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The Contribution of Management and Leadership Practices to Academic Success in Township Secondary Schools

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RUNNING HEAD: THE CONTRIBUTION OF MANAGEMENT AND LEADERSHIP PRACTICES TO ACADEMIC SUCCESS

KEYWORDS Principals. Effective School Management. Academic Success. Township.

ABSTRACT This article reports on the findings of a qualitative study that sought to investigate the contribution of management and leadership practices to academic success. Through the use of information-rich participants [school management teams and teachers serving at well-performing township secondary schools], the study found that school managers in well-performing secondary schools effectively and efficiently utilised both management and leadership in order to improve academic effectiveness. However, one of the main findings indicated that school managers were not trained on a regular basis. It is recommended that the FSDoE conduct regular training sessions with the SMTs of schools to keep them abreast of the latest management and leadership trends and developments.

INTRODUCTION

Research undertaken in South Africa has revealed that between 80 and 90% of all public schools can be labelled as dysfunctional (Botha and Makoelle 2012; Cohen and Seria 2010; Taylor 2006). Nevertheless, there are township secondary schools in the Bloemfontein area, whose managers consistently strive to ensure that their management and leadership practices promote academic success. The academic achievement of these township secondary schools exceeded the provincial target of 75% as their pass rate has been consistently between 75% and 85% during the period 2006 to 2012 (Ebersohn 2010: 2; Free State Department of Education 2010: 18; Makgoe 2011: 7; Thomas 2013: 1). This article reports on the findings of a study aimed at investigating how management and leadership practices contribute to academic success in township secondary schools. School managers are entrusted with the responsibility of overseeing the entire school operation to ensure that academic success is achieved. Mestry and Singh (2007: 478) state that the South African Council of Educators' Chief Executive Officer, Brijraj conceded that the factors which could be responsible for the poor matriculation results include a breakdown in management. They further quote from the article "*Top principals make top schools*" by Matseke (in Mestry and Singh 2007: 478), that the crucial role of school managers is in the teaching and learning process and that persons in management and leadership positions have to think about what they should do to improve academic success in their schools.

Majolo (2007: 35, 43) attests to the fact that school managers consist of principals, deputy principals, heads of department (HODs), and master educators. Majolo (2007: 35, 43) describes the post of master educator as a newly created position in the management structure of the school, with the responsibility of ensuring the effective management of the school, in order to achieve academic success. The former Minister of Education, Naledi Pandor (2004) highlighted the fact that school managers play a critical role in achieving academic success. Botha (2010: 609) states that school improvement by school managers leads to academic success. Botha argues that schools that are continually improving their academic performance, gain confidence and are self-critical and understand how people learn. Prew (2007: 459) emphasises that successful school managers are managers who are open, confident and effective at working with the community in which they serve to ensure that their schools achieve academic success. Van Deventer and Kruger (2003: 75) posit that school managers have to ensure that their schools implement management tasks, such as planning, organising, leading and controlling in order to achieve academic success. Law and Glover (2000: 146) corroborate this statement by opining

that an effective school adds extra value to its learners' outcomes, in comparison with other schools serving similar clientele. Thurlow, Bush and Coleman (2003: 119) add that firm and purposeful professional leadership with a participative approach by school managers, is descriptive of an effective school. Bush (2007: 396) and Harris, Day, Hopkins, Hadfield, Hargreaves and Chapman (2003: 9) also emphasise the importance of management for the successful operation of schools. Moreover, the understanding that school managers have to be expedient managers and the pressure exerted upon the schools to raise the learners' achievement in order to promote academic success, are also highlighted by these authors.

