

Mentoring and Teacher leadership : KwaZulu-Natal principals speak.

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Abstract :

South African principals now face tremendous challenges leading and managing schools given the constraints of self managing schools and the newly introduced Further Education and Training curriculum. Professional development of teachers is an area that is in need of immediate attention. Teacher morale is at its lowest and the culture of teaching and learning is being compromised as a result. To help overcome school headship overload, a structured mentoring programme can be of benefit and this will allow for the creation of space for collective and distributed leadership as a way forward so as to win back and take ownership of the school environment.

This paper reports on the views of principals attending the National qualification for School Leadership, a newly piloted Advanced Certificate in Education qualification. Using a survey approach, questionnaires were distributed to all 100 principals attending the course in 2008. Mentoring is seen as one of the ways a school staff can work flexibly and creatively together to become a learning organization. Bartell (2005) argues that teachers who participate in mentoring programmes are more likely to stay in teaching.

Preliminary findings point to an emerging view that an organized process of mentoring will allow for the knowledge, skills and life experience of selected, successful managers to be shared with other colleagues in the organizational system for the purpose of developing that colleague, both personally and professionally. This further provides the principals with the opportunity to lead and manage schools effectively in a time of great change, challenge and opportunity.

Background and context.

Prior to 1994, education in South Africa was under the control of 19 different Departments of Education (DoE). Race was the primary criterion used to differentiate and cater for the various groupings. There were vast discrepancies in respect of funding and resourcing, both human and physical, of the different DoE's. However, with the advent of democracy after the 1994 elections, the government was committed to transforming the education system. This involved changing the old bureaucratic structures of the past into more democratic organizations and redressing the imbalances of the apartheid era. Educational reforms initiated by the government targeted curriculum development, teaching methodologies, governance and management, as well as professionalism of teaching.

Although a single department of education was established, this did not result in the ideal as was envisaged in the **Freedom Charter**, that the **Doors of learning will be open to all**. There are still glaring disparities evident in the delivery and resourcing of the various schools. There is the distinct difference between the urban and rural contexts and this has impacted on the realization of teaching and learning.

Further to this, the criteria that used for the appointment of principals in the ex-DoE's differed drastically. Added to this, was the influence or interference of the various Teacher Unions and the School Governing Bodies in the selection of the candidates to head the schools. Transformation still remains the greatest challenge facing post apartheid education and racism still rears its ugly head from time to time.

Definition of mentoring.

Mentoring is increasingly seen as an effective way of helping people develop in their professional careers. Mentoring has also been described as the support, assistance, advocacy or guidance given by one person to another in order to achieve an objective over a period of time. It also provides a process that allows leaders to initiate productive relationships, identify and concerns, determine effective responses to resistance and empower others through collaborative learning.

Levinson (1978) says that "in its most basic form mentoring is simply friendship with someone who is a little more experienced, who acts as a guide in regard to a new career, profession, job, or development state." Merriam (1983 : 162) took this definition further and described mentoring as "a powerful emotional interaction between an older and younger person, a relationship in which the older member is trusted, loving, and experienced in the guidance of the younger."

The role of mentoring in school leadership.

The new national initiative, the Advance Certificate in Education (ACE) (School Leadership) introduced in South Africa in 2007 will require support, nurturing and changes as we go along to lead and manage people. This further provides the principals with the opportunity to lead and manage schools effectively in a time of great change, challenge and opportunity. There is a distinction between "mentoring school managers and managing the mentoring programmes in schools"

Principals now face tremendous challenges leading and managing schools given the constraints of self managing schools and the newly introduced Further Education and Training curriculum and Outcomes Based Education. Professional development of teachers is an area that is in need of immediate attention. School managers seem to be natural candidates as mentors in schools. They have an important role to play in developing their colleagues to cope with new pressures and new paradigms. Teachers ought to be empowered as well as be self-empowered to develop and implement appropriate mentoring programmes.

Teacher morale is at its lowest and the culture of teaching and learning is being compromised as a result. To help overcome this and school headship overload, a structured mentoring programme can be of benefit. This will allow for the creation of a space for collective and distributed leadership as a way forward so as to win back and take ownership of the school environment. Outstanding leaders need to rely on the people that they work with to manage, given that school leadership is too complex for one person to do.

Teacher Leadership.

