School-University Partnership in a South African Rural Context: Possibilities for an Asset-based Approach

Phumlani Myende and Vitallis Chikoko

School of Education, University of KwaZulu-Natal, P Bag X03, Ashwood 3605, Durban, South Africa
E-mail: <myendep@ukzn.ac.za>, <chikokov@ukzn.ac.za>

ABSTRACT In this paper the researchers utilised qualitative research methods to investigate possibilities for the asset-based approach to achieving school-community partnership. One partnership between a South African University and a secondary school in KwaZulu-Natal province was studied with the aim of investigating what assets the partners regarded as central in the partnership, the extent to which they utilised these assets and what could be the possibilities for the asset-based approach in that partnership. Through document analysis and semi-structured interviews, the paper reveals that teachers, the school principal's leadership, the experience of the school in partnerships and local community representatives were regarded as great assets in the studied partnership. The results suggest that while the available assets were utilized to some degree in the partnership, there existed several threats against the asset-based approach. The researchers conclude that the asset-based approach has great potential as a way of achieving school-community partnership. They further conclude that focus on strong leadership, greater clarity on the aims and thrust of any partnership, as well as well-coordinated asset-mapping strategies constitute some of the key areas requiring nurturing if this approach is to be useful.

INTRODUCTION

The South African society generally regards education as a major instrument for correcting the injustices of the apartheid system of government that manifested, among other ways, through unequal employment opportunities resulting from unequal education opportunities among different racial groups (Du Toit et al. 2010). As a result, in the new democratic South Africa, there has been a strong societal demand for improved quality of education across the entire education spectrum and in particular, regarding the primary and secondary schools system (Myende 2013; Naiker et al. 2014). In response, Government has introduced a number of changes in the education sector aimed at accelerating the transformation process. To illustrate, the South African Schools Act no. 84 of 1996, has extended the governance of schools

Address for correspondence:
Mr. Phumlani Myende,
UKZN Edgewood Campus,
Corner of Mariannhill and Richmond RD,
Main tutorial building, office G309,
Ashwood 3605.
Telephone: +27(0) 31 260 2054 or
+27(0) 73 991 2392,
Fax: +27(0) 31 260 1598
E-mail: myendep@ukzn.ac.za.

to involve parents and community members granting them powers to control school finances, among other responsibilities, as a way of decentralising the running of education (Republic of South Africa 1996). This Act has prescribed that all decisions regarding the education of a child should be a joint responsibility of the school, parents, and members of the community such as governmental, non-governmental, religious and business organisations. Thus decision-making has been dispersed to include more stakeholders (Spillane 2005). These and other initiatives have provided fertile ground for increased school-community partnership. The main aim in these collaborations has always been that of improving learner achievement (Anderson-Butcher et al. 2006; Bojuwoye 2009; Melaville 1998; Naidu et al. 2008). Among many attempts at improving the quality of education, the Department of Education implemented the Outcomes-Based Education (OBE) to improve the quality of learning (Naidu et al. 2008) and the Integrated Quality Management System (IQMS) to improve the quality of teaching and ensure teachers' accountability (Weber 2005; Naidu et al. 2008; Tsotetsi 2013).

However, improving the quality of education in South Africa particularly in rural contexts has been hindered by a number of factors such as poverty, violence, HIV and AIDS, alcohol and

drug abuse, and gangsterism (Bojuwoye 2009; Kamper 2009; Khanare 2009; Sanders and Sheldon 2009; Chikoko and Khanare 2012; Naiker et al. 2014). To be more effective rural schools will need to develop strategies to manage, if not to curb these factors (Myende 2013). This has to be done while ensuring that the academic roles of the school remain a priority. Such demands on schools require additional resources including increased and improved involvement of more stakeholders in the community (Sanders 2001; Anderson-Butcher et al. 2006; Kalenga and Chikoko 2014). However, harnessing additional external resources may not necessarily be the panacea to a school's problems. Schools will need to assess their own existing assets and mobilise them as a starting point hence this paper's focus on possibilities for the asset-based approach.

School-community partnerships have been identified as one of the means for schools to improve their performance (Sanders 2006; Bojuwoye 2009; Myende 2013). The term 'partnership' refers to a contractual relationship between two or more people with shared goals and willingness to take shared accountability for risks (Du Toit et al. 2010). In this paper the researchers define educational partnership as a process whereby different stakeholders share responsibilities to improve the quality of education in their schools. The ideal partnership is one in which decision-making power is evenly distributed such that no member claims superiority over others.