RESEARCH PROBLEM AND QUESTIONS

While academic success is a broad concept, and one that has been researched from many different perspectives (Botha 2010; Leatham 2005; Leedy and Ormrod 2001; Mertens 2010), Grade 12 results remain one of the commonly used yardsticks in measuring the success of South African secondary schools. Smith and Mngoma (in Naidu, Joubert, Mestry, Mosoge & Ngcobo 2008: 39) agree that learners' examination results have become an accepted indicator of school performance, to the extent that a school with excellent examination results is regarded as a well-performing school. Thurlow, Bush and Coleman (2003: 118) aver that examination results are globally utilised to provide valuable information about the effectiveness of schools and to address the strategic goals and objectives set by schools. To this end and in this regard, Motshekga, the current Minister of Basic Education, concurred with the statements above when she stated that the Grade 12 results are an important indicator of the academic achievement of a school (Motshekga 2011: 2). The problem that we experience in South Africa, now 19 years after the end of apartheid, is that between 80 and 90% of all schools can be labelled as dysfunctional (Botha and Mokoelle 2012; Cohen and Seria 2010; Taylor 2006). In view of the above problem, the question that could well be asked is: *How do management and leadership practices contribute to academic success in township secondary schools?*

AIM OF STUDY

The aim of this research is to investigate how management and leadership practices contribute to academic success in township secondary schools.

From this aim the following objectives were pursued:

- ❖ To investigate how management and leadership practices contribute to academic success;
- ❖ To gather information about the effective management practices utilised by the well-performing township secondary schools managers; and
- ❖ To determine what managers view as important for academic success.

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

Research design

A qualitative research method was followed in this study. Paine (2002: 262) defines the qualitative research method as using open-ended and free response questions based on informal, loosely structured interviews, observations or diaries for the collection of data. De Vos (2000: 243) views qualitative research as a research method which elicits the participants' account of meaning, experiences or perceptions. It also provides descriptive data of the participants' beliefs and values that underlie the phenomena. This approach enabled the researchers to obtain rich data regarding the subjective experiences of the participants and also to establish how the participants constructed their social world, with a focus on how management practices contribute to academic success in township secondary schools in the Bloemfontein area (central South Africa).

Sampling procedure

The researchers followed a purposive sampling method. The purposive sampling method was used particularly because the first researcher sought participants with certain characteristics or knowledge about the phenomenon under study. Burns and Grove (2005: 532) define purposive sampling as a conscious selection of participants to be included in the study. The sample in this study is made up of serving school managers from township secondary schools in the

Bloemfontein area whose schools performed remarkably well in the six-year period from 2006 to 2012. From this sample, the researcher was able to obtain rich data regarding their subjective experiences and on how they construct their social world, focusing on their perspectives regarding academic success in their schools.

Selection of participants

Eight school managers from well-performing township secondary schools in the Bloemfontein area were selected to take part in focus group interviews on the topic. The first researcher? invited participants in a purposive manner because they have experienced the central and common phenomenon at hand. The participants consisted of three principals, a deputy principal, three heads of department (one female and two males) and a female master teacher in township secondary schools which obtained good results in the Grade 12 examinations during the period 2006 to 2012. The reason for selecting these participants was to generate a range of experiences and views (O'Reilly 2005: 132). The selected school managers had experience as managers of between 5 and 15 years. Six managers had experience as managers of between 5 and 10 years; while 2 managers had experience as managers of between 11 and 15 years. One manager fell into the age group of between 30 and 40 years; six managers fell into the group of between 41 and 50 years, while one fell into the group of 51 to 60 years.

Data collection

Gorard (2001:14) acknowledges that in social science research, including education, sample sizes are often very small. A group of four to twelve people, who are often strangers to one another, can serve as a sufficient sample size. Kitzinger and Barbour (in Ferreira 2007: 8) describe a focus group interview as a rigorous method of collecting quality data. In addition, Leatham (2005: 35) notes that participants tend to feel more comfortable when talking in a group than individually. The researchers decided to use focus group interviews because they are less time consuming since the researchers interview more people at the same time; encourage individuals to express that which they regard as common among the group; and are flexible. The researcher can explore unanticipated issues as they arise (Babbie and Mouton 2001: 291; Burns and Grove 2005: 201). The school managers were requested to name a central venue which was accessible to all the participants so that maximum participation during the focus group interviews

