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Crucial management skills for principals of township secondary schools

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Principals of secondary schools in townships are experiencing increasing management problems. Research indicates that principals with insufficient or non-existant school management skills may encounter management problems which impede academic success. The effectiveness of a principal's management is probably the most important factor contributing to improved academic performance. This article set out to identify the management skills required by principals of secondary schools in townships and to establish their impact on academic performance. It found that training principals in the management skills identified as crucial would not only solve their management problems, but also improve the academic performance of their schools. The article also makes recommendations for certain changes in educational practice.

Bestuursvaardighede as 'n kritiese vereiste vir prinsipale van sekondêre skole in die townships

Prinsipale van sekondêre skole in die townships ondervind toenemende bestuursprobleme. Navorsing toon dat 'n gebrek aan skoolbestuursvaardighede onder prinsipale kan lei tot bestuursprobleme wat akademiese sukses kortwiek. Navorsing toon ook dat die doeltreffendheid van prinsipale se bestuursvaardighede heel waarskynlik die belangrikste veranderlike is wat bydra tot akademiese prestasie. Hierdie artikel beoog om die kritiese bestuursvaardighede, wat prinsipale vir sekondêre skole benodig om 'n impak te maak op akademiese prestasies, te identifiseer. Die studie het bevind dat die opleiding van prinsipale wat betref die geïdentifiseeerde bestuursvaardighede, nie net hul bestuursprobleme sal oplos nie, maar ook die betrokke skole se akademiese prestasie sal verbeter. Die artikel doen aanbevelings aan die hand vir veranderings in die opvoedingspraktyk.

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The Department of Education in the Free State is concerned about the increasing number of principals experiencing school management problems. The situation is aggravated by the rapid changes in education and the promotion of inexperienced teachers to the position of principal. This situation cannot be avoided because the country must provide numerous new schools in order to cope with the increasing number of learners. In addition, it seems that the methods used in selecting new principals are unable to identify the necessary competence. As a result, many selected principals are ill-prepared for the demands of their schools. Since the Department of Education does not have a training programme for newly appointed principals, they are bound to learn by trial and error.

Education practitioners and researchers concur that very few principals have undergone training to enable them to cope with their management duties, and that efforts to make the selection process work effectively in identifying successful principals have often failed (cf McCurdy 1989: 65, Van der Westhuizen 1991: 3, Masitsa 1995: 285). The criteria used to determine the eligibility of candidates are usually vague and minimal and do not specify the necessary skills. They include advanced graduate work, a professional teaching certificate, a good reputation as a teacher, teaching achievements, a personable and likeable manner, a good appearance, social reputation, teaching experience, and favourable inspection reports. Information concerning management capabilities and/or potential plays little or no part when appointments are made. There is minimal demand for the skills or accomplishments that are thought to translate into effective schools. Consequently, newly appointed principals have to perform a task for which they have received no training.

The criteria used do not guarantee the effectiveness of the selected principal because they do not test candidates' potential usefulness as principals (McCurdy 1989: 66). Consequently, the question is no longer whether or not principals have a managerial task to perform, but rather how well they are equipped for that managerial task (Van der Westhuizen 1991: 4). This implies that much effort will have to go into intensifying and improving the on-the-job-training of principals and remedying the ill-effects resulting from inadequate school management and leadership (Masitsa 1995: 270). Van Deventer & Kruger (2003:

62) aptly state that since principals are appointed to managerial positions without proper prior training, they have to learn as they go along, making many mistakes in the process. This situation is neither productive nor conducive to promoting a positive school culture because principals have to learn their management responsibilities, often by trial and error, while actually doing the work.

1. Conceptualisation

1.1 Training and training needs

Training in this context refers to a process of preparing or being prepared for a job. It focuses on enhancing the specific skills and abilities required to perform the job. As Van Dyk *et al* (1997: 227) put it, "training is a learning experience because it seeks a relatively permanent change in an individual that will improve his ability to perform on the job". Training is therefore influenced by job requirements. A principal must receive training in school management and administration so that s/he can perform his/her work effectively. Otherwise, s/he will use the trial-and-error method. Training needs are the basic necessities or requirements for training, or to rectify inadequacies. They are those essential, sometimes indispensable, skills which a person requires or lacks. The management problems of a principal develop into training needs which require the acquisition of certain skills in order to be resolved.

1.2 Educational management training

Van der Westhuizen (1991: 1) states that a principal was traditionally merely the head teacher and his/her task was less complex because the task of heading the school was of limited complexity. The task of the principal as a manager developed early in the twentieth century as the evolution of the principalship shifted from the classroom to professional management (McCurdy 1989: 12). The principal's task, which had focused mainly on teaching, became a more management-directed one, with a shift from instructional skills to management skills. This implied that those involved in school leadership in the twenty-first century would require complex skills relating to leading people and to performing educational management tasks (Deventer *et al* 2003: 62).

