

Abstract

An authoritarian and bureaucratic ethos adopted by South African Schools prior to 1994 continues to be adopted in many schools. It may be assumed that with the advent of the new South African democratic government in 1994 there would be more freedom given to schools to adopt different leadership styles that were relevant to their school context. Given the top-down culture and authoritarian leadership structures of schools that were designed and developed during the apartheid era, secondary school principals and school management teams have struggled to adopt a more democratic approach to running a school since 1994. In the previous dispensation, school decision making was mostly not a collective effort, and involved a minimum of consultation and sharing of ideas, with staff not being seen as having the role or potential to positively influence significant school decisions. The national Department of Education (2003) refers to this as "... the entrenched bureaucratic and hierarchical management practices inherited from apartheid traditions." However, greater choice and autonomy of thought are part and parcel of the democratic paradigm.

A comprehensive literature review on the Community of Enquiry (CoE) methodology, a resource developed by Matthew Lipman, revealed a more open and inclusive approach to thinking together and embraces the principals of choice and autonomy. It is proposed that this methodology could be used to help school management teams (SMTs) become more collaborative and democratic in their approach to decision-making. Particular attention will be paid to the democratic values that underpin a CoE, in particular the values of equality, justice and freedom will be discussed with specific reference to the South African context.

Bureaucratic, autocratic and democratic leadership styles may be adopted by the SMTs in various schools and each leadership style could influence the decision making process as well as the culture within a school.

The CoE methodology could work in conjunction with a democratic leadership style to allow SMTs to be more collaborative and inclusive in the decision making process.

Key words : *Community of enquiry, democracy, distributive leadership, lasting leadership*

