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Professionalising principalship[1] in South Africa

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At the present juncture, South Africa is one of the few countries that do not require a compulsory and specific qualification for principalship. This particular need has been part of a discussion among educational leaders for the past thirty to forty years. Despite all the laudable efforts to redesign the landscape of Educational Leadership and Management (ELM) in South Africa, a major historical shortcoming has still been neglected, namely, lack of training of school principals to a national professional standard. After the first democratic elections in 1994, a report by the committee, which had reviewed the organization, governance, and funding of schools, referred for the first time in 1995 to the development of an Education Management Training Institute (EMTI). The Department of Education assigned a task team to develop a capacity-building programme for Education Leadership and Management (ELM) to implement the directives from policy documents. A series of drafts of a Policy Framework for ELM was published during 2003/4 as a framework and guide for the development of ELM to ensure excellence throughout the education system. A particular aspect which was emphasised in this Policy Framework was the professionalisation of ELM. The Department of Education responded by introducing a National Qualification for School Leadership in the form of an Advanced Certificate in Education. This was the first concrete step towards implementing a compulsory professional qualification for principalship without which no educator would be eligible for appointment to the post of first-time principal. Although the development of the envisaged programme presents vital challenges for the long and short term, principalship in South Africa is on its way to becoming a fully fledged profession with a unique career path.

Contextualisation and focus

After the publication of the 2006 Grade 12 results the focus was once again on schools that did not perform satisfactorily academically. Amongst other factors, this also brought into the limelight the performance of the school principal. In this regard Hindle, director-general of the Department of Education, said in an interview: "This year (2007) it will be 'back to school' not only for pupils, but for principals as well" (The Star, 2007:1). The current "voluntary certificate course in school management would eventually become a compulsory requirement for all current and would be principals". He emphasised that evidence indicated over and over again that good school leadership leads to good school results. In Chicago (Chicago Tribune, 2007) a similar message was published a week after Hindle's interview, reporting that the Chicago Public School system was proposing a new plan that would give deficient principals one year to improve their performance before facing the axe.

During the past three to four decades the academic and professional training of school principals has appeared on the education agendas of most

countries and it has been a central point of discussion. From a brief overview of the discussions, it appears that the following matters were dealt with: training, certification, subject content, selection, and the relationship between the academic and practical aspects of training. Furthermore, the discussions also dealt with the compulsory or voluntary training of school principals or aspiring school principals. Repeatedly, the focus has also been towards the role of, as well as the link and relationship between, education authorities and the training institutions. Another aspect that has also been receiving constant attention is a CPD framework for school principals (Continuous Professional Development or in-service training). A few examples of the discussion in the international field will be alluded to briefly.

In the USA, for instance, principalship and the professionalisation of principalship has been in the spotlight for almost 200 years. Brown (2005:111-120) refers to the emergence of principalship (*ca* 1840–1900) including references to preparation and licensure issues, as well as references to the professionalisation of principalship (*ca* 1900–1940). Furthermore reports on *Preparing educational leaders for the seventies* (Culbertson *et al.*, 1969) had already been published in 1969. In 1972 a series of documents from ERIC/CEM – UCEA (ERIC/Clearing House on Educational Management — University Council for Educational Administration) were published which, amongst other things, included a document entitled *Preparing educational leaders* (Farquhar & Piele, 1972). In 1973, there was the report of the University Council for Educational Administrators (UCEA, 1973) which focused on *Preparation and certification of Educational Administrators: a UCEA commission report*. Reports on *Preparatory programs for educational administrators in the United States* (Silver & Spuck, 1978) as well as a work entitled *The senior high school principalship* (Byrne *et al.*, 1978) also followed. The National Association of Secondary School Principals repeatedly published focused editions that dealt with the training of school principals (e.g. NASSP, 1990a; NASSP, 1990b). A recent publication in the USA with a focus on the training of school principals is a work by Levine, entitled *Educating School Leaders* (2005). The discussion is therefore still alive and well in the USA.

