



## LEADERSHIP PREPARATION AND DEVELOPMENT

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### **Preparing and developing school leaders: the African perspective**

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## 1. Background and Theoretical Framework

This study is informed by previous work in leadership development (Moorosi and Bush, 2011) that assessed the nature and content of leadership preparation and development programmes in Commonwealth countries. This work established a gap in the knowledge about the developing context against a significant base of literature in the developed context. It further established that many Commonwealth countries appear to be focusing more on leadership development than preparation as not many developing countries had preparatory programmes available for aspiring leaders. This study explores broad leadership socialisation experiences that go beyond formal programmes and focused on two dissimilar contexts: (i) a context where there is formal leadership preparation for school principals (South Africa) and (ii) a context where principals are not formally prepared (Lesotho). It was expected that the contrasting nature of the study would provide an understanding of the interaction between formal preparation initiatives and informal processes that ultimately determine readiness for school principalship and shape leadership practice.

The study draws from the literature on career socialisation with specific focus on school leadership (Greenfield, 1985; Crow, 2006; Stevenson, 2006; Ribbins, 2008). Socialisation is defined as the process through which one acquires knowledge, skills and dispositions needed to adequately perform a social role (Crow, 2006). Stevenson (2006:414) argued that school leadership roles are “best understood against a complex background of social, political and economic trends, operating both simultaneously and interdependently on a global, national and local scale”. There is increasing evidence that the quality of leadership provided by the school is dependent on the quality of the leaders’ preparation experiences (Greenfield, 1985; Orr & Barber, 2007; Bush et al, 2011). Bush et al (2011) established that schools whose leaders participated in a leadership development programme significantly improved student outcomes compared to those who did not. Greenfield (1985: 49) asserts that “what one learns prior to role entry has an impact on role performance”. These assertions had implications for mostly professional and organisational processes, but later development identified further categories of socialisation that included anticipatory and personal socialisation. Adding to the work of his predecessors, Crow’s (2006) argument was that the context in which principals learn to become principals is much more complex and dynamic and requires a framework that looks beyond the professional and organisational aspects. He argued that socialisation needs not only to be understood but also to be enhanced, and must therefore take the pre-organisational life of a school principal into cognisance (see also Stevenson, 2008; Ribbins, 2008).

## 2. Objectives and Research Questions

The purpose of this research was to examine the preparation, accession and socialisation processes of school leaders in Southern Africa. This study examined how formal preparation interacts with other forms of socialisation, and how and to what extent do local practices and local forms of socialisation inform formal leadership preparation and development. These processes were examined through a career socialisation framework that suggests that school leadership career is shaped by a barrage of external and internal pressures and exposures that ultimately shape the identity of a leader. The overall objective is to understand how leadership socialisation occurs and how the knowledge could be used to inform leadership development models.

The study was guided by the following research questions:

- How do school leaders get socialised into the principalship role?

- What factors (personal and professional) shape school principals' leadership identity development? How does leadership identity develop?
- How do leadership identity development and socialisation processes inform leadership development initiatives?

### 3. Methodology

As indicated above, the purpose of the study was to examine leadership socialisation processes of school leaders in South Africa and Lesotho. Due to the disparities in size<sup>1</sup>, only one province of South Africa was selected as a research site, but these two contexts were selected on the basis of their similar socio-economic status. Within the province one district was chosen and one district was also chosen in Lesotho as a research site. The participants comprised principals and deputy principals of both primary and secondary public schools.

Specific methods of data collection involved (i) documentary analysis of policies and government reports that were relevant to school leadership development. This analysis gave an overview of policies and programmes for leadership development and provided information that facilitated selection of schools that participated in the study. The second method was (ii) questionnaires that collected biographic data and were administered before the interviews and in some cases emailed to participants. Thirdly (iii), interviews were conducted with principals and deputy principals lasting between 35 to 55 minutes. Interviews also involved district managers who were interviewed to get an overview of existing initiatives and further data that would expedite sampling of school principals and their deputies. In Lesotho, a leadership development manager and a government senior official were also interviewed as they had direct involvement in the development of school leaders.

