
Governing body's responsibility and power for quality education

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Abstract

Governing bodies are expected to play an important role in promoting quality education in schools. According to Section 20 of the South African Schools Act (SASA) of 1996, they have to support the principal and teachers and promote the best interests of the school; and according to SASA Section 16, they are responsible for the governance of the school but may not be involved in the professional management by the principal and teachers. Section 9 of The Education Laws Amendment Act of 2007 opens the possibility of more direct involvement of governing bodies in professional activities because principals must table the school improvement plans, and provide feedback on the implementation of this plan and present a report on professional management to the governing body. This view is supported by Section 58B of the Act because the Provincial Heads of Departments (HoDs) may suspend the functioning of the governing body if it prejudices quality education. The implication here is that the governing body has some power in professional matters related to ensuring quality education.

Governing bodies must have sufficient power to hold not only principals who cannot or do not want to implement their own improvement plans accountable for quality education, for example, but also the provincial officials supposed to support the principal.

Teachers are expected to be important role players in the delivery of quality education. Teachers have specific professional rights because of their training and specialised knowledge. However, these rights are attendant on professional performance which leads to high quality education. Teachers cannot claim professional rights if they are guilty of gross negligence such as being frequently absent or late for class or being not well prepared to teach or waiting for the Department of Education to provide professional development.

The new powers given to governing bodies allowing them to be more responsive to professional matters in schools may affect the professional rights of teachers since unprofessional or lay educational people (the parents) can now be involved in professional activities. The intention, however, is not that parental representatives be involved in professional matters for which they are not trained, but that they should be in a position to act in cases of gross negligence. They should focus on the positive aspects and promote quality via support and good relationships, building up a positive climate and encouraging ownership rather than using the negative approach of threatening people.

Although teachers claim to be professionals, the quality of education delivered does not reflect professionalism. The low literacy and mathematics levels and the high failure rate as

well as the high learner repetition rate weaken teachers' right to claim their rights as professionals and prohibit the involvement of governing bodies in professional matters in schools.

This article assesses the possible implications of a deeper level of involvement of parents in professional matters. This new 'power' must be read with SASA Section 20 which already provides governing bodies with powers in that they are expected to support principals and teachers in their professional activities. The article also explores the ambiguities in the Education Laws Amendment Act of 2007. Although, it provides governing bodies with more power to improve quality education, it also allows HODs to curtail the powers and functions of the governing body without providing detailed reasons for doing so. This could result in court cases and negatively affect quality education.

Introduction

The preamble of the South African Schools Act 1996 indicates that the purpose of the Act is to correct past injustices, to instil democratic principles in schools and, therefore, also in broader society, but also to provide quality education for all. The importance of democracy, redress and equality as part of the aims of school governance has been firmly established by many authors, for example Christie (2006), Grant Lewis and Naidoo (2006), Sayed and Soudien (2005) and Woolman and Fleisch (2008). This article will contemplate that the governing body has an important role in school improvement (see Caldwell and Spinks, 1998; Bush and Heystek, 2003; Ranson, 2008) but not at the cost of neglecting the other aims of SASA. It is not a case of either quality education or redress and equity, but rather a case of both. Against the background of the low academic achievement in the grade 3, 6 and 12 results, this article suggests that governing bodies take greater responsibility for the quality of education as implied by the Education Laws Amendment Act of 2007. This could lead to school improvement on a large scale instead of its being confined to a few schools.

The Education Laws Amendment Act (ELAA) of 2007 (Department of Education 2007) highlights the importance of governing bodies especially in underperforming schools. It also suggests that governing bodies could become more accountable for the quality of education in a school irrespective of the diverse abilities and availabilities of governing bodies (Ministerial Review Committee, 2003). If the government intends to make governing bodies more accountable for the quality of education in a school, then governing bodies may need more power to act and be involved in professional activities in schools. Legislation before the ELAA and common practice (Lewis and

Naidoo, 2006) exclude them at present from any active involvement in professional management of the school. However, according to the South African Schools Act (SASA), Act 84 of 1996, Section 20.(1), the governing body of a public school must:

- (a) promote the best interests of the school and strive to ensure its development through the provision of quality education for all learners at the school;
- (e) support the principal, educators and other staff of the school in the performance of their professional functions.

