

Power Relations in School Governing Bodies: Implications for Effective School Governance

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ABSTRACT The South African Schools Act ushered in governance in all South African public schools, by introducing school governing bodies (SGBs) that have overall control and authority in the school, its policies and its direction. However, the introduction of SGBs in schools created two centres of power. The purpose of this study is to investigate the power relations between the SGBs and principals in public schools. The convenient selected sample strategy was used by engaging practising second-year principals from the Advanced Certificate in Education (ACE) presented at a university, to write narratives. In analysing the narratives, the researcher applied the open and axial coding methods. From the investigation a number of problem areas emerged, such as unidentified roles, the misunderstanding of roles, overstepping of power and the abdication of power as some of the reasons for poor working relations between the two centres of power.

INTRODUCTION

Prior to 1994, statutory school level structures did not exist. Structures that existed in some schools were known *inter alia*, as school committees, school boards, management councils and parent-teacher-student associations (PTSAs) (Karlsson 2002:328). The African National Congress (1994:60) envisaged that democratic school governance structures were needed in order to fully develop the potential of the human resources of the country on assuming the reins of government in 1994. Kallaway (2003:11) supports this system by arguing that education in whatever form, is a fundamental component of democracy. After the 1994 elections in the Republic of South Africa (RSA), a democratic change was also implemented in the education system. The South African Schools Act (SASA), 84 of 1996 (RSA 1996) ushered in democratic governance in all schools. Joubert and Bray (2007:30) posit that the devolution of authority is one of the basic principles of a democratic state and in effect, requires the democratisation and decentralisation of education. They further state that the decentralisation of education to the institutional (school) level and sharing of powers between state and parent community, are in line with the constitutional imperatives of democratic governance in which the principles of public cooperation, participation, transparency and accountability are indispensable (Joubert and Bray 2007: 26). Through the establishment School governing bodies (SGBs), the SASA provides for the

decentralisation of a significant amount of authority and power to the school level. Heystek (2004: 311) supports the government's approach of involving the local community in the governance of the school and states that this move is in line with the principles of decentralised management within self-managing schools. The SASA supports the notion that parents as stakeholders should know the needs of their respective communities, thereby placing the governance of every public school in the hands of the SGB, which has the interests of the community and the school at heart. This implies that parents and other stakeholders should accept the responsibility of governing their schools through SGBs. The SGB of a public school consists of parents of children at the school, educators and non-educator staff, learners (in the case of secondary schools), co-opted members of the community and the principal as an *ex-officio* member SASA (RSA 1996: s.23). It is also important to note that the principal of a public school plays a dual role in the school, firstly as an employee of the Department of Education (DoE), reporting to the Head of Department (HoD) and secondly, as an *ex-officio* member of the SGB (Joubert and Bray 2007: 40). This arrangement places the principal in a very powerful position. However, section 16 (2) of the SASA stipulates that a governing body exists in a position of trust towards the school (RSA 1996: s. 16 (2)). This position of trust by the SGB should form the foundation of a working relationship between the SGB and the principal of the school. This working rela-

tionship becomes critical for both structures to cooperate to achieve their common goals; namely, the promotion of the best interests of the school through the provision of quality education for all learners (RSA 1996: s.20). A solid working relationship between the SGB and the principal creates the opportunity for the stakeholders to develop a sense of ownership of the school with its challenges and will therefore compel both partners to jointly take responsibility for the betterment and advancement of the school and its community. The question that is often asked, is whether this working relationship between the SGBs and principals in public schools is successful, since there are numerous reports (Moon et al. 2000: 57-62; Heystek 2004: 150; Karlsson 2002: 332; Mestry 2006: 28) that refer to the power relations between the SGBs and the principals in public schools. The next section will deal with power relations from a Foucaultian perspective.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: GOVERNMENTALITY-A FOUCAULTIAN PERSPECTIVE

This study seeks to investigate the power relations between SGBs and principals in public schools. The introduction of the SASA to our new education dispensation, provided for the decentralisation of power to the SGBs. Van Wyk (2004: 52) expresses concern that the SGBs in South Africa have at their disposal a considerable amount of power and authority bestowed upon them by the SASA; a situation which has the potential to result in conflict. It is, therefore, important for the purpose of this study to engage Foucault's theory on power and government in order to better understand how power relations manifest themselves in social structures.

