

IN-HOUSE MENTORING AND SCHOOL LEADERSHIP: PERCEPTIONS OF WELL-PERFORMING PRIMARY SCHOOL PRINCIPALS

H. VAN DER MERWE
University of South Africa

Abstract

A growing scholarship links good leadership with in-house mentoring. This article looks at how well-performing school leaders benefitted from the in-house mentoring they received. The author reports on a qualitative investigation based on in-depth individual interviews with six primary school leaders from Gauteng, KwaZulu-Natal, Limpopo and Northwest Provinces who were purposefully selected based on their receiving a national award for excellence in leadership. These awards were made by the Department of Basic Education in the category 'Excellence in primary school leadership'. The findings show that in-house mentoring benefitted participants holistically through behavioural, knowledge and skills acquisition. Behavioural acquisition included being humble and empathetic towards constructive work performance. Knowledge and skills acquisition related to sustaining the standard of teaching of core subjects, relying on committee input in a relational leadership approach and ensuring a dedicated teacher corps and positive parent involvement. The findings contribute to the discourse on in-house mentoring for improved school leadership practice.

Keywords: in-house mentoring, school leadership, career and psychosocial support, professional and organisational attainment

1. INTRODUCTION

School leadership functioning is multifaceted, requiring a vast array of expertise to meet the demands of accountability and efficiency. This expertise includes, amongst other things, being educational visionaries, budget analysts and facility managers who simultaneously oversee contractual and policy mandates (Dufour, 2002; LaPointe, Meyerson & Darling-Hammond, 2006; Tucker, 2010). A crucial part of the demands on school leaders concerns their accountability for learner achievement. This accountability requires the activating of parent involvement and the setting of high expectations for learner and teacher performance while constantly analysing multiple sources of data for decisions on improved teaching and learning (Duncan & Stock, 2010). All of these tasks require competent levels of management literacy and intense involvement with all stakeholders. Not all candidates are equally equipped for these tasks and beginning school principals are especially often overwhelmed by their school leadership responsibilities. To enhance their career competency, mentoring as a method of promoting professional development that encourages self-actualisation and holistic personal

development can contribute to prospective school principals being sufficiently equipped for their future leadership roles. In this regard much research has been conducted on the guiding of school principals by means of formal mentoring approaches (Ackerman & Maslin-Ostrowski, 2004; Crow, 2006; Duncan & Stock, 2010; Hean, 2003; Scott, 2010; Scott & Weber, 2008). What have been less frequently reported are the in-house, context-relevant learning opportunities that encompass constructivist problem-solving dimensions within a safety net environment of trust, moral support and sounding board possibilities. These learning opportunities are spontaneously acquired through informal mentoring as intra-professional support within the contextual school environment by a devoted mentor motivated by generativity and the recognition of potential in the mentee (Bower, 2007; Mertz, 2004).

Considering the magnitude of school leadership and the value of proper mentoring, the influence of in-house mentoring on school leadership performance is explored in this article. My argument is that aspects of mentoring that represent contextual mentoring which capacitates prospective school principals with professional and organisational know-how, points to specific foci of an in-house mentoring approach. With reference to the high demands on school leadership efficiency and accountability, an identification of these foci could extend the general discourse on school leadership mentoring for improved school leadership practice. The point of departure in this article is legitimate peripheral participation which is used as the theoretical framework underlying the qualitative investigation based on in-depth individual interviewing of six purposefully selected participants. The presentation of findings from an analysis of the data is followed by a discussion of the foci of in-house mentoring as experienced by participant school principals who were distinguished for excellence in leadership. These foci are supported by the main qualities of good leadership and the process by which these qualities were gained in-house.

2. LEGITIMATE PERIPHERAL PARTICIPATION AS SITUATED WORKPLACE LEARNING

The school as workplace relates to what Wenger (2000) describes as 'a community of practice' representing a social 'container' of the competencies that are needed in the specific setting and which, through mutual discourse, is defined by the participants of the specific community. Mutual discourse represents the framing of life in a particular way that encapsulates a particular history, culture and social identity brought about by joint enterprise, mutual engagement and a shared repertoire (Wenger, 2000). A community of practice, with its specific discourse, is based on purposeful learning aimed at achieving desirable outcomes for both the individual and the organisation to ensure the sustained development of both parties (Lave & Wenger, 1991). An example of such purposeful learning is the in-house mentoring of a prospective school leader for professionalism and sustained school success.

