

## **TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS AND EXPERIENCES OF THEIR ROLE IN TRANSFORMING RURAL AND TOWNSHIP SCHOOLS: A DISTRIBUTED LEADERSHIP ANALYSIS**

**Patrick Mafora**

University of South Africa

Dr

E-mail: pmafora@unisa.ac.za

### **—Abstract —**

Recent studies in South Africa suggest that the social, material and curricular transformation espoused in post-apartheid legislation and education policies do not always translate into implementation in schools. This article reports on a qualitative multi case study on transformative leadership in township schools and a follow up study in rural schools. The article is restricted to three rural and three township secondary schools regarding the question: how do teachers perceive and experience their role in school transformation. Semi-structured focus group interviews and phenomenological steps were the basis for data collection and analysis, respectively. Findings suggests that while teachers query their limited involvement in school transformation initiatives, and question the concentration of decision-making power regarding transformation issues on school management, they are equally reluctant to take additional non-teaching responsibilities. Perceived contextual barriers to teacher involvement in rural and township school transformation are outlined.

**Key Words:** *distributed leadership, transformation, teachers, South Africa*

**JEL Classification:** 1210

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

School-level decentralisation is considered pivotal to the restructuring of the education system and the promotion of social change in South Africa (Department of Education, 2008). This is evinced in legislation that regulates education. The South African Schools Act, *No. 84 of 1996* (RSA, 1996a), requires that schools should establish their own democratic structures that are

entrusted with the governance and management functions. These are the School Governing Bodies (SGBs) and (SMTs), respectively. The Act mandates a departure from the pre-democracy era when management and governance decisions were either made unilaterally by school principals, or in conjunction with non-statutory Parent-Teacher Associations (PTAs) that later became Parent-Teacher-Student Associations (PTSAs). The latter could not alter the power relations in decision-making as they were dominated by school principals (Department of Education, 2004). In terms of the new legislative framework, teachers are represented in SGBs that oversee policy formulation, and the SMTs that are responsible for the day-to-day management of schools under the leadership of principals.

Representation in structures is in itself not considered an adequate indicator of transformation. Rather, it is argued that in addition to new structures, processes, technology or policy, successful change hinges on the engagement and participation of those affected by the change and new behaviour and values (Department of Education, 2008). This suggests that because they are at the coalface of policy making and implementation, teachers should participate actively in making transformation-related decisions in their schools. Extant literature, however, suggests that the participation of teachers and other stakeholders in school decision-making is not always open, free and uninhibited. Instead, it is associated with some systemic challenges and undemocratic practices (Mafora, 2012; Pendelbury & Enslin, 2004; Karlsson, 2002). Similarly, literature suggests that the envisaged transformation of the education system remains elusive. Some observations in this regard are that in spite of the extension of rights and opportunities to previously disadvantaged groups, the rate of social, political and educational change remains slow (Brown, 2006a); schools lack attributes of transformation like safety practices, improved learning and teaching facilities, inclusivity and the promotion of tolerance and diversity (Karlsson, 2005); and, the bureaucratic structure hinders taking rapid decisions that match the rapid changes that are introduced (Grobler, Bisschoff & Beeka, 2012). These limitations, which are viewed as a function of a disjuncture between reform conceptualisation and implementation, are attributable to poor change leadership (Department of Education). Against this backdrop, this article examines teachers' perceptions and experiences regarding their role in the transformation of South African rural secondary schools.

### **1.1. Context of the study**

The pre-democracy South African education system was structured and funded along race and ethnic lines. This resulted in the provision of education experiences characterised by differences in access, opportunities, infrastructure, facilities, and qualified teacher corps (Kivedo, 2007) for different race groups. Consistent with the apartheid policy of inequitable funding, township and rural schools, which served black learners only, received the lowest per learner funding whereas schools reserved for white learners received the highest proportion of funding (Fiske & Ladd, 2004). Consequently, material conditions in township and rural schools were inferior to those in schools designated for other race groups. Some of the challenges which these schools faced included: a significant number of under-qualified staff (Ngcobo & Tikly, 2008; Emerging Voices, 2005); limited or unavailable media collections, sports facilities and resources (Chisholm, 2004); increased poverty in the school community (Moloi, 2010; Brown, 2006b; Emerging Voices, 2005); the breakdown of teaching and learning; poor teacher and learner attendance and punctuality; acute shortage of textbooks and other learning materials; dilapidated buildings and grounds; broken or vandalised furniture and equipment; overcrowding; sexual abuse and violence (Ngcobo & Tikly, 2008; Chisholm, 2004; Emerging Voices, 2005).