According to Van der Westhuizen (1991: 3), extensive research undertaken in South Africa has established that the task of the principal has undergone an evolutionary change and that his/her present task in mainly managerial. McCurdy (1989: 67) strongly endorses this point of view by stating that research indicates that the role of a principal is similar to that of a middle manager in private industry. This implies that the principal can no longer be expected to perform duties in a hit-or-miss fashion, but needs to receive academic and professional training in education management (Van der Westhuizen 1991: 2). Deventer *et al* (2003: 67) hold the view that teachers can only perform their task efficiently if a skilled and efficient manager is leading the school, and add that the management skills required by principals need to be learnt. Principals manage personnel and learners, physical resources, facilities, finances, etc. Although they do not work for monetary gain they must ensure that the finances and other resources of the school are managed properly, and that it is run in a manner that will enable teaching and learning to culminate in good academic results.

Researchers have identified the essential management skills of principals as relating to: organisation, communication, personnel and student management, instructional management, management of facilities, financial management, personnel and teacher evaluation and development, human relations, leadership, conflict resolution, administration, stress management, change management, motivation of educators and learners, personnel selection, planning, personnel induction, problem solving and decision making, dealing with legal issues, and negotiation (McCurdy 1989: 40-1; Deventer *et al* 2003: 62-177, and Wirsing 1991: 5-18). These skills do not differ from those of a manager in the private sector. There is thus no difference between the management functions of principals and those of managers in the private sector. Since these skills are diverse and complex, a principal or prospective principal will require a considerable amount of time to learn and acquire them, which implies that s/he must receive formal training and continuous in-service training in order to keep abreast of developments. Considerable work lies ahead for principals of secondary schools in townships.

McCurdy (1989: 76) identifies four types of management training for principals, namely traditional, institutional, competency-based, and networking, whereas Van der Westhuizen (1991: 5) identifies two

types of management training, namely basic management training and management development. The different types of management training may be succinctly presented as follows:

- Traditional training

In this training practising principals enroll for management courses at universities or colleges. The content of such training is determined primarily by the training institutions. After completion of the training the trainees receive degrees or certificates.

- Institutional training

This training implies attending workshops and seminars which provide short-term experiences of specific management issues. It is offered by professional educational associations, state education agencies, universities, and consultants.

- Competency-based training

This training focuses on the specific skills essential for effective job performance, *i e* the skills in which managers should develop competence in order to be effective. Training may be offered at workshops and seminars.

- Networking

This involves linking individuals or managers in various schools or districts so that they may share concerns, ideas and effective practices on a continuous basis. The majority of the topics discussed relate to their work.

- Basic management training

Principals receive formal academic and professional training offered by universities or colleges. Basic management training is similar to the traditional training discussed above.

- Management development training

This comprises an induction for beginners or in-service training for experienced principals and is designed to upgrade their knowledge or keep them abreast of new developments.

2. Problem statement and aim of the research

The Department of Education in the Free State province is concerned about the increasing number of principals experiencing school management problems. The situation at these schools is exacerbated by inadequate training or lack of training for principals, the rapid changes taking place in education, and the unavoidable promotion of inexperienced teachers to the position of principal. Understandably, a teacher cannot acquire all the knowledge and skills needed for the position of principal from his/her previous post. Thus many principals are incompetent to fulfil their tasks. Insufficient school management skills inevitably result in principals experiencing management problems and may lead to incompetent handling of management tasks and problems. Since the ultimate aim of school management is to ensure school success, poorly managed schools will experience poor academic performance.

In his annual budget speech in 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 is repeatedly poor (Makwela 2003: 14). These were schools which had obtained a pass rate of 40% and below for more than three years before 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 with their management and day-to-day administration. The strategy would succeed if performance at such schools improved markedly and this improvement were sustained once the mentors had left. A total of twenty mentors were appointed with effect from 2 May 2002 to assist forty-nine school principals. Five mentors assisted one principal each, while fifteen mentors assisted more than one principal each. Of these mentors, fourteen were based at the schools where they were acting as mentors, whereas 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 management of the poorly-performing schools.

Studies indicate that principals' management problems will be resolved if they acquire management skills. According to Jirasinghe & Lyons (1995: 1) it is widely accepted that for schools to be efficient, they require competent principals because the creation of an effective

school and its success depend to a great extent on school-skilled principals. Masitsa (1995: 104) states that the effectiveness of a principal's management is probably the most important variable contributing to improved scholastic performance. It is generally believed that principals are made, not born. Some are blessed with more natural leadership ability than others, but the skills required for effective management and leadership have been identified, and can be learned (McCurdy 1989: 6). Therefore, if principals are to (re)gain and retain respect, it is imperative that they acquire the relevant skills for their managerial posts (Kitavi 1995: 129).

The aim here is to identify the school management skills required by principals of secondary schools in townships if they are to resolve their management problems.

3. Methodology

Non-probability sampling was used in this study. In non-probability sampling there is no way of forecasting, estimating or guaranteeing that each element in the population will be represented in the sample (Leedy 1993: 200). The study was conducted in the south-eastern part of the Free State Province in the townships of Mangaung, Botshabelo and Thaba Nchu. This area has the largest cluster of township secondary schools in the province and includes both rural and urban settings, which was why it was chosen for this research. At the time of the research, there were twenty-five secondary schools with grade twelve classes in these townships. The schools were also chosen by means of non-probability sampling. The researcher selected all the schools to form the target group of the investigation, and distributed the first questionnaire to them all, but only eighteen returned it. These eighteen schools thus form the research sample. The author acknowledges that the sample may lack wider representativity but the circumstances in which the principals of the sample schools find themselves are roughly similar to those of other township schools in the country, with regard to the school's milieu, facilities, resources and historical background. Upon investigation, the researcher found that it was not the qualifications but rather the experience of the principals and the school management teams of the selected schools which differed.

