



# The Development Needs of Newly Appointed Senior School Leaders in the Western Cape South Africa: A Case Study

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The essential role that senior school leaders play in school leadership teams to ensure effective strategic leadership in schools has been the subject of intense discussion for many years. Crucial to this debate is the establishment of professional learning and leadership approaches for newly appointed senior school leaders. Recommendations for policy and practice highlight the importance of appropriate, multifaceted, developmental support initiatives for newly appointed school leaders. In many countries, including South Africa, a teaching qualification and, in most cases, extensive teaching experience is the only requirement for being appointed as a senior school leader in a school. This tends to suggest that no further professional development is required for newly appointed school leaders, the problem addressed in this paper. This paper reports on the main findings of the perceived development needs of newly appointed senior school leaders in the Western Cape, South Africa, and suggests that school leaders occupy a unique and specialist role in education, which requires relevant and specific preparation to support effective leadership. The respondents of this study report a lack of contextualised training and support before and after their appointment in their new roles creating unique development needs. This paper, therefore, employs a mixed-method approach to gather data to understand the perceived needs of twenty newly appointed senior school leaders in the Western Cape, South Africa.

*Keywords:* newly appointed senior school leaders, school leadership and management, professional development programmes, school leadership development needs

## Introduction

The current state of education in South Africa has been described as largely dysfunctional. This observation suggests that South African scholars, compared to their peers around the world, lack basic skills and knowledge, are ill-prepared for higher education, and that the education standards in the country are generally low. Challenges facing mainstream schools include developing leadership skills among senior school leaders to guide school

employees and staff educators to better engage with pupils, and manage institutions effectively in a time of great change.

In writing this article, I have borrowed pertinent concepts from human resource management to refer to the establishment of professional learning and leadership approaches for newly appointed senior school leaders. Similarly, retaining talented personnel demands putting dedicated programs in place, to empower school leaders to drive consistent high performance and meet challenges, such as structured learning opportunities that promote quality education in South African schools. This objective is achieved by way of developing the competency of education leaders who apply critical understanding, values, knowledge and skills to school leadership and management, within the vision of democratic transformation that contributes to improving the delivery of education across the school system.

This article attempts to address the assessment that South Africa's current state of education is deemed inadequate and in need of a major uplift through educational leadership. Effective senior school leadership is arguably crucial for school and system effectiveness and, in particular, also for school learner success (Renihan, 2012). The role of the senior school leader is undeniably demanding, diversified, complex, forever changing, and encompasses high levels of responsibility (Clifford, 2010; Leithwood & Riehl, 2003). In this regard, Leithwood and Jantzi (2005) summarise the important role of senior school leaders in the following way:

In many ways, the senior school leader is the most important and influential individual in any school. He/she is responsible for all of the activities that occur in and around the school building. It is this leadership that sets the tone of the school, the climate for learning, the level of professionalism and morale of teachers, and the degree of concern for what students may or may not become.

This article, drawing on data from twenty newly appointed senior school leaders in the Western Cape, engages with the perceptions of novice school leaders regarding their professional development needs after been appointed into their new roles. The study established the professional development needs of senior school leaders in the Western Cape, in lieu of designing contextualised training platforms that support novice school leaders in developing and managing their schools. This research study builds on the research project reported on by Piggot-Irvine, Howse, and Richard (2013), which investigated the role, workload and leadership needs of South African senior school leaders in the Gauteng Province. While the focus of their study was solely on the senior school leaders' development needs, this study focuses specifically on the development needs of newly appointed school leaders in the Western Cape. The purpose in writing this article was to

make available data gathered from interviewing 20 novice school leaders from different school contexts in the Western Cape, to expand on the progressive development of future training and mentoring platforms for new school leaders.

Firstly, this article provides the background and rationale for the study, followed by a discussion on current international and national literature about the development needs of novice school leaders. Thirdly, it describes the methodology and research design that shaped the research. In the main discussion section, the article presents the findings of the study, based on five main leadership functions used to assess school leaders. These leadership functions were adapted from leadership development frameworks by Cranston, Ehrich, and Kimber (2003), Hess and Kelly (2007) and Piggot-Irvine et al. (2013), as well as the norms and standards for school leaders from the Department of Education (2011a, 2011b). The article presents the findings of the completed surveys and discusses the outcomes, in combination with data obtained from interviews. The article concludes with a discussion of the findings alongside relevant literature, and offers recommendations for the continued development of leadership skills and knowledge platforms for newly appointed senior school leaders in the Western Cape, South Africa.