These functions must be read with SASA Section 16 which indicates that the governing body must be in a relationship of trust with the school. This position of trust must take account of the ambiguities in Section 16 arising from governance as responsibility of the governing body (of which the principal is a member) where the professional management is vested in the principal. This article will explore the supportive functions of the governing bodies and the appointment of educators to illustrate their importance in ensuring quality education as well as the possible infringement of teachers' rights.

The Education Laws Amendment Act 2007, Clause 9, added the following after SASA Section 20e:

(eA) the governing body of a public school must adhere to any actions taken by the Head of Department in terms of Section 16 of the Employment of Educators Act, 1998 (Act No. 76 of 1998), to address the incapacity of a principal or educator to carry out his or her duties effectively;

Section 56B (1–5) of ELAA 2007 indicates that a provincial HoD may take actions against principals, educators and governing bodies if the quality of the education is not acceptable. These actions specifically refer to underperforming schools as mentioned in section 58B and C. However, they are directly linked with Section 16 because Section 16A refers to Section 58 which stipulates that principals from underperforming schools must provide the provincial HoD as well as the governing body with the report and plans for the school improvement (Section 16A (1)(ii and iii)).

In the past the incapacity of principals or educators was a professional issue. Even if it was not the intention of the government, an unintended consequence of ELAA may be to grant the governing bodies greater responsibility for quality education in schools. The implication of Section 58B is that governing bodies may be required to be involved in supporting principals and schools even before the judgment of incapacity is made by the HoD. This change in the legislation may be similar in approach and in implementation as suggested by Grant Lewis and Naidoo (2006) and which Sayed and Soudien (2005) already indicated. They contend that several of the legislative amendments are double-edged, bringing to light conflicts between the goals of promoting democratic participation of role player involvement through governing bodies and equity of opportunity supporting quality education for all. In this case, the intention of the policy may be to strengthen principals' power. I would like to underline that expecting governing bodies to be concerned with improving sustainable quality education, opens the door to more involvement of governing bodies in the professional management of schools.

In exploring the support governing bodies may offer in the interests of quality education, my argument is that the non-involvement of governing bodies (mainly the parental component) in the professional management of schools is a limited interpretation of Section 20 a and e. The governing body, and especially parents will find it difficult to perform these functions (and especially Section eA) if they are totally excluded or prevented from involvement in the professional activities of schools. I have no wish to argue that parents, especially parents who have limited education experience, academic training or low literacy levels, must interfere in professional teaching activities. The possibility of such interference, however, be recognised as a direct implication of the initial intention of SASA which emphasises the importance of parents as the majority stakeholders and highlights their role in ensuring that high quality education should be in place and be sustained. The parental role in sustainable quality education begins with the appointment of motivated, sufficiently trained and most suitable educators for the local school. Although the governing body only recommends appointments, the HOD has to provide valid written reasons to the governing body if it does not accept the recommendation of the governing body, given that it followed the process and complied with the policies and legislation with regard to redress and equity as stipulated in the Education Laws Amendment Act of 2005. In line with organisational management principles (Stirling, 2008), the appointment also implies possible actions in the spirit of the Employment of Educators Act 1998 against non-conforming educators by the

employer. Education is unique in this organisational process because the parents as majority in the governing body are not employed by the government to do this work. However, since they play an important role in the recommendation of the teacher to be appointed, they may therefore claim to have some role in actions against non-performing teachers. Consequently, I would argue that the 2007 Amendment Act confirms the involvement of governing bodies in more professional activities of schools to comply with their function to promote quality education (SASA 20(1a)).

More involvement of the governing body in the professional management of the school could infringe on teachers' rights. This will therefore be discussed as a possible consequence of the change in ELAA 2007, which may open the way to the infringement of teachers' professional rights by parents. I should like to underline that arguments for greater involvement of the governing body in this article are related to observable misconduct, which will be discussed later. They specifically preclude professional matters such as selection of textbooks or teaching methodology or the quality and standards and frequency of assessment, which are the preserve of the principal and teaching staff.

