

Leadership Practices of Heads of Department in Executing of Physical Development Activities in Primary Schools in South Africa

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ABSTRACT The teaching of physical development activities has been undermined across the world. Physical development activities are part of physical education curriculum. The teaching of physical development activities is different from teaching other learning areas as it involves learning through movement. This part of the learning area is more practical than other learning areas as learners learn the skills of movements through practical performances. This study investigates the leadership practices of Heads of Department (HODs) in the teaching of physical development activities. The results should assist HODs and school management teams to consider the experiences as well as the skills that educators possess when allocating learning areas to their staff members. Teaching physical development activities should not be regarded as a filler learning area but should be regarded as an important learning area that will benefit learners to cope with future adult life experiences. A case study of two HODs and four educators in their respective departments found that School Management Teams (SMTs) were not protecting the teaching of physical development activities. Educators are allocated to teach physical development activities even if they lack content knowledge to teach it. Time allocated to develop such educators is limited and as a result they tend to rely only on the information they access through afternoon workshops or cluster meetings. The findings indicate that lack of experience and specialisation in the teaching of physical development activities has an influence on the HODs' leadership style. More support is needed in the teaching of physical development activities in order to boost the confidence of those who are teaching this part of the learning area. Deployment of staff members to the relevant positions is one of the priority areas. An implication for schools, particularly HODs and school management teams, is that the teaching of physical development activities is as important as the teaching of other learning areas.

INTRODUCTION

A lot of research has been carried out in the area of the status of teaching physical education in schools but little research has been carried on the leadership practices of Heads of Department (HODs) in the implementation of physical development activities. Although some researchers have paid attention on how the teaching of physical development activities has been undermined (Hardman and Marshall 2000; Mudekunya and Sithole 2012) little is known about what the HODs' challenges are in leading the teaching of physical development activities in schools. The literature on the state and status of teaching physical development activities across the world is evident, but it does not capture much on the roles of HODs and the leadership styles relevant for its teaching.

The fact that the teaching of physical development activities has been undermined in

most parts of the world shows the reduction in time allocated for conducting such lessons as a worrying factor (Sedibe 2008; Umalusi 2008; Stothard 1997; Wenzel 2001; Fraser-Thomas and Beaudoin 2002). Financial resources tend to be directed to other academic learning areas with budget cuts every year for physical development resources (Crouch and Mabogoane 2001; Marshall 2000). Thus pressure to perform well in other academic learning areas such as maths and literacy make educators to sacrifice teaching time allocated to physical development activities (Hardman 2008; Waring and Warburton 2007). Teaching physical development activities is different from teaching other academic learning areas as this is a practical learning area (Reilly et al. 2001; Siedintop 2002). Some people associate physical development activities with fun and play.

Past research on the teaching of physical development activities concentrated on the

perceptions of teachers and learners regarding the benefits of teaching and being taught physical development activities. Taking this into consideration the literature does not say much on the challenges experienced by HODs in monitoring educators who conduct physical development activity lessons. Therefore there is a need to find out how HODs are managing the situation in schools. Against this background, the purpose of this research was to answer the question: "What are the experiences of HODs in managing the teaching of physical development activities in primary schools?"

The aims of this research among others included:

- ♦ Identifying ways in which effective leadership styles could be used to encourage life orientation educators to conduct physical development activity lessons as they should be and;
- ♦ To analyse the instruments used by HODs in leading and monitoring the teaching of physical development activities.

The findings of this research are expected to provide information that can assist HODs to manage the teaching of physical development activities in schools. This paper has four main parts. Firstly it reviews literature relevant to the teaching of physical development activities. The second part presents methodology and data analysis techniques. This is followed by summary of the findings. Lastly, the paper provides recommendations and conclusions for the study.

Literature Review

Teaching of Physical Development Activities

The teaching of physical development activities is perceived differently by different people.

Some view it as simply athletics while others regard it as a meaningful learning area (Pangrazi and Beighle 2010: 2). The teaching of physical development activities is connected with the improvement of health (Gart and Wright 2001: 535). A number of people suffer from diseases and high rise of obesity due to lifestyle of less physical activity (Dagkas and Stathi 2007: 370). Teaching physical development activities help learners to learn how to maintain healthy life styles (Pangrazi et al. 2010: 2). The school is the right place to begin plans to promote physical activity (Liersch et al. 2011: 329). Current studies suggest a link between intellectual and regular

activity for adults and children. Physical development activities can improve academic performance by increasing the flow of blood to the brain, enhancing mental alertness and improving self-esteem (Bailey 2006: 399). It is important to see physical education pedagogically in order to protect it from not being taken serious (Lodewyk 2009: 12).