While the concept of partnership has been predominant in the business sector, there is growing literature on school-community partnership and different forms of such partnerships have been initiated, such as school-university partnership (Chikoko 2011). While literature suggests that the asset-based approach is the way to go in community development (Kretzmann and McKnight 1993; Eloff and Ebersohn 2001; Myende 2011) and while school-university partnerships have gone on for eons in many parts of the world (Johns 2003; Ford 2004; Lemmer 2007; Ledoux and McHenry 2008; Bojuwoye 2009; Chikoko 2011), in this paper the researchers contend that there is not enough knowledge regarding possibilities for the asset-based approach in school-university partnership. The researchers thus studied one such partnership between a South African university and a rural secondary school.

Within the said partnership, this paper draws from a project called 'Nothing about Us without Us' which ran from 2011 to 2013. The project, involving 38 schools and their immediate communities, aimed at enhancing teaching and learning in rural schools through the use of participatory approaches to teacher development and community wellness. Areas of focus included teacher development, issues of HIV and AIDS, gender-based violence, and school leadership and management. Among the project research team members was a principal of one of the research schools. The authors of this paper were part of the research team in the project, one as a team leader of one of the focus areas and the other as a Master's degree student and research assistant.

Within the said project, this paper draws from a study that sought to address the following research questions:
- What assets do partners in the project regard as central in the partnership?
- To what extent do partners utilise these assets in their partnership?
- What therefore can be said to be the possibilities for the asset-based approach in this partnership?

Understanding Rurality in South Africa in the Context of Education

Rurality is a complex and difficult term to describe. Hlalele (2012) contends that the definition of 'rural' eludes those who try to understand it due to both its ambiguity and the often fallible comparison between rural and urban contexts. But almost all rural contexts face huge challenges that negatively impact on the attainment of quality education (Carroll et al. 2001; Nelson Mandela Foundation 2005; Hlalele 2012; Chikoko and Khanare 2012). Rural contexts often suffer social ills such as disease, poverty, low levels of education, low learner achievement, low self-esteem among those who live there, unfavourable policy environments and limited facilities (Johnson and Strange 2007; Chikoko and Khanare 2012; Hlalele 2012) These and other related challenges often lead to what is often ignored about rural contexts and their communities is that they are unique in their own ways. These communities have what Hlalele (2012) calls community capital. He argues that rural people live in their communities by choice, and this

should not in any way affect the quality of education attained in these contexts. For him, it is this community capital that makes rural contexts to be attractive places to live and raise family in. Hlalele further argues that there is a strong bond that exists among rural community members which contributes to their welfare.

In the context of the framework of this paper (asset-based approach) researchers are aware of the unfavourable conditions that exist in rural areas, but the paper describes rurality guided by the Traditional Leadership and Governance Framework of Act 2003 (Republic of South Africa 2003) and the KwaZulu-Natal Traditional leadership and Governance Act No. 5 of 2005 (KZN Legislature 2005). Drawing from these Acts, rurality refers to any place that is under the leadership and governance of traditional leaders. A rural school will then be any school found in a place led and governed by traditional leadership.

It is argued in this paper that in order to create an effective school-community partnership, the external partner should build upon the existing capital in the school and its surroundings. This is not an easy affair because many times rural communities are unaware of their own forms of capital.

The Asset-Based Approach in a Nutshell

Kretzmann and MacKnight (1993) developed the asset-based model as the ideal approach to community development. At the core of this approach is the belief that every person and community has capacities, abilities, gifts, skills and social resources (Kretzmann and McKnight 1993). The theory asserts that support for communities is possible, feasible and sustainable only if it begins from within. According to this approach "beginning from within" means determining available assets (capacities, abilities, gifts, skills and social resources) to be utilised within the community in question. This process of identifying available assets is conceptualised as the mapping of assets (Kretzmann and McKnight 1993). Kretzmann and MacKnight (1993) further regard the asset-based approach as a process of building communities from inside-out or as a process of building communities from bottom up. Ebersohn and Eloff (2006) regard it as an "internally focused" approach to community development, while Kretzmann and McK-

night (1993) extend their conceptualisation of the approach and regard it as a "capacity focused alternative". The approach compares the community with a half-full glass (Khanare 2009). The half-fullness represents already existing assets in the community thus suggesting that for external partners to make the glass full they can only add on to what is contained therein. The researchers thus contend that efforts aimed at developing rural schools can only work if they acknowledge and utilise what these institutions and their surroundings already have. This is likely to bring a sense of ownership among local people, helping them take charge or their own circumstances. The asset-based approach is a second path to community development which challenges the first path-the deficit model which focuses on the needs, deficiencies and problems of the community in question (Kretzmann and McKnight 1993). According to Ebersohn and Eloff (2006) the needs-driven approach has been the dominant approach to development initiatives in Southern Africa for a long time. Kretzmann and McKnight (1993) assert that the needs-based approach creates a mental map of communities who denigrate their own capacities and strengths.

