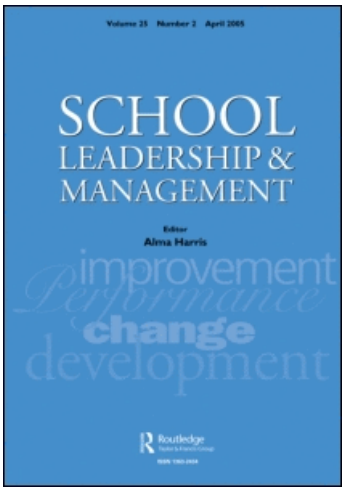

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RESEARCH ARTICLE

Managing to learn: instructional leadership in South African secondary schools

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This article reports on an empirical study of the management of curriculum and instruction in South African secondary schools. Drawing on data collected from 200 schools in 2007, a series of regression analyses tested the relationship between various dimensions of leadership and student achievement gains over time. Whilst the research confirms what we do know about school management in South Africa, and aligns with much of the international research base, the strong emphasis that emerges on school–community relations offers important insights for school management development.

Keywords: *school leadership and management, student achievement, South Africa, school community*

This article reports on a research study of curriculum management conducted in South African secondary schools in 2007. The study aimed to gain greater understanding of an issue of growing prominence in policy and research discussions: how school management might contribute to improved student achievement outcomes.

The terrain of school management in South Africa has experienced seismic shifts in the post-apartheid period since 1994. A raft of new education policies, some directed towards dismantling apartheid practices and others towards building a new system, effectively reconfigured the work of school leadership and management. Whereas under apartheid most school principals had very limited authority over finance, staffing and curriculum (see Fleisch and Christie 2004), the new dispensation gave considerable responsibility to schools for all of these. In terms of finance and governance, the South African Schools Act (1996) introduced a system of school

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governing bodies (SGBs) for all schools, as well as forms of school-based management. New funding arrangements allowed for fees to be levied, introducing a quasi-market into schooling, and at the same time provision was made for a measure of funding redistribution in favour of poor schools. In terms of staffing, a new labour relations dispensation regulated teachers' conditions of work and appraisal, but in many schools conflictual labour relations prevailed as part of the legacy of apartheid. In terms of curriculum, the post-apartheid government introduced a complex new outcomes-based curriculum, which was largely empty of content and which required considerable development work to be done at school level.

The new policies, designed to change the system from top to bottom, met with mixed success. They set out an ideal-type vision for a new system of equal quality for all, but they did not speak to the conditions of the majority of schools, or adequately address the deep historical inequalities and uneven quality that existed within and across the country's schools. The best functioning schools in the system were able to use the new management dispensation to raise fees, employ 'governing body' teachers, provide salary supplements, and offer a broad curriculum with specialist support. Not so the majority of schools in the system, often in communities too poor to pay fees, without capable governing bodies, without libraries, laboratories and computer networks to support the new curriculum and often with demotivated teachers.

The management of curriculum change, under these general conditions of system change, has proved to be a continuing challenge. A matter of growing concern is the persistent poor performance of South African students, not only on international tests such as TIMMS (where South Africa has twice come last) but also on national tests (see Reddy 2006; Christie 2008). So dire is the situation that educationists such as Taylor (2006) have estimated that 80% of schools are not functioning adequately, particularly in terms of performance in mathematics. Equally disconcerting are the patterns of continuing inequality throughout the system, with former white schools generally achieving the best results in the system, and former African 'homeland' schools the worst (see Christie et al. 2007).

The present study – the first of its kind in South Africa in terms of scale and focus – set out to investigate the management of curriculum in South African secondary schools in the context outlined above. More specifically, it aimed to gather information on how curriculum is managed across different types of secondary schools in different social contexts, and to identify the key dimensions of the management of curriculum and instruction that affect student achievement outcomes.

The paper begins with a brief overview of South African research on school leadership and management. It then considers international literature on leadership and, in particular, instructional leadership, and shows how it was used to develop a framework for the present study. The research processes of the study are discussed, followed by an analysis of results. Whilst the research confirms what we do know about school management in South Africa, and aligns with much of the international research base, the strong emphasis that emerges on school–community relations offers important insights for school management development in South Africa.