Leadership Roles of HODs in Protecting the Learning Area

HODs as middle managers are responsible for providing guidance and direction to educators in their respective departments. HODs are responsible for the operational work of others. They are the key figures in providing direction within learning area departments (Busher and Harris 1999: 306). Learning area departments are the desired organisational structures of the school and define who educators are, what they do, where and with whom they work and how they and their work are perceived by others (Siskin 1995: 89). There are important roles that leaders need to play in order to make their schools successful. These roles include, firstly developing school visions. This is an image of how the school should be (Caldwell and Spinks 1992: 50). Secondly, school leaders must communicate school visions with staff members. This should be communicated in ways that will secure commitment among members of the organisation (Beare et al. 1993: 155). Thirdly, leaders develop others. Their role is to provide support to their subordinates.

Importance of Team Work

Leadership has been found not to be a matter of passive status, but a working relationship.

among members of a group where a leader participates actively and demonstrates the capacity for carrying tasks through completion. Leadership involves inter group relations, team building and inspiration without domination (Grace 1995: 54). In collegial theory, leaders share power with team members in order to comprehend the school's objectives (Singh 2005: 12). Collaborative leadership is important because it builds on working relationships that advances achievement of goals (Dambe and Moorad 2008: 54).

Leadership Style Relevant to Teaching Physical Development Activities

Leaders in organisations use different leadership styles. New models of schooling are emerging based on collaboration. This requires new leadership approaches (Harris and Spillane 2008: 31). Choosing a leadership style is very important for the success of a school. Leaders need to be certain that the focus, structure and process of their work with staff members are always focused on teaching and learning (Gunningham and Corderio 2006: 76).

Examples of leadership styles that will follow are not mutually exclusive and leaders can adopt one or more styles to tackle particular circumstances (Pickup et al. 2007: 185).

Transformational Leadership

Managers engage in a transaction with their employees. Transformational leaders fill their followers with the urge to perform well; they motivate co-workers through communications of high expectations (Bryant 2003: 36). Decision making of a transformational leader is a collective enterprise based on information sharing. Such sharing is for the sake of followers' participation in decision making, rather than learning (Riaz and Haque 2012: 52277).

Transactional Leadership

Transactional leadership occurs when the leader rewards the follower, depending on the follower's ability to meet the required level of performance (Bass and Riggio 2006: 517). Transactional leadership is based on the leader providing assistance and rewards the followers' needs contingent on the followers' performance. Followers are rewarded when objectives are met (Gillespie 2004: 591).

Choosing a leadership style is so essential in meeting the changing demands of our education system. No leadership style is absolute but leaders should always be guided by the type of tasks and people who they lead.

METHODOLOGY

A qualitative research design was chosen to investigate the phenomena to be studied in their real life environments to make meaning to

the experiences that people bring (Merriam 2002: 3). A case study approach was undertaken to have an in depth investigation on the leadership practices of HODs in implementing physical development activity lessons in schools. A case study approach was used as it fits with the three characteristics as mentioned by Merriam (2009: 43): "Firstly, a case study is particularistic in the sense that focus is on a particular situation, secondly a case study is characterized as being descriptive in the sense that it provides a rich description of a phenomenon studied and lastly it can illuminate the readers' understanding of a phenomenon by bringing about the discovery for new meaning or confirm what is known".

Sampling

Purposive sampling method was used to identify participants in the study. The participants were selected from two primary schools in Gauteng Province, South Africa. The participants were deliberately chosen because of their suitability on advancing the purpose of the research (Vaughn and Rule 2011: 64). The schools included two urban primary schools, one serving learners from an informal settlement and another serving learners from a formal settlement. Two HODs and four educators teaching physical development activities were selected. According to MacMillan and Schumacher (1993: 378) the participants were chosen because they possessed an insight and understanding about a particular event of management or others. In total, six participants were interviewed.

