. His vision is to see all learners doing well in the Grade 12 examinations, regardless of the poverty surrounding their community. When the HoDs were asked to comment on the role of the principal in the school, they were

unanimous in their response that the principal was the one who set the tone for the success of the school. They maintained that he is not just a principal who sits in the office, only concerned with and dominated by administrative work, but he is involved in every aspect of the school.

Focus Group Discussions

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

<u>Focus group discussion with the teachers</u>

The purpose of the focus group was to obtain teachers' views on leadership practices in their school. Four teachers were selected by their heads of departments to participate in the focus group discussions. The teachers were chosen from the

same departments headed by the HoDs who participated in the study. However, this 'snowball' sampling may have impacted on the data as the HoDs may have chosen teachers who are likely to offer positive views about successful leadership practices in the school. The teachers were asked to comment upon those leadership practices at the school which they considered to be pivotal towards the success of the school.

Perceptions about leadership at the school show that teachers have a high degree of trust in the school principal:

> ...for the school to prosper or to attain good results or to have a good name like you said, I think virtually it starts from 'up there', the principal himself, then it trickles down to the deputies, down to senior teachers until it reaches teachers and finally that can actually be descending to the learners.
>
> (School A – Teacher 4)

The principal was perceived as "a very strong person, but passionate about his work". It was also clear from the data that the principal was seen as someone who was very supportive:

> ...so I think that's why our school is so successful because you always get help. Even as we are marking… if the marking is too much for you, the HOD will see to it that you are being helped.
>
> (School A – Teacher 3)

> ...there is good communication between teachers, our HODs and the principal and the deputy, especially when we were experiencing problems, especially of disciplining the learners in class. What helps is that there's that assurance that we are being helped.
>
> (School A – Teacher 1)

One of the longest-serving teachers at the school, who has been with the school for more than twenty-two years, provided a perspective on the history of the school:

> ...you know, in 1989 when I arrived here, I even said to myself, 'I wish I could go back to where I was teaching. It was a different principal at that time. He was not so firm like this one. He lacked leadership skills.
>
> (School A – Teacher 2)

It is clear from this interview extract that the principal is seen as someone who changed the school when he took over as the principal:

> Before he goes out there and addresses the problem, he sits down with us, he sells the idea to us, he asks for our opinions. He doesn't do things on his own
>
> (School A – Teacher 3)

> ...If I have a problem, I don't fear anything because I know that I can easily go to him and say, 'Sir, I've got a problem and he'll be there to advise me on the best way of tackling it.
>
> (School A – Teacher 4)

From these interview extracts, it is evident that generally in the teachers' view, the principal places a huge emotional investment in what Southworth (2003) calls "learning-centred leadership", namely, nurturing the capacity of teachers and learners to build and sustain the school as a community of teaching and learning.

When teachers were asked about the role of the principal in setting direction for the school, they identified vision as a core component of the success of the school:

> ...I think when he came here, he had a clear vision of what he wanted this institution to become. And from my interactions with him in this time that I've been here, he's a person [who] always stands by that vision. Whatever comes, he looks at it in relation to the vision.
>
> (School A – Teacher 3)

> ...he always talks about what we stand for is to produce the best results. We are striving to be the best, he always sells or articulates that idea of we're striving for best results.
>
> (School A – Teacher 4)

There was general consensus about the principal's outstanding leadership qualities. Some of the teachers were particularly complimentary about the principal's leadership:

> ...personally yes, I think I take him as a true model of a true leader and if it was possible for us to convert all the other principals to be exactly like him.
>
> (School A – Teacher 1)
>
> ...if I can be promoted to be a principal tomorrow, I think I would love to be exactly like him.
>
> (School A – Teacher 2)

It is evident from these interview extracts that the teachers reflected on the personal qualities of the principal and his presence and charisma:

> ...the charisma, the passion that he has, those ones - there's nothing that you can do to inculcate those in other principals.
>
> (School A – Teacher 3)

> ...we relate it to him and there's passion in what he does. So those are things that you cannot teach a person.
>
> (School A – Teacher 4)

The principal was also seen as a leader who is a motivator who inculcates a positive work ethic in teachers and learners at the school:

> ...I think that culture that has been created for the time that he has been in charge, he has managed to create that culture of working and it's keeping us motivated.
>
> (School A – Teacher 1)
>
> ...no one forces anyone. For example I'm a physical science teacher and I know that I'm behind with my work. I negotiate with my learners that starting from such a day, let's remain behind after school so that we can push our work.
>
> (School A – Teacher 4)

The view of the teachers was that whilst there were challenges facing the school, the fact that the principal came from the same area as the learners at the school took its effect on teachers, learners and parents and augmented his capacity to maintain discipline and be respected:

> He's from this very area Even if you are from this situation look at you, you can make it, you know. So, the kids will identify with that and it motivates them to say, 'OK, it can be done because if he made it, I can too.
>
> (School A – Teacher 4)

These teacher's perspectives provided insights into the practices of the principal. These are comments which acknowledge the power of their principal to have had the influence of turning around what was once an ailing school. The teachers interviewed were full of admiration for the principal whom they saw as visionary, charismatic and strong, but kind. There was recognition of how the principal had affected their individual personal and professional lives, as well as the whole dynamics of the school and its culture. It is clear from teachers' comments that they identified vision as a core component of the kind of successful leadership they associated with the principal. Indeed Fullan (1992a: 37) suggested that vision-building "permeates the organization with values, purpose and integrity".

Focus group discussion with the parents

The focus group discussion with parents was held at the centre where the parents gathered every morning to prepare meals for the learners who were on the school nutrition programme. Six parents were involved in the focus group discussion. I had

asked the principal earlier in the week for permission to speak to parents. The principal willingly agreed to set up the meeting on condition that it did not interfere with the duties that the parents had to perform.

I asked the parents to talk about how they perceive the school principal. The first parent to respond was the deputy chairperson of the School Governing Body (SGB) who was part of the team of parents who came to school on a daily basis to assist with the preparation of meals for the children on the nutrition programme. It was evident from the response that the principal is held in high esteem and that parents looked up to him for moral support and practical help at times when they were having problems of their own or with their children:

> ...to us, the principal is like a father not only to us, but to our children as well. He goes all out for our children. He is able to work with his staff, the governing body, parents and the learners. We are truly grateful and blessed to have such a principal.
>
> (School A - Parent 1)

It is evident from this interview extract that the principal shows commitment and he has the best interests of the parents in mind. It was also evident that the principal was admired by the parents for his accessibility. Parents were able to identify the principal's personal values, which in turn underpinned the success of the school:

> ...when you have done something wrong, he does not beat about the bush, he will call you and tell you that he does not like what you did. He always says to us that if we do wrong things, children will copy the wrong things we do, therefore, it is our responsibility as parents to do the right things.
>
> (School A - Parent 2)

A view was held by a parent that the principal has integrity and a personal regard for the development of individual learners at the school:

> ...the principal always says that all children are the same at this school and they all have to be treated as such. As parents assisting with the nutrition programme, we know that we are supporting all the children who need our support.
>
> (School A - Parent 2)

A similar view was voiced by another parent who also highlighted a recurrent theme in the responses of the deputy principal, the heads of departments and the teachers:

> ...all children are the same to him. He always says that the child comes first.
>
> (School A - Parent 3)

In response to the question on the relationship between school and home, the SGB deputy chairperson responded by saying:

> ...teachers do come and talk to us about what is happening at the school. There is so much love at his school. When a child is absent from school, one of the teachers will go out to the child's home to see what has happened to the child.
>
> (School A - Parent 2)

Parents also saw the value of staff having a clear purpose and working together to achieve common goals. The following statement by a parent illustrates this point:

> ...teachers at the school do not say because a child is left behind with their schoolwork that the teachers move on with others. Teachers are able to bring all children to the same level. If a child has a problem, you will be called to the school to discuss your child's problems with the relevant teacher.
>
> (School A - Parent 1)

The parents placed high value on the principal and staff at the school being available to them for personal contacts, and the school being sufficiently available and

accessible to parents in order that they had a sense that home and school are working together in partnership:

> If you have a problem at home with your child, you are welcome to come and discuss your child's problem with staff. If you are willing as a parent to have one of the staff members to come to your home to assist, they do come to check living conditions at the child's home.
>
> (School A - Parent 4)

The parents were unanimous in their response that because of hard work demonstrated by the teachers, the school will achieve its set target:

> ...what I like the most about the school is that the school is aiming for a 100% pass rate in all the grades [sic].
>
> (School A - Parent 2)

Whilst making judgements about the success of the school on the basis of pass rate is problematic, presenting a limited and narrow view of successful leadership in challenged schools, an interesting point to be made about the interview extract above is that the principal was able to articulate the school vision regarding student outcomes even to the parents. Fullan (2002) argues that successful leadership cannot be measured by student outcomes alone. Leaders have a deeper and more

lasting influence on organisations and provide more comprehensive leadership if their focus extends beyond maintaining high standards.

There was also acknowledgement that the principal was a firm disciplinarian, as seen in these statements by the parents:

> ...when our children are wayward, he is able to restore discipline. When a child has a problem, he is able to sit down with that child and show him/her the right way [sic].
>
> (School A - Parent 1)

This element of firmness by the principal in maintaining order and discipline was echoed by another parent. Indeed, there was a sense of admiration for what the principal stands for regarding discipline at the school:

> ...there is discipline at the school. Even though there is no corporal punishment any more, all learners know about the code of conduct of the school. All children know that they have to sign a pledge not to be involved in any misdemeanours [sic].
>
> (School A - Parent 3)

As in the interviews of senior management at the school, all the parents were unanimous in their recognition of the role the principal played in the success of the

school. The parents placed high value on the principal being available to them and their children for personal contact and support. For the parents involved in the focus group, there was a sense that home and school are in partnership, since the school recognises the challenging environment in which its parents and learners work and live.

Chapter Overview

The case reported in this chapter involved face-to-face interviews with the principal the deputy principal and four heads of departments. Two focus group discussions were held with teachers and parents. Documentary analysis and observations were also used to obtain data for School A. These various data sets compared favourably to provide a perspective on the leadership practices at the school. For analysis purposes, data had to be coded and categorised to derived themes. The cross-case analysis (Chapter 7), shows the relationship between codes and themes, and how these were derived from these data sets. This applied to all three findings chapters. From the data, it is evident that the school surmounted its contextual challenges in a way that resulted in high academic achievements for learners. The evidence from school A suggests that the principal of the school had clarity of vision, informed by clearly articulated personal and professional values. The principal was willing to direct his energy to improving the school from within and to helping learners at the school to achieve their full potential. Furthermore, the interview data showed that the

principal has a major focus on managing teaching and learning. Those under his care did not see him as only concerned with administrative tasks.

Documentary analysis shows that the results at School A showed improvement over a sustained period of time under the principal's leadership. In line with the vision of the school, the principal ensured that teachers and learners at his school stayed focused on teaching and learning. Observational data largely confirmed what was reported in the interview data. Observations suggested that the principal showed a high level of commitment to the success of the learners.

The principal of School A has his primary focus on teaching and learning. He also has a passion for education, for learners at his school and for the community in which he works. It was also possible to observe a strong emphasis on teamwork and broader participation in decision-making. However, the success of the school seems to be principal-driven. The school has high levels of optimism as a result of the principal. The principal made goals clear, communication was excellent and everyone had high expectations of themselves and others. The principal achieved this level of expectation by communicating to others a clear vision and a set of values.

The next chapter presents the findings from School B.

CHAPTER FIVE

CASE STUDY FINDINGS: SCHOOL B

Introduction

This chapter follows the same structure as Chapter Four. Documentary data and observations provide the background and context of School B. The chapter also presents data from interviews and focus group discussions with the school management team, teachers and parents.

Documentary Analysis

The data presented in this section were obtained from electronic documents on the website of the Gauteng Department of Education and the district office. The documents accessed from the district office were the overall district performance and the Grade 12 analysis of results (2010). I also requested that the school to provide me with any documents which may help to understand school leadership practices better. Amongst the documents, I was provided with the school magazine which contained the profile of the school. I was also provided with teachers' files, comprising teachers' timetables; moderation schedules; class visits schedules; and meeting schedules with teachers. The schedules contained dates that assisted the HoDs to monitor delivery of lessons. Also contained in the schedules are dates for

when assessments are due, and for the way in which assessments are to be conducted. At School B, the principal uses the HOD's master file to check on teachers' planning for the academic year.

Background and context of school B

The school is situated in one of the newer suburban areas on the outskirts of Soweto, with a middle-class catchment area. Records from the department of education show that the school was originally built as a primary school in 1995. However, when a neighbouring secondary school was closed down and demolished in order to be refurbished, learners were then moved temporarily to the newly-built primary school. The decision by the Department of Education to temporarily 'house' secondary school learners in an area which did not have a secondary school was questioned by a strong teacher union operating in the area. The school had to cope with turbulence and uncertainty at that time as the Department of Education was still determined and adamant that the school should remain as a primary school, although temporarily 'housing' secondary school learners.

The aftermath of this decision taken by the Department of Education meant that learners at the school did not live in the local community as they had been moved from a neighbouring school. Only 3% of the learners at the school come from this community. With the changing demographics of post-1994 South Africa, parents from the middle-class homes in the area were moving their children to schools

perceived to be better-resourced than local schools. The school now serves the poorest areas, mainly comprising learners from the informal settlements surrounding it.

School performance

School results can be judged by various measures: Exam results at the end of schooling (in the case of South Africa, Grade 12 results) are widely used to assess outcomes. The table below shows the Grade 12 results at the school from 2005-2011, linked to the Grade 12 enrolment figures.

Year	Grade 12 Enrolment	Results
2005	50	68.8%
2006	82	70.9%
2007	169	84.2%
2008	107	91.3%
2009	150	64.19%
2010	127	84.9%
2011	103	99.2%

Table 5.1: Learner enrolment and Grade 12 pass rates 2005-2011

Table 5.1 shows outstanding results for the school, with the exception of the 2009 results, and a generally rising profile. The table also shows a significant increase in the Grade 12 enrolment figure in 2007. This also coincided with an increase in the

Grade 12 results to 84.2 percent. Significantly, the incumbent principal was appointed in the year 2006. This is in contrast to the year 2005 and 2006, when the Grade 12 enrolment figures stood at 50 and 84, respectively.

Site Observations

Site observations reflect that School B is a large school with an enrolment figure of 1125 learners and a teaching staff of 40. The school was established in 1998. The school is surrounded by a fence and the gates remain closed during school hours. The garden and school premises are kept clean. Burglar-proofing protects the windows and doors. Also of note is that all learners wear the school uniform.

In the five days of site observations, the two deputy principals conducted class visits. However, I did not observe the principal visiting any classes during this period. During lessons, the noise level was low. The heads of departments checked, analysed and monitored teachers' work on Friday, the last day of the week. The tasks of checking, analysing and monitoring learners' work was done by the teachers alone. The focus of the teachers on learners' work was mainly on the performance of Grade 12 learners.

Interviews

To present and analyse the material from the interviews with the principal, the deputy principal, the HoDs, the teachers and the parents, I abstracted key issues that appear to be significant in the way the principal perceived the role he plays towards the success of the school. In this discussion of interviews, I treated participants' responses as descriptions of their actual lived experience of school leadership and management in their school, and their views about whether the success of the school can be attributed to the principal.

The principal of School B

Biographical details of the current principal were obtained mainly through formal and informal discussions with various participants as key informants. These key informants were the participants in the study, and they included parents who were members of the School Governing Body (SGB). The SGB members were requested by the principal to participate in the study. Also, electronic documents containing any information about the school were consulted in order to learn more about the principal. Since its establishment, the school has seen three different principals leading the school.

The first principal led the school from 1995 to 2003, when the school was first established in temporary accommodation for learners from another neighbouring school. The second principal led the school from 2003 to 2006. The incumbent principal has been in charge of the school since 2007. In the course of fieldwork in school B, I found it difficult to gain access to the school principal as he was often unavailable (staying mainly in his office). Nonetheless, I finally managed to have an informal discussion with the principal a day before our formal interview. The purpose of this meeting was to explain to the principal the purpose of my visit to the school. During our informal discussions with the principal, separate from the interview, he communicated that after graduating from the local teachers' college with a Teaching Diploma, he taught Mathematics at a local high school before securing a position at a district office as a Mathematics facilitator. During his tenure as the local district facilitator, he visited schools in Soweto to monitor the teaching and learning of mathematics in secondary schools, and to assist teachers with any challenges they faced in the Mathematics classroom. It should be noted that the principal of school B was, once again, re-appointed to the local district office. This was soon after I had conducted the principal's interview.

Interview with the principal

The interview with the principal of School B took place in his office. We had previously arranged and agreed on this day for the interview. Before the interview, I had spent five days of observation at the school. In the first two days of being at the

school, I was not introduced to the principal, who stayed in his office. My access to the school was through one of the deputy principals, and he was helpful in providing information about the school.

The principal reported that when he was persuaded by the district office to take over leadership at the current school in 2006, he was convinced that he could turn the school around. This was at the time when the school was struggling to produce positive learner achievements. As the school's principal, he managed to gain the confidence of the parents on the improvement of the results from previous years.

In the words of the principal:

> School B [actual name removed] is a wonderful school with talented staff and pupils. Given the socio-economic circumstances surrounding the school, we still offer great opportunities for academic excellence and for building the character of the learners.

It is evident that the principal is highly committed to the success of the learners at the school and his comment bears testimony to his dedication to the success of the learners:

> …it is always an amazing experience to see pupils with disadvantaged backgrounds achieving excellence in their school performance.

The principal saw his role as:

> ...leading and managing all the resources of the school, from human to physical, including learners in particular [sic].

The school has sub-committees, which are mostly led by the HoDs, though, in some cases, the committees are led by the teachers. However, everyone has to report to the principal. The principal sees his role as extending beyond leadership and management issues:

> ...I also have to be part of, and perhaps lead the School Governing Body (SGB). With our parents, as you will know, they are not au fait with issues of governance and we can't expect them to run the school. Therefore, I am not only an accounting officer in the Executive Committee of the SGB, but I play a key and active role and show leadership there [sic].

The principal feels that his role is wide-ranging and it is difficult to point to the specific role he plays in managing teaching and learning:

> ...one is the link between what one would call the Department, the district office in particular. As principals, we also have a big role [to play in] keeping in touch with our communities, including all the form of organizations that are there.

An issue that emerged from the interview is that learners at the school are not from the community where the school is geographically located. However, the principal plays a major role towards creating the school as a "community-centred organization". In this regard, the principal believes that the school should form an active part of a wider community, and staff must visit areas where learners come from:

> It is important that as the principal, I have to know exactly where our learners are coming from, and therefore be able to contribute and assist the communities and get to know the home background of the learners.

The principal believes that it is his responsibility to form the network between the school and the community:

> ...I go to some of the meetings taking place in the community. Some of the meetings I have to go there, physically, as the principal. This helps me to know exactly what the needs of our learners are from the 'home side'.

Despite such a community-centred approach, the principal also maintains a focus on teaching and learning as the core business of the school and above all, "to make sure that quality teaching and learning takes place in the school".