Power

Foucault (1981: 92) suggests that the word 'power' has led to a number of misunderstandings, with respect to its nature, its form and its unity. For Foucault (1980: 39), power is conceptualised as being a "capillary form of existence" and reaches "into itself into the very grain of individuals, touches their bodies and inserts itself into the action and attitudes, their discourses learning processes and everyday lives." He (1981: 92-93) asserts that "power must be un-

derstood in the first instance as the multiplicity of force relations immanent in the sphere in which they operate and which constitute their own organization; as the process which, through ceaseless struggles and confrontations, transforms, strengthens, or even reverses them; as the support which these force relations find in one another, thus forming a chain or a system, or on the contrary, the disjunctions and contradictions which isolate them from one another; and lastly, as the strategies in which they take effect, whose general design or institutional crystallization is embodied in the state apparatus, in the formulation of the law, in the various social hegemonies." According to him, power should not be sought as a unique source of sovereignty from which secondary and descendent forms emanate; it is the moving substrate of force relations which, by virtue of their inequality, constantly engender states of power, the latter being always local and unstable. He purports that power is everywhere, not because it embraces everything, but because it comes from everywhere. Additionally, 'power,' insofar as it is permanent, repetitious, inert and self-reproducing, is simply the overall effect that emerges from all these mobilities; the concatenation that rests on each of them and seeks, in turn, to arrest their movement. Power is not an institution and not a structure, neither is it a certain strength with which we are endowed, but is the name that one attributes to a complex strategic situation in a particular society (Foucault 1981: 92-92). Foucault's view of power consequently informs his view of the concept *government* in order to explain power functions.

Governmentality

Foucault (1982: 789-790) argues that power is basically less a confrontation between two adversaries or the linking of one to the other than a question of *government*. He suggests that the word *government* should be allowed the very broad meaning which it had in the sixteenth century. *Government* does not refer only to political structures or to the management of states; rather, it designates the way in which the conduct of individuals or of groups might be directed; for example, the *government* of children, of souls, of communities, of families or of the sick. In the case of this study, it refers to the governance of schools by SGBs. He continues to say that *government* does not only cover the legitimately

constituted forms of political or economic subjection, but also modes of action, more or less considered and calculated, which are destined to act upon the possibilities of the action of other people. To govern, in this sense, is to structure the possible field of the action of others. The relationship proper to power would not therefore, be sought on the side of violence or of struggle, nor on that of voluntary linking, but rather, in the area of the singular mode of action, neither warlike nor juridical, which is government. In explaining the concept of *government*, Foucault (1982: 791-793) asserts that "power always entails a set of actions performed upon another person's actions and reactions." This implies the actions taken by either the SGB or the principal in their power struggle over each other in the school, in order to be in a position of power. He further elaborates by opining that the analysis, elaboration and bringing into question of power relations and the 'agonism' between power relations and the intransitivity of freedom, is a permanent political task inherent in all social existence. Furthermore, power relations are rooted deep in the system of social networks, as well as in schools.

Foucault (1982: 794) contends that if it is true that at the heart of power relations and as a permanent condition of their existence, there is an insubordination and a certain essential obstinacy on the part of the principles of freedom, then there is no relationship of power without the means of escape or possible flight. He claims that it would not be possible for power relations to exist without points of insubordination which, by definition, are means of escape. Thus, every intensification and every extension of power relations to make the insubordinate submit can only result in the limits of power. The latter reaches its final term either in a type of action which reduces the other to total impotence, in which case victory over the adversary replaces the exercise of power, or by a confrontation with those whom one governs and their transformation into adversaries (Foucault 1982: 794). Guided by the theory of Foucault on government and power relations, the researcher will seek to establish what causes power relations between SGBs and principals.

RESEARCH PROBLEM

The researcher, now lecturing to principals who are attending the Advanced Certificate in

Education (ACE) School Leadership programme at the University of the Free State (UFS), realised that there are still many principals who are undermining the status, roles and functions of SGBs in their schools; a situation that has the potential to lead to a power struggle and ultimately conflict. McLellan (1996: 44) states that no longer can a principal regard him/herself as the sole governor of the school, because school governing bodies have been elected to govern schools. Mestry (2006: 28) supports McLellan's statement in that many principals feel threatened, because SGBs have been given the responsibility of managing the school's finances. It, therefore, stands to reason that some principals would resist sharing power, because they have become used to having all the power to manage the school, including the finances. Now, they no longer possess the sole power of managing the school and of taking all the decisions. This suggests that before principals are appointed at a school, they should commit themselves to a collaborative partnership with the SGB to ensure the effective running of the school, as well as promoting the best interests of the learners in terms of providing quality education. Principals should understand that the new education dispensation requires that all stakeholders should work harmoniously together to achieve the goals set by them. This requires a clear understanding of their role relations. Van Wyk (2004: 50) sheds light on the aforementioned by stating that with the introduction of school governance, the state's intention was to secure a framework of governance that was characterised by power sharing between SGBs and the school management teams (SMTs), which consist of the principal, deputy principal, and heads of department of public schools. Joubert and Bray (2007: 30) posit that the SGB, with the principal as an ex-officio member of the SGB, is responsible for the governance of the school. According to them, this means briefly that the SGB contributes to or decides on all the functions as described in the SASA; for example, the school's vision and mission, the school's policies and the school's development plans, amongst other things. The principal and the SMT, on the other hand, are responsible for the day-to-day professional management of the school. This implies the management of the curriculum and the administration of the school under the authority of the Head of Department of Education in the province. It is thus evident that the princi-

pal functions in two capacities; firstly, as an employee of the DoE and secondly, as a member of the SGB. This dual role with which the principal has been bestowed, places him/her in a very powerful position in the school. The realisation that a power struggle exists between some principals and their SGBs, prompted the researcher to seek an answer to the following research question: Why, after sixteen years of democracy and the implementation of the SASA (RSA 1996), do we still find this discourse in some South African schools? Against the background of the ensuing literature study, the aim of this article is to interrogate the power relations between SGBs and principals.