Types of Rural Schools' Assets

Chikoko and Khanare (2012) drawing from Mourad and Ways' (1998) classified community assets into three. These are called three tiers of community assets namely primary, secondary and outside tiers. According to these authors, primary tier assets are the most immediate to a community, whereas secondary ones are semi or less immediate. In this case primary tier would comprise those assets found inside the school premises such as teachers and their skills. Secondary tier would be the immediate local community of the school such as local businesses and associations. And lastly, the outside tier will be interested individuals and organisations not in the immediate community such as research institutes and universities further away. Successful utilisation of assets entails drawing from the primary tier first before moving on to the secondary and so on. This combination is likely to enable the creation of communities that are not vulnerable, but empowered and can become agents of school renewal.

Although highly supported for improving the quality of education both locally and internationally, research indicates that in South Africa many school-community partnerships have failed due to their adoption of the deficiency approach (Eloff and Ebersohn 2001) in which the targeted main beneficiary of a partnership (in this case the school) is construed as deficient and therefore incapable of contributing to addressing its own problems thus needing external intervention as its only salvation. When enslaved in this deficit approach, in a rural context in particular, teachers, learners and parents would perceive their schools as under-resourced and unable to solve their challenges without external support (Nelson Mandela Foundation 2005). External partners in turn would perceive people within schools as without any assets or potential to deal with the challenges they face (Brady 2002; Moore-Thomas and Day-Vines 2010). This approach will most likely create unsustainable partnership and communities that believe that overcoming their challenges is solely dependent upon external intervention (Kretzmann and McKnight 1993). Alternatively, the asset-based approach contends that assets within communities can and should be harnessed to help them solve or at least contribute towards solving their own challenges and is ideal for creating sustainable partnerships (Khanare 2009). This approach is also relevant in ensuring that communities perceive themselves as resourceful and empowered to look after themselves (Van Wyk and Lemmer 2007; Myende 2011).

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

This was a qualitative case study. The researchers locate this paper within the interpretive paradigm because its epistemological perspective is that there are multiple realities and these realities are constructed by informants (De Vos et al. 2002). As an case study, the researchers sought to understand the phenomenon (the possibilities for the asset-based approach in a school-university partnership) as interpreted and understood by those who knew 'what it is like' to be in the case partnership. From an interpretive perspective, this partnership could be understood solely from the people who were part of it (Cresswell 2008). The researchers believe that the meaning that the partners gave to their

partnership was socially constructed, bounded by the context in which the partnership took place, as well as by the nature of the partnership itself (Cohen et al. 2007).

Participants

Within the selected school, participants included the school principal, two school management team (SMT) members (deputy principal and one Head of Department) and two teachers. From the university participants were two project leaders. The participants were purposively selected on the basis of their leadership roles in the project. Literature suggests that it is useful to involve school principals in most if not all initiatives aimed at school improvement (Coleman and Earley 2005; Kamper 2008; Battilana et al. 2010; Myende 2013; Naiker et al. 2014). The two SMT members who were selected were part of the school management team in the project. The two teachers were involved as mentors of pre-service teachers in the project. The two university project leaders were some of the initiators of the project.

Data Collection Methods

The researchers used two data collection instruments namely document analysis and semi-structured interviews. Document analysis has gained currency as an ideal method in collecting textual in-depth data in qualitative studies (Neuman 2006; Cohen et al. 2007). The analysis of the project proposal document, project reports, written communications between the school and the university partners, and a questionnaire sent to participating schools was conducted. Documents from previous projects (2004-2009) were considered as indicated in the description of the partnership. These documents were relevant as the studied projected are connected to the old projects.

The process also involved one semi-structured individual interview with the school principal, the two SMT members, and the two project leaders and one joint interview with the two teachers. Each interview took an average duration of 45 minutes. Semi-structured interviews can enable the qualitative researcher to generate a lot of descriptive data from few participants (Thompson and Walker 2002; Neuman 2006; Maree 2007; Cohen et al. 2007).

Data Analysis

The researchers conducted content analysis of the data from documents. Data from interviews were grouped according to emerging themes. The researchers then integrated data from both sources by generating emerging themes and interpreting it in relation to the research questions.

