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Management problems at under-achieving township secondary schools in the Free State

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Principals of secondary schools in townships are experiencing increasing management problems. The situation is exacerbated by the rapid changes taking place in education and the promotion of inexperienced teachers to the position of principal. This article attempts to identify the management problems experienced by principals of township secondary schools which obtained a pass rate of 40% or less for more than three years prior to 2002. The study found that these principals experience innumerable problems which have a negative influence on academic achievement and which must be resolved.

Bestuursprobleme aan onderpresterende sekondêre skole in stadsgebiede in die Vrystaat

Hoofde van sekondêre skole in stadsgebiede ervaar toenemend bestuursprobleme. Die situasie word vererger deur vinnige veranderings in die onderwys en die bevordering van onervare onderwysers tot skoolhoofde. Hierdie artikel poog om die bestuursprobleme van hoofde in die stadsgebiede te identifiseer. Die skoolbestuursprobleme van hoofde verbonde aan skole wat 'n slaagsyfer van 40% of laer voor 2002 behaal het, is ondersoek. Die studie het bevind dat hierdie hoofde tallose probleme ervaar wat besweer moet word weens die negatiewe effek wat dit op akademiese prestasie het.

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The performance of grade twelve pupils in South African township schools in the senior secondary certificate examination is far from satisfactory. The Department of Education in the Free State province blames the situation largely on the way principals manage their schools. The current selection practices for principals do not always identify the required competence. As a result of this many principals are ill-prepared for the demands of managing a school. As Wirsing (1991: 1) states, this problem is not likely to be resolved soon, because while most training programmes for principals are designed to provide a sound knowledge of school administration, they fail to translate such knowledge into identifiable actions in the school. Some principals do not receive training at all and are thus completely unable to manage their schools. Lack of management skills invariably leads to incompetent handling of management tasks and problems.

Without an atmosphere conducive to an effective schooling environment — a harmonious and well-functioning school — it is difficult, if not impossible, to achieve quality education or a high degree of academic achievement (McCurdy 1989: 6). The creation of an effective school, or school achievement, depends to a great extent on schools being well-managed. Consequently, in order for principals to achieve success at their respective schools they need to receive the management training that will enable them to manage their schools effectively.

1. Conceptualisation

1.1 Effective schools

The ultimate goal of school instruction is achievement. In South Africa the success of secondary school learners is gauged by the performance of grade twelve learners in the matriculation examination. A school's academic performance may be poor, average, good or very good. A school whose academic performance is consistently good or very good is regarded as a successful, high-achieving or effective school, and the three terms will be used interchangeably in this article. On the other hand, a school whose academic performance is con-

sistently average or poor will be regarded as an underachieving school. McCurdy (1989: 8) states that high-achieving or effective schools are characterised by a climate conducive to learning; their students master their academic work, and they are capable of attaining high levels of academic achievement.

1.2 School management

Management refers to the organisation of activities by planning, organising, leading or guiding, and exercising control; these are known as management tasks (Van der Westhuizen *et al* 1991: 463). Thus school management entails the performance by the principal, assisted by his/her management team, of a series of tasks or activities in the management of the school to ensure its smooth functioning. As a manager, the principal is responsible for the efficient management of the school in all its facets and is accountable for everything that happens in it (Masitsa 1995: 206) ensuring that the school as a whole is functioning effectively and achieving its vision of promoting academic achievement (Davidoff & Lazarus 1997: 156). One of the principal's management tasks is to be a leader of his/her school. He or she is, among other things, an instructional leader and ought to play a crucial role in influencing the school's academic achievement. As a leader, the principal has the task of directing and coordinating task-relevant group activities at the school (Preedy 1993: 142). As a manager, s/he also has administrative tasks such as writing newsletters, drawing up a timetable, record-keeping, completing forms, requisitioning books and stationery, and completing school returns.

2. Problem statement

The performance of grade twelve pupils in township secondary schools still gives cause for concern to educators, parents and departments of education. The situation at these schools is exacerbated by the inadequate or nonexistent training of principals, the rapid changes taking place in education, and the unavoidable promotion of inexperienced teachers to the position of principal. It is not possible for a teacher to acquire all the knowledge and skills needed in the position of principal from his/her previous post. Research indicates that the

effectiveness of a principal's management is probably the most important of the variables that contribute to improved scholastic performance (Masitsa 1995: 104).

In his annual budget speech of 2002, the MEC for Education in the Free State announced that his department would introduce a "Holistic Intervention Strategy" to help "turn around" those schools whose performance was consistently poor (Makwela 2003: 14) — schools which had obtained a pass rate of 40% or less for more than three years prior to 2002. The strategy involved appointing mentors from the best schools in the province for a period of nine months to support the principals of poorly-performing schools in the management and day-to-day administration of their schools. The strategy would be deemed to have succeeded if performance at such schools improved markedly, and if this improvement was sustained once the mentors had left. A total of twenty mentors were appointed from 2 May 2002 to assist forty-nine school principals. Five mentors assisted one principal each, while fifteen assisted more than one. Of these mentors, fourteen were based at the schools where they were acting as mentors, while six were based at their own schools but visited the schools where they were acting as mentors on a regular basis (Makwela 2003: 14). The intervention of the Department of Education indicated that there was something amiss with the management of the poorly-performing schools.

