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## Empowering principals to lead and manage public schools effectively in the 21st century

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*“Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world” (Nelson Mandela, 1994)*

Globally, education systems have been affected by radical social, political and economic changes. Although school principals play a pivotal role in improving student learning and attaining educational outcomes, they work under strenuous conditions to deal with multifaceted transformational issues. Principals experience great difficulty in coping with numerous changes, partly because they are inadequately prepared for their leadership position, or simply lack the necessary skills, knowledge and attitudes to lead and manage schools effectively and efficiently. Fundamentally, principals should be empowered to effectively deal with challenges facing them in the 21st century. Using qualitative research, this study explored the importance of promoting a culture of professional development that will prepare principals to confront education challenges and obstacles facing them. Fifteen principals were selected to determine their perceptions and experiences of how they were prepared and professionally developed to lead and manage schools. Findings revealed that in South Africa, there is no formal preparation for aspiring or practicing principals taking on leadership and management positions, and very few in-service professional development programmes are available. There is a dire need for education authorities to introduce compulsory training and development programmes for aspiring and practicing school leaders to lead and manage their schools successfully.

**Keywords:** change management; continuing professional development; curriculum leadership; instruction; principalship; professionalization; qualifications; training

### Introduction and Background to the Problem

In many emerging economies in developing countries, substantial investments have been made in education, with the hope of generating a highly skilled labour force and high proportion of employment. Despite these investments, there is growing concern globally that many public schools are not functioning at their optimum, and that learner performance is generally of a low standard. However, many nations around the world have undertaken wide-ranging reforms of curriculum, instruction, and assessment, with the intention of better preparing principals for the educational demands of life and work in the 21st century (Bush, 2005; Russell & Cranston, 2012). The rapid rate at which changes have taken place, and are still taking place, together with the increased volume of administrative work, has placed principals under enormous pressure (Kinney, 2009). Managing change is complex, and usually an elusive process. According to Thurlow, Bush and Coleman (2003), it is difficult to explore potential approaches to managing change in the troubled and exhilarating context of South Africa. Changes in the new system of governance in schools have unfortunately resulted in principals being unprepared for their new role as ‘chief executive officers’ (Department of Education (DoE), 1996:18). Principals may also experience difficulty in adapting to their new roles and new channels of communication which results in role ambiguity (Dimmock & Hattie, 1994, cited in Heystek, 2016). Perhaps one of the major changes in the principalship has been the range of expectations placed on them and these expectations have been moved from the demands for management and control to the demand for an educational leader who can foster professional development among staff (Mestry & Grobler, 2004; Steyn, 2002). Bottery (2016:98) argues that principals find themselves working extra hours, “not just on weekday evenings but also at weekends and during school holidays, [...] where the job becomes unsustainable if they do not”.

It is important for principals to understand leadership as a process and to develop human relation skills and promote joint action to ensure school improvement and effectiveness (Steyn, 2009). According to Starr (2009), the role of the principal now equates with that of a chief executive officer (CEO) of a corporate organisation responsible for strategic planning, budgets, managing industrial relations, procuring resources and facilitating marketing and public relations. Botha (2004) asserts that the principal’s role in the new educational dispensation represents a balance between instructional leadership and management: leadership deals with areas such as supervising the curriculum, improving the instructional programme of the school, working with staff to identify the vision and mission for the school, and building a close relationship with the community. Management, on the other hand, includes factors such as supervising the budget, maintaining the school buildings and grounds, and complying with educational policies and acts. Many practicing principals lack basic leadership and management training prior to and after their entry into principalship (Bush & Oduro, 2006; Heystek, 2016). Tsukudu and Taylor, (1995, cited in Bush & Oduro, 2006:362) assert that “head teachers come to headship without having been prepared for their new role. As a result, they often have to rely on experience and common sense”. However, such are the demands being made upon leaders and managers now, including head teachers,

that acquiring expertise can no longer be left to common sense and character alone; leadership and management development support is needed (Bush & Oduro, 2006; Mestry & Singh, 2007).