Ethical Considerations

Conducting research, especially from a social science context has an ethical-moral dimension that researchers are obliged to follow (Neuman 2006; Maree 2007). The researchers firstly obtained ethical clearance from their University. They also obtained permission to conduct the paper from the provincial Department of Education concerned as well as from the school. They then obtained informed consent from all the participants. To ensure the confidentiality and anonymity participants' names and those of the university and school studied are not disclosed.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In this section, consistent with the research questions, the researchers firstly present and discuss data regarding the resources the partners regarded as central to their partnership. Secondly, they move on to the partners' responses on the extent to which they utilised the identified assets. Thirdly, drawing from the responses and discussion about the first two sections the section examines possibilities for the efficacy of the asset-based approach in the partnership. In presenting and discussing the data, themes that emerged from both the data analysis and the research questions are adopted.

Partnership Initiation Strategies

As argued earlier in this paper, the basic tenet of a partnership is that partners 'walk' together as equals without anyone of them claiming superiority over the other. Findings suggest that the project initiators adopted an asset-based approach. The initiation of this partnership began by an attempt to map out the school's primary and secondary assets. To illustrate, the questionnaire which was circulated to all partnering schools sought among other things,

school principals' understanding of what their schools currently possessed by way of resources, knowledge and skills. In addition to this, the project proposal document that spelt the aims and objectives of the partnership emphasises the utilisation of participatory planning processes. Here is an excerpt from that document:

A participatory planning process involving all stakeholders will be instituted involving all major stakeholders from the partner universities/institutions, the Provincial Department, Directorate of Rural Education, selected schools and community representatives in... District... The project aims to use participatory methods to involve teachers and rural communities in understanding and harnessing the potential reciprocal relationships (p. 7)

Furthermore, all the school-based interviewees reported that the project initiation strategy used was very inclusive. Researchers such as Anderson-Butcher et al. (2006) and Kalenga and Chikoko (2014) suggest that such an inclusive approach where internal stakeholders (such as teachers, school management, learners and non-teaching staff in the case of a school) are not passive consumers of services and external stakeholders pose as expert providers, is likely to lead to success. The participants' sense of being included was itself an asset to this partnership, because it would build confidence in them to participate more.

Teachers as Assets

Findings suggested that teachers were regarded as assets in the partnership. As stated earlier, the partnership started in 2004 and documents suggested that from the beginning of the partnership teachers in the project were made part of the activities of the partnership. Teachers played a role in suggesting possible dates of workshops and in those workshops they actively participated. Evidence from both data sources indicated that teachers also played an important role as mentors of student teachers. The following excerpts serve as some of the evidence:

Project Leader 1*: Teachers decide where and when they would like the workshops to take place...we also use their suggestions in designing solutions in future activities of the partnerships...Teachers make decisions they also contribute in decision making in terms of*

what we should do, how we should do it and when to do it.

Teacher 1: During workshops the University partners also allow us to say what we think must be done and at the end our suggestions are valued. Although not all teachers get involved but those that get involved play an active role.

In implementing an asset-based approach, Kretzmann and McKnight (1993) and Myende (2013) argue that all people have some capacities, abilities, skills and social resources and ignoring this when supporting them may lead in the creation of communities that believe they are useless and cannot solve their own problems. Talking about identifying and mobilising own assets, it was learnt that teachers in the school had also begun to initiate and run projects of their own. A group of teachers had started a support scheme that included feeding and donating uniforms to vulnerable learners. It appeared to the researchers that the project workshops conducted for teachers, among other factors, had awakened the potential to do things among these teachers.

As the researchers reported earlier, the school-university partnership also involved the mentoring of student teachers by experienced teachers with a focus on equipping them with knowledge, skills and the right attitude to cope with teaching in rural contexts. Thus teachers in the school were identified as a critical asset in this regard. The school principal reported that he had found teachers in the school to be very resourceful as mentors. Project leader 2 also expressed this same sentiment as follows:

The teachers are proving to be good mentors for our students. They need our continued support. Being a mentor is a special responsibility. For these new teachers to successfully learn in context, they need the support and guidance of the experienced teacher.

However, the teachers whore were interviewed reported that the mentoring role was not without challenges. For example, as also found by Morojele et al. (2013) there were gender differences regarding how things should be done. In other cases there were cultural differences between mentor and mentee. Some mentees were Indian pre-service teachers while mentors were black. What was found to be very encouraging was that the teachers did not give up. Instead, they generated solutions as they interacted more

with the student teachers and their university lecturers. At the end of the day, home-grown solutions were found to address the above challenges. In the researchers' view, this was a typical example of the asset-based approach in action. As Eloff and Ebersohn (2006) and Myende (2011) put it, the asset-based approach emphasises that solutions are better generated from inside out and this was what the teachers did in this case. However, literature has proven that schools are challenged by several social ills while they also have to respond to the demand for quality education. This creates more work especially for teachers as they also have to fulfill academic duties. Interviews with all school-based participants revealed that the quantity and value of duties that were allocated to teachers made it difficult to become effective assets in the partnership. Teachers indicated that they would appreciate it if one local organisation or representatives could be allowed to come and offer support to learners on their behalf as they felt burnt out. Now, how does the asset-based approach come in here? Hlalele (2012) argues that in South African rural contexts it is a known fact that unemployment is rife. From the researchers' asset-based perspective, it is argued that these unemployed people can offer different crucial support to their school.