Data Collection and Analysis

In this study, one-on-one interviews were conducted with six participants- two HODs and four educators from two schools. Person-to-person encounter form of interview in which one person elicited information from another was used (Merriam 1998: 71). Questions were structured in a simple way in which participants were able to understand them. No translations were necessary because the participants could understand English. Each participant was interviewed separately on different days. The questions were predetermined so as not to deviate from what was to be asked. This style of interviewing was adopted because the researcher planned to hold several interviews and wanted

to create some level of standardisation across the interviews. Another purpose was to create uniformity when collecting data (Vaughn and Rule 2011: 64).

The interview questions were divided into three sections. Section contained demographic information about interviewees. Section B gave an overview of perceptions, opinions and challenges faced by educators in the teaching of physical development activities. Section C questions required HODs to provide information about their roles in terms of leading educators who teach physical development activities. These questions provided a clue on how they lead and strategies they use to lead other educators in attaining physical development activity goals.

In analysing data, the following stages as outlined by Lacey and Luff (2001: 3) were followed: Familiarisation with data through reading and listening, transcription of recorded material, organising data for easy retrieval, coding and identification of themes. The analysis of data was guided by questions from section B and C, which served as a framework for the identification of themes.

OBSERVATIONS AND DISCUSSION

In terms of interviews conducted with educators teaching physical development activities the discussion is guided by the responses to questions asked under the following headings: facilities and equipments for presenting physical development activity lessons, content knowledge, collaborative activities and challenges experienced.

Facilities and Equipments for Presenting Physical Development Activity Lessons

Participants in school A indicated that their school lacked adequate facilities to present physical development activity lessons and with limited resources their effective teaching is threatened. In one interview an educator said:

"We do not have sufficient equipment and facilities. We use a nearby open ground and it is not safe for our learners".

Jacobs (2011) showed that there are many problems in the implementation of this part of the learning area. One educator in school B shared the following statement to show that

there were a lot of inadequacies in the quality of facilities and equipments for the teaching of physical development activities:

"Although we have a school hall, it is occupied most of the time during the day. It is divided for use as two classrooms and as a result we do not have a safe space that we require to perform movement activities with learners".

In other instances educators claimed that they had to improvise by creating their own resources such as own skipping ropes and using empty toilet rolls to substitute cones for running movements. In one school educators had to share one equipment bag that contained a set of six balls, twelve cones and six rolling dices for in - door games in a school catering 1200 learners that were enrolled. The communities in which the schools were located did not have problems with schools using their sports related facilities for movement activities but the problem is that such facilities are a bit far away from the school. It will consume a lot of time if learners were to be taken to such facilities.

Content Knowledge

None of the participants in this study had specialised in the teaching of physical development activities at tertiary institution. Out of six participants interviewed, only one showed a lack of interest in teaching the learning area due to old age and incapability to perform certain movements with learners during physical development activity classes. The others were enjoying it and felt positive even though they did not specialise in it. The content knowledge for physical education was different from that of other learning areas (Siedentop 2003). The knowledge that the participants had regarding the teaching of physical development activities was gained through department in service training.

Collaborative Activities

Participants showed that they preferred to work in collaboration with others. One educator from school B explained:

"We do planning of lessons together. We support each other. During planning we agree on the dates and time we will be taking learners together to the school grounds to coach one another. We encourage one another to work

collaboratively. We do physical training together. Although we do not share the same grades, we plan things together”.

Findings revealed that although the educators are enjoying the learning area and work together as a team, they prefer this part of the learning area to be taught by specialist educators.

Challenges Experienced by Educators in the Implementation of Physical Development Activities

Limited time allocated for the teaching of physical development activities presented problems. Often learners had to change into sport gear when performing movement activities and it took time. The second challenge was that obese children lacked interest in most cases. The challenge faced by educators was how to convince such learners that this related to teaching them healthy lifestyle. The third challenge was how to design rubrics for movement activities. The fourth challenge discovered was concern about safety issues. Learners sometimes sustained injuries and educators needed to administer first aid to such learners. Due to tight school budgets, the available first aid kit stock did not last full school year and learners end up being restricted to participate in physical development activity lessons.

In terms of interviews conducted with HODs the discussion is guided by the responses to questions asked under the following headings: Supervision and monitoring, leadership styles and characteristics, challenges experienced, training needs and keeping the balance.