could be facilitated. During the interviews, the first researcher asked one question and requested the participants to discuss the particular question. Participants were encouraged to be free, frank and honest when responding to the interview questions. Seale, Gobo, Gubrium and Silverman (2004: 73) propose that the researcher should record the focus group interviews on an audio-tape instead of using a video tape, because the audio-tape provides more data for analysis. The researchers, therefore, audio-recorded the focus group interviews on a voice recorder, in order to preserve information for analysis. These discussions were later transferred to a compact disk (CD) by means of a computer and labelled with the assigned interview code and date. The first researcher presented the questions verbally to the participants and simultaneously observed and took field notes, while the group discussed the questions. The questions which were asked, related to the participants' experiences, feelings, convictions and beliefs about the topic of the research. The process of taking field notes by the researcher is known as memoing. Memoing refers to a researcher's field notes, recording of what he or she hears, sees, experiences and thinks in the course of collecting data and reflecting on the process (Miles and Huberman in Groenewald 2004: 48). This method allowed the researchers to obtain data in the most direct way about how the participants think and feel. The researchers focused on the responses of the participants and asked them to describe their actual experiences in language as free from the constructs of intellect and the society as possible (Groenewald 2004: 47).

DATA ANALYSIS

The first researcher utilised Tesch's method which is cited in Creswell (2003: 192) during the analysis of the transcription of the interviews. This method comprises eight steps which the researchers followed in the process of data analysis. Soon after the interviews, the researchers listened to the recordings and made notes. Transcriptions of key words, phrases and statements were made in order to allow the voices of the participants to speak, as prescribed by Groenewald (2004: 48). The audio-tapes were repeatedly listened to and compared with the verbatim transcripts. The researchers read through all the transcripts to obtain a comprehensive overview of the results and their thoughts were written down in the margin. Identified themes were also written in the margin, with similar themes being grouped together. Data were then read for the second time, comparing them with the list of identified themes and categories. Common themes

shared by the participants were identified and implications that underlie the realities of meaning were captured. Nieuwenhuis (in Maree 2007: 105) identifies two coding procedures; namely, open coding and axial coding which can be used during data analysis. Open coding and axial coding were used during data analysis. Open coding can be defined as the naming and categorising of the phenomenon through close examination of the data and involves comparisons and asking questions (Gray 2004: 330). After carefully listening and making notes from the responses of the participants, themes were assigned codes to condense the data into categories by categorising the themes according to their properties and incidents (Hardy and Bryman 2004: 636). In the application of the axial coding method, the data were studied as they emerged, making it easier for the researchers to identify the participants' implicit meanings and thereby identifying relationships between the themes (Gray 2004: 331; Hardy and Bryman 2004: 636; Strauss and Corbin 1990: 205).

ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

The first researcher explained the purpose of the study to the participants and the voluntary nature of their participation in the study. He sought verbal confirmation from the participants, which was obtained. Permission to audio-tape the focus group interviews were also obtained. A letter was written to the Free State Department of Education (FSDoE) requesting permission to conduct the research, which involved school managers in their schools, during school hours. Permission was obtained from the FSDoE to conduct focus group interviews at times which would not interrupt tuition or the midyear examinations of the learners. To ensure privacy, confidentiality and anonymity, the first researcher assured all the participants that their identities would be kept private and confidential. The names of their schools would also not be identified in the research study. The researchers used pseudonyms to identify the participants; for example, participant A, B, or C. Furthermore, the voluntary participation of the respondents was acknowledged at all times. In protecting the participants from harm, the researcher endeavoured to remain honest, respectful and sympathetic to all the participants.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Through the responses provided by school managers, the first researcher was able to identify themes about how the manager's practices contributed to the academic success of their schools. The following themes were identified from the focus group interviews namely: effective management and leadership; important management tasks; the creation of a positive learning culture; communication, motivation and teamwork; assurance of quality and accountability; the effective management of resources; parental and community participation; commitment and positive attitude of educators; and the training needed by school managers on management and leadership. Owing to the limited nature of this article, the researchers are able to discuss only three responses per theme. The themes and the responses of the participants are discussed in the paragraphs below.