The Principal and his Leadership as an Asset

It has been argued elsewhere that the principal's leadership is one of the critical resources in any school improvement efforts (Kamper 2008; Naiker et al. 2013). Gretz (2003) and Naiker et al. (2014) also argue that it takes strong leadership to initiate and sustain a partnership. The principal of the partnering school was a project leader in the mentoring of student teachers component of the partnership. The project's 2009 annual report acknowledged the principal as a crucial role player in making sure that the relationship between the school and its community and the University project members was growing. This report contains several important suggestions that the principal made to strengthen the partnership. For example, the university partners designed the mentoring workshop only for teachers who had student teachers allocated to them but through the principal's intervention all teachers attended and were trained as mentors during 2010 and 2011 workshops. This was

found to have increased the buy-in into the project by the entire teaching staff. Through the interview with the principal, it emerged that the principal sometimes became less involved personally and delegated responsibilities to ensure that things continue to be done even when he was not physically there. Literature (Gretz 2003; Kamper 2008; Moore-Thomas and Day-Vines 2010; Naiker et al. 2013; Kalenga and Chikoko 2014) suggests that the role of the principal does not end at being a direct resource towards partnership but he/she must give support to teachers involved in teams and ensure there is mutual understanding between school internal stakeholders and external partners. In this regard, Gretz (2003: 34) had this to say:

Managing partnerships in which students, parents, business leaders and community members are involved requires a delicate balance of delegation and control that enables stakeholders to participate and share responsibilities and yet clearly define and understand different roles are involved is a successful partnerships.

The results of the study linked the principal's role in the partnership with what is highlighted above. In a school-community partnership such as the one in this study, the school principal needs to make sure that there is mutual understanding between the partners. He must also ensure that objectives of the partnership are communicated in order to have that mutual understanding. The school principal reported that he always worked together with other stakeholders. This is what he had to say:

You don't work in isolation... we believe you don't succeed if you do things all by yourself you have to form partnerships with people with the same purpose. Lately we have an organisation by the name of Youth for Christ which is also based in school on the very same issues of HIV and AIDS. They have their peer educators and they are assisting learners with peer education skills.

As the researchers also reported earlier, Naidu et al. (2008) and Myende (2011) argue that teachers are sometimes overwhelmed by a lot of work. This may negatively impact their involvement in partnership activities. To counteract this challenge, the principal reported that he adopted what Miller (2007) refers to as boundary-spanning leadership. This entails creating networks with other people within and outside one's or-

ganisation and bringing them on board in order to double the human capacity that is required by, in this case the school to fulfill its goals and those of its stakeholders. Kretzmann and McKnight (1993) refer to this process as asset-mapping. It is one of the strategies of developing partnerships from inside-out. Naidu et al. (2008) and Naiker et al. (2013) further argue that school leaders, especially principals must 'speak and understand the language' of the potential partners and according to Miller (2007) this will enable the leaders to foster greater social cohesion that will strengthen school-community partnership. A school principal's leadership here is not only emphasised as a direct factor, his/her indirect involvement is also acknowledged in a number of ways. For example, Sanders and Sheldon (2009) note that rather than being central in partnership, the principal can do the following: (1) identify school personnel who have skills, expertise and experience to serve in school-community action teams. (2) be supportive of the teams' effort; provide resources, attend community partnership events, arrange class coverage for teachers attending action team meetings and acknowledge and praise partnership efforts and success, (3) support their action teams in making connections with possible funders and (4) acknowledge that administrators, other educators, action team leaders, parents and students have creative solutions to school challenges. The interviews with the two teachers and the Head of Department revealed that the principal was supportive of the action teams in the school. In this regard the principal was an asset to the partnership. The principal's' support for initiatives determines the effectiveness and success of such activities (Bush 2005; Coleman and Earley 2005). Among the factors that contribute to the success of school activities, Fullan (2001) and Chikoko (2011) highly rate the strong support that principals can give in school activities. Similarly, in a study conducted by Sanders and Harvey (2002) the school principal's leadership was found to be very instrumental in extending participation and creating meaningful connections. The same view is shared by Battilana et al. (2010), Fullan (2001), Landsberg et al. (2005). The document analysis and interviews indicated that all participants were convinced that the principal is important in the partnership but through some backlogs he sometimes became a liability to the partnership.