LITERATURE STUDY

Decentralisation of Power

With the introduction of the SASA (RSA 1996), shape was given to the guiding principles of education in South Africa; namely access, redress, equity and democratic governance. The SASA (RSA 1996) provides for the decentralisation of power to school level through the establishment of SGBs which have a considerable amount of authority and responsibility for decision-making by stakeholders on issues such as: the ethos and character of the school, the development of the school's language, admission, religious observance and financial policies, as well as the code of conduct for learners, amongst other things. Caldwell and Spinks (1998:5) regard this change as a move toward self-managing schools. This can be described as schools for which there has been the devolvement of a significant level of authority and responsibility to make their own decisions.

Decentralised governance according to Squelch (2000:129) presupposes the devolvement of power from the central level and is generally based on the premise that the state should share its powers with other stakeholders, particularly those close to the school, on a partnership basis. Squelch (1999:128-129) states further that the feature of agendas for education reform has been the devolution of education management to schools, so that at school level, more decentralised decision-making responsibilities are delegated. Heystek (2004:311) agrees that the government's approach to involving the local community in the governance of the school is in line

with the principles of decentralised management within self-managing schools. He strongly supports the notion that the local level of governance (SGBs) should have the power to make decisions, because they know the local situation best. Karlsson (2002:329) argues that at the heart of South Africa's policy on democratic governance is a strong post-modern recognition of diversity. She states that although the core values of tolerance, rational discussion and collective decision-making are largely attitudinal and may be developed experientially, the values of representation and participation are addressed explicitly in the SASA. This move of government to decentralise school governance was widely accepted by the Federation of Governing Bodies of South African Schools (FEDSAS 2002:2). FEDSAS supports the principle of maximum transference of school governance to the governing bodies of public schools and it is their mandate and responsibility to establish and maintain healthy relationships among all interested parties in education. This decentralisation of power to the local community has, as its main focus, the allocation of the governance of the school to the SGB.

Governance

The South African Schools Act 84 of 1996 (RSA 1996) mandates all public schools in South Africa to elect a school governing body as part of the governance structure in schools. This move is in line with both national and international trends (Mncube 2009: 83). The SGB of a public school must consist of parents of children at the school, educator and non-educator staff at the school, learners (in the case of secondary schools), co-opted members of the community and the principal as an ex-officio member SASA (RSA 1996: s.23). According to Section 16 of the SASA (RSA 1996), the professional management of the school is the responsibility of the principal and the educators, while the governance of the school is the responsibility of the SGB. Karlsson (2002: 330) calls this "a neat separation of governance and management responsibilities to avoid interference into the others area of jurisdiction," which could lead to unnecessary conflict. This move was motivated by the need to dismantle the previously centralised bureaucratic and authoritarian management of schools and to replace it with a democratic sys-

tem which conforms to the principles of social justice. However, the election of SGBs in schools since 1997 has created a field of tension between some SGBs and principals which, in turn, has disturbed the power relations in many schools.

Power Relations

The SASA (RSA 1996: s.23) stipulates that there must be one parent more in a school's governing body than the combined total of other members with voting rights. Heystek (2004: 308) states that this majority creates the impression with parents that they are the most important group in the SGB and that they have the greatest interest in the school. According to him, this assumption by the parents can create the impression that they can 'rule' the school. This idea of ruling the school is quite common amongst SGBs which indicates that parents want to take charge of the school, make all the decisions and wield all the power in the school. He condemns this type of attitude as a contradiction of the trust that is supposed to form the foundation of the partnership as envisaged by the South African School's Act. Power play and domination is normally part of any teamwork and any interpersonal interaction (Moon et al. 2000: 57-62). The working relationship between the SGB and the school is no different. Van Wyk (2004: 52) alludes to the fact that SGBs in South Africa have at their disposal a considerable amount of power and a number of functions bestowed upon them by the SASA (RSA 1996). This is a huge challenge to many principals because they now have to share their exclusive power with other role players (Verhoeven 1996: 142). In this regard, Heystek (2004: 150) cites that previously decision-making was entirely vested in the principal. Shearn et al. (1995: 175) posit that principals have often been accused of, and found to dominate decision-making in SGBs. Karlsson's (2002: 332) findings in her research with 27 schools throughout South Africa's nine provinces reveal that in almost every school governing body, principals play a dominant role in meetings and decision-making. According to her, this dominant role can be attributed to the principal's position of power within the school, the level of his/her education in contrast to other members, first access to information from the education authorities and the fact that it is he/she, (the principal), who executes the decisions taken by the SGB. Mestry (2006:

28) supports Karlsson's findings that many principals feel threatened because school governing bodies have been given the responsibility of managing the school's finances. Previously, principals were in charge of this job and now they feel disempowered by the new legislation. It, therefore, stands to reason that principals in some schools resist sharing power, having been used to possessing all the power to manage their school; now they no longer have that sole power. Verhoeven (1996: 142) concurs with McLellan's (1996: 36) finding that the democratic education dispensation is a challenge for school principals because they now have to share their power with the SGB in a partnership. Khuzwayo and Chicoko (2009: 149) however, found that where principals were willing to share power with other role players, schools were likely to experience harmonious working relationships, a condition which is conducive to an effective partnership.