### **Professional Development for New Senior School Leaders**

Although much has been written on the vocational expertise of established senior school leaders, relevant literature on the professional development needs of newly appointed senior school leaders employed within the South African school context has not been well documented. We live in a time of great change in South Africa, in particular bringing forward the nation's vision for the future of education. The top priorities for developing leadership skills for novice school leaders involve setting clear goals, managing a curriculum that collates practical and vocational learning in conjunction with theoretical study, monitoring lesson plans, allocating resources and evaluating teachers on a regular basis to promote student learning and knowledge. Quality of instruction and overall management of the education system are the top priorities for developing leadership skills. This need for radical change is imperative, simply because the world of work has changed significantly and in order to improve our education system that has not changed fast enough. The conventional top-down, one-size-fits-all education system does not enable all children to thrive in their own way. It is important that the revised education system recognize that young people are individuals with diverse talents and aspirations. Consequently, pupils do not learn in the same way. While it is acceptable that pupils are exposed to a strong common core of essential skills and knowledge, education leaders need

to explore different variables of a subject so that pupils may develop their own particular talents and aspirations. Young people need to be informed about the unpredictability of the economic climate and how this affects the recruitment market when the time comes to leave full-time education. The formal sector requires employees with passion, know how, initiative, creativity, resilience and self-knowledge; people who can take initiative, get on with others and who know when to listen and when to lead. These skills and abilities cannot be gained in the classroom alone: they come from practical experience, learning by doing things in real time, working with experts, and applying theory that reflects the demands of the modern workplace.

That South Africa needs a new education paradigm becomes very apparent when we compare ourselves with other countries around the world. The Social Progress Index (see <https://www.socialprogressindex.com>) states that a score is allocated to represent a country's level of access to basic knowledge. As such the twenty best-performing countries, relative to access to the best education system are (1) South Korea, (2) Japan, (3) Singapore, (4) Hong Kong, (5) Finland, (6) United Kingdom, (7) Canada, (8) Netherlands, (9) Ireland, (10) Poland, (11) Denmark, (12) Germany, (13) Russia, (14) United States of America, (15) Australia, (16) New Zealand, (17) Israel, (18) Belgium, (19) Czech Republic, and (20) Switzerland.

Hess and Kelly (2007) observe that the lack of scholarly inquiry into the development needs of novice school leaders in an international context is the main reason for the shortcomings of existing development programmes in America. The same may be true within the South African context. Professional development of newly appointed school leaders often takes the form of on-the-job training, but can also include on-going professional development opportunities that can range from carefully planned training and induction programmes to formal workshops, courses, job shadowing, school leader meetings, and peer coaching or mentoring (Normore, 2004; Hart, 1993; Cranston et al., 2003; Piggot Irvine et al., 2013; Fullan & Langworthy 2014).

The author of this article acknowledges that the best school leaders are visionaries, capable of shaping education requisites to constantly adapt, to stay abreast of change, to meet future standards. The qualities needed to be a successful school leader are vision, courage, passion, emotional intelligence, judgement, resilience, and curiosity (Sutcliffe, 2013). He further states that successful school leaders show great determination and are steadfast in challenging scholars' under-performance or poor behaviour by taking an active interest in their work and that of their staff. They are team-builders, involving the whole school community and taking people forward together. School leaders are also great motivators in getting people to go that extra mile to achieve objectives.

School leadership can be defined as the symbiotic interaction between the strategic leadership functions and the organisational functions in a school (Fullan & Langworthy, 2014). Strategic leadership involves functions such as planning, budgeting, organising and staffing issues, while dealing with the day-to-day operational running of the school is considered an organisational or managerial function (Kotter, 1990; Leithwood & Riehl, 2003; Roza, 2003). Leithwood and Riehl (2003) and Roza (2003) suggest that a challenge for the new school leader is the ability to manage the balance between the strategic and organisational functions of their roles. These roles cannot be separated because the functions often run concurrently; for example, decisions relating to the vision and mission of the school affect long-term activity as part of strategic leadership. Since daily operational decisions have a direct impact on the 'here-and-now,' strategic leadership constitutes the organisational function of school leaders and both need to run concurrently in order for effective leadership to take place. These authors further suggest that it is normal for new senior school leaders to tend to respond to the more urgent day-to-day matters when leading the organisational function of a school, and that this can result in them neglecting the 'leading strategically' function of their new roles (Leithwood & Riehl, 2003; Roza, 2003; Fullan & Langworthy, 2014).

