Designing an instructional leadership framework for under-performing secondary schools in the Free State

Ntele Emmanuel Thejane

Abstract: This article argues that the challenge currently facing principals in schools is to improve external examination results in the Republic of South Africa. Besides that the Department of Basic Education has legislated schools as community and independent schools. There is a visible, disparities in performance between former Township schools, Homelands and Ex-Model C schools. The assumption this article is making is that if instructional leadership could be used as a training strategy to empower principals in the Free State Province. Performance gab between performing and under-performing schools could be closed and contemporary performing secondary schools could be realised. Further, learner's generation could be realised who will cope with the academic requirements of tertiary education. Research findings from unstructured interviews with doctoral candidates and research on China, Finland and Singapore's education systems advised by principals who went to Singapore with the Free State Department of Basic Education MEC. Confirmed assumptions made in this study, and further the principals indicated that rote learning was prevalent in the Free State Secondary Schools. Therefore was resolved by the majority of the principals selected for this study that initial postmodern instructional leadership should be recommended as an alternative for instructional leadership in a democratic South Africa.

Keywords: Instructional leadership, critical theory, postmodernism, instructional leadership framework/guidelines, performing and under-performing schools and their raison d'être, constructivism

Introduction

The challenge facing principals currently in the Free State Province is to revisit their role to improve external examination results in the Republic of South Africa. The examination benchmarks set by both the Province and the National Basic Department of Education are borne of giving birth to performing and under-performing secondary schools. In most cases in the Free State Province these under-performing schools are found in rural areas such as Thabo Mofutsanyana Education District, Xhariep Education District, part of the Motheo Education District (e.g. Botshabelo and Thaba Nchu) and most urban areas such as Lejweleputswa Education District and Fezile Dabi Education District. Despite the Free State and Thabo Mofutsanyana topping the examination calendar in 2013. And Thabo Mofutsanyana Education District holding the first position in the Province also in 2014 and 2015. In general this improvement still produce learners who do not meet university requirements by experiencing first year university drop-outs. Nevertheless this performance is in the sense that ex-model C learners advance in behaviour passes and finish their junior degree in record time. It is therefore the task of this research to close the gab between performing and under-performing secondary schools in the Free State Province.

The author of this research study as Chief Education Specialist, has experienced role played by principals as mainly managerial and administrative. Whilst the task of instructional leadership is believed to fall in the responsibility of the Heads of Department and senior teachers, who in their day to day teaching and learning practice use rote learning as a means to let learners to be drilled to pass examination. Thus the aim of this paper is to focus on:-

The exploration of the concepts of instructional leadership in both theory and practice.

The establishment of what elements, if any of instructional leadership can already be found in secondary schools in the Free State Province; and

The identification of the model for the implementation of instructional leadership in the Free State secondary schools. It is not the intention of this article to reinvent instructional leadership, but to develop the professional and leadership skill of principals when engaged with teaching,

learning assessment and evaluation in their schools with the aim of improving learner performance.

The Social Construction of Leadership
This article postulate that the leadership in schools should focus on instructional leadership and its performance objectives. Blake, Shephard and Mouton (1964) also hold that instructional leadership plays an important role in the performance of learners in schools. This is in line with knowledge and construction perspective. Bhengu and Mthembu (2014) assert that the main question that the researchers grappled with was about why the two schools that were located in the same community could be similar and also be so different at the same time.

The 1994 dispensation was borne of community schools and independent schools of which ex-model C and disadvantaged school fell under community school. Nevertheless in the year 2015 there are still gabs in the performance between ex-model C and underprivileged schools in the township and former-homelands. Nkomo (1990) citing "Pedagogy of Domination" (Freire 1972) suggested that debates and discussions should be developed and expanded with all the speed to serve the development of democratic education in South Africa, and that these problems will confront those engaged in the transformation of apartheid education just as much as they confronted those who established it.

This article holds that democracy is a social activity and knowledge is a socially constructed activity. If teaching and learning involves both teachers and learners therefore a socially constructed knowledge in a classroom involves both learners and teachers. Bruner (1986) argue that most learning in most settings is a communal activity, a sharing of the culture. It is not just that the child must make his knowledge his own, but that he must make it his own in a community of those who share his sense of belonging to a culture. On the cited issue by (Bruner, 1986), Ndimande (2012) quotes Freire (1970) who proposes liberatory education in which students are free to construct knowledge. Using this approach students come to the classroom with a wealth of information and experience. In the classroom critical analysis and appraised on a matter presented is made. And reality is discovered through interactions and discourse.

Classroom (1996) argues that spoon-feeding, rote learning and other related fundamental pedagogical paradigms suppress the nature of curiosity of learners and produce passive citizens who do not think for themselves, but reserve the thinking to teachers and lecturers. Cade (2008) makes a compelling argument about what is cited above and goes further to critique South African system of education pre and post 1994. Cade (2008) holds that such a system of education it is designed to create good consumers who follows the rules and do not challenge the content of what is taught because it is researched and presented by experts therefore, it must be consumed as it is by rote learning only to be reproduced in the examination to obtain a pass, meet a bachelor's pass, which in most cases does not guarantee a university progress at any tertiary institution.