Prior to the first democratic elections in 1994 in South Africa (SA), the education system was structured around a hierarchical and bureaucratic style of management. This meant that the control of schools and the decision making in schools was centralized, and leadership was understood in terms of “position, status and authority”. (Grant 2006:511-532).

The concept of “teacher leadership” is an emerging concept in South African education. In addition, teacher leadership is an important part of the process to transform South African schools into becoming “learning organizations” (Grant, 2005:44). It must be borne in mind that the understanding of leadership beyond understanding it as “headship” or as occupying a formal position. In this way leadership in schools will no longer be equated with headship, but rather that now the opportunities and space for more than one person to be involved in the leadership and management of schools is made possible. In other words, leadership within schools becomes distributed amongst all stakeholders, particularly amongst teachers.

Katzenmeyer and Moller (2001:17) speak of teacher leadership as “teachers who are leaders, lead within and beyond the classroom, identify with and contribute to a community of teacher learners and leaders and influence others towards improved educational practice”.

The teacher, being an extended professional, needs to evolve as a leader. There is a need to encourage and create capacity for facilitative leadership and not lose sight of the fact that in each teacher there is the inherent talent that needs to be unleashed. Mentoring creates a space for any teacher to display his/her leadership potential and thus add value to the organization.

Legislative framework for school mentoring programme.

There are several pieces of legislation that deal with the need for employees to acquire knowledge and skills while at the workplace. Below I cite two Acts as examples :

The **Skills Development Act No 97 of 1998** stipulates that :

- The workplace should be used as an active learning environment
- Employees should be provided with the opportunities to acquire new skills.

The **Employment of Educators Act No 76 Of 1998** stipulates that one of the functions of the school principal is to assist educators, particularly new and inexperienced educators, in developing and achieving educational objectives in accordance with the needs of the school.

Who is the programme for ?

The ACE programme is aimed at empowering school leaders to lead and manage schools effectively in a time of great change, challenge and opportunity. In its final form this programme is aimed at School Management Team (SMT) members who aspire to become school principals as a stage in their professional career planning.

However, there are many serving principals who also need support at this time in our history. Therefore this field testing phase of the programme has been limited to serving principals. It is hoped that through their engagement with this programme, these principals will benefit from the guidelines provided, insights and tools that can use to meet their immediate challenges and needs as school leaders. At the same time, the programme and its future students will benefit from the feedback these students give based on the experience as serving school principals.

What is the purpose of the programme ?

1. Seeks to provide structured learning opportunities that provide quality education in SA schools through the development of a corps of education leaders who apply critical understanding, values and knowledge and skills to school leadership and management within the vision of democratic transformation.
2. Seeks to empower these educators to develop skills, knowledge and values needed to lead and manage schools effectively and contribute to improving the delivery of education across the school system.
3. The programme aims to achieve the following :
 - a. Provide management to enable the schools to give every learner quality education.
 - b. Provide professional leadership and management of the curriculum and therefore ensure that the schools provide quality teaching, learning and resources for improved standards of achievement for all learners.
 - c. Strengthen the professional role of the principalship.
 - d. Develop principals who are able to critically engage and be self-reflective practitioners.
 - e. Enable principals to manage their schools as learning organizations and instill values supporting transformation in the South African context.
 - f. Add value to the understanding of the role of a school mentoring programme as part of the school's overall development plan.

Assessment is focused on applied competencies and is to include :

1. Assessment and/or examination, providing evidence of the ability to apply knowledge to practice.
2. Oral presentations, which should be observed in context to observe ability to communicate with comprehension.
3. Two or more work based projects to demonstrate the application and insights from the mentoring module and a portfolio of evidence.
4. Evidence of self-, peer-, tutor assessment as well as on-site verification of leadership and management competence.

Findings thus far

Findings are still preliminary but there seems to be a picture emerging that an organized process of mentoring will allow for the knowledge, skills and life experience of selected, successful managers to be transmitted to other colleagues in the organizational system. This has led to improved confidence in mentoring, improved competence in supervision, and building a collegial support network for the purpose of growing that colleague for greater efficiency and effectiveness.

Comments from Principals thus far on what mentoring is and the role they see mentoring playing in the management of their schools

“Mentoring is seen as one of the ways a school staff can work flexibly and creatively together to become a learning organization.”

“Structured mentoring if widely and wisely used in organizations can help teachers at different points in their working lives.”