The ultimate goal of school management is to ensure and improve school success. However, if a principal experiences school management problems, it will be difficult for his/her school to achieve academic success because good school management has a positive effect on academic performance. The aim of this article is to identify the school management problems experienced by principals of secondary schools in townships and to establish the impact of these problems on the academic performance of their schools.

3. Research design

The study was conducted in the Free State Province and targeted only the school principals of secondary schools whose grade twelve results had been below 40 % for more than three years by 2002, as

well as those principals of high-achieving secondary schools in the Free State who had been appointed by the Department of Education to mentor the principals whose schools were underachieving. Forty-nine secondary schools in the Free State had consistently obtained a pass rate of below 40% prior to 2002, and twenty mentors had been appointed. The authors randomly selected twenty principals from the 49 underachieving schools and ten mentors as the target group for this investigation of the problems experienced by principals in townships and the impact of these problems on academic performance at the selected schools. All the secondary schools selected were situated in the townships.

The research for this article was based on a literature study and two sets of open-ended and semi-structured questionnaires. The first questionnaire was distributed by mail to the twenty principals and ten mentors. This questionnaire was intended to serve as a pilot study. It was designed to gather data on the management problems experienced by principals of secondary schools in townships which hamper academic performance. The responses were analysed and yielded eleven management problems. These were then incorporated into the second questionnaire, designed to gather further data from the respondents on the management problems and their effect on academic performance. In this questionnaire the principals were asked to indicate the severity of each problem:

- 1: not a problem at all;
- 2: partly a problem;
- 3: undecided;
- 4: a problem;
- 5: a serious problem.

Data on the description of the eleven management problems, identified by the first questionnaire, and their effect on academic achievement, gathered by means of the second questionnaire, was summarised and will be discussed. Data indicating the intensity of each management problem experienced by township principals, gathered by means of the second questionnaire, was analysed to obtain the mean scores by using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences computer programme. The problems were then ranked according to

the mean scores, from the most serious to the least serious. This analysis is given in Table 1.

An in-depth but succinct discussion of the eleven school management problems experienced by principals of secondary schools in townships will be presented. The overriding aim is to establish the effect of these problems on academic achievement.

4. School management problems in township secondary schools

The principals experienced the management problems discussed below separately or in combination but for the purposes of this study, they will be discussed separately. Although this study focuses on underachieving secondary schools in townships, reference has been made in some instances to achieving schools in order to elucidate and compare scenarios.

4.1 Inadequate facilities and resources

According to both principals and mentors, more than 70% of participating schools lacked laboratories for science or biology, libraries and sports facilities. In all schools furniture was often stolen or simply vandalised. The security fences of many schools were broken, turning schoolyards into thoroughfares for pedestrians. Schools did not have night-watchmen to ensure their security. The staffrooms of half the participating schools were too small to accommodate all their staff. The majority of the buildings were old and needed renovation. The pupils' toilets were inadequate and many were in need of repair. Thus, principals had problems not only with the management of facilities and resources, but also as a result of the lack of sufficient facilities and resources. There was a shortage of educators, classrooms, equipment and textbooks. Electricity accounts and rental accounts for photocopying machines were often not paid on time, leading to electricity cuts and the suspension of photocopying services. Principals and mentors concurred that such conditions had a negative impact on both management responsibilities and academic performance.

The concerns of principals and mentors are confirmed by research conducted in township secondary schools by Legotlo *et al* (2002: 116)

who found that few of the secondary schools they visited were well-equipped with electricity, libraries, water or toilets. Many schools experienced shortages of textbooks, teaching aids and classrooms, and there were no substitutes for teachers on leave. These shortages meant that learners worked in overcrowded classes, with insufficient resources (Legotlo 1994: 103).

Research indicates that there is a link between inadequate facilities and resources and poor academic performance. Overcrowding due to shortages of classrooms and teachers militates against effective teaching and, in particular, against individual attention to pupils. A lack of facilities such as teaching and learning aids creates problems of ineffective teaching and learning (Legotlo 1994: 105). A lack of resources has a negative effect on the management and administration of a school because it can force the principal to cancel some school programmes, which may in turn affect educators, learners and even parents (Kitavi 1995: 118). A shortage of basic instructional aids such as textbooks can lead to complex problems of low morale and lack of commitment from both teachers and learners (Legotlo *et al* 2002: 114). Therefore, principals are seriously hampered in the management of their schools by inadequate facilities and resources since these are essential not only for school management but also for educator and learner performance. To achieve educational goals, stakeholders in effective schools make every effort to ensure that resources are both available and appropriate to the needs and tasks of the school and to its overall vision. In addition, parents, students and the community play a central role in the maintenance of school facilities and resources (Davidoff & Lazarus 1997: 118).

4.2 Poor teacher selection

According to both principals and mentors, secondary schools lacked well-qualified teachers in subjects such as science, mathematics and accounting. Their problem was compounded by the fact that when a school had a vacancy, it was not allowed to fill it, but had to wait for a teacher to be redeployed by the Department. Principals were supposed to select the teachers they needed from a list identified for redeployment. Principals stated that such redeployment took too long, implying that learners were without a teacher for a considerable

period while waiting for one to be redeployed. They also claimed that the majority of the teachers who were redeployed had been rejected by their principals. Principals and mentors argued that a lack of appropriately qualified teachers could have a negative impact on academic achievement.