In response to the question of managing teaching and learning, the principal believes that:

> ...everyone in the school manages the curriculum, as long as it is the teaching component, including myself.

When I probed the principal further regarding managing teaching and learning, his focus on redesigning the organization for the purpose of effective management of teaching and learning is evident in his response:

> ...perhaps, I should hasten to mention that when I came to the school, I found that one of the deputy principals was responsible for curriculum and the other one responsible for administration. I felt that the skills of the deputies, as leaders, were not utilized fully.

The principal also believes that that the school is successful because of commitment to the academic success of the learners:

> We have reached a stage where we can boast and say that over 70% of our learners finish Grade 12 and go to university. We support our learners, as far as we can, academically. In our case, it means going even beyond the call of duty.

The principal placed high value on collaboration with other schools. This extended to recruiting teachers from other schools for the extra-tuition programme. This extra-tuition programme takes place on week-ends where a teacher from another school is given an opportunity to handle a section of the curriculum with learners at the school. To do this, recruited teachers work together with the subject teachers. In some instances, the school has requested subject advisors from the district office to come and teach its learners. The principal also expressed that the school has a particular focus on learners' socio-economic needs:

> ...we have adopted some learners. I have a learner that just belongs to me, which I have to see to it that the learner has school uniform [sic]. You can go to class now and you will find that in a class of 40, up to 35 learners are without parents. If parents are there, parents are unemployed.

The interview with the principal reveals that the school has adopted a ‘collective approach’ to leadership:

> ...we do what we call collective leadership where, from time to time, we consult one another on various issues and we ensure that the information is cascaded to the rest of the SMT as well as members of staff.

During our interview, the principal mentioned that because of mainly the intake of learners from the neighbouring informal settlements, this poses challenges for the school due to the high unemployment and high levels of crime in these communities.

The interview with the principal highlighted his capacity for hard work. What characterizes the principal of School B is his commitment to the vision for the kind of school which would provide the best opportunities for learning and academic achievement of all learners under his care. Data from the interview with the principal shows that his practices and strategies focused mainly on three main areas of his influence. Firstly, it was managing teaching and learning. Secondly, he focused on the needs of the learners at the school. Lastly, his focus was on ensuring that his staff did what was expected of them, in terms of his commitment to teaching.

Interview with deputy principal

I interviewed one deputy principal at the school. When I requested to have interviews with both deputy principals, I was informed that the school could not "assign" both deputy principals to the research project. I spent five days with the deputy principal and he was invaluable in assisting me with any information that I requested regarding leadership at the school. During our informal discussions with the deputy principal, he revealed that he once acted as the principal of the school. However, when the position for the school principal was advertised, the post was offered to the current principal. The deputy principal was also keen to provide the history of the school by adding to the information I had already gathered through online research on the background and context of the school.

When I asked the deputy principal about the leadership vacuum at the school, in the light of the principal who had departed, the deputy principal believed that there was no leadership vacuum at the school, stating that "all systems are in place and the school is still running fine… actually when he arrived things were in place, so nothing has changed". According to the deputy principal, "it has been a culture of the school to use what he calls 'democratic processes'":

> ...there has never been a time where one person will dictate to the school. We ensure that decisions are collective such that everybody owns them.

The deputy principal describes key experiences that have led to the success of the school as,

> ...the key challenge was learner and teacher discipline. We had to deal with issues of late-coming. We had to deal with issues of absenteeism, but we have tried to motivate teachers as well as learners, so that everybody sees the importance of the school being successful.

On management of teaching and learning, the deputy principal believes that:

> ...with teaching and learning, there is nothing that beats proper planning. If you have planned properly, and you ensure that systems are in place, everybody has a file, everybody has prepared, learners' books are available. Once a month or so, I check learners' books. I also ensure that TLSM are available

The deputy principal explains how the school deals with non-performance:

> ...if there is a teacher who is not performing, we have structures in the school. We will call a meeting, we talk to the School Based Support Team (SBST).

A firm approach is also taken with non-performance when dealing with learners:

> ...we even talk to the learners and we tell them that when they are at school, they are not doing it for anybody else, but for themselves.

On time management, the deputy principal, maintained that **"**Effective use of time is the first thing", when stating:

> ...firstly, our teachers and learners know that they cannot come to school late. Secondly, with the FET, our Grade 11s and 12s do not leave at the same time as other learners.

Interviews with heads of departments

Four HoDs at School B were interviewed individually, and as a focus group. This section presents the findings of the individual interviews. In the discussion of the individual interviews and the focus group discussion with the heads of departments, I treated the responses of the HoDs as descriptions of their actual lived experiences of school leadership and management in their school, along with their views about whether the success of the school can be attributed to leadership. The length in service of the HoDs varied. One HoD had been with the school for five years as an HoD, whilst another had been with the school for twenty-one years, with fourteen years as an HoD. Another HoD that I interviewed had been with the school for a period of ten years with five years as an HoD. He started his teaching career with the school. The fourth HoD had been with the school for a period of three and five years as an HoD at another school.

One view held by the HoDs about leadership at the school was about adherence to set rules:

> ...the most important thing about the leadership that we have here is consistency [sic].
>
> (School B – HoD1)

Another HoD saw systems put in place by the principal as being key to the success of the school. This HoD said that there are measures to control late-coming of learners and teachers. This responsibility is assigned to different teachers in the morning when learners arrive:

> ...as early as seven o'clock we start working. We're very consistent with that seven 7 o'clock - we are checking all the things just to make sure that our learners are protected, dangerous weapons are not coming in.
>
> (School B – HoD3)

The HoDs view effective time-keeping as essential for success:

> ...when teachers stick to time, they will be able to perform, to do their duties very well.
>
> (School B – HoD3)

> ...about the learners, we wait at the school gate to check them, their time of arrival, to phone the parents in case they are late, to call the parents who gave the letter and see if the situation is worse. These are some of the things that we do.
>
> (School B – HoD2)

One HoD believed that the school is not dependent on one person for it to function effectively. Even the departure of the principal, who was promoted to the district office, did not negatively affect the school:

> ...the principal is no longer here, he has left the school. But as you came in you noticed the situation is still the same? It's just that the one person is gone.
>
> (School B – HoD4)

When I asked the HoDs about the specific role that the current principal has played towards the success of the school, one of the HoDs explained that:

> ...I would be lying if I said he never played a big role. He was playing a major role in so far as running of the school is concerned. But the principal, if he's not teaching, he's the one who makes the point to ensure that all the people are in class.
>
> (School B – HoD2)

Another HoD added that:

> ...he left the school, but the systems continue. We are still working on those systems. We still make it a point that all those classes are being attended.
>
> (School B – HoD3)

It is evident from the following extract that the HoDs believe the school to be dependent on strong internal accountability:

> ...people must account for the marks. For instance, if the learner got 40%, you check, you assess those files, you check the files. The first thing that we do, we check if the work was done. The HoDs check if the work was done properly. We check to see if the educator didn't just make it up in terms of the marks.
>
> (School B – HoD1)

Parental involvement is also key to the success of the school:

> ...we invite the parents to come, especially parents of the learners who were struggling with a specific subject.
>
> (School B – HoD3)

Given the prevalence of poverty in the school community, learners face the risk of reduced capacity to learn as a result of nutritional deprivation and social needs. It was evident that the school focuses on catering for learners' both nutritional and social needs in the hope that their concentration and performance levels will improve and ultimately influence their learning:

> ...we identify learners, we check their background, we speak to the parents. We give priority to the learners who are struggling, in the true sense of the word 'struggling'. Then those learners would get their lunch.
>
> (School B – HoD1)

> ...we encourage the previous year's grade 12s to donate their uniform when they leave the school, to donate their shoes, their trousers etc. In the case of learners who are struggling, we'd give those learners the uniform. So we are always trying to help.
>
> (School B – HoD4)

The HoDs consider the school to have a very strong relationship with the community:

> ...if we have functions as school, the community donates, they give us something. The doctor, the dentist, nurses - they give us the donations. So I would say the community is helping a lot [sic].
>
> (School B – HoD3)

Learners at the school do not come from the neighbouring community, but from other areas outside of the immediate school environment:

> ...I would say the learners who are attend school here in [School B], from the [School B] community, would make 10% from the neighbouring community.
>
> (School B – HoD2)

When I asked what was behind the school's success, one HoD stated that:

> ...we go an extra mile. We even teach on Saturdays. We have a morning class and afternoon classes. As an HOD you become an example to other educators. So people who are very, very busy are HODs.
>
> (School B – HoD3)

The HoDs believe that, what makes the school a success is that they have the welfare of the children at heart:

> ...even during lunchtime we discuss the learners. So our interaction mostly is about learners. We are more interested in the welfare of the learners and that the learners are performing well.
>
> (School B – HoD4)

> ...I don't have a teacher who gives me hassles. Most of the educators are motivated. You can see that these educators are motivated.
>
> (School B – HoD3)

An interesting comment made by this HoD was with regards to the involvement of the community in school matters. This was in sharp contrast to the comment that was made by another HoD who believed that the community was involved in the school:

> I mean the parents they are not concerned about the school. They don't have children who are learning here.
>
> (School B – HoD2)

There is a spirit of collegiality at the school and it was expressed as "we work as a team". The view that was given by the HoDs regarding parental involvement was that:

> ...parents are very supportive. The problem here is that we have child-headed families and crime in our township
>
> (School B – HoD1)

Focus Group Discussions

In addition to the semi-structured interviews and site observations, two separate focus group discussions were held with teachers and parents.

<u>Focus group discussions with the teachers</u>

In addition to the semi-structured interviews and site observations, focus group discussions were held with teachers selected by the deputy principal. The purpose

of the focus group discussions was to obtain teachers' views on successful school leadership practices in their school. The focus group discussions also assisted in determining how the school promotes best practices. To obtain these views, focus group discussions were conducted with a group of four teachers. Initially, teachers did not want to take part in the study, citing their workload. Denscombe (2003: 271) has noted such "problems of negotiating access to study settings and the effect of the observer on the natural setting".

During the focus group discussions which teachers finally agreed to attend, I asked them about what might have contributed to the success of the school. The teachers who attended the focus group, believed that staff morale is high at school. This is reported in the high commitment and sacrifices many teachers make towards the success of the learners, especially amongst Grade 11 and 12 teachers. The Grade 11 and 12 teachers come to school early in the morning and leave late in the afternoon after others have left. The same teachers also come to school over weekends to assist learners with their work.

This high level of commitment, as characterised by one of the teachers, is because of the high expectations set by the school with regards to the success of the learners. However, the teachers in the focus group discussion believed that this can be improved upon in order to ensure that the school achieves the desired result, namely, a sustained 100% pass rate in all the grades. One teacher stated that the principal is planning to raise funds to arrange staff development workshops and

training. This will further contribute to the already existing positive team spirit amongst teachers:

> ...I was going to say I think it is team spirit because our principal motivates us to work together and as a result you find out that learners are very good.
>
> (School B – teacher 1)

The School Management Team plays a key role in influencing discipline at the school:

> ...It's easy for us as teachers to be disciplined when we see [ ] that how disciplined they are and committed that we become disciplined and committed as well.
>
> (School B – teacher 1)

When probed to say more about leadership commitment at the school, this is what the teachers had to say:

> Our deputy principals they also go to classes, they teach, you understand? So if we see that they do attend their classes, they are committed to their work, we are also motivated as teachers to do this as well.
>
> (School B – teacher 1)

The teachers were unanimous in their views of leadership at the school. They believed that the principal had instilled a culture of discipline and hard work:

> If you want to be a good leader, you make sure that you instil [a] culture of commitment among your followers. The principal always tells us that, to deliver, we need to work as a team.
>
> (School B – teacher 2)

There is a sense of trust and strong discipline at the school. Teachers were unanimous on this point:

> The principal really trusts us and he knows what we are doing inside the class, so there's no need for him, maybe, to get inside like spying [on] what we are doing inside the class because, I mean, our qualifications and experience say a lot about us.
>
> (School B – teacher 2)

Teaches believed that the school had a sound relationship with the parents:

> ...sometimes maybe, if a child gives us a problem, we can do our best to call the parents to come and then we sit down with the parents, discuss about the issues that are happening with the learners.
>
> (School B – teacher 3)

> And, even during meetings, we see parents coming in great numbers. Yes. Whereby sometimes because of floor space - our hall is very small - and sometimes meetings are called according to grades, where we say we want parents for grades 8, 9, etc.
>
> (School B – teacher 1)

Focus group discussion with the parents

The focus group discussion with parents was held in the school's staffroom. Unlike in School A, where six parents were involved in the focus group discussion, four parents were involved at School B. At the time of the focus group discussion with the parents, the school was under the leadership of the new principal, who was one of the deputy principals before his appointment as principal of the school. An interesting aspect of the focus group discussion with the parents was that it was arranged by the former principal whom I had contacted about the possibility of finalizing fieldwork at the school. The former principal willingly agreed to communicate with the incumbent principal to set up the meeting and to access the school for purposes of the focus group discussion. This was on condition that the focus group discussion would not interfere with the duties that the parents had to perform. Consequently, we agreed on meeting on a Sunday morning.

I asked the parents to talk about how they perceived the incumbent school principal. The first parent to respond was the chairperson of the School Governing Body (SGB) who was part of the team of parents who came to the focus group discussion:

> ...the secret to the success of the school is because of the cooperation of all stakeholders. Teachers, parents and learners are holding hands towards the success of the school.

(School B – SGB Chairperson)

Parents further stated that learners at the school are involved in extra classes. In winter, learners come to school at 7 in the morning and, in summer, they come to school at 6.30 in the morning. Learners also attend classes on Saturdays. Of note was how the parents felt they themselves 'go an extra mile' in giving support to the school.

> ...we even subsidize teachers with money for petrol when they come for Saturday classes. It is not much, but it is something. So that teachers should not feel that it is a strain to come for Saturday classes.

(School B - Parent 4)

The role parents play in supporting the schools towards their children's achievement is reflected in these comments:

> ...we are very supportive. If teachers request any form of support, we as parents do definitely assist with whatever we can assist with. Teachers even request us to buy books for children if children do not have books, especially Maths and Science [sic].

(School B - Parent 3)

Parents' views on how they perceived changes that were taking place at the school, and whether the transition will be a smooth one given that the school was now under a new principal, they responded by saying:

> ...the new principal worked under the principal who has left the school and he saw the positive effect that the old principal had on the school.

(School B - Parent 1)

> ...I must say we had a very strong principal who knew how to work with people and we can only hope that the new principal will do the same. As parents, we will give the new principal all the support he needs for our children to be successful.

(School B - SGB Chairperson)

It was evident from the responses that the parents perceived themselves as an integral part of the school and in part responsible for the success that the school has achieved over the years:

> ...we pride ourselves on the support that we give to the principal because we believe that, without parental support, the school would not achieve what it has been able to achieve.
>
> (School B - Parent 3)

> ...what we do as parents, we listen to the principal and we try to do what he asks us to do". That applies to teachers and learners. Also, the heart-to-heart meetings between the principal and the teachers are very encouraging. Once you see that kind of leadership, as a parent, you get inspired.
>
> (School B - Parent 2)

> ...we even have a situation where I had grade 12 learners studying at my place, in preparation for their final exams. I prepared dinner for them every night. I was encouraged to do this by how the principal treats all learners at the school.
>
> (School B - Parent 4)

From the focus group discussion with parents, it is evident that this sample of parents enjoyed a close relationship with the school, and had a clear understanding of the personality and work of the principal. However, these parents may have been untypical as they were chosen by the former principal to participate.

Chapter Overview

The case reported in this chapter involved face-to-face interviews with the principal the deputy principal and four heads of department. Two focus group discussions were held with teachers and parents. Documentary analysis and observations were also used to obtain data for School B. These various data sets were triangulated in order to provide a perspective on the leadership practices at the school. The evidence suggests that the principal of the school shared a deep commitment to developing the community both within and outside the school. Within the school, the principal achieved this by developing a sense of collegiality and by working collaboratively. The principal was willing to direct his energy towards improving the school from within and to helping learners at the school to achieve their full potential. Outside, the principal was seen to be active and enthusiastic about involving the community and other key stakeholders in promoting the school. Further, the interview data showed that the principal has a major focus on managing teaching and learning. He was not seen by other stakeholders as being only concerned exclusively with administrative tasks.

Although there was a decline in the Grade 12 results in 2009, documentary analysis shows that the results at School B showed improvement over a sustained period of time under the principal's leadership. In line with the vision of the school, the principal ensured that teachers and learners at his school stayed focused on teaching and learning. Observational data indicated the principal as someone who leads the school through the involvement of all stakeholders, including parents. Observations further suggested that the principal showed high levels of commitment to the success of the learners. There was a feeling amongst teachers, as well as parents, of being well supported to carry out their duties, and that learners are supported to do their best in their academic work.

The next chapter presents the findings from School C.

CHAPTER SIX

CASE STUDY FINDINGS: SCHOOL C

Introduction

This chapter follows the same structure as found in Chapters Four and Five. A point to note about school C is that the parents were requested to participate in the study by the deputy principal, unlike in the other two case schools where parents were requested by the principals. In school C, the deputy principal seemed to have a more thorough knowledge of the local community. However, the three HoDs who participated in the study were selected by the principal. Whilst four HoDs participated in this study from each of the other two case schools, only three HoDs volunteered to participate in the study from case school C. Other HoDs from this case school cited time constraints as the reason for not participating. The study also acknowledges the element of bias in how the deputy principal and the principal, may have selected the parents and HoDs respectively to participate in the study.

Documentary Analysis

Documentary analysis was done through documents accessed about the school from the website of the Gauteng Department of Education. The principal could not provide me with any documents related to the vision and mission of the school. Documents obtained through the GDE website pertaining to the overall district performance and the Grade 12 analysis of results.

Background and context of school C

School C was established in 1971 and is situated in an area south-east of Soweto. The school serves students from Grades 8 to Grade 12. The name of the school loosely translates as 'put your shoulder to the wheel'. As of the 2011 school year, the school had an enrolment of 981 learners and 29 classroom teachers, for a learner to educator ratio of 33.8.

The school is in an impoverished area, with 99% of parents at the school unemployed. The school accommodates learners who come from the nearby community. Many of the learners are raised by grand-parents, in single-parent families, or with no immediate family members employed. Many of the learners at the school come from families with a number of siblings, with, in some instances as many as ten children in one family. This situation often results in dire straits and parental care problems.

School performance

The table below shows the Grade 12 results at the school from 2005-2011, linked to the Grade 12 enrolment figures.

Year	Grade 12 Enrolment	Results
2005	51	80.4%
2006	60	61.7%
2007	102	81.6%
2008	151	86.3%
2009	83	70.8%
2010	106	82.6%
2011	97	93,4%

Table 6.1: Learner enrolment and Grade 12 pass rates 2005-2011

Table 6.1 shows outstanding results for the school, with the exception of the 2006 results, and a generally rising profile. The table also shows a significant increase in the Grade 12 enrolment figure in 2008. This also coincided with an increase in the Grade 12 results to 86.32 percent. Significantly, the incumbent principal was appointed in the year 2009, when the enrolment and the pass rate had dropped. However, the enrolment in 2009, together with the Grade 12 results, dropped below results of the previous year (86.3 percent).