In this study, although the principal was greatly acknowledged as an asset in the partnership, the findings indicated some challenges regarding his leadership therein. One of reasons for teachers' minimal participation in the partnership was reported to be the principal's failure to communicate messages to relevant stakeholders and his sometimes poor commitment on matters of the partnership. The two project leaders and one of the teachers identified the principal as a liability in some respects. This is what the project leaders had to say:

Project Leader 1: Well I am working with the principal…when he attended the workshop that I had for the teachers for a while, he got a sense of what was happening and he left, but it didn't work too well. After that when I followed up with a second visit basically when I got into the school I found that he didn't give information to the teachers about the second workshop…Yes especially because the principal being the person representing the school and he seems to be the one making decisions and not involving the teachers.

Project Leader 2: so he [principal] is the missing link in the partnership may be the point will be to invite those people [teachers] directly… actually they (teachers) told us that they don't want to participate, especially if the partnership comes through the principal…there is a huge change…in this past year I find him to be very obstructive and disengaged for some unknown reasons. His relationships with teachers, the community and with us, I think they have been damaged and it will take a long time for those relationships to be fixed.

The project leaders' responses above suggest that establishing collaboration in a partnership is not a once-off matter. If not continuously nurtured, a partnership can fall apart. Also, information flow is crucial to sustaining a partnership. The lack of such flow seemed to slowly paralyse the school-university partnership. In this case the researchers also learnt that like teachers, school principals get overloaded with work sometimes and over-relying on them as key drivers of partnership may backfire.

The School's Experience in School-Community Partnerships as an Asset

During interviews with the principal and teachers it emerged that before the partnership under study, the school had other partnerships with local health and educational organisations. The participants indicated that this previous partnership experience was now an asset to them because they had a better idea of how to work with people from outside the school. They had now developed different committees within the school which made it easier to fulfill their duties in the new partnership. In this respect, this is what one teacher had to say:

We have worked with one organisation that provides HIV and AIDS counseling and we have also worked with our local clinic to deal with other challenges we are facing in our school. I think working with the local clinic made us understand how to deal with other external stakeholders and how successful partnerships run. Through these partnerships we have also developed committees in our school and we have used the same committees to deal with the aspects of our current partnerships.

The experience which the school gained in this school-university partnership is likely to be very handy as it engages in subsequent partnerships. Such scaffolding is what Kretzmann and McKnight (1993) have referred to as developing from inside out. Its strength lies in the tried and tested practice of drawing from the known in order to penetrate the unknown.

CONCLUSION

The significance of school-community partnerships places a need to ensure that these partnerships are created and sustained. Through literature and the findings, this paper suggests that schools within rural contexts require concerted efforts in order to deal with their daily challenges. However the researchers reject the mentality that downgrades the strengths found within such contexts. The asset-based approach acknowledges that urban and rural contexts may not be the same but it further contends that strengths of rural people can contribute immensely in solving rural problems. It is for this reason that the researchers have advocated for the utilisation of this approach in school-community partnerships.

While the approach is ideal, the paper does not ignore some possible hindering factors towards realising the asset-based approach in school-community partnerships within rural contexts. The results showed that unless

schools utilise boundary-spanning leadership, which is ensuring that school leaders develop a culture that welcomes all participants to get fully involved in the partnership, assets may not be utilised effectively. The researchers further acknowledge the challenge of placing all coordination duties on the shoulders of the school principal and argue that this might hinder the success of partnership. Thus the researchers argue for strong leadership, shared partnership aims and goals and well-coordinated efforts of mobilising assets.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Firstly, it must be argued that results proved that the asset-based approach can be utilised in school-university partnership in a rural context. However, for this to work several considerations need to be made from different angles of the partnership. Below, the researchers highlight some of these considerations.

In any school-community partnership, the crucial role of the school principal cannot be over-emphasised. Therefore the quality of the principal's leadership can either be an asset or a liability to the school. Organisations run smoothly if the vision and mission are understood by all. Such understanding can hardly develop unless the organisational leaders commit themselves to implementing effective communication. While this study's findings indicate strong interest and motivation towards partnership by most participants, there seemed to be a challenge regarding lack of fluent communication between different stakeholders. It is recommended here that through effective communication, the interests and desires of all participants can be sustained.