Globally, the poor academic standards at school level could be amongst other reasons, symptomatic of a lack of effective leadership and management in schools (Spaull, 2013). Kallaway (2009:10) posits that “(t)he crisis that has been predicted by many experienced educationists ever since the early ’90s is finally reaching such tragic proportions that we have to face the real prospect of a ‘lost generation’ that we never imagined in the past”. At national level, researchers concur with the belief that many principals lack the relevant knowledge and skills to lead their schools effectively (Mestry & Singh, 2007) and this has had serious implications for learner performance. There is thus a dire need for education authorities to continually develop and support principals so that they can effectively lead schools. This study is thus important to inform practice and policy on implementing such professional development systems in countries undergoing transformation, as well as those with scarce resources and a high level need, as change should be managed prudently for organisational effectiveness. This study is also likely to contribute to the body of change knowledge in education and the advancement of theory pertaining to change in human resource development.

In South Africa, for example, in 2011, learner achievement in the Annual National Assessment (ANA) report remained poor: Grade Three learners achieved a pass rate of 35% in Literacy and 26% in Numeracy while Grade Six learners achieved a pass rate of 28% in Language and 30% in Mathematics (Joseph, 2011). Students also fared poorly in the recent National Senior Certificate (Grade 12) Examinations and the National Systemic Tests conducted by the (DoE) to Grade Three learners (2002) and Grade Six learners (2004) in Numeracy/Mathematics and Literacy Examination. The average pass rate for the National Senior Certificate in 2012 was 73.9 percent. These startling statistics only serve to confirm the poor performance of learners across the board (Bloch, 2009; Fleisch, 2008). The relationship between school leadership and educational outcomes has been well documented (Bush, 2005). Principals, head teachers and deputy principals are normally held accountable for students’ academic performance. Goslin (2009) argues that principals tend to overlook their responsibilities of curriculum or instructional leadership, because they are not fully aware of their primary task, or they are too busy attending to their administrative duties, and either resolving conflicts among role players or maintaining student discipline. There is thus a dire need for principals to be empowered and professionally prepared for their roles as heads of schools, and to

continually enhance their skills, attributes and competencies through structured continuing professional development (CPD) programmes.

The research problem explored in this article is: How do principals perceive and experience their own professional development to enhance their leadership roles? The following questions were posed to direct this study: what is understood by CPD and of what importance is CPD to principals; and, how can principals be empowered to become effective leaders by participating in formal CPD programmes?

#### A Changing Profile of School Leadership: Continuing Professional Development

Professional development (PD), continuing professional development (CPD) and in-service training (INSET) are used interchangeably to refer to all types of professional learning undertaken by practicing or aspiring principals beyond the point of initial training (Craft, 2000). Some professionals consider CPD as training, as a means of keeping abreast, or as a way of building a career, while professional associations hold the view that CPD is part of lifelong learning; a means of gaining career security; a means of personal development; a means of assuring the public that individual professionals are up-to-date; a method whereby professional associations can verify competence; and a way of providing employers with a competent and adaptable workforce (Friedman & Phillips, 2004).

CPD can be interpreted as a structured approach to learning that will facilitate competence to practice by intensifying knowledge, skills and practical experience. CPD in school education consists of any educational activity which helps to maintain, develop or increase knowledge, problem-solving skills, technical skills or professional performance standards, all with the goal of providing quality education. CPD can involve any relevant learning activity, whether formal and structured or informal and self-directed. Day and Sachs (2004) and Hirsch (2009) describe CPD as all those activities in which educators engage during the course of a career, which are designed to enhance their work. They argue that this may be a deceptively simple description of a hugely complex intellectual and emotional endeavour, which is at the heart of raising standards of teaching, learning and achievement in a range of schools, each of which poses its own set of special challenges. Education leadership and management should be seen as a process where the development of education leaders and the achievement of organisational goals are synchronised (Mestry & Grobler, 2004). The process of development is mainly concerned with equipping principals to acquire and improve the necessary competencies to lead and manage their schools effectively (McLay & Brown,

2003). According to Guskey (2002), high-quality professional development is a central component in nearly every modern proposal for improving education. While proposed professional development programmes vary widely in their content and format, most share a common purpose: to alter the professional practices, beliefs, and understanding of school principals toward the achievement of school goals, namely, the improvement of student learning. Professional development programmes are systematic efforts to bring about change in school leadership and management where new behaviours, attitudes and beliefs contribute to the learning outcomes of students.