Governing body support and teachers rights

SASA section 20(1e) states that the governing body must "support the principal, educators and other staff of the school in the performance of their professional functions". The interpretation and application of support can be in many forms and stem from different attitudes. There is a fine line or just a grey area between support from the governing body, especially parents, and intrusion on the professional domain of teachers. Support could be moral support, e.g. the governing body (parents in the GB and also the rest of the community) may support the new initiative from teachers to improve reading skills, but they do not provide material, financial or any other support. Another form of support may be assistance with invigilation so that teachers have some time free to do more important educational work or support with fund raising. These forms of support would generally be seen as positive support. Other actions which parents may view as valid support may be experienced by teachers as an intrusion on their rights as professional teachers. An example of this form of support may be when a teacher is frequently absent; the governing body may ask the principal why the teacher is always late, which actions have been taken and why there seems to be limited improvement and then support the principal to initiate disciplinary actions against a teacher according to the

Educator Employment Act 1998. Although this request may be experienced as ‘negative motivation or just the stick without the carrot motivation’ by the teachers and as an intrusion on a professional matter, this may be what is expected in SASA section 20 from governing bodies and they have a legitimate right to support schools. In under performing schools this may be an especially important supportive function. From a parental perspective, this may also be accepted as complying with Section 20 of SASA because it promotes the best interest of the school (SASA section 20(1a) although it may infringe on individual teachers’ rights. A question emerging from this is whether teachers who do not teach in compliance with the expectations and rules may claim that this parental involvement and support are an infringement of their rights.

An example of this difference in perspective is explained by Van Wyk whose research was conducted in township and urban former white schools. According to Van Wyk (2004) a teacher from the township said: ‘They (the SGB) always tell us that we cannot survive without them or they threaten us with redeployment’ while the teachers in the urban schools do not experience this kind of ‘involvement’ in their schools. The threat to redeploy teachers is not what I have in mind but this point illustrates that teachers do not see it kindly that parents must be involved. If governing bodies receive the power to insist on an investigation about teachers’ misconduct, it may motivate teachers to improve their work performance. Teachers who are not meeting expectations may feel threatened if governing bodies exercise the power provided by SASA and the ELAA 2007.

A possible problem with involvement in improving education quality at under performing schools is that the governing bodies concerned do not know what is expected from teachers and what they can and may do to effect quality education. This is not only because they have no or limited skills and knowledge about schools or education, but also that they have no or limited exposure to the quality education to be found in schools that are performing well, for example many of the former white schools. If parents do not have wider experience, they will not be able to raise their expectations or hold teachers to a higher level of performance (Mncube, 2009; Tsotetsi, Van Wyk and Lemmer, 2008). It is therefore important that the training of governing bodies emphasise this potentially important role of governing bodies.

Teachers' rights and quality education

According to Squelch (1999) in Rossouw (2004), a right is something you are entitled to but is associated with corresponding duties that you can realistically be expected to perform. The Constitution and the Bill of Rights give teachers similar rights to any other employee. As employees, teachers also have specific rights, for example remuneration as agreed upon, protection against unfair labour practices and protection of health and safety. In terms of the South African Constitution teacher rights include equality before the law (article 9), freedom of association (article 18), fair labour practice (article 22) and the right to just administrative action (article 33). But these teachers also have a duty to render the service agreed upon and perform these tasks with competence and efficiency (Rossouw, 2004). It is important for governing bodies to have a good understanding of these rights and duties when they wish to exercise their power in the professional management of schools in accordance with ELAA (2007), but the parents right to demand quality education for their children cannot be gainsaid.

It must be emphasised that teachers as a group have specific rights that are stipulated in legislation and policy documents. It is individual teacher's rights that may be at stake when the governing body becomes more involved in the professional management of schools. This will most probably not influence group rights, for example that the right to participate in strikes is withdrawn.

Misconduct versus incapacity

If the intention of the ELAA 2007 is indeed greater involvement of governing bodies, it will be very important for them to be able to distinguish between misconduct and incapacity. This article thus focuses on the role of the governing body with regard to observable professional misconduct rather than the incapacity of teachers.