Without overburdening the school principal, the researchers contend that the school principal is usually the gate keeper in the school and this means those initiatives that are guided and blessed by his leadership stand a chance to succeed. In the study, it appeared that where a lack of participation from community representatives had occurred it was largely because of the not-so-effective communication on the principal's part. Therefore, strong leadership and effective communication on the part of the principal is one of the pre-requisites for the success of the asset-based approach. Thus, they are both recommended for the success of school-university partnerships in this paper.

The proponents of the asset-based approach have argued that there should be well structured and coordinated means towards the mapping of assets. In the findings although researchers could see documentary evidence of communication between different participants there seemed to be a lack of coordinated asset-mapping strategies. What was not found in the documents (reports and proposals) was an asset map showing all the available assets in their different tiers hence this conclusion. The researchers recommend that asset-mapping is one of the pillars for successful asset-based management and partners need to conduct asset-mapping to identify all possible contributors towards partnership.

REFERENCES

Anderson-Butcher DE, Stetle G, Midle T 2006. A case for expanded school-community partnerships in support of positive youth development. *Children and Schools*, 28: 155-163.

Battilana J, Gilmartinb M, Sengul M, Pache A, Alexander JA 2010. Leadership competencies for implementing planned organizational change. *The Leadership Quarterly*, 21: 422-438.

Bojuwoye O 2009. Home-school partnership – A study of opinions of selected parents and teachers in KwaZulu-Natal Province, South Africa. *Research Papers in Education*, 24: 461-475.

Brady L 2002. School university partnerships- What do the schools want. *Australian Journal of Teacher Education*, 27: 1-9.

Bush T 2005. Managing styles and their impact on fiancial and resource management. In: L Anderson, J Lumby (Eds.): *Managing Finance and External Relations in South African Schools*. Wakefield: Commonwealth Secretariat, pp. 23-42.

Carroll G, LaPoint V, Tyler K 2001. Education co-construction: A facilitator for school reform in school, community and university partnerships. *The Journal of Negro Education*, 70: 38-58.

Chikoko V 2011. The challenge of teaching in under-resourced school: A reflection on preservice teacher's journals. In: F Islam, C Mitchell, N de Lange, R Balfour, M Combrinck (Eds.): *School-University Partnerships for Educational Change in Rural South Africa: Particular Challenges and Practical Cases*. Lewiston: The Edwin Mellen Press, pp. 84-100.

Chikoko V, Khanare F 2012. School management teams' conceptualisation of school assets in addressing the needs of children orphaned and made vulnerable by HIV and AIDS: Evidence from South Africa. *Journal of Social Science,* 32: 23-36.

Cohen L, Manion L, Morrison K (Eds.) 2007. *Research Methods in Education*. 6th Edition. London: Routledge.

Coleman M, Earley P 2005. *Leadership and Management in Education: Cultures, Change and Context*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Cresswell JW (Ed.) 2008. *Educational Research: Planning, Conducting, and Evaluating Quantitative and Qualitative Research.* 3rd Edition. New Jersey: Pearson.

De Vos AS, Strydom H, Fouche CB, Poggenpoel M, Schurink EW 2002. *Research at Grassroots: A Primer for the Caring Profession*. Pretoria: Van Schaik Publishers.

Du Toit GS, Erasmus BJ, Strydom JW (Eds.) 2010. *Introduction to Business Management.* 8th Edition. New York: Oxford University Press.

Hlalele D 2012. Social justice and rural education in South Africa. *Perspectives in Education,* 30: 111-118.

Ebersohn L, Eloff I 2006. The implications of an assets-based approach to early intervention. *Perspectives in Education*, 19: 147-156.

Ford BA 2004. Preparing special educators for culturally responsive community partnerships. *Teacher Education and Special Education*, 27: 224-230.

Fullan M 2001. *The New Meaning of Educational Change*. London: Falmer Press.

Gretz P 2003. School and community partnerships: Cultivating friends. *Principal Leadership (High School Ed)*, 3: 32-40.

Johns S 2003. Partners in the leadership dance: School vocational learning partnerships and community development. *The Educational Forum*, 67: 317-325.

Kalenga R, Chikoko V 2014. The state of inclusion in one South African Primary School: Evidence from one school principal. *Journal of Social Science*, 38: 321-331.

Kamper G 2008. A profile of effective leadership is some of South African high poverty schools. *South African Journal of Education*, 28: 1-18.

Khanare FP 2009. *School Management Teams' Responses to Learners who are Orphaned and Vulnerable in the Context of HIV and AIDS: A Case Study of Two Rural Senior Secondary Schools in KwaZulu-Natal*. Master's Dissertation, Unpublished. Durban: University of KwaZulu-Natal.