It is against this background that one of the concerns of the South African government has been the improvement of conditions in public schools, with the view of eliminating inequalities (Karlsson, 2005), and enhancing democratic participation, human dignity, social justice and redress (Lemmer, Meier & van Wyk, 2006). To this end, efforts associated with the transformation agenda include reinstating the culture of teaching and learning in schools; a more equitable basis for school finance; efforts to rationalise and redeploy staff and curriculum reform (Ngcobo & Tikly, 2008). What is envisaged is a fundamental overhaul of the education system by eradicating apartheid ideas, values and practices and replacing them with a system characterised by democracy and human rights (Karlsson, 2005). However, almost two decades into a democratic dispensation and policies and legislation meant to transform the education system, quality differences in schools continue to reflect historical legacies and differences (van der Berg, 2008; Soudien, 2007; Chisholm, 2004). In rural and township secondary schools the culture of teaching and learning has not been fully rekindled (Jansen, 2013, Motala, 2011; Christie in Ngcobo & Tikly, 2008), and

the quality of education has not improved much (van der Berg, 2008; Department of Education, 2003). Instead, violence, sexism, rape and abuse, still remain issues in these schools (Motala, 2011; Mokonyane 2011; Chisholm 2004) and they are characterised by bureaucracy, ineffective leadership and management (Brown, 2006b; Grant, 2006), as well as poor state of infrastructure and limited resources (Motala, 2011; Moloi, 2010; Brown, 2006b).

I share Karlsson's (2005) contention that if apartheid-era inequalities continue to manifest in school environments, the transition from apartheid to democracy cannot be said to be completed in the education system. The transformation agenda in township and rural schools is thus still valid as it was at the inception of the new government. A question that begs an answer is: what roles do educational leaders at local level play in the transformation of these schools? This article is restricted to the examination of teachers' perceptions and experiences of their role in the transformation of these schools.

## **2. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK**

Teachers' perceptions and experiences regarding their role in transforming rural and township secondary schools are examined from a distributed leadership analytical framework. This lens is considered relevant because it coheres with the participatory and shared decision-making ethos mandated by the South African Schools Act (RSA, 1996a) and the prescription of leadership as one of the seven roles of teachers in terms of the Norms and Standards for Educators (RSA, 1996b).

Like many terms, distributed leadership is said to conjure up different meanings to different people (Harris & Spillane, 2008; Timperley, 2005). However, a common conception of the term, which is adopted in this article, is that it is a form of participatory democracy or democratic leadership (Kayrooz & Flemming, 2008; Spillane, 2005). This suggests that a key requirement in the practice of distributed leadership is the participation of different stakeholders within an organisational climate that is permeated by democratic values and principles. In this regard, Harris and Spillane (2008) aver that it focuses upon the interactions, not just the actions of those in leadership roles. The focus shifts from one leader and personal interests and goals to multiple leaders and how they go about pursuing common organisational goals. Power is not centred on one formal leader. Rather, it is shared among different people drawn from across the organisation and assigned leadership roles on the basis of merit and expertise in

relation to the tasks to be performed, not formal position (Harris & Spillane, 2008; Kayrooz & Flemming, 2008; Copland, 2003). In the context of schools distributed leadership involves principals and teachers, who are all leaders, working towards common goals in distinct but complementary ways (Spillane, 2005a; Andrews & Lewis, 2004). Sharing the leadership role with teachers does not mean principals relinquish their formal leadership positions. Similarly, it is not equivalent to routine delegation where individuals perform some defined roles separately (Harris & Spillane, 2008; Timperley, 2005).

Some reasons proffered in support of distributed leadership in schools are that: principals face increasing demands from stakeholders and do not cope with their assigned administrative tasks (Kayrooz & Flemming, 2008; Elmore, 2002); education increases in complexity and poses challenges that call for leadership with diverse expertise and flexibility (Harris & Spillane, 2008; Kayrooz & Flemming, 2008; Duignan & Bezzina, 2006); and that, for principle, efficiency and sustainability, transforming schools cannot be entrusted to one individual who may leave the organisation (Timperley, 2005; Copland, 2003). In schools distributed leadership is associated with improved organisational outcomes and student learning (Harris & Spillane, 2008; Silins & Mulford, 2002); positive comprehensive reforms (Timperley, 2005); and, enhanced change leadership and commitment (Duignan & Bezzina, 2006).

