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Collaborative Leadership and Sustained Learner Academic Performance in Secondary Schools: A Blaming Game?

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Abstract

This article reports on a study that investigated how collaborative leadership can influence sustained learner academic performance in secondary schools. The key problem resonates about secondary schools that are unable either to sustain or improve learner academic performance when intervention strategies rolled out from the district offices are concluded. The literature pursued in the study covered collaborative leadership from both schools and district education offices and their impact on learner academic performance. Participants were circuit managers, subject advisors, principals and teachers. They completed open-ended questionnaires that sought to explain the relationship between collaborative leadership and sustained learner academic performance. Major findings indicated that participants (at the various levels of leadership) attribute low learner academic performance to all other involved parties except themselves. Thus, collaborative leadership within the school and between schools and district education offices is not enabling sustained learner academic performance.

Keywords: collaboration; leadership; academic performance; sustainability

Introduction

Leadership is universally acknowledged as an essential feature in the process of realising school effectiveness and evolvment (Day and Sammons 2013; Robinson, Hohepa and Lloyd 2009). School management teams (SMTs) normally consist of the principal, deputy principal(s) and heads of department (HoDs).

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To ensure sustained learner academic performance, schools need to address challenges in three wide areas, namely: actions in the classroom (learners and teachers); school leadership and management (principals); and the administration of the education system (subject advisors and circuit managers). Flowing from this, sustainability requires intervention and support aimed at addressing various challenges at schools for sustained learner academic performance. Key role players in this regard are, amongst others, education district officials, school leadership, teachers, learners, the community and parents (Bojuwoye, et al. 2014).

Collaborative Educational Leadership in Context

Collaborative leadership within the school, as well between schools and district education offices, is discussed.

Collaborative Leadership within Schools

Collaborative leadership involves strategic school-wide actions that are focused on school improvement and shared among the SMTs, teachers and district office administrators. Many educational leaders, especially principals, often find themselves isolated and alone with the belief that they are exclusively responsible for leadership in their schools. Such a standpoint portrays a very narrow understanding of leadership (Hallinger and Heck 2010; Harris 2002). Schools need to recognise and develop leadership among many different kinds of individuals representing all education stakeholders in order to effectively model and develop a school climate that engages adults and learners in a shared mission that improves learner academic performance (Hughes and Pickeral 2013). The current view is that leadership in a multi-faceted organisation, such as a school, necessitates the energy, commitment and contributions of all who work there.

It seems reasonable, therefore, to conclude that, in an educational context characterised by complexity, diversity and pressures on teachers and learners to improve academic outcomes, a model of leadership focusing mainly on the principal is not the best option. The challenge is to find ways of encouraging more teachers to become leaders and to provide them with the support and resources necessary to change current individualistic pedagogical and teaching and learning practices (Guerrie 2014).

Collaborative Leadership between Schools and Education Districts

According to Murphy (2008), consistently low-performing schools are in need of support from education districts in order to build their capacity to permanently change the teaching and learning culture and climate at such schools. School leadership is seen to be most productive when carried out in collaboration with supportive and reliable

district-level leadership. In such a case the education districts determine the overall vision and expectations of schools in the district, but the principals are permitted to lead the school with some autonomy. Such autonomy and flexibility over school operations and teaching and learning must be supported by the district leadership, especially for low-performing schools (Moorosi and Bantwini 2016). Focused vision, guidance and support from district leadership are therefore imperative.

Wilson-Morgan (2015) states that to improve education in low-performing schools, education districts must prioritise the development of strong school leadership which is second only to teaching among school-related influences on learning. Two aspects are evident in this regard. First, solid leadership is a prerequisite for turning around failing and low-performing schools. Second, education districts should use human resource processes to place strong leaders in these schools and support them to enable sustained learner academic performance. Bottoms and Fry (2009) assert that teaching and learning are the fundamental tasks of all schools, so the effectiveness of principals and teachers in implementing a high-quality instructional programme and a culture and climate that encourages, involves and supports learning is essential. Without operational district-wide commitment, some schools may perform well while others continue to struggle. Many South African schools are dysfunctional and are not transforming time, teaching, physical and financial resources into learning outcomes. The curriculum delivery is poor as teachers do not complete the curriculum and tend to pitch their teaching at levels lower than those demanded by the curriculum (Khanyisa 2006).