South African studies on leadership

The South African leadership research base is very limited. Studies on the availability of training and development and the needs of school managers dominate the field (Tsukudu and Taylor 1995; Sayed 2000; Krause and Powell 2002; Mestry and Grobler 2002; Van der Westhuizen et al. 2004). What these studies show is that most principals have not received adequate specialist training, especially in financial management and instructional leadership. Much research on the foregoing issues focuses on policy rather than actual practice. Bush et al. (2006), in their review of research on leadership and management, argue that most of the research into leadership is 'not conceptually rich', and assert the need for a theory of leadership relevant to the South African context.

Knowledge of how principals manage curriculum in schools in South Africa is therefore limited. Although there are detailed normative frameworks (often from elsewhere) on what principals *should do*, there is little consideration of the reality of the work of principals in particular contexts, and what they *actually do*. Some clues are offered in relation to school management by the early school effectiveness studies in South Africa, however. These studies show empirically a number of school-level management practices that are associated with better than expected student performance in South Africa. What has been shown to be significant in terms of management variables in relation to improved student outcomes includes the following:

- The regulation of time (Fleisch and Christie 2004; Gustafsson 2005; Van der Berg et al. 2005);
- The monitoring and support for planning and delivery in relation to curriculum coverage (Gustafsson 2005; Kanjee and Prinsloo 2005; Taylor and Prinsloo 2005; Van der Berg et al. 2005);
- The procurement and management of books and stationery (Gustafsson 2005; Kanjee and Prinsloo 2005; Taylor and Prinsloo 2005; Van der Berg et al. 2005); and
- The quality assurance of tests and the monitoring of results (Kanjee and Prinsloo 2005, 45; Taylor and Prinsloo 2005). (Taylor and Prinsloo 2005)

One of the key findings of this small group of studies is that resources are important, but it is 'not only the presence of school resources but how these are used which contribute to learning differentials' (Taylor 2007, 536). In Taylor's view, efficient use of resources 'is a central problem in South African schooling and one which we know least about' (2007, 536).

These South African studies lend greater specificity to what we might look for in terms of what effective principals do in schools. The first factor is time regulation, which has been pinpointed in a number of studies over a period of time (Taylor et al. 2003; Gustafsson 2005). In particular, a recent study by Chisholm et al. (2005) shows how principals' time is largely consumed by administrative activities. The second factor is curriculum leadership and management, where management oversight of teachers

constructing their plans, the monitoring of curriculum coverage and the management of textbooks and stationery was associated with positive effects on student performance (Kanjee and Prinsloo 2005; Taylor and Prinsloo 2005; Van der Berg et al. 2005). These issues were included in the design of the study presented in this article.

The relationship between school management and student outcomes

There is consensus in the US and European literature, and increasingly South African research, that school managers play a crucial role in creating the conditions for improved instruction (Marsh 2002; Spillane 2004; Taylor 2007). What is less understood is *how* the principal contributes.

Empirical studies of the effect of leadership on student achievement show that effects are small and indirect (Barker 2007). There is some consensus that the indirect effect on student outcomes is achieved through direct impact on instructional organisation and culture (Kruger et al. 2007). Hallinger and Heck (1998) argue that researchers' questions have shifted from whether principals make a difference, to 'more particularly the paths through which such effects are achieved' (187). They contend that the principals' primary influence on schooling outcomes is in shaping the school's direction – the setting of visions, missions and goals. Another way of putting this is about principals creating the conditions of possibility for teaching and learning, or the establishment of a form of organisational containment that enables teaching and learning and that sets a climate of expectations. Hallinger's (2000) model proposes three sets of leadership dimensions: Defining the School's Mission, Managing the Instructional Program, and Promoting a Positive Learning Climate. In similar vein, Leithwood et al. (2004) and Leithwood and Riehl (2005) identify four core sets of practices for successful leadership: setting directions; developing people; redesigning the organisation; and managing the instructional programme.

There is in fact remarkable consistency across this literature around what constitutes effective leadership of curriculum and instruction. Leithwood et al. (2004, 6), however, caution against the 'leadership by adjective literature'. They argue that we need more robust understandings of leadership practices, of responses to external policy initiatives and to local needs and priorities. That said, the lists are useful in drawing attention to the possibilities of instructional leadership, and in guiding further research.

