Learners' and teachers' perceptions of principals' leadership in Soweto secondary schools: a social justice analysis

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The legislative framework for education in South Africa enforces the democratisation and transformation of education consistent with the values of human dignity, equity, human rights, and freedom. As ex officio *members of School Governing Bodies (SGBs) and professional managers of schools, principals should play a pivotal role in providing transformative leadership for social justice in these schools. The purpose of this study was to examine, through a social justice framework, how teachers and learners who are SGB members perceive and experience the principals' leadership in Soweto secondary schools. Five schools were purposefully sampled for this qualitative case study. Data were collected through semi-structured focus group interviews and follow-up individual interviews. Findings suggest that learners and teachers experience sampled schools as democratically untransformed with a climate fraught with unfairness, inequity, disregard for human rights, and intolerance of diversity. The leadership behaviour of principals is perceived as a barrier to democratic transformation and social justice and this engenders resistance and threatens management effectiveness.*

Introduction

Following political changes in South Africa, one of the major educational reforms introduced was in school governance and management. There was a shift to more inclusive and democratic governance. To this end, the preamble to the South African Schools Act (No. 84 of 1996) advocates for the democratic transformation of society and the participation of learners, parents, and educators as partners of the State in education. A reasonable expectation would be that such participation would translate into broader democratic changes that benefit the school, its learners and the community. This, however, does not happen automatically. This ideal may be attained if, among other interventions, SGBs, which are charged with the leadership of schools, formulate democratic policies and oversee their implementation. Adams and Waghid (2005) correctly contend that SGB members must receive training on what democracy entails because the effective execution of their functions depends on them having a fair understanding of democracy and its principles. Almost two decades into democratic governance of schools and the provision of training such an understanding and accruing benefits seem to be elusive. Findings from recent studies in South Africa suggest that different members of SGBs still experience some marginalisation (Heystek, 2004; Mabovula, 2009; Magadla, 2007; Mncube, 2008, 2009; Van Wyk, 2004).

Notwithstanding evidence of such undemocratic practices, Grant-Lewis and Naidoo (2004) found that most stakeholders in SGBs tend to deny the existence of competing constituent interests, values and demands. Brown (2006) notes that, despite South Africa's success in extending rights and opportunities to previously disenfranchised and disadvantaged groups, there has been a slow rate of social, political and educational change. There are still observed disparities in infrastructure, pupil-teacher ratio, and learner completion rates between township and former Model C schools. These differences create the perception that standards in former Model C schools are higher than those in township schools (Brown, 2006), and that the environment in former Model C schools is more socially secure and conducive to effective teaching and learning than it is in township schools. It is thus not surprising that the migration of learners in South Africa is always from township schools to former Model C schools, not vice versa.

Differences between these schools suggest that those entrusted with the democratic leadership of township schools may be failing to fulfil their transformation mandate. In developing countries the transformation of the education system is considered one of the means of bringing socioeconomic change to individuals and the broader society (Pandey & Vedak, 2010; Parameswaran & Kader, 2009). Such transformation is, however, pursued in the context of conflicting interests and issues that include, among others, reconciling the quest for equity with the allocation of resources for education (Van Wyk, 2007). Notwithstanding their limited resources, schools must still provide social experiences, skills and knowledge that equip learners for responsible citizenship and meaningful participation in the economy. In South Africa transforming the education system was meant to help overcome the devastation of apartheid, and provide a system that builds democracy, human dignity, equality and social justice (Department of Education, 2001:2). Parameswaran and Kader (2009) opine that it amounts to denied access and inhibited future prospects when schools provide marginalising experiences. Given the promise that education holds in developing countries compared to how injustice hurts individuals and organisations (Aydin & Karaman-Kepenekci, 2007), the extent to which schools are perceived as democratically transformed warrants investigation. The research question which this study sought to answer, in the context of transformation and social justice, is: *How do teachers and learners who are SGB members perceive and experience the principal's leadership in township schools?* Since leadership practices and social conditions in these schools have not changed much, notwithstanding a democratic policy framework, it was anticipated that teachers and learners in these schools would be more critical of principals' leadership because of their history of resistance and militancy.