#### Sampling

In Lesotho, a list of schools was obtained from the district office that had names of primary and secondary schools as well as names of principals. The intention was to purposively select participants to include equal numbers of male and female principals of primary and secondary schools. However, the interview with the district manager alerted the researcher to the cluster networks within the district that played a significant role in leadership development. It was then decided to select principals of schools that were coordinators of clusters due to the role they played in the coordination of clusters and for their accessibility as well. Eight secondary schools and eight primary schools were selected and their principals and deputy principals were interviewed. Deputy principals were not available in three schools and in one school the head of department was interviewed in the absence of the deputy principal. This resulted in the total number of 29 participants. All participants were of the Sotho ethnic group and 65% of them were women.

On the South African site sampling was initially purposive to include male and female principals of both secondary and primary schools who had completed the programme of leadership development. These data were available from the provincial office selected on the basis of proximity to the researcher. As data were not available to suggest all candidates who had received leadership training, other participants were identified through the process of snowball sampling. Nine primary and six secondary schools participated and 29 participants from mixed ethnic groups including Coloured (48%), Xhosa (41%) white (10%) were interviewed. Women

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<sup>1</sup> Lesotho's population is approximately 2million people while South Africa has approximately 51 million people. The chosen province has 6.5million people and shares borders with the large part of Lesotho.

made 48% of the participants. Principals were interviewed from all schools but where deputy principals were not available, HoDs were interviewed.

The involvement of principals and deputies provided well-triangulated responses that enhanced validity.

### **Research ethics**

A strict code of ethics was adhered to by the researchers which included:

- Seeking approval to conduct the study according to the University of Warwick code of ethics.
- Seeking approval and access from the respective ministries/departments of education.
- Seeking informed consent from all participants and protecting participants from harm.
- Ensuring anonymity and confidentiality of data

## **4. Key Findings**

The findings are structured using research questions as sub-headings.

### **Question 1: How do school leaders get socialised into the principalship role?**

Findings suggest several ways in which principals get socialised:

- i) formal preparatory programmes and development workshops

In Lesotho, 37% of the school leaders had some form of leadership training. This was through formal programmes or courses that introduced them to basic school administration and management principles that were embedded in their initial teacher training in anticipation for the principalship. These were participants who obtained their teaching qualification from the teacher training college rather than the university.

There was no requirement for leadership training before the principalship but there was also mention of leadership development workshops provided by the Ministry of Education. However, these were inconsistent as not all participants had attended some form of training. Some of the older generation of leaders had last attended some workshop in 2007 and the previous one had been 10 years before. There was no formal mentoring but mention of individuals who were regarded as mentors was made, suggesting some degree of informal mentoring. There was no formal induction for school leaders. Participants decried formal induction that used to happen for all teachers but was no longer available even for newly appointed teachers. According to the senior ministry official this was due to lack of funding.

The significance of formal preparation programmes was expected in the South African context where there is a preparatory programme for school leaders in the form of the Advanced Certificate in Education (ACE): School Leadership programme. However, we also found that the majority of participants obtained a certificate in school leadership through the NGOs long before the introduction of the national ACE in 2007. 76percent of participants had some form of leadership training as opposed to only 37percent in Lesotho. However, although, the study particularly sought participants who had undergone a leadership development programme in South Africa, it was evident that not all school leaders (particularly deputy principals) had as yet obtained the formal qualification.

There was also mention of lack of proper induction, suggesting lack of mediated entry which sometimes delays professional development. There was no mention of formal mentoring

even though the qualification mandates formal mentoring. There were ad hoc developmental workshops which have become more irregular in the post 1994 period. This was attributed to the dysfunctionality of the provincial department as these used to be regular and helpful before 1994.

#### ii) Self-development

In the Lesotho context there were differences between generations: the older generation of principals had taken some specific leadership and management certificates through correspondence with some international institutions. Three of the principals in this category had actually obtained their postgraduate (Masters) qualification with universities in the UK and US. While the younger generation who were mostly deputies, developed themselves locally and in South Africa.

Self-advancement was also largely seen in the South African context where the majority of participants (60%) had postgraduate qualifications in leadership and management. Participants were mostly old generation in this context and most of their leadership development had been self-initiated.

