
Editorial

Thandi Ngcobo and Kholeka Moloji

We, the guest editors for the *Journal of Education* special issue on Educational Leadership, express our appreciation to all the members of the editorial board for initiating this issue, the scholars who submitted their articles for publication and all the reviewers of these articles for their very valuable insights. Without your contributions and commitment to educational leadership and management this task would never have been realized. We appreciate the varied perspectives expressed in the different articles about the important function of school leadership, without which no school would realize its, and the country's, educational vision, mission, values and strategic goals.

Leadership is not an easy or straightforward task. This is especially the case in today's schools in that they are bereft with social, cultural, political and economic complexities that make huge demands on those who are given the task of leading our schools. The challenges of globalization, knowledge economy, transformations in geo-politics, governance and citizenship in an era characterized by migration, flight, asylum, multi-culturalism and diversity, and incessant conflict between the youth and their teachers – as well as among the learners themselves – make the task of leading schools even more complex and difficult. These difficulties and complexities have changed the face of organizational work in many ways, including how teachers teach and whether learners and their societies do benefit from the teachings. Leadership thus becomes a crucial but contested terrain of survival, struggle, multiple meanings and an agenda of who has influential power and what that power does to those who experience it.

Given these difficulties and contradictions, the search therefore is for optimum social, educational, cultural, political and economic conditions for sustainable, effective and efficient educational leadership. Emergent questions include those that point to how men and women experience the leadership challenges in today's complex and changing educational landscape and whether leadership is structurally located or, for that matter, a gendered based battle? For example, regarding the latter research has, according to Chisholm (2001), seemingly intractably linked leadership in educational management to gendered character of organizational culture and the way in which women

negotiate these conditions. Her argument is that organizational culture and structural conditions occur simultaneously with the global processes of restructuring education in which asymmetrical and unequal nature of social relations of gender are reconstructed through ‘discourses of masculinity, rationality and leadership’. Given the nature of these changes, she makes the point that the stage is set for conflict and contradiction between policy goals and outcomes. In South Africa, she argues, a powerful agenda for social justice has emerged and is shaping the re-composition of the state and bureaucracy while, simultaneously, new discourses of leadership undermining the position of women have emerged. In this regard, feminist theory deconstructs the systems of knowledge by bringing forth their masculinist bias and knowledge biases. Knowledge thus has to be deconstructed to find the ‘hidden’ behind what is presented to the masses by those who are in power (Ritzer, 2008).

Bernal (1999) argues that epistemological concerns in schools are inseparable from cultural hegemonic domination in educational research. Arguably, the way educational research is conducted contributes significantly to what happens or does not happen in schools. Bernal (1999) further argues that, in education, what is taught, how it is taught, and whose fault it is when what is taught is not learned are often manifestations of what is considered to be the legitimate body of knowledge, an epistemological issue of power, ideology, ethics, politics and survival. Furthermore, Bradley (1999) claims that current changes in organizational work in schools are altering class and gender relations that influence the way researchers theorize them. She argues, for example, that Sociology is no longer exclusively preoccupied with class but has now turned its attention to other forms of inequality especially those of gender and race or ethnicity, age, disability, sexual orientation, region (geopolitics) and religion. Arguably, Bernal (1999, p.301) asserts that most feminists of colour recognize that gender, race, ideology, class and sexual orientation determine the allocation of power and the nature of any individual’s identity, status and circumstance within the education sector. He further points to the “endarkened” feminist epistemologies that he deems crucial in this debate because they speak to the failures of traditional patriarchal and liberal educational scholarship to examine the intersection of race, class, gender, ideology, power and sexuality.

The critical approach in deconstructing and reconstructing the leadership mystique, therefore enables researchers to enhance our understanding of the role of educational leadership in the socio-economic and political

transformation of our young democratic society. Schools and those who work in them have an agency. Our aim is to unpack the discursive leadership practices, performances, meanings, ideologies, and power relations in various schooling contexts. In that process, we should be able to explicate and understand the essence of educational leadership in the ineluctable process of educational reform. This is why it is essential that those who engage in the business of school leadership begin to appreciate that “knowledge must always be understood in its historical and discursive specificity”. As we engage with leadership issues, it is essential that we begin to understand this concept as “a set of epistemological distinctions to orient the observer toward the empirical world, but whose actual concepts and descriptions involve a continual interplay between the theory and events of the world, as argued by Popkewitz (1998) in *Struggling for the Soul: The Politics of Schooling and the Construction of the Teacher*. Our aim is to allow space for understanding and appreciating that hegemony and influence are contested in our school systems at every level and how this impacts on the notion of sustainable, effective, efficient and transformative leadership. We firmly believe that the articles that are part of this edition variously go a long way in helping address these issues.