It is a reality and truism that most ex-model C and private schools perform better than the historically black schools. Despite being both called the community schools. These disparities creates performing and under-performing. With performing schools mostly in ex-model C schools whilst the under-performing schools mostly found in urban, rural and ex-homelands schools. The challenge of the author of these research study is "How can schools in the same geographical environment and both called community schools by the Department of Basic Education, be so different when Grade 12 examination results are released each year."

The debates around instructional leadership and effective schools dominated the leadership discourse by alluding to the fact that instructional leadership is the answer to this disparities and closing the gabs between performing and under-performing secondary schools in the Free

State or elsewhere in the Republic of South Africa. Nevertheless in closing the gabs Suiter (1994:141) argues that "Educationally, we have to face the inseparable inequality of the children failing before us as unequal in attainment and in motivation facts which are mere glance at the exercise books forces our attention, however much ideologically we may seek to deny the partial indevice.

Construction of knowledge in a classroom situation as argued by Dewey, J. Piaget and L. Vygotsky. Scholarly views by Michel Foucault and Paulo Freire on critical approach and post-modernisation of education will receive broad acknowledgement in this article. It is also noted in this article that to close the gabs between performing and underperforming secondary schools. A paradigm shift from rote learning (banking system of education) to critical problem solving and self-reliant system of education is a need. Jacobs and Kristionis (2006) cited in English (2003) demonstrate in their ten stages that post-modernism as paradigm shift could produce a postmodernist instructional leader trained to improve learners' performance in secondary schools.

This article postulate the idea that to achieve a shift in paradigm in Free State secondary schools. Drives the state transformation agenda (note pp 99 & 174 fig 3.8 & 5.3 of the thesis) to understand the education culture embraced in modern and post-modernism paradigms. An attempt by this article to make sense of the quoted paradigms these questions were brought in as probes for this study.

Main question
What instructional leadership paradigm could be formulated by this research to design a framework for under-performing secondary schools in the Free State Province?
Secondary questions
1) What contributes the instructional leadership role of school principals in the execution of their curriculum managing responsibilities?
2) Why do some secondary schools perform well and others poorly in the Free State Province?
3) What is the current status regarding the training of principals in relation to curriculum management as instructional leader in secondary schools?
4) What prototype should be introduced to design a framework which could provide a paradigm shift from the teacher-centred education led by the principal?
5) What recommendation could be made to the Free State Department of Basic Education that could offer a remedy for under-performing secondary schools?

Classroom teachers should be facilitators of education rather than depositors of knowledge.

The assumption this article is making in answering the questions presented. Is that instructional leadership dominates the learner performance discourse and serves as an answer towards performing and under-performing schools. The researcher did not want to conclude on the assumption hence literature review was pivotal in bringing ideas of various scholars on the subject "Instructional Leadership". It is the intention of this article to design and analysis framework that serves as a remedy for learner who do not own knowledge but only consume knowledge. This could be achieved by critical thinking, problem posing and solving. And paradigms related to postmodernism to realise critical and self-reliant learners in the system.

PROBLEM STATEMENT

Manase (1968) avers that expectations from both leadership and management, from the same individual in most cases, cause a principal to concentrate more on office work than on teaching and learning (instruction). This idea may arise from district and school structures, where

superintendents and principals are the primary administrators (http://www.sedl.org/change/leadership/characters). Besides the fact that principals are primary administrators, the policy of the government (DoE,1996) holds that leadership in schools is about making a difference in the lives of all learners, regardless of their family background, socio-economic status, race, gender, sexual orientation, or geographical location. It thus becomes a problem of why there are still underperforming schools in the Free State province in the post-1994 education system.

The challenge is to transform these schools into efficient, functioning schools. Despite the fact that the Grade 12 examination results were announced as "improved", the fact is that there is no link between input (instructional leadership) and output (examination results). The concept "improved" is clouded with questions about the curriculum, if teaching is not an input of learning. In his thesis Van Wyk (2012) presented an argument that the requirement of Outcome Based Education (OBE) is that learners must be able to demonstrate or apply specific knowledge, skills and values at the end of the learning process in order to master the requisite knowledge, skills and attitude. The author of this thesis agrees with Van Wyk (2012).

Clearly, if it is indeed the case that a lack of knowledge and skills is due to the absence of effective teaching and learning, this research supports the arguments made by Hoer (1945): "I agree: principals should be instructional leaders. The title 'principal', emanated from the term 'principal teacher'. The assumption behind the title was that the principal had more skills and knowledge than anyone in the building and would guide others on how to teach". According to Stewart (2006:36), "Instructional leaders focus on school goals, the curriculum, instruction and the school environment," whilst Hallinger (2003) suggests that in many instances principals have less expertise than the teachers they supervise.

There is an ongoing struggle with the concept of leadership and in particular, in the field of instructional leadership and the impact it has on the transformation of underperforming to performing schools

LITERATURE REVIEW

The purpose and importance of the literature review as it applies to any research topic can be extracted from the writings of various authors, including Bless, Higson-Smith and Ragee (2006:24) and Walma, Kruger and Mitchel (2010:38). "We usually begin the literature review section by reviewing the literature dealing with our chosen topic". This article topic is: Designing an instructional leadership framework for under-performing secondary schools in the Free State Province. Whilst the question to be answered probe on the role of principals as instructional leaders.