3.1 Method

The research for this article was based on a literature study and two open-ended and semi-structured questionnaires. The literature study was intended to support statements and points of view with research evidence because empirical justification requires reference to other research. The intention was to assist the reader to place this research in the context of the relevant body of knowledge and to explain the management skills found in the empirical research and their impact on academic performance. The use of questionnaires was appropriate because the participants were distributed over a wide area. Respondents were given ample time to express their views in writing, and were not under any pressure to answer questions quickly as would have been the case in an interview. The use of questionnaires was thus compatible with the aim and purpose of the study. The first questionnaire, distributed to twenty-five principals and returned by eighteen, was intended to serve as a pilot study for the research. It was designed to gather data on the management skills desperately required by principals to manage their schools properly and to improve academic performance. Their responses were analysed and yielded fifteen necessary management skills.

The researcher graded these fifteen management skills according to the number of times they were mentioned in the responses to the questionnaire. The skills with most support appear first on the list and those with least support last. All the skills identified and the frequency with which they were mentioned are illustrated in Table 1. For the sake of brevity, the research investigated only the eight skills mentioned by at least ten respondents. These eight skills will be referred to as the critical school management skills required by principals in township secondary schools. These eight skills were then used in the second questionnaire, designed to gather data from the principals of the eighteen sample schools as to why the skills are needed and what effect they have on academic performance. In this questionnaire the principals were asked to indicate the importance of each skill by choosing from the following five possible answers, using a Likert scale in selecting a response:

1: not important at all
2: partly important
3: undecided
4: important
5: extremely important

The following table illustrates the management skills identified by the principals in the first questionnaire and the number of times they were mentioned.

Table 1: Profile of the management skills and the number of times they were mentioned

Management skills	Frequency of mention
Financial management skills	17
Personnel evaluation and development skills	16
Conflict- and problem-resolution skills	15
Administrative or technical skills	14
Skills in coping with stress	14
Skills in managing change	14
Skills in motivating educators and learners	13
Skills in dealing with school-related legal issues	12
Personnel selection skills	6
Instructional leadership skills	5
Organisational skills	5
Planning skills	4
Effective leadership skills	4
Human relations skills	3
Skills in the induction of personnel	3

3.2 Data analysis

Data gathered by means of the first questionnaire was analysed and yielded fifteen management skills considered essential by principals of secondary schools in townships. Data on the description of the management skills and their effect on academic achievement, gathered by means of the second questionnaire, was summarised and discussed in the context of the critical management skills required by principals. Data indicating the importance of each management skill to the township principals, gathered by means of the second questionnaire, was analysed using an equal interval scale to obtain the mean scores of the

responses and the management skills were ranked accordingly. The analysis is presented in Table 2.

An in-depth but succinct discussion of the eight critical school management skills required by principals of secondary schools in townships will now be presented, followed by the ranking of the skills.

4. The critical school management skills for principals

4.1 Skill in motivating educators and learners

The principals claim that lack of motivation to teach and to study are major problems facing townships educators and learners, respectively. They indicate that in many cases redeployment takes place against the will of the teachers concerned. This invariably lowers their morale and demotivates them. On the other hand, principals accept redeployed teachers reluctantly, suspecting that they are weak educators who will not contribute towards the improvement of school results. The teachers' overall motivation and morale are also negatively affected by the consistently poor performances of grade twelve learners and by the use of outcomes-based education which many of them do not fully understand. The teachers are of the opinion that many variables contribute to the poor performance of township schools, but the Department of Education appears to overlook this and simply blame teachers for it. The principals hold the view that protracted union disputes over salaries have also contributed to poor morale. Poor academic performance and a negative attitude towards education are indicators of poor motivation and morale, and may play a role in learners' truancy.

The principals agree that teachers with poor motivation and low morale cannot be expected to perform their task effectively, and that this can have a negative impact on learners' performance. Unmotivated teachers can neither perform in accordance with their ability, nor motivate pupils effectively. Unmotivated learners cannot perform in accordance with their innate potential, but will underachieve. For these reasons a principal must ensure that both teachers and learners are motivated. Motivated teachers are an inspiration to learners, while motivated learners lessen the burden on their teachers. By acquiring

the skills to motivate educators and learners, principals will be able to make both groups enjoy their work enthusiastically.

In their research on township schools, Legotlo *et al* (2002: 116) found that educators' morale is very low, as indicated by a high rate of absenteeism. Poor educator morale is due to poor working conditions, inadequate curricular materials, and vague government policies (in particular the right-sizing policy). Learners are demotivated because they do not have sufficient educators and textbooks. The high rate of unemployment among educated people also demotivates learners because they do not see education as leading to employment (Legotlo *et al* 2002: 116). The high failure rate of grade twelve pupils in township schools is an indication that pupils are not motivated to learn. In fact, the repeated failure of these pupils further lessens their motivation because they do not anticipate success (Masitsa 1995: 165).