Within the South African context, the ability of new senior school leaders to lead their schools strategically is consistently mentioned in the literature published by the Western Cape Education Department (WCED) as being one of the most important functions of the role of the senior school leader (see <http://wced.pgwc.gov.za/home/home.html>). In line with the Norms and Standards for Educators (Department of Education, 2011a, 2011b), 8 key areas are identified as the roles of the senior school leader. These are:

1. Leading teaching and learning in the school
2. Shaping the direction and development of the school
3. Managing the quality of teaching and learning, and securing accountability
4. Developing and empowering self and others
5. Managing the school as an organisation
6. Working with and for the community
7. Managing human resources (staff) in the school
8. Managing and advocating extramural activities

The National Education Policy Act 27 of 1996 in South Africa (Department of Education, 2011a) interprets the role of the senior school leader as the person that has the overall responsibility for leading and managing

the school and who is accountable to the employer (Provincial Head of Department) and, through the school governing body (SGB), to the school community. This implies that the leaders of the school should be well-appointed and trained both broadly – to respond to the Department of Education requirements – in order to respond to the contextual challenges within the school context, to perform their duties optimally.

Important attributes and skills for effective newly-appointed school leaders are:

- Maintain continuity to instil trust and support by regularly re-evaluating and adapting accepted traditions;
- Implement change to advance student learning, based on proven personally achieved experience and involvement;
- Promote constructive involvement of parents, the community and stakeholders to advance the development of the school;
- Provide instructional leadership based on a focused mission for the school, creating a culture for learning, setting goals for learning, making sure instruction is consistently of a high quality, and measuring student outcomes;
- Be accessible to students, staff, and parents, to formulate problem-solving strategies;
- Maintain a positive school culture that provides a safe, healthy, and orderly environment for learning;
- Establish and maintain a cooperative school climate that encourages positive student behaviour;
- Maintain staff balance, taking gender equality and ethnicity into consideration;
- Encourage high student expectations;
- Ensure that all lines of communication are operative to keep everyone within the school community informed about what is happening in the school;
- Effective interpersonal skills to galvanise people to work productively with one another;
- Ability to acquire and utilize relevant resources from the school system and other sources;
- Exercise participatory leadership to optimize human capital and organisational capacity by collaborating with others;
- Promote professional growth by helping teachers and staff members recognise their individual strengths and weaknesses in performing their duties;
- Forward thinking by keeping abreast of global trends in education de-

velopment and by utilizing this knowledge to advance learning, and by establishing a learning environment reflective of available technological innovations to prepare staff and students for the 21st century.

Heystek (2014) notes that the role definition and expectations of senior school leaders in each school may vary and therefore these different contextual roles determine the extent to which the school leader needs to be able to move between strategic (leadership) activities and organisational (managerial) activities during a normal school day. This movement between the two different roles requires the senior school leader to focus on both the setting of the strategic direction of the school, while simultaneously developing the people and the organisation. Thus, senior school leaders need to find ways to engage in both the strategic function of leading and the operational day-to-day function of their roles, in order to successfully manage their school. It is therefore critical to the development of any newly appointed senior school leader that they are well-trained and prepared for both the operational and strategic leadership functions (Heystek, 2014).

The roles of the senior school leaders further require them to engage with the broader school community to provide guidance on educational matters to parents. The function of leading the community – while not necessarily a core leadership function – is an important role that school leaders must play to enable them to harness the support and involvement of the community. This dual function is essential for both the strategic and the organisational running of any school (Leithwood & Riehl, 2003).

South Africa's education system in general is in need of an overhaul. Smaller schools in rural areas have to close not only due to a lack of financial support but also because sufficiently educated and motivated teachers are in short supply. Large numbers of pupils living in rural areas or townships adjacent to major cities are denied access to basic education, which in the long run will impact negatively on the national economy, increasing unemployment and poverty. Consequently, the current state of education in South Africa places the country at the second last position on the international league table. The burning question is 'How to drastically improve South Africa's education system?' Jansen (2016) states that Government should invest in early childhood development so that children are better prepared for formal education. He argues that every senior school leader and teacher would benefit from regular coaching and mentoring; these coaches and mentors must have a track record of running successful schools or achieving high results in the subjects for which they are responsible. Every pupil must have the required textbooks, parents must be informed of the pupil's achievement scores, and teachers must be encouraged to further their studies to at least a Master's Degree qualification.