### **3. RESEARCH METHODS**

This article reports on a study which was conceived for township schools only, but was subsequently extended to rural schools. The study was a qualitative multi-site case study which examined transformative leadership and social justice from the participants' perspectives (McMillan & Schumacher, 2006). The underlying philosophy was phenomenology which emphasises that individual realities are constructed on the basis of individual experiences of phenomena (Polit & Beck, 2008). This article is restricted to perceptions and experiences of teachers with regard to their leadership role in transforming rural and township secondary schools.

The sample comprised of six secondary schools; three drawn from a township in Gauteng Province and three from a rural district in the North-West Province, respectively. Purposive sampling was followed to select the schools. All the schools were sampled because they are located in low socio-economic areas. The author assumed that the myriad of social problems faced by these

communities and their schools create expectations for change that might influence perceptions of transformation.

From each school two teachers who were SGB members; three who served in the SMT as Heads of Departments; and four teachers who did not occupy formal leadership positions were sampled. The use of three or more participants to describe a phenomenon is considered adequate to provide sufficient data variety with meaningful results (Giorgi, 2009). Except for SGB members, the selection of individual teachers was random and convenient. Only those available at the time of the scheduled interviews participated in the study.

Data were collected through homogenous semi-structured group interviews. The duration of interviews was about 90 minutes for each category of respondents. All interviews were audio-recorded and verbatim transcripts thereof were subsequently generated. Data analysis followed Amedeo Giorgi's general steps for conducting research and analysing data. These steps entail: 1) reading all the interview material to get a sense of the whole; 2) identifying commonalities within the descriptive data; 3) determining and describing the relevance of each meaning unit, and 4) articulating the experiences of the participants in a statement that is consistent with the interview material (Polit & Beck, 2008; Giorgi, 1995).

Designated officials in the two provincial departments of education and principals of sampled schools granted permission for the study prior to its commencement. Ethical clearance attesting to the soundness of methods and procedures was obtained from my university. Participation in the study was voluntary and participants were informed that they could withdraw from the study or decline to answer some questions if they considered it necessary to do so. The narratives were recorded with the express permission of participants who were free to give responses off-record if they deemed it necessary (Saunders, et al., 2000).

I adopted the following measures to enhance the accuracy and credibility of the findings (Conrad & Serlin, 2006; Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2000):

- Bracketing to avoid contaminating data with personal biases and preconceived ideas or prejudice;
- The use of extant literature to ground the case study protocol and interview schedule; and
- Member checking.

### **3. DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS**

The analysis of respondents' narratives suggests that teachers have concerns about school transformation that transcend policy-prescribed structures. Their responses focused on values, processes and relationships. There were no major differences between the perceptions of township and rural secondary school teachers. Emergent themes which cohere with the broad transformation priorities identified in the Reviews of National Policies for Education-South Africa (Department of Education, 2008), are discussed next.

#### **3.1 Transformation conception and priorities**

There was consensus among respondents that township and rural schools need to be transformed. There was, however, no common agreement regarding what constitutes transformation, issues to be prioritised and, the role of teachers in the transformation process. These differences were manifest along the dimension of rank not the locale of schools. The majority of respondents who were entry-level teachers held similar and more radical views respondents who were HODs. The former conceived of transformation as the overhaul of all school structures, their processes and social relationships. Their majority identified school leadership and the culture of teaching and learning as two key transformation priorities. They held the view that their schools were held back by SMTs and SGBs who benefited from existing arrangements and saw no need for change. Two responses that captured this sentiment were:

*Yes, we have SGBs and SMTs who think their role is to keep things as they are at all costs. They feel threatened when one suggests changes because they know change means how they lead should also change or they should be changed...*

*We cannot speak about transformation without first changing what goes on in the School Governing Body and the SMT. They are dinosaurs living at a wrong time and pulling everyone backwards. All what our SGB decides is fund-raising and suspending learners.*