In other western countries such as England, with its *National Professional Qualification for Headship* (NPQH) (Bush, 1998) and Scotland, with its *Scottish Qualification for Headship* (SQH) (Menter *et al.*, 2005), the focus is on the qualification, training, and certification of school principals. Dialogue in Spain also focuses on replacing the current principalship preparation model (Palomares & Castillo, 2004). In October 2005, an international seminar on the *Professionalisation of school leadership* was held at the University of Erfurt, Germany. Here, attention was given to — amongst other things — the training and certification practices of school principals in countries such as USA, UK, Australia, Turkey, Hong Kong, Germany, Sweden, and Denmark. The papers by Burch (2005) and McCulla (2005) focus directly on the professionalisation of educational/school leadership. In October 2006, the CCEAM (Commonwealth Council for Educational Administration and Management) held a

conference in Cyprus with the focus on *Recreating linkages between theory and praxis in educational leadership*. This conference attracted more than 220 presenters of papers and symposia. The most recent contribution is from Thody *et al*. (2007:37-53) also focusing on the selection, preparation and training of school principals in Europe.

In the eastern countries, the focus likewise falls on the training of school principals. The focus of the *Proceedings of the International Conference on School Leader Preparation, Licensure/Certification, Selection, Evaluation and Professional Development* (Lin, 2002), held in Taiwan in 2002, is characteristic of the ongoing discussion on the training of school principals. With regard to Hong Kong, Cheng (2005) focuses on a CPD framework for school principals as well as on efforts since 2004 to officially certify Principalship. Furthermore, the central theme at the *First International Conference on School Effectiveness and School Improvement in China* (Shenyang, 2005) (two weeks before the Erfurt Conference) was the training and certification of school principals in China, Hong Kong, and other eastern countries.

Conclusion 1

A common denominator, evident from the above-named documents in the international arena, is that the formal training and professional development (pre-service and in-service training and development) of school principals can only be made real, effective practice if it forms part of a national qualification policy.

If the focus is shifted to South Africa, it becomes obvious that several pleas have been made for the formal training of school principals since the 1970s. The following serves as a brief overview:

Research

From both a Nexus and a Sabinet computer search, it is evident that there were more than 10 master's and doctoral degrees since 1970 in which courses were developed for the academic training and in-service training of school principals.

In-service training courses for school principals (specifically for newly appointed school principals), by Departments of Education, date back as far as 1967 (Boshoff, 1980).

Training institutions

By 1980, approximately six tertiary institutions were presenting formal study programmes in Educational Management and by 2005 practically all tertiary training institutions had followed suit.

Articles and books

In books and articles calls have also been made for the compulsory training of school principals, for instance:

- "Many people during the past 15 years have proposed that the successful

completion of an educational management course should be a recommendation for appointment in the position of school principals" (Van der Westhuizen, 1988:378).
- "No uniform and national management development policy exists in the Education Department in the RSA as yet". (Van der Westhuizen, 1991: 114).
- "Whereas athletes normally have time and opportunity to prepare themselves for success in national and international games, school principals in South Africa have to face the realities of transforming and implementing the new educational policies, enshrined in the White Paper on Education and Training ..., with little preparation and no specific guidelines for managing this transformation" (Van der Westhuizen & Legotlo, 1996:69).
- "Thus, it becomes clear that South Africa lags far behind in the formal management training/certification of school principals in comparison with countries like the USA and UK, and many others" (Van der Westhuizen & Mosoge, 1998:42).

The aforementioned overview must be seen in relation to the growing awareness in South Africa that the task of the school principal has changed irrevocably. The question is no longer whether the principal has a management or leadership task, but rather how the principal should be trained or prepared for the task of principalship (Van der Westhuizen, 1988:378; Gallie *et al.*, 1997:460-465; Hallinger, 2006:1). The preceding references point to a growing concern that the appointment of school principals, on the grounds of academic and professional qualifications with a specific classroom teaching and learning focus, is not sufficient. Teaching excellence is not necessarily a valid indicator of the management and leadership task of a principal. This explains the steadily increasing demand since the 1970s for a formal, academic and professional qualification, specifically for principalship. However, the Department of Education (2005) states unequivocally that no national standard or structure exists for the training and accreditation of school principals. The issues mentioned relate, in particular, to the main characteristics of a profession, i.e. specialised training, standards, and accreditation (Palomares & Castillo, 2004:151-152; Oosthuizen, 2005:107-109).