Site Observations

Site observations focused on the tasks performed by the School Management Team (SMT) and in particular, the principal. In the morning of my visit on Monday, the SMT meetings held a meeting. After the SMT meeting, I observed the deputy principal spending time in the staffroom with the rest of the staff members to make announcements. I observed other members of staff signing the time-book in the staffroom during the announcements. The deputy principal informed the teaching staff about new assignments, according to a DoE circular. After the SMT meeting, the principal attended to non-teaching staff to address house-keeping issues.

On the Friday of my site visit, there was morning assembly which was led by a member of staff who was assigned the responsibility to lead assembly on the day. Teachers and learners had gathered in front of the administration block to hear a motivational talk. The teacher responsible for assembly on the day had invited a local motivational speaker to speak to the learners, encouraging and inspiring them. After assembly, learners then walked to their respective classrooms to commence with their lessons.

The principal also made time for consultation with parents. Some of the meetings were more of a ‘private’ nature, as a result of the misconduct of a learner. These

sessions were held behind closed doors in the presence of the principal, one deputy principal, an HoD, the parent and the learner.

Interviews

To present and analyse the material from the interviews with the principal, the deputy principal and the HoDs, I abstracted key issues that appear to be significant in the way the principal perceived the role he plays towards the success of the school. In this discussion of the interviews, I treated participants' responses as descriptions of their actual lived experience of school leadership and management in their school, and their views about whether the success of the school can be attributed to the principal.

The principal of School C

Biographical details of the current principal were obtained mainly through formal and informal discussions with various participants as key informants. These key informants were mainly parents and they were requested by the deputy principal to participate in the study. Also, as many electronic documents as could be found containing any information about the school were consulted in order to learn more about the principal. The incumbent principal has been in charge of the school since 2009. Previously, he held the position of a deputy principal for three years at another school in Soweto.

Interview with the principal

The interview with the principal took place in his office. Initially, the principal was reluctant to have me do fieldwork at the school, citing schedule difficulties. This was at the time when the school was preparing for the half-yearly examination. However, he finally agreed to grant me access to the school and for fieldwork to continue. The principal further agreed to the interview being recorded.

The interview carried out with the principal revealed that he was a teacher by profession. According to the principal, the major challenge he faced when he took leadership at the school was connected with discipline, and poor school attendance. He states that his first priority as principal of the school was to create a safe and orderly environment for effective and learning to take place, emphasizing that late-coming has been completely eliminated through a non-negotiable stance against the lack of discipline of both teachers and learners. He says that he makes sure teachers and learners do not come to school late and that in the event of late-coming and absenteeism, certain necessary procedures are followed:

> I also check if teachers are coming late and monitor those who are taking early leave. It is my prerogative to make sure that they fill in the leave form for early departure and even for late-coming.

It is also evident that the principal was concerned with ensuring that the environment was conducive to teaching and learning:

> ...I started to make sure that there was discipline at school and teachers were punctual, teachers were doing what's expected of them. If all teachers are at school obviously there will be order at school, you see [sic].

In this interview extract above, it is evident that the principal placed emphasis on discipline. According to Hill and Hill (1994: 16), learners learn to the best of their abilities in an orderly and safe environment. Researchers like Potgieter, Visser, Van der Bank, Mothata and Squelch (1997: 59) state that if discipline is not taken into consideration, the process is disrupted and that this has a negative effect on the educational attainment of learners.

I asked the principal to describe his role as the head of the school and he responded by saying, "...as the principal, you're an overseer". The principal further states that:

> As the principal I must make sure that teachers are teaching and learners are learning and I achieve this by what I call managing by walking. I always make rounds to check if teachers are in class and all learners are in class.

The principal's responses provide evidence for the significance of leadership and management in enhancing classroom practice and improving learner outcomes. Bush et al. (2010: 162) acknowledge the "international recognition that managing teaching and learning is one of the most important activities for principals and other school leaders":

> ...I worked with teachers so that they understood misconduct and different types of leave because I knew that most of the teachers didn't understand different types of leave. We have timetables for morning and afternoon classes. So we make sure that teachers attend these classes, morning and afternoon classes and I also monitor that. [sic].

When I asked the principal to talk about values which underpin the success of the school, he had this to say:

> ...the moment you start to talk about values you are talking about issues like respect, you are talking about tolerance, you are talking about discipline in terms of they come early to school, I am referring to teachers and learners [sic].

The principal maintains that the school is accountable to the parents, and that:

> ...if they come to our school and find that all learners are in class, teachers are teaching, come the end of the year then they see good results, then that makes parents to be very much happy [sic].

The principal believes that the school draws learners from all areas of Soweto and as far afield as the inner city of Johannesburg because of the reputation that the school has:

> Parents bring their children to our school because of the good reputation of the school. The newspapers were talking about us, the district was talking about us and we are in the top 10 in our district.

When asked to explain how he deals with socio-economic challenges facing the children at his school, the view of the principal was unwavering and his stance very clear on maintaining discipline at the school:

> ...number one in success is the actual attendance because learners must come to school. There is a policy of our school that deals with the attendance of learners. You see, this policy most of the time must be implemented to make sure that it's happening [sic].

The principal also mentioned that there are some positive values that he considers to be the cornerstone of success at the school and one of these values is discipline. One challenge that the school was faced with was substance abuse. In this regard, the school experienced a challenge of outsiders coming to sell drugs to learners at the school. However, because of the positive values instilled in the learners at the school, the school managed to deal with the challenge of drugs:

> ...you see our learners are disciplined, they like education, they come and tell us if there are people selling drugs through the fence. We'd call the police and they come and arrest those selling drugs to our learners.

Another strategy that was used by the principal was to improve teacher motivation, which the principal saw this as key to the success of the school. The principal always worked on increasing and maintain the motivation levels of the teachers. I asked the principal about what he thinks motivates his staff, and he had the following to say:

> Motivation comes from school management, because we are monitoring each and everything that is done. We call the teachers to say, 'You know we believe in you, you can produce the results. We believe in you.

According to the principal, a challenge facing many schools is the manner in which learners are treated from the lower grades. The principal sees the problem as that of not having quality learners who progressing through all the grades, culminating in a quality group of learners in grade 12:

> ...the mistake that we make as principals, as educators, is that we always give learners special marks or extra marks so that they must go to grade 12. We push them and we are not supposed to push them. The moment you push them they're heading for a disaster [sic].

Lastly, the principal mentioned that he shares his strategies and success stories with departmental officials, teachers, learners and parents. His message was one of pride in self. He believes that "Every day, pride [of] self and school must be reinforced. Every day, the integrity of the school must be maintained through learner achievement".

Interview with deputy principal

In the five days spent at the school, the deputy principal was invaluable in assisting me with any information that I requested from in order to better understand leadership at the school. The deputy principal had been with the school since 1992 and he was keen to provide the history of the school by adding to the information I

had already gathered through online research on the background and context of the school.

When I asked the deputy principal about how he sees his own role at the school, his response was:

> ...my role has been to look into the safety first of these children and the safety of the teachers as well, everybody must be safe in terms of stopping this infiltration of drugs coming from outside, because people do come to the fences and sell all those things [sic].

The interview extract provides evidence for the focus of the school, the issue of safety of the learners. The deputy principal placed emphasis on the issue of safety and this is further evidenced in the following response by the deputy principal:

> ...at this school we are trying by all means together with the parents, to be always thinking about the safety of the children. We call parents, we call the Community Policing Forums. The police are also looking after us. That is where we need to start before we come to class. Are we safe as a school? [sic]

The deputy principal further maintains that in terms of discipline, the school has seen over the years that learners at the school do listen and respect the teachers. He considers the school to be 'lucky' in that way because "when you look at all these other schools in the township, children do as they wish".

> ...for all these years I've been a deputy principal of this school our results have not been good. Since I have worked at this school the results were just moderate. What changed it for us were the morning and afternoon classes and checking that all teachers were at school – going according to the book because sometimes people like taking chances. We always compare ourselves with other schools which are good [sic].

The deputy principal says the school has quality teachers:

> ...we do have good teachers, in terms of qualifications, in terms of delivery, in terms of motivating the children to do what they want children to accomplish. We know Grade 12 is the culmination of twelve years of schooling, if we put a good foundation in the lower grades, from grade 8, but we are looking at the school through the eyes of Grade 12 and saying the school is good, but it starts from grade 8 [sic].

Given the socio-economic challenges, when asked about the way in which the school deals with these challenges, the deputy principal noted an example, where graduating learners are asked to donate their uniforms for incoming learners in need. Further, the deputy principal maintains that the school has a positive relationship with the community, especially parents of the children at the school:

> When we go away the school is looked after by the parents because we said to look after the school some of you don't have church buildings, so you can hold your church services here. Our relationship with the community is good.

The deputy principal also mentioned that there are some positive values at the school which he considers to be the cornerstone of success at the school. Amongst others, he mentioned commitment, sacrifice, and the school being results-driven. According to the deputy principal, the school also places a high emphasis on motivating learners:

> ...at assembly we involve community members to come and talk to the children, to motivate them. We hold prayers all the time. People from outside do come and read some verses that are addressing respect, addressing spirituality in general [sic].

Overall, the deputy principal did not present a view that the success of the school hinges on the principal, although the principal was perceived as someone who is committed, caring and supportive in the role he fulfils as the school leader. The principal was seen as someone who was always willing to transform the school. In many respects, it would seem that leadership in this school was driven by a core set of values upheld by various members of staff, including that of community involvement.

Interviews with heads of departments

Three heads of department were involved in the study. The school has a total of seven HoDs. In the discussion of the individual interviews with these heads of department, I treated the responses of the HoDs as descriptions of their actual lived experiences of school leadership and management in their school, and their views about whether the success of the school can be attributed to leadership. The length in service of the HoDs varied. One HoD had been with the school for three years, whilst another HoD has been with the school for a period of fifteen years. The longest-serving member of staff, now an HoD, had been with the school for a period of twenty-five years, with twelve as HoD.

What emerged from the interviews with the HoDs on their perceptions of the success of the school and the role played by the principal towards the success, the HoDs shared the following views:

> ...I like his leadership style because he listens to teachers and he follows protocol. He goes by the book in terms of disciplining teachers, but he is also very supportive.
>
> (School C – HoD1)

It is evident from this interview extract that the principal, as new as he was at the school, was considered to have ushered in a new way of thinking:

A common theme emerging from the interview data with the principal, the deputy principal and the HoDs was the importance of a safe and orderly environment for effective teaching and learning to take place. This was expressed in the following ways:

> ...it is our prerogative to make sure that there is tranquillity at school; that the atmosphere is conducive to effective teaching and learning.
>
> (School C – HoD2)

> ...I often tell teachers about the power of the environment for example, if the environment is dull, there are no activities in the school, say there's minimal sports activities, how do you expect the learners to be creative? [sic]
>
> (School C – HoD1)

Other HoDs saw the importance of discipline as contributing to the success of the school:

> ...when it comes to discipline we are still a little bit harsh, you know. In the sense that hairstyles – girls are not allowed to have braids – as compared to other schools.
>
> (School C – HoD3)

There was also acknowledgement by the heads of department of their key role as part of management of the school:

> ...you know, even our internal policies in terms of discipline, uniform and so on, we take decisions as a collective. So when I say collective decisions as management, I'm talking about financial decisions, curriculum decisions, anything that has got to do with the school, like the general running of the school.
>
> (School C – HoD2)

> ...we've got SSIP classes which is the Secondary School Improvement Programme. We've got 7 o'clock classes in the morning. Some teachers even stay on after school. The principal monitors that process as well.
>
> (School C – HoD3)

> ...other schools tend to focus too much on Grade 12s and the lower grades are not given as much attention. I mean you have to start with the Grade 8 learner if you want good results in Grade 12. You can't just all of a sudden try to mend in Grade 12 [sic].
>
> (School C – HoD1)

> ...I think this problem that I'm going to mention is, it's just here in the township. Parents in the townships don't… I feel they don't do enough to support their children. Because in order for a school to be successful, you know, I think three things here should be involved: the parents, the teacher and the learner [sic].
>
> (School C – HoD2)

Staff morale seems high at the school. This is seen in the extra-ordinary commitment given and the sacrifices many teachers make towards the success of the learners, especially Grade 11 and 12 teachers. One of the HoDs summed it up by saying:

> ...in our school, teachers are very passionate about their job. If the teachers are not passionate about what they're doing or they lack knowledge or are not competent enough, then the school will not do well [sic].
>
> (School C – HoD3)

According to the HoDs, teachers at the school also provide pastoral care because they understand the socio-economic backgrounds of the learners in their care:

> ...learners are given support, you know, like domestic problems at home and talking to the children individually. I'm talking about serious problems – problems that can even involve court cases. The social problems that these kids are experiencing are very severe [sic].
>
> (School C – HoD1)

> ...at the end of the day we are saying the education of the African child can no longer be compromised, can no longer be negotiated, can no longer be postponed. It's as simple as that [sic].
>
> (School C – HoD2)

There was a high degree of consensus amongst the heads of departments about their perception of leadership at the school. However, the views were not conclusive about the degree to which the success of the school is attributable to the principal. The complexity facing the school in terms of being targeted by outsiders selling drugs to learners at the school was raised as an issue by all the participants. The heads of department maintained that there are constant attempts to establish

learners' challenges, and interventions are then put in place to deal with potential obstacles learners are facing.

Focus Group Discussions

In addition to the semi-structured interviews and site observations, two separate focus group discussions were held with teachers and parents.

Focus group discussion with teachers

The deputy principal invited the participation of teachers in the study and it was opened to all the teachers at the school. Three teachers volunteered to take part in the study. In this manner, participation was voluntary. Teachers in the focus group discussion were asked to comment upon leadership practices at the school which they considered to be pivotal towards the success of the school. The focus group discussions also assisted in determining how the school promotes best practices.

Perceptions about leadership at the school show that teachers have a high degree of trust in the school principal:

> ...he motivates us, he encourages us and he is very supportive [sic].
>
> (School C – Teacher 1)

When asked to say more about commitment at the school, one of teachers had this to say:

> ...I was going to say the principal and his deputies lead by example because for instance, when they talk of punctuality, you'll never ever get an HOD or a deputy principal coming late to school [sic].
>
> (School C – teacher 3)

The principal was also seen as a leader who is a motivator and has encouraged the collaborative culture and a positive work ethic in the school.

> ...if one of us is struggling with content, we normally have something like team teaching and the principal encourages it [sic].
>
> (School C – Teacher 2)

> ...the principal checks that all Grade 12 learners attend morning, afternoon and Saturday classes [sic].
>
> (School C – Teacher 3)

When asked to comment on what brings about the school success, some of the teachers responded by saying:

> ...we want our children to be disciplined even in other areas like sorting out their lives at school. Like having a working schedule for themselves, a study timetable and so on. So I think that does contribute in a way.
>
> (School C – Teacher 1)

The interview extract provides evidence that the high level of commitment, is a result of high expectations set by the school towards the success of its learners. However, the HoDs in the focus group discussion believed that it is possible to improve on this in order to ensure that the school achieves the desired result. As one HoD stated:

> ...I still don't feel this school is doing well enough, you know, until I see a 100% pass rate in Grade 12 [sic].
>
> (School C – Teacher 1)

Collaboration seems to be a norm at the school:

> ...we work together as a team and this is very important because it strengthens working relations, as well as the relationship between the teachers and the learners themselves [sic].
>
> (School C – Teacher 2)

> ...everyone knows that we need to work together, leadership, teachers, learners and parents [sic].
>
> (School C – Teacher 3)

The school also focused on discipline:

> ...you know, for us to be where we are as a school, we needed to be disciplined [sic].
>
> (School C – Teacher 2)

The teacher's perspectives provided insights into the practices of the principal. Whilst the the teachers interviewed were full of admiration for the principal, there was no conclusive evidence that he contributed significantly in the success of the school. It seems the school has been successful despite the incumbent principal.

Focus group discussion with the parents

The focus group discussion with three parents was held outside on the school premises, as there were no classrooms or venues available for the discussion. At the time of the focus group discussion, learners were involved in half-yearly examinations and all the classrooms were in use. I asked the parents to talk about how they perceive the school principal. It was evident that the principal is held in high esteem by the parents.

> ...there have been a lot of positive changes at the school over the years, including security and I feel that my child is safe here [sic].
>
> (School C – Parent 1)

> ...the principal and the deputy principal are over-worked. They have to teach and also be responsible for ensuring discipline on school grounds [sic].
>
> (School C – Parent 3)

> ...I have seen the principal walking around with a note-book and he writes down all the learners who are misbehaving at the school.
>
> (School C – Parent 2)

> ...When the bell rings in the morning, you find the principal, the deputy principal and some of the teachers waiting at the gate, shouting to the children to hurry up to school [sic].
>
> (School C – Parent 3)

The parents placed high value on the staff at the school being available to them for personal contact time, and the school being sufficiently available and accessible to parents that they had a sense that home and school are working together in partnership:

> If you have a problem at home with your child, you are welcome to come and discuss your child's problem with the principal. If you are willing as a parent to have one of the staff members to come to your home to assist, they do come to check living conditions at your home.
>
> (School C - Parent 3)

Chapter Overview

The case reported in this chapter involved face-to-face interviews with the principal, the deputy principal and four heads of departments. Two focus group discussions were held with teachers and parents. Documentary analysis and observations were also used to obtain data for School C. These various data sets compared favourably to provide a perspective on the leadership practices at the school. Observational data largely confirmed what was found in the interview data. Observations suggested that the school showed, first and foremost, high commitment to the safety of the learners at school followed by high expectations towards achieving positive results.

The name of the school, is seen as ‘symbolic’ to what is happening at the school – a description of high-levels of commitment displayed by a collective effort to make a difference in the lives of the learners at the school, the staff, parents and the community at large. The involvement of parents in the school matters has contributed to the success the school has seen over the years. The commitment of parents to the school translates into their own children receiving quality education at the school. Every day, the principal demonstrated, through his own example, how commitment to breaking the back of poverty can make children from high-poverty contexts better citizens and better people.

The next chapter presents the analysis and interpretation of results.

CHAPTER SEVEN

ANALYSIS

Introduction

This chapter builds on the findings set out in the previous three chapters (chapter 4, 5 and 6). The aim of this chapter is to provide a cross-case analysis of the research and to understand the various elements of the cases through a critical examination of the relationships between them. Mouton (2001: 137) explains data analysis as "breaking up the data into manageable themes, patterns, trends and relationships". The structure of the chapter is determined mainly by the main themes emerging from data analysis of the three case studies of principals (a 'grounded' approach). Themes emerging from the findings were then interpreted in order to make sense of the data and to answer the research questions. Mouton adds that "data analysis also helps the researcher to answer the research question in a systematic way" (ibid).

I also used the existing literature to describe, narrate and analyse the findings. Miles & Huberman (1994) suggest that the process of inductive cross-case analysis provides a rich source of data about the phenomenon studied. In this study, the cross-case analysis provided insights into the characteristics of successful school

leadership, as well as into features of leadership which support and enhance academic performance in the disadvantaged township secondary schools.