The study undertaken by Legotlo *et al* (2002: 117) in township secondary schools to a large extent supports the views held by both principals and mentors. It found that schools were uncertain as to how they should appoint educators and how educators should be redeployed from one school to another. Principals observed that they were powerless to control redeployed or borrowed educators in terms of sick leave and regular attendance. To exacerbate matters, redeployed educators were not well-qualified in the subjects they were required to teach.

A principal needs to staff his/her school with capable educators. S/he must identify the teachers needed to accomplish the school's goals and objectives (Masitsa 1995: 252). Kitavi (1995: 96) is of the opinion that the methods usually used to select and place teachers do not produce the best results. He attributes this to the complexities of the teaching function, insufficient attention to hiring, and inadequate selection techniques, which fail to assess the abilities of teachers. Poor teacher selection results in schools not appointing appropriately qualified teachers who can teach effectively. The problem is aggravated by the shortage of qualified teachers in commerce and the natural sciences and by inadequate teaching posts. If these problems are not resolved, poor academic achievement can result (Damane 1996: 12; Pawlas 1997: 108). In their research on effective and ineffective schools, Reynolds *et al* (1994: 165) found that successful principals take teacher recruitment seriously and ensure that they appoint good teachers, whereas principals of ineffective schools take on any teacher sent to them. If the principal cannot select appropriately qualified teachers for his/her school but must depend on teachers made available because they are in excess at their own schools, s/he cannot be expected to acquire good teachers to teach effectively and ensure good academic performance.

4.3 Inadequate teaching posts

Principals and mentors agreed that many secondary schools had inadequate teaching posts. In view of this, some educators were forced to teach subjects they were not qualified to teach, resulting in poor teaching, which had a negative impact on the academic performance of learners. They claimed that the Morkel model used to allocate teaching posts to schools is flawed because it allocates more teaching posts to technical schools and fewer to academic schools. The reason for this is that technical subjects need more individual attention than academic subjects. According to the principals, this reasoning ignores the facts that academic schools teach many languages; subjects taught do not have equal numbers of learners, and that every subject requires individual attention. Principals and mentors claimed that inadequate teaching posts lead to overcrowded classes by creating a situation in which principals try to squeeze learners into as few classes as possible in order to avoid exposing them to underqualified teachers. Overcrowded classes militate against individual attention and make educators lose their enthusiasm for teaching, their motivation and their morale. This leads to ineffective teaching and poor academic performance by learners.

In research conducted in township secondary schools, Legotlo *et al* (2002: 115) found that other problems related to overcrowding in schools were caused by a shortage of educators. In one instance, sixty learners were crammed into one classroom. This supports the views held by both principals and mentors. Legotlo *et al* (2002: 115) also found that in overcrowded classrooms, educators found it difficult to complete their syllabuses as overcrowded classes slowed down teaching and learning.

Research indicates that inadequate or undesirable workloads are a deterrent to the effective functioning of educators because they pose a threat not only to effective teaching but also to effective evaluation and prompt feedback (Van Tonder & Du Plessis 1994: 261). Revision of work done also becomes almost impossible under such circumstances. Inadequate posts also impede the smooth management of schools by increasing a principal's management problems and have a negative impact on academic performance. Unfortunately, principals cannot do much about this problem as the allocation of teaching posts is the

responsibility of the Department of Education. However, they need to make their plight known to the authorities.

4.4 Poor teacher motivation and morale

The principals indicated that in many instances redeployment took place against the will of the teachers involved, making teachers lose morale and become demotivated. On the other hand, principals accepted redeployed teachers reluctantly, suspecting them to be weak teachers who would not contribute towards improving school results. Teachers' overall motivation and morale were also negatively affected by repeated poor performances of grade twelve learners and by the use of outcomes-based education which many of them did not fully grasp. They were of the opinion that many variables contributed to the poor performance of township schools, but the Department of Education appeared to overlook this aspect and blamed teachers for poor performance. Principals held the view that protracted union disputes over salaries also contributed to poor morale. They agreed that teachers with poor motivation and morale could not be expected to perform their work effectively, and that this could have a negative impact on learners' performance. Principals stated that, due to poor motivation and morale, some teachers opted to go on pension when they turned fifty-five instead of waiting until they were sixty, while others resigned. They claimed that if this situation were allowed to continue, schools would lose many experienced teachers who would otherwise have served as role models to inexperienced teachers. They claimed that teachers cannot be expected to perform their work effectively if they are not happy at work.

In their research on township schools, Legotlo *et al* (2002: 116) found that the educators' morale was very low, as indicated by high rates of absenteeism. This was ascribed to poor working conditions, inadequate curricular materials and government policies which were seen as unclear and confusing.

Studies indicate that there is a close link between teacher motivation and morale and the way in which teachers perform their work (Legotlo 1994: 75; Skelly 1996: 95). Low staff morale is associated with low productivity, friction and tension between staff and management, high absenteeism, rejection of the educational philosophy

underlying the curriculum, and diminished respect for principals (Legotlo 1994: 78). A decline in motivation and morale results in teachers being unable to carry out their work effectively and efficiently. As they find it increasingly difficult to fulfil their role adequately, the school's goals and mission may not be realised, resulting in poor academic performance. Kitavi (1995: 106) adds that the morale of educators is rarely static, but rises and falls from time to time. Low morale is due mainly to physical deterioration of schools and to the low status and poor salaries of teachers. Effective schools do not experience the problem of unmotivated teachers because their principals motivate their staff on an ongoing basis and foster a culture of learning (MacBeath & Stoll 2001: 154). If teachers are motivated and have high morale they will not retire from teaching, and this will benefit schools which desperately need qualified, experienced and committed teachers, while also making the principals' management of schools easier as they will be able to focus on important issues.