Steyn (2000) emphasises the changing task of the school principal and underlines that they need to be trained for their "new" role. Kunene and Prew (2005:4) recently highlighted some of the advantages such as a uniform professional and academic qualification and a career path which can form part of a national training programme for school principals.

Conclusion 2

From all the documentation since 1970, a number of commonalities appear to be present, namely:
- A national qualification policy should direct and control the training of school principals;

- compulsory training should be provided to school principals;
- the training and development of school principals should receive attention at both pre-service and in-service level;
- the professional development of school principals should be initiated and co-ordinated centrally by the Department of Education; and
- continuous pleas have been made since the 1970s for the training and in-service training of school principals in the RSA.

Conclusion 3

From the aforementioned, it is clear that there have been calls in South Africa for the professionalisation of the post of school principal for more than 30 years. It is, however, less clear what the role of the Department of Education is in this regard.

Aim of the investigation

Seen in the light of the preceding, the aim in this article was to investigate the development of a national policy framework for education management and leadership development (i.e. school leaders) in South Africa during the period 1990–2006. A periodic approach is therefore adopted to describe and critically comment on the unfolding of a long-awaited national initiative for the professionalisation of principalship in South Africa.[2]

From unbanning to election (1990–1994)

From various documents during this period, namely, *ANC Discussion Paper* (1991), *ANC Policy Guidelines for a Democratic South Africa* (1992), *Educational Renewal Strategy* (ERS) (1992), and *National Education Policy Investigation* (NEPI), it appears that professionalisation of school principalship did not yet appear officially on the national education agenda. School governance and the involvement of educators in school governance were, however, referred to.

From election to white paper 2 (1994–1996)

In the *First White Paper on Education* (1994) education management was likewise not referred to, although generic guidelines were indeed offered for school management. In the *Hunter Report* (1995) it was proposed, amongst other things, that a capacity building programme should be developed for school governance. Proposals were also made for the creation of an EMIS (Education Management Information System) and the founding of an EMTI (Education Management Training Institute). For the first time, official proposals were also formulated for the development of education management, *per se*.

White Paper 2 (1995/1996), which followed the Hunter Report, introduced the establishment of democratic school governing bodies. The appointment of a task team for education management was also proposed. Part of the terms of references of the task group was to conduct a needs assessment and to identify best practices with respect to education management.

During this period, education management was officially placed on the

national education agenda and a process was initiated that would irreversibly change the professional landscape of education management (i.e. principalship) in this country.

Report of the task team on Education Management Development (1996)

This report was not only a turning point, but also a starting point, for the training and development of education leaders in South Africa. The highlights of the report were the specification of the needs and priorities of Education Management Development (EMD). This report established the primary focus of education management as being the promotion of effective teaching and learning. Reference was also made to the self-managing school and emphasis was placed on schools as learning organisations.

Explicit guidelines for Education Management Development (EMD) were also included in the report, namely: strategic direction, organisational structures and systems, and human and infrastructural resources. The heart of the report was, however, a proposal for the establishment of a National Institute for Education Management.

Past and current management and leadership training in the South African education system was, however, not regarded by the *Draft Policy Framework for Management and Leadership Development* (2004) to be cost effective or efficient, neither with regard to capacity building, skills and competency development, nor concerning enabling policies that could impact significantly on the majority of schools. This situation was attributed to the absence of a national framework to guide education management and leadership development in the South African education system. A policy framework was therefore designed to address these particular concerns by the introduction of a national professional certification for principals.

Education White Paper 3 of 1997: a programme for the transformation of higher education

This policy document introduced a single qualifications framework for higher education in South Africa. The purpose was to provide a framework for the provision of higher education qualifications within a single, co-ordinated higher education sector to facilitate the articulation and comparability of qualifications across the South African education system. The Standards Generating Body (SGB) registered a qualification called the 'Advanced Certificate in Education (School Management and Leadership)' for the professionalisation of school principalship with the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA). This qualification was subsequently developed as a National Professional Qualification for Principalship within the National Qualifications Framework.