“the role of a school mentoring programme must form part of the school’s overall development plan - lead and manage people, provide the right support and follow-up”

“If it is used well it can facilitate induction, career advancement, acquisition of new skills and problem solving. It will support capacity building within the school by providing valuable opportunities for contextualized learning.”

“Mentors can also assist mentees to deal with the challenges associated with a productive and meaningful worklife, especially in an era of unprecedented change”

“ It brings about the required effective teaching and learning which in the long run culminates in the development of a school into a learning organization.”

“It lessens the duty of the HOD because all the teachers with problems are mentored by more experienced teachers.”

“Way of identifying potential in people and to then put them in senior position if someone is retiring. Create a forum for junior staff to view professional development.”

“As a leader I believe that mentoring will speed up the development of future leaders”

“ May motivate educators to remain in the teaching profession, educator stress may be alleviated, negative influence on learners learning may be reduced.”

Bartell (2005) argues that teachers who participate in mentoring programmes are more likely to stay in teaching.

Variations in mentoring programmes :

Traditional mentoring grew from the concept of the older and wiser guiding the young and aspiring. Masters and apprentices, patrons and proteges and mastermind (expert/novice) mentoring continue this paradigm.

Contemporary mentoring has many forms and frequently people regard each other as partners, colleagues or peers, ignoring age, status or power.

Perry and Volkoff (1998), citing the work of Gray (1994) observe that it is important to understand the evolutionary nature of mentoring relationships and changes that are likely to occur throughout the cycle.

Gray (in Mackenzie 1994:81) devised a development model of mentoring outlining the styles that tend to be used at different phases of the relationship. His model moves in four stages :

1. Informational mentoring :

The emphasis during this stage is on imparting experience and information and the most active member in this phase is the mentor.

2. Guiding Mentoring :

There is shift from imparting information to guiding the mentee as the relationship develops, but the mentor still plays the key role.

3. Collaborative Mentoring :

As the mentee matures, gains experience and develops confidence, the relationship tends to become more collaborative and more equal in status.

4. Confirming Mentoring :

In this model, as the mentee becomes more independent, the mentor begins to disengage and play a lesser role.

Gray's model points to the fact that an important role of the mentor is to help the mentee become as independent as possible. Initially, the mentor may need to give a lot of guidance and support in a close relationship but the aim is to lessen this as the mentee's confidence increases. Gray's model could be simplified further to three key stages :

a. The building stage

Finding out about each other.

b. The maintaining stage

Helping and supporting one another.

c. The exciting stage :

Saying goodbye, changing the relationship, reducing and removing immediate support.

Tiered Mentoring Programme.

Fowler and Muckert (2004) investigated the effects of a Tiered Mentoring Programme (where professionals mentor upper-level students who in turn mentor lower-level students) on students who are both mentors and mentees, to see whether being a mentee had any impact on their mentoring. The students identified some particular benefits of simultaneously being a mentor and a mentee.

It was found that the students were able to transfer skills learnt through being mentored to their own mentoring relationships, such as modeling and value transferring. The students also identified a strong influence that being a mentor had on being a mentee. This influence included a greater appreciation on the mentor's time and work, and a greater sense of the relationship being bidirectional.

When the principals were asked to comment on the benefits of mentoring for them as new principals, they went on to say that it

"reduced feelings of isolation, stress and frustration/therapeutic benefits . Increased confidence, reflectiveness and self-esteem and created a safe place to talk about teaching challenges."

"gave me the opportunity to reflect on the new role, and accelerated rate of learning. It also benefitted my own professional development since I am able to share common experiences."

"improved my personal skills, including communication skills and improved technical expertise and problem analysis and to meet the changing needs of teachers and encouraged collegiality."

"added value to my insights into current practice, and a greater awareness of different approaches to headship"

"gave support to me as the new principal to act as a catalyst for improving professional culture, teaching and learning."

Comments on the value of mentoring in our ever changing educational system

Can give stability to the changing scenario, since it brings trust, confidence and restores the way one looks at things."

"A tool to ease resistance to change and new ideas as it leads to empowerment as an individual and benefits the organization."

"Makes the organization self-reliant and teachers are able to face all challenges that they encounter at the workplace".

“ Improves staff interpersonal relations, where teachers will view each other as true colleagues they can lean on.”

