

Effective Leadership towards Quality Outcomes in South African Education

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ABSTRACT As countries struggle to transform their education systems to equip learners with the knowledge and skills needed to function in rapidly changing societies, the roles and expectations for school leaders have also changed. School reform initiatives that are continually taking place necessitate alternative ways of thinking with regard to our concept of educational leadership. Principals can simply no longer lead in the old and traditional ways. This article, based on a descriptive review of the literature, focuses on evolving school leadership within the changing school context. It portrays the South African school context as dynamic and characterised by the interaction of external and internal factors, with the latter dominated by issues such as school-based management and dysfunctional schools. Understanding this dynamic nature and the enormous challenges that emerge is a prerequisite for understanding the types of leadership approaches suitable for the changing environment. A framework for emerging school leadership to indicate leadership's response to the changing context is provided and includes elements of alternative and re-emerging leadership approaches such as the school principal as community servant, as organisational architect, as social architect, as moral educator and as visionary leader.

INTRODUCTION

During the past 20 to 30 years there have been continuous and major educational transformation trends in educational institutions throughout the world. One of them is the shift towards greater self-management and self-governance in schools. This trend, evident in a number of countries (Murphy 2002; Cuban 2008), is related to a move towards institutional autonomy, the so-called school-based management or self-management of schools (Bush and Heystek 2003; Botha 2006; Marishane and Botha 2011; Botha 2012a, Botha 2012b).

The shift towards school-based management, as well as other modern school reform initiatives as well as political and curriculum changes that have taken place over this time, has presented enormous challenges to role-players at every level of the education system, with many of the effects felt by those at the school level. School principals, as key players at this level, are at the receiving end of various impacts generated by educational reform and have to adapt themselves to the changing world of their special business (Botha 2012b).

As the leadership role of the school principal is widely regarded as the primary factor contributing to a successful relationship between school reform and school improvement and is therefore an essential dimension of all effective

schools (Johnston 1997; Botha 2006; Marishane and Botha 2011; Botha 2012b), South African principals of the future, as the counterparts world-wide, will be increasingly expected and required to lead in alternative ways to keep up with the new challenges, expectations and demands of modern-day society.

Aims

The aim of this study is to offer a dynamic perspective on the evolving role of school leadership in the South African educational context.

Problem Statement

The main problem of this study is: Which leadership approaches will be relevant and dominant to school principals in the South African schools of tomorrow?

This question leads to the following sub-problems:

- What entails leadership and educational leadership?
- What are some of the more traditional approaches to educational leadership?
- What are the more common characteristics of modern school reform that requires a change in educational leadership approaches?
- What are some of the emerging approaches to educational leadership?

METHODOLOGY

This article, based on a descriptive review of the literature, offers a dynamic perspective on the evolving role of leadership in the South African educational context and concludes with a presentation of five emerging approaches to leadership with regard to the evolving role of school leaders in restructuring our schools of tomorrow.

THEORETICAL ONCEPTUALIZATION

Educational Leadership

One of the traditional and widely accepted definitions for leadership is that of Greenberg and Baron (1993: 444) who described leadership as “the process whereby one person influences individual and group members towards goal setting and goal achievement with no force or coercion”. According to this definition, leadership is not a matter of passive status or of the mere possession of some combination of traits (Bottery 2004). It appears rather to be a working relationship among members of a group, in which the leader acquires status through active participation and demonstration of the capacity for carrying cooperative tasks through to completion. According to Hersey et al. (2001: 9) leadership occurs “whenever one person attempts to influence the behaviour of an individual or group, regardless of the reason”.

It can be concluded that leadership is generally defined as the process of directing the behaviour of others towards the accomplishment of goals. It involves elements such as influencing and motivating people, either as individuals or groups, managing conflict and communicating with subordinates. Educational leadership entails all these aspects in an educational setting or school context.

Descriptive Approaches to Educational Leadership

A synopsis of some of the initial or earlier descriptive approaches to educational leadership that gained prominence in the past few decades is subsequently given in order to understand how educational leadership has emerged and evolved over the years. Common among these approaches is the understanding of school leadership as an evolving process (Bottery 2004).