Effectiveness of management and leadership

The participants believe that both management and leadership play an important role in the promotion of academic success in their schools. This correlates with the statement by Mosoge and Van der Westhuizen (1998:78) who emphasise that the effective management of schools requires school managers to be both managers and leaders. The responses of some of the participants are indicated below:

There is management and there is leadership. You can be a good manager, who is able to handle processes and to know legislation. But in terms of leadership, some of these things you cannot learn from books. You need a particular kind of attitude for you to be a leader, especially of the school. Leadership comes from within (Participant G).

Managerial skills are very important if the school is to be successful. Principals need to be good leaders to ensure that schools are managed successfully (Participant H).

Participant B, on the other hand, is of the opinion that leadership ensures that the school has a vision and is moving towards an intended goal and also provides motivation. This is illustrated in the following response:

The leader must emphasise the school vision and direction. In the school environment, we usually depend on the leader. The leader must show the direction. He must lead.

The participants were explicitly clear about the contribution of both management and leadership in the promotion of academic success. They indicated that leadership is important for achieving academic success, stressing the point that leadership comes from within and not necessarily from the literature. This concurs with Bisschoff, Du Plessis and Smith (2004: 139) who state that leadership is not the function of the position a person holds, but basically emerges from the desire of an individual to improve the circumstances of any situation as a service to others. Thurlow *et al.* (2003: ix) postulate that the extent to which effective learning is achieved becomes the criterion against which the quality of management is to be measured. It is evident from the responses that the utilisation of both education management and leadership by school managers in their schools will ensure the provision of quality teaching and learning, resulting in academic success.

Important management tasks

According to Marais (2009:123) and Du Toit, Erasmus and Strydom (2007: 129) school managers have to acquaint themselves with the four basic management tasks of planning, organising, leading and control, in order to achieve academic success in their schools. The foregoing is corroborated by the school managers who emphasised the important role that management tasks play in achieving academic success. Participant G reiterated the importance of planning and monitoring by saying:

In our school we plan collectively for the coming year. Towards the end of the year we sit down and identify the activities; we design a programme and then we consolidate it. We believe in strong monitoring and we support to our colleagues.

Regarding support, participant (A) stressed the importance of planning and monitoring as effective tools in ensuring academic success and responded as follows:

I think that planning and monitoring are very important. Specific goals must be set. After the goals have been set, there must be proper planning. I strongly believe in monitoring, because without it, the goals will never be met and the direction will be lost.

In response to the above, participant B added:

Monitoring should serve as a motivation factor for the staff and not as a deterrent to the staff. There are cases where we use monitoring as a tool to police the staff. But in this case, I would

say monitoring must be used to motivate the staff. We must use monitoring tools that would do a lot for the success of management and the school as a whole.

Moreover, participant E was of the opinion that control and monitoring of the educators' work is vitally important for academic success. This participant responded as follows:

When it comes to monitoring, it has to be the same, from languages to subject content.

During the focus group interviews participants expressed a strong opinion that indeed, management tasks contribute positively to the attainment of academic success in their schools. They also placed serious emphasis on collective advanced planning. Furthermore, they asserted that through personnel meetings they are able to assemble as personnel and plan collectively to ensure that whatever is planned is put into practice. This view of school managers regarding their description of planning as a process which clarifies the organisational goals and strategies to achieve these goals corresponds with the views of Everard, Morris and Wilson (2004: 276). Monitoring (Control) is another management task emphasised by the participants. The participants stressed that school managers can use monitoring to promote academic success. According to them, monitoring ensures that all activities are carried out as planned. Their responses also suggest that the monitoring of educators' work should be done on a regular basis to ensure academic success. It is therefore imperative for school managers to utilise the management tasks effectively, if they seriously intend to improve their schools' academic performance.