## Research Methodology

The data for this paper was constructed using a mixed-method approach. Themed and structured questionnaire surveys were used, followed by individual interviews that discuss the perceived needs of twenty newly appointed senior school leaders from schools in diverse socio-economic communities in the Western Cape. The structured questionnaire survey, which was adapted from a variety of leadership development frameworks (Cranston et al., 2003; Hess & Kelly, 2007; Piggot-Irvine et al., 2013) as well as from the Norms and Standards for Educators of the Department of Education (2011a, 2011b), sought, among other things, to ascertain the novice school leaders' views about their development needs shortly after their appointment to a senior leadership position. Using the data from the surveys, individual interviews were conducted to clarify the survey responses and enrich the data. The responses were transcribed and coded to reveal patterns. This paper reports on the perceived professional development needs of the twenty selected newly appointed senior school leaders from the Western Cape, South Africa.

Drawing from leadership development frameworks, the five main leadership functions identified for this study that these newly appointed school leaders perceived to be their most required development needs were:

- Leading strategic initiatives
- Leading teaching and learning
- Leading the organisation
- Leading people (staff)
- Leading the community

The structured questionnaire survey used a five-point Likert scale (a Likert scale is one where the format in which responses are scored is done along a range, I opted to use the Likert Scale as it allowed me to assign a numerical value to otherwise subjective opinions) to structure the data regarding which leadership needs were perceived by the new leaders as requiring the most on-going support and development.

The next section reports on findings of the study and details the perceived development needs of newly appointed school leaders using the five leadership functions noted above.

## The Findings of the Study

### *Leading Strategically as a Development Need for Newly Appointed WCED Senior School Leaders*

It is argued by Boal and Hooijberg (2001) that the essence of strategic leadership involves the capacity to learn, the capacity to change, as well as



managerial wisdom to lead one organisation. Strategic leadership involves functions such as planning, budgeting, organising and staffing issues, while dealing with the day-to-day operational running of the school is considered an organisational or managerial function (Kotter, 1990; Leithwood & Riehl, 2003; Roza, 2003).

Newly appointed senior school leaders in WCED schools are expected to have the ability to exercise strategic leadership decisions within their schools. To this end, the respondents identified four sub-areas in which they perceived a need for on-going development and support. These four areas are:

1. Strategic goal setting
2. Turning strategic goals into action
3. Change management research
4. Staff management

According to the survey data, strategic goal setting and the management of change processes in schools are recognised as the two areas in which the newly appointed senior school leaders perceived they needed the most professional development. This resonates with the research done by Piggot-Irvine et al. (2013) and Cranston et al. (2003), where they found that senior school leaders reported a greater need for development in strategic goal setting, with 26% requesting development in problem-solving skills, which included the management of human resources. Their respondents also suggested a greater need for further development in human resources management. In a further international study in the Pacific Island States, Robinson, Lloyd, and Rowe (2008) found that their established school leaders perceived strategic vision setting and leadership as key areas of professional development needs for school leaders.

The interview data reported in this paper from the newly appointed WCED senior school leaders highlighted the fact that, in order to lead strategically, the respondents indicated that they needed professional development in analysing and interpreting student results and whole school data. One respondent in the WCED, who has been mentored by local business leaders to develop strategic leadership skills, made the following statement during his interview:

You need practical examples about how to run the school as a business by using data. I have introduced what I have learnt in the corporate world in my curriculum. I am pulling it apart to make it relevant, so I can set strategic goals for the staff.

The respondents further suggested that they perceived change management research as an area for development. Change management research

can be defined as the process, tools and techniques to manage the people-side of change to achieve the required business outcome in an organisation (Kotter, 2010). While the data from this study revealed that the newly appointed senior school leaders perceived further knowledge and development in all aspects of strategic leadership, they highlighted 'change management research' as being the area in which they felt that they required specific, contextualised professional development.