Data analysis began as soon as the first set of data was gathered and it ran parallel to the rest of the data collection process. In the analysis, I compared and interpreted the data to generate cross-case themes. Firstly, I coded the data. My coding of participants' statements went through a repetitive process of constantly checking and re-evaluating the codes across the three case schools. Initially, I used these codes with tentative categories assigned to them and I progressively re-grouped and reclassified these categories until I could establish a more specific category. For instance, the final categories of "setting goals"; "creating a culture of high expectations and hard work"; "capacity building"; "discipline"; "managing teaching and learning"; "frequent monitoring of learners' progress"; "parental and community involvement" and "focus on learners' socio-economic and educational needs" were derived from the analysis of illustrative quotes in the three Findings Chapters.

Thereafter, I looked for patterns from the categories that I had established from the data to determine how they might explain successful school leadership practices in challenging circumstances. The approach adopted in the study was grounded in the data, but it also showed consideration for Leithwood et al's framework, the aims of the study and research questions. Table 7.1 demonstrates how the codes and categories were derived from the data:

Codes		Categories
Discipline		
Class attendance		Setting goals
Focus on core business of the school, teaching and learning		Creating a culture of high expectations and hard work
Encouraging parental and community involvement.		Capacity building
Committed staff		Discipline
HoDs fully responsible for own Departments		Managing teaching and learning
Adopting most impoverished learners		Frequent monitoring of learners' progress
Good relationship with community		Parental and community involvement
Results-driven		Focus on learners' socio-economic and educational needs

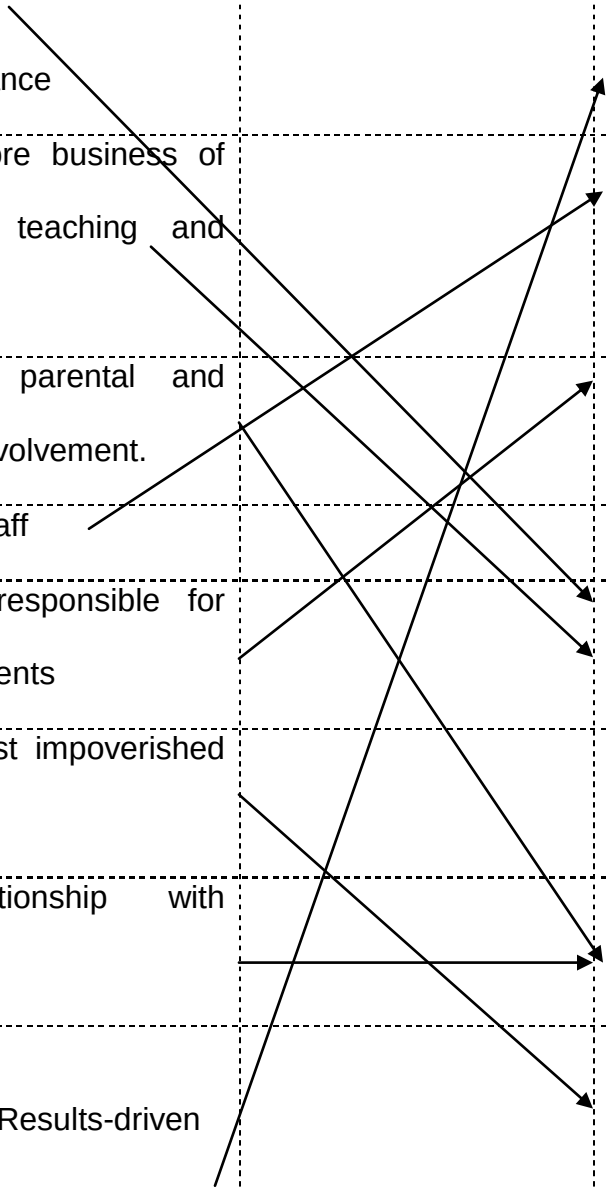

Table 7.1: The relationship between codes and categories

After I had gone through the process of coding and deriving categories, I developed a “framework for analysis” which underpinned the emerging themes (see Appendix 1). This was to assist with drawing out patterns from the categories. As data analysis entails surfacing interrelationships in the data, the framework for analysis allowed me to further compare themes from the three case schools to find continuities and discontinuities between and within these schools. Further, I used triangulation to cross-validate among the various data sources and my data collecting methods. MacMillan and Schumacher (2010: 379) see triangulation as being done to “find regularities in the data” and “to compare different sources, situations and methods to see whether the same pattern keeps recurring” (ibid). I cross-checked, for example, the theme of “*maintain discipline*” by comparing data found in the interviews of other participants, school documents and my field observation notes.

Using my analytic framework, I integrated all the responses from the participants and subsequently eight (8) themes emerged. In reflecting on the themes, I generated four distinct dimensions. The use of the term “dimension” is not new in educational leadership literature. Robinson (2007: 5) uses the term ‘dimension’ within the context of educational leadership to denote “a set of related practices”. Table 7.2 presents the dimensions, together with the related themes.

Table 7.2 shows the relationship between each of the dimensions and the related themes:

DIMENSIONS	EMERGING THEMES
Strategic	• Goal-setting • Creating an organizational climate of high expectations and hard work towards success. • Capacity building
Regulatory	• Maintaining discipline
Pedagogic	• Managing teaching and learning. • Frequent monitoring of learner progress.
Compensatory	• Building and strengthening home-school relations • Parent and community involvement

Table 7.2: Dimensions and related themes of leadership

The four dimensions in the study are grounded in the data and are determined mainly by the themes emerging from data analysis of the three case schools. The dimensions are interrelated and they show how the case schools were successful by focusing on various practices.

Strategic Dimension

The strategic dimension deals with three related themes: goal setting; an organizational climate of high expectations and building capacity. The first theme can be seen to be strategic, in the sense that it signifies how the principals set the goals through articulating the vision and values of the school. The other themes are linked to strategy as they show how the principals created a positive school climate for achievement, and how they built leadership capacity in their schools. International research shows that vision is an important component of leadership (e.g Leithwood, et al. 2006). Harris (2009) suggested that putting a well-defined vision and established values in place, can raise staff morale and pupil expectations as well as convey a sense of direction for the school.

Goal setting

There were variations in how the schools set their goals and what goals were set. This theme considers three main issues. Firstly, the theme considers whether there was goal setting by the principals. Secondly, it relates to whether goal setting translated into a vision that was articulated. Thirdly, the theme also considers how the vision was articulated. Hill (2001: 1) sees "the prime task of school heads as exercising leadership that results in a shared vision of the directions to be pursued by the school". Taking Hill's view into account, it would seem that the articulation of a clear vision has considerable potential to provide direction to the school (see also

Bush and Glover, 2003). This is consistent with Leithwood et al's framework where they noted that creating vision and setting direction was one of the core practices of successful principals. However, Begley (1999) noted that principals may vary in the extent to which they are able to develop and articulate a shared vision for their schools.

The articulation of a clear vision is exemplified in school A, with parents knowing about the goals that were set by the school. For instance, one parent mentioned that the principal had stated very clearly that the school was aiming for a 100% pass rate across the grades. This shows that the vision of school A has indeed cascaded to the parents and that this level of awareness was confirmed through discussion with other stakeholders. In school B, the school vision is exemplified in the view of the principal that the school should achieve high completion rates at Grade 12 and high numbers of entrants to university. In school C, the vision was not explicitly articulated and there was no document stating the vision of the school.

Variation in the visions of the case schools was not only based on the focus of the visions, but on how the vision was driven. In school A, the school vision seems to have been driven by the principal. In this regard, Bush et al (2003) raised concerns about "the extent to which the leader's vision may be imposed on the school". School A's teachers stated that the principal was to some extent autocratic but accepted that this was necessary in order to improve the school. Nevertheless, school A has shown remarkable academic achievements under the guidance of the

current principal. Haberman (2003: 2) puts the onus on the principal to create a clear school vision. He adds that, to be effective in this role, a principal should “create a common vision, build effective teams to implement that vision, and engender commitment to task” (ibid).

In school B, the vision seems to have been driven by the senior management team. This is exemplified in the meetings that were held by the principal together with the two deputy principals. HoDs expressed reservations at the two-tier management structure of the school as they felt it undermined them as members of the school management team. Cibulka and Nakayama (2000: 4) warn that, for teachers to be an integral part of the change process, they need to do more than blindly accept a principal’s vision. They add that “too often schools are organized as administrative hierarchies rather than as groups of professionals working toward shared goals” (ibid). Whilst school B has shown excellent learner achievement, it seems that this was driven by senior management rather than the whole staff.

Goodman (1997) asserted that teachers should be partners with the principal in creating the school vision, or they may even be the sole creators of the vision. This is consistent with school C, in the sense that the vision of the school seems to have been driven by a teacher-led, collaborative culture. Teachers mentioned that it was a collective responsibility to ensure the success of the school. HoDs said that everyone puts their weight behind the success of the school. Discussions with other stakeholders confirmed the teacher-led vision of the school.

The notion of collective self-efficacy of teachers seems to explain the teacher-led, collaborative nature of school C (see Hoy, Tarter and Woolfolk Hoy, 2006). Bandura (1997: 137) explained self-efficacy as “an individual’s beliefs about her or his capacity to organize and execute the actions required in order to produce a given level of attainment. In the case of school C, teachers’ collective beliefs about the efficacy of the school (Goddard, Hoy and Hoy, 2000) can be argued to have contributed significantly towards the success of the school by promoting learner achievement. The relatively new incumbency of the principal in school C militates against drawing firm conclusions about his leadership influence on the success of the school. However, the interview with the principal does provide some evidence of managerial leadership in school C. For example, the principal could not clearly articulate the vision of the school, nor was there a document stating it. The principal could only articulate managerial features such as prolific monitoring of late-coming, absenteeism, and class attendance.

The evidence from this sub-theme indicates that, whilst vision was an important aspect observed at the case schools, only two schools (A and B) could clearly articulate their visions for achieving success and discussions with various stakeholders confirmed this level of awareness. Evidence also suggests that the vision of school A was principal-driven while that of school B was driven by a strong School Management Team. As noted above, school C does not have an explicit

vision but seems to have an implicit vision which is teacher-led and focused on improving learner outcomes.

Creating an organizational climate of high expectations and hard work

This theme looks at the extent to which the principals created a climate of high expectations and hard work within their schools. These issues are connected to the notion that positive attitudes within the school community contribute towards a culture of high-performance. Lezotte (1991: 2) maintains that “high expectations for success will be judged, not only by the initial staff beliefs and behaviours, but also by the organization’s response when some students do not learn”. Students’ performance has also been linked to their levels of motivation (Tavani and Losh, 2003). Further, several studies have also shown a relationship between high teacher expectations and student achievement (Berliner, 1985; Levine & Lezotte, 1995). In supporting the view of the relationship between high teacher expectations and student achievement, Leithwood et al (2006) maintain that successful school leaders have strong positive influences on staff motivation, commitment and working conditions, leading to enhanced classroom practices.

The three case schools are high-performing schools and they demonstrated the culture of high-performance in various ways. In school A, teachers clearly stated that they were inspired by the commitment of their principal, and they believed that their level of motivation was positively influenced by the way the principal led the school.

This is exemplified in classroom visits being received positively by teachers of school A, mostly because the principal also invited teachers in turn to observe his own teaching. The statement by the principal of school B that “everything that we do as a school is about ensuring that learners succeed” exemplifies the culture of high-performance in school B, which focused on learner achievement. One teacher expressed that, if any teacher does not produce the expected results in their subject, they were letting the whole school down. In school C, teachers said that they believed they were capable of helping all their students achieve academic excellence. This comment signifies a culture of high-performance in school C and this was confirmed by other participants in the study.

Maden (2001: 33) comments that “schools facing challenging circumstances have to go beyond normal efforts because of the challenges that their children bring with them to school”. The principal of school A mentioned that he has high expectations of both teachers and learners, aimed at promoting the success of the school. To achieve this, the principal also called learners’ meetings, particularly of Grade 12 learners. During these meetings that learners received constant motivation. In school B, one HoD revealed that teachers “go an extra mile in assisting learners to achieve at the school”.

The concept of academic optimism is useful in framing our understanding of high levels of achievement in the case schools. McGuigan and Hoy (2006: 37) see academic optimism as a characteristic of schools that are academically successful. Furthermore, Tschannen-Moran, Woolfolk Hoy and Hoy (1998: 202) see academic

optimism as comprising three related concepts, namely teachers' sense of efficacy, teachers' trust in students (and parents), and teachers' focus on creating a positive academic environment for students. Woolfolk Hoy, Hoy and Kurz (2008: 4-5) add that teachers' sense of efficacy is defined as a teacher's "judgment of his or her capability to bring about the desired outcomes of student engagement and learning, even among those students who may be difficult or unmotivated". The three case schools are remarkable in that they managed to thrive in contexts where neighbouring schools showed symptoms of crisis (see Christie, 1998; 2001). In this regard, academic optimism may explain how the schools were able to raise, and to sustain, high expectations of the learners in challenging contexts.

Capacity building

Capacity building is regarded as an important feature of successful schools (Harris and Chapman, 2002). In Leithwood et al's framework, successful principals focus on developing people and this is consistent with Harris and Chapman's view. The principals of school A and B used a number of strategies to build capacity and to bring out the best in their schools. There was no evidence of capacity-building in school C. One of the strategies used by both school A and B was to work with, and through teams as well as individuals. In school A, one HoD was afforded an opportunity to be the acting principal while the principal was away at a conference. This was a unanimous decision by members of the School Management Team (SMT) and they recognised the merit of empowering individual SMT members in various ways.

Capacity building extended to all members of the SMT in school A and it is exemplified in SMT members being able to make critical decisions within their departments. One HoD stated that if any one of them went to the principal to seek advice, the principal would at first ask if they had thought about possible solutions within the department. In this way, it is clear that there was a deliberate and conscious effort towards capacity building within school A, in particular.

The principals of Schools A and B emphasized the importance of motivating staff and students and they spoke of the importance of creating opportunities for dialogue and communication with staff as a feature of capacity building within a functioning school. The principal of school A stresses that when he leaves the school, there should not be a consequent loss of direction. The principal also highlighted that "when teachers are empowered, they feel good and usually do their best to prove that they can do the job well". This is contrary to school C where the principal seems to have played the role of maintaining systems that he found fully-functional at the school. Teamwork seems to be the main aspect that was crucial towards school C reaching its desired goals.

Collaboration and teamwork in school C seemed to have developed bottom-up, as against a top-down approach. All participants in school C expressed that the commitment, dedication and enthusiasm of the teachers were significant factors contributing to the school achieving its good results. In this regard, West-Burnham (2008) advocates a cultural shift from dependence on leaders to one that values the

collective, shared potential of leadership across the organisation. Boyd and McGree (1995) maintain that teachers who become leaders often experience personal gains, intellectual and professional growth, and decreased sense of isolation. Recent research confirms that good teachers contribute significantly to students' academic growth (see Goe and Stickler, 2008) and that "school leadership is second only to classroom teaching as an influence on pupil learning" (Leithwood, Day, Sammons, Harris and Hopkins, 2006: 6).

Regulatory Dimension

As set out in table 7.1, the theme related to the regulatory dimension is maintaining discipline. This theme can be seen to be regulatory, signifying the way in which the principals 'regulated' the school environment. The theme also points to the way in which the principals worked towards creating a safe and orderly space for teachers and learners to work in the schools. Safety and order are necessary conditions for effective teaching and learning (Chubb and Moe, 1990; Mayer, Mullens, Moore & Ralph, 2000).The regulatory dimension is grounded in the data and is determined mainly by the issues emerging from data analysis of the three case schools.

<u>Maintaining discipline</u>

A notable feature of the case schools was that they had clear disciplinary practices in place, although these practices were not identical in all three schools. Blandford

(1998: 5) stated that “managing discipline is an essential element in educational practice and at a time when teachers and managers are anxious about reported increases in violence and other forms of anti-social behaviour”. Whilst Blandford refers to the United Kingdom in writing this, what he states is nonetheless consistent with Mabeba and Prinsloo’s (2000) observation, and van Wyk’s (2001) comment, that discipline is a major concern in many township schools in South Africa. In this regard, Potgieter, Visser, Van der Bank, Mothata and Squelch (1997) warned that, if discipline is not addressed, there will be a negative effect on the educational attainment of learners.

In the three case schools, disciplinary action against late-coming, absenteeism and substance abuse were directly linked to enforcing school attendance; and this towards improved learner achievement, mainly in Grade 12. This is exemplified in strict and regular keeping of class registers as this enabled the schools to know whether learners were present or absent. The issue of class attendance is a matter of debate. Moore (2003: 370) noted that there are other factors cited for poor performance, other than class attendance. These factors may be related to personal motivation and family circumstances (ibid). However, it seems that class attendance was essential for the success of the three case study schools. In controlling attendance, for example, school A would contact parents in the case that a learner was found to be absent from school, if even for a day. In school B, learners would be locked out of the school premises for coming late and, when the day’s programme of

teaching and learning had begun, the late-comers would be let in and led to the principal's office to account for their lateness.

There is evidence, though, that not all three schools used accountable and legitimized disciplinary practices. For example, in school C, one teacher pointed out that the school still used corporal punishment as a measure to control late-coming and absenteeism. The teacher acknowledged that they were aware corporal punishment was against the law. Since the abolition of corporal punishment (1997), cases have been reported in the media where teachers had failed to comply with the law in this regard (see Rossouw, 2003; Erasmus, 2009).

A further distinction to make amongst the three case schools is that the external environment was less of a threat to school B than it was to school A and C. Given that school B is in one of the newer suburbs of Soweto, it appears that crime and substance abuse in this area are not as acute as in other parts of Soweto. However, school B still had to deal with issues of late-coming and absenteeism. Participants in the study emphasized that the deputy principal consistently worked towards curbing lateness of both teachers and learners.

One way in which all three schools also maintained order and discipline was in sustaining close personal interactions with the learners. Participants across case schools affirmed that every learner was personally known to at least some members of staff, even if not all. What this implied was that if there were problems with

individual learners, these would be easily noticed and action could be swiftly taken. School C presents a particular feature in this regard. Teachers were instrumental in forming personal interactions with the learners, whereas in school A and B closer links with the learners were encouraged by either the principal (in school A) or the school management team (in school B).

Another consistent feature of the schools in the study was that there were concerted efforts to buffer the schools from external distractions. It would seem that one of the biggest challenges facing township secondary schools was the safety of teachers and learners. The communities surrounding the schools are characterized by crime, substance abuse and teenage pregnancy. However, the case schools managed to minimize the effects of such problems spilling over into the school and negatively affecting learner achievement (Christie and Potterton, 1997). The three case schools, to varying degrees, provided a demarcated safe and orderly space for teachers and students. Hill and Hill (1994: 16) say that learners learn to the best of their abilities in an orderly and safe environment. This is supported by Levin and Nolan (1991) who maintain that, in addition to the obvious impact on the teaching and learning environment, disruptive behaviour can also affect the learners' safety.