In-house learning as situated learning represents an interplay between social competence and personal experience, combining personal transformation with the evolution of social structures (Wenger, 2000). Interplay is then brought about by mentees participating in authentic activity, such as school leadership, using the tools of their discipline to solve real problems within the context where the knowledge is located so as to achieve knowing-in-action on account of acting-in-situation (Smith, 2007; Williams, Matthews & Baugh, 2004).

Central to the concept of situated learning is legitimate peripheral participation which enables mentees to engage with their mentors in legitimate expert activity, but in a limited way with limited responsibility for the ultimate product (Lave & Wenger, 1991). Considered within the school context, 'legitimate' pertains to the daily activities integral to school practice; 'peripheral' signifies the participation of school leader mentees at the edge of the practice alongside their mentors; and 'participation' encapsulates the engaged working and talking between mentees and their mentors as they negotiate meanings to take decisions on school functioning. As mentees become familiar with and qualified to perform their leadership tasks, mentors pull back to allow their mentees gradually to move on to central participation (Lave & Wenger, 1991) such as, for example, acting fully on all levels as executive leaders of their schools.

Participation in a legitimate peripheral way within the school context includes dialogue through collaborative social interaction by means of reflection in, reflection on and reflection for practice (Williams et al., 2004). Mentors, together with their school leader mentees, reflect in practice by assessing and adapting to daily situations at school. They mutually reflect on practice by evaluating past actions for applicability to present situations so as to plan for future actions in their reflecting for practice endeavours. Based on this collaborative reflective participation, both mentor and mentee experience a sense of belonging as the awareness grows that they are mutually able to contribute to the purpose of school functioning due to valid and valued experiences and ideas (Smith, 2007). Through these reflection activities embedded in dialogue, mentors, with their mentees, create their in-house, customised mentoring environment. This environment capacitates mentees to move to central participation based on mastered knowledge and skills in contextual school leadership.

3. MENTORING FEATURES

In-house mentoring as a learning strategy to enhance workplace learning holds that a senior person with experience and position provides information, advice and emotional support to a junior person in the same contextual environment in a relationship that lasts for an extended period of time and that is marked by substantial emotional commitment by both parties (Mertz, 2004; Normore & Loughry, 2006; Scott, 2010).

This relationship implies a career and psychosocial function with mentoring. With the career function mentees learn the ropes of the workplace through coaching and the provision of learning opportunities holding a mentoring intent of brokering and advising (Kram, 1983; Mertz, 2004). Psychosocial functions raise mentees' sense of competence and professional effectiveness and include the mentoring roles of counselling and friendship based on a modelling intent from the mentor (Kram, 1983; Mertz, 2004). Within a school leadership context mentoring is both professional in terms of building career-related leadership capacity and organisational in terms of gaining a deep psychosocial understanding of the specific context (Crow, 2006).

Contemplating the effects of mentoring, two mutually inclusive but distinguishable outcomes relate to a performance and a social justice effect (Kirchmeyer, 2005). Aiding the acquisition of task-specific skills and job-relevant knowledge, a functionalist approach to mentoring is arranged assuming conformity (Crow, 2006; Darwin, 2000). In the school leadership context this functionalist approach implies that mentees conserve and adopt the thinking patterns of the next layer to ensure sustained ways-of-doing (Scott, 2010). The social justice effect of mentoring is embedded in a radical humanist approach of challenging power relations and respecting mentee subjectivity in a climate of risk taking based on a horizontal mentorship relationship (Darwin, 2000; Kirchmeyer, 2005; Louw & Waghid, 2008). In a school leadership context social justice implies that mentees are open to constructive criticism from their mentors while maintaining perspective and a conscious awareness of the own sense of control for strategic upward mobility. The result is that mentees, while adopting the thinking patterns of the next layer, also develop ways to lead which reflect their own philosophies and convictions and which are aligned to contemporary societal demands (Crow, 2006; Peters, 2010).