Although there are also many other earlier approaches to school leadership, some of them are discussed and are cited more commonly in the research literature. The following seven leadership approaches seem to be the more important and dominant ones that have been associated with principal leadership over the years (Hersey 1984; Blumberg and Greenfield 1986; Tichy 1990; Davies 2005; Grubb and Flessa 2006; Marishane and Botha 2011):

- **Authoritative Leadership:** This traditional leadership concept presents the principal as someone who is totally in charge and is associated with aspects such as authority/power.
- **Instructional Leadership:** The concept presents the principal as someone whose approach to curriculum and instructional development displays strong, directive behaviour.
- **Contingency Leadership:** This situational concept of the principal as leader proceeds from the premise that each situation is unique and must be viewed and studied as such.
- **Transactional Leadership:** This occurs when the relationship between the leader and the followers is forged mainly on the basis of the exchange of valued things between them.
- **Shared Leadership:** Shared leadership, also known as collaborative leadership or distributed leadership, is leadership in which a leader acknowledges that leadership of an organisation cannot be the exclusive preserve of a single person, but is team-based.
- **Transformational Leadership:** Transformational leadership occurs when leaders and followers join hands “in pursuit of higher-order common goals” (Barnett and Sagor 1994: 26). Transformational leaders build unity with followers around a clear collective vision and a commonly understood and accepted mission and purpose.
- **Political Leadership:** The political leadership role of the principal can be described in terms of the principal as a member of the school governing body. In this structure the principal serves as member who nonetheless plays an important political leadership role.

The Characteristics of Modern School Reform

Underlying the literature on school reform, school restructuring and emerging visions for schools of tomorrow are three dominant and central themes which represent the heart and soul of school reform (Ainscow et al. 2009). These represent fundamental shifts in education that have dominated schools in South Africa, as well as worldwide, over the last decades, while touching each of the three key levels of schools as organisations, namely the institutional level, the managerial level and the technical core level.

• From Producer Control to Consumerism

There is currently a fundamental change in our view of the relationship between the school and its environment. Historically ingrained notions of schools as sheltered public monopolies are breaking down under the incursions of a market philosophy into education. The business of schooling is being redefined in relation to the customer, marketisation and consumerism. At the same time, the traditional dominant relationship between educators and the public domain is being reviewed in favour of parents and community members (Grubb and Flessa 2006). The role of parents is dramatically redefined in the restructuring of schools. Hargreaves (2007) emphasised four elements of this evolving role in the restructuring process, namely choice in selecting a school; voice in school governance and management; partnership in the educational process; and enhanced membership of the school community.

• From Hierarchy to Community

There is a growing feeling that the existing structures of management in South African schools are unsustainable (Marishane and Botha 2011). Although school-based management has existed for a while, there are still various scholars (Murphy 1995; Leithwood 1999; Bolden 2004; Gertler 2007; Robinson 2008; Moller 2009) who believe that the continuation of the existing bureaucratic systems of management in all schools is counterproductive to the needs and interests of educators. In view of the far-reaching attack on the basic organisational infrastructure of schools, McNeil (1998: 7) as-

serted more than a decade ago that “ambitious, if not radical, reforms are required to rectify this situation”. In place of bureaucracy is an argument for a system of self-management that will require from principals to lead in alternative ways.

• From Behaviourism to Social Perspectives

At the centre of this newly-forming vision of South African schools of tomorrow are fairly radical changes in our assumptions about knowledge. The alpha paradigm of knowledge, that is, the view that “knowledge can be assumed to be an external entity existing independently of human thought and action, and hence, something about which one can be objective” (Fisher 1990: 81), has begun to be critically examined. A new view, one that holds that knowledge is internal and subjective, that it depends on the values of the persons working with it and the context within which that work is conducted, is receiving serious consideration (Begley 2000). The traditional emphasis on acquiring information (Grubb and Flessa 2006) is being replaced by a focus on learning to learn and on the ability to use knowledge. In schools of tomorrow, a learner-centred model will replace the more traditional teacher-centred instruction (Marishane 2009; Botha 2012a).