In the case study schools, there were clear physical boundaries of space. All three schools are fenced, although Schools B and C had been vandalised on numerous occasions. Therefore, providing safety within their boundaries seems to have been a need that the three case schools took seriously, even though two of the three case

schools (school B and C) were not always entirely successful. Whilst school A had been a target of vandals before the arrival of the incumbent principal, it would seem that he managed to forge very strong links with the community as the school has never experienced any vandalism since his arrival. One HoD in school B expressed concern at what seems to be unabated scourges of vandalism targeted at the school. The deputy principal of school C pointed out that he was fighting an endless battle in keeping out drug peddlers from the school.

Overall, in all three case schools, lateness and absenteeism on the part of both staff and students were not condoned and were kept at a minimum. All three principals mentioned that drastic measures were taken if a teacher was late, especially what they called 'habitual latecomers'. In school A, the school siren went off at intervals in the morning. This was done to inform learners of the impending start to the school day so that even those who were still far from the school could hurry up.

Charles (2002) argues that "the management of discipline requires that educators make learners feel emotionally comfortable and physically safe so that learners can develop intrinsic discipline and accountability for their actions" (p.13). This is consistent with school C which focused on ensuring a safe environment for learners and staff. The deputy principal of school C was particularly firm on the need for maintaining order and stability at the school and he strongly expressed the need to protect learners from negative external influences. This is exemplified in repairs made to the school fence each time there was a case of vandalism. The school also

arranged regular police patrols around its perimeters. School C also formed strong links with community organizations such as the Local Community Police Forum.

Pedagogic Dimension

The significance of the pedagogic dimension is based on Bush and Glover's (2009: 162) claim that there is "international recognition that managing teaching and learning is one of the most important activities for principals and other school leaders". As set out in table 7.1, themes related to the pedagogic dimension were designated as 'committing to teaching and learning' and 'frequent monitoring of learner progress'. These themes can be seen to be pedagogic in that they impact upon how the principals manage teaching and learning.

Bush and Glover (2009) further suggest that a principal focused strongly on managing teaching and learning would undertake activities such as ensuring the availability of appropriate learning and teaching support materials (LTSM); ensuring that lessons take place; evaluating learner performance through scrutiny of examination results and internal assessments; by monitoring the work of HoDs, through scrutiny of their work plans and portfolios and by arranging a programme of class visits followed up by feedback to educators. These activities form the basis for discussion within the two themes relating to pedagogy.

Managing teaching and learning

Bush et al. (2010: 162) assert that the core purpose of principalship is to “enable the creation and support of conditions under which high quality teaching and learning takes place”. This is consistent with a South African study conducted by Christie and Potterton (1997: 97), which showed that successful schools, especially those in disadvantaged communities, were characterised by the central place given to teaching and learning. The case schools considered teaching and learning as their primary purpose, although the practices of the principals in providing support for teaching and learning varied.

The principal of school A focused on monitoring teachers’ work in the classroom, observing and commenting on what worked well and what did not. This was accompanied by keeping track of teachers’ professional development needs. The principals of schools B and C did not conduct classroom visits. However, the principal of school B ensured that the deputy principals and HoDs spend time with teachers discussing their work, although this was done in the staffroom and no classroom observations were conducted. It would seem that school B relied on ensuring that HoDs monitor the work of teachers within their departments. This is exemplified in meetings held with individual teachers, where teachers were required to account for the performance of learners in each subject within a department.

The notion of ‘accountability through pupil assessment’ (Gipps & Goldstein, 1983) appears to explain the approach adopted by school B in improving learner achievement. In school C, the principal did not make classroom visits to observe teachers’ work. However, school C has managed to achieve excellent learner outcomes over the years, even prior to the arrival of the incumbent principal, and this through a strong culture of teacher collaboration. The teacher-led culture of collaboration in school C is supported by Lambert’s (2002: 37) notion that “the old model of formal, one-person leadership leaves the substantial talents of teachers largely untapped”. Whilst a case can be made for what appears to be a teacher-led culture at school C, the leadership role of the principal was not prominent in this school.

The italicised sub-sections below are informed by Bush and Glover’s (2009) work. They state that within the South African context, a principal strongly focused on managing teaching and learning would undertake the following activities:

Ensuring the availability of appropriate learning and teaching support materials (LTSM)

The three schools all saw the importance of making learning and teaching support materials (LTSMs) available to all learners but, in practice, they were not always available. It is important to note Van der Berg’s view (2008: 3) that educational resources (assumed in this study to be inclusive of all learning and teaching support

materials, such as textbooks), ought to be converted into educational performance. In this regard, LTSMs should be seen alongside teachers' and leaders' capacity to use textbooks for the educational benefit of the learners.

In school A, there were more LTSMs as a result of extensive fund-raising by the principal. School B and C depended on resources readily available at the school from previous years' procurement processes. Retrieval systems are not always effective in school B and C, however, and the schools are struggling to provide a book per learner for each subject. School A has a library, a science laboratory, a technical centre and a media centre. However, these resource centres have been turned into normal classrooms due to a shortage of classroom space. School B only has a computer centre which has been the target of vandalism on numerous occasions. School C does not have a library, but it has an under-resourced science laboratory. Teachers stated that there was a need to 'resource the science laboratory' and they all agreed on the need to have a computer centre.

The implications for effective teaching and learning at the case schools are that learners may be confined to rote learning rather than to meaningful learning (see Mayer, 2002). Without the necessary resources, such as a library, they do not have the opportunities to discover ideas and information for themselves. Learners learn what the teachers tell them, and cannot support their learning through additional LTMSs and have to rely largely on what they are told by the teachers (see Christie

and Potterton, 1997). However, the availability of LTSMs should not be seen separately from other factors that may impact on learner outcomes (see below).

Ensuring that lessons take place

The three case schools ensured that lessons took place. This is exemplified in various ways. For instance, the schools had teachers' files showing yearly learning programmes and weekly schedules. This showed that the schools had well-organized programmes of teaching and learning. The learning programmes were linked to well-coordinated timetables, and teachers and learners were working inside classrooms. The level of efficiency observed was also connected to attendance at school by staff and learners, effective discipline, and teaching in classrooms. Participants at the three case schools maintained that they used all available time during school hours. This is consistent with other research findings that *'time on task'* is an important ingredient of success (see for example Jansen, 2000, 2001). Chisholm et al. (2005) also identified that many South African teachers in poorly-performing schools spend less than half their time teaching. In contrast, Malcolm et al. (2000) and Christie et al. (2007) found that high-performing schools in disadvantaged communities highly valued teaching time.

All three schools provided additional support to learners through extra-tuition programmes. The extra-tuition programme is scheduled as a regular and monitored study time after hours, for teaching and learning.This entailed morning and afternoon

classes for Grade 12 classes. The extra-tuition programme also extended to Saturdays and Sundays. This clearly shows the commitment and willingness to sacrifice on the part of the teachers at these schools. However, teachers from Schools A and B remarked that they were constantly under pressure to maintain high standards the schools have achieved.

Overall, teachers in the three case schools worked hard and in a co-operative way to provide high-quality education, including voluntary extra lessons, especially for all Grade 12 learners. In Schools A and B, teachers said that they even keep registers of extra lessons in order to ensure that learners knew it was not optional to attend extra-tuition classes. In school C, there was no obligation for learners to attend extra-tuition classes arranged by the school. However, learners knew that it was compulsory to attend the Senior Secondary School Improvement Programme (SSIP) which was arranged by the Gauteng Department of Education for all secondary schools in the province. Teachers of school C commented that they always derived intense satisfaction from seeing their learners achieve well. As a result, they are always looking at producing even better results every year.

Frequent monitoring and evaluation of learner progress

The second theme related to the pedagogic dimension is frequent monitoring and evaluation of learner progress and Lezotte (1991) sees monitoring of learner progress as essential for improving individual learner performance. To influence

learner achievement and improve results, the three case schools frequently monitored learner progress. Monitoring and evaluation of learner performance was done through the scrutiny of examination results and internal assessments. Teachers mentioned that they used tests on a regular basis, as well as quarterly and half-yearly examinations, to measure student progress.

All three case schools had a School Assessment Team (SAT). Whilst the establishment of the SATs was statutory, the case schools seemed to comply fully with the requirements of the establishing SATs and focusing on school-based assessment. The principals said that they ensured that SAT teams met on a quarterly basis in order to evaluate learner performance. Special attention was given to those learners who partially achieve and to those who did not achieve at all. In schools A and B, there were special curriculum delivery management plans in place. In these plans, teachers were expected to submit their subject targets and improvement plans and thereafter to discuss how learner performance could be improved. As part of the process of evaluating learner performance, there was constant feedback given to the learners and their parents. The principal of school C could not produce a curriculum delivery management plan. However, he stated that he is aware that “high-performing schools in Soweto have such a plan”. He pointed out that he was still working on putting systems in place at the school in this regard.

There was also individual interaction between teacher and student which provided the teacher with opportunities to evaluate progress. Black and William (1997) reported that such interactions provided learners with the opportunity to evaluate

their own progress and to communicate any concerns or needs to the teacher. All three case schools implemented teacher-learner joint reviews of learners' work. This enabled an accurate evaluation of progress, and provided teachers with valuable suggestions for interventions where necessary. There was also positive feedback offered to the learners. This provided learners with valuable motivation and encouragement which helped to change learners' perceptions of their abilities, often from a negative outlook to a positive one.

In school A, teachers said they conducted what they called 'academic interventions'. These were short tutoring sessions with individual or small groups of learners and these sessions were conducted in the morning and the afternoon. In school B, this involved teachers working with high-risk learners on a regular basis. This was done to continuously monitor learners' levels of understanding and to determine ways in which to address any problem areas. In school C, teachers said they relied on evaluating learner portfolios (collections of learners' work completed over a specified time period). Teachers saw portfolios as useful for providing an in-depth look into learners' progress in specific subject areas, as well as an overview of their overall achievement.

Ensuring that HoDs monitor the work of educators within their subjects

Southworth's (2004) view is that monitoring involves visiting classrooms, observing teachers and giving them feedback thereafter. It is done to establish whether teaching and learning takes place in a satisfactory way and to help identify areas

where teachers require assistance. O'Sullivan (2002) maintains that quality in education can only be attained if there is systematic observation and monitoring of what is happening in the classrooms.

In school B, all SMT members monitored teaching and learning, and they visited teachers' classrooms to observe how teachers were handling and delivering lessons. Whilst the principal of school C highlighted that one of his major roles was to manage teaching and learning, teachers said they met regularly, on their own accord, to discuss teaching and learning. The principal of school A made time to monitor classroom teaching and learning and ensured that individual assessments of teachers and learners were carried out.

In all three case schools, poor quality teaching was not ignored. When it did arise, support systems were put in place to assist any teacher who required help and guidance. This manner of teacher support is exemplified in school B, where a combination of structured support, monitoring, and an individual development programme addressed the problem of poor quality teaching. For instance, in the year 2008, the school obtained an average Grade 12 pass rate of 64%. This was lower than the school had achieved in the past three years. This was attributed to one Mathematics teacher whose performance was considered to be questionable. However, the teacher received the necessary support and the results improved again thereafter.

In school A, the principal had regular one-on-one discussions with teachers to establish whether there were any specific individual needs. School A maintained that they had well-qualified teachers and that their consistently high-performance was testimony to their high-calibre. In school C, there seems to be self-monitoring of teachers. One teacher said that, whilst they were not against being monitored, there was no reason for it because they knew what they were doing and the school results showed that they do their work well.

The principal of school A visited classes and talked to learners, so as to gain an understanding of what was taking place in the various classrooms. In addition, the principal of school A focused on learner support through holding meetings with learners, especially with those in Grade 12. The principal of school B relied on the HoDs for class visits and monitoring of teaching and learning. While the principal of school C did not visit classrooms, it seems that there was reliance on feedback from the teachers regarding what was happening in the classroom. As Leithwood and Riehl (2003: 4) suggest, “leadership has significant effects on student learning, second only to the effects of the quality of curriculum and teachers’ instruction”.

Compensatory Dimension

As set out in table 7.1, there are two themes related to the compensatory dimension. The first theme focuses on building and strengthening home-school relations. The second theme looks at parent and community involvement. The first theme is also

linked to the way in which the case schools addressed the social and educational needs of the learners. The first theme is consistent with what Christie and Potterton (1997) called the culture of concern. This signifies the schools' sense of agency and responsibility towards creating favourable conditions for learner success. Levin (1995: 30) argues that education is directly and strongly affected by poverty and that any concern about poverty is by default an important educational issue.

Building and strengthening home-school relations

Honig, Kahne and McLaughlin (2001) propose that teaching can be enhanced by teachers becoming familiar with students' families. It appears that a strong commitment to the welfare of all learners in the three case schools led to a sense of belonging on the part of the communities associated with the schools, albeit to varying degrees. In school A, the school prided itself on the fact that teachers, learners and parents viewed the school as being a 'family' and that most of the learners come from the nearby community. In school B, the demographics are such that only 3% of the learners live in the immediate local community. The school serves the poorest areas further afield, mainly comprising learners from so-called informal settlements. However, the principal commented that the success of all learners at the school, through education, was a concern shared by all the stakeholders at the school.

In schools A and B, principals mentioned that learners who are really struggling at home were adopted by individual members of staff. This is reflected in the visits that the principals of schools A and B personally made to learners' homes to discuss any critical issues pertaining to the learner. This was further seen in school C liaising with voluntary and welfare agencies in order to assist learners with their social and educational challenges. This was expressed by one of the deputy principals as "we have to go beyond the call of duty to assist our learners"**.**

Whilst all three case schools seemed focused on nurturing learners in their schools, and strengthening relations with learners' homes, each school had a unique sense of community identity (Day, 2005: 580). The body of literature addressing concepts such as self-concept, motivation, and school-family relationships, attest to the strength of the home-school relationship (Gilligan, 1982; Noddings, 1984; Beck, 1994; Epstein, 1995; Penry, 1996; and McDonald, 1996). Stakeholders in all three schools mentioned that they depended on family support as a source of strength. Schools A and B seem however to have managed to build much stronger relationships with families than school C.

The principal of school A claimed that, because of the strong relationship that the school has with the families of the children, the school was seen by families as their 'second home'. In school B and C, involving parents was seen to be generally 'fair'. Both schools consistently encouraged parents to be involved in school matters. The principal of school B did this by visiting parents and children in their homes. In school

C, one HoD commented that the involvement of parents was neither stable nor constant. However, the deputy principal of school C maintains that the whole staff works hard to build and strengthen home-school relations. Close similarities can be drawn between school A and school B in terms of relationships between home and school. As with school, A, the principal of school B encouraged all his staff members to forge strong links with their learners' homes.

Participants in school A expressed the need for the school to engage and interact with learners' home background. The principal clearly described the connection that he saw between building positive relationships and learner success. Schools B and C seemed to have extended home-school relations to include providing the schools as community centres. For instance, both schools B and C are used by the community on Sundays to hold church services. However, school C seemed to be generally struggling to gain the support of parents. This situation is further compounded by the unemployment in the area, which gives rise to problems in parenting that affects the school's learners.

As mentioned in chapter Six, school C is in an impoverished area and 99% of parents are unemployed. Many of the learners are raised by grandparents, in single-parent families, or with none of the adult family members employed. As well as the socio-economic challenges facing the school community, this situation seems to have led to parental care problems. One HoD mentioned that parents do not attend parents' meetings. Prew (2007), Harris and Chapman (2002), and Harris (2002), all

argue that leaders should invest time in developing and maintaining good relationships and to creating space for students, parents and the community to participate in educational affairs.

Parent and community involvement

This theme deals with the support of, and involvement in schools by parents and the community. The theme involves three related elements: participation, communication and governance.

Participation refers to the extent to which parents and community were involved in the day-to-day running of the case schools. Interviewees at the three case schools acknowledged the importance of participation. However, there were variations in how the parents participated in school matters, and in the levels of participation. These variations were based on the parents' different perceptions of the schools and on the manner in which they are received in their children's schools (see Nsibande, 2005). When parents work in partnership with the school, pupils' behaviour and academic performance are enhanced, and a positive school climate is facilitated (see Epstein, 1991, 2002; Cairney, Ruge, Buchanan, Lowe, & Munsie, 1995).

In school A, the chairperson of the SGB was part of the team of parents who came to school on a daily basis to prepare meals for children on the School Nutrition Programme. In school B, the former SGB chairperson still saw himself as part of the

school. As someone who was unemployed, he was fully involved in school B matters and provided what he called ‘handyman services’ to the school. In school C, participation is exemplified in general maintenance of the school. One parent was a guard during the day, yet another parent was a night watchman. Whilst these may be individual cases of participation of local parents, the significance is that there was a will on the part of parents and the community to contribute to the school upon which it may indeed be possible to build.

The principal of School A revealed that the school was visible to parents and the community. The principal indicated that he held parents meetings’ whereby parents were ‘educated’ about school matters, but he reportedly also involved parents in the development of the school vision. In both schools B and C, the schools’ communities used the schools for church and other meetings, including burial society meetings, and in exchange kept watch over the buildings. Whilst this was also used as a strategy aimed at reducing vandalism, one could speculate that it did not seem to have the desired effect at school C as the school was the victim of vandalism on several occasions. Teachers of school C said that active participation of parents is predominantly seen when it comes to ‘social’ activities such as when there is a funeral or other social functions at the school. The deputy principal of school C also mentioned how difficult it was to get parents to attend parents’ meetings.

The element of communication refers to the extent to which the schools developed lines of communication both to and from parents and the community. Several studies

have supported the value of two-way communication about student progress (Jackson & Davis, 2000; Visscher, 1999) and an active flow of information between the home and the school (Garcia & Gonzales, 1995; Jackson & Davis, 2000). These studies found that successful schools in challenging contexts communicated regularly with the families of students through a variety of channels, including parents' meetings, telephone calls, home visits and informal discussions with parents. As a result, parents or guardians in the case of orphaned children, knew how well their children were doing, where they needed additional assistance, and how to help them.

Another element addressed in this theme is that of governance. This refers to the extent to which established structures allowed for parents to be involved in decision-making. Christie and Potterton (1997: 98) observed that "questions of school governance, and the forms of school-community relationship it expresses, have been a key concern of education policy in South Africa". In this regard, the South African Schools Act (1996) stipulates that all schools must establish governing bodies on which parents have the largest numerical representation. The assumption in this legislation has been that parents would have a majority stake in decision-making, thus allowing for the powers to be vested in the parents.

Issues of governance in the three case schools were, however, complex. Parents were generally uneducated. This made it difficult for the parents to impose their authority on matters of governance of these schools. The notion of constrained

agency seems to explain the dilemma about school governance which is faced by most township schools. In all three case schools, the involvement of parents seemed more conspicuous at the school governing body level where, for example, in school C, they are requested to do a specific task such as being consulted on the renting of school premises.