### **Leading Teaching and Learning**

An important and necessary aspect of the role of senior school leaders involves the improvement of student performance by focusing on improving teaching and learning in schools. The literature defines this area as instructional leadership (Fullan & Langworthy, 2014). Within the South African context, the Department of Education defines the role of the senior school leader as the person who is responsible for leading, managing and evaluating the curriculum. The newly appointed WCED senior school leaders suggested that they require developmental support in the following five sub-areas of teaching and learning:

1. Greater understanding of current approaches to teaching and learning
2. Using valid and reliable assessment practices
3. Creating a learning culture of positive staff attendance
4. Creating, analysing and interpreting student and whole-school data
5. Managing classroom instruction

The respondents suggest that in order to improve in all of the mentioned five areas, an integrated approach, which involves working towards improving all these areas, is required. Thus the new senior school leaders suggested that they require training in both analysing data from teaching and learning assessments, as well as support in using the data results to develop practical strategic plans to maintain a high level of student learning. One of the respondents made the following statement during her interview:

We are expected to analyse and interpret student results to assist with short- and long-term planning. The data helps us with strategic goal setting. Without this knowledge, we will be making decisions without knowing why.

This comment is echoed in the study from Piggot-Irvine et al. (2013), which suggests that school leaders who rely on data to support their decisions show far greater success in their strategic planning than those who do not. This concurs with the arguments made by Bush et al. (2006) and Hoadley and Kopanong (2007), who support the importance of instructional

leadership, i.e. leading teaching and learning as a means to improve student results.

Fullan and Langworthy (2014) suggest that successful teaching and learning in schools has traditionally been associated with senior school leadership adopting a direct hands-on approach to teaching and learning by strategically managing classroom instruction. However, the surveyed group of new WCED senior school leaders perceived this need as a lesser need. This is not surprising since the data suggests that the mandated teaching load and regulated approach by the WCED pays particular attention to this area, resulting in the new senior school leaders knowing that they are well supported by the WCED in this area. The results from a South African study by Hoadley, Christie, and Ward (2009) reveal that the teaching and learning function of senior school leaders is perceived as less important than other roles, which they relate to the fact that the school leaders in their study were also actively involved in teaching and learning. In contrast, two international studies by Robinson et al. (2008) and Cardno and Howse (2005) concluded that their respondents reported a need for development in the teaching and learning function as their respondents were not actively involved in daily classroom teaching. It may be concluded, then, that a more active teaching load may result in being perceived as a lower development need in the 'teaching and learning' function of leadership.

Within the South African school context, the data from this paper suggests that many WCED new senior school leaders are expected to not only lead the school, but also to take on teaching roles. This may place unnecessary pressure on the new senior school leaders who have already taken on fairly onerous organisational and strategic roles. As a result of the roles taken on by new senior school leaders, this study reveals that the new senior school leaders may be inclined to neglect the teaching and learning function of their roles as they are under pressure to acquire operational knowledge in their new leadership positions. This theory is supported by the work of Chikoko, Naicker, and Mthiyane (2011), who report that classroom teaching places additional pressure on the senior school leaders, reiterating the consensus of the WCED respondents that combining classroom teaching with the roles of a school leadership position, places considerable pressure on new senior school leaders.

### **Leading the Organisation Development**

This paper reports that the respondents of this research study perceive a medium to high need for leadership development in most areas of the 'leading the organisation' aspect as part of their role as school leader. The importance of 'leading the organisation' is echoed by Hess and Kelly (2007), who report that internationally professional development training for

school leaders is not aligned with the contextualised development needs of senior school leaders. Within the South African context, Bush and Heystek (2006) state that the focus of newly appointed school leaders tends to be on managing the administrative, financial and human resource aspects of their role, as well as that of policy implementation.

Based on the surveys, the following areas of 'leading the organisation' were identified as the most important developmental needs by the respondents:

1. Leading and managing change
2. Leading organisational self-evaluation strategies
3. Coaching and mentoring on instructional leadership

These results suggest that the newly appointed senior school leaders believe they are required to integrate the organisational role functions with the strategic role functions of their new positions, and therefore need support in developing the leadership skills that span across both leadership areas. This understanding is supported by Mintzberg (1996) and Heystek (2014), who suggest that new school leaders' roles must be integrated, as leaders need to be able to move seamlessly between their managerial (leading the organisation) and leadership (leading strategically) role functions.