In designing the present study, we drew five themes from literature on leadership, and in particular, leadership of teaching and learning. These refer to the issues of principals' pedagogical expertise; distributed leadership; linkages between management and instruction; context; and organisational features.

Pedagogical expertise

Stein and Nelson (2003) raise the question as to whether generic studies of leadership suffice in deepening our understanding of what it means to lead a school.

They argue that '[w]ithout knowledge that connects subject matter, learning and teaching to acts of leadership, leadership floats disconnected from the very processes it is designed to govern' (446).

Both Southworth (2002) and Hill (2001) stress the importance of leaders' *understanding* of learning. Hill (2001) argues that principals' knowledge is often dated, based on 'increasingly distant memories of a former life in the classroom' (1). In the South African context, a study by Roberts and Roach (2006) on five effective schools found that principals in these schools maintained what they termed a 'connection to the classroom'. In these schools all principals carried a significant load with regard to teaching.

Thus, a concern in our study was to consider the levels of principals' own pedagogic expertise, how and whether it was deployed, and what effect it had on student outcomes.

Distributed leadership

Starting with Gronn's (2000) preliminary taxonomy, the notion of distributed leadership has become prominent in the instructional leadership literature, as well as in management studies, development and training bodies. Spillane et al. (2004) provide perhaps one of the most theoretically developed accounts of this notion of 'distributed leadership', which is at the core of instructional leadership. They assert that leadership is a property of a number of actors at the school level, and is not invested in the principal solely. In their terms, leadership is 'stretched over' a number of roles, including 'followers' and also over situations, which include artefacts and organisational structures within the school. The concept of distributed leadership has been criticised for being poorly defined, with little consensus around its precise meaning. Hartley (2007) argues that its 'conceptual elasticity is considerable. And this lack of conceptual clarity does not allow for a clear operationalisation of the concept in empirical research' (202). Other criticisms include the fact that it ignores the micro-politics of the school, and does not take account of the socioeconomic context of the school, and its impact.

What is useful, however, is the notion of 'dispersal' of leadership, across not just different actors, but also structures and artefacts. The approach taken in this study was that, in looking for evidence of leadership of learning, we should not expect it to inhere exclusively, or even primarily, in the principal.

Linkages between management and instruction

Lee and Dimmock (1999), in a somewhat different approach, identify three key themes related to the curriculum leadership. The first is the extent to which the curriculum is actually managed, or whether it 'just happens' through teachers working interdependently. The second is the degree to which principals are involved in the management of curriculum, or whether it is left to Heads of Department (HoDs) and

teachers. The third is how, when principals are involved, they bring their influence to bear (Lee and Dimmock 1999, 458–459). These questions are interesting in that they do not assume that principals do or should undertake instructional leadership.

The approach in this study was to allow for influence over the curriculum to be exercised in different ways, and to consider how visions translate into practice.

Context

A number of authors call attention to the importance of considering context (see Lingard et al. 2002). Those aspects relevant to context are: geographic location of the school (urban, suburban, rural); level of schooling (secondary, primary); small and large schools; the student population, including socioeconomic level and support agencies; the historical context; and the policy context.

Influence of context was considered to be particularly significant in South Africa, where historical inequalities remain profound in schooling, and was thus a key concern in designing our study. One of the key relationships we identified was between the school and its community – which did indeed emerge as a significant variable in this study.

Organisational features

Lingard et al. (2002) and Christie and Lingard (2001) offer an approach to leadership that straddles the individual, organisational and structural aspects of principals' work. They support the notion that what principals might do that is of most importance and effect is to create the conditions for effective teaching and learning in the complex field of schools. Organisational aspects, such as the management of time, and structuring the day for learning, are of crucial importance in creating organisational containment and establishing expectations around good quality teaching and learning within the school. The social relations within the school as an organisation are also important to consider, in particular in terms of professional exchanges between staff regarding curriculum and instruction. Given the nature of the South African curriculum, these exchanges are particularly important in terms of designing and delivering learning programmes.

What this meant for our research design was that organisational-level factors were important to consider, above individual-level strategies or traits. These organisational aspects were privileged in the research design and data collection. The nature of social relations within the school was also included in the design.