A draft policy framework: Education Management and Leadership Development (1st draft 2003, 8th draft October 2004)

This policy framework provides the context for a multi-faceted national strategy for education management and leadership development. From this point

of departure the policy framework aims to provide a conceptual "*map*" that is rooted in the contextual needs and realities of South African schools for building capacity in management and leadership and, by doing so, to build excellence throughout the South African education system. The policy framework intends to define the roles and responsibilities of the national Department of Education, provincial Departments of Education, and school management teams. The premise is that without this policy framework, school management, *per se*, will remain unco-ordinated and directionless with limited leverage available to hold school managers accountable.

The vision for the professionalisation of principalship in South Africa emerged from a reliance on the potential effectiveness of decentralised, site-based management for the achievement of transformation in the education system. The national education management and leadership development programme is intended to be a truly national initiative because it is designed, shaped, and owned by all role-players and stakeholders. It does not represent a centralised prescription for action. This implies a collaborative approach that involves the national Department of Education, the provincial Departments of Education, the Higher Education Institutions (HEIs), Non-governmental Organisations (NGOs), professional associations, educator unions, and the private sector.

This emergence of a national strategy for education management and leadership development necessitates a mindful approach to the theory of school leadership in South Africa. As a case in point, it is worth noting that the transformational and distributed leadership theories are, at the present juncture, the two dominant theories in the United Kingdom's approach to education and leadership development (Lumby, 2006:1). The prevalent interpretation of these theories is, however, that they are essentially identical because they both negate the influence of diversity on the emergence of leadership by valorising similitude. In this sense, these theories can be interpreted as a disguise of value-based or hierarchical inclusion. Transformational and distributed leadership strive for the achievement of aligned values and a configuration of leadership roles. An alternative theory like authentic leadership aims, instead, at finding common ethical positions within the context of value and power conflict so that opposite viewpoints and practices are not "aligned," but accepted to be mutually influential (Lumby, 2006:3).

Intentions of an inclusive approach and promotion of ownership by relevant stakeholders is commendable, but the initiative and purposive leadership of the Department of Education is vital for the completion and successful implementation of a range of policy documents in practice. Conclusion 2 applies in this case, because the professional development of educational leaders should be initiated and co-ordinated centrally by the Department of Education. The role of the Department of Education should be clear and should not be obscured within a mix of roles of various role players (*cf.* Conclusion 3).

The South African National Professional Qualification for Principalship (SANPQP)
(Concept Paper — September 2004: Draft document for discussion only)

The Department of Education (DoE) is in the process of establishing a *South African National Professional Qualification for Principalship* (SANPQP). Through this qualification the DoE is seeking to raise the professional standards and competencies of school principals for the benefit of the quality of the entire education service. The intention is to implement a mandatory professional certification for principals without which no educator will be eligible for appointment to the post of first-time principal. Located within the National Qualifications Framework, this qualification is to be developed according to the South African school context and in coherence with proposals for continuous professional development and career paths for educators.

The Department of Education (DoE) has identified a number of key principles that should inform a national professional qualification for existing and aspiring principals. These key principles make it clear that the South African National Professional Qualification for Principalship (Department of Education, 2004a:4):

- Should be rooted in school improvement and that it should draw on the best leadership and management practice inside and outside education;
- should be based on a set of agreed upon national standards for principals, rooted in the contextual realities and requirements of South African schooling;
- will signal an educator's readiness for principalship but will not replace the selection process — it should provide an assurance to School Governing Bodies (SGBs) and districts that the candidate has the necessary foundation of school leadership and management knowledge, understanding, skills and abilities to perform successfully;
- should be sufficiently rigorous to ensure that only those ready for principalship are awarded the qualification, while being sufficiently flexible to take account of candidates' existing proven skills and achievements and the range of contexts in which they have been applied;
- will provide a focus for the continued professional development of aspiring principals to assist them in preparing for principalship; and
- will provide a baseline from which newly appointed principals can continue to develop their leadership and management competencies within the context of their own school environment.