The data from this study suggests that the requirements for the organisational and strategic roles of the new school leader differ depending on different school contexts, the needs within the organisation, and the approach adopted within each school to teaching and learning. Thus, the development needs of the new senior leaders are particular to their school context and, since developmental programmes take a more generalised approach to developing school leaders, it might not be helpful in supporting the new school leaders to develop leadership skills that respond to the challenges of their specific school contexts.

The respondents in the study, who were offered the opportunity to develop leadership skills despite not being formally appointed into a leadership role, found the transition to being the leader of the organisation much easier. One respondent noted:

I find no problem with leading the organisation, but I found it to be a real challenge dealing with the staff ... The deputies before me didn't have the same role I have; I have many more roles and duties to perform, because my senior school leader is training me for his position ... I actually thought I could do it. I was very fortunate to have senior school leaders that allowed me to do things in the school that post-level one teachers never do. So I had a management role in the school for a long time.

Another respondent explains:

Yes, I was well prepared because the former senior school leader let me do a lot of his work, and I went on two courses and a Head of Department course.

Not all respondents, however, were coached and mentored to strengthen their leadership capacity before being appointed. One respondent, a new school leader, noted when asked whether she felt prepared for her new role:

I would say no, I did not have any training; I wasn't coached or mentored into the role; it was a case of having to assess what was going on and learn as you go on. In terms of preparation, I do not think so.

Another respondent stated that he was very unhappy that he did not receive any induction training at his school:

I do not think anyone can be fully prepared for such a job. We attended a course but I was very confused after the course. According to all the paperwork, all the regulations you have to adhere to are specified, although the old school leaders tell you to go with the flow and to satisfy everyone in the department.

The statements indicate that the experiences of newly appointed school leaders are very different. Most new senior school leaders are not subjected to formal training before taking up their new leadership roles, and generally need to acquire essential skills as quickly as possible. In addition, they are expected to find time to attend short courses offered by the WCED to support their developmental needs as new senior school leaders.

### **Leading People Development**

According to the South African Department of Education, new senior school leaders are expected to provide professional guidance and development to their staff (Department of Education, 2013). This commitment reflects the point made by Otunga, Serem, and Kindiki (2008), who state that the role of senior school leaders is to improve material and professional prospects for staff.

Based on the surveys, the following areas of 'leading people' were identified by the respondents as their most important developmental needs:

1. Developing strategic direction for staff
2. Building capacity within the teams
3. Designing and delivering broad scope professional development

The study revealed that the area of 'leading people' was the area in which respondents experienced the most frustration, following their appointment as new senior school leaders. This concurs with the findings from studies of school leaders in the Gauteng province, which found that the greatest development need for school leaders was the management of human resources (Piggot-Irvine et al., 2013). This is further supported by data from exit interviews with Gauteng province school leaders (Bush & Glover, 2010), which found that the greatest challenge reported by most of their respondents was in the area of managing their staff. This is not unexpected data, given the very contentious labour and union issues that exist in South Africa (Piggot-Irvine et al., 2013). One of the respondents from the study stated that the unions make them feel 'very vulnerable' since they have no training in labour law issues.

Davies and Hand (2015) state that there is a distinction between managing people to ensure good quality education, and the managing of conflict situations that involve legal issues. Senior school leaders are generally more familiar with issues that involve educational matters about teachers, students and parents, but have often had very little training or experience in dealing with complex labour dynamics and the legal aspects involved in the managing of people. One respondent explained her concerns regarding the risks involved in dealing with the unions and legal aspects:

It puts me in a space where I am afraid to do my work. We need constant guidance and support on this matter because we are at risk of doing things in good faith and we expose our lack of knowledge in certain areas.

The respondents in the study, who had had previous managerial experience before being appointed into a senior leadership role, stated that they felt that they were better able to cope with the 'leading people' function. This resonates with Robinson et al. (2008) and Bush and Heystek (2006), who suggest that it is important that aspiring leaders be given the opportunity to be involved in, and developed in, the role of leading people in the organisation before they take up their positions as senior school leaders.

### **Leading the Community Development**

It is interesting to note that only a limited number of previous studies focused on the development needs of senior school leaders in the area of 'leading the community.' The results of the study conducted for this paper reveal that school activities are often intertwined with the community in which the school is situated, and school leaders are expected to play a supporting role in interacting with the broader community. This concept is supported by Fataar (2015) in his analysis and discussion of how three

school leaders navigate the social dynamics of the community in which their schools are situated, in relation to their leadership practices in townships schools in the Western Cape.