Research procedures

Sample and methodology

Two provinces – the Western Cape and Eastern Cape – were selected for study. These two provinces vary significantly in terms of performance in the school-leaving

(National Senior Certificate) exam, and also vary economically, politically and socially – differences which impact on the schooling system in particular ways (see Fiske and Ladd 2005).

A stratified sample of 200 secondary schools was drawn from the two provinces, 100 in each of the Eastern and Western Cape. The total number of returns in the survey was 195 schools, 96 in the Western Cape and 92 in the Eastern Cape. A further seven schools were excluded from the analysis: five because the principals were not available to complete the survey form, and the remaining two because neither a teacher nor HoD was available to complete their forms. A further part of the sample was excluded during the course of the analysis: Only those schools whose principals had been in the headship position since 2004 were included. A total of 46 principals had been at their schools for less than the three years of the study, and so we excluded these from the analysis. A total of 142 schools remained in the sample. The final sample thus comprised 142 schools, 66 in the Eastern Cape and 76 in the Western Cape. The sampling strategy aimed for a spread of urban and rural schools. Rural schools constituted 53% of the total final sample and urban schools 47%. The sample was also stratified in terms of former education department (apartheid designations), which remain an index of level of (dis)advantage.[1] Schools in the sample had a range of school fees. Using fees as a measure of wealth, 42% of the schools in the sample can be classified as poor (with fees of R200 per year or less), while 18% of schools (which charge fees of R2001 and above) could be classified as wealthy. The remaining 40% of schools charged between R201 and R2000. Finally, schools were also selected in terms of the change in their performance between 2004 and 2006 on the National Senior Certificate (NSC), for reasons we describe below. An even number of schools that had experienced gains and decreases in their NSC results were selected. In total there were 66 improving schools, 12 consistently high achieving schools, and 64 declining schools.

Drawing loosely on the typology provided by Lingard et al. (2002), as well as the South African and international literature reviewed above, we identified six components in a typology of leadership. These were: the instructional focus of the school; vision and expectations; dispersal of leadership; social relations within the school; management of resources; external relationships. These six components were developed into 29 constructs (later formulated as hypotheses) and a set of indicators which formed the basis of questionnaires for administration in schools. In each school three questionnaires were distributed to the principal, a senior manager (Head of Department or Deputy Principal) and a teacher. This facilitated triangulation of responses to questions regarding the management of teaching and learning, and also allowed for a consideration of the 'distribution' of leadership across the organisation. Collection of data from three sources was also intended to reduce bias, and to widen the 'angle of observation' (Schatzman and Strauss 1973). This was particularly important given that the study relied solely on the self-report of actors in the school. Student achievement data were obtained from the provincial departments of education.

Student achievement gains over time

It is well known that schools in South Africa differ radically in terms of their levels of resourcing (both human and physical), the kinds of communities that they serve, and the student results that they produce. Many of these differences are the legacy of an extremely unequal education system established under apartheid. The inequalities in schooling have been further entrenched in the post-apartheid era through the establishment of a quasi-market in education, where schools are able to set their own fees. In trying to establish a relationship between management practices and student achievement, then, we felt that it would be unproductive to examine schools in terms of their absolute scores on the NSC examination, since these follow known patterns of inequality (see Christie et al. 2007). Rather, we were interested in whether schools were improving or declining on this measure.

We therefore used, as our dependent variable in the analyses, the difference between 2004 and 2006 scores, or student achievement gains over time, which we abbreviate here to SAGOT. The NSC results are a restricted measure of student outcomes. However, since this is the one measure that is available for all schools for all years, it was chosen as the best possible representation of changes in student outcomes over the years. In the study, we refer to those schools whose SAGOT has improved over the three-year period as 'improving schools', and those whose SAGOT has declined as 'declining schools'. Improving schools would include those schools that have maintained a high and steady pass rate over a three-year period.