Consistent with Wright's (2008) findings, the majority of respondents who are entry-level teachers held the view that schools were not transforming because formal school leaders, notably principals, resisted change. They conceded that some teachers were, at times, assigned oversight of some tasks in projects and

committees. They, however, argued that such assignments were merely an extension of the power and authority of those in formal leadership positions as they allowed no exercise of discretion, but had to be executed as prescribed or deviations could be followed by sanctions. Without shared decisions regarding such assignments, their execution does not constitute distributed leadership (Spillane, 2005; Timperley, 2005). These respondents also queried that they were barred from making unsolicited suggestions to change the school's traditions and culture, even when they ceased to be relevant or were counterproductive. None of the respondents could, however, cite an incident that they knew of where change initiatives or deviations from instructions elicited sanctions. This suggests that teachers' fear of persecution could be baseless. It is, nevertheless, a barrier to them initiating changes, and an excuse for not taking responsibility for the lack of transformation in their schools. A minority of respondents held a disturbing view that it was not their problem whether schools were transforming or not, as their responsibility was to teach. They viewed transformation as the responsibility of the Education Department and the SMT. Such a stance is at odds with distributed leadership which requires that all parties should lead and be accountable.

The majority HODs maintained that their schools were transforming. In the main, their view was that transformation entailed improving on what was available, not a total overhaul of systems and processes. They identified learner achievement, infrastructure and learning-teaching resources as transformation priorities that they actively pursued. They maintained that transformation was held back by lack of teacher commitment and a highly unionised environment which made it difficult for them as managers to hold teachers accountable for their actions. Although they did not consider school management to be a transformation priority, the irony was that some of them viewed principals' autocratic leadership style as a barrier to transformation. It was also interesting that they did not view themselves as barriers to transformation, but were perceived in that way by entry-level teachers. It was only in two schools, one rural and the other urban, that the leadership style of principals was viewed by the majority of HODs as democratic and enabling transformation.

Like entry-level teachers, HODs also lamented the fact that they were barred from taking initiative and introducing changes, even on matters that only affected their departments. Common concerns expressed in this regard related to work allocation, procurement of learning-teaching resources, and teacher deployment. They maintained that their principals did not consult them when



making redeployment decisions that affected teachers who offered subjects in their departments, but based their unilateral decisions on non-curricula considerations. Schools had reportedly lost committed teachers due to this practice. The leadership practice in this case is, incorrectly, what is done *to*, instead of what is done *with* fellow-leaders. It reflects a lack of the requisite collaboration and interdependence (Timperley, 2005; Spillane, 2005a).

In response to the question regarding how they included teachers in transformation initiatives in their departments, all respondents referred to the routine delegation of teachers to execute administrative tasks or to participate in committee activities. None referred to activities that gave the delegated teachers power to change anything. An informative response in this regard was:

*Teachers in my department know that they all share responsibilities. One teacher is responsible for setting cycle tests; one for controlling learner workbooks, another one attends subject phase meetings and so forth. I coordinate their work and account to the principal for the decisions I make. If they make mistakes I am to blame, so I make sure they do the right thing.*

A common view held by the majority of respondents across the ranks, was that the number of women in SMTs and SGBs was increasing. There was, however, disagreement regarding the value-add of this development. The majority pointed out that it was evidence of the successful implementation of the principle of equity. The minority view was that it was just the abuse of power by members of the dominant teacher union, the South African Democratic Teachers' Union (SADTU). While the majority could not advance reasons for their stance beyond saying it advanced gender equity, the minority pointed out that those women who were promoted to SMT ranks were promoted for wrong reasons including their teacher union activism, sexual relations with union leaders and, payment of bribes. Therefore, such appointments were in themselves, neither viewed as part of the transformation of the education system, nor were the appointees viewed as contributing to the transformation of their schools. One female respondent who was not a SADTU member remarked thus:

*It is a good thing that more women should be managers too. But we all know how they go up there [it] is just that we cannot say it in public. Yes, they do all sorts of things bribes, affairs, night union meetings and the favours. But what do they do once they are appointed, the union comes first and the cycle of night meetings and favours goes on and on.*

*Meanwhile, there is no improvement in schools. Learners fail, buildings fall apart, and there are no resources...*

The analysis of data points to respondents' different understanding of what should constitute the transformation of their schools given their unique context, and what role they can play to advance the transformation agenda. Without a common understanding of transformation and associated shared goals and values the transformation of township and rural schools will remain a challenge.