Research indicates that pupils' lack of motivation to learn is a major problem for those involved in education today (Masitsa 1995: 142). What is more, no matter how excellent education may be, unless pupils are motivated to take advantage of it, they will not apply themselves diligently enough to learn. Therefore, even vast amounts of instruction and high learner ability count little if learners are not motivated. It is imperative that principals be constantly exposed to modern motivation techniques for learners and teachers in order to equip them to address the problem of unmotivated learners or teachers successfully (Masitsa 1995: 143). Learners must be motivated to learn and teachers must be motivated to teach at an acceptable level of performance. Wevers & Steyn (2002: 210) regard motivated educators as a crucial component of effective schools. The degree of satisfaction derived from their work will determine the effectiveness with which educators fulfil their task.

According to Damane (1996: 33-4), the effectiveness and leadership of management depend to a great extent on the ability to motivate, influence, lead and communicate with subordinates. Van der Westhuizen (1991: 296) concurs, stating that management activities are dormant cocoons until the leader triggers the power of motivation in people and guides them towards their goals. Leadership is a major factor affecting staff morale, as leaders influence it directly or by

means of their effect on individuals and groups (Weindling & Earley 1987: 85).

Effective motivation comprises all attempts of the manager to lead his/her staff to the point where they willingly strive to do their best (Ncede 1996: 33). According to Masitsa (1995: 142), staff development offers one means of motivating teachers because it makes them feel sufficiently equipped and prepared for their task. Wendling & Earley (1987: 85) hold the view that morale can be improved by means of discipline, staff development, school organisation, effective leadership, and general encouragement. Skelly's (1996: 95) view is an organisation takes on the character of its leader. If principals are good performers, those around them are much more likely to adopt a positive attitude to work. The crucial aspect of motivation is to change the attitudes of teachers and, in particular, learners towards their school work and towards education in general. In order to do this, township principals need to acquire the requisite skills.

4.2 Personnel evaluation and development skills

The principals of the sample schools stated that the Department of Education and the teachers' organisations had not yet decided on the instrument to be used for teacher evaluation. Thus, the principals were still uncertain about the methods to be used. Principals do not evaluate the performance of their teachers in all schools because if they did they would be opposed, in particular, by 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 imposed form of evaluation, wanting it to take place on their terms. Some teachers see evaluation as an attempt by the principal to expose them, especially if they are deemed incompetent. The principals agreed that if teachers are not evaluated and supervised, they are not likely to improve their performance and will not develop their full potential. They stated that skill in evaluating and developing educators would enable them to identify the strengths and weaknesses of their staff, and to rectify the weaknesses and empower them to perform at their full potential.

Research undertaken in township secondary schools revealed that many schools did not have distinct policies relating to class visits and

assessment, or to the computation of final examination marks. In addition, instruction was not effectively supervised. The moratorium or ban on class visits by principals and heads of department has made it impossible for them to help educators who need assistance (Legotlo *et al* 2002: 116). The knowledge explosion makes it impossible for teachers to remain in their jobs for a number of years without retraining. Their knowledge and skills must be continuously updated so that they can address the ever-changing needs of learners and keep abreast of developments in science and technology as well as changes in education. Ongoing teacher development is essential if teachers are to be effective and proficient in the execution of their duties. This implies that the knowledge explosion, educational change and the quest for effectiveness and proficiency are the phenomena rendering staff development essential (Masitsa 1995: 141; Damane 1996: 28).

Damane (1996: 18) regards evaluation as designed mainly to improve instruction and to assist in the development of the professional abilities of staff, as well as to identify their areas of strengths and weaknesses. It attempts to assess teachers on the basis of what they are and what they are actually doing, not on the basis of how well they can conceal reality (Damane 1996: 18). Simply put, evaluation is designed to prevent and correct errors. At the heart of a good evaluation is the planning necessary to prepare for change (McCurdy 1989: 80). According to Nottingham (1978: 76), the primary purpose of teacher evaluation is improved performance. This is a continuous process and the need for it is never satisfied. It enables a teacher to receive regular guidance, achieve set goals, improve his/her work achievement, and be identified for promotion or merit awards (Damane 1996: 18-9). In addition, evaluation is essential because there is simply no other effective way of holding people accountable for their job performance. It is a tool enabling a person to do his/her job more effectively (McCurdy 1989: 81). Personnel evaluation aims to give recognition for proven achievement; determining whether a teacher is ready for promotion; measuring his/her ability and progress in a given task, and identifying weaknesses with the intention of rectifying them (Ncede 1996: 22).

Dean (1985: 170-1) considers professional development a twofold phenomenon. Staff may undergo development to achieve the objectives

of the school or to meet their own developmental needs. A new teacher's first school is his/her source of learning and it is likely to affect the way s/he works for many years, perhaps his/her entire teaching career. Staff development entails broadening teachers' outlooks, heightening their professionalism and improving their effectiveness. It makes teachers aware of their professional accountability, such as their moral commitment to serve the interest of pupils, and their obligation to monitor and review their own effectiveness, to expand their repertoire, to reflect on their experience, and to develop their expertise (Reeves *et al* 1988: 194). In addition, Hoyle *et al* (1990: 153) state that staff development, often approached via in-service training, promotes demands for true school improvement, long-term planning, commitment to specific goals, and the nurturing required to guide a child through adolescence.