The Employment of Educators Act 76 of 1998 indicates serious offences as activities involving drugs and assault. For the period of 2005 to June 2006 there were 255 cases before the South African Council for Educators (Sace) (2006). According to the report by the Legal Affairs and Ethics division of Sace, only 25 teachers were found guilty of serious misconduct during this period. In a sense, 255 accused of serious misconduct are too many, but this is a relatively small proportion of the total number of teachers. But the essential

point is that responsibility for the lack of quality education reflected in the reports on the reading and mathematics abilities of learners in grade 6 (Republic of South Africa, 2005) goes far beyond this group. According to Taylor, Fleisch and Shindler (2008), 72 per cent of teachers spend fewer than three hours per week on active teaching activities and teacher absenteeism is at its worst in rural schools with the low performances. It follows, therefore, that it is the less serious misconduct which is deleteriously affecting quality education. To achieve quality education, we need professional teachers who are well prepared and in time for class, set examples of hard and dedicated work and have realistic aims for learners. Those who do not meet these criteria can therefore be regarded as being guilty of misconduct. The report on learner absenteeism (Community Agency for Social Enquiry and Joint Education Trust, 2007) indicates that poor relationships between teachers and learners, corporal punishment (which is prohibited) and poor teacher examples regarding time and preparedness strongly influence learner absenteeism. These factors would also be reasons for poor education quality, and so governing bodies may have to give special attention to them in their effort to support schools for quality education.

For the purpose of this article, misconduct will be regarded as issues that children are aware of in the school and parents may observe through their children's experience or see evidence of or hear about in the community. This is in line with what Rossouw (2004) identifies as less serious misconduct, which can normally be dealt with by the principal in the school. Examples of these kinds of misconduct are listed in Section 18 of the Employment of Educators Act 76 of 1998 and include conduct such as continual late coming, not being in class when required to be there, lack of appropriate lesson preparation, drunkenness, abuse of authority, unacceptable disciplinary actions towards children, parents or the broader community. These can all be addressed by the governing body as part of their function to support the principal and teachers in meeting their professional teaching responsibilities.

Many researchers have reported on the poor conduct of educators, particularly in township schools (Chisholm and Vally, 1996; Van Wyk, 2004). Van Wyk (2004), for instance, found that 73 per cent of educators from the township schools felt that the SGB should be involved in disciplining educators who have misbehaved. As one educator explained: 'They (the SGB) should address such issues before teacher misbehaviour becomes an embarrassment for the school'. Another argued that the SGB should be involved in disciplining staff as a natural consequence of being involved in their appointment. In addition,

educators said that involving the SGB was particularly relevant ‘. . . if the principal has tried all other means of calling the teacher to task and has failed’. This lends support for granting SGBs the authority to be involved in disciplining educators. However, as mentioned previously, SGBs must be aware of the problems in the school and have the required training to fulfil this task to the satisfaction of all concerned.

The Department of Education acknowledged in 2003 in the Ministerial Review Committee for School Governance that parents through governing bodies, even illiterate parents, can be and must be more involved and take responsibility for the quality of education in their respective schools. Even semi-literate parents or parents with limited education would be able to determine that teachers are guilty of the transgressions listed above and therefore possibly guilty of misconduct. Most of these transgressions seem to be unprofessional actions rather than serious misconduct. However, in an underperforming school, actions like frequent late coming can be construed as serious misconduct. In those circumstances, governing bodies should support principals when teachers act in an unprofessional manner. Furthermore, teachers and teacher unions must be willing to accept and support governing bodies when they act against teachers who are guilty of this kind of misconduct.