Supervision and Monitoring

An HOD in school A indicated that she was responsible for leading and managing eleven educators in her department while an HOD in school B was responsible for leading and managing four educators in his department. The two HODs were using the same instruments that were aligned to the district's tools for school visit and monitoring. Both HODs were doing class visits to support educators through the teaching process. During class visits, educators' files were monitored, learners' work books were monitored to check the quality and quantity of work given. Tasks given were moderated as shown on the moderation reports. Although

the HODs interviewed have different teaching experiences in terms of the number of years as leaders in their departments, it was clear that they are guided by monitoring instruments used by district officials when monitoring the work of educators in their departments. Such common knowledge is guided and influenced by experiences they got through attending HOD workshops conducted by district officials.

Leadership Styles and Characteristics

In terms of motivational strategies, the HODs said they were not using any monetary tools but they acknowledge educators for the good work especially in meetings. Those who did well are applauded and recognised for the job well done. The HOD from school A gave the following response when asked about the leadership characteristics that best define her:

“I am an assertive kind of person. I usually go an extra mile. I am willing to sacrifice time”. This clearly shows that as a leader in her department she is aware of the qualities that the leader should possess. This included working harder than expected levels, walking an extra mile in order to be ahead and sacrificing much time to meet deadlines for her department. Both HODs were clear to say they prefer the democratic leadership style. An HOD in school A said even though she prefers this leadership style she does not take for granted the fact that she is accountable in terms of decisions being made in her department. An HOD in school B said that even if he prefers a democratic leadership style, at times he is forced to be autocratic. There are situations where he cannot be as democratic as others may want him to be. It all depends on the situation that his department finds itself in. He clearly mentioned that if there are deadlines to be met in order to comply with departmental requirements and needs, he does not compromise. This is where he had to be autocratic in order to avoid non-compliance, especially to policy issues and submissions of reports.

Challenges Experienced by HODs in the Implementation of Physical Development Activities

Three challenges were identified when HODs departmental reports were analysed.

Firstly, reports on observations made during class visits showed that educators had difficulties in assessing physical development activities. Learning objectives were not clearly clarified when designing rubrics for movement activities. Secondly, educators struggle to submit movement tasks well on time for moderation. Some tasks had to be referred back to educators in order to be redesigned. This in turn delays the progress for the department as well as the school. Thirdly, late submissions cause delays in terms of completing assessment reports.

Training Needs

Both HODs indicated the need for training in their departments as workshop information was not enough. Training needs in their departments include rules on how to teach, play different games and designing lessons for activities associated with enjoyment of sport. There was an indication of a challenge in teaching opposite sex learners and refereeing other kinds of games.

Keeping the Balance

HODs are not only required to do admin work, but are required to teach as well. They are responsible to induct newly appointed educators, feed other educators with information regarding new learning area developments and ensure a fair distribution of resources in their respective departments.

CONCLUSION

The study revealed that HODs in the interviewed schools prefer to use democratic leadership styles. However, there may be situations that require them to change their leadership styles. These situations include a lack of experience and specialisation in the teaching of physical development activities and have an influence on their leadership styles. The study also revealed that lack of time for mentoring and coaching of educators who teach physical development activities de-motivates educators in that department. The workshops provided by the Department are not sufficient and happens mainly in the afternoons after contact time with learners. It is important for school management teams to carefully consider the experiences

as well as the levels of skills that educators possess when learning areas are being allocated during the restructuring process. Educators feel that they do not have much power to change the situation. Instead they tend to avoid teaching and instruction areas in which they lack skills and confidence. This in turn is used as an excuse for not being able to account to how physical development activity scores were given.

RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that the Department of education must provide professional development of educators teaching physical development activities. Educators who teach this learning area should be encouraged to register with higher learning institutions that will offer them long term courses on how to teach physical development activities. It should relieve HODs from their heavy workloads in schools. This will give them time to mentor or coach educators in their departments. They will have time to collaborate with community sport coaches and incorporate skills gained into everyday teaching of physical development activities. More time should be allocated for practical demonstrations when information is cascaded to others.

School Management Teams should consider the experiences and skills of educators during the restructuring process within their schools.

LIMITATIONS

This study was limited to two urban schools in Gauteng Province. It is qualitative in nature and the number of participants was very small. The findings cannot be generalised for all provinces in South Africa.

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