Personnel evaluation and development form one of the major responsibilities of the principal, and should take precedence over all other roles s/he must play. S/he should ensure that teachers have both the opportunity and the necessary encouragement to develop in their work. S/he should evaluate teacher performance and effectiveness, reinforce individual strengths, and develop appropriate plans for assistance and action to remedy identified weaknesses. The school should have and maintain policies for staff evaluation and development (cf Wirsing 1991: 13; Nottingham 1978: 61; Dean 1985: 205). The scope of the work to be done during the evaluation and development of educators and the value of that work to the school prove that principals need to acquire the appropriate skills in evaluation and development techniques. However, the reluctance or slow pace with which the Department of Education is dealing with this matter may give teachers the impression that evaluation is not important. Many of them have not been evaluated for a very long time.

4.3 Skills in dealing with school-related legal issues

The eighteen principals regarded knowledge of legal issues as essential as it would enable them to manage their schools in terms of the law and to know and respect the rights of educators, learners and parents as set out in the Bill of Rights. They would know, among other things, about labour law and how it relates to the educators' strikes which

are common occurrences in township schools, and about acceptable methods of punishment for learners, which cause numerous controversies in schools. In addition, since the law is not straightforward but often tends to be a matter of interpretation, it is imperative that principals receive training in the legislation and the legal issues that have a bearing on the school. Principals may have to deal with union problems and must therefore be knowledgeable about the rights of teachers as well as about grievances, disciplinary procedures and disputes.

In the preface to his book, Squelch (2000) states that the vast and complex array of labour law confronts education officials, governors, principals and teachers with new and demanding challenges. Issues such as equity, discrimination, fair and unfair dismissals, rationalisations, grievances, disputes, redeployment and educator misconduct have become part of everyday discussion in schools and at meetings of governing bodies. Principals cannot effectively manage their schools without a basic knowledge of labour law. Oosthuizen (1998: 3) argues that the law of education is applied in order to solve and regulate a particular conflict satisfactorily and to create a basis for harmonious co-operation for the sake of learners' progress. The law acquaints the principal with the rights of all stakeholders in education and teaches him/her how to act legally in every situation, as well as to recognise his authority and responsibility in relation to learners, teachers, parents and other stakeholders, and how to deal with the misdemeanours of teachers and learners. In short, it enables him/her to act at all times within the ambit of the law. The principal may have to make quick decisions and needs to be clear about his/her rights in order to do so (Dean 1985: 123). As the law is not straightforward and as it is imperative for principals to know about the legal issues that have a bearing on schools, it is crucial that principals acquire the necessary legal skills.

4.4 Conflict- and problem-resolution skills

Township principals claimed that from time to time they were faced with problems or conflict situations at their schools, since conflicts have become inevitable in schools. They reported that it is common knowledge that township schools have been ravaged by politically motivated unrest for many years, with principals bearing the brunt

of this and in some instances being forced to resign. The principals would like to minimise or if possible prevent political interference from educators' unions and learners' organisations, but stated that politically motivated problems in township schools are not likely to end because some educators' and learners' organisations are aligned with political parties.

During the 1980s and 1990s radical political organisations selected township schools as one of the major battlegrounds in their attempts to disrupt and change the former political order. The politicisation of education resulted in a lack of pupil and teacher discipline, which is still present. Instead of doing their academic work learners and teachers can be pre-occupied with political activities to the detriment of both school discipline and academic performance.

The principals concurred that the effectiveness and efficiency with which a principal manages conflicts may determine his/her degree of success in resolving the situation. A high level of success will result in self-confidence, self-reliance and satisfaction on the part of learners, teachers, parents and the community. On the other hand, a low level of success in handling conflicts or problems will result in a loss of support from learners, teachers, parents and the community. Consequently, the acquisition of skills in resolving conflicts and problems would enable principals to handle and resolve conflicts and problems amicably and swiftly, by dealing with them before they develop into crises. Since conflicts and problems systematically erode the learning culture, their resolution would create a situation conducive to teaching and learning at school.

Studies indicate that those currently serving as administrators or principals, or aspiring to that state, will experience numerous conflict situations in the course of their career. Hermans' (1994: 43) advice is that one should not wait for a crisis before making contingency plans. One should develop and adopt policies and actions to take both during and after the conflict. Those who have served as principals for a long period will have experienced numerous incidents, varying in type and complexity. New principals should be keenly aware that they will be expected to handle conflicts. They should develop policies and standard operating procedures as well as positive preventative strategies (Plucker 2000: 2). According to McCurdy (1989: 44), an effective

principal discourages fights and misunderstandings among subordinates, and helps them settle conflicts in a constructive manner. S/he takes prompt and decisive action in dealing with serious school-related problems and disturbances.