### **3.2 School governance and management**

The majority of respondents expressed the view that the inclusion of teachers in SGBs was indicative of a commitment of the Department of Education to transformation. They, however, pointed out that the composition and power relations within SGBs made it difficult for these structures to advance transformation in schools. All respondents who were SGB members decried the fact that teachers were ineffective in SGBs. They expressed a concern that they could not influence policy decisions because they were in the minority, and that parents who were in the majority were easily manipulated by principals. They claimed they were marginalized by both parents and the principals if they were perceived as questioning the principals' vision. This coheres with Wright's (2008) finding that it is only those who are perceived as supportive to the principal's vision who are invited to participate in formal leadership. Respondents' view was that this made it difficult for them to question principals' abuse of power within SGBs. They could also not convince parents that school principals were accountable to the SGB, not vice versa. A common view was that their membership of SGBs did not help advance transformation in the school or transform the SGB itself. An informative response in this regard was:

*Being in the SGB is like being between a rock and some hard surface. Teachers think you are not effective in representing their interests to parents, some parents and the principal think you want to take control of the school from the principal when you ask questions or disagree on things. In the end, you just sit there and cannot make a difference. You become guilty by association to chauvinism, sexism, manipulation, tribalism and so forth. Because you are in the SGB teachers blame you when things don't work...*

The majority of these respondents also conceded that they were not completely silenced in SGBs. However, their reservations stemmed from having their

opinions sought only with regard to those issues that they viewed as non-critical, or which did not threaten the power-base of principals. They indicated that they were also assigned the leadership of *ad hoc* SGB committees. Such committees would invariably have no original decision-making authority but merely implemented SGB resolutions. In their opinion, these committees did not deal with any transformation issues but sought to maintain the status quo.

Heads of Departments had a slightly different view. Their majority perceived SGBs as focused on transforming schools. However, their responses suggested that by transformation they meant ordinary school improvement. They attributed the failure of SGBs to achieve their goals to the fact that parents did not understand their roles and responsibilities, and were not assisted by teachers or principals. Instead, parents were caught up in the power struggles between principals and teachers and took the principals' sides, because they think it is in the best interest of their children to do so. It is ironic that while some of the HODs did not approve of the interference of parents in the day to day management of schools, they considered it justifiable for the decision-making power of teachers in SGBs to be curtailed because they claimed it was abused. They could, however, only cite the influence of teacher union in teacher appointments to substantiate their claims. A plausible explanation for this claim is that it could be stemming from teacher union rivalry. It can however not be dismissed as it suggests different and oppositional perceptions of what should be transformed. Interestingly, the HOD's were unanimous that teachers should contribute to decision-making in their respective subjects. A comment from one HOD in this regard was:

*The problem that we have in our SGB is that teachers want to take over from parents, like they want to do with the running of the school. Logically, parents must resist this and make their own decisions about their own children. These teachers must also make policies at their children's schools where they are parents. Here they can decide with us about their subjects and their work.*

As with the SGBs, the majority of HODs expressed the view that SMTs were transformed and leading transformation in schools. They cited the inclusion of more women in SMTs, increased consultation and teachers' continuing professional development, and involvement in committees as indicative of their contribution to transformation. They, however, expressed concern that some teachers were reluctant to serve in departmental committees and that some

decisions were made exclusively by the principals and passed down for implementation as SMT decision. Although the principal still retains the authority to make certain, this should not be through deception as it may engender perceptions of manipulation and resistance. In this regard Wright (2008) posits that performance is negatively affected when people feel alienated and powerless. Instead of monopolising decision-making those perceived as inexperienced or not ready to be involved in decision-making should be mentored (Kayrooz & Flemming, 2008) or be accommodated in advice networks (Spillane, 2005b).

Consistent with the notion that schools do not observe their visions in practice (Timperley, 2005), the majority of entry-level teachers highlighted the paradox that while democracy is the espoused philosophy of their schools, interpersonal relationships were characterised by practices that were undemocratic, and which bordered on the illegal. Respondents' narratives suggest that unequal power relations are manifest in schools. Teachers are divided into perpetrators and victims along a number of dimensions that include gender, age, and language group. In the context of these divisions, teachers were reportedly only willing to participate in school team initiatives if they had positive relationships with other team members as defined in terms of these dimensions. Timperley (2005) found that informal leaders tend to be openly disregarded and disrespected. Similarly, in the sampled schools some male teachers were reportedly still uncomfortable with being led by women, especially if they were also younger. These male teachers were reported to make subtle sexist remarks, did not follow instructions, or became outright bullies when they were led by women. Perceptions and experiences of victimhood in turn engender withdrawal from, and reluctance to be collegial with those perceived as discriminative, sexist, or bullies. The majority of respondents expressed the view that SMTs were not effective in eliminating these undemocratic and regressive practices, and uniting teachers around common transformation goals. This lends credence to the view that schools may not succeed in restructuring themselves without the support of other stakeholders (Moyo, 2005).

