

Landscapes of Leadership in South African Schools: Mapping the Changes

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Pam Christie

Abstract

This article argues that the work of school principals in South Africa is shaped by two major sets of constructs or 'landscapes': the literature on leadership and management which provides particular constructions of the field and its changes; and the terrain of new policy frameworks adopted after apartheid to transform the education system. In terms of the former, the influence of international debates may be seen in South Africa, but these are situated adaptations rather than simple reflections. In terms of the latter, the new policies are underpinned by a tangled network of regulations on governance, labour relations and performance management, which bring complexity to the task of running schools. In addition, the enormous inequalities that continue to exist between schools mean that the work of principals is very different in different contexts. The article argues that a mismatch between the ideal and the actual may impede, rather than assist, attempts to improve schools. In particular, constructions of principals' work in discourses that conflate leadership and management, that over-generalize, and that do not engage seriously with local conditions and the day-to-day experiences of principals, are likely to provide distorted depictions of principals' work. In this context, a better understanding of the landscapes of leadership is a necessary starting point for change.

Keywords

educational change, leadership, principals, school-based environment

Introduction

In studying school leadership in South Africa in the post-apartheid period, two major 'landscapes' need to be considered: first, the research and theory on school management and leadership that has burgeoned in western countries such as the UK, USA and Australia, and has informed leadership studies in South Africa; and second, the complex framework of post-apartheid policies introduced to reform the schooling system, including its leadership, management and governance. Across and

Corresponding author:

Pam Christie, Faculty of Education, University of Canberra, ACT, 2601, Australia
Email: pam.christie@canberra.edu.au

between these two landscapes, school leadership practices take locally specific forms. As I argue in this article, these are not simple replicas of universal constructs, though they may appear to be so at first sight.

I use the term 'landscape' loosely from the work of Arjun Appadurai (1996: 33), who sees in the suffix '-scapes' the possibility of 'fluid, irregular shapes' that 'are not objectively given relations that look the same from every angle of vision but, rather, . . . are deeply perspectival constructs, inflected by the historical, linguistic and political situatedness of different sorts of actors'. Applied to studies of school leadership, the notion of landscapes calls for fluid and situated approaches rather than static and generic ones. It suggests that instead of singular or monolithic constructs, it may be more useful to seek multiple, perspectival understandings.

This article sets out to map the changing landscapes of school leadership in South Africa. The article begins with a brief conceptual clarification of the terms 'leadership', 'management' and 'principalship' as a basis for considering their fluid and hybrid forms. It then sketches a number of key themes on the international landscape of leadership that are also evident in South African studies; and it explores the effects of the changed policy framework in South Africa on school leadership. I argue that different expectations of school leadership together with a new policy framework have radically changed the work of the school principal. An unanticipated—and largely unacknowledged—consequence is that the complexity of this may have contradictory effects that impede, rather than assist, school improvement in South Africa.

Leadership, Management and Headship: a Hybrid Cluster of Concepts

The concepts of leadership, management and headship (or principalship, in South Africa) are often used interchangeably in the context of schooling (Bush, 2008; Christie and Lingard, 2001; Leithwood et al., 2002; Jossey-Bass, 2000; MacBeath, 1998). In probing the meanings of these concepts it is useful to distinguish between them while at the same time acknowledging their interrelationships. This conceptual mapping is not intended to fix the meanings of these terms, but rather to provide a basis for exploring their different inflections and contextual variations.

Leadership, I suggest, may be understood as a relationship of influence directed towards goals or outcomes, whether formal or informal (Bennis, 1991; Burns, 1978; Kotter, 1996; Yukl, 1998). Though leadership is often framed in terms of individual qualities, it may more usefully be framed in terms of a social relationship of power whereby some are able to influence others. In Weber's classic approach, the authority of the leader may be based in tradition, charisma and/or legal rational government. Whatever its basis, leadership is characterized by influence and consent rather than coercion. Nonetheless, as an exercise of power, it necessarily entails ethical considerations (Bottery, 1992; Grace, 1995). Since it is directed towards achieving goals, leadership is often associated with vision and values.

These points do not imply that leadership is necessarily moral (people may be 'led astray'), or effective (leaders may 'take people nowhere'), or even well done (the notion of 'bad leadership' is not a contradiction in terms). In fact, while leadership is often a valorized concept associated with success rather than mediocrity or failure, there certainly exist examples of leaders as controlling individuals, ineptly dealing with complex contexts, and winning support on the basis of shallow or immoral visions of a desired future (Christie and Limerick, 2004; Clements and Washbush, 1999; Krantz and Gilmore, 1990).