Creation of a positive learning culture

Masitsa (2008: 102) observes that one of the most important challenges facing South Africa today is the restoration of a culture of teaching and learning, because the majority of schools continue to reflect the characteristics of a poorly developed culture of teaching and learning. The participants supported this view point by saying:

I believe that the simple things we usually overlook will make the environment more conducive to learning; simple things, such as the outward appearance when you enter the gate; clean premises; and a beautiful garden are intrinsic motivations. They motivate learners to come to school and once they are at school, we as educators, are motivated to do our work (Participant B).

Adding to what participant B said, participant D contended that:

Learners will not enjoy the school, the work or the learning environment if the learning environment is not positive.

In addition, the participants emphasised that feedback plays an important part in the promotion of academic success. The following statements from the responses illustrate this influential issue: *The feedback that we give to the learners is very important. When we give them assignments, the next day the first thing we do is to give the memo to them to mark those assignments. In this way, we create a culture of learning and of knowing the importance of learning* (Participant H).

Participant G went further to suggest that school managers have to ensure that they create an environment of high expectations from all the stakeholders, as well as a stable and encouraging family atmosphere. This participant expressed that:

If the environment is not conducive, teaching and learning definitely cannot take place. We create an environment of high expectations from everybody that is, from Grade 8. During that week before the schools reopen, we give them our expectations for in the next four to five years. When schools officially reopen, they already know about the expectations of the school. They know what is expected from them to perform and what is not going to be allowed in the school or outside the school.

The participants confirmed that when an environment of high expectation and a positive learning culture is created, academic success will be achieved. This implies that is incumbent upon the managers to create a positive learning culture and an environment of high expectation. The participants also emphasised the important role played by the school's physical environment, such as keeping the school premises clean. They maintain that a tidy environment, with a beautiful garden serve as motivation to both the personnel and the learners. Therefore, a positive learning culture has to be created in order to ensure that the learners achieve their maximum potential.

Importance of communication, motivation and teamwork

According to Johnson and Bonaiuto (2009: 27), communication is at the heart of a good school system. In a successful school, professionals co-ordinate services, share information, and support learners. Communication aims at generating an understanding of the school and its activities by

the community (Henderson in Van der Westhuizen, 1991: 391). In collaboration with the literature, the participants attributed academic success in their schools to communication. Participant A asserted that:

There must be communication. You can use delegation to bring about communication with the staff. Once you open channels of communication, educators feel that they are part and parcel of the school.

Communication is important. We must conduct regular SMT meetings, staff meetings, and briefing sessions and so on. Educators must be able to communicate their problems to the management (Participant D).

These responses suggest that it is imperative for management to open the channels of communication with all stakeholders by conducting regular personnel meetings, morning briefings and having informal discussion meetings with them. Communicating with teams, directs the educators to work towards sustaining the competitiveness of the school. This will inevitably lead to excellent teaching and learning and consequently, enhance academic success.

Similarly, Participants A and E believe that motivation is critical for the enhancement of academic success. Participant A mentioned that:

For any school to succeed, educators must be motivated. And for motivation, there are two aspects; that is, intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. Regarding intrinsic motivation, they must be motivated from within.

Participant E added weight to the above by saying:

Sometimes we, as the management, invite experts from outside the school to motivate the staff. We also arrange small get-togethers to make the educators feel free and to make them feel that they are part of the school. In our meetings, we keep on hammering the issues of motivation and try to make them feel that they are really needed here.

Motivation has to do with complex forces, incentives, needs, tension, and other mechanisms that energise, channel and sustain human behaviour. Additionally, Van der Westhuizen (1991: 387) endorses the important role of school managers who should be involved in inspiring the personnel to attain a common objective, which in this case, is academic success. The participants suggested that school managers can invite experts, such as motivational speakers, psychologists and religious leaders to visit their schools in order to motivate their colleagues and learners towards achieving academic success. Teamwork is another tool school managers can utilise to

ensure that quality teaching and learning takes place, resulting in the achievement of academic success. Participant C indicated that:

Teamwork is very important. The SMT must work as a team, as a whole. Sometimes, you as a leader, have to motivate the educators to work as a team.