On the question of literature review, Bryman (2008:98) strongly argues that in answering the question as to why one needs to review the existing literature, what is already known about this area (Instructional Leadership) should be identified together with the concepts and theories that are relevant. Research methods and research strategies which have been employed in studying this area should be analysed, it should also be established that no unanswered research questions remain. Consistent with Bryman (2008) this article argues that only the core question of this research study will be answered. Unanswered questions shall be researched for further study. Nenty (1999) argues that during a literature review a research activities are those of quoting paraphrasing, summarising and evaluating. Each of these should be done in such a manner as to protect the right of the other and avoid plagiarism. In this article acknowledgement of the sources is in line with the presentation of the sources used. Sources quoted are those that support the

topic of this research. In support of this association Lee and Danby (2012:26) argue that in doctoral education the concern about the literature review is focused on the thesis, a very public presentation of student abilities that are closely associated with a specific institution and programme.

In this literature review, an investigation will be made that will add meaning to chapter 4 on Instructional Leadership Perspectives Dalin, Roff and Kleenkomp (1995:151-152) opine that both research and practice show us that the effect of organisational learning will slowly disappear if there is not a continuous and systematic evaluation or supervision of the organisation. The researcher in his 30 years of experience as Chief Education Specialist, Curriculum development and delivery formulated an instructional improvement plan with his colleagues. By pursuing this literature review, the researcher is able to provide in service training and design an instructional leadership framework for underperforming secondary schools. These in-service guidelines would bring impetus in the training of newly appointed principals and improve underperformance in secondary schools. Finally create critical –and problem solving independent learners who would perform well in tertiary education.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Fraenkel and Wallen (2006) contend that qualitative researches are partners in research as instruments; therefore, they formulate both research design and questions within explicit theoretical and philosophical traditions; access and enter settings; select, collect and analysis data and build a case for condition: Quality is constructed and maintained continuously throughout the life of a research project, it includes decisions that researchers make as they interact with those with whom they study and consider their analyses interpretation of data. Data consist therefore of constructive and interpretation (Rorty, 1967) that critique. The stabling and transparency of language and contribute to the proliferator of critical theories and the development of postmodern and post-structural approaches to science, research and scholarship.

This study in its narrative synthesis does not ace mixed research methods but exclusively uses the qualitative research paradigm. In this view Lincoln and Guba (1955:56) postulate "Researchers should achieve enough distance from the phenomenon to permit recording action and interpretation relatively free from the researcher's own point of view". As postulated by Lincoln and Guba (1955) this thesis asserts that human construction cannot be known outside human being experience and beliefs. To affirm this assertion, Cresswell (1994:54) "A qualitative study is defined as an enquiry process of understanding a local or hetman problem based on building a complex holistic picture, formed with words reporting detected views by informants and conducted in natural settings. Whilst Turalyn wanted that the researcher is an active respondent in the research process. In chapter of this thesis the research indicates how the researcher and respondent are active members of the research project. Consistent with the assertions made by the researcher Hickman, Newbert and Reich (2004) make a supporting argument by stating that constructivists do not look for copies or imitation of an outer reality in the human mind rather, they see humans as observers, participants and agents who actively generate and transform the patterns through which they restrict their own realities.

Research design

Research design as seen by Mouton (1990:107) is a route plan that set guidelines and instructions on how to research a particular goal. In addition it can be seen as the blue print of the blue print of a research project that moves way from the actual research process. He concludes by saying that the objective of research design is to plan structure and execute the relevant project in such a

way the validity of the findings is maximised. In this regard Adams and Schvaneveldt (1991:108) use a blue print as a guide for data collection and interpretation with the afore-mentioned in mind, this researcher holds that the plan option is chosen to comply with guidelines to stimulate discussion and implement a strategy plan with mechanisms for improving Grade 12 performance through instructional leadership.

Research Methods

In needs analysis conducted through group discussions during the primary stage of guideline construction, the researcher used instrumentation that was able to involve principals personally in their involvement in the leadership environment. This was done so that the researcher could learn about a range of behaviours related to principals' instructional leadership styles and to gain a broad understanding in terms of constructing relevant guidelines for improving Grade 12 examination results, especially those where performance is poor. The instrument chosen, as Mouton (1990:289) holds, must essentially be one which is capable of capturing a conversation and be able to establish a general direction about the phenomenon and any specific topics raised by the respondents. Ideally, the respondents should do most of the talking. In light of the information and data to be collected, it should open windows into the principal's experiences with regard to how he or she leads in his or her field of operation. In addition, the instruments should help the researcher to share his world with the respondents and understand why their schools are performing well, whilst others are not. The information and data collected through instrumentation should help the researcher solve various problems and meet the challenges for which it is designed.

With regard to information and data, Dingwall and Miller (1976:38) contend that all data are shaped by the circumstances at the time, and different data produced by different research procedures cannot be treated as equal for the purpose of collaboration. In this case, as stated above, the circumstances of production are collaborated by group discussions in which the researcher and the respondents interacted as a group in a joint setting. Mann (1997:92) confirms these views by saying that the interview is essentially a form of human interaction which may range from the most informal chat to the most carefully systematised and recorded set of questions and answers. The qualitative enquiry conducted in this study was in the form of informal chats between researcher and respondents about various listed items and an interview schedule of a carefully constructed, systematised set of questions administered to a group of principals in an organised meeting.