Many progressive countries have placed CPD for school leaders high on the education agenda. In the United Kingdom (UK), for example, the challenge of training school leaders has been accorded the highest priority of any social goal. At the insistence of the former Prime Minister Tony Blair, his staff was directed to benchmark international practices and find leading experts on the topic to advise the government (Roe & Drake, 1980:272). In the United States of America (US), CPD programmes are usually offered by external agencies. For example, the Wallace Foundation, a national philanthropy organisation based in New York City provides, among other, school leadership training for head teachers. It attracts high-quality candidates and provides free, high-quality professional development for successful teachers and assistant principals interested in improving their leadership skills and possibly becoming a principal (The Wallace Foundation, 2013). The idea is to create a pathway to school leadership for effective teachers and other top instructors, who may not have considered the job of headship. The Canadian government, using the Energising Ontario Education model of improving education through more effective school leaders, developed a coherent leadership strategy to provide adequate contextual support for school leaders (OECD, 2010; Schleicher, 2012). In Singapore, successful potential school leaders are selected to attend the Management and Leadership in Schools programme at Singapore's National Institute for Education, based on interviews and leadership-situation exercises. Once accepted, aspiring school leaders can attend the four-month executive leadership training. Potential vice principals attend a six-month 'Leaders in Education' programme. Candidates in both programmes are paid during their training. Only 35 people are selected for the executive leadership training each year (Mourshed, Chijioke & Barber, 2010, cited in Schleicher, 2012). It is thus crucial for the South African education authorities to attract and select prospective principals with the right leadership and management qualities to lead public schools. Prospective and practicing principals should be afforded the opportunity of

participating in formal professional development programmes so that they can effectively adapt to their roles and responsibilities, which are changing radically. According to study undertaken by Bush and Heystek (2006) and Piggot-Irvine, Howse and Richard (2013), South African principals require development in supporting networks, policy issues and interpersonal skills, and place a strong focus on their administrative, financial and human resource management role.

#### Theoretical Framework

Theories in change management have been used as frame for this study. Change denotes making or becoming distinctly different and implies a radical transformation of character or replacement with something else. Applied to the principals' professional development, change is the process of transforming the schools' organisational practices into new behaviours that support a shared vision of achieving the institutions' goals. The basic framework followed in this study to examine this change process was Kurt Lewin's Force Field Model (1951) to embrace change and achieve organisational goals (Robbins & Judge, 2010). According to Senior (2002:308), Lewin's Force Field Model states that "organisations are held in equilibrium by equal and opposing, driving and resisting forces". The driving forces may include competitive pressures, legislative mandates, new technology, and environmental factors. Kurt Lewin's Force Field Model (1951) advocates three stages (Queen-Mary & Mtapuri, 2014):

- Unfreezing: In this stage principals have to reflect on their current practices before they adapt new behaviours.
- Moving or Changing: Principals consider making changes that will most likely contribute to achieving the organisational goals of their schools.
- Refreezing: Once changes are effected, new behaviours become apparent through what is observed within the organisation.

In the case of this study, it is evident that the government's legislative mandates are the driving force in organisational changes at public schools. Resisting forces include established customs and practices, teacher union agreements and the organisation's culture. Senior (2002:308) argues that the main focus of the "unfreezing stage is centred on changing the principal's habitual modes of thinking" as a result of new legislation, diversity in school population and technological advancement, to heighten awareness of the need to change. Thus, there is a definite need to move away from established behaviours to create new behaviours. Once the principal has chosen a course of action, he/she has to share insights about the problem, its probable causes, and the identified solutions with school management teams (SMTs), teachers, school governing bodies (SGBs) and other stakeholders of the organisation. Moving (change) is the

second stage of the process that essentially makes the actual changes. Principals embark on professional development programmes that will move the principal to new types of behaviour. Van der Westhuizen (2002) agrees that movement involves the development of new norms, values, attitudes, and behaviour through the identification of changes in the structure. In the refreezing stage, the principal's behaviours become apparent where a "shared vision" could inspire the participation to attain the desired future goals of the institution (Senge, Kleiner, Roberts, Ross, Roth & Smith, 1999). The third stage (refreezing) becomes apparent when changes are observed within the organisation.

#### Aim and Objectives of the Study

The primary aim of this study was to explore the perceptions and experiences of practicing principals of their professional development, and how this enhanced their leadership roles. This aim was encapsulated by the following objectives, namely to:

- advance a clear understanding of continuing professional development and its importance for principals; and
- empower principals to become effective leaders as a result of gaining access to and participating in formal CPD programmes.