Concerns with the effectiveness of SMTs as vehicles for school transformation were raised by the majority of respondents, including the HODs. While conceding that SMTs were not effective in introducing school level transformation, the latter projected blame for this shortcoming at the principals, not on their own failure to act appropriately in their capacity as SMT members. In essence, they suggested that they did not participate in decision-making freely,

openly and as equals. They maintained that official rank and other social considerations like gender, age, period of service at the school and staff cliques were considerations that were subtly used to assign value to one's contribution in deliberations. It was within this context that the majority of these SMT members were critical about their own SMTs' failures. Recurring examples which they cited to support the claim that SMTs were failing to transform schools included: failure to curb the use of corporal punishment and the general abuse of learners by teachers; unfair and inequitable work allocation; failure to hold all teachers accountable; and, irregularities in the procurement of goods and services for day-to-day operations. An insightful cue to teacher despondency was this HOD's comment:

*Yes we decide as a team, because what people are told is that the SMT decided this or that. Behind the scenes it is different. From the onset it is clear what the principal wants and who supports him. So the meeting is for getting more support, which we always give, even if we do not really agree. If you disagree, people start asking who you think you are and you will be called names. Why should one make enemies and block your way when you can just smile and thrive?*

### **3.3 Culture of teaching and learning**

All respondents emphasised the significance of transforming the culture of teaching and learning in their schools. They described their schools as characterised by incidents of unpunished learner misconduct, unsatisfactory learner achievement and, increasing substance abuse by learners. They, however, held different views regarding levels of teacher morale and commitment in the execution of their teaching responsibilities. The majority claimed that teachers were highly committed but were hampered in their efforts by work overload which was mainly administrative or what they called "too much paper work". Reportedly, all the surveyed schools had improvement plans that focused on teaching and learning. No respondent could, however, describe what their school plan entailed or their individual initiatives taken in pursuance of the improvement goals. Their narratives suggested that, in the main, they were involved in planning school-wide projects like Saturday and school holiday classes. However, only a minority of respondents reported taking steps to provide support to at-risk learners.

Although only a minority view, some teachers were also reported to be unprofessional and lackadaisical in approaching their teaching responsibilities. It was reportedly common for teachers not to attend to their scheduled classes while chatting in the staff room; to assign unscheduled classwork as an excuse not to offer lessons; or, to while away time chatting to learners instead of teaching. Some teachers did not assess students' tasks and give feedback timeously. What is worrisome is that no respondent indicated ever taking the initiative to report such conduct or take some form of action that could help address the problem.

The majority of respondents indicated that very few learners in their schools completed their homework. Those who did rarely submitted high quality work, even when they had relevant material. The respondents indicated that they never prescribed work that required the use of additional resources like the internet because their experience was that it discourages learners from attempting the assigned task. Almost all respondents attributed learners' indifference to their work to the absence of effective alternatives to corporal punishment. They pointed out that alternative forms of punishment like detention and additional work were punitive to the teacher who had to stay behind or assess the additional work they have assigned. Hence they avoid such forms of punishment but resort to corporal punishment as a last resort. This amounts to a cancellation of the gains of educational transformation. The majority of respondents, especially those in rural schools, indicated that they found it difficult to get parents involved in the learning activities of their children. Some of these learners either live by themselves without parents or guardians or the latter are unable to supervise school tasks because of their low literacy level. Although all respondents expressed a concern, none considered it their responsibility to assist parents to get involved. The chances of improving learner outcomes will remain slim if teachers do not take the initiative to bridge the school-home divide.

Respondents' narratives suggest that the majority do not perceive themselves as effective in helping to transform the culture of teaching and learning. They believe they spend too much time doing administrative work and completing forms associated with implementing the new curriculum. They also invariably revert to their tried and tested teaching methods instead of implementing teaching methods and strategies suggested at workshops meant to facilitate the implementation of curricula reforms.