Literature overview
The analytical framework adopted for examining the leadership practices of principals as perceived by learners and teachers is the social justice and transformative leadership

theory. This is informed by equity, social justice and democratic transformation being among key objectives of the post apartheid education system (Ministry of Education, 2000). Although social justice is a policy prescript, this will not, by itself, make schools socially just. It will depend on the extent to which educational leaders at different levels of the system embrace social justice and create conditions under which it can thrive. Or, it will remain a pipe-dream. At school level this becomes the respon- sibility of principals who oversee the day-to-day management and give effect to applicable state policies. Because school principals operate within a social justice policy framework, it is reasonable to examine their leadership practices in terms of their effectiveness in promoting social justice in their schools. A commonly held view supporting this stance is that social justice is inextricably linked with educational leadership (Shields, 2009; Bogotch, 2002; Normore & Jean-Marie, 2008). Leadership practices that are not grounded on social justice principles but flout them and produce unjust consequences are morally and legally indefensible. Such practices, in effect, undermine the democratic transformation and social justice agenda of the Ministry of Education and some human rights enshrined in the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa. The irony, however, is that transformation and social justice are, in themselves, not enforceable through conditions of service for principals and defaulting principals cannot be disciplined. A social justice orientation is considered relevant because this study focuses on township schools that have historically been considered disadvantaged and marginalised. The new political dispensation does not seem to have brought desired changes in the leadership of these schools because of the reported disjuncture between prescribed democratic policies and practices (Brown, 2006).

Social justice is a deliberate intervention that challenges fundamental inequities that arise when one group uses power inappropriately over another (Furman & Shields, 2005). Goldfarb and Gilbert (in Theoharis, 2007) opine that social justice is the exercise of altering organisational arrangements by actively engaging in reclaiming, appropriating, sustaining and advancing inherent human rights of equity, equality and fairness in social, economic, educational and personal dimensions. In concurrence Zajda, Majhanovich and Rust (2006) maintain that social justice occurs when a society values principles of equality, and solidarity, understands and values human rights, and recognises the dignity of every human being. Theoharis (2007) further adds that social justice supports a process built on respect, care, recognition and empathy. The emergent common emphases from these conceptualisations are that social justice:
• is a proactive endeavour, not inaction;
• aims to change existing power relations;
• is based on democratic values and principles;
• focuses on upholding human rights; and
• must benefit people who are marginalised.
Hytten (2006) argues that since democratic societies are ideally just, social justice is an integral feature of democratic life where equity, social justice and solidarity are

pursued. Organisational structures, processes and relationships must be experienced differently from how they are experienced in unjust societies. Thus, Lee and Mc-Kerrow, (2005:1) argue that social justice may be defined "not only by what it is but also by what it is not, namely injustice."

A just school promotes inclusion and equity, holds high expectations for all learners, develops reciprocal community relationships, and has a direct social justice education and intervention (Carlise, Jackson & George, 2006). Educational leaders must therefore show commitment to and ground their practices on social justice. In concurrence, Marshall and Gerstl-Pepin (2005) argue that leaders can further entrench social justice in schools if they are critically pluralist and democratic, transformative, moral and ethical, caring, and spiritually or culturally responsive. Shields (2004) advocates for transformative educational leaders who engage in moral dialogue that facilitates the development of strong relationships, eliminates pathologising silences, challenges existing beliefs and practices, and grounds educational leadership in social justice. The essence of transformative leadership is thus to bring about positive change in the social and material condition within schools and their broader communities. The existing taken-for-granted social conditions must be questioned, changed and aligned to democratic values and social justice tenets. According to Shields (2009:4) the major elements of transformative leadership identified in literature are:

- a combination of critique and change;
- attempt to effect equitable changes;
- deconstruction and reconstruction of the knowledge frameworks that generate inequity;
- acknowledgement of power and privilege;
- emphasis on both individual achievement and the public good;
- focus on liberation, democracy, equity, and justice; and
- evidence of moral courage and activism.

In the context of schools the essence of transformative leadership and social justice is therefore to question organisational inequities and injustices that result from inappropriate use of power and to create more inclusive and socially just organisations permeated by democratic values. This may, however, not be easy given that schools tend to be sites of cultural politics that serve to reproduce and perpetuate some inequities, and to confirm and legitimate some cultures while other cultures are marginalised (Shields, 2009). Schools and classrooms represent a culture of power and mirror social relations that exist in the larger society (Applebaum, 2003) and what they value is construed from a specific class, race, gender and sexual orientation (Ryan, 2006). This means schools have unequal values, beliefs and practices that compete. As transformative leaders principals must interrogate and change these conditions, and create conditions that promote and nurture democracy and social justice. In their quest to transform schools for social justice principals must, among others:

- be open, sensitive and authentic in the treatment of teachers (Hoy & Tarter, 2004);

- be exemplary (Theoharis, 2007);
- make issues of race, class, gender, disability, sexual orientation and other margi-nalising conditions central to their advocacy and leadership practice (Theoharis, 2007; Bogotch, 2000); and
- question the assumptions that drive school policies and practices (Cambron-McCabe & McCathy, 2005).