Defined as the exercise of influence, leadership (unlike management) can take place outside of formal organizations as well as inside them, and it can be exercised at most levels in organizations and in most activities. This is important, because it means that leadership in schools is not the preserve of any position, and can be found and built throughout the school. Indeed it is possible for leadership to operate from the centre rather than the top (Newmann and Associates, 1996), and to be stretched and dispersed across people and functions (Spillane and Hartley, 2007). However, this is not to deny the agency of individuals in leadership, or to imply that leadership in schools is amorously empty of specific content—a point I return to later.

Management, in contrast to leadership, is an organizational concept: it relates to structures and processes by which organizations meet their goals and central purposes (Buchanan and Huczynski, 1997). Arguably, it is more likely to be tied to formal positions than to persons. There is ample research in South Africa to suggest that good management is essential for the functioning of schools (Christie, 1998, 2001; Fleisch and Christie, 2004; Roberts and Roach, 2006; Taylor, 2007). This research confirms that if schools are not competently managed, the primary task and central purpose of the school—teaching and learning—is likely to suffer.

Headship (or principalship), like management, is an organizational concept. It designates a structural position which carries with it responsibilities and accountabilities. Whereas the power of leadership is expressed through influence, the power of headship may legitimately extend beyond consent and influence to compulsion (though not to the use of force which, in Weberian analysis, is the legal prerogative of the state). Those who are in structural positions within an organization, as managers and heads/principals, are bound by the goals and primary tasks of the organization, and their successes and failures are judged in terms of these. They are officially accountable for the operations and outcomes of the organization—in this case, schools. The principal represents the school formally, and it is principals who are also usually responsible for symbolic roles such as ceremonies and assemblies.

Having distinguished between the concepts of leadership, management and headship, I would argue that ideally, the three should come together in schools. Ideally, schools should be replete with good leadership, at all levels; they should be well managed in unobtrusive ways; and principals should integrate the functions of leadership and management and possess skills in both. Leadership should be dispersed throughout the school; management activities should be delegated with proper resources and accountabilities; and heads should integrate vision and values with the structures and processes by which the school realizes these. Clearly, however, this is an idealized picture—a school of our dreams, rather than our experience (to draw an analogy from the sociologist Zygmunt Bauman [2001]). Perhaps the first step in understanding the complexity of leadership in schools in current times is to recognize how hard it is to integrate these three dimensions in the practices of running schools, to bring a coherence that links substance to process and deeper values to daily tasks.

For it is in the daily practices of running schools that the situatedness of concepts such as leadership becomes immediately apparent. School leadership is always embedded in broader social relationships and cultural understandings; it embodies race and gender in different ways; it inevitably involves normative judgements of right and wrong, good and bad; it involves emotional engagement and unconscious dynamics as well as rational and cognitive activities; and it is not experienced in the same way by the different actors it brings together. Discourses of leadership both define and restrict who may exercise leadership, what actions count as legitimate and sensible, and where the limits of acceptability may be drawn. Tracing these different inflections and their contextually specific forms in South Africa is one of the purposes of this article.

On the basis of these points of clarification, I turn now to look briefly at the landscape of leadership studies and several recent trends in international and South African debates.

The Landscape of Theory and Research in Studies of School Leadership

Recent studies of school leadership in South Africa have tended to draw, understandably enough, on the research and theory that has burgeoned in the USA, UK and Australia in recent decades. At a time of globalization and policy borrowing, this is not surprising. Three debates have been significant in shaping this broad landscape in recent decades: uncertainty about the nature of the field; discursive shifts; and the move towards school based management.

Uncertainty About the Field

In looking across the literature on school administration, management and leadership, one of the striking features is a preoccupation with the nature of the field and its knowledge basis. Peter Ribbins (2007), for example, notes the large number of special editions of journals in the UK and Australia that have reflected on the state of educational administration. He highlights a number of questions that have troubled theorists and researchers on this terrain. Is it to be understood as a discipline, a field of knowledge, a domain of teaching and learning, a set of practices? What counts as knowledge and how is it produced? Is research sufficiently related to theory or is it largely a technical activity? Looking across work in the UK and Australia, Ribbins identifies two separate epistemic communities: first, policy studies; and, second, leadership, administration and management studies. Whereas, in his view, the latter has overemphasized ‘how to do’ and ‘what works’, the former has overemphasized ‘what should be done’ and ‘how far is this being achieved’. This epistemic split, he argues, is to the detriment of both communities of scholarship.

It is interesting to note that Ribbins airs these and other concerns in his contribution to a themed edition of the *South African Journal of Education* looking at educational leadership in South Africa.