#### Research Design and Methodology

An interpretivist qualitative research methodology brought to the forefront the varied experiences and perceptions of principals of their preparation for leadership positions and participation in professional development programmes. Standardised open-ended qualitative questionnaires followed by individual interviews were the main data-gathering tools used to explore the unique nature of principals' experiences and perceptions of CPD. The standardised open-ended interviews were structured in terms of the wording of the questions that allowed the participants to contribute as much detailed information as they desired (Gall, Gall & Borg, 2003; Kvale, 2007). With open-ended questions, participants were free to respond in their own words, and their responses were comprehensive. The individual interviews allowed the researcher to clarify participants' responses and to delve deeper in order to gather data-rich feedback from the sampled principals (Creswell, 2007). The interviews allowed principals to communicate areas of concern with regard to their professional development, and provided the researcher with opportunities to request clarification.

Purposive sampling methods were used to select fifteen principals of public primary and secondary schools in three education districts in the Gauteng Province of South Africa: Gauteng West, Gauteng East and Johannesburg Central. The sampled participants included males and females who

had served as principals for more than three years at these schools. These principals headed schools that were situated in inner cities, townships and affluent suburbs. After receiving consent from the participants, individual interviews were conducted in their offices after school hours. Each interview lasted between 45 and 60 minutes, until data saturation was reached and no new information emerged. The interviews were conducted in no particular order or district, but was dependent on the availability of the participants.

Data were analysed for content, broadly using Tesch's method of open coding (Creswell, 2014) in order to identify themes or categories. Tesch's method provided a systematic approach to the analysis of the qualitative data. The data was reviewed to establish value, depth and richness. Data was analysed by reading the transcriptions, giving attention to patterns and commonalities, while validity was established. The data was then linked with the research aims and objectives, in order to establish whether these had been achieved. This then involved the identification of topics, the use of coding into categories, and the emergence of themes. The study adhered to strict ethical requirements. Consent was requested from the Gauteng Department of Education (GDE) and principals of the selected schools. Participants were ensured of their anonymity, and were made aware that they could withdraw from the research at any time. To ensure confidentiality, no personal information would be revealed without the participants' consent.

Lincoln and Guba's (1985) norms of trustworthiness, namely, credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability (Shenton, 2004) were considered relevant for this study. Prolonged engagement, triangulation, member checks and peer debriefing were used to promote confidence that the researcher had accurately recorded the phenomena under investigation (credibility). Transferability was addressed through purposive sampling and through the provision of rich descriptions, which allowed the researchers to gain a proper understanding of the phenomenon under investigation. Regular checks were done with the participants to ensure the accuracy of data collection (member checks), that is, transcription of interviews was given to each participant to verify (Shenton, 2004).

#### Findings

The collected data were analysed and three themes emerged: The significance of principals enriching their qualifications; Principals' access to CPD programmes; and self-evaluation and personal professional development. The principals' responses have been coded as follows: FGW denotes Principal F of Gauteng West, GGW, Principal G of Gauteng West, etc.; AGE signifies Principal A of

Gauteng East, BGE, Principal B of Gauteng East, etc.; and JJC represent Johannesburg Central, Principal J, and KJC, Principal K of Johannesburg Central, etc.

#### Theme 1: The Significance of Principals' enriching their Professional Qualifications

Although most of the participants complied with the basic requirement of holding a three year teachers' diploma, and had seven years teaching experience when they were appointed as principals, they had subsequently improved their qualifications by either completing an Advanced Certificate in Education (ACE), or postgraduate studies at tertiary institutions. These qualifications empowered them to deal with pertinent administrative, staffing, and teaching and learning matters, by improving their basic qualifications.

Principal BGE explained that "*the B.Ed (Hons) afforded me the necessary skills to deal with legal and curriculum management issues, while the M.Ed endowed me with relevant knowledge and skills in strategic planning and setting medium and long-term goals*", IGW concurred with BGE that "*the B.Ed (Hons) boosted my self-esteem in data informed decision-making ... and I can analyse and interpret data for strategic planning and support*". FGW, who before completing the ACE (Education Leadership) in 2014, stated:

*I realised that my knowledge was compromised and very limited pertaining to management and leadership. I found out that I did not understand what it meant to manage education change ... through this course I was able to acquire deep updated knowledge, which involved complex skills adapted for every circumstance.*

JJC, who completed the ACE and B.Ed (Hons) in Leadership and Management, and is currently reading for her Master's, confirms the above view:

*The qualifications I obtained definitely keeps me updated and affords me the relevant skills and knowledge to deal with everyday, complex situations. I am also of the view that principals must be continually trained to keep abreast of latest developments. [all sic]*

LJC waxed lyrical of the ACE qualification that she recently obtained:

*This programme changed the whole school set up to become an enabling environment for effective teaching and learning. It has also helped me to bring all stakeholders that are designed to support the school to work as a collaborative structure ... it has empowered me, together with other School Management Team (SMT) members, to improve teaching and learning. [all sic]*

Some of the participants believed that improving their qualifications, combined with their experience in school management positions, contributed to them being effective leaders. Principal DGE, who is also currently reading for her Master's degree in Education Leadership and Management, submitted that "*my eight years' management experience as*

*head of department (HoD) and my qualifications contributed significantly to my successfully leading the school*". She emphasised that the module, Organisational Behaviour at M.Ed level harnessed her skills in managing the change environment. MJC had passed through the ranks of head of department (HoD) and deputy principal before he took on the principalship position. Although he acquired numerous qualifications, he felt that his experience as HoD provided him a strong foundation to effectively lead a school. This is what he shared with me:

*I gained experience as a manager in my department. I monitored the work of teachers and gave reports to my principal. In 1996, I was promoted to deputy principal, that time I got more experience of managing the school, because our principal was on and off, because he was sick. I became ready to lead a school. In 2003, I was promoted as a principal in this school, and I registered for the ACE course in leadership, which assisted me in growing to be a good leader. [all sic]*

HGW, who holds a Doctorate in Education, claims that it is through many years of teaching experience and interaction with different cultures and people in different countries, that prepares one adequately for the principalship position.

#### Theme 2: Principals' Access to CPD Programmes

CPD for principals is emphasised in the Integrated Quality Management System (IQMS) informed by Schedule I of the Employment of Educators Act, No. 76 (Republic of South Africa, 1998). The Minister of Basic Education is mandated to determine performance standards for teachers and SMTs that evaluate their performance in schools. The IQMS consists of three programmes aimed at enhancing and monitoring performance of the education system (Education Labour Relations Council (ELRC), Resolution 8 of 2003). These include Developmental Appraisal (DA); Performance Measurement (PM); and Whole School Evaluation (WSE). The district offices have the overall responsibility of advocacy, training and proper implementation of the IQMS. CPD is an aspect of DA, which aims to appraise individual educators in a transparent manner, with the view to determining areas of strength and weakness, and to draw up programmes for individual professional development. DA is designed to provide support for continued growth, and to promote accountability. As part of the process, a principal should select his/her immediate line manager (district official) and a peer (principal of another school) to serve in his/her Development Support Group (DSG), and they are responsible for the principal's professional development. JJC expressed her concern of the IQMS process:

*I am not happy with the manner the CPD is managed, whereby I have to report on my Personal*

*Professional Development Plan. I am of the view that my immediate senior, who is the Circuit Manager, ought to report on my behalf, based on the know-how during the monitoring exercise conducted on principals, because it is time-consuming to gather evidence and do the reporting in June and November of each academic year. [all sic]*

Responses of most principals revealed that education districts have not attached any importance to CPD for principals. Most of the development programmes arranged by education districts deal mainly with curriculum changes such as the National Curriculum Statement (NCS), Revised National Curriculum Statement (RNCS) and Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS). In some districts, ad hoc development programmes, such as school governing body (SGB) training and financial management workshops were provided. AGE asserts that:

*I attended very few Department/External CPD programmes in the last two years. I don't really know if the training and meetings, like the SGB training that I attended, were CPD programmes... . To my knowledge very few programmes were offered. If there are many CPD programmes offered by the GDE, obviously it is not well communicated. [all sic]*

These CPD programmes had limited benefits for principals who required training and development in matters relating to leadership and management. However, IGW had high regard for the Department and articulated the following:

*(They) play a pivotal role in ensuring quality development of principals to ensure quality curriculum delivery, and effective leadership and management. Through facilitating continuous professional development and training, the department is successful in keeping principals abreast on current education developments and offering a platform for principals to develop and support each other. [all sic]*

MJC shared a similar reaction:

*The Department of Education is playing a leading role in registering principals for readiness to lead. I was registered in school leadership as mentioned above. The department carried all the costs for this course. I have also registered with South African Principals Association (SAPA) which assists us to be the best leaders. The department also sent me to London with another principal and district director to visit other schools there. It was a very good initiative. We are also partnering with those schools. [all sic]*

Regarding the quality of CPD programmes offered to principals, it would appear that most of the workshops organised by education districts ranged from below par to mediocre, and most programmes delivered were mainly “one size fits all”. According to Darling-Hammond and Richardson (2009), the ‘workshop’ professional development model that the Department applies is generic, and usually ineffective. The needs of the participants were not considered at all. LJC expressed serious reservation

about the CPD programmes facilitated by the education district offices. The programmes he attended, “offered nothing new, as these were aimed at newly appointed SGBs and principals – a one size fits all”. BGE expressed similar sentiments:

*I have attended some workshops such as CAPS and Information and Communications Technology (ICT) training. At the moment, it is a ‘one size fits all’ approach by the Department, and they are seemingly working on specific programmes as requested by specific educators and schools. At the moment, the CPD programmes are not catering for our personal needs. [all sic]*

This opinion was also shared by principals CGE and DGE. NJC shared her thoughts on the role of the education districts:

*The Department's role on CPD for principals is not satisfactory. As a new principal, only one CPD programme was conducted last year (that I failed to attend due to family commitments). The workshop had its focus on curriculum management. According to those who did attend and from the material distributed, it was quite informative. Since it was the only programme for the year (2015), the maximum of 80 hours was not reached as required by the Personnel Administrative Measures (PAM) as it was only a three day workshop. This was a ‘one size fit all’ workshop where individual areas of development was not taken into consideration. The quality of the content during the three days were very mediocre. [all sic]*

GGW shared the same views as most of the other participants:

*CPD programmes are imposed on principals. There should be a strong desire from the part of leaders to acquire knowledge, skills and strategies to excel in their profession. The programme, such as Coaching and Mentorship, were imposed on principals, and were in my opinion of low quality, waste of money, and added no value to the development programmes. [all sic]*

CGE concurred with the feelings expressed by other principals. She indicated that:

*(The) Department held workshops normally arising on a need-to-know basis. For example, if a new circular is sent by Head Office, then our district conducts a workshop to bring it to our attention. These workshops are usually conducted in school halls, which are overcrowded. [all sic]*

CPD programmes are also offered by external agencies. These include tertiary institutions, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and the South African Council for Educators (SACE). KJC was involved with training and development arranged by external agencies such as Matthew Goniwe School for Leadership and Governance (MGSLG) and the University of Johannesburg. JGW was not very positive about the role of some of the NGOs:

*Although MGSLG and other institutions of higher learning have been offering programmes specifically crafted to develop principals, this has not necessarily translated into acquired skills to effectively administer, lead and manage schools (particularly high schools). This is, in my view, because they are one size fits all kind of programmes, and*

*for that reason fall short to equip principals with skills to deal with daily demands and challenges in their jobs. [all sic]*

FGW expressed high regard for SACE. She asserts that the SACE is:

*... involved in providing CPD programmes for leaders. SACE contributes to helping leaders to acquire knowledge which is continuously updated, widened and involve skill building to strengthen the capacity of leaders along understanding and development, and to renew their commitment and dedication to their profession ... [all sic]*

FGW shared her views on trade unions:

*[they] also provide professional development workshops to improve knowledge and skills, but some of their programmes ... are being politicised and no monitoring of the process.*

MJC indicated that she:

*attended at Penreach for computer studies; we go there once a month from nine hrs to 13hrs. For the past three years I have been busy with Penreach; doing management workshops and computers. This has been most beneficial to me. [all sic]*

AGE provided a suggestion that:

*... the Department should do a survey to find out what are our needs, and then base their training and development on these needs. They or external agencies can develop training programmes that are custom built. [all sic]*

BGE also provided an idea:

*Ongoing professional development is a must for all educators and needs to be done before (own emphasis) a leader takes up a position. I improved my qualifications and this has prepared me to take on leadership positions. [all sic]*

### Theme 3: Self-Evaluation and Personal Professional Development

Based on the IQMS policy, principals are also required to reflect on their own practice and determine their own professional needs. Although most principals complied with the requirement of self-evaluation, this process was seen merely as a paper exercise, and not taken seriously. A possible reason for the apathy is that performance management is linked to a one percent salary increment, and the DSG (the immediate line-manager and peers) are hesitant to give principals a low rating. All the participants were thus positive that self-evaluation is conducted on an on-going basis. However, there was very little evidence that most of the principals' personal professional development programmes were initiated. Some indicated that they did not depend entirely on the education districts to provide professional development programmes. Principal JGW explained:

*I chose to develop myself instead of waiting for the Department's CPD programmes to be implemented. I attended training sessions arranged by the Education Leadership Institute of the University of Johannesburg. I attended workshops on Education Policy and Law and Financial Management. I also had the opportunity of attending a series of workshops on the role of SMT arranged by MGSLG and*

*University of Johannesburg. These sessions provided me with new perspectives of how to deal with leadership and management matters. [all sic]*

Principal CGE concurred with JGW:

*CPD programmes offered by the Department of Education have contributed to a limited extent to my development as a leader or manager. However, I do feel that my own initiatives to develop myself professionally have contributed, to a large extent and more effectively, to my development as an effective leader. When challenges arise or when I feel the need to know more about certain aspects I am much more capable of doing online and other media research; and this has boosted my confidence, and in turn my capability to lead. I have invited specialists from tertiary institutions to provide me personal professional development. All the costs were borne from my personal income. [all sic]*

Principal KJC, who attended numerous workshops on leadership and management organised by local universities, indicated that she was afforded the opportunity to network with other principals and "copy good practice". She added that:

*Looking at the state of the school at the time I was appointed and now, I see a remarkable improvement in the way learning materials are presented, involvement of educators in outcomes assessments, recordkeeping, governance, attitude of teachers towards their work, learner discipline, and parents' involvement in all school matters. This could only be achieved by taking the initiative of professionally developing myself. [all sic]*

### Discussion

The findings indicate that leadership preparation and training are central to school effectiveness and school improvement. The participants unanimously agreed that they were appointed as principals without having any professional training or formal preparation for their principalship position. In South Africa, there are no rigorous criteria for educators to be appointed as school principals (Bush, Kiggundu & Moorosi, 2011; Townsend & MacBeath, 2011). Currently, South Africa is one of the few countries that do not require a compulsory and specific qualification for principalship (Van der Westhuizen & Van Vuuren, 2007), unlike countries such as the UK and US, that have national qualification structures in place (Quong, 2006; Walker & Qian, 2006). In the US, a teacher is only eligible to apply for the principal's post once he/she has completed the Master of Educational Administration degree (Tucker & Coddling, 2002). In the UK, teachers who wish to continue up the career ladder first become senior teachers or deputy heads, and thereafter work with the principal as a member of the senior management team. With an average of about five years' experience as a deputy, they can apply for headship posts. According to the Employment for Educators Act (Republic of South Africa, 1998), an applicant should at least hold a three year teacher's diploma (REQV 13) and seven

years teaching experience. This implies that a post level one teacher may be appointed as principal on the recommendation of the school governing body (SGB), without having any leadership and management qualifications or experience (e.g. passing through the ranks of head of department or deputy principal).

The Ministry of Education has made numerous attempts to raise the professional standards and competencies of school principals by formulating the South African National Professional Qualification for Principalship (DoE, 2004). This draft policy identifies a number of key principles that ought to inform a national professional qualification for existing and aspiring principals. More recently, the South African Standards for Principalship (SASP) (Department of Basic Education (DBE), Republic of South Africa, 2014) has been sent out for public comments with the hope of making the Standards for Principalship, legislation. Government should, in collaboration with various education stakeholders, enforce the SASP as policy. The DoE recognises the current lack of a co-ordinated system to meet these identified needs, and is therefore seeking to develop and implement a system of career pathing for education leaders and managers, and a framework of leadership and management development processes and programmes. It is envisaged that these will be built upon agreed understanding of the core purposes of the leadership roles, the key functions within these, the values which underpin them, and the personal and professional attributes required to carry out the role. The key functions in line with the core duties and responsibilities of the principals are clearly described in the IQMS policy document.

From responses of the participants, it is evident that the education districts attach very little importance to the CPD of principals. Most of the workshops facilitated by education districts deal with disseminating policy matters relating to curriculum changes and administrative matters instead of focusing on the needs of principals. Principals therefore seek other agencies (e.g. universities and NGOs) to access relevant professional development programmes to enhance their skills and knowledge to effectively lead and manage schools. The Ministry of Education consider CPD for educators to be crucial and has subsequently entrusted SACE with the management of CPD in public and independent schools (SACE, 2013). SACE emphasises that like all professionals, teachers and SMTs (including principals) require deep knowledge, which is continuously updated and widened, and which involves complex skills that need to be continually adapted to new circumstances. As part of a process, each educator will have a personal Professional Development Portfolio (PDP) developed according to SACE guidelines.