The South African education management system is decentralised across four levels from national to province to districts to local schools. The Department of Basic Education's *Policy on the Organisation, Roles, and Responsibilities of Education Districts* (DBE 2013) clearly states that education districts play a key role in school success and in ensuring that all learners have access to high quality education.

Problem Statement

The world of work expects from the education system a competent, skilled and knowledgeable workforce to enhance economic growth within South Africa. This expectation is currently not being met and poses a problem to the leadership of district education offices and schools. The goal of the study was to determine the influence of collaborative leadership within the school and district offices on the sustained academic performance of learners.

Thus, the objective of the article is to establish the perceptions of circuit managers, subject advisers, principals and teachers regarding collaborative leadership for sustained academic learner performance.

Method

The study used a qualitative approach to gather and report on data. Polit and Beck (2012) present qualitative research as a type of investigation of phenomena, typically in an in-depth and holistic fashion, through the collection of rich narrative materials. It is conducted in the natural setting wherein the phenomenon under study is taking place. Phenomenology was used for the current study as it describes the meanings of a lived experience with the aim of transforming the lived experience into a description of its essence, allowing for reflection and analysis (Nieuwenhuys 2014). The study participants were circuit managers, subject advisors (situated at district offices), principals and teachers (at school level) of under-performing schools identified in the Lejweleputswa Education District, Free State, South Africa. A selection of five each of these four groups of participants was purposefully sampled to total 20 participants. Data was collected from participants regarding collaborative leadership and its influence on learner academic performance in low-performing schools. Participants on each level of leadership completed a questionnaire relating to their opinion on the phenomena under study. During data analysis, thematic patterns were identified and the outcomes were described.

Credibility was sought through multiple perspectives provided from participants at various levels of educational leadership. Transferability was obtained through a clear description of the research process. Sufficient information was obtained to judge applicability of findings to other settings. The strategies employed for dependability were the transparent chain of evidence used to report findings. Confirmability was obtained through verbatim accounts provided with the findings.

Thematic Analysis and Reporting

Three main themes are highlighted and discussed with elaboration in some sub-themes.

Theme 1: Relationship between Leadership and Learner Academic Performance

Sub-Theme 1.1: The Existence of the Relationship between Leadership and Learner Academic Performance and Elements of This Relationship

The majority of the teachers disregarded the link between leadership and learner academic performance. The main reason for this opinion is non-cooperative and unhealthy relationships experienced at these low performing schools. Teacher 1 stated:

The principal has lost focus on the vision and mission of the school. As a result, the decision-making is not in line with what the school wants to achieve academically. This might be due to a shift in focus from teaching to fame.

Teacher 2 contended that the relationship between school leadership and teachers is not good. She further elaborated that the

... attitude of the principal at my school is frustrating and he is running the school with gossips.

Teacher 3 had this to say:

The SMT of the school is run by the principal only. As a result, teachers become less interested in their work as their inputs are not considered.

The principals mostly commented on the ineffective relationship they have with the circuit managers. Principal 1 highlighted that the school would perform academically better if the circuit manager were more available to render a more sustained supportive management and leadership role on a continuous basis. He added that subject advisors are also difficult to get hold of for required assistance to their related subject teachers at his school:

The district supports the learner academic achievement through intervention programmes, but the deployment of subject advisors needs to improve. Lesson [sic] the scope of subject advisor deployment so that they can concentrate on fewer schools to make their intervention more effective.