4. TOPICAL ASPECTS FOR MENTORING WITHIN THE SCHOOL LEADERSHIP CONTEXT

School effectiveness translates to classroom achievements which are largely defined by academic outcomes in standardised tests (Blair, 2002). School leaders influence these outcomes through the support and development of competent teachers and the implementation of effective organisational processes. In this regard strong leadership activates all the qualities that promote powerful teaching and successful learning for all pupils. Features of effective schools that are closely associated with strong leadership pertain to high expectations with regard to learner achievement, a shared sense of purpose, sound home-school relations, the frequent and systematic evaluation of learners, high professional standards among teachers, an orderly environment, the availability of comprehensive resources, a planned and purposeful curriculum, time on task and neat and clean buildings and facilities (Bacolod & Tobias, 2006; Blair, 2002; Kruger, 2003; Mathibe, 2007; Pollard-Durodola, 2003; Van der Werf, Creemers, De Jong & Klaver, 2000).

The school leader affects all of these features by acting as instructional guide, financial manager, policy developer, stakeholder mediator, disciplinarian, and marketer (Scott, 2010; LaPointe *et al.*, 2006).

In order to carry out these roles, and gain a deep understanding of the specific school context, school leader mentees need professional and organisational socialisation. Professional socialisation equips mentees with skills to facilitate pupil learning through professional learning communities based on data-driven decisions. Organisational socialisation enables mentees to manage school finances and enforce school rules while liaising with parents and the community (Crow, 2006; Duncan & Stock, 2010; LaPointe *et al.*, 2006). As the intense involvement with all stakeholders is a main function of school leaders, mentoring assists with the acquiring of skills to relate effectively with people. Dealing with difficult parents and poorly performing teachers, for example, is an important aspect of organisational socialisation and factors for mentoring (Hean, 2003; Scott, 2010; Yong & Yue, 2007).

Considering the career and psychosocial function implied in mentoring, professional and organisational socialisation are developed by mentors who support and challenge their mentees by being their strategists, critical friends and role models. In this regard mentors act as teachers who challenge productivity, offer encouragement, provide feedback, and promote independence (Duncan & Stock, 2010). All of these mentoring actions contribute to school leader mentees acquiring the knowledge, skills and dispositions needed for professional and organisational efficiency in context-specific school environments.

The findings of an empirical investigation into the influence of in-house mentoring on school leadership performance, in which all of this literature is considered, are discussed next.

5. RESEARCH DESIGN FOR THE EMPIRICAL INVESTIGATION

To understand the influence of in-house mentoring on school leadership performance, my investigation was oriented within the pragmatic paradigm using a qualitative inquiry entailing individual interviewing. Concurring with Henning, Van Rensburg and Smit (2004) and Johnson and Christensen (2004), I selected a qualitative inquiry for an in-depth understanding of the situation of those involved, as well as of the meaning they derived from their situation. Since my interest lay in process rather than outcomes, I decided that my study would entail a rich description of the context and operation of the case pertaining to the influence of in-house mentoring on school leadership performance.

My main denominator in organising the research sample was the selection of participants who were most suitable, because of the breadth and depth of their experience with regard to the topic under investigation (Henning *et al.*, 2004; Johnson, 2002).

I selected six school principal participants who had received national awards for excellence in primary school leadership during the period 2010 to 2012. A national award for excellence in leadership was considered a convincing indicator of good leadership and possible mentoring assistance. These awards, representing first, second and third prize on the national level, are made annually by the National Department of Basic Education to recognise and promote excellence in different categories of teaching and leadership. One of these categories is primary school leadership. The selected participants consisted of two participants from Gauteng, one from KwaZulu-Natal, one from Limpopo, and two from Northwest Province. Between the six participants two first prizes were achieved, three second prizes and one third prize. All of these prizes were achieved at national level. In each case participants identified their mentors as their seasoned and distinguished school principals who served as role models for proper school leadership.

With regard to gender representation, two participants were female. Race representation included white, Indian, and black participants. Mentors represented the same race as their mentees, with three mentors being female. In line with the findings of Rossman and Rallis (2003), namely that with phenomenological studies three to five in-depth interviews with information-rich participants provide intensive coverage of the data, I experienced saturation of information when I realised that nothing new was learned after the sixth interview was conducted. All six interviews were conducted at the participants' schools and at times convenient to them with regard to their busy schedules. Interviews ranged from one to two hours in length with the timing dictated by each participant. With all six interviews further prompting contributed to a deeper understanding of the influence of in-house mentoring on school leadership performance. Member checking in order to ensure that participants were accurately represented was utilised as a triangulation strategy (Johnson & Christensen, 2004).