4.5 Supervision and evaluation of teachers

The principals of participating schools stated that the Department of Education and the teachers' organisations had not decided on the instrument to be used for the evaluation of teachers. Thus, principals were still uncertain about the methods to be used for teacher evaluation or appraisal. They did not evaluate the performance of their teachers in all schools because if they did so, they would be opposed by the unions, particularly the South African Democratic Teachers' Union. This issue is not likely to be resolved soon because the members of the teachers' union are opposed in principle to any form of evaluation except on their own terms. Some teachers regard evaluation as an attempt by the principal to expose them, especially if they are deemed incompetent. The principals and mentors agreed that if teachers were not evaluated and supervised, they were not likely to improve their performance, and would not develop their full potential. This could have a negative impact on both teaching and the academic performance of learners.

Research undertaken in township secondary schools revealed that many schools did not have clear policies relating to class visits, the number of tests and exercises which learners are supposed to do in a

year, or the computation of final examination marks. In addition, learning and teaching were not supervised effectively. The banning of class visits by principals and heads of department made it impossible for them to help educators needing assistance (Legotlo *et al* 2002: 116).

The main responsibility of a principal is to ensure that effective teaching and learning take place at school. As an instructional leader s/he is responsible for teacher supervision and evaluation, with the purpose of improving the school's instructional programme (Kitavi 1995: 98). The principal may, by means of supervision and evaluation, develop teachers in order to achieve the objectives of the school as well as their developmental needs (Dean 1985: 170-1). Evaluation is thus a tool that enables a person to do more effectively what the job calls for (McCurdy 1989: 81). To be effective, teacher supervision and evaluation should culminate in professional development, motivation of teachers and the improvement of academic performance (Legotlo 1994: 68; Hoyle *et al* 1990: 153). Davidoff & Lazarus (1997: 140) are convinced that evaluation or appraisal should be owned by the teachers of a school and that if it embraces the values reflected in the vision and mission of the school it will be more acceptable to them. This implies that teachers should be involved in the development of the criteria for evaluation if they are to regard it as a form of support and development rather than a means of control. Baptiste *et al* (1990: 36) state that principals of high-achieving schools developed routines to improve the quality of the teaching staff by constant and continuous staff development, implemented to assist teachers in the improvement of instruction. Principals monitored teacher and student performance regularly to ensure that routines necessary for the acceleration of growth and the elevation of academic achievement were in place.

Davidoff (1997: 29-30) contends that without ongoing programmes and processes to encourage and support staff development, schools lose touch with educational trends and teachers lose the sense of renewal and inspiration which forms an essential part of meaningful education. While correctly targeted staff development can have an impact on teachers throughout their career, Reynolds *et al* (1994: 165) hold the view that it can have the greatest impact on three occasions: during the induction of new teachers, at the inception of a new

programme, and to rehabilitate an incompetent teacher. Thus township secondary schools are undoubtedly currently at a stage when staff development is critically important. It can assist them in managing the ongoing changes taking place in education and in dealing with incompetent teachers. Effective teacher supervision and evaluation enable a principal to manage his/her school by monitoring teachers' performance and being able to provide appropriate assistance when required, thus facilitating management and minimising problems.

4.6 Incompetent teachers

The principals of participating schools claimed that the incompetence prevalent in township secondary schools is mainly the result of teachers not attending all their teaching periods, not marking pupils' books, not completing the syllabus, not going to school fully prepared to teach and not being appropriately qualified for the subjects they teach, as well as often being absent from school without reason. Principals are often reluctant and in some instances scared to deal with incompetent teachers because they fear the teachers' union. Dealing with incompetence also involves legal issues with which few principals are familiar. In addition, they claimed that it is not easy for such teachers to be either dismissed or dealt with effectively by the Department of Education if they are reported. The principals and mentors agreed that since incompetent teachers lack the ability to perform their tasks successfully they can retard the academic performance of learners.

The study conducted by Legotlo *et al* (2002: 115) in township secondary schools revealed that there was a high shortage of experienced and effective educators in learning areas such as Biology and Mathematics. Legotlo *et al* (2002: 116) also observed that educators who committed offences might not be punished, and late-coming, absenteeism and non-performance of duty were thus practised with impunity. When incompetence was discovered at schools, principals did not know how to deal with it quickly and effectively (Legotlo 1994: 70).

There is reason to believe that pupils in schools are not receiving the quality of teaching they deserve, because of incompetent teachers (Kitavi 1995: 100). Clearly defined criteria for dealing with incompe-

tence are needed as incompetent teachers have a negative impact on overall school performance. However, it is crucial that they should be made competent by means of proper selection as well as ongoing evaluation and development of their skills (MacBeath & Stoll 2001: 198). Baptiste *et al* (1990: 35) state that high-achieving schools do not have incompetent teachers because their principals refuse to accept them or to have them assigned to their schools.