Principal 3 stated that:

Teaching is no more regarded as a calling; most of the teachers are not doing justice for the education of our society. Furthermore, unions are preventing the promotion of effective teaching and learning.

Principal 5 elaborated on the insufficient financial management on national and provincial level that affects the set strategies at school level in order to improve learner academic performance:

We are supposed to put strategies in place that will help with academic performance, but we at low performing schools struggle to get the funding from provincial level and national level. What must we now do?

Most of the subject advisors stated that when they visit certain teachers at low-performing schools, the learners' work is not marked and therefore no feedback is provided to learners, and that this clearly indicates poor control by HoDs. Subject advisor 2 summed up this trend:

In some schools the support from the HoD is not good at all and it is clearly visible from the performance of teachers and learners.

Subject advisor 3 concluded that if there is a lack of planning, self-discipline, work ethics and motivation within the SMT – learners will follow the same negative traits.

Subject advisor 4 indicated that:

Sometimes I feel that I am standing alone and no one hears or sees how I am struggling.

Subject advisor 5 complained about the lack of support and communication, although it was not made clear from whom support was lacking or which communication channels were lacking.

A few circuit managers commented that they sometimes feel demoralised with how the education system operates. They stated that they receive certain goals to achieve, but that the time allocated to achieve such goals is not sufficient to implement the plans and to ensure success. One commented that educational leaders at all levels (in schools and in the district) have no interest in the academic performance of learners. Circuit manager 1 stated that:

One is demoralised by the way the system operates. Too many things needed at once without giving the time to monitor implementation of what the jobholder has done. Educational leaders' interest have declined, little interest of learners' wellbeing is considered which impact on performance.

Circuit manager 5 contended that there is too much politics involved whilst a lack of provision of support staff is also evident:

You get the clicks [sic] that are linked to politics, if you are not favoured you do not get the support you need, for instance staff that must assist to provide support to schools, like we are running short of subject advisors in certain subjects.

Sub-Theme 1.2: The Leadership Factors/Roles, Responsibilities and Support Received That Impact on Learner Academic Performance

Teacher 1 reported on qualities a teacher should possess for the advancement of learner academic performance which refer to: providing constant support towards learners; being strict regarding completion of homework; being on time at school and for classes; and being well-prepared for each lesson on a daily basis. Teacher 2 commented on the role of the SMT in her school and did not provide any of her own leadership roles and responsibilities as leader of the classroom situation. Her educational leaders do not provide a positive trend for others to follow:

Our school's SMT is not really making a positive impact on performance. They also come late for classes or do not even attend it! They don't possess the required inter-personal and

professional management skills! There is a negative attitude amongst the staff which highly affects our learners' performance!

Teacher 5 provided some factors/roles when stating that:

Communication: clear and unambiguous instructions to teachers lead to better implementation of objectives; Mentoring: Teachers need assistance from seniors in order to evaluate their own strengths and weaknesses; Monitoring and control: It eliminates an atmosphere of "doing-as-I-wish" and also helps to detect problems at an early stage.

Principal 1 contended that a positive and supportive school environment is needed for learner academic performance. Principal 2 added that the SMT of the school should be more aggressive in addressing the teacher developmental needs. Principal 3 contested that leadership should focus on clear and effective communication with all school structures and keep reminding learners and teachers about the school's objectives and mission. He further added that leadership should be firm on educational policies, such as a code of conduct for both learners and educators. Principal 4 summed up many of the frustrations that principals must endure:

Discipline, respect, determination and positive work ethics are substantial for effective performance of learners. In the FET band the leadership is sound because pass requirements are fair and they enjoy more luxuries like camps and extra classes. In the senior phase, the department created a mess which they are shy to acknowledge. You cannot expect that every South African learner must attain 50% or level 4 in a DIFFICULT subject like Mathematics and make it a prime requirement. To revive relationships they must copy from the "past" system and provide pure Maths and functional Maths in order to cater for various learner IQs.