The first of these articles is titled *Educational leadership and management – some thoughts from the field*. At the core of this article is reflection on whether South African higher education is succeeding in helping students develop a better understanding of this very complex and elusive concept. Arguments that the author, Van der Mescht, raises in this article draw from Bourdieu’s notion of field forces and his own extended background in the educational leadership ‘professional’ field, academia, national curriculum development and review processes. Against this background, the author then focuses on the Masters in Education Leadership and Management (ELM) to develop a framework that attempts to ‘capture the complexity of the field and to militate against its debilitating eclecticism’ and related ‘weak force of academic pursuit’.

Focus in the second article, *Leading change in the academy: a biographical narrative of developing a dynamic strategic planning model for student affairs in HWI* is also on ‘academia’ and change. The authors, Moloi, Dzvimbo and Ngcobo, present a dynamic strategic planning model for leading change in the post apartheid era. Their discussion is mainly informed by the experiences of one of the authors in leading strategic change in a Historically White Institution’s (HWI) Division of Student Affairs. It also draws from critical theory, post modernism and works by Mintzberg’s (1994) and Kaplan and Norton (2001 and 2004) on strategic planning and use of strategy maps. In the

end the authors make use of a social epistemology to point towards the development of a strategic process that is socially constructed by staff and students.

The third and fourth of the articles draw attention to what may be viewed as hardly unexplored, but very important, locally related educational leadership issues. The first of these two is entitled *An unexplored partnership: the influence of traditional leaders on schooling*. In this article the authors, Mbokazi and Bhengu, reflect on their observations in five research projects conducted between 2002 and 2004 of influence exerted by traditional leaders on schooling. The authors' reflections in this regard draw from the sociology of cultural transmission, collaborative theories and systems approaches to change management. In the fourth of these articles the author, Msila, focuses on *Ubuntu and school leadership*. The discussion in this regard begins with a demystification of the 'ubuntu' concept and proceeds with a presentation of the ethnographic case study in which the author explored the role of 'ubuntu' in leading teacher change and school improvement.

Authors of the last 'group' of the articles help emphasize the importance of working together for leadership effectiveness. Grant 'begins' discussion in this respect in an article she entitled, *'We did not put our pieces together': exploring a professional development initiative through a distributed leadership lens*. The discussion in this article is informed by a study in which the author explored the professional development initiative of educators in four KwaZulu-Natal schools. The article is premised on the view that leadership is vital for organizational 'movement and change' and that for the leadership to be effective in this respect it needs to be distributed amongst various members of an organization. The author's findings in the related study serve to confirm this view and lead to a conclusion by the author that such collaboration is only possible through a critical reconceptualization of, and debates about, leadership. On a similar note, in the last of the articles Edwards and Smit present a proposal of *Collaborative leadership as a necessary condition for successful curriculum implementation*. The proposal is located in post structuralism and is informed by a study in which collaborative curriculum leadership that enabled the successful curriculum implementation in the absence of the school principal was explored. Conclusions drawn by the authors from findings in this research were that such leadership is a 'precondition for the creation of a collaborative culture' that they found to enable the success even in the absence of the school's principal.

References

Bernal, D.D. 1999. Using a Chicana Feminist Epistemology in Educational Research. In Segarra, J, Dobbles, R. and Greene, M. (Eds). *Learning as a political act*. Cambridge: Harvard Educational Review.

Bradley, H. 1999. *Gender and power in the workplace: analysing the impact of economic change*. London: Macmillan Press.

Chisholm, L. 2001. Gender and leadership in South African educational administration. *Gender and Education*, 13(4): pp.387–399.

Popkewitz, T.S. 1998. *Struggling for the soul. The politics of schooling and the construction of the teacher*. Amsterdam: Teachers College Press.

Ritzer, G. 2008. *Sociological theory*. Boston. McGraw-Hill.

Thandi Ngcobo
Faculty of Education
University of KwaZulu-Natal

ngcobot9@ukzn.ac.za

Kholeka Moloi
Faculty of Education
University of Johannesburg

kholekam@uj.ac.za