There can be no doubt that the landscape of leadership, management and administration is methodologically diverse and its central concepts by no means settled. Heck and Hallinger (2005), both of whom have strong publication records in the field, are not complimentary about its state. In their review of the field of educational leadership and management, they (2005: 229) conclude that ‘there is less agreement about the significant problems that scholars should address than in past years’, that the field lacks methodological and scholarly criteria for judgments of value, and that there is too little sustained and rigorous empirical research in the field. Interestingly, Alma Harris (2007: 107), in identifying the same ‘crisis’, frames this as an opportunity rather than a threat, celebrating the chance to move away from ‘the traditional model of leadership that simply does not match the organizational complexity of twenty-first-century schooling’. This resonates with the views of scholars such as Pat Thomson (2000) and Helen Gunter (2001) who, in different ways, have urged the field to be more creative and diverse, as well as Jill Blackmore (1999) whose work on gender has posed fundamental challenges to established ‘malestream’ assumptions in leadership and administration.

Uncertainty about the parameters of the field, and in particular what counts as good research within it, suggests that the proliferation of studies in recent years does not necessarily come with

a consolidation of research knowledge or good practice. This applies in South Africa as well as the UK and USA.

Reviewing the existing research on management and leadership in South Africa, Tony Bush and colleagues (2006) argued that most of it was not conceptually rich, and noted the need for a theory of research relevant to the South African context. Specifically, Bush et al. (2006: 11) noted the limitations with regard to the management of teaching and learning, stating that 'there are not accounts of how school principals, and other school managers, exercise 'instructional leadership' in their schools and seek to develop an effective culture of teaching and learning'. Similarly, when surveying the literature for a large-scale (but geographically limited) study of instructional leadership in South Africa in 2008, Ursula Hoadley and Catherine Ward (2008: 11) comment that 'the South African leadership research base is very limited'. They note that studies on training and development for school managers 'dominate the field', and that much of the research that exists focuses on policy rather than what principals actually do.

To sum up, it is noteworthy that in South Africa as elsewhere, scholars in the field are not fully confident that the existing research base does justice to the nature of the field and the complexity of its central concepts, particularly in times of change.

Shifting Discourses

A second theme that can be traced across the landscape of this area of work in the USA, UK and Australian literature is a shift in interest from 'administration' to 'management' to 'leadership'. In part, there are geographical differences: whereas 'administration' was the preferred term in the USA from the 1950s onwards (and was the term used in pre-1994 South Africa), 'management' was favoured in the UK (with principals being designated 'headteachers' until the 1970s). Bush (2008) argues that the term 'management' in UK research in the 1970s and 1980s indicated the prevalence of models drawn from business and industry. These included bureaucratic and rational models of management, and, I would suggest, fashions such as 'total quality management' and 'strategic management'. These models were transferred with little reflection about the suitability of business models for schools. The shift to school-based management in the 1990s sharpened the notion of school principals as managers, requiring a repertoire of management skills to run their schools as organizations. At the same time, the term 'leadership'—again often imported from business literature—became fashionable. Having previously been viewed as a dimension of management, it came to eclipse management as the ascendant term.

In part, these differences in use of terms are semantic, reflecting conventions and fashions. In part, however, they are also substantive. For, as Foucault (1969) points out, discourse systematically and actively forms that about which it speaks. In a Foucauldian approach, discourses establish relationships between language, power, meaning and subjectivity. They demarcate what counts as knowledge, who the 'experts' are, and how 'problems' should be identified and understood. Thus they provide shared social meanings. Where discourses are drawn from business and industry, their terminology and ways of understanding issues inevitably sets out particular understandings of the world, subject positions and relationships of power/knowledge. So, for example, teachers are reframed as 'human resources', parents and students become 'clients', and education a 'product' to be bought and sold on the market. Management dimensions of school organization are placed in the foreground and principals are framed as 'managers' to whom fashionable business approaches such as 'total quality management' and 'strategic planning' are offered as 'solutions' to problems of 'performance'. The shift to a discourse of leadership has tended to emphasize the principal as an

individual, and the principal's work as influencing others in visionary if not 'transformational' ways. 'Instructional leadership' and 'leadership dispersal' have appeared as complementary terms, and no doubt new trends will emerge as the discourse extends.

This is not to deny that management and leadership discourses may be useful for education. Rather, it is to suggest that if these discourses are unproblematically transferred from business and industry to education, they are likely to frame education issues in terms that do not necessarily reflect educational considerations or situations in schools. Conflation of the concepts of management and leadership obscures the situation further, as does the tendency to view leadership in exclusively positive terms. Moreover, there is also the danger that a generic approach to management and/or leadership may mask the specific conditions that principals need to deal with on a day-to-day basis in running schools. As mentioned earlier, singular or monolithic constructs cannot adequately address the historical, linguistic and political situatedness of schools and their management/leadership. More fluid and inflected concepts and approaches are needed.