Partnerships

The composition of the SGB of a public school consists of all the stakeholders of the school. Through the employment of this structure in a school, the SASA envisages a partnership between all the stakeholders in the best interests of the learners and the school. The stipulations of especially sections 16(1) and (3), as well as section 20(1) (e) of the SASA, outlines how the partnership should be forged. The separation of duties and responsibilities is not intended to be performed in isolation by the two centres of power (that is, SGB and principal). On the contrary, this arrangement is purposefully intended for the two centres of power to work together in a partnership to achieve the goals and objectives which they have set out for themselves. Members of this partnership should work together to promote the best interests of the school through the provision of quality education for all learners at the school (RSA 1996: s.20). Section 36 of the SASA, as well as section 5(1) of the 2001 Education Laws' Amendment Bill (RSA 2001) strengthens section 20 of the SASA in that an SGB of a public school must take all reasonable measures within its means to supplement the resources supplied by the state in order to improve the quality of education provided to all learners at the school.

Khuzwayo and Chikoko (2009: 147) believe that an effective partnership and trust between

the principal and the SGB is essential if the staff and governors are to contribute positively to the effectiveness of the school. Heystek (2006: 474) points out that although the emphasis is placed on the SGB by legislation to be in a relationship of trust with the school, in practice, trust is also expected from the other parties, namely the principal, the SMT and the educators. Clase et al. (2007: 243) support this notion with their assertion that the proper functioning of any country's education system is dependant, to a great extent, on the mutual trust and collaboration that exist among all partners.

There is, therefore, no doubt that the building of a partnership between the SGB and the principal is of utmost importance so that there is a shared responsibility for developing and maintaining the school at local level. A solid partnership between the SGB and the principal creates an opportunity for all stakeholders to develop a sense of ownership of the school and compels partners to take responsibility for the advancement of the school and its community.

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

The qualitative research design was employed to elicit participants' views on the foreshadowed questions (Fouche and Delpont 2003: 77). The researcher requested the participants to write narratives on the questions to illicit information on, amongst other things, the power relations between the SGBs and principals. This method enabled the researcher to draw information from the participants' lived experiences. The nature of this phenomenon is socially constructed and therefore, also requires the utilisation of the interpretive constructivist paradigm (Mertens 1998: 11).

Sample

The researcher used the convenient selected sample strategy by engaging practising principals from the Advanced Certificate in Education (ACE), in the School Leadership programme presented by the University of the Free State, to write narratives on the foreshadowed questions. These principals were selected by the Free State Department of Education for the School Leadership programme in an effort to improve the quality of education in the province. The principals

were selected from across the Free State province and constitute mostly principals from the townships and rural areas. It must, however, be stated that this School Leadership programme is not a Free State-based programme but, a national one. The convenient sampling method refers to a situation where the population elements are selected, based on the fact that they are easily and conveniently available (Maree and Pietersen 2007: 117). This study was conducted mainly from the interpretive constructivist paradigm perspective which revolves around two central issues namely, the self understanding of the individual as a basis for all social interpretation and transparent human consciousness (Waghid 2003). In this regard, Nieuwenhuis (2007: 51) adds that "interpretivism focuses on people's subjective experiences, on how people construct their social world by sharing meanings and how they interact with or relate to each other". It is from this perspective that the researcher opted for the convenient sample strategy, because the principals, on average, have more than five years experience as principals and more than ten years experience as teachers or as senior managers. The class consisted of fifty practising school principals, both male and female, in their final year of study. Twenty-five of them voluntarily participated in the inquiry. The sample which the researcher chose is convenient, because principals understand their own worlds and are willing to communicate their experiences to the researcher.

Foreshadowed Questions

Lodico et al. (2006: 266) point out that foreshadowed questions are designed by the researcher and are based on the topics or research questions identified at the start of the study and which change as the study progresses. Foreshadowed questions help the researcher to focus on the data and allow the data collection to proceed in a systematic way. The statement of foreshadowed problems indicates that the researcher has tentatively decided the research purpose, research questions and the focus of the data collection strategies (McMillan and Schumacher 2001: 430). Guided by the foreshadowed questions' principle, the principals had to write narratives on the following foreshadowed questions:

- 1 What are the roles played by the SGBs in their schools to ensure that quality education takes place?

