Chapter 17

The Relationship between Emotional Competence and Instructional Leadership and Their Association with Learner Achievement

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ABSTRACT

The mandated approach to school leadership in South Africa has not produced any significant improvement in learner achievement during the last decade. A new approach to leadership with greater emphasis on the ideographic dimension of school leadership is necessary. This chapter investigates how principals' can utilize emotional competence and instructional leadership to influence learner achievement. The structures of emotional competence and instructional leadership are investigated using factor analysis and Structural Equation Modeling. These constructs are linked to learner achievement data. Intrapersonal emotional competence impacted directly on interpersonal emotional competence, which in turn, impacted directly and indirectly on all the components of instructional leadership. The postulated pathways in the model were statistically significant and substantively meaningful. The model suggested by this research indicates that learner achievement can be influenced in a collaborative way by school leaders via utilization of emotional competence and the four components of instructional leadership.

INTRODUCTION

Leadership is a multifaceted phenomenon and as such it has often been metaphorically linked to the many facets of a diamond. Which facets in a diamond sparkle and shine depend on which facets catch and reflect the light? In a similar vein the school principal also has many facets or dimensions involved in his/her leadership activities. In this chapter the light will fall on a facet which all principals have but which some use more effectively than others namely emotional intelligence or competence. The utilization of this often hidden facet in conjunction with a second

leadership facet or dimension namely instructional leadership, to influence learner achievement, is the topic of this chapter.

BACKGROUND TO THE RESEARCH PROBLEM

The practice of school leadership in South African public schools is guided by mandates published in Government gazettes. Among other things the school principal is responsible for the professional management of the school, implementing all curricular activities and for implementing policy and legislation (PAM, 2003; SA, 2007). Furthermore the action plan of 2014 for South African Schools (SA, 2010; DoBE, 2010a) states that by 2025 a school principal "must be seen to ensure that teaching in the school takes place as it should, according to the national curriculum (DoBE, 2010b), and understand that his or her role as a leader is to be responsible to promote harmony and a sound work ethic within the school community and beyond". School leadership in South Africa, like many other countries, is thus impacted by State and District policies and procedures as well as many other variables. Learner achievement is typically measured via standardized Annual National Assessments. School principals are held accountable for learner achievements in these standardized national assessments yet they only have an indirect influence on learner achievement. Compliance to the mandated national curriculum with its emphasis on measurement of learner achievements could possibly lead to an over emphasis of the bureaucratic role expectations characterized by a prominence of hierarchical authority, rules and regulations and specialization and a decrease in the ideographic expectations such as the use of emotional competence to influence people towards achieving the set goals. Hence aspects of leadership such as emotional competence in influencing learner achievement could be deemed to be less important. Furthermore it could be inferred that

if the learners' academic achievements in terms of minimum average pass percentages in Literacy and Mathematics, as provided in the action plan (DoBE,2010b), are achieved then the principal has been successful in ensuring that teaching in the school takes place as it should. This chapter argues that the most effective means towards achieving the learning targets as set out in the National Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS) (SA, 2011) and the action plan for 2014 (DBE, 2010b) is for school principals to be instructional leaders as this involves them directly in the teaching and learning process. However, in order to achieve these mandated targets the principal needs to influence teachers regarding the importance of meeting these mandated learner academic targets. To obtain achievement targets through other people can be both cognitively and emotionally challenging as the leader has to be able to mange his/her own emotions as well as those of others (Cline & Necochea, 2000). Leadership in schools thus needs persons who are both cognitively as well as emotionally competent as discussed in the next paragraph.

Any person who wishes to qualify as teacher first needs to acquire a certain level of cognitive competence and in order to qualify for a leadership position in a school one usually also needs to successfully complete graduate and post-graduate programs dealing with school management and leadership. The academic rigors of such programs together with their credentialing procedures typically serve to ensure that those who are able to pass such hurdles are of above average intelligence (Emmerling & Goleman, 2003).To process the complexity of information that principals face daily requires a high level of cognitive ability and hence cognitive competence would be an important part of a school leaders competencies. However, there is still a perception in South Africa that such a cognitive competence is the most important variable influencing learner achievement as was demonstrated by the request received from a group from the private sector who provide fi-

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