The above principles of the South African National Professional Qualification for Principalship can be viewed as idealistic because policy makers have assumed that leadership is a necessary factor in creating quality education systems. Leadership development programmes are usually, for the most part, forced to rely upon the mentioned policy logic, which is patched together from rhetoric and unsubstantiated opinions. Leadership development is primarily grounded in the belief that school leaders make a difference in schools. There is, however, no evidence in the available literature to validate the fairly common perception that either university preparation programmes or national

certification make a difference in the professional performance of principals. Scientific evidence of the impact, costs, and benefits of leader development programmes are scarce, indirect , and mostly questionable (Hallinger, 2006:3). In this regard Niemann *et al.* (2002:135) explain the reason for no change in some dimensions of management development and training as being "… that possibly the behaviour of educational leaders in regard to these dimensions cannot be changed by means of training". Empirical data on the effects of leadership development programmes on the participants, their stakeholders and organizations must replace rhetoric and mere policy logic as a driving rationale for the professionalisation of principalship in South Africa. A systematic and appropriate research programme should be concurrently developed with the intended national qualification for principals.

The establishment of a South African National Professional Qualification for Principalship (SANPQP) has highlighted the need for a national standard for principalship and development in this regard, realised during 2005.

The South African Standard for Principalship (SASP)
(3rd Draft — Discussion only — August 2005)

The Department of Education (DoE) believes that there is an imperative to establish a mutually agreed understanding of what the country's education system expects of those who are entrusted with the leadership and management of its schools. With the possible exception of some definitional descriptions included in the Personnel Administration Measures (PAM) and Integrated Quality Management System (IQMS), no such understanding exists at present. The South African Standard for Principalship (SASP) intends to define the role and key aspects of professionalism and expertise required for principalship in South Africa. In this context, the SASP will provide a clear role description for school leaders and will serve as a template against which professional management and leadership development needs may be addressed.

The purpose of the South African Standard for Principalship (SASP) (Department of Education, 2005b:5) is to:

- provide information to all school stakeholders about what is expected regarding the role of the principal;
- inform better recruitment and selection procedures,
- form the basis of improved performance management and processes applicable to principals; and
- identify the professional development needs of principals and aspiring principals.

Read together, the various elements of the SASP aim at providing answers to at least the following fundamental questions related to principalship:

Why does a principal take particular courses of action?
What are the main functions of principalship?
How does a principal fulfil effectively the main functions of principalship?

The South African Standard for Principalship (SASP) recognizes that the generic areas of principalship are applicable to any schooling system striving for

world-class education provision for its learners in the global market. On the other hand, it also recognises that in South Africa the complex issues of diversity may require particular knowledge, action, and context-specific practical applications within the key areas of principalship. The emergence of the Report of the Task Team (1996), the Draft Policy Framework (2004), the SANPQP (2004) and the SASP (2005) initiated the first operational steps towards the professionalisation of school principalship in South Africa.

In 2007 the name SASP was changed to be more inclusive in terms of its outcomes to the South African Standards for School Leadership (SASSL) (DoE, 2007).

The development of the South African National Qualification for Principalship — September 2004 / November 2005

The Department of Education (DoE) took the initiative and with representatives from higher education institutions formed a *National Management and Leadership Committee* (NMLC) with agreed-upon terms of reference and an operational plan with time frames. The Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) provide consultative constituency through their nominated members on the NMLC and accordingly mandate the process through representation. The DoE is responsible for leadership and management and therefore chairs the meetings and work sessions. As such, it also fulfils the secretariat function.
The NMLC is responsible for (Department of Education, 2005:1):

- Designing a truly national qualification, which meets the criteria of the SAQA-approved Advance Certification in Education (ACE) for principalship;
- acting as a reference group during study programme implementation;
- setting up and facilitating the course review process; and
- submitting the ACE programme to HEDCOM for approval.

Comments

Implementation of a South African National Professional Qualification for Principalship is only one way of meeting the future needs of more effective and improved schools. It is however a positive step towards providing a professional qualification for school principals that will ensure professional competence, specialised knowledge, and skills (*cf*. Conclusion 1). A salient development in this regard is that the qualification is validated by means of a national accreditation process under the auspices of the Department of Education (DoE) (*cf*. Conclusion 2).

The development of a national professional qualification for principalship is however a complex process and the following important matters necessitate clarification during the development process of the envisaged programme (Department of Education, 2004a:4-8):

Programme design

A national generic programme (one-size-fits-all) needs to be flexible enough to embrace the diversity of education praxis as well as that of the HEIs. It is

not clear to what degree a particular HEI, as an independent institution, will be allowed to individualise the intended study programme.