It should be borne in mind that the researcher administered interview schedules with subjects not *on* subjects. The reason is to reflect on the realities in the classroom of each of the case guidelines to be constructed. The researcher formulated unstructured interview questions which were flexible because of any historical perspectives in which the researcher might find himself. The open-ended nature of the questions allowed respondents to reflect upon their different experiences moulded by history.

Research Process

The research process regards fieldwork as the main or central activity. In this regard, Patton (1990:49) holds that qualitative research approaches stress the importance of getting close to the

respondents and situations that are being studied. This is done in order to understand personal activities, externally observable behaviours and internal states (opinions, attitudes and other symbols of construction). The different worlds from which principals come shape their views, opinions, values, attitudes and environments. These differences are captured at the stage of guidelines construction and the contents and context of the guidelines become widely inclusive.

The researcher has been district manager and head of administration in the district investigated, is at first level management, and is familiar with all the respondents in the area. Because he is in middle management of the Free State Department of Education, there is no difficulty in interacting with other principals whose expectations and experiences might be needed for this study.

Through his colleagues in the school management division, the researcher was able to meet the director and obtain permission to conduct this research in the district. Subsequently, any schools labelled as dysfunctional, as well as those with a high level of performance were selected. Teachers from the selected schools were chosen as respondents to find out how instructional leadership has affected on them. The school management developers were also selected as respondents to give their views on the performance of the schools chosen for the study.

During the interaction with the respondents, a profile of the instructional leadership in their schools was compiled and perspectives documented (Wayne and Musked 1997:176-178; Maurel 1989:231; Ray 1997:1211-1213; Brady 1996: 66-72; Boyes 1991:68). This was done to find out the perspective of the principals' instructional leadership in terms of modernist and postmodern paradigms. Research items were discussed to obtain clarity on the various schools of thought concerning the historical experiences of principals. Finally, models as feedback loops were used (Kebler, 1974:140) to monitor instructional units per lesson per week, while tests and examination scores served as mobility checkpoints for progress made.

5.4 Selection of subjects

The Free State Department of Education, of which the researcher is part in middle and top management at district level, projects the concept of providing quality education efficiently and effectively. Roger (1990:2) views efficiency as getting the most out of all the resources at one's disposal. Effectiveness is about ensuring that output is what you really wanted or intended. Being effective implies some degree of efficiency. From observing the degree of satisfaction shown by the top officials in the Free State Education Department and their political counterparts, it is evident that principals of well-performing schools have the answers to efficiency and effectiveness, and they do provide quality education. With this notion in mind, the researcher chose principals whose learners perform well and those who do not perform well in the Grade 12 examinations.

After the initial stage of alluding to various perspectives of instructional leadership as selected for this research, the researcher identified participants for this study as follows: five principals from performing schools; five teachers from performing schools; five school management developers whose schools perform well and the same number of subjects from schools whose Grade 12 learners do not perform well. Instructional leadership instruments for performance improvement was administered only to principals whose Grade 12 learners do not perform well.

5.5 Data collection and recording

Respondents are members of the core group, of which the researcher is the administrative leader. They met periodically to assess progress and restrict the instructional leadership guidelines for the principals. At each stage of the encounter, data and information are collected from principals and school management developers, which allow cross-checking and validating the data. Validated information was recorded and in case of doubt, it could be checked and verified with teachers and the examination section of the district, of which the researcher is the head of curriculum delivery, learning facilitation and examination.

5.6 Methods of data collection

The researcher was an active participant in the data collection, together with the respondents. The boundaries of the study were set in the Free State, which included the secondary school principals. Owing to the socio-constructive nature of the project and the narrative intent of the study, unstructured interviews and electronic instruments were used as the means of recording information.

Actors in the study were identified and chosen from district schools which had achieved 100% pass rate in the 2008 to 2012 lists; appointments were made telephonically with personnel at the schools; however, this arrangement was unsuccessful. The researcher made personal appointments by driving to each respondent at his or her school and in some cases to his or her home. This approach of conducting interviews produced positive results. Moreover, the researcher spent a considerable time in the respondent's environment gathering information. The researcher conducted face-to-face interviews and lastly organised a group interview in three venues to construct a joint response guideline. Audio-visual and electronic voice materials were linguistically edited for presentation to the examiners of this thesis.

5.7 Data presentation

Data collected were organised into chunks of electronic data and the thesis structure segmented similar and different responses for questions into categories and codes. The essence of the respondents' meaning which was verified from their responses for the writing of the guide became helpful in this regard. The phenomenon under study, instructional leadership as a means to improve learners' performance was highlighted in a similarities and differences analysis, followed by recommendations.

5.8 Data analysis

Haukin (2006:108) states that (until the phenomenon has started to emerge), they advise a researcher to be sensitive and responsive to the data collected, together with an analysis that allows the researcher's preconceptions to be interrogated and adjusted by the data. It may be possible to bracket scientific and theoretical assumptions about the topic of interest, even if these assumptions emerge only once a researcher has started to engage with the data. There may be implied referrals which cannot be probed too deeply because of their political or ideological nature.