#### **4. CONCLUSION**

This article examined how teachers perceive their role in transforming rural and township schools from a distributed leadership perspective. Findings points to respondents having different conceptions of what constitutes transformation and what role they should play in the transformation process. In the main, respondents expressed the interest to participate in the transformation of their schools but they feel they are marginalised from deciding on some pertinent transformation issues. This engenders indifference and reluctance to participate in other issues. Respondents do not view their participation as effective. It is unacceptable that each level in the school management hierarchy perceives the levels above as barriers to their effectiveness. This points to a lack of accountability, and it explains why in the face of indisputable evidence that the transformation of rural and township schools is very limited and slow, no effective measures are implemented at school level to transform the system. Transformation remains a national policy imperative that is not given practical effect in schools in relation to their unique contexts. Practices that fall within the purview of educational transformation objectives continue unchanged because they have become ingrained in the school culture. This culture is not transformed because people think it is correct and defensible. Some incorrectly think it is not their responsibility to initiate changes, while others are reluctant to do so because of fear of punitive consequences.

The findings in this study confirm the view that schools will be unable to transform themselves without intervention from external stakeholders. Flowing from in-depth capacity building initiatives, schools should be mandated to draft transformation charters that are given effect through action plans. The latter should be aligned to key transformation imperatives and seek participation from across the teaching ranks in schools. Progress on the attainment of targets could be infused into the Integrated Quality Management System, which has Whole School Evaluation and Developmental Appraisal components. National policies in themselves cannot transform township and rural schools in South Africa without individual teachers' commitment to transformation and accountability for what happens in their schools. They should take charge irrespective of their rank.

## REFERENCES

- Andrews, D., & Lewis, M. 2004. Building Sustainable Futures: Emerging Understandings of the Significant Contribution of the Professional Learning Community. *Improving Schools*, 7(2), 129-150.
- Brown, K. 2006a. "New" Educational Injustice in the "New" South Africa. A Call for Justice in the Form of Vertical Equity". *Journal of Educational Administration*, 44,(5), pp.509-519.
- Brown, K (2006b), "Leadership for Social Justice and Equity: Weaving a Transformative Framework and Pedagogy", *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 40(1), pp.79-110.
- Conrad, C.F., & Serlin, R.C (2006), *The SAGE Handbook for Research in Education: Engaging Ideas and Enriching Enquiry*. Thousand Oaks: SAGE.
- Copland, M.A. (2003), "Leadership of Inquiry: Building and Sustaining Capacity for School Improvement", *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, 25(4), pp. 375-395.
- Chisholm, L. (2004), "The Quality of Primary Education in South Africa". *Background Paper-Prepared for UNESCO Education for All Global Monitoring Report*, 13 April 2004.
- Department of Education (2003), "Review of the Financing, Resourcing and Costs of Education in Public Schools". Pretoria: Government Printers.
- Department of Education (2004), "Review of School Governance in South African Public Schools". *Report of the Ministerial Review Committee*. Pretoria: Department of Education.
- Department of Education (2008), "Reviews of National Policies for Education: South Africa, Publication 18/09/2008". OECD.
- Duignan, P., & Bezzina, M (2006), "Distributed Leadership: The Theory and the Practice". *Paper presented at the CCEAM Annual Conference. Lefkosia, Cyprus*, 12-17 October, 2006.
- Fiske, E.B., & Ladd, H (2004), "Elusive Equity: Education Reform in Post-Apartheid South Africa". Brookings Institute Press.
- Elmore, R.F (2002), "Bridging the Gap Between Standards and Achievement". Cambridge, MA: Albert Shanker Institute.
- Emerging Voices (2005), "A Report on Education in South African Rural Communities". Cape Town. HSRC Press.
- Giorgi, A (2009), "The Descriptive Phenomenological Approach in Psychology: A Modified Husserlian Approach". Pittsburgh, PA: Duquesne University Press.