All the subject advisors supported the importance of effective leadership at school level towards the improvement of learner academic performance with special reference made to teachers being committed – in other words possessing good work ethics. Subject advisor 2 indicated that:

Poor interpersonal relationships between SMT members and poor leadership from the principal, deputy principal and HoDs make it very hard for many learners to perform in our schools.

Circuit manager 1 indicated that:

Strong leadership and management by SMTs is the biggest threat! Failure to monitor improvement strategies and holding teachers accountable for their performance is a huge concern for us.

Circuit manager 3 indicated that the appointments of teachers should be done strictly according to the teachers' performance and by neutral panels. In such a way, the best teachers will be appointed and promoted. He also advised that more subject advisors and administrators should be appointed to serve the immeasurable need of improved learner academic performance. Circuit manager 5 agreed when stating that:

Good and qualified teachers at all schools are very difficult to get! The best ones should be appointed and kept.

He also stated that the infrastructure of schools should be revisited in terms of ablution facilities, water and electricity availability and educational resources. He stated that without these, no academic plan will be successful as the schools look like rubbish dumps.

It is not a pleasure to see some of our schools with the electricity and water problems. Our learners cannot perform if the school looks like a rubbish dump.

Theme 2: Academic Support and Learner Academic Performance

All leaders within the school and district need to collaborate to provide support to learners in order to enhance learner academic performance. All teachers were asked how the specific component that they are responsible for in the education process (teaching in the classroom) is being identified in terms of academic support. Teachers are directly responsible for learners and these are direct quotes captured in support of their opinion:

The teachers' general opinion is that the learners are not interested in focussing on school work. According to teacher 1:

Learners show no interest in their school work and when given homework they come late purposefully to school so that they cannot attend the class. They try to find ways to miss classes for which they have not completed their homework.

Teacher 4 commented that:

Mostly they don't do their homework, even in the classroom they don't take part nor write classwork. You have to make sure you monitor them to get them to write. Sometimes you will find they don't even have books at school.

The parents do not seem to be aware of the academic progress of their children and rely on teachers to ensure that their children are academically successful. Teacher 5:

Parents don't monitor the children's work and they hardly come to inquire about the progress of their kids. They think it is only our task to teach them. This is a problem for me as I need their help.

The principals were of the same opinion as the teachers regarding identification of learner academic support. However, the principals commented that the teachers are in need of academic support in the following ways:

Principal 1 articulated that some teachers show little interest in teaching and that support regarding their commitment to the teaching profession is needed. He stated that in some cases this lack of commitment may be due to a lack of content knowledge, especially in subjects such as Mathematics and Physical Science.

... and some teachers do not show commitment to teaching. I think they do not know all the content, especially in Maths and Science and then the learners must suffer.

He further added that poor work ethics leads to poor academic performance which is displayed through low teacher morale. In addition, Principal 2 added that the following pertains to the identification of teachers who are in need of academic support: lack of planning to cover the curriculum in the academic year; non-attendance of subject meetings with fellow teachers and the subject advisor; lack of support from teachers towards HoDs regarding programmes for enhancement of learner performance; and a general negative attitude towards subject workshops and training programmes organised to assist teachers.

The subject advisors stated that many of the teachers they need to assist do not have the passion to ensure that their learners receive the best teaching. It is almost as if many of them have given up and only go through the day to day motions. The subject advisors indicated that specific support programmes for different levels of teachers need to be organised and presented by “outsiders”, meaning persons from outside the DBE. Such support should not only include content training, but also training in classroom management, large class management, being leaders with HoDs and principals, and a commitment to put the learners’ academic future as the number one priority. Subject advisor 4 stated:

Teachers have no passion anymore, they just come to school to go home again. They should be supported and trained in content, manage the classroom, large classes and so on, but from other people outside the department, maybe they will listen to them.

The circuit managers indicated that in some instances the principals and teachers are the ones who are mostly absent from school, with such absenteeism then filtering through to the learners.