One of the management approaches that has been introduced in educational contexts is that of performance management, and the setting of 'standards' for principals and teachers, as part of a broader drive for accountability and performativity. These standards, often termed 'professional standards', provide codified descriptions of work, as well as expected values and behaviour, and criteria for achievement. Thus they may operate as a regulative framework of accountability (Moller, 2009; Ozga, 2003), which is in tension with traditional notions of professional accountability, where ethical codes and specialist knowledge provide the basis for discretionary action.

Turning, then, to explore this theme in the context of South Africa, it is interesting to note that discourses of leadership and management surfaced as the education system was being redesigned in the dying days of apartheid. Under apartheid, educational administration was characterized by a high degree of centralization and was operated along bureaucratic administrative lines. Previously, principals had no budgetary authority or influence in their schools over the flow of resources such as textbooks, little or no influence over hiring and firing of staff, and almost no curriculum decision-making powers (Fleisch and Christie, 2004). The first initiative to address educational management in the post-apartheid period, termed *Changing Management to Management Change* (Department of Education, 1996), showed a marked switch in discourse as well as focus. The activity of principals was profiled as 'management', signifying their responsibility for running schools and at the same time highlighting their role in transformation to meet new constitutional principles of democracy and equality. The draft policy framework on *Education Management and Leadership Development* (Department of Education, 2004) introduced the term 'leadership' alongside 'management', and almost invariably used the two alongside each other without distinction. *The South African Standard for Principalship: leading and managing South African schools in the 21st century* (Department of Education, 2005) (draft document) continued to link management and leadership, this time reversing the order of terms. The principal was identified as 'the leading professional', and 'effective leadership' was viewed as 'critical to the achievement of the transformational goals of the South African education system' (Department of Education, 2005:4).

At this point, the complexity of context was also acknowledged, with particular reference to HIV/AIDS. Six key areas for standards were identified: leading and managing the learning school; shaping the direction and development of the school; assuring quality and securing accountability; developing and empowering self and others; managing the school as an organization; and working with and for the community. For each of these key areas, a definition was supplied, together with points on the knowledge and actions required for its achievement. In an interesting shift, the national Department of Education initiated its own Advanced Certificate in Education (ACE) in

Educational Leadership, although ACE programmes were already operating in a number of universities. In this nomenclature, leadership is favoured, though much of the content relates to management. Heystek (2007) raises interesting questions on this point. He sees in the introduction of the ACE an attempt on the part of the government to extend its control over the training of principals, through a tightly structured programme with a specific format and outcomes. He argues that while this may be positively interpreted as an indication of the government's political will to improve the system, at the same time it is questionable whether such a controlled and managerialist approach may accurately be identified with 'leadership'.

To sum up, the discursive shifts evident particularly in UK and Australian research are evident in South Africa as well, but inflected in particular ways by historical context and the complexities of political transition. Discourses of management and leadership in South Africa have recast the work of principals in terms of organizational tasks and responsibilities, and these in turn have been used to define the capacities of individuals that are considered necessary as professional qualifications for principals. It is interesting to note the emphasis on organizational management, and the discursive absence of trends such as 'instructional leadership' and 'leadership dispersal' which are prominent in broader international literature. Nonetheless, 'leadership' is now the discursively ascendant term for the field in South Africa, hence its use in the title of this article.

School-based Management

A third major development in international literature and practice on school leadership and management is the move to school-based management (SBM). This has entailed responsibilities for areas such as finance, staffing and school development being moved to school level. There is a broad literature on this, which reflects considerable debate about what self-management means both as a policy and in its effects (Caldwell and Spinks, 1992; Chapman, 1990; Dimmock and O'Donoghue, 1997; Lingard et al., 2003; Rizvi, 1993; Smyth, 1996; Yeatman, 1993). There is no doubt that the move towards SBM has brought questions of management and leadership to the fore in schools, but in ways that are very different for differently positioned schools (a point I explore further in relation to South Africa).

However, SBM is more complex than it may seem, in that it is seldom a uni-directional act of devolution. Devolution towards self-managing schools is accompanied by a countervailing or contradictory trend, whereby the state takes on new centralist functions. The centralizing tendencies include putting in place nation-wide curriculum and reporting frameworks; formulating strategic objectives for the system as a whole including schools; setting standards of practice; monitoring quality; and establishing accountability measures for performance and outcomes. Thus, greater autonomy comes with more visible accountability pressures. The inherent tension creates genuine dilemmas at the site of the school. In Chapman's (1996: 36) words:

Although many of these reforms have been undertaken under the overt agenda of decentralization, or devolution, the situation is far more complex than this. A closer examination of data and practices suggests that any attempt to elucidate the redistribution of power is likely to encounter and have to deal with a far more complex set of factors and variables than any account based upon a one dimensional or linear account of changed relationships along the centralization-decentralization continuum would suggest.

As Fullan (1996: 702) says, 'school leaders must constantly negotiate this simultaneous centralization-decentralization terrain'.