There is a significant degree of self-initiative for leadership professional development in both contexts, which suggests something about the agency of the participants. In Lesotho principals were coordinators of clusters while in South Africa, participants had chosen to do the ACE and continued to seek other forms of development. There is a great deal of disappointment at the lack of initiative on government from both sites.

#### iii) On the job experience (development by delegation)

Experiences of teacher leadership and lower level leadership are significant in the Lesotho context. A significant number of school leaders did not know they wanted to or could actually run schools until they started doing it. Roles and responsibilities that provided the necessary preparation were delegated and allocated by school proprietors and these were mostly at principalship level (with no prior formal experience in many instances).

In South Africa, although some participants refer to experiences of teacher leadership as preparation these were hardly voluntary and in most cases not necessarily based on expertise but on qualifications. For example some participants were asked to act when the principal left because they had a degree. However, some explained that their leadership competence had been seen by someone senior, who then created more opportunities for them to perform some leading role.

There was however, some tension with regard to the development of and delegation of duties to the deputy principals in both Lesotho and South African contexts. There was a lack of clarity surrounding the deputy principals' roles which made deputies visible only when the principals were not around. In some cases the deputies admitted that when the principals are not around, there is chaos in the schools because the learners do not recognize them. There was little evidence of close collaboration or genuine sharing of leadership practice. School leadership still appeared to be a one person band with principals holding the power and deputy principals in the background.

#### iv) Networking and cluster development

Network clusters were very strong in Lesotho where each of the principals interviewed was a leader of the network cluster. Although the networks were coordinated at district level, the network leaders oversee the regular interaction with other principals and shared experiences. However, it was interesting to observe in most cases that the deputy principals were not part of the network and in some extreme cases not even aware of their schools being cluster coordinators.

In South African there was also a strong presence of the now formal networks that mostly emerged informally out of the ACE contact sessions – both national ACE and the one offered by the NGOs. These networks were not coordinated by district but were initiated from geographical networks of participants of the ACE who continued to meet even after completion of the programme.

Thus, although there were differences in the forms of socialization experienced in the two countries, there were some commonalities that suggest the significance of context.

## **Question 2: What factors shape school principals' leadership identity development?**

Factors that shape the development of leadership identity were categorized into two sources: educational and non-educational sources. It was found that non-educational sources were significantly stronger and showed very early on through engagement in family, youth groups, church and general community involvement.

### (i) Non-educational sources

*Family/ childhood values* – Findings suggest that school leaders develop leadership identity from the family, long before they start their teaching career. These were mostly participants from large families with relatively low socio-economic status where each child had to share in the household chores. Family values that shaped leadership included respect for elders, Christian values, love for education (as a tool for a bright future) and a strong sense of community. Observing these values singled participants out and shaped their leader identity.

*Youth / church/ community leadership* - The majority of the leaders in Lesotho had been active in the church or in some youth groups such as Boy Scouts and Girl Guides or in other church groups where, as youths, they played some leading role.

In South Africa, politics and the struggle played a huge part in the majority of the leaders' stories. At an early age they were involved in political youth leagues and in sports where many of the clubs were political in nature. There, leadership was noticed and they were called on to become involved and take the lead.

### (ii) Educational sources

*School /college experiences* – These experiences were characterized by the presence of teachers as role models, particularly those who were strong subject teachers or the principals who were found inspiring (despite being quite strict and authoritarian).

Student representation also played a significant role. A significant number of leaders had actually been head girls/boys at school and this had continued into student unions in colleges and universities. It was noticeable that a significant majority of female leaders in Lesotho were influenced by nuns at school – perhaps not surprising given the predominance of the Roman

Catholic denomination that owned and ran most boarding schools. These nuns emphasized good behavior which earned the girls respect of others and the latter ‘propelled’ them into leadership roles.

### **Question 3: How do leadership development initiatives and socialisation processes shape and inform leadership identity?**

This question initially sought to explore the extent to which context shapes leadership development initiatives. However, the question answered more directly by data is how leadership development initiatives and socialisation processes (largely context) shape and inform school leaders’ identity.

*A strong sense of spirituality* – This for most leaders crystalized at youth stage and had been a strong presence that shaped the paths they took later in life where as adults they continue to lead some church groups. In Lesotho spirituality linked to church where leaders also play a significant role.