After the 2013 Senior Certificate Examination results had been published, educationalists, by evaluations in print and the electronic media, admitted that there were certain challenges, which some of the respondents could not articulate, because of their sensitive nature. In analysing the research data a double hermeneutic strategy was used (Smith & Osborn, 2003:51) to emphasise and uncover meaning in understanding the inequalities in secondary school learners' performance in the Free State. This double interpretation of meaning should be understood

during the collection of data (in which the researcher also played an active part) which was to be verified by electronic evidence. Data analysis on the plenary and parallels of the research indicate that there is administrative and management interference by the officials of the Department of Education which hinders principals from adhering to their annual school programmes. Performing schools have encountered officials who claim that their schools do not, in fact, lack the management and professional content which would otherwise allow them to fall into the main stream of historically disadvantaged schools. The positive outcomes of performing schools are reflections of their efforts, especially in ex-Model C schools. It is noted that capable teachers are being drawn away from performing schools and their efforts are being dissipated. In most cases where principals in performing schools are transferred to underperforming schools to improve results, the performing schools who lose these principals, then become underperforming schools.

Performing schools view teachers from underperforming schools, especially those teaching Grade 12, as lacking in academic and professional expertise and as not being committed to their professional task. The underperforming schools need development and training in instructional leadership, rather than being reprimanded each January when results are poor in their schools.

There is willingness on the part of ex-Model C schools to help the underperforming schools. Moreover, they have been helping some underperforming schools which are now classified as performing schools. A Free State Community of Instructional Leadership Practice is proposed to close the performance gap. This allows expertise from performing schools to be amassed for underperforming schools.

5.9 Improvement guidelines

The philosophy held by Dewey (1938) is the notion that what is important about an idea is its value as an instrument of action, and the truth of an idea lies in its usefulness. The practical purpose of successful adjustment in the improvement guidelines should not be guidelines for their own sake, but for their usefulness. Moreover, success and usefulness can only be realised if learners improve their performance through the skills gained from these guidelines.

Improvement guidelines are both qualitative interviewing mechanisms and improvement plans for the principals. This places pressure on the researcher to implement efficient, effective and reliable guidelines that principals can use as a framework to provide quality education and improve learners' performance.

5.10 Implementation of framework/guidelines

In this study implementation implies the practical application of the structured, instructional leadership guidelines in an instructional environment, using teachers, principals and school management developers, under the administrative guidance of the researcher. In this regard, implementation means face-to-face contact with all the subjects mentioned above in group discussion sessions. Regarding implementation and the management of the processes in the classroom, this is left to the leadership skills given to principals as a guide in contact sessions. Implementation will be spread over various activities as the topic is referring to instructional leadership. At each stage of implementation, a review was made of any items which are irrelevant and ambiguous. After critical assessment and discussions by the core group, items agreed upon in the list of items and models was once more be implemented.

Principals were assisted to adopt a new role of being a hands-on researcher, able to review research strategies in practical, given situations, as well as using different perspectives for the common good as an instructional leader.

6 RESEARCH FINDINGS

In this study, the voices of principals attributed the inequalities in performance to material disparities before 1994 and not to cultural differences. This research clearly found commitment and passion for teaching and learning as key to quality instruction in secondary schools in the Free State.

6.1 Inequalities in post-apartheid South Africa

The post-apartheid education system has found that all historically white schools, such as Model-C schools negotiated a political and economic settlement redefining and reconstructing the way to a rainbow nation, acknowledging that people of all colour can co-exist. This approach has been used for 20 years wherein the inequality gaps have become significant in performance between performing and underperforming schools in the system.

The range of answers to questions asked in this study failed to conceal racial inequalities with regard to performing and underperforming schools in the Free State. The discourse of sameness, when principals revealed the reasons behind these inequalities are: (1) committed, passionate, innovative, creative principals in the system are difficult to attain because school governing bodies in underperforming schools are reluctant to execute their tasks or lack the knowledge on how to govern schools, as well as teachers who are members of the South African Teachers Union who politicise their schools. Commitment and passion of teachers is not the norm but the political will of the unions. (2) Principals are ill-trained as instructional leaders. (3) Politically correct principals are chosen to lead schools. (4) Principals are not yet clear about the philosophy underpinning South African Education. (5) A lack of expertise in some areas of school management, governance and development is evident. (6) Teachers who are lazy and uncommitted to their work of creating a civilised society leave this responsibility to the state, because of their lack of skills and know-how. (7) Knowledge is power and skills are a means to sell one's labour. Drill work, rote learning and a tabula-rasa philosophy only produces workers without the initiative or ability to innovate or create anything and learners who are always waiting for thinkers to think for them because they are not self-reliant. (8) Education is the terrain of educationalists. Politicians should learn to address education collectively with the best pedagogues in the system. (9) The delivery of examination outcomes is for the governing body and district to appoint the best of the crop to principalship and high expectations of instructional leadership in schools should be the contemporary norm. (10) Information and Communication Technology should be available in schools. The Internet plays a major role in instruction in schools today, with the principal playing an instructional role. (11) Lastly, principals should make it a priority to study how Finland and Singapore manage to produce high-performing schools. They should remain life-long learners, scholars in their own right, and researchers in their field of study (educators).

6.2 Innovative research findings

Research findings on education in Finland, China and Singapore were directed by Principals who went to Finland, China and Singapore with the Free State MEC: Basic Education and Nkosi (Independent, January 19, 2014: 6), citing Prof. Vuyisile Msila (Educational Leadership Unisa).