Schools that have not transformed, to socially just entities, emphasise the supremacy of one culture over others resulting in those students belonging to minority cultures being, "routinely excluded from learning activities because they do not bring to school the same kind of language and interactional skills that are required" (Ryan, 2006:7). Such schools are characterised by racist words, hate speech, and social oppression which inflict psychological harm and restrict people's freedom (Applebaum, 2003). According to Brown (2006), failure to transform schools into just entities exposes individuals to inequity which carries detrimental consequences. A key manifestation of injustice in such schools is the unequal allocation of resources which engenders resentment, students' low self-esteem, discipline problems and teacher bias (Brown, 2006).

Socially just schools are experienced differently. They become better educational environments with raised student achievement, improved structures, enhanced staff capacity and strengthened school culture and community (Theoharis, 2007). In addition, a greater number of marginalised families participate in school activities (Aydin & Karaman-Kepenekci, 2008). In view of the detrimental effect of injustice in schools, it is inexcusable for principals to ignore their transformative leadership mandate and let schools forego the benefits of social justice.

Research methodology

This paper is based on an earlier qualitative multi-site case study of Soweto secondary schools. The aim of the study was to ascertain perceptions and experiences regarding democracy and shared decision-making in the SGB from the perspectives of SGB members (McMillan & Schumacher, 2006).

Five secondary schools were selected purposefully from Soweto's Johannesburg West-D12 Education district. Three schools are located in the original township while two schools are situated in an informal settlement. The socioeconomic milieu of these schools was considered a possible catalyst for high levels of political consciousness and activism that may influence perceptions about democracy and related social justice issues in schools. Most families have working class, low socio-economic backgrounds. They live in four-room council houses, rooms in other people's backyards, or self-erected structures in informal settlements. In a recent study of Soweto households Gray, Van Niekerk, Struthers, Violari, Matison, McIntyre and Naidoo (2006) found, among other things, that 11% of children had lost a parent, and 44% of households had at least one sick adult and could not pay school fees for their children or assist them

with homework. The literacy level of most parents is usually low and it is common for teachers to be the most highly qualified members of low socio-economic communities (Van Wyk, 2004). This results in skewed power relations in the SGBs. The informal settlement in which the two schools are based is considered to be one of the seven most deprived wards, out of 109, in the City of Johannesburg and as having: the worst levels of food insecurity; the highest recipients of child support grants; and female headed families (De Wet, Patel, Korth & Forrester, 2008).

From each school all current SGB members, except for parents, were selected. These were the chairperson, the principal, two teachers, three learners and one professional support staff member. Convenient sampling on the basis of availability was used to select three parents from the current SGB and two teachers and two learners from the previous SGB. This paper is restricted to data collected from teachers and learners. Separate group interviews were held for teachers and learners in each school. Individual one-on-one interviews were conducted for teachers who could not participate in group interviews. Interview transcripts were re-analysed with the view to answering the question: *How do teachers and learners who are SGB members perceive and experience the principals' transformative leadership for social justice in township schools?* Corti and Thompson (1998) maintain that secondary data facilitates wider use of data from rare or inaccessible respondents and helps generate new knowledge. Permission to conduct the study was obtained from the Gauteng Department of Education. Participants were informed that their involvement was voluntary and that they could withdraw from the study. They were assured of anonymity and confidentiality. Hence, only codenames, such as FL3E for female learner 3 from school E, are used in the discussion of findings.

Audio-recorded interviews were transcribed verbatim and coded. Themes and categories were generated from the analysis of the transcripts following Tesch's steps for open coding (Creswell, 1994). The categories were given names derived from the actual responses of the participants (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2000) and from social justice literature.

Findings and discussion
The analysis of data yielded the following themes which are discussed individually, namely: principles of organisational justice; commitment to democratic values; principals' (mis)management practices; and principals' personality traits and attitudes.