- 2 To what extent is the partnership between the SGB and the principal successful or unsuccessful in his/her school?
- 3 To what extent are the SGBs of their schools involved in participative decision-making?
- 4 To what extent are the SGB members in their schools trained to perform their roles and functions effectively?

This article will focus on questions two and three of the foreshadowed questions to address the problem under investigation. The remaining questions will be dealt with in a follow-up article.

Aim and Objectives

The aim of this study is to investigate the power relations between SGBs and principals in public schools. In addressing the aim, the following objectives were identified:

- To determine to what extent the partnership between the SGB and the principal is successful or not in his/her school; and
- To establish to what extent the SGBs are involved in participative decision-making in their schools.

Data Analysis

In analysing the narratives, two coding procedures, namely open coding and axial coding were used. The foreshadowed questions served as the four main themes. By applying the open coding method, the researcher allocated an identifying pseudonym to each participant. After carefully reading through the responses by the participants, codes were allocated to the sub-themes that emerged. The researcher then categorised the sub-themes according to their properties, dimensions and incidents. In applying the axial coding method, the researcher identified relationships or connections between the main themes and the sub-themes to assist him to give meaning to the themes (Nieuwenhuis 2007: 105; Strauss and Corbin 1990: 205).

Validation

The following three validation strategies were used:

- Data (principals' narratives) and investigator triangulation (the researcher and an experienced qualitative researcher inde-

pendently read and coded the transcripts and took part in consensus discussions) were used to strengthen the study.

- Rich, thick descriptions allow readers to make decisions regarding transferability. The detailed descriptions in this paper may enable readers to transfer information to other settings and thus determine whether the findings can be transferred.
- Member checking (if something was not understood during the interviews, the researcher went back to the participants to confirm/explain the meaning that was asked for) was also used to strengthen the study (Nieuwenhuis 2007: 103).

Ethnical Measures

In this enquiry, the voluntary participation of the participants was acknowledged at all times. All the participants were informed regarding the aims of the inquiry, the research methods, the nature of the participation, confidentiality and the possible publication of the results (Burgess 1989: 6).

FINDINGS

This article focuses on the participants' narratives on power relations between school principals and SGBs. All the themes discussed in this article were directly derived from the data.

Partnership between the SGBs and Principals in Public Schools

The SASA envisages a system where principals and SGBs work together in partnership to ensure quality education. The school is seen as an extension of the family and therefore, a formalised partnership is required between the parents and the school. This implies that parents are very important stakeholders, especially in the governance of public schools. This partnership is further based on the fact that parents have the responsibility to educate their children or to ensure that their children are educated. A lack of this partnership is a serious infringement on the rights of the parents in the provision of education for their children. To establish whether a partnership existed in the schools, as well as the nature of the partnership, the following foreshadowed question was posed to the principals: "Is

the partnership between the principal and the SGB successful or not?" The ensuing discussion will focus firstly on the findings pertaining to the successful partnerships; thereafter, attention will be given to participants' narratives on unsuccessful partnerships. The participants' views on why the partnerships were successful or not will also be emphasised.

Successful Partnerships

From the twenty-five participating principals, nine principals wrote that the partnership between themselves and their SGBs was successful. Two of these principals attribute the success of the partnerships to the SGBs acknowledgement of the separation of governance and management responsibilities of the SMTs and SGBs respectively:

The partnership is very successful because the SGB is trained to perform its functions which are separate from the professional duties of the principal (Principal H).

The partnership is successful in the sense that the SMT and the SGB know exactly where the line is drawn between their different roles and functions. The SMT handles management issues and the SGB handles governance issues. As a result, there is no conflict, because teachers do what they know and are expected to do best and the SGB does what it knows and is expected to do best. This affects the quality of education of the learners in a positive way (Principal I).

Additionally, principals H and I attribute the success of the partnership to the acknowledgement of the division of power while principals J ("The partnership is successful at our school, because decision-making is done collectively") and U ("The partnership is going well ... working collectively) believe collectivism is at the heart of the successful partnership in their respective schools.

It seems furthermore, that some participants equate a successful partnership to the SGBs ability to fulfil certain duties:

Successful. They (SGB) attend meetings; they assist with workshops; they form panels and interview candidates and then recommend candidates for appointment. They pay for services and decide on extra-mural activities (Principal F).

It is successful because the SGB provides financially for the SMT and the educators (Principal R).

The partnership is successful in the sense that the SGB and the management team of the school often meet to discuss issues that affect the school (Principal V).

Although principal T and S also emphasised the positive relationship between them and their SGBs, they acknowledge that it is not a faultless relationship. According to principal T "There is still room for improvement". Principal S concluded his narrative by saying:

There is not much animosity between the SMT and the SGB. Differences in views are settled amicably.

The view of some of the cited principals that where the SGB members understand their roles and functions, the partnership is destined to be successful is in line with research findings by Mazibuko (2004: 45). According to him role clarification is a key element of a successful partnership between principals and their SGBs. The finding that that the partnership between the SGB and the principal is successful because the two centres of power work together, may suggest that the participants understand the stipulations of the SASA in terms of working harmoniously together in the best interests of the learners and the school. Research by Khuzwayo and Chikoko (2009: 149) point out that where principals are willing to share power with the SGBs and where the roles between themselves and the SGBs are clear, there is likely to be a harmonious working relationship between them.