Notions of SBM were picked up in South Africa in the early 1990s, but with complex political motivation. In the dying days of apartheid, the previous/outgoing government introduced self-management principles into white schools, in what may be interpreted as a political move to consolidate their privileged position (Christie, 1995). In effect, the parent communities of these schools were given control over admission criteria and language policy, enabling them to desegregate on their own terms when faced with inevitable political change. Ironically, SBM was used to secure white and middle class control over the most privileged schools in the system at the time of political transition.

SBM was firmly established in the post-apartheid education system (Karlsson, 2002; Motala and Pampallis, 2005; Sayed, 2002). Two opposing sets of circumstances and interests may be identified with the view that the system of governance should be devolved as far as possible. The first was a democratic imperative, arising from the political struggle. Devolved governance would continue the democratic tradition of Parent Teacher Student Associations (PTSAs) which had been set up during times of political struggle in parts of the black education system. At a time of political contestation, community structures had a legitimacy which apartheid structures did not, and offered an alternative form of authority. However, the impulse for local control also came from a completely different political position, namely the white parent communities of schools that had been granted governing body powers in the early 1990s as a means of controlling their own pace of change. Thus SBM satisfied divergent interests in the time of political transition.

Again, what this illustrates is the local inflections of global policy trends, as South Africa sought models for its new education system at a time of change. Without recognizing these local inflections, it would not be possible to interpret the meanings and power relations of global discourses, and in this case, of SBM.

Having outlined what I regard to be major contours on the landscape of theory and research on school management and leadership, I turn now to consider the second major landscape that has influenced the conceptualization of schooling in South Africa, namely the education policies introduced by the first democratic government in South Africa in 1994. I suggest that these two landscapes—different conceptualizations of leadership and management and a new policy framework—have radically changed the work of school principals.

The Landscape of New Education Policies in Post-apartheid South Africa

The landscape of education policies has experienced seismic changes in the post-apartheid period. Given that apartheid policies had structured the education system along racially unequal lines, the post-1994 government was faced with two simultaneous tasks: to dismantle apartheid structures, and to design and implement a new education system. The first *White Paper on Education and Training* (Department of Education, 1994) set out an ambitious design for the new system, signalling a range of different policy initiatives to bring about change. The National Education Policy Act of 1996 established the structures for decision making in the new system, the South African Schools Act 1996 set out frameworks for governance, the *National Norms and Standards for School Funding* (Department of Education, 1998) established a pro-poor funding framework, and Curriculum 2005 (1998) introduced outcomes-based education into schools. The Education Labour Relations Act 1995 established the framework for negotiating teacher conditions of work, codes of conduct and duties and responsibilities. These and other measures provided the overall

design for ending apartheid and establishing a new ideal-type of education system—an elegant cartography but one not necessarily suited to the complex and uneven terrain that required change.

One perspective on the new landscape for principals' work is provided by the lofty set of 'best-practice' policies developed for post-apartheid education, reflecting the vision of a modern state with institutions that functioned well. However, a different perspective is provided by looking at the responsibilities and regulatory networks that were developed to manage educational change in the politicized, unequal and differentially functioning system that was apartheid's legacy. Three examples illustrate the terrain of principals' work from this second perspective: governance, labour relations and performance management. Each of these will be considered in turn.

Governance

The South African Schools Act (SASA) (1996) constituted each public school as a juristic entity, and vested responsibility for the governance of every school in its governing body. Membership of school governing bodies (SGBs) is set out in the Act, as are procedures for their establishment. Membership consists of the principal (ex-officio) and elected parents, teachers, non-teaching staff and, in secondary schools, students. SASA gives wide-ranging powers to governing bodies, with additional powers to schools that are deemed fully capable of running their own finances. Powers given to all SGBs including the right to determine:

- the school's admissions policies (provided there is no unfair discrimination or use of admissions tests);
- the language policy of the school (provided there is no racial discrimination in its implementation);
- the fees to be charged at the school (within broad guidelines, and including policies for fee exemption);
- the choice of subject options and the extra-mural curriculum of the school;
- the mission statement of the school;
- the code of conduct for students.

Governing bodies also have the power to recommend appointment of staff to their relevant education departments, and to appoint and pay for extra teachers at the school. In terms of finance, they are responsible for supplementing state funding, establishing a school fund, opening and maintaining a bank account, acquiring and controlling school assets, preparing an annual budget, and maintaining school property.

This is an extensive list of powers, which, needless to say, requires considerable time and expertise to implement at school level. And it goes without saying that South African schools are vastly unequal in terms of the human and financial resources they are able to draw on in implementing policies at school level. One of the unintended effects of the new governance system was to increase the historical inequalities within the system. The parent bodies of the best functioning schools in the system—mostly the former white and Indian schools—have been able to use their resources and social capital to the advantage of their schools. They have used their management powers to raise substantial fees, to employ 'governing body' teachers, to provide salary supplements, and to offer a broad curriculum with specialist support. However, this is not the picture for the majority of schools in the system, often in communities too poor to pay fees, often with demotivated teachers working under difficult conditions, without libraries, laboratories and computer

networks to support the new curriculum. In these communities, governing body members do not always have governing skills, or even the resources to travel to meetings.