Kolodny KA 2002. Idealistic, fatalistic, and co-opted perceptions: Views surrounding the disparities of educational collaborations in low-income urban areas. *Education Foundations*, 16: 25-43.

Kretzmann J, McKnight J 1993. *Building Communities from the Inside Out: A Path Towards Finding and Mobilizing Community Assets*. Chicago: ACTA Publications.

KwaZulu-Natal Legislature 2005. *Traditional Leadership and Governance Act No. 5 of 2005*. Pietermaritzburg: Government Printers.

Landsberg E, Kruger D, Nel N (Eds.) 2005. *Addressing Barriers to Learning: A South African Perspective*. Pretoria: Van Schaik Publishers.

Ledoux W, McHenry N 2008. Pitfalls of school-university partnerships. *The Clearing House*, 81: 155-160.

Lemmer EM 2007. Parent involvement in teacher education in South Africa. *International Journal About Parents in Education*, 1: 218-229.

Maree K (Ed.) 2007. *First Step in Research*. Pretoria: Van Schaik Publishers.

Melaville A 1998. *Learning Together: The Developing Field of School-Community Initiatives*. Flint, MI: Mott Foundation.

Miller P 2007. "Getting on the balcony to see the patterns on the dance floor below": Considering organizational culture in a university-school-community collaboration. *Journal of School Leadership*, 17: 222-245.

Moore-Thomas C, Day-Vines N 2010. Culturally competent collaboration: School counselor collaboration with African American families and communities. *Professional School Counseling*, 14: 53-63.

Morojele P, Chikoko, V, Ngcobo T 2013. Do women have to 'grow muscles' in order to successful manage school? Evidence from some South African female school principals. *Anthropologist,* 15: 199-207.

Myende P 2011. *School-Community Partnerships in Education in a South African Rural Context: Possibilities for an Asset-Based Approach.* Master's Dissertation, Unpublished. Durban: University of KwaZulu-Natal.

Myende P 2013. Sustaining school-community partnerships through effective communication. *Journal of Community Communication and Information Impact,* 18: 76-94.

Naidu S, Joubert R, Mestry R, Mosoge J, Ngcobo T 2008. *Education Management and Leadership: A South African Perspective*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Naiker I, Chikoko V, Mthiyane SE 2013. Instructional leadership practices in challenging contexts. *Education as Change*, 17: 137-150.

Naiker I, Chikoko V, Mthiyane SE 2014. Does mentorship add value to in-service leadership development for school principals? Evidence from South Africa. *Anthropologist*, 17: 421-431.

Nelson Mandela Foundation 2005. *Emerging Voices: A Report of Education in South African Rural Communitie*s. Cape Town: HSRC Press.

Neuman W (Ed.) 2006. *Social Research Methods: Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches.* 6th Edition. New York: Pearson.

Tsotetsi CT 2013. *The Implementation of Professional Teacher Development Policies: A Continuing Education Perspective*. PhD Thesis, Unpublished. Bloemfontein: University of the Free State.

Republic of South Africa 1996. *The South African Schools Act No. 84 of 1996*. Pretoria: Government printers.

Republic of South Africa 2003. *Traditional Leadership and Governance Framework Amendment Act No. 41 of 2003*. Pretoria: Government Printers.

Sanders MG 1996. School-community partnerships focused on school safety: The Baltimore example. *Journal of Negro Education*, 65: 369-374.

Sanders MG 2001. The role of community in comprehensive school, family and community partnership programs. *The Elementary School Journal,* 102: 19-34.

Sanders MG, Harvey A 2002. Beyond the school walls: A case study of principal leadership for school-community collaboration.*Teachers College Record*, 104: 1345-1368.

Sanders MG 2006. *Building School-Community Partnerships: Collaboration for Student Success*. California: Thousand Oaks.

Sanders M, Sheldon S 2009. *Principals Matter: A Guide to Comprehensive Programs of School, Family, and Community Partnerships*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.

Spillane JP 2005. Distributed leadership. *The Education Forum*, 69: 143-150.

Swick KJ 2003. Communication concepts for strengthening family-school-community partnerships. *Early Childhood Education Journal*, 30: 275-280.

Thompson CB, Walker BL 2002. Basics of research (part 12). Qualitative research. *Air Medical Journal,* 17: 65-70.

Weber E 2005. New controls and accountability for South African teachers and schools: The Integrated quality management system. *Perspectives in Education,* 23: 63-72.

Van Wyk N, Lemmer E 2007. Redefining home-school-community partnerships in South Africa in the context of HIV/AIDS pandemic. *South African Journal of Education*, 27: 301-316.