Some of the participants attributed the success of their partnerships to the ability of the members of the SGBs to fulfil their (allocated) functions. This may imply that the SGBs of these schools are well trained and/or equipped to fulfil their roles and functions as set out by the SASA. In this regard Tsotetsi et al. (2008: 397) emphasise that the training of SGBs is important so as to improve their capacity. They insist that the training of the SGB members should ensure that they understand their roles and responsibilities clearly.

However, as much as there are schools where the partnerships are successful, there are also schools where the partnerships are failing.

Unsuccessful Partnerships

In the principals' discussion of the partnership between the centres of power, several of them mentioned that this partnership is fraught

with problems. The key reason for the unsuccessful partnerships is the SGBs lack of understanding of its role and functions. This may lead to power struggles on the one hand and an abdication of power on the other.

SGBs do not Understand their Roles and Functions

Despite the fact that the SASA (RSA 1996: s. 16) is clear about the roles and functions of the SGBs and the principals, it emerged from the data analysis that SGBs often do not understand their roles and functions. This is illustrated by the following three extracts from the narrations:

Sometimes the SGBs overstep the mark and move on to management issues (Principal D).

Some members overstep their territory; for example, by trying to execute the functions of school management (Principal U).

SGBs do not stick to governance and want to do administration, which causes friction (Principal Q).

This 'overstepping' seems to be a common problem in South African schools. Khuzwayo and Chikoko (2009: 148) note, for example, that principals find it difficult to perform their duties as required by the SASA, because of what they view as the 'interference' of SGB chairpersons. Some principals accuse the SGB chairpersons of not understanding their roles and at times, performing duties that are outside their area of jurisdiction, such as coming to school to check whether the educators are teaching in their classrooms. Bush and Heystek (2003: 129) confirm Khuzwayo and Chikoko's findings. They make mention of the fact that parent members of a SGB at an Afrikaans-medium school asked to sit in during the interview between the researchers and the principal. Heystek (2006: 480) finds that in some black rural schools, the parents also dominate the relationship. He mentions that in one school, the chair of the SGB locks and unlocks the gates, tells the educators where to park their cars and walks to the classes to 'lend' support. This overstepping of power may, amongst other things, be the result of ignorance; literacy levels of the members of SGBs, as well as their inability to correctly interpret the SASA in some cases (Heystek 2006: 482; Tsotetsi et al. 2008: 387). This lack of understanding of their roles and functions may also create serious tensions between the two centres of power which ultimately result in conflict.

Power Relations

The partnership between the SGB and the principal is of utmost importance for the effective functioning of a school. An important stipulation of the SASA (RSA 1996: s. 16 (2)) states that the SGB must stand in a position of trust towards the school.

Position of Trust

It emerged from some of the narratives that SGB members sometimes disrespected the participants in the study. According to these participants, the SGBs abuse their position of trust. To substantiate this accusation principal C reported:

The partnership has been unsuccessful for the past six years, because the chairperson of the SGB does not act in the best interests of the school. He always looks for what he can get from the school. When contractors tender for work at the school, he manipulates the tenders in such a way that his friends get the tenders.

According to a newspaper report by Khumalo (2002: 9), fraudulent actions are not uncommon. Principals and SGBs have often been subjected to forensic audits by the Department of Education due to the mismanagement of funds through misappropriation, fraud, pilfering of cash, theft and improper control of financial records. According to Mestry (2006: 29), the issue of mismanagement and misappropriation of school funds has subjected the principal and/or SGB members, in some instances, to be named in legal action. Heystek (2006: 474) attests that being a member of the SGB means that an individual accepts the trust vested in him or her, which means that the member should act in good faith and with due diligence towards the school. He also warns that members of the SGB should avoid the kind of behaviour which might lead to fraudulent conduct, recklessness or dishonesty. The literature thus confirms the findings of this study; namely, that some SGBs tend to misuse their power to promote their own interests and in the process, break their positions of trust towards the school.

The tension between the two centres of power is not only obvious in the participants' discussion of SGBs fraudulent actions, but also in the explanation by some of the participants that there are SGB members at their respective schools who wish to be in control.

Control of School by SGB

The following two quotations exemplify the concern of some of the participants that some SGB members wish to control their schools:

Some SGB members are bent on disciplining the principal and want to control me (Principal Q).

Some SGB members, especially the older ones, are under the impression that they should be policing the principal and the educators. This situation creates tension between the two groups (Principal O).