According to Participant B, Teamwork is vital for proper school management. I think we also need to work towards the creation of team building. Everybody should know his or her place as an educator. Interrelationships between various educators are important. They are important factors of the team spirit.

From the preceding statements by the participants, it is evident that establishing a team spirit is essential for the effective running of a school. These statements imply that workshops and personnel meetings can be used to establish team spirit among the staff members. The statements also suggest that relationships among all personnel members have to be strengthened. This means that good relationships can promote the spirit of togetherness and when people work together as a team, academic success will be achievable.

Assurance of quality and accountability

The literature emphasises the importance of quality assurance and securing accountability (Gunter 2001; Inglis and Aers 2008; Naidu et al. 2008; Clarke 2009; Marais 2009). In addition, the Department of Education (2008: 111) states that school managers have an overall responsibility for the promotion of quality assurance and that they are accountable to a wide range of stakeholders for all aspects of a school's performance and its continuing improvement. Evidently, the participants corroborate the above that assuring quality and securing accountability is fundamentally critical for attaining academic success in their schools. This view is expressed in the following conversations:

In our school after every quarter, we sit down as the SMT and analyse the results of every class. We compare the performances of all the educators in terms of their pass and failure rates in the different subjects. We check, for example, how many level 7s or 6s there are and why other subjects have only level 2s. We then try to find solutions to these problems (Participant C).

Participant G contended that: *...immediately the school reopens, we hold a meeting where we analyse results, the performance of the learners and educators. Educators must give reasons why*

they performed the way they did. The educator must indicate what it is he or she is going to do to improve the current situation. This really promotes accountability.

Although the abovementioned participants emphasised the importance of quality assurance in terms of a regular analysis of results, participant B highlighted the importance of quality contact and teaching as the determinants of quality assurance and accountability. This participant stated that:

Educators have everything, the means and the tools; therefore, they must be held accountable. They must know that accountability is part of their responsibility (Participant B).

Interestingly, participant F holds the view that after the marking and moderation of the learners' examination scripts they should be returned to the learners, thus serving as a tool for measuring accountability. Participant F mentioned that:

The educators' accountability can be determined during the marking of the exam papers which must be accounted for. The learners must be given their exam scripts after they have been marked. The educators must account for every mark given to the learner. In this way, it will be established whether the educator had done his or her work.

There seems to be consensus between the literature and the respondents with regard to the assurance of quality and accountability. The responses suggest that the regular analysis of learners' and educators' performances enables school managers to ensure that there is quality teaching and learning, as well as accountability in their schools. Moreover, the responses suggest that the assurance of quality encourages a system of continuous assessment of teaching and learning activities with the purpose of ensuring that these activities conform to the standards as required by the Department of Education. It is evident that the critical role played by accountability in the attainment of academic success is highlighted by both the participants and the literature. In reality, school managers and the above cited authors are in agreement that the assurance of quality and accountability play an important role in the achievement of academic success.

Effective management and control of resources

Effective management and the maintenance of resources play an essential role in the promotion of academic success. According to the South African Schools Act (RSA, 1996(a):section. 34),

provincial departments are responsible for ensuring that schools are provided with resources to ensure that effective teaching and learning takes place.

Despite the limited provision of resources, school managers should ensure that these limited resources are utilised responsibly and sparingly. Participant A explained that:

With the little that we have, we have to make sure that somebody is in charge of it. We must get somebody who will be held accountable, so that it is basically controlled. Having control over resources and monitoring them from time to time will help the school quite a lot.

Furthermore, keeping records of the available resources is imperative, as cited by participants E and F. These participants indicated that:

At our school, we have an asset committee. The committee members get records from the Heads of Department (HODs). They keep these records. From time to time, they should be checked and there should be clear traces of that which was recorded in January, should still be there in July (Participant E).

The school must keep a book register and it must be in duplicate. The head of department and the educator must have lists, and every now and then, they must go through and check whether the learners still have their books. When learners have lost books, they must replace them (Participant F).