In a country such as Finland, the number of children who fall behind academically is small. Principals when interacting with each other in plenary and parallels argue as follows:

Flowing from Finland, China and Singapore, instructional leadership experience the principals is the single biggest influence in a school to change an underperforming school into a performing school. These can be achieved by a principal who uses effective and efficient tools to diagnose underperformance from lesson plans, lesson delivery, revision, classwork and tests at an every encounter of teaching and learning in a school.

Both instructional teachers and leaners should construct knowledge from relevant and practical experiences in their environment. Instructional leaders should be moulded from their primary schooling, and these should be chosen from the best of schooling communities. The construction of social knowledge which produces indoctrination and ideology should be discouraged as an instructional leader's teaching methodology. This is because such a methodology discourages innovation and creativity: Freire (1993) would call this "banking education" in which knowledge is "deposited", only to be "withdrawn" in tests and examinations. Because learners memorise and reproduce what they have learned to pass examination, they find it difficult at tertiary education where critical thinking is a norm.

The voices of the principal, as a means to turn underperforming schools around, would be to recommend a postmodern headmaster (instructional leader) who holds the ideas of social constructivist, critical thinkers, innovates and postmodernists. This instructional leader is aligned to a consultative, participatory and inclusive stance when curriculum knowledge is constructed.

RESULT AND DISCUSSIONS

Data interpretation is a process of making sense of numerical data. These data have been collected, analysed and presented. The difference between the parallels in this study are the individual responses given by principals of performing and underperforming schools in the Free State. Each group wrote its own report which is tabled in the appendices of this report. A descriptive discussion of the results was from the area of the balanced leadership phenomenon was critically acknowledged as inequality, because of the socio-historical nature of the phenomenon. A narrative approach was applied to examine the feedback of every principal involved in performing and underperforming schools in the Free State.

Description of results

A persuasive strategy and data probing in this study were done by principals of performing and underperforming secondary schools in the Free State. The literature review became the yardstick at each stage of analysing the data. This was done because of the subjective nature of the study; comparing findings in the literature by other researchers corroborated the reliability of the findings. The experiential narrative of the results explored areas which were not specifically in the questions of this study. The question of instructional leadership brought a new dimension to education in Finland, Singapore and China. Discussions on this topic between the researcher and his colleagues revealed that Finland and China are examples of outstanding learner outcomes practices. The principals of Beacon and Sekgutlong schools contributed valuable information and experience to this study. Results were described in this documentary study and the literature review orientated their description.

Table of results and alignment

in this study indicates that the unstructured interview information for further interviews and discussions by respondents from Singapore, China and Finland. The Singaporean education experiences were captured due to the fact that some principals in Free State Secondary Schools had the experience of interacting with education authorities in Singapore.

The executory phase of the data helped the researcher to make sense of critical theory and postmodernism as applicable to instructional leadership in Scandinavian countries. All tables in this research indicate cohesion in terms of how principals in the Free State view the philosophy of instructional leadership.

Research guideline for Principals

Despite reports of gaps in the learners' knowledge and low test scores, many schools have shown sustainable progress in educating children. How are they doing it and are there any similarities among those schools? (Bergeson and Davidson, 2007). This research found that instructional leadership is a practice in all research orientated schools, though in other schools it is not necessarily called instructional leadership. Yet their core business of education is still teaching and learning.

The researcher's additional findings underpinning high-performing schools was included as a guide for underperforming principals. Research has found that reaching a high level of performance takes years of commitment, affecting values, attitudes, beliefs and instructional practices (Bergeson, 2007). In the similarities and differences on how to lead by instruction in all the schools studied, there are commonalities about what instructional leadership is but its implementation is, at times, vastly different. Research on models in Finland, China and Singapore gave principals instructional leadership space to argue from a similar perspective. In the abovementioned countries there are universities that train only principals and teachers which all produce the same high calibre of learners.

Instructional leadership in Finland

Reflecting on exceptional instructional leadership in Finland, Mason (2014) states that principals are committed to their jobs, their schools and their communities and realise that their job is to motivate, inspire and encourage, no matter the cost. They believe in collaboration, empowering others and creating a positive school climate. What this study can learn from Finland's instructional leadership is: commitment, community involvement, motivation, inspiring and encouraging staff members. Collaboration, empowerment and creating a positive school climate seems to be the winning formula of instructional leadership in Finland.

Education policies for raising learners' learning

As suggested by Stahlberg (2007), the Finnish policy for teachers is based on equity, flexibility, creativity, teacher professionalism and trust, the aim being to raise learners' achievement. All committed teachers and principals are specialists in their own fields of pedagogic practice and hold Master of Education degrees which train them to be competent researchers. The Finnish education policy encourages teachers and learners to try new ideas and methods, learn through innovations and cultivate creativity in schools, while respecting schools' pedagogic legacies.

Singaporean model

Respondents (from the Sekgutlong and Beacon High Schools) clearly indicated how instructional leadership could help to close the gaps between performing and underperforming schools. Advocacy encourages learners to learn by providing students with opportunities and choices to solve real-world problems in a freely dialogic environment and stimulates students to encipher the meaning of the tasks themselves (Newman, 1996; Ahlstrom and Hoog, 2008). These projections are in line with Sargent (2011) who states that in advocacy, the humanistic position is based on narrative in which each head teacher tells his or her own story as to how he or she exercises leadership in a particular setting. This critical position gives the principal the power to underpin internal logic in terms of knowledge construction in the classroom, as well as in the school. There is the realisation of injustices and social inequity that produce indoctrination and ideology in their school and the ability to solve these issues.