Heystek and Paquette (1999: 191) observed that “neither parents nor educators have had much experience of participatory decision making since, in the past, principals were considered to be the only people with the knowledge and authority to make decisions. The principal of school A commented that parents involved in the governing body are fully part of the school and that they show good attendance in all parents’ meetings. However, this does not seem to extend to decision-making by the parents on key matters of school governance. In school B, the principal commented that he had to play a major role within the SGB structure to “inform decisions [that] parents made”. This meant that, whilst the SGB is the formal school governing structure, the principal often made decisions for the parents on the School Governing Body.

Chapter Overview

This chapter dealt with the cross-case analysis of the three case study schools. The chapter identified patterns that were found to be common in the three case schools. Four dimensions and eight related themes were identified. From the dimensions and

themes, we can observe common practices associated with success in the three case schools. The three case schools illustrate the need to see leadership and management reaching beyond the core purpose of school, namely teaching and learning. The case schools also worked towards nurturing the environment, and building relationships within and between the school and its community.

Despite some differences among the three schools, there were several commonalities that could be identified. Firstly, the three principals all viewed teaching and learning as their core activity. Secondly, the principals identified their safe and orderly environment as contributing towards the success of the schools. Thirdly, participants expressed particular concern with both the social and educational needs of the learners. Harris (2002) asserts that the core message about successful leadership in schools is that most principals were relationship-orientated. The case study school leaders believed that good relationships are crucial for the school's success and focused on ensuring that such relationships are maintained. Their overarching aim was to create the conditions that would lead to higher performance for students, as well as improving the quality of teaching and learning.

CHAPTER EIGHT

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

The previous chapter provided a cross-case analysis of the three case schools. The chapter was structured mainly by the main themes emerging from data analysis of the three case studies, using the 'grounded' approach. The thesis also provided an account of these schools in chapters Four, Five and Six. This chapter aims to show how the research questions have been answered and it further discusses the empirical and theoretical significance of the study. In addition, the chapter proposes a model of successful leadership in disadvantaged township schools. Also, the chapter highlights the limitations of the study. Finally, the chapter makes recommendations for leadership practice and for further research. The study was important in that it also provided an opportunity to outline and explore the difficult, deeply problematic, and challenging, contexts that exist in township secondary schools.

The study was guided by the following aims:

- To examine successful school leadership practices in schools serving communities with poor socio-economic conditions.
- To establish features of leadership which enabled successful academic performance in the challenging context of township secondary schools

- To determine how successful school principals negotiate the township's specific socio-economic and educational challenges.

These research aims translated into the research questions. I show how these were answered below.

Answering the research questions

The study was undertaken to address the following questions:

Question 1: What are the practices used by successful principals in township secondary schools?

Question 2: What features of leadership enabled successful academic performance in the historically-disadvantaged township secondary schools?

Question 3: How do successful school principals negotiate the township's specific socio-economic and educational challenges?

Question 1: What are the practices used by successful principals in township secondary schools?

This question sought evidence of the practices of successful school principals in the three township secondary schools. The study found that the practices of the successful principals varied and Fullan (2003) acknowledges the existence of a degree of flexibility about what constitutes successful leadership. The principal of

school A was seen by the school community as someone who transformed the school. He had encountered a difficult environment with various challenges ranging from weak student discipline through low teacher morale to general apathy. However, through certain values that he promoted and encouraged within the school community, he managed to transform the school. This is evident in the comment by one HoD that:

> The principal has inculcated values of compassion, empathy and feeling for one another. These are the things that are bringing the educators, parents and learners closer to one another.

Begley and Johansson (2008) claim that current trends in educational leadership are focused on how values influence school leaders' perceptions of their leadership practices, the way they articulate their relationships with students and teachers, as well as their aspirations and expectations of their schools. Leadership in school A can be explained in terms transformational models of leadership. Transformational leadership, as observed in School A, showed that the central focus of leadership was to the commitment and capacities of organizational members (see Bush and Glover, 2013). However, Bush and Glover also noted that transformational leadership has the potential to be used as a vehicle for control over teachers, although this was not observed in School A.

The principal of school A also focused primarily on managing teaching and learning in the school. This approach suggests an emphasis on instructional leadership. This was observed in his daily class visits which ensured that teachers and learners stay focused on the core business of schooling, namely teaching and learning. There was also frequent monitoring of learner progress at School A. These approaches contributed to outstanding results and consistent positive performance of the school. In this instance, this can be attributed strongly to the influence of the principal.

Participative leadership is the model that comes closest to explaining the leadership practices of the principal in school B, in terms of the work of the SMT and networks with the community. Whilst participative leadership has been 'conceptualized' as distributed leadership (see Bush and Glover, 2003), a distinction can be made between participative leadership and distributed leadership in school B. Spillane (2005: 144) argues that distributed leadership is "first and foremost about leadership practice rather than leaders or their roles, functions, routines, and structures". He adds that a distributed perspective frames leadership practice in a particular way; it is a product of the interactions of school leaders, followers, and their situation. This point is important in understanding the practices of leadership in school B. The networks established by the principal clearly point to participative leadership. However, his leadership cannot be seen to have been 'dense' enough to warrant conceptualisation as a form of distributed leadership.

There is no whole-school approach to distributed leadership in school B. The principal of school B followed a two-tier management structure when making decisions.. Leadership practice, therefore, was vested in the senior management team, with the middle management team playing a strong monitoring role. For Leithwood et al (1999: 12), participative leadership assumes that “the decision-making processes of the group ought to be the central focus of the group”.

In school B, the principal not only focused on learners’ social and educational needs, but he also focused on building relationships inside and outside the school. The model of invitational leadership explains the practices of this principal. Eagley (2003: 57) suggested that the goal of invitational leadership is to create schools with a climate that invites everyone in the school to experience success.

The principal of School C focused on managing processes within the school. He was mainly concerned with procedures such as the completion of leave forms by staff members. The deputy principal at the school, who has been with the school for significantly longer than the principal, maintained that he was fighting a constant battle for the security and safety of the learners at the school. The principal, who was only three years into his tenure at the time of the research, acknowledged that he instilled a sense of purpose through focusing on late-coming and absenteeism. However, there is insufficient evidence to conclude that he had a telling impact on the success of the school, given his relatively new incumbency, without previous leadership experience.

Despite the focus of the principal on what appears to be managerial leadership, the school had been obtaining positive learner outcomes before his incumbency. Evidence points to the collective self-efficacy of the teachers at the school. All participants in School C expressed that the commitment, dedication and enthusiasm of the teachers were significant factors in the school achieving its good results. For instance, teachers took the initiative to arrange the extra-tuition programme for Grade 11 and 12 learners. The extra-tuition programme took place outside the normal teaching timetable, after school hours and on weekends. The participating teachers saw this as an expression of their commitment to the learners at their school and it was not on the insistence of the principal.

Grant (2006: 154) argues that leading teaching and learning is the responsibility of every teacher in every classroom and that “schools can no longer be led by a lone figure at the top of the hierarchy”. She adds that the only way that schools will be able to meet their challenges is to tap the potential of all staff members and allow teachers to experience a sense of ownership and inclusivity and to lead aspects of the change process (ibid). This is consistent with the findings of the study regarding the collective self-efficacy of teachers in school C.

Question 2: What are the features of leadership that enable successful academic performance in the township secondary schools?

This question looks at those features of leadership that enable successful academic performance in the township schools. There is consensus in the literature regarding the central role of the principal in successful schools (see for example Gronn and Ribbins, 2003; Marzano, Waters and McNulty, 2005). The four dimensions discussed in the previous chapter provide evidence of features of leadership which enabled successful academic performance of the schools. The dimensions showed how the schools achieved their primary educational goal of enhanced teaching and learning. Hoadley, Christie and Ward (2009) maintain that the most important aspect of the principal's role is to create the conditions for effective teaching and learning in their schools.

However, the features that enabled successful academic performance could not be found in all three school principals equally, and it was concluded that the principals were not solely responsible for the success of their schools. The study showed that the reasons behind the success of each school were multi-dimensional (see Ngcobo and Tikly, 2010). There is evidence that all three case schools considered time management as a significant feature of their success. Fleisch and Christie (2004), Gustafsson (2005), and Van der Berg et al. (2005), all cite the regulation of time as important for school success.

In the three case schools, disciplinary actions against late-coming, absenteeism and substance abuse were directly linked to improved learner achievement, mainly in Grade 12. This is exemplified in strict and regular keeping of class registers as this enabled the schools to know whether learners were present or absent. However, the influence of class attendance is debatable. In contrast to the sources cited above, some studies have shown that class attendance is unrelated to academic performance (e.g. Berenson, Carter and Norwood, 1992). Moore (2003: 370) adds that other factors cited for poor performance, other than that of class attendance, are personal motivation and family circumstances.

Participants at all three case schools also considered frequent monitoring and evaluation of learner progress as a significant feature of their success. Lezotte (1991) saw frequent monitoring and evaluation of learner progress as essential for improving individual learner performance. To influence learner achievement and improve results, the three case schools practised frequent monitoring of learner progress. In schools A and B, monitoring and evaluation of learner performance was undertaken through the scrutiny of examination results and internal assessments. Teachers mentioned that they used tests on a regular basis, including quarterly and half-yearly examinations, to measure student progress. In school C, teachers said they relied on evaluating learner portfolios. These were collections of learners' work completed over a specified time period. Teachers saw portfolios as useful for providing an in-depth look at learners' progress in specific subject areas as well as for their overall achievement.

All three case schools had a School Assessment Team (SAT). Whilst the establishment of the SATs was statutory, the case schools seemed to comply fully with this provision. The principals said that they ensured that SAT teams met on a quarterly basis in order to evaluate learner performance. Special attention was given to those learners who only partially achieve, as well as to those who did not achieve at all. In schools A and B, there were special curriculum delivery management plans in place. In these plans, teachers were expected to submit their subject targets and improvement plans and thereafter to discuss how learner performance could be improved. As part of the process of evaluating learner performance, regular feedback was given to the learners and their parents.

An important feature of the three schools, which may not seem related to the improvement of learner outcomes, was compensation. Given the socio-economic circumstances surrounding the schools, in the words of one principal, the schools "went beyond the call of duty" to support learners in their schools. This feature is consistent with what Christie and Potterton (1997) called the culture of concern. This signifies the schools' sense of agency and responsibility towards creating favourable conditions for learner success. Levin (1995: 30) argues that education is directly and strongly affected by poverty and that a concern about poverty is an important educational issue.

In schools A and B, principals mentioned that learners who are really struggling at home were ‘adopted’ by individual members of staff. This is reflected in the visits that the principals of schools A and B personally made to learners’ homes to discuss any critical issues pertaining to the learner. This was further seen in school C liaising with voluntary and welfare agencies to assist learners with their social and educational challenges.

Question 3: How do successful school principals negotiate the township’s specific socio-economic and educational challenges?

This question focused on the way in which the principals negotiated the township’s socio-economic and educational challenges, specific to their own context. Townsend (1994: 105) contends that recognizing variation in local priorities and needs lends support to the view that effective leadership styles are contingent on context. He adds that “there is no one package for school leadership: no one model to be learned and applied, regardless of culture and context”. The challenges that leaders of township secondary schools face in South Africa are complex and need to be understood at various levels. This relates to how the social, demographic and historical dimensions of school leadership can be viewed within the South African context.

A guiding assumption in the study was that successful leadership depends to a significant degree on the extent to which leadership is able to negotiate educational

and socio-economic challenges to improve learner outcomes. This places emphasis on the role of leaders in seeking to understand, influence and maintain the boundaries between the school and its community. In this instance, community signifies broader stakeholder constituencies, in relation to both the internal and external environment of the school. Whilst all three case schools worked towards building and strengthening the relationship between home and school, as well as on parent and community involvement, they were not equally successful in doing so. Schools B and C, in particular, faced a huge challenge in involving parents in the education of their children.

The major factor was that children in these schools came from depleted homes, headed by siblings or grandparents. This also implied absence of guardianship for many children. Challenges such as teenage pregnancy, substance abuse, and violence on school grounds, point to the realities facing principals in township schools. It was observed that the degree to which school principals were able to influence the various socio-economic and educational aspects of their schools played a critical role in determining their influence on learner achievement.

Specifically, the principals focused on creating conditions for effective teaching and learning. For instance, the principal of school A took a firm stance in restoring discipline to make the school a safe environment. The school experienced serious disciplinary problems during the early 1990s, which were compounded by the changing political situation in the country. Given the historical context of township

schooling, the need to focus on discipline is not unexpected. Unterhalter et al (1991) argued that during the last two decades of apartheid in South Africa, a large number of black schools ceased to function, particularly township secondary schools. Dysfunctionality or under-performance characterises many township schools. Therefore, instilling discipline as a step towards restoring the culture of teaching and learning ought to be a priority for many township schools. The challenges of discipline have a negative impact on teaching and learning.

The principal of school A also had a major focus on managing teaching and learning. Therefore, instilling discipline, with a particular focus on creating a safe and orderly environment, ensured that effective teaching and learning can take place within a more conducive environment. The principal of school A ensured that teachers and learners at his school stayed focused on teaching and learning. The principal spent a significant amount of time dealing with discipline and managing teaching and learning.

The principal of school B demonstrated a deep commitment to developing the community both within and outside the school. Within the school, the principal achieved this by developing a sense of collegiality and by working collaboratively. Contrary to School A, where it could be argued that the school is based on a “strong and powerful” principal, data suggests that school B is ‘leadership dense’. Decision-making at school B was based on the involvement of the senior management team.

In terms of socio-economic factors, School C bears more resemblance to School A than to School B. The school is situated in one of the oldest and most impoverished 'parts' of Soweto and it accommodates learners who come from the nearby community. Many of the learners are brought up by grand-parents, in single-parent families, or with none of the family members employed. The principal believes the only way he can achieve excellence in his school is to "ensure the success of the disadvantaged child at all cost". Documentary analysis shows that School C sustained an excellent performance record over a period of time. A significant feature of school performance at school C is that results have been consistently above average, even before the appointment of the current school principal. In contrast to School A and B, the principal of the school was observed to focus mainly on managerial forms of leadership.

The principal of school C provides a somewhat different picture of successful leadership practices. Being the new head at school C, the principal did not provide evidence that he has sufficient leadership skills, or the confidence to demonstrate that the school is successful because of him. He is concerned with administrative duties and ensures that procedures are being followed, such as completion of leave forms and staff accounting for late-coming and absenteeism. At the time of the study, the principal of School C had only been in his post for three years and he had never been a principal elsewhere. Whilst Leithwood et al (2006a: 5) maintain that "there is not a single documented case of a school successfully turning around its pupil achievement trajectory in the absence of a talented leadership", participants of school C did not attribute the success of the school solely to the incumbent principal.

There was also little evidence of the School Management Team being particularly effective in school C. The success of the school was through mutual co-operation between individual members of staff.

The assumption is that it was difficult for the principal of school C to delegate leadership to other members of his staff. This situation, if continued, has the potential to create mistrust amongst members of staff, especially the School Management Team. Southworth (2002) pointed out that 'the long standing belief in the power of one is being challenged'. Southworth's comment is consistent with Grant's (2006) assertion that schools can no longer be led by a lone figure at the top of the hierarchy.

The notion of teacher leadership seems useful in understanding the collaborative nature of leadership in school C. This was evident in teachers of school C saying that "as a collective, they would continue working hard to protect the image of the school". Day and Harris (2002: 962) maintain that "collaboration is at the heart of teacher leadership". This is consistent with Crowther's (2000) view that teacher leadership is an important factor in improving the life chances of students in disadvantaged contexts. Crowther's view is further supported by Barth (2001) who maintains that all teachers can lead and he proposes that, if schools are going to be places in which all children are learning, then all teachers must be leaders. .

Significance of the study

The significance of this study is discussed within two dimensions:

1. Empirical and
2. Theoretical

This study has provided an in-depth understanding of participants' experiences of leadership in township secondary schools. In terms of empirical significance, the study contributes to international discourse on the way in which schools succeed in difficult circumstances (Hopkins, 2001b; Harris and Chapman, 2002) and to the limited literature on leadership in post-apartheid South Africa (Christie and Potterton, 1997; Christie, 2007). In relation to theoretical significance, this research contributes to theoretical literature on how leadership has been conceptualized and it illustrates the inadequacies of existing theories in explaining leadership in South African township secondary schools, which are faced with a unique set of circumstances.

Empirical significance

This research is significant because it is the first major qualitative study to focus on township secondary schools. Hoadley, Christie, Ward (2009: 375) commented on the limited literature base on South African school leadership studies. The study focused on what the leaders do to achieve success. The findings of this study have confirmed that township secondary schools in South Africa are still haunted by many problems, which include crime, violence, teenage pregnancy, high rates of absenteeism and late-coming. Further, this study showed that many of these

problems (and the consequent poor performance in many township secondary schools) were as a result of the legacy of the past. However, this research found that, instead of adopting a defeatist approach to the challenges facing their schools, the case principals confronted the socio-economic and educational challenges facing learners in their schools.

The study adopted a grounded approach to provide insights into how these challenges were overcome by the township secondary school and how the principals achieved success. Whilst the study aligns with much of the international research base, it highlights the strong emphasis that schools have on managing teaching and learning, instilling discipline, creating high expectations and hard work, and strengthening home-school relations. This offers important insights for school leadership and leadership development in South Africa.

A prominent element observable in the three case schools is that they viewed teaching and learning as their primary purpose. This finding is important for two reasons. Firstly, it contributes to the limited research and literature on managing teaching and learning in South Africa (see Bush et al. 2005). The study supports other research on the importance of managing teaching and learning to achieve enhanced learner outcomes (see Bush et al, 2010). Secondly, the finding that lies at the heart of this study is that the participating principals were aware of the importance of teaching and learning and this was unexpected in this research. This unexpected outcome is informed by research conducted in South Africa (for example

Bush et al., 2010: 162). In their study, Bush et al (2010: 162) have shown the inadequacies of the South African schools in managing teaching and learning and "largely failing to compensate for the social and educational problems facing learners and their communities". Christie and Potterton (1997: 95) noted a primary focus on teaching and learning as "one of the key characteristics of success against the odds in disadvantaged schools in South Africa".

This study also found that the leaders of these township schools stressed the importance of time-management. This is consistent with findings of other research studies on successful schools which show 'time on task' to be an important element of school success (for example Jansen, 2000, 2001). Malcolm et al (2000) and Christie et al (2007) found that high-performing schools in disadvantaged communities highly valued teaching time. There was also evidence that the township case schools used all available time during school hours, and also scheduling teaching and learning time, and study time after hours. This finding is significant for this study, given the high rates of absenteeism and late-coming in many township schools. Low levels of class attendance have also been noted in many township schools.

The study further highlights the significance of disciplinary practices in schools. This supports Mabeba and Prinsloo's (2000) observation, and van Wyk's (2001) finding, that discipline is a major concern in many township schools in South Africa. Therefore, schools should consider disciplinary actions against late-coming,

absenteeism and substance abuse. Firm discipline is also assumed to be directly linked to enforcing school attendance and this may be an important step towards improved learner achievement in township schools.