More to the point for the purposes of this article, SBM increased the scope of work of the school principal, while at the same time it introduced a system of dual authority between school management and governance. The potentially unstable boundary between management and governance was recognized in the White Paper that introduced the new arrangements. In the words of the White Paper:

Working definitions of the concepts of 'governance' and 'management' assist in clarifying the role of governing bodies. The sphere of governing bodies is governance, by which is meant policy determination, in which the democratic participation of the schools' stakeholders is essential. The primary sphere of the school leadership is management, by which is meant the day-to-day organization of teaching and learning, and the activities which support teaching and learning, for which teachers and the school principal are responsible. These spheres overlap, and the distinctions in roles between principals and their staff, district education authorities, and school governing bodies, need to be agreed with the provincial education departments. This would permit considerable diversity in governance and management roles, depending on the circumstances of each school, within national and provincial policies. (1996: para. 3.7)

In practice, boundaries are not always clearcut. For example, regulations state that the principal and school management team are responsible for organizing all activities to support teaching and learning, while the SGB is responsible for 'ensuring that high quality education is offered at the school'. Whereas management is responsible for personnel at the school, the governing body is responsible for recommending their appointment. Whereas management is responsible for the timetable, the SGB is responsible for the choice of subjects and the school times. It is not surprising that there are many instances of confusion, if not conflict, over these roles (Heystek, 2006; Mncube, 2009).

Labour Relations

At the same time as new governance relationships were introduced into the education system, a new labour relations dispensation was introduced to regulate teachers' conditions of work and appraisal. One reason for this was the conflictual labour relations that had prevailed in late apartheid, when the education system was a site of political contestation. With the difficult conditions of work in many schools, teacher militancy increased, leading to the formation of the powerful South African Democratic Teachers Union (SADTU). In their opposition to apartheid structures and officials, militant teachers opposed accountability measures such as inspection, even managing in some cases to oust principals who were regarded as anti-union. In the early years of the new government, labour relations were further destabilized by the government's strategy of teacher 'rationalization and rightsizing' (measures taken to equalize student-teacher ratios between schools serving different racial groups) resulting in three nation-wide strikes in successive years (Chisholm et al., 2005; Fleisch and Christie, 2004).

A framework of legislation regulates the conditions of work of principals and teachers. These include (together with their amendments): the Labour Relations Act, the Basic Conditions of Employment Act and the Education Labour Relations Act. In 1993, the Education Labour Relations Council (ELRC) was established with the aim of maintaining labour peace through processes of dispute prevention and dispute resolution. The ELRC negotiated agreements on duties and

responsibilities of teachers and principals, hours of work, remuneration scales, and related matters. A continual sticking point has been agreements around appraisal and accountability, with militant teachers refusing to allow principals and education departments the right to visit classrooms.

The terms and conditions of employment of principals and other staff were set out in the Personnel Administrative Measures (PAM) (1999) in terms of the Employment of Educators Act 1998 and accompanying regulations. What is striking is that management tasks are placed in the foreground, with only a passing reference to 'professional leadership'. The detail of stipulated administrative tasks is also noteworthy, as, for example, in keeping a school journal, inspecting the premises regularly, and bringing departmental circulars to the attention of staff and storing them accessibly. These points are illustrated in the following extract from the PAM document.

(d) THE AIM OF THE JOB:

- (i) To ensure that the school is managed satisfactorily and in compliance with applicable legislation, regulations and personnel administration measures as prescribed.
- (ii) To ensure that the education of the learners is promoted in a proper manner and in accordance with approved policies.

(e) CORE DUTIES AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE JOB:

(f) The duties and responsibilities of the job are individual and varied, depending on the approaches and needs of the particular school, and include, but are not limited to, the following:

(i) GENERAL/ADMINISTRATIVE

- To be responsible for the professional management of a public school.
- To give proper instructions and guidelines for timetabling admission and placement of learners.
- To have various kinds of school accounts and records properly kept and to make the best use of funds for benefit of the learners in consultation with the appropriate structures.
- To ensure a school journal containing a record of important events connected with the school is kept.
- To make regular inspections of the school to ensure that the school premises and equipment are being used properly and that good discipline is being maintained.
- To be responsible for the hostel and all related activities including the staff and learners, if one is attached to the school.
- To ensure that departmental circulars and other information received which affect members of the staff is brought to their notice as soon as possible and are stored in an accessible manner.
- To handle all correspondence received at the school.