- Giorgi, A (1995), "Saybrook Institute Course Guide: Introduction to the Theory and Practice of the Descriptive Phenomenological Method". San Francisco: Saybrook Institute.
- Grant, C (2006), "Emerging Voices on Teacher Leadership". *Educational Management, Administration and Leadership*, 34, pp. 551-532.
- Grobler, B., Bischoff, T., & Beeka, A (2012), "Changing Perceptions of Teachers Regarding the Importance and Competence of their Principals as leaders". *South African Journal of Education*, 32(1), pp. 40-45.
- Harris, A., & Spillane, J.P (2008), "Distributed Leadership Through the Looking Glass". *Management in Education*, 22(1), pp. 31-34.
- Jansen, J (2013), "Our matric Results and Schooling: Two Ways of Doing the Maths. *Sunday Times Review*, 2013, January 06.
- Karlsson, J (2005), "Transformation in the School Environment – An Analysis of Photographs from One Rural Secondary School". Johannesburg: CEPD.
- Karlsson, J (2002), "The Role of Democratic Governing Bodies in South African Schools". *Comparative Education*, 22, pp. 326-331.
- Kayrooz, C. & Flemming, M.J (2008), "Distributed Leadership: Leadership in Context". *Paper Presented at the UNESCO-APEID International Conference: Quality Innovations for Teaching and Learning*. 08-08 December, 2008. Bangkok, Thailand.
- Kivedo, C (2006), "A Psycho-Educational Investigation into the State of Multicultural Education and the Design of a Multicultural Framework for Northern Cape Schools". Unpublished PhD Thesis. Bloemfontein: University of the Free State.
- Lemmer, E.M., Meier, C., & van Wyk, N (2006), "Multicultural Education: An Educator's Manual". Pretoria: Van Schaik Publishers.
- Mafora, P (2012), "Shared Decision Making in School Governance: A Case Study of Two Soweto Secondary Schools". *The International Journal of Learning*, 18 (6), pp. 97-107.
- McMillan, J.H., & Schumacher, S.S (2006), "Research in Education: Evidence-based Inquiry", (6<sup>th</sup> ed.). Boston: Pearson.
- Mokonyane, N (2011), Address by the Premier, at the Soweto Education Summit, 09 April 2011, Johannesburg. <http://www.polity.org.za/article/gp- mokonyane> [Accessed 3.3. 2013].
- Moloi, K.C (2010), "How Can Schools Build Learning Organisations in Difficult Education Context?" *South African Journal of Education*, 30, pp. 621-633.

- Motala, S (2011), "The Great Classroom Debate". *The Star*, 2011, December 13.
- Moyo, G (2005), "Change Agents in the South African Schooling System: Challenges and Prospects". Johannesburg: CEPD.
- Ngcobo, T. & Tikly, L (2008), "Key Dimensions of Effective Leadership for Change: A Focus on Township and Rural Schools in South Africa". *Paper presented to the CCEAM Conference, Think Globally Act Locally: A Challenge to Education Leaders*. 8–12 September 2008, ICC Durban.
- Pendelbury, S., & Enslin, P (2004), "Social Justice and Inclusion in Education and Politics: The South African Case". *Journal of Education*, 34, pp. 31-50.
- Polit, D.F., & Beck, C.T (2008), "Nursing Research: Generating and Assessing Evidence for Nursing Practice", (8<sup>th</sup> ed.). Philadelphia, PA: Lippincott Williams & Wilkins.
- Republic of South Africa. (1996a). "South African Schools Act No. 84, 1996". Pretoria. Government Printers.
- Republic of South Africa. (1996b), "National Education Policy Act No. 27, 1996". Pretoria: Government Printers.
- Saunders, M., Lewis, P., & Thornhill, A (2000), "Research for Business Students, (2<sup>nd</sup> ed)". Essex: Pearson Education Limited.
- Silins, H., & Mulford, B (2002). Schools as Learning Organisations: The Case for System, Teacher and Student Learning. *Journal of Educational Administration*, 40(5), pp. 425-446.
- Soudien, C (2007), The "A" factor: Coming to Terms with the Question of Legacy in South African Education. *The International Journal of Educational Development*, 27, pp. 182-193.
- Spillane, J.P (2005a), "Distributed Leadership". *The Educational Forum*, 69(2), pp.143-150.
- Spillane, J.P (2005b), "Primary school leadership practice: how the subject matters". *School Leadership and Management*, 25(4), pp. 383-397.
- Timperley, H (2005), "Distributed Leadership: Developing Theory from Practice". *Journal of Curriculum Studies*, 37(4), pp. 395-420.
- Van der Berg, S (2008), "How Effective are Poor Schools? Poverty and Educational Outcomes in South Africa". CeGE Discussion Paper, No. 69 <http://hdl.handle.net/10419/32027> [Accessed 1.9.2013].
- Wright, L.L (2008), "Merits and Limitations of Leadership: Experiences and Understandings of school principals". *Canadian Journal of Educational Administration and Policy*, Issue 69, February 7, 2008.