4.7 Undisciplined learners

The principals and mentors argued that principals and educators deal with undisciplined learners on a daily basis and are often targets of undisciplined and militant learners. In such a situation a principal is faced with the daunting task in trying to establish a positive school atmosphere that will enhance teaching and learning. Undisciplined learners pose various problems for educators and principals: truancy, absenteeism, late-coming, dodging, insubordination, failure to complete assignments, vandalism, and disruption of learning. The abolition of corporal punishment, a tried and tested method used by educators for decades, without substitution, may have aggravated matters. Once corporal punishment was banned, the Department of Education took a long time to decide on alternative methods of punishment to be used in schools. In the meantime teachers were unsure as to which methods of punishment were acceptable. Pupils felt that they would not be punished at school, and became uncontrollable. The principals and mentors observed that ill-discipline among learners is a serious stumbling-block to academic performance.

The studies undertaken in township secondary schools by Legotlo *et al* (2002: 115) and Masitsa (1995: 53-4) found that some learners were still ill-disciplined and that educators had difficulty to work with them. Such learners are uncontrollable in class, deliberately ignore instructions, leave class during the lesson, come to school late, and disappear before noon.

Kitavi (1995: 114) holds the view that learners currently present a formidable challenge to principals because they are no longer passive recipients of educational programmes and discipline, but rebellious. Without clear guidelines on how to deal with disciplinary problems, principals may find it difficult to improve learners' performance.

Principals need to know how to enforce discipline, develop a code of conduct for learners and ensure their co-operation (Kitavi 1995: 114; Squelch 1994: 1; Oosthuizen 1998: 3). According to Baptiste *et al* (1990: 36) principals of high-achieving schools have clear disciplinary routines and supervise the implementation of those routines themselves. Students and parents know what to expect and discipline is consistently and fairly administered. Parents, teachers and students are involved in resolving serious disciplinary problems. Establishing a climate conducive to learning at township secondary schools, as in achieving schools, could markedly limit their disciplinary problems. The establishment of this climate requires the co-operation and commitment of all stakeholders in education.

4.8 Ongoing changes in education

The new dispensation in South Africa has intermittently introduced changes in education and in many instances principals and teachers have found it difficult to adapt to these changes. The principals stated that they had little knowledge of the Educators' Employment Act and did not know how to manage outcomes-based education or Curriculum 2005. They claimed that only the teachers had been introduced to outcomes-based education, while they were expected to manage teachers' performance. Numerous other administrative changes had been introduced in education which principals were expected to know and manage. Principals felt that the simultaneous introduction of numerous changes in education was causing confusion. They felt that their insecurity about these changes could adversely affect both their performance and that of their teachers, negatively influencing academic performance.

The views held by the principals are supported by research conducted in township secondary schools. Nuku (1998: 23) observed that in South Africa, principals must understand that several forces have altered the conventional way of managing school activities. In an attempt to reform education the government has enacted many laws and adopted new policies. However, not all policies have been easy to implement (Legotlo *et al* 2002: 117). Legotlo (1994: 80) states that principals who do not understand the changes in education and who are unsure about how to introduce these are nevertheless

expected to introduce them to educators. Legotlo (1994: 80) warns that resistance to change is another factor with which principals have to deal. While introducing changes to educators may not be a serious challenge, handling resistance to change can be a major problem.

Change is a vital and essential component of any growing and developing system (Walker & Vogt 1987: 41). It may include innovation, development, progression, renewal, positive reform, the introduction of a new curriculum, technological management, and so on. However, researchers warn that teachers may resist change because it threatens them or is fast-paced or is imposed by an external source (MacBeath & Stoll 2001: 151-5). Benaim & Humphreys (1997: 87) hold the view that if change is not correctly handled, it often splits the staff into three groups: those genuinely relieved and excited by the change, those who want to wait and see, and those who hold the view that change disregards tradition and the practices previously upheld. Davidoff & Lazarus (1997: 38) argue that one needs to understand that resistance to change is likely as participants in the process move from a known situation to one which is unknown, and which may or may not be better than the previous situation. Change is a process that needs to be managed, and a principal determines to a great extent a school's success or failure in implementing change (Theron 1996: 145). A principal's efforts to bring about change may fail or lead to resistance if s/he has inadequate knowledge and information concerning the proposed change. McCurdy (1989: 10) claims that in effective schools principals are expected to know the methods for implementing change and promoting continuity and stability in schools. Consequently, township principals should be trained and well-informed about the changes they have to implement at their schools so that they can assist teachers to understand the complexity of change and to implement it.

According to Van der Westhuizen & Theron (1996: 185), the effective management of resistance to change involves the ability to understand the nature of resistance and identify the true source of resistance in specific situations. The principal should therefore know how to manage resistance to renewal or change because of the pressure it may exert on personnel who are not prepared for the demands made on them (Kitavi 1995: 110; Portin *et al* 1998: 6). This is an arduous

task if principals are not certain about the changes to be introduced, as is the case in township secondary schools.

4.9 Insufficient parental involvement and support

The principals indicated that the endless, politically motivated riots and disruptions which ravaged schools in the eighties and nineties are mainly responsible for parental apathy in matters affecting secondary schools in particular. Parents are tired of attending to endless school problems. Parents of secondary school pupils are no longer motivated to participate in school activities such as meetings, sports and fund-raising. The situation is exacerbated by the fact that some pupils do not live with their parents while others live with a single parent. As a result of parental apathy, schools cannot discuss with parents matters essential to the education of their children, or enlist their support in combating the truancy and neglect of school work which are rife in schools and cause underachievement and failure. On the other hand, some parents are unable to attend school activities because they work late, work over weekends, work away from home or are illiterate and do not consider it necessary to take part in school activities. Principals claimed that parents who do not attend school activities will not know their responsibilities with regard to their children, such as ensuring that they attend school regularly and on time, do their homework, and have all the necessary books and stationery. This can lead to learners not performing as they should at school.