With the in-depth interviews, I prompted participants to reflect on and narrate the factors of good school leadership and the influence of in-house mentoring on their remarkable work performance. The three main questions that I included in an interview schedule related to what the elements of distinguished school leadership are, the extent of participants' in-house mentoring, and the main aspects relevant to participants' mentoring experiences. Follow-up questions probed the 'why' and the 'how' of in-house mentoring initiatives for effective school leadership.

I used qualitative content analysis to ensure that all the perspectives and issues that arose from the data were included in the report. In brief, this meant that I transcribed each interview for an immersion into the data and as an initial segmentation of the data into units of meaning (De Vos, 2005). I followed this up with open coding by reading and re-reading each interview to ensure an overview of as much contextual data as possible, so as to achieve an inductive selection of codes determined on sentence level (Henning *et al.*, 2004).

After axial coding I used selective coding to ensure that themes from the labelled categories were constructed and extracted to represent the interpreted and rationalised data as research findings (Henning et al., 2004). I referred to Guba's trustworthiness model as explained by De Vos (2005) to ensure the authenticity of my findings in terms of truth value, applicability, consistency and neutrality. Apart from member checking, I triangulated the research findings from the empirical investigation with the research findings from the literature. I guaranteed the anonymity of participants and the confidentiality of their disclosures at all times during the research project. Although limited in scope with an intensive focus on six participants only, rigour was achieved through emerging regularities and recurring patterns provided by different participants from different situations and with different interpretations of reality. This rigour produced a comprehensive and context-rich set of findings relevantly linked to theory.

6. PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS

The influence of in-house mentoring on school leadership performance is discussed through three themes. These themes, relating to the questions posed with interviewing concurring with what was identified in the literature, pertain to the following:

- elements distinct to remarkable school leadership
- assistance in practising school leadership skills
- foci for in-house mentoring in school leadership

In the following paragraphs I discuss these themes. My discussion is substantiated by verbatim excerpts from the interviews. For the sake of confidentiality and authenticity, I distinguish the six school principal participants by numbers as SP1, SP2, and so on.

6.1 Elements distinct to remarkable school leadership

Participants identified positive discipline, constructive teamwork, relational leadership and being sensitive to one's specific school context as elements distinct to school leadership performance. With regard to constructive discipline, School Principal 4 stated, 'Firstly you get the discipline right and everything else falls into place.' Good discipline entails 'a fostering of respect for everyone and for everything' (SP4), through 'the principal who is an exemplar' (SP3) of practising 'that respect for people and for things' (SP4). Practising respect entails fundamentals such as to 'come to school punctually' (SP2), 'to consider human dignity at all cost' (SP6), and to live one's passion by 'addressing all matters from the heart' (SP1). Teamwork as a shared sense of purpose and ownership-taking prompts staff and learners to be there for each other and for the cause.

This principle is fostered by strong leadership from the school principal who reminds staff and learners that 'the school is not mine, or yours, but ours' (SP4) and that whatever is done is done with 'the pupil as point of focus' (SP1).

Relational leadership is motivated by acknowledging that 'you cannot work alone' (SP5). Through committee input which consists of participative decision-making and shared responsibility, school leadership capacity is strengthened for increased work performance. Committee input manifests as follows: 'Coordinators of committees are the ones who advise me, I just check whether they are in line with their projects and the policy. I give them guidance, I give them motivation and space to manage because I need the backing from them' (SP3). A distinct approach in relational leadership and to 'stay informed on technical know-how' (SP6) is to 'surround oneself with specialist knowledge' (SP1) by approaching colleagues and experts to increase 'one's toolkit of technical skills' (SP6).

The importance of being sensitive to one's specific school context and the needs of stakeholders was highlighted as being crucial to good leadership performance. Acting as a 'magnified person that wins people' (SP2), the school principal must be able 'to sense people to bring them closer so that one can achieve' (SP5). For this to happen one must 'live with the community to understand their problems' (SP3) in order to be sensitive to learner achievement possibilities. Indicators of school success in terms of optimal learner achievement, which is inspired by the belief that 'education is the only hope' (SP3), is the feedback from secondary schools that 'my learners are dominating because they are disciplined' (SP2), or that 'all the learners from my school passed matric with exemption' (SP1).