You think it is learners who are absent! Check how many time[s] principals and teachers are absent. The academic climate at these schools has gone so low that nobody seems to care anymore. And when your principal is absent, then the HoDs stay away, and then the teachers and that filters to the learners. All need to be shown what commitment to teaching and leadership is.

The circuit managers also indicated that the SMTs do not volunteer either to serve on subject committees or to engage in any extra work in order to assist the learners. They see this as an extra burden. According to the circuit managers, the SMTs’ level of commitment as the leadership of the school has declined to the extent where they

confront each other in meetings and where politics have overpowered the normal teaching and learning milieu.

Theme 3: Culture of Accountability and Learner Academic Performance

The participants who expressed their opinions included the principals and circuit managers. Collaborative leadership has a direct link with a culture of accountability, as leaders at all educational levels have a responsibility towards being accountable for their leadership actions.

The principals were all in agreement that a culture of accountability would enforce sustainable performance in schools as well as collaboration received from the district office. They did, however, mention the issue of progressed learners which should not be forming part of the accountability at school level. Principal 2 exclusively mentioned that accountability at school level should not include the process of progressed learners:

Sometimes it becomes extremely difficult for teachers to account for the decisions made by the department. Progressed learners were already not coping at lower grades and now the teacher at the higher grades must perform miracles with the same learners.

Principals 3 and 4 explained that a culture of accountability would be helpful to develop the basic school identity and create an environment that is stable and consistent. They further added that with accountability, everyone takes the required responsibility for their actions and answers for what they do.

The circuit managers were all in agreement that such a culture of accountability is necessary at schools. Circuit manager 1 stated that a culture of accountability implies that all parties involved in the teaching and learning of learners must have the interest of such learners at heart:

Everyone involved with teaching and the learning of the learners must work hard for the learners, it must be the learners that are important, not us or the teachers or principals.

Circuit manager 2 asserted that there is a relationship between learners, teachers and principals situated at the school and education officials from the district office. All these stakeholders must work collaboratively and take responsibility for their actions with the goal of improving the learners' academic performance. It should become a culture where it is the norm to be accountable, not the exception.

Teachers, learners, principals at the schools and us at the district must all link and work together to make our learners the best performers. We should not be just accountable now and then, it must become our culture, then it will work.

Discussion

This section portrays the summary of discussions of the qualitative thematic analysis. Perceptions regarding the relationship, academic support, and culture of accountability driven by collaborative leadership in relation to learner academic performance were sought through qualitative analysis. The thought was to discuss each theme with regard to the findings obtained from participants. What emerged very distinctively from the results is the perception of the different groups of participants that the causes for learners' low academic performance seem to resort with all other groups of participants, but their own.

The teachers attribute the lack of academic performance of learners to their principals for a lack of leadership and focus. According to them, their principals have lost focus and in many instances lead the school by themselves. This trend to attribute some blame to other groups of participants continued through all the themes discussed. Teachers also mentioned the lack of leadership commitment from their SMTs (of which the principal is a member), also when it relates to academic intervention strategies to be implemented. Teachers mentioned that the lack of regular availability of subject advisors to them as teachers plays a major role in their successful teaching of learners. No teacher indicated any deficiencies in their own repertoire. Effective collaboration can only transpire in an environment where leaders themselves are open to collaborative discussion. Collaboration between the teachers, HoDs and subject advisors necessitates a readiness to sometimes be vulnerable and to request assistance. However, these three groups of leaders may see admitting their own role in the poor academic performance as a sign of weakness, incompetence or inefficiency. Even if they require assistance, teachers have been shown to avoid asking for it in environments where there is a stigma linked to doing so.