The third theme dealt with self-evaluation. The participants explained the purpose of a self-evaluation, namely, to inform them of their personal goals and the need for professional development. Piggot-Irvine (2010) asserts that although the complexity of the principal's role provides challenges for such principal development, there is an increasing awareness of approaches worthy of consideration. For example, the principal's self-evaluation on instructional leadership determines whether the principal satisfactorily develops and implements a school improvement plan that results in increased learner achievement; working with teams to develop realistic and attainable goals regarding learner achievement; implementing a system for monitoring learner progress and staff performance on an ongoing basis; providing feedback to staff for continuous improvement and growth; and selecting instructional programmes that meet specific school needs. If deficiencies in any of these attributes are noted, then professional development in these specific areas are required. It is evident that progressive principals take the initiative of arranging their own professional development programmes, based on needs, instead of relying on the Department's 'one size fits all' professional development programme. Murphy, Elliot, Goldring and Porter (2007:187) assert that "effective school leaders are especially skilful in creating learning organisations and fostering the development of communities of learning. Improvement-focused leaders thoughtfully attend to their own growth, modelling a lifelong commitment to learning."

### **Conclusion and Recommendations**

From this study it can be established that principals can make significant contribution to schools' achieving the educational goals and improving learner performance, if they are adequately prepared for their leadership role. This can be achieved by ensuring that aspiring and practicing principals are exposed to structured CPD programmes, based on needs analysis. For principals to cope with the demands of the 21st century, innovative leadership development programmes help prepare school leaders to apply creative approaches that address the broader roles and responsibilities of leaders and the purpose of schooling, and to use core technologies to achieve intended outcomes. Participating in structured CPD programmes will enable principals to make autonomous decisions, adapt teaching programmes to local needs, promoting teamwork among teachers, and engaging in teacher monitoring, evaluation and professional development. CPD programmes empower them to set strategic direction and develop school plans and goals, and to monitor progress by using data to improve practice.



Three pertinent issues regarding changes to professional development of principals come to the fore. Lewin's change theory of freezing, moving and refreezing framed this study appropriately. Firstly, serious consideration should be given to the professionalisation of principalship by redefining the promotion criteria (unfreezing). All participants acknowledged that principals and aspiring principals should be well-prepared to take up leadership and management positions. Secondly, to support principals and aspiring school managers to become effective leaders and managers in South Africa, the DoE piloted an ACE course aimed at developing leadership and management competence for those in school leadership positions or those aspiring to such leadership positions (unfreezing). This professional qualification has now been replaced by the Advanced Diploma in Education (ADE). The desired outcome of the ADE course is to provide participants with relevant knowledge and skills to develop and implement school development plans; draw appropriate policies in line with national legislation and regulations to guide their practices, as well as set up mechanisms to deal with issues across all aspects of school management and leadership. This ADE qualification is practice-based, and is aimed at providing management and leadership support through a variety of interactive programmes that improve the students' practice, professional growth and ethos of leadership. School leaders and managers should be made aware of what is expected of them through the Norms and Standards of Educators, competencies and the expectations of the DoE (Naidu & Conley, 2005). The ADE qualification should be made a prerequisite for anyone aspiring to take up leadership positions in schools (moving). Thirdly, the IQMS policy should be reviewed, accepted by all stakeholders, and seriously implemented. Perhaps the performance management dimension of IQMS should be completely detached from the policy to allow professional development to form the crux of IQMS. The education district offices should play a more constructive role in promoting professional development for principals, SMT members and teachers. The budgets for professional development should be substantially increased, so that experts and specialists in all facets of education can be employed. Principals and SGBs should not be entirely dependent on the DoE for the professional development of the principal and staff at their schools. The SGB should set aside funds to accommodate the professional development of principals and teaching staff. The Development Support Teams should identify the needs of teachers and the principal, and recommend as well as implement individual and group professional development programmes. Schools should be encouraged to strengthen professional learning

communities within schools and engage with those who need to change their practice.

#### Note

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