Parental and community involvement has become a central theme in school management and governance in recent years. It is evident that parental apathy is one of the major problems in school-parent relations. Independent and public schools belong to the community and cannot function effectively without parental and community involvement and support (Legotlo 1994: 88). Establishing a sound school-parent relationship is a key ingredient of success in securing mutual participation of parents in decision-making, school activities, problem-solving, providing assistance, and offering services to the school (Legotlo *et al* 2002: 117).

Parents and the school share similar educational aspirations for learners, thus involvement in and support of education are essential

to the realisation of those shared aspirations. Educational experts agree that a single factor can largely contribute to a learner's continued scholastic achievement and motivation, namely parental interest in his/her learning and their high but realistic expectations of him/her (Masitsa 1995: 189-90). In effective schools there is a cordial working relationship between parents and the school, and parents have high aspirations for their children. This co-operation increases learners' love for the school and their school work (Baptiste *et al* 1990: 37; MacBeath & Stoll 2001: 154).

Despite parental apathy, parents are demanding a stronger voice in the governance of schools. Meeting the demands of parents and other stakeholders is a major problem for principals. Thus, principals need guidance on how to meet these demands and to maintain and maximize parental involvement and support in matters relating to the school (Gooden *et al* 1998: 103). School leadership is about empowering teachers, parents and the community to work together for the benefit of the school (Licata & Ellett 1990: 5).

4.10 Inadequate school management training

Principals stated that they needed training in financial management, the management of change, the management and supervision of outcomes-based education, the new methods used in the acquisition of books and stationery, and other administrative duties. They claimed to experience numerous management problems due to lack of training. Clerical staff also need to be trained in administration. The mentors found that some principals had lost the respect of their subordinates by managing their schools poorly. They claimed that educators often lose confidence in an incompetent principal and show disrespect. Principals and mentors agreed that lack of management skills could lead to poor management, having a negative impact on academic performance.

Research conducted in township secondary schools indicates that not all principals have a wide range of management skills. In addition, the responsibilities and accountability of principals need to be clearly defined. Their authority and power have been eroded by the greater powers of the unions and by the rights and freedoms of learners. Principals were found to be considerably restrained by policies

and collective agreements made at higher level, while union leaders were more informed than some of them (Legotlo *et al* 2002: 116).

The managerial tasks of the principal call for the effective and efficient application of specialised technical expertise (Legotlo 1994: 60). Without this, the school cannot be managed effectively. Therefore, principals need sufficient training in school management in order to avoid using trial-and-error methods in managing their schools. Lack of principal development inevitably leads to lack of teacher development, which has serious consequences for academic performance at school. According to Weindling & Earley (1987: 85), teachers' effectiveness and morale are not improved by lack of teacher development, increased demands on them due to changes in curriculum, large classes, less time for preparation and marking, improvement of pupils' achievements, and shortages of resources, equipment and materials. Davidoff & Lazarus (1997: 156) categorically state that certain skills and understandings are important to school managers and leaders and need to be acquired by means of learning and experience. Wirsing (1991: 19) argues that because no management programme can assure lifetime proficiency, principals of effective schools should never stop learning, striving and growing, but should participate in ongoing management development. This would make them skilled and certain about the role they are supposed to play at school (Stoll *et al* 2001: 184). Without the acquisition of the necessary management skills, principals are hampered in their efforts to ensure that their schools function effectively and achieve their objectives.

4.11 High job demands and stress

The principals stated that they had to contend with teachers who did not do their work properly, or complete syllabuses, or come to school daily as well as with learners who did not attend school regularly, neglected their school work, and produced substandard academic performances. They had to manage the changes taking place in education, meet the expectations of the authorities and the community, ensure improvement in their school's academic performance and achieve proper management of their schools. They were blamed for failures of either teachers or learners. These problems, expectations, demands

and their daily responsibilities were an unbearable burden, causing significant stress.

A study of township secondary schools revealed that the heavy workloads to be completed during a normal working day and the day-to-day frustrations due to limited resources and staff problems may cause administrative problems and burn-out. Feelings of frustration and emotional exhaustion may cause stress (Legotlo 1994: 53). Kitavi (1995: 188) found that the sources of stress for principals in developing countries are: time demands; difficulty with educators, learners, parents and community members; inadequate facilities and resources; theft of school equipment; vandalism; workload, and a feeling of powerlessness. Lack of appreciation for their work and unsolved problems may also be sources of a principal's stress.

Gmelch (1988: 139) found that principals generally work under considerable to high stress. Consequently, they are at risk as their profession may be hazardous to their health. High job demands and stress limit a principal's ability to function effectively. They may cause declining morale and lack of enthusiasm about managing the school effectively and efficiently. Kitavi (1995: 188) emphasizes the seriousness of this problem by stating that work-related stress can have devastating effects, resulting in job dissatisfaction, emotional and physical exhaustion, and a general inability to cope effectively. Consequently, principals need to receive training and to acquire skills in coping with or preventing stress (McCurdy 1989: 93). This view is endorsed by Mentz (1996: 128), who states that the ability to identify and reduce stress can ensure the survival of a healthy organisation.