Theme 1: Principles of Organisational Justice
Findings suggest that respondents perceive their schools as generally lacking fairness and not transforming because of limitations in the leadership practices of principals. Consistent with other research findings (Mafora, 2012; Hoy & Tarter, 2004), the majority of respondents perceive their principals as failing to create an environment in which social justice thrives. Instead, principals' partisanship is seen as preventing schools from becoming productive workplaces for teachers or vibrant learning envi-

ronments for learners (Leithwood, Seashore, Anderson & Walharstrom, 2004). This perceived unfairness of principals reportedly encourages teachers and learners to question, reject, or sabotage managerial decisions.

The majority of teachers perceive the principals as biased in favour of learners and teachers who belong to their preferred social groups. Teachers reportedly benefit unfairly if they belong to the principals' union, ethnic group, friendship circle, or show blind loyalty. The rest of the teachers are usually belittled, humiliated or censored. Such marginalisation of teachers, which is contrary to the assertion that leaders for social justice value teachers as people and give them a say in the running of schools (Theoharis, 2007), was also found in earlier studies (Mafora, 2012; Beckmann & Blom, 2000; Smyth & Shacklock, 1998). The following comments capture teachers' perceptions of these principals' unfairness:

> Male Teacher 3 from School C (MT3C): *I am a member of the SGB but I know that the principal will never listen to me. He only listens to those people who say exactly what he wants. People like me, our sin is that we question his poor decisions and inconsistency…, but the price we pay is too much. We cannot get promoted after many years here, because we speak our mind…*

> Female Teacher 1 from School D (FT1D): *It is good for the principal to include women in structures and give them promotions, but it must be deserving-women, not only those who give him something else in return... . Some women are more equal than others here…*

Learners also think that principals are biased in favour of learners whose parents are personally known to them, are high achievers, or speak the same home language. Parameswaran's (2009) study also uncovered class and language-based discrimination in schools. Informative comments in this regard were:

> Male Learner 3 from School E (ML3E): *The principal is not always helpful. It depends on who you are and what your problem is. Some learners are allowed to go home and do whatever their parents want during school hours. Others are not allowed.*

> Female Learner 2 from School A (FL2A): *…another thing is, if your English is not perfect the principal and teachers will not allow you to speak your language, but they speak Zulu to learners, even when these learners do not know Zulu well… . One boy is a ZCC* [member of the Zion Christian Church]; *everybody calls him Sheriff or Bishop because of his church badge. They know he does not like it but they just call him that; the principal calls him that too.*

Although the majority of respondents expressed concern about the principals' perceived unfairness, they seemed to condone it where they were beneficiaries or perpetrators. The two comments below illustrate this anomaly:

> Male Teacher 1 from School E (MT1E): *Yes, principals can belong to unions. Our principal is a product of our union and he understands that he has to carry the mandate of the union. Equity and parity are okay, but they must first be union*

mandates. We cannot afford to have leaders in our schools who will take us back to apartheid days; we must have progressive people… Imagine the principal having HODs [Head of Department] *or a deputy who opposes the union, it would be conflict and chaos. That is why we only support the promotion of people from our union only and the principal makes sure it happens…*

Female Learner 2 from School D (FL2D): *As the RCLs* [members of the Representative Council of Learners] *we must enjoy some benefits or gains which other learners do not have because we are leaders. Like, we must not be punished like other learners or they will not respect us.*

These findings are consistent with other findings (Mafora, 2012; Parameswaran, 2009; Mncube, 2008) and suggest that the major principles of organisational justice for example, equity, voice, correction, accuracy and consistency (Hoy & Tarter, 2004) are perceived to be flouted by principals.

Theme 2: Commitment to Democratic Values
A common concern from the majority of respondents was that, contrary to their claims, principals were generally undemocratic and hampered transformation. Unlike Theoharis's (2010) findings that principals' key strategy to enacting social justice was valuing racial, economic and cultural diversity, principals in this study were perceived by the majority of teachers as intolerant of diversity, suppressing different voices, and as being unfairly discriminative. An apt remark from one teacher was:

Male Teacher 3 from School E (MT3E): [The principal] *seems to think this school is like his own house and the rest of us are his children who must just agree with whatever he says. If we ask questions or disagree we are troublemakers who must be solved. If you are seen as a problem you don't get what other teachers get, you are always blamed and for little mistakes. Those who agree with him are always praised, sometimes for doing nothing special. Their mistakes are ignored.*

Specific reference to one principal's intolerance of diversity and failure to create a warm and welcoming climate as expected (Theoharis, 2007), was summed up thus:

Male Teacher 2 from School D (MT2D): *Our principal treats us with little respect, but is worse with parents. He is inconsiderate... . When poor parents visit the school they do not get the same treatment as the who's who of this township. Those who are not literate are not helped immediately and do not get things explained to them properly. Sometimes the clerks shout at them like little children and the principal does not reprimand them.*

Marginalising parents on the basis of their socioeconomic status corroborates other research findings (Mafora, 2012; Brown & Duku, 2008; Mncube, 2005; Ministerial Review Committee, 2003). It suggests that in exercising leadership these principals do not look at the conditions in which people live and seek to change them or reach out to the community and marginalised families (Theoharis, 2007) in order to change and improve their social and material conditions. Rather, they use these conditions as the

basis for discriminating unfairly against others and humiliating them. Taylor (1992, cited in Applebaum, 2003) cautions that non-recognition or misrecognition is a form of oppression and that a person or group can suffer damage if they are confined, demeaned, or treated with contempt. The majority of respondents in this study can thus be said to feel oppressed by their principals.

The majority of learners also perceive their principals as suppressing different voices. Consistent with other findings (Mafora, 2012; Morojele & Muthukrishna, 2011; Mabovula, 2009; Mncube, 2008; Shields, 2004), these learners feel silenced and marginalised because of their age, social background, and assumed lack of substance in their views. One learner maintained:

Female Learner 1 from School B (FL1B): *The principal and teachers never listen to us seriously. Maybe it is because we are young and they think we know nothing, which is not fair. If we are young or know nothing how come they want us to help control other learners*?

A recurrent concern of learners was that principals tend to be indifferent or complicit when their rights are abused. Some learners' comments in this regard were:

Female Learner 1 from School A (FL1A): …*boys always harass us about our attire, our looks and say nasty things to us or touch our breasts and bums and so forth. Sometimes a person would insist that you love him by force and threatens you. When you report to the principal he just laughs and ask what is wrong to be loved*…

Male Learner 2 from School C (ML2C): …*at first my friend always reported to the principal and the class teacher whenever other learners called him 'istabane'* (derogative slang for gay person). *Each time they promised to do something about it but did nothing. He stopped reporting when he overheard the principal re-ferring to him as istabane when he was among a group of learners who were scolded for late coming*; and

Male Learner 3 from School D (ML3D): *Our principal is not a bad person. His problem is to protect bad teachers. For instance, he is aware that some teachers still use corporal punishment and call us by funny names when we fail but says nothing… . Some learners are repeatedly proposed* [propositioned] *by teachers and victimised if they refuse, but the principal says he cannot do anything without evidence*…

The failure of principals to protect students is inconsistent with findings of Place, Ballenger, Wasonga, Pireval and Edmonds (2010) and Normore and Jean-Marie (2008). Rather, it validates the view that schools perpetuate inequalities and dis-crimination regarding sexual orientation (The Gay, Lesbian & Straight Education Network, 2005) and research findings that harassment and sexual violence are endemic in South African schools (Wilson, 2008; Prinsloo, 2006; Human Rights Watch, 2001). It is thus fair to infer that learners do not perceive the school environment as socially just in terms of its processes and relations (Bogotch, 2000), and that democratic values

are just espoused, not observed. The leadership practices of these principals are not transformative because they fail to put on the agenda social justice issues like class, gender, and other marginalising conditions (Theoharis, 2007).

Theme 3: Principals' (Mis)Management Practices
The majority of learners and teachers attribute the lack of democratic change and injustice in schools to the principals' adherence to the assumed tradition of the school or their personal preferences. Principals reportedly claim to follow policies when justifying their actions but are unable to produce such policies on demand. This amounts to management by personal whim and manipulation, and reflects failure to question assumptions underlying school policies and practices (Cambrone-McCabe & McCarthy, 2005). In three of the surveyed schools teachers reported that it was common practice to allocate classes considered to be difficult to teach because of poor learner achievement and discipline problems to new teachers, irrespective of their qualifications and experience. This practice effectively punishes affected teachers and learners alike.