Emerging Approaches to Leadership

Taking the abovementioned school reforms in mind, it becomes clear that schools of the future cannot be led in the same traditional manner as before and that these reforms necessitate other, alternative approaches to leadership (Botha 2010; Gunter 2011). School leadership for the schools of tomorrow will consequently be discussed by using various approaches that portray fundamental shifts in our concept of educational leadership – approaches that convey changes from what leadership is today to what leadership will need to be in tomorrow’s schools (Botha 2012a).

Although some of these approaches had been in used by some school leaders for the past two decades or more, they are all not ‘new’ in the true sense of the word, but rather emerging and re-emerging as their relevancy becomes now an important issue again, mainly due against the background of changes and challenges that are

taking place in society. Although there are also other emerging and re-emerging approaches to educational leadership such as the post-modernistic and Ubuntu ones that are regarded as relevant by some authors (Marishane and Botha 2011), the following five approaches seem to be the more frequently referred too and cited by authors in a discussion that attempt to capture the vision of leadership for tomorrow's schools (Murphy 2002; Stone et al. 2003; Davies 2005; Davis et al. 2005; Cuban 2008; Gunter 2011; Botha 2012a):

• ***The School Principal as Community Servant and Facilitative Leader***

According to Fryar (2001), servant leadership differs from more traditional approaches to leadership in a number of ways. Establishing meaning rather than controlling and supervising is at the core of this type of leadership, which is based on dialogue and cooperative, democratic leadership principles. It is more ethical and is grounded more in the modelling of values and beliefs than upon telling people what to do. In such a paradigm, to lead means to serve. Serving leaders such as Mother Teresa, Mahatma Gandhi and Nelson Mandela have had a huge influence on the history of the world. This approach to leadership is influenced by the spirit of these leaders, their humanity, respect for others and the ability to persuade and inspire staff.

The leadership challenges for principals in this new era will be complex (Gunter 2011). Not only must they accept the mantle of leadership (that is, changing from implementers to initiators, from focusing on process to a concern for outcomes, from being risk avoiders and conflict managers to risk takers) but they will also need to adopt leadership strategies that are in harmony with the central tenets of the innovative school organisations they seek to create, working with people rather than through them. As parents and the community are becoming equal partners in the South African educational landscape through formal structures such as school governing bodies and parent-teacher associations, principals will need to facilitate these partnerships and become '*servants*' of the community and the people in the true sense of the word. Principals will need to learn to become servant facilitative leaders, leading by empowering staff rather than by controlling them. Lead-

ership in such a school becomes a support function for teaching rather than a mechanism for the control of teaching (Stone et al. 2003; Marishane and Botha 2011).

• ***The School Principal as Organisational Architect***

If there is an all-encompassing challenge for our leaders of tomorrow's schools, it is to lead the transition from the bureaucratic model of schooling to an adaptive, self-management model (Cuban 2008). At the same time, principals will have to adjust their own definition of what it means to be a school leader. The challenge, then, is to redirect their activities and roles from management to leadership in ways consistent with the principles of post-industrial organisations. Administration has evolved to meet the clerical needs of the school. Bureaucratic schools require managers, but self-managed democratic schools of tomorrow will require leaders. The attack on the existing bureaucratic infrastructure of the school, as already mentioned, is based on the belief that, according to authors such as Cuban (2008), "the institution itself impedes the performance of all those working within it" and those who, according to McNeil (1998: 7), maintains that "bureaucratic controls undermine educational goals". School leaders of tomorrow will need to function less as classical managers and more as change agents. McNeil (1998: 8) states in this regard: "The new school leader will not be a classical, hierarchically oriented bureaucrat, but a customised version of Indiana Jones: proactive, entrepreneurial, communicating, able to inspire, empower, motivate and persuade all stakeholders".