Governing body competence and quality education

In order to understand the possible influence of the ELAA 2007 on teachers and their work, certain aspects of the South African education system need to be considered. Taylor, Fleisch and Shindler (2008) underline the significant diversity between schools and then specifically between the former white and black schools with regard to teachers’ ability, motivational level and professional ethics, their academic qualifications, the expectations of teachers from the community, the pressure to provide quality education and the exposure and experience of communities (especially governing bodies) to high quality education (Botha 2005). This influences the ability of governing bodies to ensure quality education. Beckmann and Prinsloo (2009) indicate that although the governing body has no original power to act on its own outside the provisions in SASA, it has original power to perform its functions in terms of SASA. The power of a school governing body refers to its legal capacity to perform its functions and obligations in terms of Section 16 of the South African Schools Act (SASA). The power of a governing body is not

delegated power but original power, in terms of the Schools Act (SASA), to act as the duly appointed agent of a public school. For the purpose of this article the implication is that the governing body's right to offer support to the school has some legal status and power. Consequently, it may claim, as the ELAA 2007 seems to suggest, that it may be more involved in the professional management of schools, albeit in a limited role.

The governing bodies in former white schools generally have more human and social capital – more specifically, high levels of literacy and professional competencies, and motivation (Woolman and Fleisch, 2008; Mncube 2009). Usually they also have more financial capital in the form of the income they can generate or access to funding than schools in rural and financially deprived areas. This makes it possible for the governing bodies in these former white schools to be actively involved in supporting schools and promoting the best interest of the school. A possible negative consequence, from the teachers' perspective, may be intrusions on the rights of professional teachers. These governing bodies are likely to demand high quality education and they can and may be able to put pressure on principals and teachers to produce better results.

Governing bodies in former disadvantaged schools may have less knowledge, experience and skills to perform the expected governance functions (Botha, 2006) because they have limited academic skills and experience as a result of the literacy levels of parents. This may therefore influence their ability to support or demand that teachers provide quality education. But it does not deny parents the right to demand quality education for their children. However, as pointed out earlier, Van Wyk (2004) makes the point that implementing and using these powers without proper training can be experienced as threatening to teachers.

Both the Western Cape as well as the Gauteng Department of Education categorise low performing schools according to a matriculation pass rate. The schools declared to be underperforming schools are generally in lower socio-economic areas and in rural areas (Gauteng Department of Education, 2007; Western Cape Department of Education 2007). As has already been established, it is generally accepted that the less able governing bodies are predominantly in schools with lower levels of education quality than the former white schools. In such cases, governing bodies are unlikely to be able to support the principal and teachers to improve the quality or to take the

principals and teachers to task where necessary (Mncube, 2009; Ngidi, 2004; Sayed and Soudien, 2005; Woolman and Fleisch, 2008).

Governance and management for quality education

In spite of the stipulated functions as indicated above, these supposedly separate governance and management functions remain poorly delineated (see Dieltens and Enslin, 2002; Bush and Heystek, 2003; Heystek, 2006). SASA section 20 (a) and (e) are examples of the possible ambiguities in the interpretation of governing body functions. Promoting the best interests of the school and supporting the principal can be interpreted in a wide or narrow sense depending on who is doing the interpretation. According to Van Wyk (2004), principals in former white urban schools interpret support in a narrow sense and reject any questions about classroom activities and teaching methodology or pass rates on the basis that these relate to professional activities (*which I believe is the correct interpretation – author addition*). However, they appreciate support in the form of extra funding to appoint more teachers. The governing body and especially the parent governors, on the other hand, may interpret these same questions in a wider sense as support for the principal and school in the interest of quality education. There is vagueness about what constitutes support and when it becomes intrusion on professional matters or teachers' rights but the evident low quality of education makes the possible involvement of governing bodies a viable and maybe even a necessary option.

Before the promulgation of ELAA (2007), the two functions mentioned in Section 20 (a and e) did not seem to include much parental involvement in professional activities in schools. However, with the specification in ELAA that parents become more accountable for quality of education because principals must table their improvement plans to the governing body and this could imply that governing bodies (and for that matter the parent majority) may claim more involvement in the professional activities of schools. This is especially the case when schools do not perform according to expected academic standards. It can be expected that the report and plans from the principal to the governing body and provincial HOD must detail why a school is not performing well, for example, under-qualified teachers or teachers not preparing well or not in class. If this detail is not in the principal's reports and plans, the governing body and also the HoD must request that any improvement plans have a clear rationale.