The principals stated that district office officials (circuit managers and subject advisors) do not provide the necessary leader support to positively affect learner academic performance. The principals also mentioned teachers' lack of commitment and the district office for not concentrating more on primary school learners (which according to them would solve the problem when the learners reach secondary schools). The teachers' lack of commitment was also mentioned as a direct influence on poor academic performance. None of the principals indicated that they should carry some of the blame for lack of leadership towards learner academic performance. Principals have an important collaborative leadership role to play by assisting teachers in identifying their development needs, as well as finding and distributing resources to support teaching and learning in their schools.

The subject advisors implicated the HoDs for their lack of leadership to motivate teachers and to control homework given. Their general perception regarding academic

intervention strategies is that such strategies are not successful, as teachers do not seem to cover the curriculum and leave too much for these intervention sessions. Learners then fail to grasp content in such condensed interventions. In one instance, a subject advisor blamed all levels of leadership within the school – from principals who fail to lead, to lazy HoDs who do not support their teachers, to teachers who regularly absent themselves from the classrooms. This becomes the culture at such schools and the climate then is not conducive for proper teaching and learning to occur. None of the subject advisors designated any of the blame for lack of leadership regarding learner academic performance to themselves. Within their subject field, they must develop collaborative district-school support programmes with the subject teachers to develop the teachers' curriculum knowledge, skills and teaching values so that they can lead and manage people effectively and contribute to improved learner academic performance.

The circuit managers attributed the problems to the education system in that they struggle to attain their goals within the given time-frames provided to them. They also indicated that not all educational leaders (in schools and in the district) have the interest of learner academic performance at heart. From the findings the following emerged as problem areas for sustained learner academic performance for circuit managers: (i) leadership qualities of many principals and SMTs are limited; (ii) teachers' total commitment to all their learners is not always found; (iii) not all teachers provided by tertiary institutions seem to be properly trained; (iv) financial assistance and provision of learning and teaching support material (LTSM) is sporadic; (v) learners who have progressed to higher grades are not performing academically in the higher grades; (vi) learner discipline and school attendance are major contributing factors to intervention failure; (vii) principals and SMTs fail to monitor improvement academic strategies; (viii) principals and SMTs fail to hold teachers accountable for their performance; (ix) parents' lack of support; and (x) accountability by all stakeholders in the education process. None of the circuit managers indicated that they should carry some of the blame for lack of leadership towards learner academic performance. Collaborative leadership at the management and leadership level of a school is imperative for academic success. High-achieving school districts have circuit managers who take their role as collaborative leaders seriously by being personally involved in the supervision and guidance of principals. Such leadership will then cascade down to the HoDs, subject advisors and teachers.

From the above discussion, it is evident that what literature considers being necessary for academic success, is not what reveals itself in the schools and district office. Without exception, all levels of leadership perceive the lack of leadership to be somewhere else. Principals in general do not engage in sustained collaborative leadership actions within their schools or with district offices. The subject advisors and circuit managers in general also seem to neglect their leadership actions and resort to putting the blame for poor

learner academic achievement at the door of the various school leadership levels. The overall climate of the schools in the study did not seem to be conducive to successful academic interventions, let alone for such academic interventions to be sustained over time. It is unfortunate that, in the end, the outcome of such a lack of accountability negatively affects learner academic performance.

The findings of the study reinforce what Kouzes and Posner (2010) found, namely, that no single person has all the knowledge, skills and talent to lead a district, improve a school, or meet all the needs of every child in his or her classroom. The findings of the study emphasise that it requires collaborative effort and dispersed educational leadership to meet the academic challenges confronting schools. The responsibility of education rests on all levels of leadership within the school and district. It is not easy work, but it is necessary for current ineffective systems to change in order to benefit the learners.

Recommendations

Leadership at all levels is necessary to ensure sustained learner academic performance. To this end, recommendations to enhance learner academic performance are provided per level of leadership, namely, teacher, principal, subject advisors and circuit managers.