This study also showed that one of the biggest challenges facing township secondary schools is a concern with the safety of teachers and learners. Whilst the communities surrounding the schools are affected and often characterized by crime, substance abuse and teenage pregnancy, these township schools reduced the effects of such problems spilling over into the school and negatively affecting learner achievement. As noted previously, each time the schools were vandalised, the township schools would again repair their fences. This is evidence of their commitment to learner safety. This finding in the study aligns with other research studies on safety and order in schools. For instance, Hill and Hill (1994, p.16) say that learners learn to the best of their abilities in an orderly and safe environment. The negative impact of a disruptive environment on teaching and learning was seriously considered, and addressed, by the township schools.

One of the findings discussed in the previous chapter was that of building and strengthening home-school relations, and community and parent involvement. Leithwood et al. (2010) suggested that leadership engagement with families can have a powerful impact on learner outcomes. This study, therefore, highlights the strength of the relationship required and attained between home and school in the case schools. The township schools examined were able to compensate for

learners' social and educational needs through strengthening relations between the school and the families of the children at the schools. The study revealed that building and strengthening home-school relations boosted learner confidence, morale and self-esteem.

The principals also reached out beyond the school walls to develop positive relationships with external stakeholders, as well as to foster connections with the wider environment. This finding is significant in that other research has shown the importance of community and parent involvement (Prew, 2009). Bush et al (2010: 39) suggest that the 'family pathway' (see Leithwood, et al, 2010) is likely to be an important route for school improvement, given the fragmented nature of many South African families, with child-headed and granny-headed units. The significance of this finding is that socio-economic challenges must be addressed for schools to succeed.

Theoretical significance

This sub-section contributes to theory on successful school leadership, linked to the four dimensions discussed in the previous chapter. These dimensions are grounded in the data, and they signify the work of successful school principals in the township secondary school context. These dimensions are strategic, regulatory, pedagogic and compensatory. The dimensions were common in the three case schools, but not uniformly, and they form the basis of a grounded theory model, which is discussed in the next section. A systematic account of the dimensions is provided below in order

to illustrate the significant contribution of this study to the field. This study also found that these dimensions are interdependent, rather than mutually exclusive when it comes to the success of the township schools. All four dimensions are connected to the success of the township schools. It is argued here that the theoretical significance of the study lies in identification of the interplay between the four dimensions within the specific context of a South African township.

Significance related to the strategic dimension

In the previous chapter, the strategic dimension dealt with three related features: goal setting; an organizational climate of high expectations, and building capacity. I considered the first feature to be strategic in that it signifies how the principals set goals at the school through articulating the vision and values of the school to teachers, learners and parents. Researchers in the field of school leadership posit that principals can affect achievement indirectly by setting goals and building capacity (Day et al. 2005, Harris and Chapman, 2002; Bush et al. 2003). Although Bush (2002: 3) states that 'vision is increasingly regarded as an important component of leadership', he argues as to whether it is an essential aspect of school leadership or, rather, a feature which distinguishes successful from less successful leaders. What is significant in this study is that vision on its own could not be linked to the success of the schools. There is also a need to understand the specific challenges facing township schools and the need for the schools to instil discipline,

to restore the culture of teaching and learning, and to address the socio-economic challenges of the learners attending their schools.

Another significant feature of the schools in this study was the creation of a climate of high expectations and hard work within the case schools. This was significant because a positive climate of high expectations and hard work contributed towards a culture of high-performance. In discussing the relationship between high expectations and student achievement, Leithwood et al. (2006) maintain that successful school leaders have strong positive influences on staff motivation, commitment and working conditions, leading to enhanced classroom practices. Further, the notion of academic optimism was useful in framing our understanding of high levels of achievement in the case schools. Academic optimism explains how the schools were able to raise, and to sustain, high expectations of the learners in challenging contexts.

Another feature to have emerged from research on school leadership is that of capacity building. Leithwood et al. (2006) claim that successful leaders know how to develop people by building capacity within their organizations. Whilst building capacity has been seen to be important for distributing leadership within a school (see Harris and Chapman, 2002), this study did not find any conclusive evidence to suggest that capacity building was focused on improving learner outcomes. The level of awareness about building capacity, and perhaps even the need to do so, varied amongst the three principals interviewed.

Significance related to the regulatory dimension

An important feature of the case schools was the way in which they maintained the boundary of space between the internal environment of the school and its external environment. The significance of this finding is to understand the challenges schools face in instilling discipline. The case schools showed that discipline could be instilled in various ways. Teachers could be instrumental in forming personal interactions with the learners. Closer links could also be encouraged by either the principal or the school management team. In South African township schools, a focus on managing discipline is required to support the teaching and learning environment. Discipline can only be maintained if there is clear demarcation between the school and its external environment. For this reason, township schools need to focus on providing a safe place within their boundaries for effective teaching and learning to take place.

Significance related to the pedagogic dimension

Also discussed in the previous chapter, the pedagogic dimension dealt with two related features: managing teaching and learning, and frequent monitoring of learner progress. Previous research appears to suggest that, when schools are managing teaching and learning, it will lead to improved learner outcomes. For instance, Bush and Heystek (2003) found that, in South African schools, principals were not focused on managing teaching and learning, which is the core business of the school. They observed that most of the time, principals in South African schools are devoted mainly to administrative work. In contrast, the township principals' responses, to a

large extent, resonated with many research findings on the importance of managing teaching and learning. Whilst there is support for a focus on managing teaching and learning (Bush et al. 2010), Leithwood et al. (2004: 10) suggest that research on the effects of leadership is becoming increasingly sensitive to the contexts in which leaders work and how, in order to be successful, leaders need to respond flexibly to their contexts.

This research also found that the schools had systems in place for frequent monitoring of learner progress. There is evidence that frequent monitoring of learner progress gave the schools the data needed to check for effective teaching and learning. Monitoring and evaluation of learner performance was done through the scrutiny of examination results and internal assessments. My research showed that frequent monitoring of learner progress is of particular significance in South African townships, which are characterised by under-performance as a result of the historical breakdown of the culture of teaching and learning.

The schools examined here gave special attention to those learners who partially achieved and to those who did not achieve at all. There was also constant feedback given to the learners and their parents. Further, there was also individual interaction between teacher and student which provided the teacher with opportunities to evaluate progress. The significance of frequent monitoring of learner progress is that it provided learners with valuable motivation and encouragement to learners, which helped to change learners' perceptions of their abilities, often from a negative outlook to a positive one.

Significance related to the compensatory dimension

As mentioned in the previous chapter, there are two features related to the compensatory dimension. The first feature focuses on building and strengthening home-school relations. The second feature looks at parent and community involvement. The first feature was linked to how the case schools addressed the social and educational needs of the learners.

The significance of the feature on building and strengthening home-school relations is that schools should have a strong commitment to the welfare of all learners. For the schools, the success of all learners was a concern shared by all the stakeholders. Of particular significance in this study was the informal adoption of learners with difficult home lives by individual members of staff at one of the schools. This is reflected in the visits that the principal at school B made to learners' homes to discuss any critical issues pertaining to the learner.

What was also significant in the study was the extent to which parents and community were involved in the day-to-day running of the case schools. This showed that when schools work in partnership with parents, pupils' behaviour and academic performance are enhanced. It is therefore important to recognize what Gurr et al. (2005:10) saw as the influence of 'environment-specific factors'. This resonates with Leithwood et al's view (2004) that leaders behave quite differently

depending on the circumstances they are facing and the people with whom they are working.

Significance of Leithwood et al's conceptual framework

This study began its journey by locating the theoretical context within what Leithwood et al (2006) identified as four core practices of successful school leaders:

(1) Creating Vision and Setting Directions, i.e. working towards a set of shared goals that encourage a sense of common purpose.

(2) Developing people, i.e. influencing behaviour towards the achievement of shared goals through the provision of intellectual stimulation, individual and collective support.

(3) Restructuring the Organisation and Redesigning Roles and Responsibilities, i.e. facilitating the work of the school community in achieving shared goals, and

(4) Managing Teaching and Learning.

As stated previously, Leithwood and colleagues studied successful school leadership practices in a context different to that of South Africa. Therefore, the use of Leithwood et al's framework to explore leadership practices is against the backdrop of the consideration of the specific context of the township secondary schooling in South Africa. Nonetheless, these practices were found to be significant for the study in that they threw light on how success may have been achieved by the township school principals.

The study found that the three principals strongly exhibited three of the four core practices of successful school leaders. These three core practices are creating of a vision, developing people (through capacity building) and managing teaching and learning. However, one of the practices of successful school leaders in Leithwood et als' framework is restructuring the organization and redefining roles and responsibilities. In this study, there was no concrete evidence that the school leaders restructured the organizations

This study aims to verify and to substantiate evidence of Leithwood et al's core practices through providing a contextualised understanding of successful leadership in three carefully selected township secondary schools as sites for the study. There was a need, therefore, to consider what was emerging from the data. This takes cognisance of Christie and Lingard's (2001: 2) caution that "leadership is not a simple concept". These authors have proposed that leadership involves the complex interplay of the personal/biographical with the institutional/organisational in the broader social and economic context.

As discussed earlier in this chapter (and in the previous chapter), there are four discernible features that signify the work of these successful school principals. The four features: strategic, regulatory, pedagogic and compensatory, were common in the three case schools, but not uniformly and they formed the basis of the dimensions in the emerging model of successful school leadership, which is discussed below.

An Emerging Model of Successful Leadership in Disadvantaged Township Schools

The study has generated outcomes which contribute towards the emergence of a model of successful school leadership in township secondary schools facing challenging circumstances. In this model, the four dimensions, with related core themes, which were used to structure Chapter Seven, are reiterated to explain the leadership which underpins good academic performance in the township secondary schools. These dimensions, with their related themes, are shown in figure 8.1:

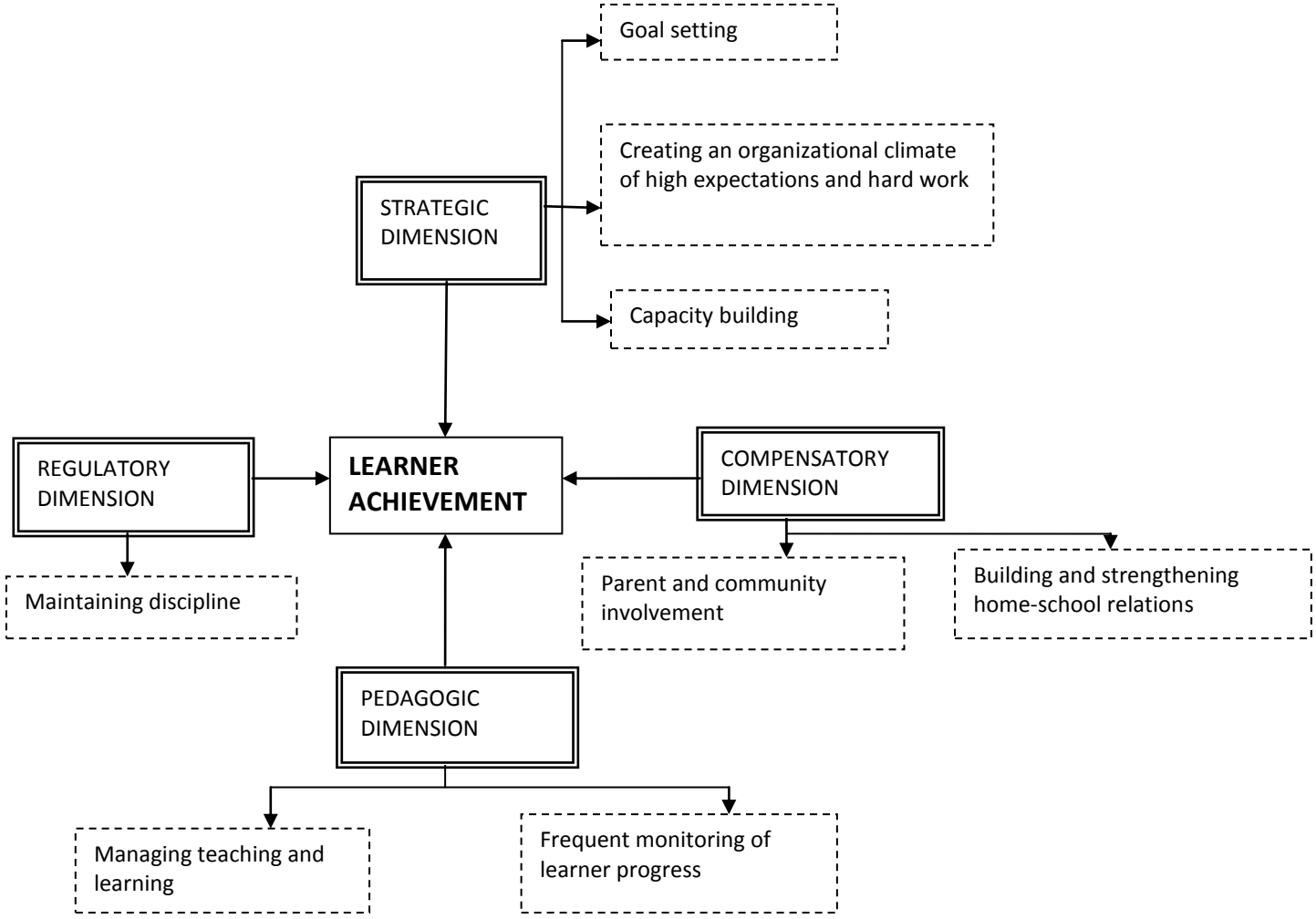

Figure 8.1: An Emerging Model of Successful Leadership in challenging township schools.

Figure 8.1 illustrates those practices engaged in by school leaders. Schools in similarly challenging contexts may find these practices relevant for informing their work. The figure shows that learner achievement is centred around the four dimensions and I explain each dimension in turn as follows:

Strategic dimension

Research has shown shows that vision is an important component of leadership (e.g. Leithwood et al. 2006). Harris (2009) suggests that putting in place a well-defined vision along with established values can raise staff morale as well as learner expectations, and can communicate a sense of direction for the school to all who participate in it. My research shows that the strategic dimension is linked to the principals' ability to create a vision and it also apply in these township contexts, but it requires the support of the other three dimensions in order to be meaningful.

Regulatory dimension

This dimension points to how the principal can work towards demarcating a safe and orderly space for teachers and learners to work in the schools. Studies have shown that safety and order are also necessary conditions for effective teaching and learning (Chubb and Moe, 1990; Mayer, Mullens, Moore & Ralph, 2000). Safety and order are of particular significance in South African townships, which are characterised by weak family structures, violence and crime, in part arising from the

Apartheid era, when schools and their communities were seen as centres of resistance to a despotic regime.

Pedagogic dimension

This dimension can be seen to be pedagogic in that it signifies how the principals manage teaching and learning. Bush and Glover (2009) suggested that a principal focused strongly on managing teaching and learning would undertake activities such as ensuring the availability of appropriate learning and teaching support materials (LTSM); ensuring that lessons take place; evaluating learner performance through scrutiny of examination results and internal assessments; monitoring the work of HoDs; through scrutiny of their work plans and portfolios; and arranging a programme of class visits followed up by feedback to educators. These activities are of particular significance in this study because South African schools are characterised by a lack of focus on managing teaching and learning. Bush et al. (2010) concluded that, in South African townships, managing teaching and learning are often inadequate, and largely fails to compensate for the social and educational problems facing learners and their communities. The case study schools give a high priority to managing teaching and learning, and this is a central aspect of their success.

Compensatory dimension

The compensatory dimension is of particular significance in South African townships. It recognizes leadership and management as reaching beyond the core purpose of school, namely teaching and learning. The case schools also worked towards nurturing the environment, and building relationships within and between the school and its community. The significance of this dimension is that, when parents work in partnership with the school, pupils' behaviour and academic performance are enhanced, and a positive school climate is facilitated (see Epstein, 1991, 2002; Cairney, Ruge, Buchanan, Lowe, & Munsie, 1995). This is significant given the multiple challenges in township communities.

Limitations of the study

Although the research achieved its aims, there were some limitations which were unavoidable. I expand upon two limitations of this study here, namely sampling and language issues.

Sampling

The involvement of the third school through snowball sampling may have meant that participants were not completely willing to participate in the study. Whilst I went through a process of obtaining consent from the participants, there was a sense in which they seemed ingratiated towards me because the school was referred to me

by a principal whom they held in high esteem. Therefore, the validity and reliability of the data from the third school may not be to the level of schools A and B.

Language issues

I carried out the interviews in English, which may, in any given instance have been the second, third or fourth language of the participants. Whilst the majority of the participants were fairly comfortable with interviews conducted in English, I felt that I would have benefitted immensely had the interviews been conducted in the language of their own choice. This language limitation is acknowledged in this study.

Recommendations

This section makes recommendations for the principals facing challenging circumstances and it also makes recommendations for further research. The three schools in this study are exceptional schools. They are exceptional in the sense that they have succeeded where others, faced with the same set of difficult circumstances, have not yet been able to succeed. The most outstanding feature of the case schools was the commitment of the principals to the education of children in their care and to serving the community in which they worked. The schools were able to create a climate of high expectations and hard work in their schools. Another notable feature of the case schools was that discipline issues were considered seriously. Further, the case schools focused on building and strengthening home-school relations. The case study schools adopted approaches which may be helpful for leaders of similar schools.

The following recommendations for principals are grounded in the findings.

- Recommendations relating to discipline

As mentioned earlier, a notable feature of the case schools was that they had disciplinary practices in place, although not consistently across all three schools. Discipline is a major concern in many township schools in South Africa and Potgieter, Visser, Van der Bank, Mothata and Squelch (1997) have warned that, if discipline is not addressed, there is a negative effect on educational attainment of learners. Thus, schools ought to take firm disciplinary actions against late-coming, absenteeism and substance abuse, to enforce school attendance. Also, class attendance is essential for the success of the school. In controlling attendance, schools need to work closely with parents. Another way in which schools can maintain order and discipline is in close personal interactions with the learners. If learners are personally known to at least some members of the staff at school, problems with individual learners would be more easily noticed and action can be swiftly taken.

One of the biggest challenges facing township secondary schools is safety of teachers and learners. For this reason, schools need to focus on 'insulating' or buffering the school from outside influences. Schools can achieve this insulation by a clear demarcation of physical space. The township schools should arrange regular

police patrols around the school. Also, the schools should form strong links with community organizations such as the Local Community Police Forum.

- Recommendations relating to teaching and learning

A central feature of successful schools, including the case study schools, is a commitment to the core purpose of schooling, namely teaching and learning. One recommendation is that schools should monitor teachers' work in the classroom, observing and commenting on what is working well and what is not. Principals ought to ensure that HoDs monitor the work of teachers within their departments. Furthermore, schools ought to see the importance of making learning and teaching support materials (LTSMs) available to all learners. Whilst ensuring the availability of appropriate teaching and learning support materials is essential for effective teaching and learning to take place, schools also need to ensure that lessons take place as scheduled. This can only be achieved through monitoring attendance at school by teachers and learners, through effective discipline, and by ensuring effective teaching in classrooms.

