



A Model of In-service Professional Development for School Principals in Namibia

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This study investigates how to train school principals focusing on improving their professional development areas. It is a descriptive qualitative study. The sample comprised a small, but information-rich group of respondents: three principals and four professional developers of principals. The most striking finding was the necessity for the professional development needs of principals to be analyzed and categorized into professional development areas that included: knowledge and skills, attitudes and values, and actions and behaviors. Analysis and categorization of professional development needs are necessary to ensure that correct areas of professional development are identified and developed using appropriate professional training strategies. The paper concludes by suggesting a model for training of all three professional development areas of school principals.

Introduction

This article is an extract from my PhD thesis submitted at the University of the Western Cape, South Africa. The purpose of my thesis is to elucidate how Namibian school principals develop. The study aims at providing a detailed description of the in-service professional development of school principals in Namibia. To this end, the thesis addresses, among other issues, the following research sub-question: What suggestions can be made with regard to improving all professional development areas of school principals? This research question is the focus of this paper.

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This paper comprises of four sections. The first section describes the three areas that are important for professional development. The second section provides a summary of the research design and methods I employed to collect data. The third section discusses the data concerning the professional development of principals, and explains the necessity of professional development needs analysis and categorization to track professional development. The final section proposes a model for developing all professional development areas of school principals.

Areas of Professional Development

Professional development of principals aims or should aim at developing three areas of skills and knowledge (competence-based development), attitudes and values, and actions and behavior (practice) (Ng, 2001). This section discusses these areas.

Knowledge and skills

Competence-based development needs are the generic needs, a cluster of knowledge and skills needs, which should be satisfied in order for principals to be able to perform certain tasks as expected in a particular context. According to Cave and Wilkinson (1991), there is common assent on the main areas of knowledge required by principals in the UK: professional knowledge of educational principles and practices; knowledge of theories and models of managerial processes; and knowledge of social, political and legal contexts. Also, reporting about development needs of principals from the UK, but in a different context, Ouston (1997) states that there are four competences needed by educational leaders: the management of policy, learning, people, and resources. Mestry and Grobler (2002) found that educational leaders from various positions levels in Gauteng Province, South Africa should be competent in the following four key functions in order to manage schools effectively: management of the curriculum, management of the organizational structures, management of financial and physical resources, and management of educators. Further, Mestry and Grobler (2002) found that in managing educators, principals should be competent in the following areas: personnel provisioning, human relations, and ability to appraise and develop staff members. In sum, the competence-based development needs of principals differ from context to context.

Although researchers suggest some clusters of generic competences that enhance a school leader's chance of success, they are in agreement that there is no conclusive evidence of such influence. Specific competencies of principals should not be seen as sufficient or necessary conditions, but desirable qualities for principals for a particular situation. In short, professional development needs are as sensitive to time as they are to place. As the knowledge and skills of principals change with time, the way principals manage their schools should also change.

The technical aspect of competence is neither the sole nor the most important dimension of principal professional development (Morgan, 1997; Bennett, 1997; Ng, 2001). There are some other equally important areas of professional

development needs of principals. The following subsections look into two other areas of professional development needs of school principals.

Attitudes and values

Values are described as a broad inclination to give preference to a certain state of affairs. Values involve feelings and emotions that are regarded as good or bad. Uys (1990) explains that values do not reliably predict behavior in a certain situation. Attitudes, on the other hand, are relatively stable emotional tendencies that cause a specific reaction. Attitude is a primary force that determines whether a person succeeds or fails. It determines performance (Uys, 1990; Maxwell, 1993). The report of Presidential Commission on Education, Culture and Training (1999, p. 22) implies an attitude problem in the Namibian education sector when it remarks that one of the main problems "... is a lack of urgency and responsibility, or commitment to take decisions and solve problems immediately at the lowest possible level, as is required in today's fast-moving world". Mushaandja (2000, p. 2) was more specific when he was addressing teachers and principals in a workshop in the former Ondangwa West Education Region (Omusati and Oshana regions). He said:

The main problem in our education, as I see it, is not that our teachers are not ready to teach, neither is it that our learners are not ready to learn, but the main problem is how to make principals want to lead and teachers want to teach effectively and to the best of their ability. Our main problem is that of negative attitude.