Analytic procedures

Frequency counts and cross-tabulations were used to provide descriptive detail of the sample. Associations between school achievement gains over time (SAGOT) and other variables were investigated using linear regression. In each analysis, we used SAGOT as a continuous variable, and, because the sample size was relatively small, a criterion of $p < 0.1$ to establish significance. Although a number of regression models were run, each was hypothesis driven and we therefore did not make any corrections to the p-value. SAGOT measures the difference between two scores, and therefore does not account for schools' absolute NSC pass rates (that is, a SAGOT score of 0 – no change – could equally apply to schools with NSC pass rates of 95% and 20%). In order to control for this, the 2004 NSC pass rate was included in each analysis as a control variable. We also explored whether any of the following were significant and should therefore be included in the analyses as control variables: province, the urban–rural distinction, and former education department. Both province and urban–rural, when entered into separate analyses, were found to be significant, as were some of the former departments. We retained former department as a second control variable in all models. In addition, because socioeconomic status is known to be strongly associated with educational outcomes, and because the fees charged by the school are a good indicator of the socioeconomic status of parents, we explored whether school fees might also be an appropriate control variable. Since the variable

was highly skewed, we used the log of the school fees as the control variable. It was found to be significantly associated with SAGOT, and we therefore retained it as a control variable in all models.

Limitations

Three limitations were identified in the study. The first was that NSC results are a limited measure of school quality. They do not differentiate between low average pass rates and high rates (which the mean aggregate mark of candidates within a particular school might tell us, for example), and may not be strictly comparable due to standardisation of question papers from one year to the next (Umalusi 2004).

The second limitation of the study is that although it focuses on change in achievement scores over time, it does not measure changes in leadership practices over time. Thus, it is not possible to make a direct link between improved scores and particular management styles. Rather than establishing causal relationships between management styles and strategies and improved NSC results, the study establishes what management practices in schools are associated with improvement in student learning. As such, it is able to suggest which practices would bear further research in a longitudinal study (the design that would be necessary to establish causality in this instance).

Third, as in most studies of this nature, the results of the study are based on self-report data. Thus responses could have reflected subjective perceptions or socially acceptable answers rather than actual reflections of reality. Attempts were made in the development of the survey to capture facts rather than opinions to minimise the subjective bias. In addition, in several cases responses were triangulated between a principal, a teacher and a deputy or HOD respondent. The fact remains, nevertheless, that the responses were not independently verified.

Although these limitations curtail the claims that can be made in this study, and we are not in a position to make any strong causal links between student achievement and management practices, the research nonetheless provides a more comprehensive picture of school management in South Africa than has hitherto existed.

Findings

The vast majority of principals were male, and most had at least an honours degree. Most of the principals had more than five years' experience as a principal (and most of this experience was at their current school). Two interesting aspects emerged from principals' responses. The first was that principals reported spending most of their time on administrative functions and disciplining learners. 'Instructional leadership', as read through 'overseeing teaching and learning' and 'supervising teachers', was not a function that took up the majority of many principals' time.

Relatedly, the second aspect was that the management of curriculum and instruction was dispersed across the school. This was an explicit finding – only 17% of principals

identifying overseeing curriculum and instruction as their main task. About a third of principals claimed that they were primarily responsible for ensuring curriculum coverage, whereas the majority stated that this was the responsibility of the senior managers. This was confirmed by the teacher responses – 62% reported that overseeing curriculum coverage was primarily the task of HODs and subject heads.

Variables associated with SAGOT

Unsurprisingly, we found that the poverty level of the school, which we derived from the school fees charged, makes the biggest difference to a school's SAGOT. This confirms the broader research base on the strong relationship between SES and student achievement (see Lam 1999; Louw et al. 2007, for example). Poorer schools were more likely to experience a decline or small improvement in their NSC results over time. Controlling for SES, our concern then was whether we could see any significant effects of school management on student achievement over time.

As mentioned earlier, for each of the six dimensions derived from the literature described above, hypotheses were generated to guide the analysis. Of the 29 hypotheses that were developed for the six dimensions of leadership, regression analyses resulted in eight variables showing significance in relation to student achievement gains over time. Table 1 gives the significant variables together with the dimensions they formed part of. For two of the dimensions, there were no significant variables.

A learning-centred school

The findings show the central importance of the instructional focus of the school. This is manifested in curriculum coverage ($t = 2.951$, $p = 0.004$), the day being structured for maximum learning ($t = 2.790$, $p = 0.006$), and the school having a well-worked out plan to improve student results ($t = 1.994$, $p = 0.048$). Curriculum coverage showed a particularly strong relationship to SAGOT. Arguably, covering the curriculum is one of the most important functions of the school. Without curriculum coverage, students' chances of learning and achievement are greatly diminished. Relatedly, the importance of the day being structured for maximum learning is particularly important in the South African context, where existing research suggests that school time is not always well used for maximum learning (see Hoadley 2003; Chisholm et al. 2005). Taken together, these three variables suggest key aspects of instruction that an improving school might focus upon.