Teachers

- Teachers are the leaders of their classrooms and need to plan the implementation of the curriculum. They are therefore collaboratively involved in the leadership of the school. The curriculum needs to be completed each quarter to ensure learners are ready for assessment on a quarterly basis. This implies that teachers need to be in their classrooms daily and use time allocations per subject favourably.
- Teachers are to create a conducive atmosphere in their classrooms that will collectively lead to a positive academic climate in the school. Learners should be encouraged to attend classes; complete their homework; and be actively involved in the classroom.
- Teachers need to set themselves (in collaboration with HoDs) achievable academic targets for their learners and then actively engage with learners to achieve the set targets. Teachers then must hold themselves accountable to reach the targets.
- Teachers need to state clearly to subject advisors and HoDs what support they are in need of. This relates to the Personal Growth Plan for each individual teacher. Teachers are to be adamant that lack of skills needs to be addressed by training and development.

Principals

Principals are the foremost leaders of a school and recommendations deal with a wide range of leadership aspects.

- Principals must create organisational conditions (i.e. positive school climate) and effect institutional changes (implement time management, proper curriculum coverage) that will ensure that secondary schools provide quality education that will lead to quality educational outcomes. To achieve this they should align educational resources with education delivery which they are expected to monitor and supervise.
- To improve performance and achieve the desirable educational outcomes, principals should take decisions based on concrete evidence derived from empirical data rather than assumptions. To achieve this, they need to regularly collect classroom information on learner achievement, use this information in discussions with teachers and HoDs about adjusting and improving their teaching strategies.
- Principals should link with the district office to discuss possible school improvement planning. They must then lead subsequent meetings with staff, the school governing body, parents and the entire school community to discuss and implement such a school improvement plan.
- Principals should lead in such a way as to gain the respect of the school community. The school climate regarding accountability is set by the principals and in this way their transformational leadership role will come to the fore.

Subject Advisors

- Subject advisors must take the time to capacitate teachers by developing their sense of the meaning of the academic information they deal with in the classroom, as they learn to translate it into the information needed to improve learner outcomes. Teachers need to understand the meaning of assessment results and the resultant actions they should embark on to intervene.
- Subject advisors must ensure that the professional development of teachers is focused on building their requisite content and pedagogical knowledge, skills and competences to help them accomplish the district and school goals.
- Subject advisors must work with teachers collaboratively to establish professional development goals that focus on the goals and strategies aimed at enhancing timeous curriculum delivery.

Circuit Managers

- Circuit managers must state and describe the learner academic performance expectations to principals, HoDs, teachers and parents. The current school

environment in low-performing schools is a challenge for principals and teachers and therefore calls for such engagement to state and describe the learner academic performance expectations.

- Circuit managers must engage with clear explanations with all staff members, school governing body, learners and parents how teacher outcomes, school organisational outcomes, instructional outcomes and learner outcomes affect learner academic performance.
- To improve academic performance and achieve the desirable educational outcomes, circuit managers, in collaboration with subject advisors and principals, should take decisions based on concrete evidence derived from empirical data rather than act on assumptions.
- Circuit managers, in collaboration with principals, must set specific achievement targets for schools and learners and then ensure the consistent use of research-based instructional strategies in all classrooms to reach those targets. Continually monitor achievement and instruction goals to ensure that these goals remain the driving force behind a school's actions.

Conclusion

Creating the conditions to assist learners to succeed academically is one of the premier duties of educational leaders. School, circuit and district leaders are to create the conditions that assist more learners to succeed at all levels of schooling. They should build the capacity of teachers to function as members of high-performing collaborative teams. To create the conditions for high-performing collaborative teams in schools and improve learner academic performance, educational leaders are to develop clarity of purpose and priorities, structures, support, feedback, and dispersed leadership. Time and again the power of collective capacity is observed. When a group is mobilised with focus and specificity, it can accomplish amazing results. Teachers should ultimately shift the conversation from “What was taught?” or “How was it taught?” to questions such as “What was learned?” and “How can we use evidence of learner performance to strengthen our professional practice?”

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