Programme provision

The intention is that the HEIs will offer the qualification, but acceptance of final responsibility and quality control for the programme is uncertain. It may, for example, be queried whether the programme should be centralised or decentralised to the provinces or to the HEIs?

Theoretical underpinning

The nature, scope, and depth of a sound theoretical basis for articulation between other academic qualifications within the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) need to be finalised. The balance between the theoretical and practical components remains a contentious issue that needs to be cleared up. As such, it forestalls the question whether HEIs will, in fact, be offering it.

Assessment

HEIs need to develop new approaches and methodologies required for assessment in an authentic context. Terminology like school-based and on site-based assessment is used interchangeably with no definitional guidance. For example: Does school-based assessment imply the assessment of work done in the school, but not necessarily assessed at the school, and does on site-based imply an assessor being present to assess the student "in action" at the school?

Capacity development

It is inevitable that the intended qualification will place a range of demands on providers that will require support for both provision and assessment. A national demand for a compulsory qualification will significantly increase the training commitment of HEIs. The nature and process of support therefore need to be clarified.

Accreditation and licensing

Issues relating to accreditation and licensing are complex. On the one hand, they relate to mechanisms for the accreditation of providers while, on the other hand, they relate to the licensing of those who are successful in the programme. The shared responsibility should be clearly defined and, if necessary, the locus of ultimate responsibility should be indicated — with the DoE, SAQA, the EDTP SETA, or the HEI? A further question is: Will HEIs be awarding their own academic qualification (ACE), while the HEQC accredits the offering of the programme and the DoE awards a separate, national licence, granting eligibility to apply for principalship? These respective roles need to be clearly stated and communicated to all involved.

Eligibility

Some of the issues with eligibility include the following:

- Should there be open access for all aspiring principals to register for the qualification?
- In the case of selection, how should candidates be selected, by whom, and what are the criteria for selection?
- What mechanisms are needed to ensure fairness, equity, and redress in selection processes?
- What are the procedures in the case of an appeal?
- Should candidates be allowed more than one opportunity to obtain the qualification?
- What is the role of an HEI's internal academic rules in relation to a national qualification?

Funding

Implementation of a national qualification for principalship will generate funding needs in respect of its provision and maintenance. Mechanisms will have to be put in place for the estimation and provision of such funding, e.g. the training and support of assessors.

Trialling

Compulsory programmes need to be meticulously trialled before being made mandatory. Effective trialling enables both the design and implementation to be thoroughly tested before the qualification becomes a prerequisite for school principals. The process and results from a comprehensive pre-test programme are not clear to all stakeholders.

Time scales

Realistic time scales are necessary to ensure that the processes of consultation, development, and trialling are fully accommodated. The overall conceptualisation of the programme and its impact may be compromised if essential processes are either rushed or prolonged.

Estimation of demand

The issue of supply and demand needs to be investigated. It is imperative to determine that the provision of sustainable and quality programmes at HEIs is sufficient to meet a national demand from nine provincial departments of education.

Conditions of service

Aspects that also need attention are impact of the intended qualification on conditions of service, negotiations with educator unions, and status of principals with qualifications in Education Leadership and Management.

The above list of important matters is by no means an exhaustive one, but it is an indication of the complexity of such a mandatory initiative. Taking into

account the high priority put on the programme by the DoE, it is essential that these and other issues of importance need to be addressed with expertise and caution in an inclusive manner.

Conclusion

The periodic description of an emerging vision of a national policy framework for education management and leadership development in South Africa shows that the need, according to Conclusion 1, is addressed because the professionalisation of principalship is part of a national qualification policy. With regard to Conclusions 2 and 3, the requirement of compulsory academic and professional job-specific training for school principals is accomplished with the initiative that is developed, co-ordinated, and guided by the Department of Education.

It is evident that the professionalisation of principalship is a complex process and presents vital challenges for the short and long term. How these challenges are met will certainly impact on the success of this national initiative. Thus principalship in South Africa is on its way to becoming a fully-fledged profession with a unique career path.

Notes

1. In this paper, principalship refers to 'education management and leadership'/ 'education managers and leaders'.
2. In contrast to the professionalisation of principalship, it is noted that in a country like Ethiopia a reverse-process is taking place (Tekleselassie, 2002).

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