• ***The School Principal as Social Architect***

As the single most important individual in the school context, the principal must possess the skills and abilities to transform the school into a high-performing organisation focused on improving teaching and learning outcomes to prepare learners for the challenges of the twenty-first century (Gunter 2011). Beyond these essential duties, the school leader is also confronted by some of the pressing social challenges that affect society and schooling on a daily basis in South Africa, including globalization,

poverty, unemployment, unacceptable low literacy and numeracy rates amongst primary school learners, high crime rates, the ravages of HIV/AIDS, corruption, power black-outs, teen-age pregnancies, poor services delivery as well as a predictable water shortage within the next 20 years that will have an unimaginable backlash on the society at large (Marishane and Botha 2011; Botha 2012b).

It is these broader responsibilities, in fact, that have come to define the daily work of school leaders. This often-overwhelming changes in the social context, nowhere more visible than in the family, makes the role of the principal extremely demanding, complex, and challenging. The condition and structure of the South African family is changing, so that an increasing number of learners come from homes without parents, without strong support systems and most often from very poor and disadvantage communities.

The task then is to restructure schools completely in order to address these needs and problems. Problems currently experienced in this regard in South African schools indicate that school leaders have so far largely failed this challenge and are clearly not able to respond to these increasing demands (Botha 2012b). Acting as social architects by developing the ability and skills to focus on and address these and other changes in the social context of the school and family, will enable principals to transform the school into social friendly institutions that can accommodate learners from even the most socially deprived families.

• *The School Principal as Moral and Ethical Leader*

In contrast with the social approach, the view of the school leader as moral educator takes on many forms. At its roots is the fundamental belief of Greenfield (1999: 3) who states that “the new science of management will be a science with values and of values”. Moral leadership acknowledges that values and value judgements are the central elements in the day-to-day realisation of the educational purpose. As moral educators, leaders of tomorrow’s schools will be more heavily invested in purpose-defining activities than simply in managing existing arrangements. This means that those wishing to impact society as school leaders must be motivated by a set of deep personal social values and

beliefs (Bezzina 2007). This approach emphasises the fact that morality and values are at the very core of education and link up with the social problems currently experienced in the family and society described above. The task of the school leader will be, as Sergiovanni (1996: 87) have stated, to “create a moral order that bonds both leader and followers to a set of shared values and beliefs”.

The pedagogic dimensions of moral leadership in modern society are also becoming more clearly defined (Duignan and Bezzina 2006). Tomorrow’s leaders must provide one portion of learners with a more complex and demanding educational experience than ever before, while also reaching a large portion of learners who have not experienced success even under less demanding standards and expectations, largely due to issues such as Apartheid and subsequent poverty (Shapiro and Stefkovich 2000; Botha 2010).

The belief that the activities of school leaders are deeply intertwined with ethical and moral issues is central to the issue of moral educational leadership. As defined by Kidder (1994: 37), and the researcher quotes, “an ethical dilemma is not a choice between right and wrong, but a choice between two rights”. This belief means, *inter alia*, sensitivity to racial issues and the goal of equal educational opportunities and to be responsive to the needs of historically disenfranchised and undereducated learners.

• *The School Principal as Visionary Leader*

Although not a new but rather a re-emerging approach, leadership for our schools of tomorrow needs to be anchored in the struggle to forge a new vision for schools, and such a vision should be firmly grounded in a transformational view of education in relation to the South African society at large (Moller 2009). As a vision builder, the school principal assumes a futuristic-style of leadership. This involves taking the initiative in developing a dream about the school and sharing it with others in such a way that what is initially a personal dream is reshaped and elevated to the status of a shared organisational vision (Duignan and Bezzina 2006; Steward 2006; Botha 2012a). According to Murphy (2002), this has three advantages. Firstly, a clearly expressed and shared vision gives all stakeholders in the school community

clear direction. Secondly, for people to pursue a shared vision they need to have shared goals and clarity on how to achieve these goals. For this reason, the visionary school principal should be able to communicate realistic goals to stakeholders. Thirdly, the visionary school principal should set high performance standards directed at achievement (Spillane 2006; Botha 2012b).