Even though most participants acknowledged the fact of insufficient provision of resources, participant G mentioned the fact that school managers should stop complaining about the lack of resources and utilise those that are available to the maximum. The participant stated that:

We, township schools, always complain that we do not have resources, but even the ones that we have, we do not use them maximally. We have these computers that we cannot use and they have become white elephants.

Resources play an important role in providing effective teaching and learning, and it is therefore very important that the school governing body of a public school takes all reasonable measures within its means to supplement the resources supplied by the Free State Department of Education, in order to promote quality education to all learners in the school (RSA, 1996(a): section.36). Moreover, McGowan (in Hessel and Holloway 2002: 69) advocate that it is essential for school managers to preserve precious resources and to make every effort to utilise them to support teaching and learning. The importance of resources for effective teaching and learning cannot be underestimated. The participants emphasised that it is vital to put measures in place

which will ensure that school resources are used maximally and are kept safe. They contend that someone must be in charge of the resource as a measure of control and accountability and are adamant that records must be kept of all resources, thus ensuring that resources can be accounted for. It is therefore important to note that the management of resources plays a significant role, thus guaranteeing that effective teaching and learning occurs, which in turn, result in academic success.

Ensuring parental involvement and community participation

The South African Schools Act allows for greater community involvement in the affairs of the school. This strategy encourages the ownership of schools by the wider community which is essential to the development of a well-performing school. The participants all agreed that parental involvement and community participation in school affairs contribute to academic success. This is revealed by the participants as follows:

From time to time, we open clear communication channels between the school community and parents through the school governing body. They always come to the school and we also involve other stakeholders. When we have parent meetings, we do call parents, even though we still struggle with that one, because there is no day that we can say this term we had 100% attendance. But they do come. We meet them. We iron out problems. It is key that parental involvement should always be the order of the day (Participant E). Additionally Participant F had this to say:

You know that parents are very, very important. Fortunately our parents do support us. When we have meetings they attend and those who do not attend make arrangements to attend during the week, at least to get information from the horse's mouth. In the first meeting of parents, we encourage them to check the learners' school work and to support their children. They must have the timetables of the learners, sign their books and where they are not satisfied, they must liaise with the school, especially with the subject or class educator.

Participant B opines that learners who have completed their studies and are currently working, have a duty to their former schools to plough back into these schools as community members. This suggestion of contributing as alumni is exemplified in the following illustration:

I also like the idea that in terms of community involvement, the very same learners that you teach learn that the school is their home. They learn that in future, when they are parents, they should plough back (Participant B).

It is evident from the responses that the participants are in agreement concerning the importance of parental involvement and community participation in education, together with the principle of partnership and mutual responsibility for a public school. Greater parental involvement and community participation is demonstrated by the fact that parents make up the majority of the members of the school governing bodies which allows them more say in the affairs of the school. Through their involvement a healthy partnership can be established between parents and school managers. Thus, it is essential for the parents to play a supportive role in educating children through personal, social and academic development, thereby ensuring academic success.

Commitment and positive attitude of educators

The literature and the participants are in agreement that academic success is always achieved in schools where commitment features prominently (Bush and Bell 2002; McEwan 2003; Masitsa 2008; Clarke 2009). The participants attribute excellent academic performance to the level of commitment and the positive attitude displayed by the educators in their schools. They asserted that:

The level of commitment of the educators in our schools is quite interesting. The minute the learners are in your camp, you don't have any choice. You have to make sure that the learners pass. Fortunately, there is a high level of commitment of educators in many of our schools (Participant G).

Commitment of the educators plays a crucial role in the performance of our learners. You have these learners in your classroom. Sometimes they lose interest towards the end of the year. As a committed educator you have to know that you have got these kinds of learners in class who seriously need your support. These committed educators will sometimes take the learners to their houses to study until the exams are over (Participant F).

Academic achievement is also enhanced by a positive attitude showed by the educators, as cited by the following participants:

With the positive attitude of our educators, we can perform miracles with those learners that are needy. We are also products of poverty, but these days it is coming down like a volcano. We must change our attitude so that we can assist these needy and poverty-stricken learners in order to enable them to escape from this poverty trap (Participant H).