6.2 Assistance in practising school leadership skills

The value of practising one's leadership skills on site under the watchful eye of a dedicated mentor is proved by constructive learning. However, for this to be realised, passion and a willingness to work extremely hard are prerequisites, as pointed out by the participants. School Principal 4 confirmed the value of her mentoring period of two years before her school principal retired, which involved hard work: 'He gave me everything to do and although I had a full load, and it was heavy for me, I was like all fair with everything on the part of the manager.' School Principal 3 commented, 'I do hard work' and noted that the extra workload during mentoring was considered to be 'an opportunity to learn'. With reference to mentoring functions in a legitimate peripheral participation arrangement, School Principal 5 received career-related mentoring with a brokering intent: 'My mentor used to guide me, I used to do the things and had to come to him and he used to check and see that I am on the right track.' For School Principal 2 the psychosocial function involved in mentoring manifested in her mentor repeatedly saying, 'You are capable in terms of this and this and this, I think you are the relevant candidate for the position.'

With regard to central participation within the community of practice of school leadership, School Principal 6 remarked, '[M]y school principal gave me everything to do, she eventually just sat back and I managed the school.' With School Principal 1 the social justice effect of a horizontal mentoring relationship was evident: 'I shared my dream with my principal, we built it together, he challenged me not to be afraid of believing in my own dream.'

6.3 Foci for in-house mentoring in school leadership

Major topics emerged from the transcribed interviews as expertise in school leadership that participants gained through in-house mentoring. These competencies, which extend knowledge and skills to embody a holistic know-how on good leadership, represent foci for in-house mentoring. The foci included mentoring on a leadership philosophy, on instructional leadership, on staff motivation, on parent involvement and on entrepreneurial approaches.

With regard to leadership philosophy, participants emphasised the value of their mentors as role models who practised what they preached. Of the many virtues gained through their mentors' living examples, participants highlighted humility, empathy and being fair. Mentors fostered humility in their mentees by continuously reminding them of the following: 'Suppress your ego' (SP6); 'Swallow your pride' (SP2); 'Do not be over-sensitive' (SP1); 'Take critique without it killing you inside' (SP5); 'Failure is not the end, but the beginning' (SP6). Mentees understood their mentors' humility as the result of completeness brought about by gradual development and having empathy for the environment. School Principal 4 remembered her mentor emphasising the importance of managerial development being gradual in order to be thorough and keeping perspective because 'one must go step by step, post level 1, post level 2, post level 3, to get all those experiences' and 'to realise how little one knows the more one knows'. Empathy for the specific environment was fostered by mentors who understood the environment because they came from that environment. School Principal 3 explained how his mentor enlightened him on the real conditions in which many of the learners lived 'because she came from that background, her family was very, very poor'; therefore, 'every time my mentor said education is life it was not empty words' (SP3). That inspired School Principal 3 to study further: 'I have just completed my master's.' With regard to being fair, participants acknowledged their mentors' living example such as that their mentor would never turn anyone away, whether they were 'his teaching staff, support staff, or the cleaners' (SP4), or that no one on the staff ever needed to be reprimanded, because 'we did not want to disappoint her, she was so soft and so fair' (SP3).

Mentoring on instructional leadership included a consistent emphasis on the essential aspects of the curricular programme, the professional development of teachers, and the arranging of a sufficient support system for optimal learner development.

In drawing up the school timetable, School Principal 1 recalled his mentor continuously reminding him that priority must be given to the main subjects, namely 'the three Rs' because to equip learners with possibilities for social mobility reading, writing, 'rithmetic' is what it is all about'. Through in-house mentoring the importance of networking with other well-performing schools was stressed in order 'to exchange subject knowledge, the methodology of examination paper setting, so that our learners receive the best education possible' (SP1). In ensuring sustained professional development for improved teaching, mentors enlightened their mentees on arranging continuous development workshops for teachers on topics with high relevancy, such as 'conflict management' (SP3), 'emotional counselling with children' (SP2), 'stress management' (SP5) and different aspects to gain increased 'subject-related knowledge' (SP1).