The majority of teachers maintain that in their schools all teachers who were placed on the redeployment list were invariably individuals who had differences with their principals. That is, their re-deployment was not perceived as occasioned by the school's curricular needs, but was the principal's way of settling scores. Similarly, the majority of teachers thought principals were not completely objective when dealing with teacher appraisal, but swayed the decision of the appraisal panel and associated benefits in favour of those teachers they preferred and against those teachers they had differences with. This engendered resentment and resistance among teachers. Pehlivan (1993) and Bozkan (1998) also found that unfairness in appraisal and work allocation increased stress levels among teachers. Some noteworthy comments in this regard were:

> Male Teacher 3 from School C (MT3C): …*he does not care which learning areas need teachers or who came first or last in the school when doing re-deployment lists. He just checks who is a threat, or his enemy. We always lose good teachers that way…*
> Female Teacher 2 from School E (FT2E): *Appraisal is a joke. It depends on who you are. How do you explain it if a teacher gets a low score but gets no development opportunities, but those who got higher scores are the ones who are sent to workshops, including those not relevant for their areas?*

Principals are perceived as managing schools without any framework for democracy and social justice considerations. Their management decisions are considered to be influenced by self-interest and as being divisive and facilitative of cronyism. The allocation of resources and privileges is thus seen as partisan and punitive depending on which individuals were involved and the nature of their relationship with the principal.

Theme 4: Principals' Personality Traits and Attitudes
These findings are inconsistent with other studies which found that principals had

personal qualities like boldness, care and courage which enhanced social justice (Ryan, 2010; Zembylas, 2010; Theoharis, 2010; Normore & Jean-Marie, 2008). The majority of teachers and learners perceive their principals as having some personal traits and attitudes that militate against the transformation and social justice agenda. These were that principals were:

• uninformed about social justice issues;
• domineering and manipulative;
• unpredictable and moody;
• aloof and unconcerned about other people's issues; and
• arrogant and evasive.

According to Hoy and Miskel (cited by Hoy & Tarter, 2004), principals who tend to hide behind their positions, lose their temper, or manipulate teachers do not command trust, loyalty and respect, particularly in the absence of valid policies. This in turn makes them more domineering and dictatorial, further eroding the social justice considerations that should be nurtured. Concern about one principal's attitude was expressed thus:

> Female Learner 4 from School E (FL4E): *Our principal does not care about our background; all he is interested in is that we must be well-behaved, do our work, pass and go. Nobody wants to know what makes us fail to do our homework, misbehave like dodge class or being rude to teachers. Whether you dodge because you are hungry or don't come to school because you do not have clothes or money for civvies* [informal clothing worn at school for fund raising], *nobody wants to know. All they see is a naughty child; meanwhile your problems stay the same…*

Although one principal had only been appointed to his post for six months from another school, a teacher could already form an opinion about his attributes that could impact on the manifestation of social justice in the school. That teacher remarked thus:

> *Mr* [name omitted] *is new at this school. His problem is that he isolates himself. How does he expect to know our problems and concerns? There are family-heading kids, substance abusing staff, and poor families who all need help. Unless he changes, he will only add to the factionalism and divisions in the school and things without helping out. Things will get worse…*

The cumulative effect of these attributes and attitudes in schools is that they engender feelings of injustice, insecurity and discontentment among teachers and learners.

Conclusion

Findings suggest that teachers and learners experience schools as places devoid of democratic transformation and social justice. This is mainly because of how they perceive principals to be exercising their leadership of schools. Instead of actively questioning social inequities and unequal power relations that are manifested in society and actively seeking to eradicate them, principals are perceived as promoting such relationships in schools. Because of their perceived lack of commitment to democratic values,

their management practices that are not grounded on moral and ethical standards, as well as negative personal attributes, principals' leadership of schools is experienced as a barrier rather than a catalyst for transformation and social justice. In fact, learners and teachers perceive the leadership of these principals as devoid of all major elements of transformative leadership outlined by Shields (2009).

Teachers and learners who feel marginalised and dehumanised suffer psychological damage that poses a threat to the stability and management effectiveness of schools. In concurrence, Applebaum (2003) contends that when principals face resistance because of the perception that they are unjust, they feel pressurised when they feel they are not effective in changing things fast enough.

To address the potential negativity of the discontentment that arises from perceptions of social injustice, school principals should have clear standards of fairness and implement them consistently in the leadership of their schools. A commitment to social justice in schools should be encouraged through the formulation and adoption of policies and charters on social justice. In addition, social justice should be one of the Key Performance Areas (KPAs) of school principals for which they should be held to account, like other areas of responsibility. It would be helpful if social justice issues, especially principles of organisational justice, could be incorporated in the initial teacher training curriculum and continuous professional development of principals (Cambrone-McCabe & McCarthy, 2005).

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