Attitude plays an important role. I say this with confidence that if you change the attitude of a learner, you can surprise that learner. That is what makes our school consistently perform excellently. We display a positive attitude to our profession (Participant G).

People are at the heart of any organisation, particularly a school. Hoerr (2005:7) emphasises that good leaders change organisations and great and disciplined leaders change people and their behaviour. These responses suggest that it is only through changing the attitudes of their personnel, by nurturing them, by helping them to grow and develop, and by creating a culture in which they can all learn, that the school can flourish and be academically successful. Furthermore, the participants are confident that it is through their positive attitude and the high level of commitment of their personnel that their schools consistently perform well. It is therefore conclusively clear that a positive attitude and a high level of commitment from personnel members serve as the driving force towards academic success.

Training needed by school managers on management and leadership

The literature indicates that it is imperative for school managers to develop themselves and their educators in order to be able to provide effective school management and leadership (Steyn and Van Niekerk 2002; McEwan 2003; Bisschoff, Du Plessis & Smith 2004; Mestry and Singh 2007; Mathibe 2007). The participants' views are consistent with assertions in the literature cited above. Participants E, H and D expressed the need to train school managers. They respectively argued that:

We really need training, especially in management. When I started working as an HOD, there were workshops that I attended which were quite informative. We really need to attend more workshops so that we can move with time.

Managerial skills are very important. Even principals and deputy principals need regular workshops, because some principals are not experienced. They just became principals. They need a lot of training.

I really think that the school is like a business. You, as the principal, are a CEO of the company, but you are trained as an educator. So I fully agree that there must be a high level of training for the principals on a quarterly or monthly basis. They are doing it overseas; they are not doing it in South Africa.

There seems to be consensus between the literature and the participants that regular training for school managers is needed, especially in the fields of education management and leadership. The participants also claim that frequent workshops for school managers are needed in order to keep them abreast of the latest educational demands. More and more schools are awarded section 21 statuses. This means that such schools must charge school fees and manage the budget of the school. In this regard, the participants agreed that they should be trained to run their schools as businesses. Adding weight to the aforementioned, Mathibe (2007: 532) emphasises that the empowerment of school managers and educators will result in a more responsive, flexible and effective school, while at the same time, academic performance will be strengthened.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The findings of this study shows that school managers of well-performing township secondary schools possess excellent management and leadership abilities and skills which they fully implement. Excellent management and leadership abilities, skills and practices, are largely attributable to and contribute towards a school's excellent academic performance.

It is also evident from the findings of the investigation that school managers in well-performing secondary schools effectively and efficiently utilise both management and leadership in order to improve school effectiveness. This is achieved through the expedient execution of activities, such as strategic planning; the creation of a positive learning environment and of high expectations; continuous monitoring and control of work; regular analyses of learners' and educators' performances; the effective management of resources; regular motivation of personnel and learners; team building and open and free communication, as well as parental involvement. Lastly, the appropriate execution of the core responsibilities of school managers ensure that some township secondary schools in the Bloemfontein area perform successfully.

There is, however also a need for support of school managers, according to the participants in the aforementioned study. They maintain that they need regular and ongoing training to keep them abreast with the latest management and leadership developments.

The following themes were identified from the focus group interviews, namely: effective management and leadership; important management tasks; the creation of a positive learning culture, communication, motivation and teamwork; assurance of quality and accountability; effective management of resources; parental and community participation; commitment and attitude of educators; and training needed by those involved in school management and leadership.

It is recommended that the FSDoE conduct regular training sessions with the SMTs of schools to keep them abreast of the latest management and leadership trends and developments.

It is further recommended that the identified themes serve as guidelines which could provide school managers with an appropriate opportunity to develop their skills, abilities, knowledge, values and attitudes that will enable them to contribute towards building better and more effective schools. It is also anticipated that better management and leadership in schools will promote academic success in township secondary schools in the Bloemfontein area.

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