In order to ensure that 'everything is focused on the child and on every child' (SP1), in-house mentoring assisted school principal mentees to be tuned in to sufficient and relevant support systems for children with learning distortions. School Principal 3 acknowledged that his mentor had made him aware of the importance of liaising with 'orthopaedists to screen the learners and come up with intervention strategies'. School Principal 1 was inspired by his mentor to arrange for the provision of all crucial support such as the services of 'educational psychologists, speech therapists, orthopaedists and counsellors' to cater for every child's optimal learning. He recalled his mentor jokingly saying, '[W]e do not have to provide orthodontic services' (SP1), but emphasising that all the other services are important in pursuit of value-added education. Within the context of support service provisioning, School Principal 6 acknowledged that his mentor had reminded him 'to implement things that are agreed on' in order to be reliable and constructive.

Staff motivation to ensure a dedicated teacher corps was identified as a focus point for in-house mentoring. The participants mentioned that their mentors had shown them ways of keeping their teachers motivated. These related to ensuring a sense of belonging amongst staff, giving recognition for teacher excellence annually, and practising intrinsic motivation daily. With reference to developing a sense of belonging, School Principal 2 learned from her mentor that 'to operate in one's unique form' and sustain a sense of belonging 'the professional mood of a dignified organisation is reflected in dress code'. For that reason she and her staff decided on the following dress code: 'Mondays we are all in black and white, Tuesdays we are all in black and red, Wednesdays we wear jeans with t-shirts, Thursdays black and pink and Fridays it is our dress to kill day when everybody wears what he likes' (SP2). School Principal 5 gained from his mentor's example the skill of motivating his staff through formal recognition of excellence. Such recognition is given to staff 'during [the] learners' annual award function when educators also receive their awards for excellence' (SP5).

Practising intrinsic motivation that relates to 'put in petrol for every teacher' (SP1) was something that School Principal 1 copied from his mentor by 'walking the school grounds, looking the teacher in the eye and saying, "You are an excellent mathematics teacher, thank you" '. Special care was taken to ensure that 'everyone gets a turn to be thanked for dedicated teaching' (SP1).

Parent involvement is crucial to learner development and school success, and know-how on ways to 'win the parents' (SP2) and 'influence parents to own the school' (SP3) was gained through in-house mentoring. Through her mentor's living example School Principal 2 learned to take special care in implementing parents' proposals 'so that they must see a value of their coming to those parent meetings' (SP2). Mentees were guided by their mentors to 'get fresh mandates from parent meetings' (SP3), to relate to parents in such a way so as to 'win learners through their parents' (SP5) and to acknowledge parents as primary educators whose 'moral support with discipline' (SP4) is indispensable for successful teaching and learning. Participants captured the gist of positive parent relationships by stating that their mentors had emphasised that 'the school is owned by the parents' (SP3) and that the pursuit of the school principal must be 'to have parents who are user friendly with the principal' (SP2).

The participants noted that it is important to investigate sponsorships to supplement existing resources for improved school success. School Principal 3 recalled his mentor using the phrase 'power of attraction' indicating that when persons pass the school they must be attracted to the school. For that reason, and thanks to his mentor, School Principal 3 is aware that before approaching businesses for sponsorships, 'I must make sure that my school is a good product, functional and marketable'. Linked to in-house mentoring in acquiring sponsorships was the mentoring in fostering of an attitude of approaching experts in order 'to surround oneself with knowledge' (SP1) for capacity building. This resulted in constantly learning from experts: 'Copy what they do, but add something unique for one's own school' (SP1), 'to enhance what one is having in one's own school' (SP2), all in pursuit of benefitting 'one's own school which is bigger than oneself' (SP6).

7. DISCUSSION

Through in-house mentoring the school principal participants were capacitated with knowledge, skills and behaviour that enabled them to respond successfully to the demands of accountability and efficiency. Within the context of legitimate peripheral participation and in line with the findings of Lave and Wenger (1991) and Smith (2007), participants acted in the specific school situation to develop know-how for central participation within their school leadership contexts.

Their competencies as fully-fledged school leaders became evident in school environments characterised by positive discipline due to respect for the dignity of people and the environment, constructive teamwork inspired by a sense of belonging in pursuit of learner well-being, relational leadership for increased capacity and improved deliverance, and a deep understanding of the specific school context. These leadership competencies engendered optimal learner development which, in line with the findings of Blair (2002), manifested in significant academic performance in standardised tests.