Empirical research by Marx, Harbernas, Baudrillard and Foucault (Ryan, 1998) opens up the possibility of exploring critical territory in instructional leadership, and new avenues for critical, postmodern, instructional leadership. Blackmore (1999) states that workers with critical knowledge are more open about the origin of their research questions. What is powerful here is the narrative and theory because they raise fundamental questions about current leadership imperatives; thus, positioning is connected to a critical approach towards policy intentions and how they are being worked through at local level. The research poses this question: If principals were the constructors of knowledge and skills (curriculum), what role should be played and how much support should be given by the Department of Education?

In Finland, China and Singapore there is flexibility between classroom, and the school and state in terms of knowledge construction. This approach helps the school and the department to construct their own knowledge and freely implement it, because they have constructed it. The postmodern perspective is seen by Cahoone (1995) in his example of Indonesia as being liberating and democratic. With the critical postmodernist approach, the national examination's modernist approach is oppressive because it kills creativity, by testing nomothetically. The scope of knowledge is through memorisation and the revision of previous examination question papers is the norm. Consistent with the above, Freire (1970) distinguishes between banking education and problem-posing education. A teacher deposits knowledge in students and never asks them to question that knowledge. They receive, memorise and repeat; in this case, passing the examination is the main objective while uncovering reality, striving for the emergence of consciousness and critical intervention is not the chief goal.

A further implication of postmodern thought is that theory and practice are inseparable; useful theories are those that have the potential to offer new alternatives to the present culture. Mitchell, Walker and Sackney (1996:50) argue that "To close the gaps between performing and underperforming schools was not the only reason the Singaporean education system was put in place; instructional leadership became an illuminating mechanism for teaching and learning to reflect and produce learners who are sustained by the knowledge they have critically accumulated''. Using the Singaporean approach to technology, the critical theory of technology helps learners to connect with a wealth of research and findings across the globe and become learners for life. A principal who uses computers and the Internet in education is able to meet a broad spectrum of his or her instructional needs.

Chinese model

Research confirms that effective principals increase learners' achievement; that successful schools have a clear sense of direction and are supported by principals who demonstrate effective instructional leadership behaviours (Waters, Marzano & McNulty, 2005; Hessel & Holloway,

2002; Andrew and Sondor, 1987). This research agrees with the above findings, seeking to find out how China endorses Singaporean and Finnish instructional leadership. This triangular approach (Singapore, Finland and China) contributes largely to how these countries work on underperformance in the area of teachers' and principals' education and training. Underperforming schools and leadership for learners' success (Ormrod, 2005) mirror the other side of this study. Schools where teachers teach out of their field of expertise or are poorly prepared in their subjects are unable to teach well due to the diverse needs of their learners; and where incompetent teaching is tolerated, these schools and the learners in them are severely handicapped in the pursuit of excellence. Leadership can do much to ensure the quality of a school's instructional staff. It is within the precinct of the above-cited experience in the South African education system, that my fellow PhD/DEd students referred me to India, in terms of how instructional leadership is handled, as well as how its postmodern paradigm improves teaching and learning.

Chinese society is very group orientated. The group's interest is always of higher importance than the personal interest. Patriotism and collectivism are highly valued and inculcated through textbooks at schools. Smooth relations with education officials generate trust and create favourable conditions for school leaders to carry out their vision to lead their schools. On the other hand, findings from underperforming schools indicate that improvement plans in various schools should not be realised by education officials (district or provincial); therefore, any interference with plans for the school should be the prerogative of the principal. Underperforming schools are controlled by district officials from afar, preventing principals from realising their goals. In the Free State and elsewhere in the Republic of South Africa, principals do not only create knowledge, but they use it. A school leader's success is, to a large extent, based on his or her ability to adjust the operation of his school according to a large social reform agenda and progress. In the Free State, principals of underperforming schools are judged by the examination results of learners in Grade 12, over which they have no influence. Teachers are appointed from performing schools to run the programme in March, June and September. In contrast, Chinese school leaders have been granted more autonomy by education reforms in the last two decades, whereas autonomy in the Free State is enjoyed only by performing schools, with ex-Model C schools being highly autonomous.

As the progress of reform is largely dependent on the support and efforts of school leaders, their training has attached more importance and has been linked with the outcome of reform. Principals in China are part of curriculum reform and they are the cadres of education in their own right. They are clear about where the state is leading education because they are part of its construction. Principals are management and leadership specialists. In China, even if a principal has a master's degree in educational management, he is still obliged to attend workshops in his or her field of competence. Lifelong education for professional and other sectors of leadership receive in-service training periodically from the institution where they initially trained. This idea acknowledges research, as well as constructivist and postmodernism theories and has been widely translated and introduced in China since the new curriculum reform was launched in the country. These theories provide alternative viewpoints to reflect on the drawback of traditional, examination-oriented education. With the curriculum moving forward progressively, frontline teachers in China and in Scandinavian countries have embraced the idea of the development of every learner, using constructivist educational theory (Mau & Tang, 2004). These findings reveal that the implementation of the new curriculum reform in China which advocates the constructivist concept, has had a positive effect on teachers' practices.