Globally, principals function in an arena that extends far beyond the individual school or particular community. No school is an island immune from either the local community or the current culture of its society (Benaim & Humphreys 1997: 97). To ensure a quality educational experience for learners, principals must be increasingly skilful in dealing with forces outside the school whose influence more often than not impinges on it and distracts attention from the educational process (Wirsing 1991: 18). To be able to handle such situations, principals should be equipped with strategies for dealing with political issues or with any other forces that impinge on the school's operation. Research has shown that disregarding these issues is not a solution. Principals need effective skills or strategies to confront, resolve or lessen any negative effects, or at least to know who must do this. They must be well-informed regarding issues that have the potential to disrupt a school (Howe & Townsend 2000: 12). Since nobody has answers to all problems, it is essential that principals receive training in the analysis and resolution of problems and conflicts. This is especially important for the principals of township secondary schools because until relatively recently their schools experienced unending problems and conflicts which no one would wish to see recur.

4.5 Skills in managing change

The political and social changes which have taken place over the last ten years in South Africa have had a significant impact on schools, in particular, and on education in general. The most conspicuous and far-reaching change is the introduction of outcomes-based education, but numerous other administrative changes have been introduced which principals are expected to know and manage. The principals claimed that they were expected to manage the conflicting trends effected by change, to make change less disruptive, and to make teachers understand and accept change as a normal human phenomenon. This is not easy because they do not understand some of the changes themselves. They felt that the simultaneous introduction of many changes in

education was causing confusion, and that their own insecurity about many of the changes introduced could adversely affect both their performance and that of their teachers. This does not augur well for academic performance.

The views of the principals are supported by research conducted in township secondary schools. Nuku (1997: 23) observed that in South Africa, in particular at present, principals must understand that several forces have altered the conventional way of managing school activities. In its attempt to reform education the government enacted many laws and adopted new policies of which not all were easy to implement (Legotlo *et al* 2002: 117). Legotlo (1994: 80) writes of principals who do not understand the changes in education but are expected to introduce them to their educators. He (1994: 80) warns that resistance to change is another factor confronting principals, since introducing changes to educators may not pose a serious challenge, but handling resistance to change can be a major problem. The Department of Education cannot afford to introduce change that will not be properly assimilated by those who must implement it, as this would be a futile exercise. However, the Department should be aware that if change is not properly introduced people may regard it as unimportant, so that it will not be properly implemented, but only on paper.

Education is by its very nature always in a state of flux. The changes taking place in education may alter a principal's task in many ways. This invariably also changes some of the skills needed for the job, if principals are to keep pace with ongoing developments. Political changes precede the education needed to cope with them. Dean (1985: 69) holds the view that principals should be equipped with the skills to cope with educational changes because the management of a school is measured by the extent to which it is able to adapt successfully when major changes are required.

Walker & Vogt (1987: 41) regard change as a vital component of any developing system. Change is also necessary in education and must be guided by a competent change agent — a principal with the skills to guide change for the benefit of the school. Thus, unless principals are familiar with the dynamics of change, they will not survive long (Schmieder & Cains 1999: 28). Principals need skills that will enable them to be flexible and adaptable, to keep pace, and to accommodate

legally instituted changes as well as change in general. They need to manage the changes themselves — to plan, organise, lead and manage them (Nuku 1997: 23). Resistance to change is often due to a lack of knowledge and of the skills required to facilitate change. Thus, a principal must be "change-proficient" if the education system is to retain its viability and grow (Walker & Vogt 1987: 41; Portin *et al* 1998: 6). Without the necessary training any new system is bound to fail.

4.6 Financial management skills

No school can be effectively run without finances. The goal of financial management is the utilisation of available funds in the interests of effective instruction at school. Township principals regard the handling of finances as a major problem. Chapter 4 of the South African Schools Act places the financial management of a school in the hands of its governing body (Bisschoff & Sayed 1999: 311). However, since the governing bodies of township schools often include uneducated parents, principals are compelled to keep the financial books. Principals are not usually familiar with the accounting procedures needed in the collection and disbursement of funds. They lack knowledge about budgeting, cash-flow management and preparing a financial report. This leads to questions about the credibility and accountability of the school's financial reports and statements.

Bisschoff & Sayed (1999: 312) state that since financial management is a relatively new concept in most South African schools, it may be vital to provide training programmes and advice for principals. A principal is accountable for all a school's income and expenditure, and makes decisions on financial matters in the day-to-day running of the school. Judicious management of funds enables a principal to articulate the school's needs clearly and to be creative in finding potential new resources to support the school's programmes (Wirsing 1991: 17; Masitsa 1995: 218).

McCurdy (1989: 41) states that fiscal management begins with the establishment of programme goals and objectives, and that a principal must understand the relationship between the school's programmes and the budgeting process. Principals must be able to make realistic estimates of financial needs, to adhere to established guidelines governing income and expenditure, and to observe the cost-effectiveness

in budget management. Owing to its complexity, financial manage-ment cannot be intuitively grasped, but must be learnt. Since the go-verning bodies of township schools often include uneducated parents, and since principals regard dealing with finances as a major problem, it is imperative that they receive training in financial management to enable them to manage their finances properly and to assist their governing bodies to understand how funds should be generated and disbursed. If this is not done, the current financial mismanagement at schools will not cease.