Attitudes and values are important ingredients in the professional development of principals. Hodgkinson (as quoted by Ng, 2001, p. 77) contends that "... values, morals, and ethics are the very stuff of leadership and administrative life." And Sergiovanni (as quoted by Ng, 2001 p. 77) refers to these qualities as "... the heart of leadership." Therefore, in addition to leadership knowledge and skills, effective educational leaders should have qualities such as integrity, upholding their beliefs, being morally upright, being committed to education and caring for teachers and learners (Ng, 2001). The approach of developing principals in the United States of America has come under attack for overlooking human, moral, social and political aspects (Cooper & Shute, 1988). Foster (as quoted by Cooper & Shute, 1988, p. 24) raises an intriguing point by arguing that administration is a moral science:

When administration is considered as a moral science, administrators must deal with moral dilemmas. Each decision carries moral rather than technical implications. This realization distinguishes the administrator from the technocrat. Each administrative decision carries with it a restructuring of a human life; this is why administration at its heart is the resolution of moral dilemmas...

Young (cited by Bennett, 1997) found that principals' actions are influenced by what is called their 'assumptive world.' This denotes principals' values about how things actually happen and what they ought to do in particular settings. In any given situation, principals create an understanding of what is happening and how they fit into it by turning to their knowledge of similar circumstances (experience) and their personal attitudes and values, which cause them to regard certain elements of the situation as more important than others. This determines

what decision they take and what they do. Moreover, this personal set of beliefs might be different from, and might conflict with, the public's values and expectations. Therefore, principals have to learn how to strike a balance between the two. Bennett (1997) argues that if the principals' practice is a reflection of their understanding of a circumstance and their perceptions of what their job involves, it follows that they can only improve what they are doing if they are clear about that understanding and prepared to put it under review, which is described as 'double loop learning.' Double loop learning calls for learning by reflecting not only on what principals do but also considering the reasons why they do what they do, and allowing for the possibility that those assumptions about their practice may need to be revised. It is worth noting and learning from the Scottish Qualification for Headship Program, which contains what is referred to as "professional values" (O'Brien & Draper, 2001). According to O'Brien & Draper (2001) the development of professional values in Scottish principals aims at developing commitments to critical reflection and extending knowledge and understanding of educational values. In short, it appears that there is little argument about whether values and attitudes should form part of the development program for principals, but the contentious issue is what values and attributes should be inculcated in principals and how (Ng, 2001).

Actions and behaviors

The final area of professional development aims at enabling principals to turn into action what they learn. The main aim for principal development is for them to be able to influence teaching and learning. Knowledge, skills, professional attitudes and values are of little value if the principals are unable to bring about improved learner performance. Action is considered as "... more important than knowledge" (Ng, 2001, p. 78) and "... the most complex, the most worrisome, and often the most exhilarating" (Donaldson and Marnik, 1995, p. 49). Therefore, "... it is not difficult to know but difficult to act." Action and knowledge are inseparable as "... knowledge is the direction for action and the action the effort of knowledge, and that knowledge is the beginning of action and action the completion of knowledge" (Yang-ming, as quoted by Ng, 2001, p. 78). Thus there should be correspondence between knowledge and action.

Methodology

Given the nature of the research problem, namely the in-depth investigation of in-service professional development of school principals, I found the descriptive qualitative research design to be appropriate. The sample was comprised of three information-rich school principals and four professional developers of principals. The sample was purposeful selected carefully so that the findings collected from the sample could be "transferable" (Patton, 2002, p. 581) to those principals whose contexts were similar to those of the respondents. If considered with a quantitatively orientated mind, the sample appears to be small. However, for an interpretive research study, the sample is sufficient. A qualitative research sample is generally smaller compared to a quantitative research sample (McMillan & Schumacher, 1997; Stake, 2000; Patton, 2002).

Patton (2002, p. 245) cites two famous small-sampled studies, one by a renowned Swiss psychologist Jean Piaget, and the other an Ed.D thesis by G. Sands:

Piaget contributed a major breakthrough to our understanding of how children think by observing his own two children at length and in great depth. ... Sands (2000) did a fine dissertation studying a single school principal, describing the leadership of a female leader who entered a challenging school situation and brought about constructive change.

—Patton (2002, p. 245)

I used a combination of document analysis, interviews and observations as data collection instruments. Previous research studies on the same topic have found the combination of these instruments to be effective (Robertson, 1999; Wale, 2003). The actual data collection required me to shadow the principals while they were doing their work at their respective schools and while they were attending workshops and courses aimed at their in-service professional development. After every observation, I had individual reflective interviews with them. In the course of the data collection period, I subjected the principals to standardized open-ended interviews; and throughout the data collection time, I analyzed as many relevant documents as I could obtain.