Based on the survey information, the following areas of 'leading the community' were identified as the most important developmental needs by the respondents:

1. Establishing effective communication strategies between the school and community
2. Developing strategies to encourage parental involvement
3. Encouraging and developing partnerships with local communities

The school as a community centre plays an important role in supporting various community activities, especially in disadvantaged communities in South Africa. For many families living in impoverished and often unsafe neighbourhoods, the school is perceived as an institution that provides a secure, pastoral and caring environment for their children. As many parents work long hours, often leaving home before the children are awake in the morning and only returning home after dark, it is parents' expectation that the school environment provides a safe place where children are supervised and taken care of for a period of time every day. The school is often considered to be the focal point of the community, an entity that acts as a consistent support structure that can develop the community (Hart, 1993; Leithwood, 1992; Normore, 2004; Fataar, 2015). One of the study's respondents explained how his school is expected to support the needs of the parents and community:

Our greatest challenge is the socio-economic circumstances the children find themselves in, but we have a feeding scheme for them and a swop shop. They bring school-related products to stock the shop, which is supported by other schools. The parents contribute bread to the school, which is distributed to 600 children on a Wednesday. They get porridge at the school. We have sponsors that supply children with clothes. If it is their birthday, the sponsors give them gifts.

Supporting the needs of the school community appears to be a significant challenge for many new WCED senior school leaders. One of the respondents noted that as school leaders they are not trained specifically to assist with the needs of the broader school community and neither do most schools have the funds or staffing capacity to support the community needs. Most of the new senior school leaders perceived their roles as being more focused on the requirements of the school, staff and students within the school. However, the South African Department of Education states that

interaction with the community and leading the community is a very important function of the senior school leaders (Department of Education, 2013).

The importance of encouraging the parents to become role players in the school community is seen as a supportive function, in that parents are perceived as being able to play a productive role in the school by supporting their children's schooling. Nonetheless, in many cases, parental school involvement contributes to the frustration of senior school leaders. The results from the survey suggest that many of the newly appointed senior school leaders had very little desire to deal with parents and community members as a result of 'constant frustration caused by some parents' (survey respondent). The data further suggests that, for some new senior school leaders who take up positions in schools where they are new to the community, it may be difficult to be accepted by the community. One respondent explained how difficult it was for him to motivate the local school community to accept him:

I am not from this community, so every time I reach out to get them involved, they reject my invitation. They support the school leader who lives in this community and whom they know well.

In relation to the aspect of 'leading the community,' the respondents suggested that communicating with the community, as well as initiating strategies to encourage productive parental involvement and partnership building in the community, are areas in which they believe need the most development.

## Conclusion

The results of the survey questionnaires and interviews of newly appointed senior school leaders in the Western Cape suggests that many new school leaders believe they are inadequately prepared for the diverse challenges of their new roles. As highlighted in this paper, the respondents indicated that they believe they need development in most of the leadership areas listed in the Norms and Standards for Educators document (Department of Education, 2011a, 2011b). However, due to the huge disparity in South African schools, leadership development that takes the needs of their particular school context into account is a top priority. From the research data presented in this paper, it is therefore suggested that 'leading strategically' is the most important development need identified by new senior school leaders. The respondents suggested that this aspect of their roles contributes much to their daily pressure and stress; all the respondents expressed the belief that they lack the ability to manage this area.

Secondly, the function of 'leading people' was identified by the respondents as a significant development need for newly appointed WCED senior



school leaders. The respondents suggested that they are not equipped to deal with the 'leading people' function of their leadership role. They indicated that the additional element of dealing with unions created a stressful situation, especially directly after their appointment when they had little or no practical experience in this area of leadership. The respondents in this study stated that they felt vulnerable as a school leader as a result of the lack of support in this area.

While it might be argued that new senior school leaders are often given the opportunity to prepare for their roles as senior school leaders following their appointment to leadership positions, such as head of department or subject head, the respondents in this study stated that this basic preparation failed to adequately adapt them for the challenges of a senior school leadership role. The respondents noted that the requirements and expectations of the skills requirements for a school leader are significantly different to that of a head of department or subject head. Thus, the position of a senior school leader cannot be compared to that of other leadership roles in a school and respondents felt strongly that separate development programs should be scheduled on a regular basis in a contextually specific manner in order to satisfy the expertise advancement of all senior school leaders.