4.7 Skills in coping with stress

The principals stated that they had to contend with teachers who ne-glect their work, fail to complete syllabuses, and are often absent. They also have to contend with learners who play truant, who neglect their schoolwork and whose academic performance is below standard. They have to manage the changes taking place in education, meet the expectations of the authorities and the community, and ensure the improvement of their school's academic performance, the proper mana-gement of their school, and so on. They are blamed for the failures of both teachers and learners. These problems, expectations, and demands, as well as their daily responsibilities, are an untenable burden that can cause severe stress.

A study of township secondary schools found that the heavy work-loads to be completed in a normal working day and the day-to-day frustrations due to limited resources and staff problems may cause administrative problems and burn-out. Such 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 include: time demands; difficulty with educators, learners, parents and community members; inadequate facilities and resources; the theft of school equipment; vandalism; heavy workloads, and a feeling of powerlessness. Lack of appreciation for his/her work and unresolved problems can also be sources of a principal's stress.

A study of stress (McCurdy 1989: 93) revealed that it begins with anxiety resulting from an imbalance within a person, such as a threat-ening condition. This anxiety leads to tension, a physical reaction often exhibited in nervous impulses which cause changes in the body. When

tension reaches a degree of intensity that has an adverse effect on the body, it results in stress. The greater one's sense of powerlessness over the stressor, the greater the stress. McCurdy (1989: 93) adds that studies have found that unresolved problems and inadequate training cause more stress than anything else. This finding places principals of township schools, who are desperately in need of school management skills, in a highly unenviable position.

Stress may cause a variety of physical problems, is often debilitating and deleterious to work performance, and it is present to a greater extent in those who deal with people, such as managers. It also occurs in situations of strikes, strife, conflict and uncertainty. When one is stressed, there is greater pressure to achieve a satisfactory resolution to problems (McCurdy 1989: 93). Gmelch (1988: 138) warns that if principals do not alleviate some stressors and learn to cope with them, they may develop serious mental, behavioural and physical illnesses. It is essential that principals be equipped with the skills to cope with or prevent stress as these are essential to an effective principal. By providing township schools with enough facilities and resources, and maintaining them, the Department of Education could go a long way towards alleviating the stress of principals.

4.8 Administrative or technical skills

Since the head of the school is also an administrator, s/he must from time to time perform administrative duties which require a sound knowledge of technical skills. Principals in secondary schools in townships claim that they are not fully acquainted with the procedures or formulae for completing requisitions for textbooks and stationery, completing school returns, or determining staff shortages. In addition they have insufficient knowledge of record-keeping and filing. The principals also want to be computer-literate in order to keep abreast of new developments as well as to do planning, draw up time-tables, make quick changes when necessary, and do other administrative work.

Technical skills are indispensable to principals in running their schools effectively and efficiently (Dean 1995: 9). Such activities cannot be learned by trial and error, but involve the acquisition of specialised knowledge, and therefore require specialised training methods (Legotlo 1994: 92).

5. A rank order of the critical management skills for principals

The ranking of the critical management skills identified by principals given in Table 2 results from the analysis of the principals' responses to the second questionnaire, in which they indicated the importance of each skill. The analysis was done to obtain the mean score of each skill and then to rank them accordingly. The mean scores were determined by using a Statistical Package for Social Sciences computer programme.

Table 2: Profile of the critical management skills required by principals

Critical management skills	Mean score	Rank order
Financial management skills	4.667	1
Personnel evaluation and development skills	4.556	2
Skills in managing change	4.556	2
Skills in dealing with school-related legal issues	4.556	2
Stress-coping or -handling skills	4.444	5
Skills in motivating educators and learners	4.222	6
Conflict and problem resolution skills	4.000	7
Administrative or technical skills	3.889	8

The skills were ranked in order of importance and grouped into three categories according to their mean scores, as follows: means ranging from 4.44 to 4.667; from 4.000 to 4.222, and one of 3.889.

6. Discussion

Skills in financial management, personnel evaluation and development, change management, dealing with school-related legal issues, and coping with stress ranked highest in terms of importance with means of 4.667, 4.556, 4.556 and 4.444, respectively. These means indicate that the principals as a group regarded these four skills as almost extremely important. They are followed in descending order by skills in motivating educators and learners, and conflict- and problem-resolution skills, with means of 4.222 and 4.000, respectively. These means indicate that the principals as a group regarded these skills as important. Administrative or technical skills scored a mean of 3.889,

which indicates that the principals as a group regarded this as almost important.

These findings imply that the principals as individuals do not all need the skills they identified as necessary to the same extent, and as a result differ slightly (but not significantly) in their assessment of their importance. Thus the principals' ranking of the skills supports their views as obtained from the questionnaires. Their views on their need of management skills are also supported by the literature study.

Only eight of the fifteen management skills identified by the principals as critical have been investigated here. Substantial evidence obtained from both the literature study and the principals' responses indicates that the acquisition of these skills will better equip principals for their tasks, enabling them to overcome their management problems and manage their schools effectively and efficiently, so that their efforts will culminate in good academic performance. The research has yielded recommendations for change in educational practice, and is invaluable for resolving practice-orientated educational problems. Although the skills have been discussed separately, some of them overlap and complement one another. The identification of these skills addresses the fundamental aim of this study. The need for a more comprehensive investigation encompassing all the management skills identified by the principals is a self-evident limitation of the study. The findings of this study support the initial hypothesis that the acquisition of management skills is crucial for secondary school principals in townships.