Section 16Ac states that principals must table their plan for school improvement at governing body meetings after their schools have been declared as an underperforming school by the provincial Head of Department as stipulated in Section 58B. Reading Section 20 a and e with Section 16Ac, it can be argued that there is the possibility of recognising governing bodies' power in the endeavour for sustained quality education. Section 16Ac makes the governing body, and therefore specifically the parents as the majority in the governing body, more involved and responsible for the academic quality of the school. Tabling improvement plans at a governing body meeting implies that the governing body can or rather must discuss them, make suggestions, and hold the principal and the educators to their plans. Hence the governing body becomes more involved in the professional management of schools, which may be experienced by some teachers as an intrusion on their professional work. But do teachers, not performing according to the expectations and demands, have the right to claim that this form of involvement is intrusion or is it just part of governing body support towards quality education for all?

A possible problem with the intended and actual implementation of this legislation is that most schools declared as underperforming schools are located in communities where parents have low levels of literacy and knowledge about professional school management. It is in these schools where teacher absenteeism is rife and teachers are on average less qualified, tend to arrive late and do not prepare for class teaching; they are therefore less able to provide quality education. Teacher motivation in these schools also seems to be lower (Taylor, Fleisch and Shindler, 2008; Western Cape Department of Education, 2006). It may therefore be more important that governing bodies perform their expected duties to support principals to achieve quality education with the required training.

The involvement of the governing body in the improvement of quality education at schools and thus professional activities suggests that additional powers maybe necessary. If they accept these responsibilities, governing bodies need actual power to support the principal and the school to implement these plans, but, more importantly, to hold principals to their own plans. When and if principals are not able or willing to implement their own plans, the governing bodies must be empowered to initiate action against them. ELAA (section 58B 5), read with section 16eA makes provision for the provincial HoD to take actions against principals, educators and governing bodies if the quality of the education is not acceptable. This seems to imply that the

governing body is an active partner in sustaining quality education and thus it should be granted sufficient powers to play this role.

The suggested power must be limited but strong enough so that the governing body support can improve the education quality. Suggestions of these activities may be that governing bodies may request principals and teachers to explain (orally and/or in written format) why the work is not according to acceptable standards. Or governing bodies may have a supportive discussion with a teacher or principal to determine why the teacher is not well prepared or frequently absent. Teachers and principals may find this intrusive or threatening. However, our current level of education may need radical actions to get teachers to be in their classes and doing the teaching expected of them. All these supportive activities must be in a spirit of trust between teachers and parents (Section 16 of SASA) as well as collaborative ownership of the school as valued community asset as indicated in the Tirisano document from the Department of Education.

Staff selection as an example of power and quality education

Staff selection and appointment will be used to elucidate the relationship between decision-making power, responsibility and accountability of governing bodies for quality education and the possible infringement of teachers' rights. Taylor (2009) concurs with Van Wyk (2004) in her research that the teachers from the townships as well as the principals from the former white schools are in favour of the governing body being involved in the selection of the teachers.

Selecting and appointing the best qualified person for the specific post is one of the important starting points of quality education. The effective and productive functioning of any person in a specific post is not just a match of the person with ability and the number of a specific post. If it were as uncomplicated as that, allocating people to posts and schools could be a matter of a computer linking a person and a post number (Oldroyd, 2005). *However, a more centralised decision-making structure was introduced by the Education Laws Amendment Act of 2005 (Department of Education 2005). This may limit the decision-making power of governing bodies and principals to appoint the most suitable candidate for the specific post, but only if they do not follow the policy and rules as determined by the legislation. An important question

arises when the 2005 and 2007 ELAA are read together: If the power to recommend the appointment of educators is taken out of the hands of the governing body, and therefore also out of the hands of the principal as a member of the governing body, is it then fair to hold the principal and governing body accountable for not achieving and maintaining quality education? People can be held accountable for performances if they are in control of the circumstances which influence their performance. When people do not feel in control of their environment or when they feel that the locus of control is outside their ambit, they tend to lose motivation. This directly influences the quality of their performance (Pintrich and Schunk, 2002).