Viewed from the multifaceted school leadership perspective, visionary leaders are leaders who cast their vision beyond the visible horizon and expect the unexpected. Hay's (2005: 3) approach to creating a vision lies in the development of, and the researcher quotes, a "shared commitment to core values" that will, by their very nature, change how people work together. Stone, Russell and Patterson (2003) explain such a leadership shift in terms of tomorrow's values in schools and ways to put these values into action, namely openness to participation, openness to diversity, openness to conflict, openness to reflection and openness to mistakes.

DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS

The transition from the traditional educational leadership approaches to more emerging ones necessitated, *inter alia*, by modern school reforms, will in conclusion be discussed. While some of the traditional concepts of and approaches to school leadership discussed earlier will continue to be relevant, some of the current and outdated leadership practices will have to be changed to be in line with modern school reform. Principals use different leadership approaches in different scenarios and therefore their assumptions and attitudes toward other stakeholders are the foundation for their behavioural modification towards other individuals and ultimately for their respective choice of leadership approach.

As the South African educational landscape is volatile and changing by the day, the contingency leadership approach will always remain relevant as the school situation is and always will be contingent in nature. Emerging approaches to school leadership are all dependent on the situation and will therefore be contingency-based. Although recent research (Varaki 2003; Spillane 2006; Moller 2009; Botha 2012a) has indicated clearly that an authoritative approach to leadership will always be important in the educational setting, this approach, for one,

will not be applicable in the South African schools of tomorrow because of changing assumptions about society and the democratisation of the country and the school environment. As an organisational architect, the principal is to lead the transition from the autocratic and bureaucratic models of schooling to a more adaptive, self-management, distributive and participative model.

In an era of transformation, as currently experience in South African education, the transformational leadership approach, focusing on the importance of teamwork and comprehensive school improvement, will continue to be important, but only as an expansion to other modes of leadership such as visionary and ethical leadership. The traditional transactional leadership role of the principal where relationships are based on the exchange of values will be continued and will expand as moral leadership which increasingly acknowledges the fact that values and value judgements are the central elements in the day-to-day realisation of the educational purpose. Those principals who really wish to influence society as school leaders will need to be motivated by a set of deep, personal social values and beliefs.

The concept of 'vision' is currently one of the most frequently used buzzwords in the education literature of the modern era. Although it is clear that a new approach can't be entirely build on a current buzzword mainly because they do change so regularly, the visionary approach to leadership may be considered as the make-or-break approach for the school leader of tomorrow, more specifically in the ways in which leaders facilitate their vision. This includes the ethical responsibilities of principals and the dilemmas that they face in this regard. They should be able to examine these dilemmas from different perspectives and be willing to act and reflect upon them according to standards that are ethically acceptable.

The view of the school leader as social architect has clear implications for the role of school leaders as social architects. School leaders of tomorrow will need to treat cultural diversity in a complex South African society from a team-based approach to make it work in the educational setting. In this process they will need to bring together home and school more effectively in a concerted effort to enhance the quality of education. The traditional concept of

shared leadership will have to make way for their role as, *inter alia*, social architects of the schools of tomorrow.

These changes in our leadership approaches (from the more traditional ones to new and emerging ones) to ensure better quality outcomes in schools of the future forms the main outcome of this study and are described in Figure 1.

CONCLUSION

Studies on school restructuring and the leadership role of the South African school principal in this process suggest that what has been the traditional leadership role of the school principal appears to be changing in relation to the substantial changes and school-wide reforms