5. Ordering the principals' management problems

The following rank ordering of the management problems identified by the principals results from the analysis of their responses to the second questionnaire in which each principal indicated the severity of each problem by choosing from five possible answers. The analysis was done to obtain the mean score for each problem and thereafter to rank the problems from highest to lowest according to those scores.

Table 1: Profile of principals' management problems

Management problems	Mean score	Rank order
Insufficient parental involvement and support	4.000	1
Poor teacher motivation and morale	4.000	1
High job demands and stress	3.667	3
Dealing with incompetent teachers	3.444	4
Inadequate teaching posts	3.333	5
Poor teacher selection	3.333	5
Management of ongoing changes in education	3.222	7
Inadequate physical facilities and resources	3.000	8
Supervision and evaluation of teachers	2.889	9
Inadequate school management training	2.778	10
Dealing with undisciplined learners	2.778	10

Problems are ranked in order of seriousness and are grouped into five categories according to their mean scores, as follows: mean of 4; mean of 3.667; means ranging from 3.222 to 3.444; mean of 3.00, and means ranging from 2.778 to 2.889.

6. Discussion

Insufficient parental involvement and support as well as poor teacher motivation and low morale ranked highest in terms of intensity with means of 4. This implies that the principals as a group regard these two issues as a problem. They are followed by high job demands and stress, with a mean of 3.667, which implies that the principals as a group regard it as almost a problem. These are followed in descending order by dealing with incompetent teachers, inadequate teaching posts, poor teacher selection, and management of ongoing changes in education with means of 3.444, 3.333, 3.333 and 3.222, respectively. These means indicate that the principals as a group are almost undecided about them. Next, inadequate physical facilities and resources, with a mean of 3.000, implies that the principals as a group are undecided about it. Supervision and evaluation of teachers, inadequate school management training, and dealing with undisciplined learners, with means of 2.889, 2.778 and 2.778, respectively, indicate that the principals as a group are almost undecided about them.

The implications of these findings are that the principals as individuals regard and observe these problems differently, and thus differ in their judgement regarding their severity. The problems do not affect them all in the same way or to the same extent. However, they all experience some of these problems. None of the problems in the rank order is dismissed by the principals as not a problem at all. Thus their ranking of the problems supports their other views as obtained from the questionnaires.

The views held by the principals and mentors on the prevalence of management problems in township secondary schools as well as their negative impact on academic achievement are supported by the literature. The identification of these problems addresses the fundamental aim of this study. Although they have been discussed separately, they are to a large extent intertwined and have a combined negative impact on academic achievement. This makes their resolution essential to the improvement of academic achievement.

7. Findings

The study revealed that principals experience numerous management problems which do not only inhibit their performance of their management responsibilities, but also have a negative impact on the performance of learners and educators. These problems hamper the smooth running of the school and retard academic performance.

Township secondary schools experience a shortage of teaching posts, educators, classrooms, laboratories and basic instructional aids such as textbooks. The shortages of teachers and classrooms result in overcrowded classes and overworked educators teaching subjects which they are not qualified to teach. The shortages of laboratories and instructional aids results in superficial teaching. Such conditions seriously hamper proper teaching and learning.

The schools experience a specific shortage of well-qualified educators in science and commerce. This results in educators teaching subjects they are not qualified to teach and struggling to meet requirements. The method used for redeploying educators from schools where there are surplus educators to schools where there are shortages has failed to solve the problem because it is not intended to supply

schools with suitably qualified teachers but to find space for teachers who are in excess at their schools.

The principals observed that their teachers' motivation and morale are low, as reflected by high rates of absenteeism and truancy. Factors such as redeployment, endless union strikes over salaries, poor conditions in schools, and shortages of basic facilities and resources may contribute to this low motivation and morale. Teachers who lack motivation and have low morale find it hard to teach effectively or to motivate learners to learn.

It was found that there is no teacher evaluation, supervision or appraisal in schools, and that no clear policies on these issues are available. The attempts made by some principals to evaluate teachers were not effective. Without effective evaluation and supervision, teachers cannot be made aware of their strengths and weaknesses, will not receive appropriate assistance and development, and will not be motivated to improve their performance.

There is teacher incompetence at schools due to teachers who do not attend all their teaching periods, who are truant, who do not complete syllabuses, who do not mark learners' books, and who teach subjects they are not qualified to teach. These issues have a negative impact on learners' academic performance.

Principals and teachers deal daily with undisciplined learners who pose problems such as truancy, late-coming, insubordination, failure to complete assignments and vandalism. Generally, learners who are guilty of these misdemeanours do not perform well academically.

The new dispensation in South Africa has introduced considerable changes in education. These have not been clearly explained, with the result that principals find it difficult to understand and to introduce them to their teachers. This results in the changes not being taken seriously or correctly implemented.

Parental apathy is a serious problem in schools. Schools cannot discuss essential matters with parents or enlist parental support in curbing truancy and neglect of school work by learners. On the other hand, there are parents who, due to work commitments, do not find the time to attend school activities, as well as parents who, due to illiteracy, do not feel able to play a significant role in school activities.