In the process of collecting and preliminary analysis of data made available by the principals, I realized the need to interview their developers. One of the emerging working hypotheses I needed clarity on was the contributions of the professional developers that were involved in the professional development of principals. I was keen to gain a more and deeper understanding of how the principals were trained and what new plans were in place for improving the professional development of school principals. I selected four information-rich developers to constitute the additional sample. I prepared an interview guide for the additional sample. The procedures of interviewing the developers were more or less the same as those of the principals described above.

The data analysis involved selecting, categorizing, comparing, synthesizing, and interpreting data to provide explanations for the professional development of the principals (McMillan & Schumacher, 1997).

Table 1 shows specific professional training needs of the three principals. Through analysis, the professional development needs are categorized into appropriate management and professional development areas. This categorization is necessary to ensure that the right areas of development are identified and developed. It is important to point out that categorizing specific professional development needs in those areas is not necessarily clear-cut. It is a matter of a trend. That is to say, categorization of the professional development needs does not mean, for example, that the challenge for personnel management is solely attributed to the inappropriate actions and behaviors of the respondents. Other areas (i.e. attitudes and values, knowledge and skills) had a stake too, but to a limited extent at that time. Thus, after the specific needs are identified, they have to be categorized in areas of development in order to determine which area of development should be most emphasized.

Findings and Discussions**Table 1.** Categorising development needs into professional development areas

Respondents	Specific development needs	Management area	Area of development
Principal A	Managing and leading learners	HRM	Behaviours & actions
	Managing personnel	HRM	Behaviours & actions
	Creating conducive environment to teaching and learning	Curriculum management	Knowledge & skills
	Securing support of seniors	Leadership	Knowledge & skills
	Coordinating, organising and facilitating professional development for staff	HRM	Knowledge & skills
	Managing school-community relations	HRM	Values & attitudes
Principal B	Managing finances	Financial management	Knowledge & skills
	Implementing policies	Administration	Behaviours & actions
	Securing support of seniors	Leadership	Behaviours & actions
	Influencing and inspiring learners and personnel.		
	Coordinating organising and facilitating professional development for staff	HRM	Knowledge & skills
	Managing stress	HRM	Knowledge & skills
	Managing and leading learners	HRM	Behaviours & actions
Managing and leading personnel	HRM	Behaviours & actions	

Continued on next page

Principal C			
	Creating conducive environment to teaching and learning	Curriculum management	Knowledge & skills
	Managing finances	Financial management	Knowledge & skills
	Coordinating, organising and facilitating professional development for staff	HRM	Knowledge & skills
	Managing school-community relations	HRM	Behaviours & actions
	Managing Interpersonal relationships	HRM	Actions & behaviours

Furthermore, Table 1 shows that while the three principals required training in all three areas of development, the area of actions and behaviors needed more urgent attention. The developers supported this finding when they indicated that the crucial need of the principals was how to implement what they had learned. In other words, acting on what they had learned was the main challenge. The data suggest that most of the professional developers of principals do not pay enough attention to helping principals to learn how to put into action what they had learned.

Thus, one of the key findings is that the challenges that faced the principals could be attributed mainly to their inability to put their known management knowledge and skills into practice (actions and behaviors). The principals knew good management theory, but they could not implement it. This was so because, as the literature (Ng, 2001) contends, it is not difficult to know but difficult to act. The actions and behaviors of principals were determined by their values and attitudes. These two professional development areas, actions and behaviors, and attitudes and values, are difficult to develop, yet they are significant factors in the management and leadership of schools. The figure of an iceberg (Figure 1) depicts this point more clearly.

Figure 1 shows an iceberg representing the areas of professional development. The tip of the iceberg represents the area of knowledge and skills. This area is less important and easier to develop than the other two areas.