What is interesting is that none of the individual-level factors, especially those concerned with the principal's pedagogical expertise and 'connection to the classroom', emerged as significant. What the study suggests, rather, is the importance of a broader, institutional view of instructional leadership alluded to in the literature, which emphasises teacher cultures and school organisation, rather

Table 1. Leadership dimensions and significant variables.

Dimension	Construct
The instructional focus of the school	• The school curriculum is covered • School has a well-worked-out plan to improve student results • The school day is structured for maximum learning
Social relations within the school	• Positive relations between staff members at the school • Collaboration between staff at the school
Management of resources	• The effective management of LTSM in the school
External relations of the school	• Parental valuing and support of education • The willingness of the SGB to assist in the school
Vision and expectations[1]	No significant variables
Dispersal of leadership	No significant variables

Note: [1]Initially the question of purposes, vision and goals of the school was the object of interest. We were interested in how this was related to curriculum and instruction, and the extent to which they were shared in the school. One of the problems in addressing this question was that the survey followed a major nationwide teacher strike that had lasted a month. It was the biggest public sector strike since 1994. As a result, all schools surveyed were focused on recovery from the strike, and their missions were focused on preparation for the end-of-year exams. Consequently, little variation was found in the vision and goals of schools. What we were interested in, however, was linked to the vision of the school, and concerned the expectations that school staff had for student performance. In the analysis this was found not to be significant in relation to student outcomes. The level of curriculum offered was also considered and found not to be significant. These issues were grouped under the heading 'vision and expectations'.

than focusing only on individual teacher and manager behaviours that influence student learning (Southworth 2002, 77).

Positive school culture

Within-school relations also emerged as having a significant effect on SAGOT. Specifically, positive relations between teachers and managers ($t = 1.749$, $p = 0.83$), and collaborative relations between teachers ($t = 2.134$, $p = 0.035$), were positively associated with better results. The latter suggests the importance of collaborative teacher cultures, as identified, for example, by Hargreaves (2001) and Darling-Hammond and Sykes (1999). The link between a positive school culture and management is indirect. However, good social relations among staff are unlikely to be established and maintained if they not supported by the principal and senior management. This finding is also congruent with research on the effects of professional learning communities in schools (see Bryke and Driscoll 1988; Newmann

and Associates 1996). What these might entail in the South African context, and what the primary focus of such groupings might be, requires further research.

Positive home–school relations

What was perhaps more surprising in the analysis, and the issue that emerged as most significant in the final analysis, was the importance of the relationship between parents and the school. Parental valuing and support of education ($t = 5.137$, $p = 0.000$), and the willingness of the SGB to assist in the school ($t = 2.513$, $p = 0.013$), were both found to have significant effects on SAGOT.

That said, good relations between the parent community and the school are not necessarily attributable directly to principals' practices. In the analysis, principals reported spending little time on liaising with parents and the SGB, or on dealing with issues in the community. We have no way of telling from this data whether these relations were directly affected by the principals, or whether a particular management strategy fostered good relations.

The interpretation of this finding is further complicated. Based on perceptions of the school, the finding could reflect a culture of blame in schools that are faring poorly, and who place the responsibility for student achievement solely on the homes of students rather than the school. The finding could also be a reflection of the types of practices and values in the home that are contributing to better student outcomes rather than the outcome of any management practice. Thus the finding, although showing significance in the regression, is suggestive rather than conclusive.

Nonetheless, the development of 'social trust' (Sebring and Bryk 2000) between the school and community emerges as key, as does the importance of the SGB in contributing to SAGOT. It is also worth bearing in mind that these items are significant *after* controlling for SES. In other words, in all schools, regardless of the poverty level of the community, supportive parents and an SGB willing to assist the school make a difference to the improvement or decline of student results at that school.

Good resource management

Finally, confirming a number of South African studies, the management of learning and teaching support materials also emerged as a significant variable in the analyses ($t = 2.527$, $p = 0.13$). The management of staff, and of other financial resources, was not significant. However, in relation to instruction in particular, making sure that textbooks and learning materials are available and well controlled has been a stable finding in local research for some time (see Taylor et al. 2003). In short, this study supports the argument that the central issue is not the sufficiency of resources but their effective management.