(ii) PERSONNEL

- Provide professional leadership within the school.
- To guide, supervise and offer professional advice on the work and performance of all staff in the school and, where necessary, to discuss and write or countersign reports on teaching, support, non-teaching and other staff.
- To ensure that workloads are equitably distributed among the staff.

- To be responsible for the development of staff training programmes, both school-based, school-focused and externally directed, and to assist educators, particularly new and inexperienced educators, in developing and achieving educational objectives in accordance with the needs of the school.
 - To participate in agreed school/educator appraisal processes in order to regularly review their professional practice with the aim of improving teaching, learning and management.
 - To ensure that all evaluation/forms of assessment conducted in the school are properly and efficiently organized.
- (iii) TEACHING
- To engage in class teaching as per the workload of the relevant post level and the needs of the school.
 - To be a class teacher if required.
 - To assess and to record the attainment of learners taught.
- (iv) EXTRA- and CO-CURRICULAR
- To serve on recruitment, promotion, advisory and other committees as required.
 - To play an active role in promoting extra and co-curricular activities in the school and to plan major school functions and to encourage learners' voluntary participation in sports, educational and cultural activities organized by community bodies.
- (v) INTERACTION WITH STAKEHOLDERS
- To serve on the governing body of the school and render all necessary assistance to the governing body in the performance of their functions in terms of the SA Schools Act 1996.
 - To participate in community activities in connection with educational matters and community building.
- (vi) COMMUNICATION:
- To cooperate with members of the school staff and the school governing body in maintaining an efficient and smooth running school.
 - To liaise with the Circuit/Regional Office, Supplies Section, Personnel Section, Finance Section, and so on concerning administration, staffing, accounting, purchase of equipment, research and updating of statistics in respect of educators and learners.
 - To liaise with relevant structures regarding school curricula and curriculum development.
 - To meet parents concerning learners' progress and conduct.
 - To cooperate with the school governing body with regard to all aspects as specified in the SA Schools Act 1996.
 - To liaise with other relevant government departments, for example, the Department of Health and Welfare, Public Works, and so on, as required.
 - To cooperate with universities, colleges and other agencies in relation to learners' records and performance as well as INSET and management development programmes.
 - To participate in departmental and professional committees, seminars and courses in order to contribute to and/or update professional views/standards.
 - To maintain contacts with sports, social, cultural and community organizations.

Performance Management

An important dimension of the labour relations framework that school principals need to navigate is the move towards performance management in the South African public service. In education, monitoring of performance of teachers, principals and schools has been a contentious issue, both because of the breakdown of apartheid systems, and because of the continuing inequalities between schools in the post-apartheid period that impact on teachers' work (resulting in what are considered to be unfair comparisons). Through a series of labour relations agreements, various complex systems of accountability were set up in the post-apartheid period, involving peer- and school-based reviews, but not classroom inspections. These included agreements on Development Appraisal (1998), Whole School Evaluation (2001), and Performance Management (2003). These overlapping, if not confusing, separate systems were brought together in 2003 into the integrated quality management system (IQMS), which requires a complex system of paperwork and a time-consuming monitoring system. Suffice it to say that these systems have a mixed record of understanding, implementation, and effectivity.

In 2008, after a devastating public service strike which included teachers, the occupation specific dispensation (OSD) was negotiated through the ELRC. The OSD establishes a performance management and development system (PMDS) for public servants working in education. It sets out the performance requirements of different levels of appointment within the education system, and their links to qualification and remuneration. Principals (and deputy principals) are required to draw up annual personal performance development plans setting objectives and targets. There are six key result areas (KRAs) and fifteen core management criteria (CMCs); principals are required to prioritize five KRAs, each with performance standards and indicators.

The six KRAs which are compulsory for principals are the same as those set out in the *South African Standards for Principals* (Department of Education, 2005):

- (1) Leading and managing the learning school.
- (2) Shaping the direction and development of the school.
- (3) Assuring quality and securing accountability,
- (4) Developing and empowering self and others.
- (5) Managing the school as an organization.
- (6) Working with and for the community.

In their individual performance plans, principals are required to break down KRAs into measurable outputs, duties/responsibilities and activities, and to give each a percentage weighting in terms of importance for their own job.

The 15 CMCs are:

- (1) Job knowledge
- (2) Technical skills
- (3) Acceptance of responsibility
- (4) Quality of work
- (5) Reliability
- (6) Initiative
- (7) Communication
- (8) Interpersonal relationships

- (9) Flexibility
- (10) Team work
- (11) Planning and execution
- (12) Leadership
- (13) Delegation and empowerment
- (14) Management of financial resources
- (15) Management of human resources

Each CMC also has performance standards and indicators, and principals must choose five for their annual performance plans. Performance plans are appraised by district officials, and salary increments based on the outcomes. Interestingly, 'leadership' is optional as a CMC.