The literature indicates that with the decentralisation of governance, a tremendous amount of power and authority has been bestowed upon the SGBs through the SASA. Heystek (2006: 475) warns that this power and authority of the SGBs may lead parents to believe that they can 'rule' or control the school through the SGB. Verhoeven (1996: 144) raises the concern about the considerable amount of power and authority vested in the SGBs and contends that it presents a huge challenge to principals who, in the past, possessed all the power to manage the school. Khuzwayo and Chikoko (2009: 147-149) are of the view that the two centres of power which were created by the SASA have the potential to create conflict between the SGB and the principal if this power is not managed properly. The danger of this arrangement is that too much power is vested in the SGB, while the principal and the educators are actually running the school with limited powers. The participants' narratives suggest that some SGBs are under the impression that they have all the power to control the principal and the school. This perception undermines the principle of a partnership between the principal and the SGB. The aforementioned perception also strengthens the idea that there exists two centres of power in the school, which may ultimately have a negative impact on participative decision-making.

Decision-Making

The SASA (RSA 1996) provides for the decentralisation of power at school level through the establishment of SGBs which wield considerable authority and responsibility for decision-making. To ascertain whether or not SGBs abuse their decision-making powers, one of the foreshadowed questions was: "To what extent is

the SGB in your school involved in participative decision-making?"

The analysis of the participants' narratives revealed that some of them believe that members of SGBs do not abuse their decision-making powers. On the contrary, it seems that relations are amicable. The following four extracts from the narratives illustrate this harmonious relationship:

The SGB is very involved. All decisions regarding the purchasing of LTSMs, the maintenance of infrastructure, the language and admission policies and fundraising must go through their authority (Principal H).

They (SGB) are involved in governance matters such as finance, maintenance and policy making (Principal K).

They (SGB) are involved. Decision-making is done collectively (Principal J).

We all, the SGB and I take decisions about what we want to do. I do not take decisions alone in my office for them (Principal N).

These statements may suggest that the SGBs understand their functions according to the SASA; thus, their active participation. The statements may further suggest that the SGBs understand the importance of their decisions in ensuring quality education for their learners as required by the SASA. Various authors support the notion of the devolution of decision-making powers to the SGB. Concomitantly, the FEDSAS (2002: 2) supports the principle of maximum transference of governance to the SGBs of public schools and it is through their endeavors and responsibility to establish and maintain healthy relationships between all interested parties in education. Heystek (2004: 311) also supports the government's approach of involving the local community in the governance of the school and states that this move is in line with the principles of decentralised management within self-managing schools. He strongly advocates that the local level of governance should have the power to make decisions in the interest of the community, because they best know the needs of the community. By democratising education in South Africa, freedom has been given to parents to be involved in the governance of the schools which their children attend and for them to make decisions about the standard and quality of education they need for their children. It may be concluded that in some schools, participative decision-making is indeed taking place as envisaged

by the SASA. This is also in line with the principle of self-managing schools.

It is unfortunately also true that not all SGBs are actively involved in participative decision-making as may be suggested by the following three statements. All of these statements mention an abdication of power in favour of one of the centres of power (the principal and/or his/her SMT).

The previous SGB left 95% of the decisions in the SMTs hands (Principal B).

They (SGB) always accept what I say. They do not question. I long to see them question and give their own opinions and not just agree with what the SMT and I say (Principal P).

In township schools principals still dominate discussions (Principal K).

Because I, as principal, have knowledge of the policies and regulations of the Department, I always give them direction (Principal N).

Principal N's view that this lack of involvement which may be ascribed to a lack of knowledge on the part of members of the SGB is supported by one of his colleagues:

The SGB is not really involved. They lack the knowledge and experience to make decisions (Principal O).

The above-mentioned responses suggest that there are also schools where the SGBs are not actively involved in the decision-making of the school, because they lack knowledge and experience in school matters. Mncube (2009: 99) found that the reason for this lack of participation by the SGBs is that they lack confidence and that they need to have a certain level of competency, literacy and skill to be able to make positive contributions. Mncube also states that SGBs are not always given sufficient opportunity to participate in the decision-making process. This lack of confidence may also be attributed to a perception that the principals and the SMTs are more educated and knowledgeable about educational aspects, in which case the SGBs may be led to believe that they should leave all the decisions in the hands of the principal and the SMT and simply carry out orders.

According to Heystek (2006: 475), numerous public schools in South Africa, especially the former disadvantaged schools, are still too traditional in their way of thinking and too bureaucratic as far as participative decision-making is concerned (two of the above quoted principals are from township schools). This notion is cor-

roborated in earlier research done by Heystek and Paquette (1999: 191) who assert that neither parents, nor educators has had much experience of participative decision-making in the past, since principals were considered to be the only people with the knowledge and authority to make decisions. Heystek (2006: 475) further points out that for many schools in South Africa, especially the historically disadvantaged schools, the involvement of parents as governors is relatively new, as the first SGBs in township schools took office as recently as 1997. Joubert (2008: 231) posits that participative decision-making is highly desirable, although very few governors have the experience or capacity to fulfil these roles.