Table 2. Final model.

	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		
	B	Std. Error	Beta	T	Sig.
(Constant)	−19.806	16.974		−1.167	.246
NSC pass rate 2004	−.796	.068	−1.045	−11.687	.000
HOA[1]	6.644	5.550	.137	1.197	.234
HoR[2]	4.797	4.495	.101	1.067	.288
New education department[2]	−.937	5.622	−.012	−.167	.868
Ciskei[2]	−17.475	5.182	−.253	−3.372	.001
Transkei[2]	−5.681	4.671	−.099	−1.216	.226
School fees per annum	.577	1.175	.035	.491	.625
Average of curriculum completed	7.100	3.028	.161	***2.344***	***.021***
Effective management of LTSM	2.477	3.745	.057	.661	.510
SGB willing to help	12.323	5.775	.130	***2.134***	***.035***
School has plan to improve student results	−.826	1.337	−.048	−.618	.538
Positive relations between staff members	.142	.605	.023	.235	.815
School day structured for maximum learning	.784	1.259	.049	.623	.535
Parental value and support for education	1.592	.526	.274	***3.027***	***.003***
Collaboration between staff	.642	1.527	.036	.420	.675

[1]DET is the reference category.

Leadership dispersal

In the analysis, items related to the dispersal of leadership and to a culture of expectation did not emerge as significant to SAGOT. However, considering the typology of leadership that we designed, various *aspects* of the six dimensions we identified emerged as significant. This suggests that that the importance of leadership lies across various dimensions, rather than inhering strongly in a particular dimension. A tentative claim can be made that successful leadership of curriculum and instruction involves the ability to oversee a wide range of functions, most of which do not relate directly to teaching and learning.

Moreover, as mentioned earlier, the majority of principals saw curriculum coverage as the responsibility of senior managers rather than themselves. Given that curriculum coverage did emerge as significant for SAGOT, this suggests that leadership of curriculum and instruction is likely to have been dispersed – a point which has a number of implications. These refer in part to training, and who is trained in what

functions to ensure the good leadership of teaching and learning. But this finding also points to the importance of developing positive and collaborative teacher relations within the school, in order for dispersed curriculum leadership to operate effectively. In other words, we tentatively suggest that dispersed leadership requires strong teacher cultures to be effective. Again, this bears further research.

The final model

Our next step was to enter the eight significant variables into a model, to see which remained significant. We used the criterion of $p < 0.05$ to determine significance.[2] The results are given in Table 2 above.

This model suggests that, after controlling for all other variables, what remains significant is curriculum coverage, parental valuing and support for education, and the willingness of the SGB to help. This does not mean that the other variables are not important, but that when all other variables are held stable, these three variables emerge as making the greatest difference to the improvement of student achievement gains over time.

Conclusion

As mentioned at the start of this article, the terrain of school management and leadership in South Africa has undergone significant changes in the post-apartheid era. Not least among these changes are the introduction of SGBs and school-based management, and the implementation of an outcomes-based curriculum which devolves a considerable degree of decision-making to schools and teachers.

In this context, the findings of this research point to the importance of parental support and engagement as well as the instructional focus of the school in achieving student gains over time. The research largely confirms what we do know about school management in South Africa, and aligns with much of the findings of the international research base. However, the strong emphasis that emerges on school –community relations may be an important point for school management development towards improved student learning outcomes, an area that has been neglected thus far in considering the training and development needs of schools managers.

Notes

1. Under apartheid schools were classified, and resourced, according to the racial grouping they were intended to serve. Different racial groupings and 'tribal areas' had different administrations for their education systems. These former departments numbered 19 in total. Schools that participated in the study represented five of these different departments. Former House of Assembly (HOA) schools for students classified 'white'; House of Representatives (HOR) schools (for students classified 'coloured'), Department of Education and Training (DET) schools for 'black' classified students, and 'Ciskei' and 'Transkei' schools for those belonging to these formerly designated 'tribal areas'. New schools,

established after 1994, also formed part of the sample. These designations are reflected in Table 2.

2. Using the stricter criterion of $p < 0.01$ to determine significance only parental valuing of education remains significant.

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