Time management is also important for school success. Schools should use all available time during school hours. Provision of additional support to learners through extra-tuition programmes should be encouraged. This requires scheduling an extra-tuition programme as regular and monitored study time after hours. Schools should also be encouraged to have morning and afternoon classes for Grade 12 classes. This extra-tuition programme should also be extended to Saturdays and Sundays. However, the success of the extra-tuition programme is dependent on

getting teachers committed to giving up their time in the afternoons and on weekends. Therefore, there is a need for teacher ‘buy in’.

Another aspect that is essential for academic achievement is frequent monitoring of learner progress. Monitoring and evaluation of learner performance should be done through scrutinising examination results and internal assessments. Schools should fully comply with the requirements for statutory School Assessment Teams (SATs). Special attention should be given to those learners who partially achieve and to those who did not achieve at all. This is dependent on regular feedback given to the learners and their parents. Schools should also be encouraged to implement teacher-learner joint reviews of learners’ work. This will enable an accurate evaluation of progress, or lack thereof, and provide teachers with valuable information for interventions.

Another recommendation is for teacher support in the schools. Whilst the Integrated Quality Management System (IQMS) is statutory for schools, and teacher development needs should be addressed within this system, teacher support should be a combination of structured support, monitoring, and an individual development programme, especially to address the problem of poor quality teaching. The principal should also have regular one-on-one discussions with teachers to establish if there are any specific individual needs.

- Recommendation relating to learners' social and educational needs

This study has shown that a strong commitment to the welfare of all learners led to a sense of belonging by the communities of the schools be examined. This is especially important for learners who are struggling at home. Therefore, schools are encouraged to make a concerted effort to make personal visits to learners in their homes, especially to discuss any critical issues pertaining to the learner. Further, schools are encouraged to liaise with voluntary and welfare agencies to assist learners with their social and educational challenges. Schools should also invest time in developing and maintaining good relationships, and into creating space for students, parents and the community to participate in school matters.

Recommendations for further research

School leadership in township schools is under-researched, particularly in South Africa, and the role of principals has changed over the years. It would be valuable, therefore, for other South African researchers to conduct similar studies that contribute to the body of knowledge about the role of principals, and other aspects of leadership, within the township schooling context.

The following are recommendations for further research.

1. This research focused on secondary schooling in the township. Gurr (2005) noted that most case studies within the International Successful School Principalship Project (ISSPP) were conducted in elementary schools. This was

not explored in this study and it will be useful in exploring practices of principals within the primary level of schooling in South African townships. Therefore, future research should look at successful school leadership practices in township primary schools.

2. Future research is also required to examine schools in different contextual settings in South Africa. This will extend research to understanding successful leadership beyond the township context. Deep rural schools, in particular, continue to lag behind the rest of South African schools in the post-apartheid era, in terms of education provision.

3. Given the impact of the case study principals, issues of leadership development in South Africa are significant. Given the unique challenges facing principals in the 21st century, research is required to examine how principals are selected and trained within the South African context.

Chapter Overview

This study provides insights into successful leadership practices in challenging township schools in Soweto. The findings show that the schools in this study were successful in different ways and that the success was not solely due to the principal. However, it is notable that all three focused on managing teaching and learning as the core purpose of schooling. Furthermore, the successful schools in this study have shown what Christie (2009: 103) calls an “exceptional imagination, courage

and commitment that human beings [can] bring to bear under the most intolerable of circumstances".

The leaders of these schools have also shown resilience. In psychological terms, 'resilience' is defined as a dynamic process where individuals exhibit positive adaptation when they encounter significant adversity (Luthar, Cicchetti, & Becker, 2000). The principals in the study have clearly shown resilience. The findings of this study are consistent with the claim by prominent scholars that schools which make a difference are led by principals who make a significant and measureable contribution to learner outcomes (Bush & Glover, 2009).

Different forms and levels of leadership were discernible in the three case schools:

1. Principal-driven success (school A)
2. Participative leadership (school B)
3. Teacher-led success (school C).

This study concludes that school leadership models and theories rarely take hold when they are used outside the context in which they were developed. The need to develop a contextualised understanding of leadership practices in Africa and elsewhere is shared by other authors (for example Crossley et al, 2005; Oduro, 2006; Riley, 2000; Horner, 2003; Riley and Macbeath, 2003). The significance of the study is that it will help principals to identify features which have the potential to enable good academic performance in their schools.

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APPENDIX 1: FRAMEWORK FOR ANALYSIS

CASE A

Participant	EMERGING THEMES				
	1	2	3	4	5
Principal	Discipline	Highlight achievements of individual teachers.	Encourages and promotes teamwork	Role of implementing school policies	Ensuring curriculum delivery
	Empathy	Compassion	Feeling for one another		
Dep Principal	• Principal as visionary leader. • Exemplary • Committed	• Late-coming not negotiable • Class attendance	• Committed staff • Hardworking staff • Results-driven staff	Principal rewards excellence	Good relationship with the community
HoD 1	Principal has a strong personality	HoDs take responsibility for their own depts.	School functions as a team.	Firm stance on teaching and learning	Principal not a dictator.
HoD 2	Principal has transformed the school.	One of the values of the school is respect	Extra-tuition classes		
HoD 3	Principal acknowledges achievements of teachers	Sense of belonging to the school community	Exemplary leadership	One of school values is working together	Principal sets targets with teachers.
HoD 4	School has a non-negotiable stance on class attendance.	Punctuality	Staff members visit children in their homes.		
Teachers [FGD]	The principal viewed as a strong, but passionate person.	Collaboration and collegiality.	Results-driven school.		
Parents [FGD]	School places the child first.	Discipline at the school.	Emphasis on treating all learners equally and with respect	Teachers visit learners in their homes	Principal always concerned with discipline

Participant	EMERGING THEMES				
	6	7	8	9	10
Principal	• Monitoring of learners' work • Supervision of learner work. • Controlling quality of learners' work	A results-driven school	We visit learners' parents in their homes.	Non-interference with the teaching and learning space.	Control of learner admission – no admission in Grade 9 - 12
Dep Principal	Principal is a democratic leadership	Principal encourages collective leadership.	SMT meetings chaired by different SMT members.	Extra-tuition classes	
Parents [FGD]	School aiming for a 100% pass rate.	School involves parents in dealing with problems facing their children at school.			

CASE B

Participant	EMERGING THEMES				
	1	2	3	4	5
Principal	Being in touch with learners' family background.	Attending meetings taking place in the community.	Going beyond the call of duty in supporting learners	Ensuring quality teaching and learning takes place.	Effective time management.
Dep Principal	Collective decision-making.	Controlling late-coming and absenteeism of teachers and learners.	Proper planning key to the success of the school.	Protecting learners by ensuring that no dangerous weapons come into the school.	
HoD 1	Consistent and exemplary leadership.	Accountability for learner performance	Encouraging parental support		
HoD 2	Controlling learner school attendance.				
HoD 3	Effective time-keeping essential for success.	Parental involvement key to the success of the school.	Extra-tuition classes.	Going an extra-mile for the learners.	Principal motivates teachers.
HoD 4	Recycling of school uniform for poor learners at the school. .	Positive effect of involving unions in the school.	Interested in the welfare of the learners.		
Teachers [FGD]	Supervision of teachers through monitoring learners work.	Achieving goals established at the beginning of the year.	High commitment of teachers.	Principal motivates teachers.	Staff development and

					staff training takes place at the school.
Parents [FGD]	Cooperation of all stakeholders	Supportive parents.	All learners treated equally.	Heart-to-heart meetings between principal and teachers encouraging.	Parents have the best interests of all learners at the school.

Participant	EMERGING THEMES				
	6	7	8	9	10
Principal	Adopting learners.	Collective leadership.			
Teachers [FGD]	Confident and committed teachers. High team spirit.	Exemplary leadership Success driven by positive values of the school.	Principal encourages teamwork.	Parental involvement.	
Parents [FGD]					

CASE C

Participant	EMERGING THEMES				
	1	2	3	4	5
Principal	• Focus on maintaining discipline • Dealing with misconduct	School attendance is key to success.	Extra-tuition programme.	Accountability to parents.	Motivating teachers.
Dep Principal	Safety of the children is critical. Stop infiltration of drugs.	Extra-tuition programme is central to success.	Strict on teachers and learners being at school on time, all the time.	Positive re-enforcement of teachers.	Focusing on lower Grades to get results in Grade 12.
HoD 1	Concern with the school internal environment.	The principal is supportive.	Principal goes by the book in terms of discipline (follows protocol)	School provides support to learners.	Recycling of school uniform for poor learners.
HoD 2	Concern with school external environment.	A prerogative to have tranquility at school.	Collective decision-making.	Parents not doing enough to support their children.	
HoD 3	Discipline at school.	Concern with progression rates.	Passionate and highly-committed teachers.	Learner support for children with severe social problems.	Importance of the extra-tuition programme.
HoD 4					
Teachers [FGD]	Acknowledging support of the principal.	Exemplary leadership.	Team work is encouraged	Rewarding excellence Annual prize giving.	Relationships of trust.

				"Success breeds success"	
Parents [FGD]	School is concerned with safety of the children	Positive changes at the school since incumbent principal.	Late-coming not tolerated.	Principal controls learner misbehaviour.	

Participant	**EMERGING THEMES**				
	6	**7**	**8**	**9**	**10**
Principal	Focus on developing learners from lower grades.				
Dep Principal	Working with learner with progression rates	Encouraging high community involvement	Learner motivation.		
Teachers [FGD]	High expectations of learners	Benchmarking against other schools that are doing well.	Concern with progression rates.	Setting high standards for achievement.	Team work encouraged
Parents [FGD]					

Merged findings	**EMERGING THEMES**
Merged finding 1	Setting goals
Merged finding 2	Creating a culture of high expectations and hard work
Merged finding 3	Capacity building
Merged finding 4	Discipline
Merged finding 5	Managing teaching and learning
Merged finding 6	Frequent monitoring of learners' progress
Merged finding 7	Parental and community involvement
Merged finding 8	Focus on learners' socio-economic and educational needs

Appendix 2

UNIVERSITY OF THE WITWATERSRAND, JOHANNESBURG

SCHOOL OF EDUCATION

SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW GUIDE

Research Topic An exploration of successful school leadership practices in challenging contexts

PLEASE TICK AS APPROPRIATE

1. BIOGRAPHICAL DATA ON PRINCIPAL

A. Gender**:**

Male		Female	

B. Age group

25-34		35-49		50-64	

C. Years of service as a teacher

D. Years of service as a principal of present school

E. Number of principalships

F. Level of study

Certificate		Diploma		Degree		Postgraduate	

2. BACKGROUND INFORMATION ON THE SCHOOL

G. School quintile	
H. Student enrolment	
Male	
Female	
I. Age range of students	

PRINCIPAL'S INTERVIEW GUIDE

The semi-structured interview will be guided by the following probes:

Section 1

Questions about existing practices of successful school leadership in township, secondary schools

- How the school principal describes their role as the head of school
- How they manage teaching and learning
- Decisions-making processes by the principal
- Efficient use of time
- Evaluation of learner progress
- Use of resources in the school

Section 2

Questions about how the school principal negotiates the township's specific socio-economic and educational conditions

- Extent of community involvement
- Values which are unique to the school and underpin the success of the school

Section 3

Questions about how the principals adapt and adjust their own professional and managerial identities in the context of a township secondary school

- What the principal considers to be the cornerstone of their successful leadership
- What the principal considers to be their achievements at this school
- The principal's view of the challenges they face in their work

Appendix 3

DEPUTY PRINCIPAL'S/HEAD OF DEPARTMENT

INTERVIEW GUIDE

Research Topic An exploration of successful school leadership practices in challenging contexts

3. BIOGRAPHICAL DATA ON DEPUTY PRINCIPAL

A. Gender**:**

Male		Female	

B. Age group

25-34		35-49		50-64	

C. Years of service as a teacher

D. Years of service as a principal of present school

E. Number of principalships

F. Level of study

Certificate		Diploma		Degree		Postgraduate	

DEPUTY PRINCIPAL'S/HEAD OF DEPARTMENT

INTERVIEW GUIDE

QUESTIONS GUIDE FOR THE SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEWS (PROBES)

The in-depth, semi-structured interviews will be guided by the following probes:

Section 1

Questions about existing practices of successful school leadership in township, secondary schools

- Comment on leadership and management approaches adopted by your school principal.
- Description of key experiences that readily come to your mind concerning leadership in your school
- How the deputy principal describes their role in the school
- How teaching and learning is managed in the school
- Decisions-making processes by the School Management Team (SMT)
- Efficient use of time
- Evaluation of learner progress
- Use of resources in the school

- What the principal considers to be the cornerstone of their successful leadership
- What the principal considers to be their achievements at this school

Section 2

Questions how successful school principals negotiate the township's specific socio-economic and educational conditions?

- Personal/professional qualities that the deputy principal considers to be critical for successful school leadership
- The values which underpin their school?

Section 3

Questions about how the principals adapt and adjust their own professional and managerial identities in the context of a township secondary school

- What are you expectations of students in terms of their performance?
- How does the school deal with parental expectations regarding student achievements?
- What the principal considers to be the cornerstone of their successful leadership
- What the principal considers to be their achievements at this school
- The principal's view of the challenges they face in their work

Appendix 4

TEACHERS' GROUP INTERVIEW GUIDE

Research Topic: An exploration of successful school leadership practices in challenging contexts

Section 1

Questions about existing practices of successful school leadership in township, secondary schools

- What is your understanding of leadership and management?
- Comment on leadership and management approaches adopted by your school principal.
- What key experiences readily come to your mind concerning leadership in your school?

Section 2

Questions how successful school principals negotiate the township's specific socio-economic and educational conditions?

- Are there personal/professional qualities that you consider to be critical for successful school leadership?
- What are the values which underpin your school?

Section 3

Questions about how the principals adapt and adjust their own professional and managerial identities in the context of a township secondary school

- What are you expectations of students in terms of their performance?
- How does the school deal with parental expectations regarding student achievements?

APPENDIX 5

Observation Schedule

This observation schedule was used in conjunction with the in-depth interviews.

Observational field notes were recorded over a five-day period, with focus on leadership practices/strategies and consequences of the practices/strategies.

DATE OF OBSERVATION:_____

SCHOOL: (Pseudonym)_____

DAY OF THE WEEK:_____

Focus of observations: Principal's practices/strategies

What practices are displayed by the principal?

Where do these practices manifest? (Staffroom, principal's office, classrooms)

Interactions with others

Description of what happened	**Interpretive notes** (*consequences of the practices/strategies)*	**Preliminary analysis of what it could mean**

Wits School of Education

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In
D
Principal to Participate.

Dear Sir/Madam

My name is Mr Zakhele Mbokazi of the Wits School Of Education at the University Of The Witwatersrand. I am involved in research on successful school leadership in historically-disadvantaged township schools.

Your school has been selected on the basis of your outstanding performance in Senior Certificate results over the past four years. (for information see the Subject Information Sheet attached). I would like to invite you to participate in this important research study.

Should you wish to participate, the study will require that I conduct one–on-one interviews with you as the Deputy Principal of the school, each interview lasting for at least an hour. These interviews will focus on the leadership you have experienced in your school as the Deputy Principal.

The study will also require that I spend two days involved in observation at the school.

I will be visiting your school to describe the study in detail and answer any questions that you or your staff may have.

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

Sincerely

Mr Zakhele Mbokazi
Wits School of Education

Deputy Principal Consent Slip

I,_____, as (position)_____ on behalf of -

_____ School, understand the nature, requirements and benefits of participating in the study, consent to participate in the study.

Signature _____

Date _____

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SUBJECT INFORMATION SHEET

Studying leadership in schools

Research has shown that effective leadership is the key to successful organisations and to successful schools. I am involved in studying school leadership developments and the role that principals play in the success of their schools. Much has been written about school leadership developments internationally. However, the understanding of school leadership within the South African context is significant in that principals in disadvantaged township secondary schools have rarely been studied. Little is known about existing patterns of school leadership practices in South African schools operating in disadvantaged communities with poor socio--economic conditions, what school leaders do in the schools and why they do what they do.

The main aim of the research is to explore patterns of school leadership practices in disadvantaged townships. School principals face complex demands from their communities and the Education Department whereby principals are regarded as agents of transformation – transforming the roles, operations and achievements of their schools, transforming local communities and transforming the nation. These demands have particular dimensions in South African schools, arising in part from the different social, economic and political characters of schools, and in part from the history of Apartheid. A shift in thinking is needed in understanding school leadership practices in South Africa,

as a logical and essential part of transformation envisaged in new educational policies. Six Soweto township secondary schools have been selected as case study school for the research. The schools were chosen on the basis of performing well in their Senior Certificate pass rates over the past four years. Principals, deputy principals, teachers and representatives of Grade 10 – 12 classes of the case study schools will be selected as participants. They will be informed that participation in the study will be under conditions of anonymity and that the names of the schools will not be divulged to any other parties.

One–on-one interviews will be conducted with the principals and the deputy principals of the selected schools, each lasting for at least an hour. The principals will be requested to grant access to their deputies, teachers and learners in order to conduct one-on-one and group interviews. These interviews will focus on the leadership the deputies, teachers and learners have experienced in their schools. Principals as participants will be chosen on the following basis:

1. School principals from 'successful' Soweto secondary schools
2. The selected school principals should have spent different amounts of time in their positions (ranging from relatively new to well-established principals with many years of experience).

The results of the study will be presented to the University of the Witwatersrand for examination, together with the research report, and it will also be made available to the Gauteng Department of Education.

In you have any questions please feel free to contact:

Mr Zakhele Mbokazi

011 717 3092

zakhele.mbokazi@wits.ac.za.

Faculty of Humanities: Education Campus

Room 208/9, Administration Block, 27 St. Andrews Road, Parktown **Tel:** +27 11 717-3021/18 · **Fax:** 0865533484 or +27 11 717-3219 E-mail: mathoto.senamela@wits.ac.za

Mr Z Mbokazi
17 Rudi Neitz Street
Vorna Valley
1686

PERSON NUMBER 8904924W

18 December 2009

Dear Mr Mbokazi

CONFIRMATION OF CANDIDATURE FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY (FULL-TIME)

I am pleased to inform you that the Graduate Studies Committee in Education has approved your research proposal entitled: **School leadership in historically disadvantaged township schools: Case studies of six Soweto secondary schools.**

You have now been admitted to candidature. Both readers raise a number of questions and suggestions which can help you tighten your proposal, and increase the alignment between purpose, theoretical framework, literature review and methodology. You and your supervisor should have a serious discussion around these, and decide which should be addressed now, at the proposal stage before going into the field, and which should be addressed in the final thesis.

Please note that copies of the readers' reports have been given to your supervisor.

I confirm that Professor T Bush have been appointed as your supervisor.

You are required to submit 3 bound and 1 unbound copies of your thesis to the Faculty Office for examination. The copies go to the examiners and are retained by them.

Your attention is drawn to the Senate's requirement that all higher degree candidates submit brief written reports on their progress to the Faculty Office once a year.

Please note that higher degree candidates are required to renew their registration in January each year. Please keep us informed of any changes of address during the year.

Yours sincerely

Mathoto Senamela (Ms)
Senior Faculty Officer
Faculty of Humanities: Education
cc Supervisor(s) Professor T Bush
Student file
HD30