The above statements further indicate that in some schools the principals dominate the discussions and the decisions, because of them being privileged to have first-hand information on the issues under discussion. These statements may also point to the fact that because the principal is in the privileged position of having the knowledge of policies and regulations, he/she will take advantage of the SGBs lack of knowledge and dominate the decision-making process. Shearn et al. (1995: 179) attest that in some instances, principals have been accused of, and have been found to dominate decision-making in SGBs. Karlsson (2002: 332) adds weight to this view by contending that in almost every SGB she studied, principals played a dominant role in meetings and decision-making. She attributes this dominant role to the principal's position of power in the school; the level of his/her education in contrast to the other members; having first access to information from education authorities and the fact that he/she executes the decisions taken by the SGBs.

The literature and the narrations of the participants confirm, especially in the schools where the partnerships and participative decision-making were unsuccessful, that power relationships exist between the SGB and the principal. In this regard Foucault (1982: 791-793) attests that power is everywhere and that power relations, as a permanent political task, is inherent in all social existence. This implies that power also manifests itself in the school where the SGB is in a position of governance. Foucault (1982: 789-793) purports that to govern is to structure the possible field of action of others. He also argues that power relations exist only where there are points of insubordination. In the schools where

the partnerships are unsuccessful, the principals seem to become subordinate since they have ceded power to the SGBs. In the schools where the participative decision-making is unsuccessful, the SGB becomes the subordinate party because of the dominant attitude of the principal. Foucault emphasises that as the power relations intensify to force the subordinate to submit, his or her power becomes limited. This limitation of power reaches its final stage, either in a type of action which reduces the principal to total impotence, in which case victory over the adversary replaces the exercise of power, or by a confrontation with those who govern. The implication of such confrontation ultimately results in conflict; a situation that is not in the best interests of the learners, the educators, the school and the community.

CONCLUSION

It is evident from the literature and the narratives of the participants that most of the participants confirmed that the partnership between the SGB and the principals was unsuccessful because of issues such as, undefined roles, the misunderstanding of roles, the over-stepping of power boundaries, the SGBs wanting to rule the principals and the school, amongst others things. The study also revealed that not all SGBs were involved in participative decision-making. In the schools where participative decision-making was poor, it was attributed to the SGBs lack of knowledge in decision-making, illiteracy, the abdication of their power or because of the dominant attitudes of the principals. The aforementioned reasons are also the result of the power relations that exist between the SGBs and principals of these public schools. Power relations are central to any understanding of the practices and processes of school governance, regardless of the cultural context in which they operate. Moreover, power relations are an ineradicable fact of the fragile character of school governing bodies as organisations (Deem et al. 1995: 133; Mncube 2008: 85). It, therefore, goes without saying that power relations in schools may ultimately lead to conflict where both centres of power fail to work together in the best interests of the learners and the school. Additionally, Heystek (2006: 480) contends that one of the main reasons for the uncertainties and problems is that neither the SGB, nor the principal is sure about the demarcation of their roles and

functions. It is, therefore, imperative that the National Department of Education clarifies the roles and functions of the SGBs and principals to ensure that every member knows the boundaries of his/her involvement. If this is not done, involvement may become an infringement which may create relationship problems between principals and parents. Numerous calls have been made by the academe (Khuzwayo and Chikoko 2009: 149) for capacity-building training that will enhance knowledge of the specific tasks of the two centres of power. Joubert (2008: 231) has unfortunately found that despite the training of SGBs over a number of years, research surveys and reviews on the status and functionality of SGBs in South Africa reveal that the conceptualisation of what role the SGB has to play in executing its functions remains a challenge.

RECOMMENDATIONS

It is clear from the participants' responses and the literature that both centres of power are failing to understand their main function, which is to promote the best interests of the learners and the school. Therefore, to drastically combat the above-mentioned challenges, the National Department of Education should amend the SASA. Firstly, the term of office of the SGBs should be amended from three to five years, since the current term is too short for most SGBs to fully comprehend their roles and functions and to execute them in accordance with the prescripts of the SASA. Secondly, the roles and functions should be clarified and simplified in the SASA, so that both centres of power can easily understand their roles and functions. Thirdly, a minimum of two training sessions per annum for both centres of powers should be introduced by the National Department of Education to develop their capacity and skills. These training sessions should be presented in the language of the specific community. This would necessitate that the SASA is also translated into all eleven official languages of South Africa. The purpose of school governance is to promote the principles of democracy. English should therefore not be used to the disadvantage of minority languages. Lastly, the National Department of Education should introduce short courses at tertiary institutions to capacitate SGBs and SMTs to master a number of skills such as problem solving, conflict resolution, change management, tolerance, and financial planning, amongst other things, if they are

to fulfil their tasks successfully. Currently, principals are being capacitated through the Advanced School Leadership programme which is presented at tertiary institutions on behalf of the National Department of Education throughout South Africa. Similar types of course may also improve the SGBs knowledge of their roles, as well as understanding their main function, which is to serve the best interests of the learners and the school. The author is strongly of the opinion that if the above recommendations are implemented whereby the two centres of power are trained and skilled together, the issue of power relations will be dealt with and resolved, in many schools.

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