What this description illustrates is a performance management system that is intended to have a strong impact on how the work of the principal is defined and evaluated. Not only is their own work to be appraised in these terms; principals are also required to play a role in the appraisal of others. Management capabilities are emphasized, and the assumption appears to be that defining and assessing the work of principals in performance management terms will improve the functionality of schools.

However, it needs to be recognized that schools in South Africa do not function equally, and that many schools are actually dysfunctional (Christie et al., 2007; Taylor, 2007). In well-functioning schools, appraisal systems such as these may be achievable even though time-consuming; however, in dysfunctional schools they may simply be unachievable, let alone adequate to effect change. In dysfunctional schools, teachers do not always conform to overt forms of regulation, such as arriving on time and keeping to school hours, or adhering to nationally devised curriculum planning and assessment requirements. More importantly, ensuring that teachers provide quality learning experiences for students lies beyond the reach of the existing performance management system, as is all too evident from South African students' poor achievements on national and international tests. Schools in South Africa are still highly unequal in terms of both resource levels and performance, and context has a strong influence on the nature of the principals' work. Teese and Polesel (2003) use the term 'institutional geography' to describe the enduring and predictable patterns of inequalities between schools. Arguably, the degree of difference between schools, and where schools lie on the institutional map, are likely to have a major impact on the principal's work and what it means to lead and manage the school.

That said, it would be mistaken to assume that all poor and historically black schools perform badly, and have deficient leadership and management practices. The *Schools that Work Report* (Christie et al., 2007) highlights the dynamics of a number of schools that perform well in challenging circumstances, as does Martin Prew's (2007) comparison of successful and struggling principals in similar difficult circumstances. Studies such as these challenge deterministic arguments about school success and failure.

The argument I have been making is that the South African landscape of policy change stretches beyond the evident beacons of new policy, such as the National Education Policy Act, the South African Schools Act, Curriculum 2005, and so on. Extending beyond and beneath these is a complex network of regulations and requirements, which have been put in place in schools that operate in very different conditions and with different capacities to implement them. What is required of principals is, I suggest, strongly influenced by these requirements, and the nature of the job is very different in schools with different historical legacies.

Conclusion

In this article, I have attempted to clarify concepts of leadership and management, and to illustrate two major landscapes that shape notions of the principal's work in the South African education system. One is the landscape of literature on leadership and management, which provides particular discursive constructions of the field and its changes, and provides particular ways of understanding the work of school principals. On this landscape, 'leadership' is the favoured term for framing the work of the principal. At a time of global policy borrowing, it is possible to see the shadows and forms of theories from countries such as the USA, UK and Australia on the South African landscape. However, I suggest that these are not simple reflections of debates from elsewhere, but rather are situated adaptations, whose forms are inflected by history and context. A second landscape, one of new policy frameworks, provides another terrain for principals to navigate. Here, I have argued, the beacon-like policies should not distract from the tangled regulations that give effect to them, and the inequalities that render the terrain of the education system treacherous in terms of working for change.

In this article I have argued that the expectations of school leadership as expressed in the literature and studies of leadership, together with new policy frameworks and regulations set out by the post-apartheid government, have changed the work of school principals in complex and contextually different ways. It is by now a well-established criticism of South Africa's new policies that they are more suited to the well-functioning parts of the education system, and have unintentionally widened inequalities. Taking this a step further, I would suggest that constructions of the principalship in discourses that conflate leadership and management, that over-generalize, and do not engage seriously with local conditions and the day-to-day experiences of principals, are likely to provide distorted pictures and to create unrealistic expectations.

It is here that the mismatch between the ideal and the actual may impede, rather than assist, school improvement in South Africa. In attempting to understand the principalship in South Africa, I suggest that it is more useful to start from the position that there is no single, entrenched picture of what it entails. Regulations of governance, labour relations and performance management have a major influence on what the work of the principal entails, no matter how this is framed in policy discourses. In addition, the functionality of the school and its position in the overall institutional geography are likely to inform what the principalship entails in major ways, and this needs to be recognized by those working for change in the South African system. If generic instead of situated approaches to the principalship inform policies, regulations and professional development for principals, they may well act as impediments to the very changes they aim to support. A more appropriate approach would be to recognize the situated complexities of the work of running schools—to say nothing of changing them under the very different circumstances in which they operate. A more thorough understanding of the landscapes of leadership is, I suggest, a good starting point for mapping the changes that are needed.

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Biographical Note

Pam Christie is Professor of Education at the University of Canberra, and Visiting Professor at the University of Queensland, University of the Witwatersrand, and Cape Peninsula University of Technology. Her interests lie in education policy, leadership and school change, from a social justice perspective.