7. Findings

The study found that the principals of secondary schools in townships did not have the skills they identified as essential, and that the acquisition of these skills would help them in a variety of ways. Financial management training will give principals knowledge of the accounting procedures needed in the generation and disbursement of funds. Training in personnel evaluation and development would enable principals to recognise the strengths and weaknesses of their teachers, and to rectify them, thus improving teachers' performance. Training in managing change would assist principals in managing change and making teachers understand and accept it. Training in dealing with

school-related legal issues would enable principals to manage their schools in terms of the law, and to share their knowledge with their staff and parents. Skills in coping with stress should enable principals to alleviate stressors in their work and to help teachers cope with stress, thus avoiding stress-related illnesses. Training in motivating teachers and learners would enable principals to motivate teachers and learners, boosting their morale so that they are able to do their work with maximum effectiveness. Conflict- and problem-resolution skills would enable them to resolve problems before they develop into conflicts, and to minimise and obviate such issues. Training in administrative or technical skills would give principals a sound knowledge of procedures and of computers, thus enhancing their productivity.

Teachers' motivation and morale are low, as reflected by the lack of motivation to teach effectively. Factors such as redeployment, endless union strikes over salaries, poor conditions in schools, and shortages of basic facilities and resources are all contributing factors. Poor academic performance, truancy, and a negative attitude towards education in general are indicators of the learners' poor motivation and morale.

The study has found that the Department of Education, like the principals, is aware of the importance of teacher evaluation and development, but that there is no clear policy on or implementation of it. As a result attempts by schools to evaluate teachers are not efficient, and teachers cannot be properly assisted and developed.

Principals are not familiar with the provisions of the law that have a bearing on the school and on education in general, such as the Bill of Rights, labour law and the Schools Act. Thus, they know little about their legal responsibilities and are not in a position to assist teachers and parents with regard to school-related legal issues.

Principals are often unable to resolve school problems and conflicts affecting learners, educators and parents before they develop into crises. This is a serious shortcoming, given the fact that their schools have a long history of problems and conflicts.

The new dispensation in South Africa has introduced considerable change in education without clear explanation, with the result that principals find it difficult to understand and introduce this change to their teachers, or to manage it themselves.

Principals lack financial management skills. They are not familiar with the accounting procedures needed in generating and disbursing funds, budgeting, cash-flow management, and preparing financial reports. This poses serious problems as schools have over the years experienced intermittent conflicts regarding the raising and expending of funds.

Principals work under considerable stress caused by the need to manage teachers and learners, their inability to manage their schools properly, the intermittent changes in education, and the needs and expectations of both the authorities and the communities which they must satisfy. The inability to manage stress causes stress-related illnesses.

Principals also lack the technical skills required to complete requisitions for textbooks and stationery or school returns, to determine staff shortages, to keep accurate records and to do filing. They are not computer-literate and often cannot cope with new developments in school management.

As far as the ranking of management skills is concerned, skills in financial management, personnel evaluation and development, managing change, dealing with school-related legal issues, and coping with stress ranked highest in terms of importance with means of 4.667, 4.556, 4.556 and 4.444, respectively, *i e* "almost extremely important". They are followed in descending order by skills in motivating educators and learners, and resolving conflicts and problems with means of 4.222 and 4.000, respectively, *i e* "important". Administrative or technical skills scored a mean of 3.889, *i e* "almost important".

8.   Recommendations

The Department of Education should ensure that secondary school principals in townships receive intensive training in financial management skills in order to equip them to manage their finances properly; personnel evaluation and development skills to enable them to evaluate their teachers and ensure that they receive training; skills in managing change so that they can assist teachers to understand and accept change; skills in dealing with school-related legal issues to ensure that they can manage their schools in terms of the law, and can guide their teachers and governing bodies in this regard; skills in coping with

stress; skills in motivating educators and learners and boosting their morale; skills in resolving conflicts and problems before they become disruptive to their schools, and administrative skills give them a sound knowledge of how to use modern technical facilities and procedures. These skills would enable principals to manage their schools effectively, as well as to improve both teachers' and learners' performance.

In the long term the Department of Education should conduct a needs analysis of the management skills required by principals and their school management teams in schools under its control, and structure skills management training programmes on the basis thereof. Principals and their management teams should be trained on an ongoing basis.

The department should ensure that newly appointed principals receive training in school management skills before they assume duty as well as ongoing training to keep abreast of developments.

Principals and prospective principals should be advised to study school management courses at university as this would enhance their ability to perform effectively as principals.

9. Conclusions

This study has revealed that principals of township secondary schools in Mangaung, Botshabelo and Thaba Nchu desperately need training in school management skills to overcome their management problems and improve both their management and their learners' academic performance. It has also revealed that insufficient or non-existant management skills have a negative impact on a principal's management and administration of his/her school. Poor school management and administration invariably have a negative impact on the overall functioning of a school and, in particular, on academic performance.

As many teachers who lack management training are promoted annually to the position of principal, the management problems of principals are not likely to be resolved soon unless the Department of Education implements the recommendations made in this study. Training principals in school management skills is the only way to eliminate their management problems, empower them to work with maximum effectiveness, and enhance the academic performance of their schools.

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