Principals lack skills in financial management, supervision of outcomes-based education, management of change, acquiring textbooks and performing other administrative duties. They often find themselves in situations where they are required to apply management skills which they do not possess in order to do their work effectively.

Principals work under considerable stress caused by their management of teachers and learners, their inability to manage their schools properly, the intermittent changes taking place in education, and the needs and expectations of the authorities and the community which they must satisfy. Although stress cannot be avoided in the positions they hold, their situation is exacerbated by the management problems they experience and their lack of stress management skills.

Principals of achieving schools are not likely to experience the management problems of principals in underachieving secondary schools in townships because of the following: their schools have adequate facilities and resources, good teachers with high motivation, ongoing staff development and fewer disciplinary problems; their parents are involved in school activities, and they themselves have management skills and thus less stress.

As far as the rank ordering of the management problems is concerned, insufficient parental involvement and support as well as poor teacher motivation and morale ranked highest in terms of intensity, with the means of 4, implying that the principals as a group regarded these two issues as a problem. These were followed by high job demands and stress, with a mean of 3.667, implying that the principals as a group regarded it as almost a problem. These are followed in a descending order by dealing with incompetent teachers, inadequate teaching posts, poor teacher selection and management of ongoing changes going on in education with means of 3.444, 3.333, 3.333 and 3.222, respectively. These means indicate that the principals as are almost undecided about them. Inadequate physical facilities and resources, with a mean of 3.000, implies that the principals as a group are undecided about it. Next, supervision and evaluation of teachers, inadequate school management training and dealing with undisciplined learners, with means of 2.889, 2.778 and 2.778, respectively, indicate that the principals as a group are almost undecided about them. The implication of these findings is that the principals

as individuals regard and experience these problems differently and thus differ in their judgement regarding their severity. The problems do not affect them all in the same way or to the same extent. However, they all experience some of them.

8. Recommendations

The Department of Education should address the backlog in the shortage of human and physical resources at schools as this would facilitate their effective functioning, and should renovate buildings in disrepair. A survey should be done to identify areas which experience shortages and other problems, and these should be addressed without delay. New schools should be built on an ongoing basis to cope with the ever-increasing number of learners in schools, and repairs should be done as soon as the need arises. Regarding the shortage of teaching posts, the Department should devise a model for the allocation of teaching posts that will be suitable for both technical and academic schools.

The Department of Education should provide explicit guidelines on teacher assessment and ensure that finality is reached regarding the instrument to be used for the evaluation of teachers in order to enable principals to evaluate, supervise and develop their staff on a regular basis for their own benefit and that of the schools, as this would ensure that they perform with maximum effectiveness.

Schools should be free to select the teachers they need. If there are no suitable candidates among the teachers to be redeployed, they should be allowed to advertise posts until they find appropriately qualified candidates. The Department should improve teachers' conditions of work, by means of salary increases, on an ongoing basis, and not wait until teachers go on strike (thus legitimising strike action), in order to motivate teachers and boost their morale.

The Department should ensure that changes taking place in education are essential, well-planned and pedagogically justifiable. They should also be discussed with the relevant stakeholders and meticulously implemented. Care should be taken not to introduce too many changes simultaneously.

The Department of Education and all stakeholders should make a concerted effort to encourage parental involvement in schools and to ensure that learners are brought under control. Parents ought to be trained in how to monitor their children's progress regularly, should ensure that they attend school and are disciplined, and keep in touch with their teachers. Teachers, in turn, should inform parents regularly about the progress of their children.

The Department of Education should introduce and facilitate the training of principals at all types of schools in all aspects of school management and issue certificates to successful candidates. Such training would produce skilled principals who will perform their work with maximum effectiveness.

Prospective principals and heads of department should be advised to take school management courses at university. This would help minimise the promotion of unsuitable teachers to the position of principal. The ability to demonstrate a sound knowledge of school management should be a significant criterion for the selection of principals.

The Department of Education should heed the concerns and problems of principals, because failure to do so will only exacerbate the problems, which will not be in the interests of the school. The School Management Developer, whose main responsibility is to assist and empower principals, should be used to address principals' concerns and to present them to the authorities.

9. Conclusion

This article has clarified the Free State education authorities' concern that some principals in township schools experience problems with school management. The situation is not surprising because school management problems are central to educational discourse on school management in South Africa. These problems, caused by various factors, hamper the management of schools and have a negative impact on their overall performance. In order to solve them, principals should receive training in management skills and the specific problems identified in this study should be effectively addressed. In brief, the climate of schools should be conducive to teaching and

learning. MacBeath & Mortimore (2001: 11) illustrate this clearly by stating that the high-achieving teacher may not easily be separated from the context in which the achievement takes place. If the situation in township schools is improved, principals will be empowered to manage schools effectively and efficiently and schools will achieve their objectives. The Department of Education should be aware that if changes introduced in education are to be implemented correctly, they must first be clearly understood by the persons who must implement them or monitor their implementation, otherwise they will not be effectively implemented or taken seriously.

If schools are not fully equipped with human and physical resources, they cannot be expected to function effectively, as they depend on the availability of such resources. The Department of Education cannot afford to postpone the use of the evaluation instrument indefinitely, because the delay allows teachers to think that schools can do without it. This will make it difficult for the instrument to be used in future. The authors are convinced that the swift implementation of all the recommendations of this study will establish a sound foundation for the lasting improvement of conditions in secondary schools in townships.

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