In conclusion, the five elements investigated, namely leading strategically, leading teaching and learning, leading the organisation, leading people, and leading the community, each revealed various sub-sections where the new senior school leaders perceived the need for support and development. The respondents noted that it would be helpful to focus on task-specific training and re-training before taking up their new leadership positions.

### **Recommendations**

The suggestion, therefore, is that potential new senior school leaders should be identified and developed prior to their appointment into senior leadership roles. The WCED must identify individual needs of new senior school leaders and adapt the current programmes on offer by the department to provide a local contextualised development programme. The WCED must apply structures wherein the new senior school leaders may find coaching and mentoring support, while establishing themselves in their new roles.

Moreover, the current practice of a mandated teaching load for new senior school leaders must be adapted to assist the new senior leaders to focus on their new roles by relieving them from their teaching duties during the first year following their appointment. This policy change may result in a far more successful and focused new leader while alleviating the stress of the new role.

Senior school leaders are in a paradoxical position. On the one hand, they are expected to shape a vision of academic success for all students by implementing mandated reforms. On the other, they must simultaneously guide teachers and staff educators to improve the quality of instruction through human resource management; initiating refresher lecturer, teacher and trainer development; managing school employees, data and processes to foster school improvement; establish technology-based laboratories; physical education activities; and vocational guidance.

The author of this article believes this multifaceted approach toward developing student achievement and enhancing teaching techniques is the cornerstone of school improvement. The question 'What knowledge, skills, and dispositions should all students acquire to learn at high levels?' focuses the attention on teaching pupils how to learn. In other words, familiarising pupils with basic learning styles: visual, auditory, and kinaesthetic/manipulative; it is not uncommon to combine primary and secondary learning styles.

Gardner (1991) identified seven distinct profile intelligences that explain how different kinds of minds learn, remember, perform, and understand the process of learning. According to his theory, 'we are all able to know the world through language, logical-mathematical analysis, spatial representation, musical thinking, and the use of the body to solve problems or to make things, an understanding of other individuals, and an understanding of ourselves.'

Gardner (1991) further states that these differences 'challenge an educational system that assumes that everyone can learn the same materials in the same way and that a uniform, universal measure suffices to test student learning.' Our current educational system in South Africa is heavily biased toward linguistic modes of instruction and assessment and, to a somewhat lesser degree, toward logical-quantitative modes as well. Gardner (1991) argues that 'a contrasting set of assumptions is more likely to be educationally effective. Students learn best in ways that are identifiably distinctive. The broad spectrum of students would be better served if disciplines could be presented in a numbers of ways and learning could be assessed through a variety of means.'

The author of this article concedes that 21st century teaching carries with it a complex mix of challenges and opportunities. Challenges include issues like teacher turnover, accountability, changing student expectations, mounting budget pressures, and ever-changing demand to build students' 21st century in-demand job skills. The increasing demand for expertise in technology-based skills and resources should motivate the education community to keep abreast of international developments. It is therefore critical that senior school leaders address these requirements by establishing a

supportive productive environment to enable educators to continuously advance their skills so that they are competent in teaching and in supporting pupils' learning needs and potential. In order to address a commitment of 'lifelong learning,' teachers should be encouraged to opt for digital learning to strengthen not only their professional vocational development but also that of the pupils.

Pupils, parents and the community rely on the school, as a supportive instructional environment, to sustain a high level of education. This includes access to engaging content, and the opportunity to broaden pupils' knowledge in collaboration with peers, teachers, and the larger world community. Pupils today thrive in a digital environment; they are familiar with the Internet, text messaging, social networking, and multimedia. Consequently, they expect a parallel level of technology and opportunities in their academic lives. The senior school leader is responsible for closing this gap in South Africa's current school system.

Just as education methods must change so must the governing authorities, teachers, parents and community develop a cooperative and successful approach that balances economic realities with educational imperatives. The senior school leader has a pivotal role in bringing about this critical transformation. Developing a school through strategic innovation starts with crafting an effective school improvement plan, not different from a business plan. Key aspects of the plan include writing a mission statement that describes the school's purpose and defines needs assessments that gauge strengths, weaknesses, and areas for improvement. The school improvement plan serves multiple purposes, such as maintaining focus, securing finance, motivating ambitions, introducing beneficial extramural modules such as cultural and sports activities, and enlightening teaching and non-teaching staff, school board members, and stakeholders.

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