In-house assistance in practising leadership skills, which was based on mentor generativity and mentees' own passion to excel, prompted career guidance with the meticulous carrying out of management tasks. These tasks that gradually increased in quantity and accountability capacitated mentees with comprehensive organisational know-how. Career guidance was accompanied by psychosocial support that manifested as encouragement to believe in themselves. This enhanced the participants' professional socialisation and inspired them to approach experts for increased capacity building. With reference to social justice and in line with the findings of Scott (2010) and Crow (2006), participants were provided with the space to develop their own way of doing, reflecting their own philosophies and convictions in pursuit of leading their schools effectively and uniquely.

In-house mentoring represented certain foci that encompassed behavioural, knowledge and skills competencies which exposed mentees to a holistic know-how on school leadership. A first of these foci pertained to leadership philosophy. Through their mentors' living examples participants developed a leadership philosophy reflecting humility (which engendered sincerity), empathy (which prompted a deep understanding of the contextual environment) and fairness (which ensured the loyalty of all the stakeholders). A second foci point related to instructional leadership capacity. In-house mentoring alerted participants to the importance of the 'three Rs' as essential subjects of the curriculum to equip learners with literacy and numeracy competencies for proper functioning in knowledge-based societies. Related to the importance of ensuring literacy and numeracy skills was the know-how on maintaining competitive standards of teaching with regard to these subjects. These standards were ascertained by networking with well-performing schools to benchmark the level of the own schools' teaching and learning against best practices. In addition to the focus on essential subjects, and ensuring that all pupils' every learning need is addressed, the importance of appropriate support services for every child's optimal learning was conveyed.

A third foci point with in-house mentoring related to ensuring a dedicated teacher corps for excellence in teaching. In this regard mentees received guidance in staff motivation that involved intrinsic motivation associated with a concerted recognition of each teacher individually, and a formal annual acknowledgement of significant teaching.

Guidance in staff motivation also included the awareness of a constant arranging of appropriate professional training opportunities for all staff. The fourth in-house mentoring foci point pertained to the alerting of participants to the importance of parent involvement for proper school functioning and disciplined learning. The importance of gaining parents' goodwill capacitated participants with the know-how of making parents feel valued and receptive to supporting school projects. This know-how prompted concerted efforts to consult parents and to implement parents' suggestions for improved school functioning. The fifth factor of in-house mentoring foci related to the value of sponsorships to obtain crucial teaching and learning resources and skill in securing these sponsorships. In developing their expertise in obtaining sponsorships, participants were alerted to the importance of ensuring the marketability of their schools in terms of functionality and productiveness. Through their mentors' guidance manifested in these five foci for in-house mentoring, school leader mentees acquired discrete knowledge, skills and attitudes that prompted their distinguished leadership.

8. CONCLUSION

Understood within the context of Wenger's (2000) community of practice arrangement, it became evident that the specific school environment functions as a social 'container' of all the competencies needed to manage that particular school to effective levels of accountability. The logic of in-house mentoring resulted in a constructive equipping of mentees with valuable know-how on good school leadership. With the guidance of their seasoned school principal mentors, prospective school principals received professional and organisational coaching accompanied by psychosocial encouragement to develop as unique leaders. Competencies gained through in-house mentoring capacitated mentees with noble leadership philosophies and valuable knowledge and skills on instructional leadership, teacher motivation, parent involvement, and sponsorship acquisition. These competencies enabled participants to become school leaders who manage their schools in such a way that their learners are given the best possible opportunity for development.

The aspects of in-house mentoring for capacitated school leadership represent foci for an in-house mentoring programme. Contemplating school leadership's multifaceted functioning for meeting the demands of accountability and efficiency, these foci play some part in directing and refining the discourse on school leadership mentoring for improved school leadership practice. It is suggested that further studies focus on a comprehensive interpretation of the different nuances and influence of in-house mentoring on school leadership in order to develop a possible detailed checklist approach for proper in-house mentoring. Such an interpretation should entail the inclusion of both well-performing school leaders and school leaders who are struggling with goal accomplishment for a holistic view on the mentoring of school leadership practised in-house.

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