“ Assists both learners and teachers in career-pathing and educators to become reflective practitioners.”

“ It could help to promote succession planning and through distributed leadership heads can increase levels of effectiveness and power in the school system.”

Having spoken to a few Principals in a district in Boston, United States of America, I learnt that one would qualify to be a mentor after 3 years experience as a teacher. Further, time is allocated to perform this vital role function. I believe that any form of recognition or acknowledgement (remuneration) can further add value to a structured mentoring programme.

Comments on the role /value of communication in mentoring ...

As with any communication, face-to-face is best, telephone is good, written or electronic delivery your third choice.”

“Talking to people is time consuming but a worthwhile investment, particularly at the beginning when you are establishing a relationship. Real communication is two-way.”

“ You will need to be available to participants and willing to listen and respond constructively to any concerns or issues that they raise.”

“To keep people actively involved schedule talks, discussion forums, workshops or webinars as part of your programme.”

“These may range from simple lunchroom presentations , self-organized social events, an on-line chat facility or blog to formal workshops.”

“People who feel that they are part of a programme are more likely to stay engaged.”

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Choice of mentoring programme.

Mentoring may be a one-to-one relationship, but in a mentoring programme there is the advantage of being part of a group. Mentees benefit by sharing experience with peers since human beings love to belong. When making our way in the world, we begin by being part of an immediate family, we to join a circle of friends, professional associations, social groups so as to feel wanted and this gives us a sense of community or belonging. Belonging to or being part of a group sustains us on our journey through life and career. A carefully constructed mentoring programme is a natural breeding ground for a nurturing network.

Ways of mentoring suggested by the principals include ...

- Informal conversations and these can happen by chance or by arrangement.
- Formal relationship in the form of a structured program.
- Peer mentoring and this could occur where two colleagues mentor each other.
- Reverse-mentoring, where executives are mentored by non-executives.
- Cascading mentoring occurs where each level of an organization mentors those below.
- Tiered Mentoring, where an individual transfer skills learnt through being mentored to their own mentoring relationship.
- Group mentoring, can be of an advantage since it creates the space for one mentor to meets with several mentees.
- Mentoring round-tables where peers interact in a group mentoring conversation.
- Mentoring circles in a facilitated group, where each person mentors one person and is mentored by another.
- Mastermind mentoring where experts mentor a novice.

Programme of action.

Once you have announced the programme, selected the participants, introduced them, trained and paired them, then people are excited, enthusiastic and keen to make it work. If the people’s commitment is not nurtured, the mentoring programme’s success may be limited.

A mentoring programme that does not achieve its’ full potential is a concern. But a failed mentoring programme, or one that “fizzles out” leaves staff cynical and management contemptuous of human resources strategies.

Conclusion :

Borrowing from the United States mission statement of “ **No Child Left Behind** ” – how about “**No Teacher or Head Teacher left behind.**” Every teacher needs to understand that : **If you are handed it , you can handle it.** You must believe in your ability to be a mentor and not regard this as the preserve or reserve of the SMT and the school head. Teacher leadership need not be determined or restricted by any formal or designated position in the school management.

We have to encourage and create capacity for facilitative leadership and not lose sight of the fact that in each teacher there is the inherent talent that needs to be unleashed. Professional career planning does help you develop in your professions and careers. It is therefore suggested that mentoring and being a mentor/mentee is key to the personal and professional growth of all teachers who teach in our classrooms.

Regardless of the purpose of mentoring, it represents the very best of human endeavours and must be viewed as a relationship for growth. Remember, the mentoring programme that you have invested in will not sustain itself. A planned programme of support and follow-up is essential. Providing ongoing communication, activities and a network will ensure a satisfactory return on investment for all concerned.

A mentoring programme must be based on the premise that stakeholders have a shared vision. That is to say the school principal, members of the SMT and the teachers, have a shared vision of what learners of a school should achieve and the role of each teacher in facilitating learner achievement.

The school’s Vision and Mission Statement should, therefore be a living document which informs what the teachers do in class and what the school management does in ensuring that effective teaching and learning takes place. The mentoring programme becomes a component in achieving these goals and can become part of the school’s overall development plan.

**Baholi khombani ndlela. Masisukume sakhe ngokuvuselele izikole zethu ! Unzima lo mthwalo.
(Leaders, point the way. Let,s get up and build by winning back our schools. The task is heavy
!)**

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