Dello-lacovo, (2009; Li, 2006; Mau and Tang, 2004; Song, Lee and Chang, 2010; Wang and Turner, 2004; and Sargent 2011) reveal that the vast majority of teachers use the following methods:

1) Open-ended questions;
2) Class discussions;
3) Group work;
4) Inquiry based learning;
5) Applied activities;
6) Role play;
7) Multimedia games; and
8) Games and hands-on activities

In China, teachers are advised not to indoctrinate specific epistemological and pedagogical beliefs or teacher and learning approaches. This research argues strongly that China's approaches to instruction could be viewed, in terms of critical thinking, as a continuous partnership between the university and its alumni to enhance knowledge. It is not advisable for a principal to be a teaching principal, but if need be he or she can teach to keep abreast with what is happening in the classroom. Some principals, particularly in ex-Model C schools argue for the approach outlined below. Principals should keep in touch with the performance of their learners. For example, the principal could take a few exercise books and check written work, tests or examination scripts and any problems could be discussed with staff or district officials.

Whole-school evaluation means teaching-learning-assessment and evaluation. This necessitates evaluation from the lower classes in the school up to the senior classes. There are stakeholders and role-players at school whose involvement should also be evaluated, and contributors who are vital to the school should be co-opted to play significant roles. The principal should play an acute support role in the school as a facilitator of teaching and learning. Assessment looks at the progress made thus far in teaching and learning. Without the evaluation of teaching, learning and instructional leadership in classes may continue without the learners learning anything. An example is where learners are assessed below the expectations of the particular class or grade and what learners know is below the curriculum standard. The principal should be given the authority to scout for hard-working teachers wherever he or she is able to find them, and especially in those subjects that cause the school to underperform. Provincial and district programme officials should talk to each other and the programmes should be relevant to those areas which cause the school to underperform. The province and district should research the problem at specific schools before inviting experts to give solutions which are irrelevant to what really causes the school to underperform.

Conclusion

The first chapter of this thesis posed these questions: 1) how can leadership solve poor school performance? and 2) how can instructional leadership solve learner performance? This study sought to examine why some schools do well in the Grade 12 examinations, whilst others are not. The literature review and the findings from the qualitative research shed light on the topic of this study. It became clear that the narratives given by principals were of seminal importance regarding the socio-historic approach to practical experiences in the field and in instructional craft. A design or framework that serves as a remedy for learners who do not own knowledge but only consume knowledge should be implemented and a critical, postmodern instructional leader appointed. The design, with the joint participation of some schools in the Free State, has managed to close the inequality gaps using information and communication technology as a strategy to bring universities and other tertiary institutions on board to create a set of learners that

perform well in every classroom. Training colleges should select future teachers and principals from amongst the best of the learners in high schools, with Finland, Singapore and China's systems of training as models. Only committed, dedicated, and passionate teachers and principals should be admitted to the teaching profession.

Recommendations

Recommendations for change

Inequalities between performing and underperforming historically black schools are clouded by rote learning and drill work. Learners are drilled in March, June, September and November/December camps before they write their examinations. Assessment is the third leg of instruction and cannot be the sole determinant of self-reliant innovation and creativity mechanisms. Therefore, leadership should be redirected to instructional leadership that is critical, postmodernist and upholds principalship. There should be synergy between universities, high schools and the Department of Basic Education. The strategy and the mechanism used for teachers and principals to be educationalists should be revised to create passionate and dedicated individuals. The BEd and BEd (Hons) should be revisited, and perhaps these graduates should be called back to universities for further training, as most are theory laden and lack the knowledge of how to apply what they have learnt. The Finnish MEd training of principals could be used as a model. The Department of Education should start to be the authority in education rather than the unions; better training should be given to governing bodies as the socio-political mouthpiece of the parents, so as to acquire the best educators in schools. Education should be run by educationalists and politicians should function as the bearers of policy. The instability and failure of the curriculum is due to a lack of education activists. Activists are critical, postmodernist educators who transform education for the masses and treat everybody as equal. Information and communication technology should be introduced as a subject in all schools to be used by teachers, principals and learners to gain knowledge on how other countries are making strides in instruction, mathematics and science. Countries such as Kenya and Tanzania should become partners with South Africa in order share their performance strategies. Examining how other African countries make strides in education (instructional leadership) would help the South African Department of Education. Gaps between ex-Model C and historically black schools should be closed. In ex-Model C schools the approach towards instruction is different from educational practices in townships and the rural areas. For example, there are no March, June, September and November/December camps, yet they still do well and their learners cope well with tertiary studies.

From the following are suggestions for on-going research. First, it should be interrogated whether cultural values and formation play a role in the performance of Grade 12 learners' examination results. Second, if principals are given the task of constructing the curriculum in the South African education system, what role could education officials play and what support could they give? Third, research should be undertaken on whether grounded theory can be used to develop a contemporary theory for training and educating teachers in the 21st Century. Fourth, the idea that "one-size-fits-all" should be eradicated and a collaborative-narrative approach in the collective construction of tools to improve Grade 12 results in underperforming school should be adopted. Fifth, principals' instructional leadership voices in district and provincial teaching and learning discourse should be heard. Sixth, a critical, postmodern instructional leadership paradigm as a backdrop for social and instructional change in underperforming schools in the Free State should be embraced. Finally, further critical analysis and appraisal of postmodernism and how it affects instructional leadership needs assessment.

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