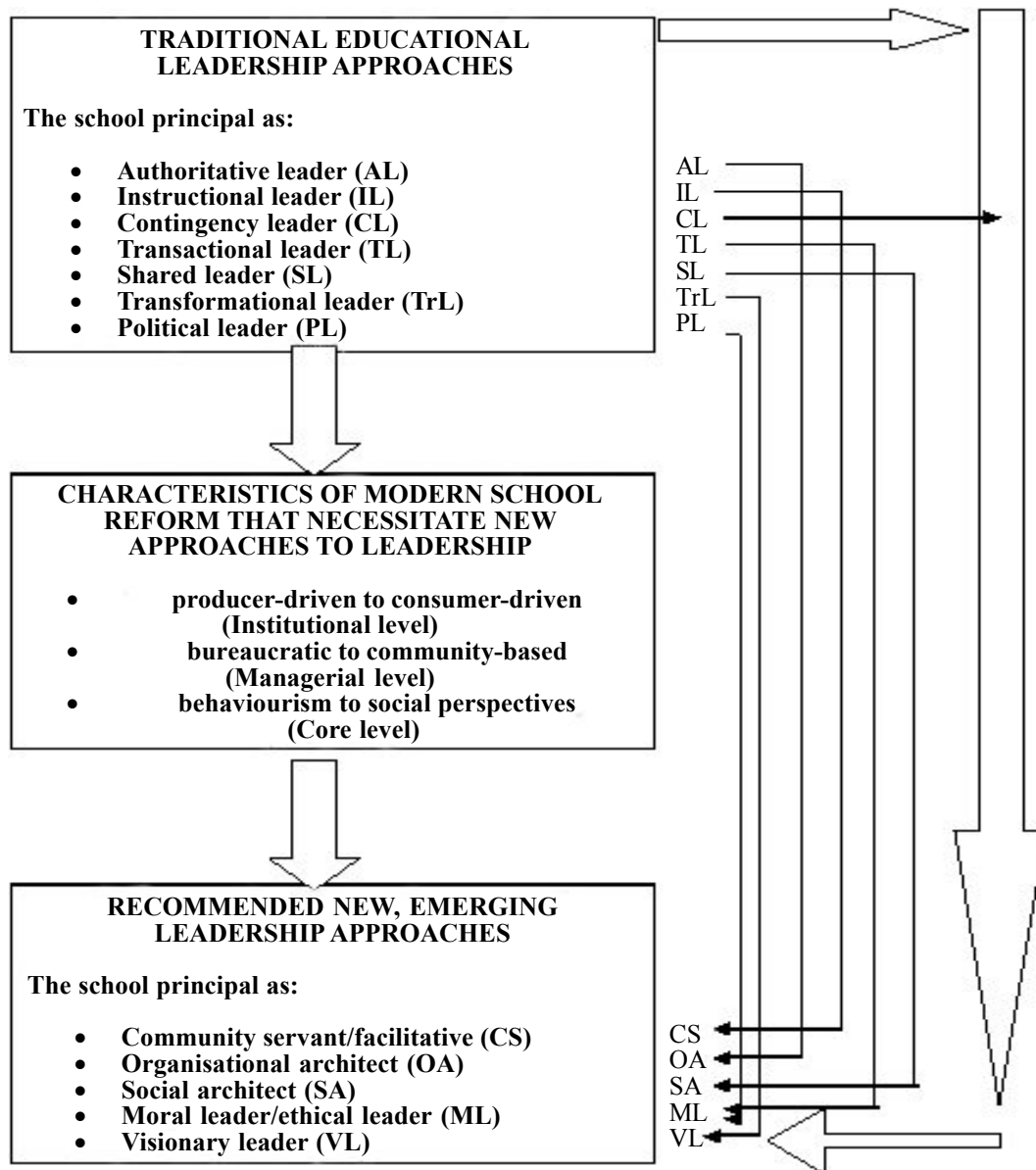


Fig. 1. Changing approaches to educational leadership

that are taking place in South African schools today. In response, this article has focused on evolving school leadership amid the changing school context. It portrays the school context as dynamic and characterised by the interaction of external and internal factors, with the latter dominated by issues such as school-based management and dysfunctional schools. Understanding this dynamic nature and the critical changes and challenges that emerge is a prerequisite for understanding the type of leadership approach suitable for the changing environment.

It can be concluded that the over-riding challenge for tomorrow's school leaders is to help articulate and implement an educational vision for a new South African society. The challenge arising from our struggle to redefine education is that if we want improved quality in our schools, we are going to have to lead differently. In the process, our concept of leadership in schools of tomorrow will have to be radically different from the way it was in the past. The driving problem behind this aim might be that although these suggested leadership approaches are crucial for successful school leadership, it currently seems if many school principals are found wanting in this regard.

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