There was still a strong sense of spirituality amongst South Africans too but this was not necessarily linked to church participation. Spirituality was for many instilled at home as was many of the other values that shaped their approach to leadership.

There is thus a strong moral purpose shaping how leadership is performed.

*A sense of agency* - In the South African context, there was a strong sense of leaders as reflective practitioners based on leaders’ wealth of experience as well as their additional qualifications which implies that experiences are used as a leadership learning platform. In spite of the dysfunctional department they became independent leaders who took initiative of their own development and became agents in their own right in order to get the job done and bring about change.

*A strong sense of community* – In Lesotho, the role played in community from youth seemed to influence the leadership in schools. Roles that participants played in the community became part of the leadership socialization and give leaders a strong sense of the larger context. Schools are not run in isolation from the community but are very much integral to the activities of the communities and vice versa. Many of the leaders are also active in community leadership after their leadership roles in schools. And as the participants say there appears to be an expectation that school leaders would also assume community leadership and this role is accepted as part of what school leaders do. This leads to retirement being seen as total disengagement from all forms of public engagement suggesting an identity of leadership that is seen in relationship to the formal role.

However, in the South African context community involvement was first through youth, sport and struggle activities against the apartheid regime. Leadership was noticed and then taken on to lead at school because of this. Theirs then became a life of service – “a calling” to be offered even after retirement.

*Social justice agenda* – This was mostly present in the South African context where there was a stronger determination to want to change things for the better. The leaders are more alert to issues of exclusion and oppression and this significantly shapes the approach to leadership that is driven by the social justice agenda.

Although women are in the majority of school leaders in Lesotho, there was no collective sense of social justice. While some male principals hold sexist views about women (e.g women are not very strong as principals) within a strong patriarchal society, only a few of the leaders (both men

and women) see women from a position of disadvantage. There is therefore no conscious effort to promote and advance women and girls.

This is not taken out context – a context where women represent a majority in school leadership and a context where female literacy rate is higher than that of men.

## 5. Implications for Theory and Policy

Socialisation appears to be stronger at the anticipatory level but weaker at organizational level. Formal leadership development is directly available in the South African context as a nationally driven programme, which on the surface may not be informed by individual school issues. However, most of the schools in this sample were performing fairly well despite their disadvantage. They had developed resilience – committed to the basics, punctuality, teaching and learning taking place, time on task, some parental involvement etc. These contextual practices could inform the nature of leadership development programmes.

Through partnerships with education NGO (funded by business in the area), and through informal networkings, this is where the leadership aspect was developed. People found their agency and the courage to initiate new ideas and change projects. A handful of really pivotal people emerged in the district – sustained the commitment to the education agenda.

It should be noted however, that this was a unique sample: by selecting people, many of whom elected to do the ACE – we have found a group of go-getters. In the Lesotho case, the principals were coordinators of network clusters which suggests they may have been chosen because they had something extra. The sample does not represent the vast majority of principals and deputy principals in both contexts. Many principals in South Africa have not had the opportunity/will/interest to do an ACE School Leadership. Many are far from cities and so they do not have access to an education NGO funded by business. They work in rural areas where there are limited resources and face many other socio-economic challenges.

In Lesotho, leadership development is mostly through ad hoc government workshop. The infrequency of the workshops suggests a lack of strategic approach to leadership development. When these workshops are offered school leaders hardly feel a sense of progression and/or development. The older generation of leaders are waiting to retire, but there is eagerness and will to improve schools amongst the younger generation. There is also potential within the in-house leadership development and within the network clusters.

## 6. Future Plans

A presentation is planned on this work for the BELMAS 2014 Conference. Previous presentations presented methodology and merely summarized findings. However, future presentations engage the data a lot deeper showing the relationship between leadership and context. Furthermore, an application to Belmas funding to extend the project has been successful and this study is going to be extended to a further two African states starting January 2014. It is envisaged that upon completion, the project would lead to the development of a model of leadership development that is rooted in the African context. This will inform publication of a book manuscript that has been a major goal of the project.

## 7. Related Papers and Presentations

Moorosi, P. & Grant, C. (2013) '*Preparing and developing school leaders: the African perspective*', paper presented at the BELMAS conference, Edinburgh, Scotland, July 2013 (article in preparation)

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