Strongly associated with the appointment of teachers is the disciplinary process to act against a person who does not conform to the accepted rules and professional conduct for teachers. Although the South African Schools Act does not provide governing bodies at this stage with the right to be directly involved in the disciplinary process of teachers (ELAA, 2007, Section 16(2d and e)) as they can in the case of learners, it may be possible under the ELAA of 2007, for a governing body or a subcommittee to deal with teacher misconduct. This committee may be seen as working in collaboration with the Minister of Education's plan to establish a National Education Evaluation and Development Unit to act as 'inspectors' (Pandor, 2008). A governing body taking ownership of the school and willing to support the school to achieve quality education may have more positive effects on quality than an inspector coming in from outside. It is envisaged that a disciplinary committee for teachers would work in a supportive and caring role. It can, for instance, have a consultation with non-performing teachers before any official actions are taken against them, according to the Educators Employment Act. This disciplinary committee must function within the principles of the right to fair administrative processes and fair labour practice. The envisaged meeting with the teacher is therefore more of an intimation to the teacher or principal that the parents, as trusted co-owners of the school, are worried about the performance of a teacher or the school.

Conclusions

Teachers not providing quality education must not expect to be treated as professionals or according to professional ethical codes or to be protected by unions while education standards are unacceptably low in South Africa. Sustainable quality education for all is essential. This underpins the argument

presented in this article for greater involvement of governing bodies to ensure quality education in all schools. Governing bodies have been allocated more involvement and responsibility for quality education in terms of the ELAA Section 16 which was previously exclusively the terrain of the principal. The involvement of parents is important for education success as indicated by Pashiardis and Heystek (2007) where the parents in very poor and disadvantaged schools were positively involved as well as Singh, Mbokodi and Msila (2004), who studied parents in the former black schools with parents in low socio-economic living conditions.

More involvement of parents in professional activities must be based on a relationship of trust (Heystek, 2006; Woolman and Fleisch, 2008) and concomitant training for governing bodies. If the purpose of the Amendment is to empower governing bodies to support schools and enhance quality education, governing bodies must be allowed to act on these expectations. An example would be taking some form of action against teachers in cases of minor misconduct related to unprofessional performance.

It is understandable that teachers and principals are not positive about more parental involvement in professional matters. It is predominantly in the schools with lower achievement levels (Lewis and Naidoo, 2006) that teachers are likely to be afraid that parents may notice the inadequate academic work being done in the classrooms because of lack of preparation, time on task activity or limited knowledge about the curriculum and methodology. At the same time this may be the very reason for giving parents more power to be involved in the professional activities described in the article. It is important, however, that the support be in the form of a discussion with a teacher and be in the spirit of support: 'we see something is wrong, where can we help or support you to improve the situation'.

In the past, governing bodies in the former disadvantaged schools generally had a limited ability to offer support to schools. It is ironic that the attempt by ELAA to improve quality education is unlikely to result in governing bodies in schools with low quality education being able to support schools to improve their quality. Proper training for these new responsibilities, though imperative, is insufficient to bring sustainable change. What is needed in addition is a culture change resulting in a strong sense of ownership, a high level involvement and expectations and positive support – that needs time and sufficient commitment from all the role players.

The actual reading and interpretation of ELLA (2007) will only become clearer if and when a court is asked to rule because particular governing bodies are stripped of their power in underperforming schools or have actually intruded on professional matters like selecting text books or commenting on teaching methodology. In the meantime, governing body training must make all parents aware of their responsibility to ensure quality education. Even parents with limited education or literacy skills can gain the ability to ask the necessary and appropriate questions about why a school is not performing well. If trainers do not include this in training programmes for governing bodies, most members of governing bodies will never know that they could exercise more power, especially in schools that may be labelled as failing, underperforming or disadvantaged schools. Activism and agency for quality education are what may be demanded from the communities and governing body as indicated by President Zuma in his address at the principals' meeting on 7 August 2009.

The implication of the argument presented in this article is that large scale empirical research must be conducted to determine the actual influence and role of the SGB in the underperforming schools where it was possible to turn the tide and begin to implement sustainable improvement.

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