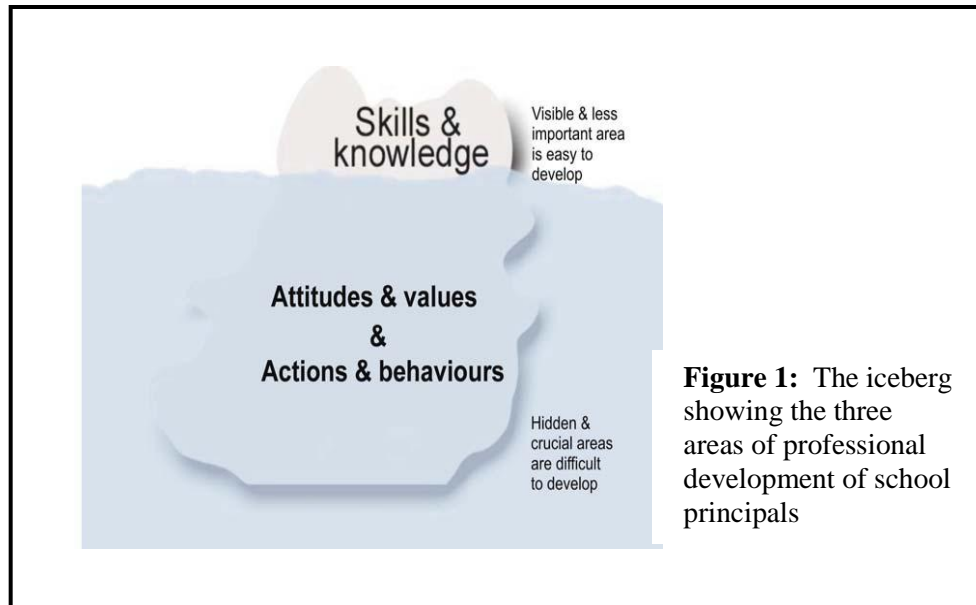


Figure 1: The iceberg showing the three areas of professional development of school principals

The hidden portion of the iceberg represents the other two areas. These two areas matter more, but they are difficult to develop. Unfortunately, principal development in Namibia focuses mainly on the tip of the iceberg, the acquisition of knowledge and skills. Knowledge and skills in themselves have no value unless translated into actions.

Suggesting the Model for Professional Development

Professional development of principals should not only focus on the provision and improvement of management and leadership knowledge and skills, but should also focus on attitude and value modification, and putting into action what was learned. An effective professional development exercise for principals should start with a needs assessment to identify their professional developmental needs and categorize these needs into professional training areas.

Planning stage

Although constituting the core of all professional development endeavors, planning for how and what to develop in principals usually does not receive the attention it requires. If developers and principals do not plan, they may fail by default.

Needs assessment

Identifying, analyzing and defining professional development needs are not easy exercises. Asking workshop participants to write down their expectations of a workshop and requesting them to fill out evaluation forms after the workshop do not provide sufficient information. While participants may give indications of what their professional development needs are, they may not be able to define or clearly articulate their needs. As in the case of a medical doctor diagnosing a

patient's disease, instructors of principal training, in consultation with principals, should identify, analyze and define the professional development needs of principals. A professional development need refers to the gap that exists between what principals should know or do and what they actually know or do, and professional development needs should be taken not only as weaknesses but also strengths that need to be improved upon and consolidated. When a performance problem is discovered, a thorough analysis should be carried out to determine the professional development area. Usually people agree on a performance problem which needs to be put right, but they disagree on the area to which the performance problem applies. More often than not, inappropriate analysis results in inappropriate definition of the problem at hand and, consequently, inappropriate professional training is offered. Needs collection requires developers to use research data gathering instruments such as: Interviews (individual or focus group), questionnaire, document analysis (such as inspectors' reports), and observation (for example, when inspectors visit schools).

Data should not only be gathered, but should also be analyzed and objectively interpreted. One crucial aspect in interpreting the needs is to determine the areas of development.

(a) The principals need to acquire more and appropriate knowledge and skills if they do not know what to do.

(b) The principals need to modify their attitudes and values if they do not demonstrate professional attitudes and values.

(c) The principals need to bridge the gap between theory and practice if they cannot turn into action what they know and believe in.

Objectives

Developers and principals derive objectives from the needs they identify. The objectives represent the task that the developers and principals want to achieve. These should be expressed in terms of what principals are expected to be able to do when they perform professional development exercises. These would constitute the behavioral objectives. It is only when principals have improved the way they cope with a management or leadership challenge that objectives are fully achieved.

Implementation stage

When the professional development needs are properly identified and well defined, and the objectives clearly formulated, the next step is the implementation of the model. The model can be used in any in-service principal learning situation, be it regionally organized development, cluster-based development, or whole school development. For example, a school management team, as a learning team in the whole school development, should meet regularly to identify their development needs, classify them in the appropriate development areas, use appropriate development strategies to learn, practice what they have learned, monitor their practice, and evaluate their performance in relation to teaching and learning in their schools. The figure below sums up the model:

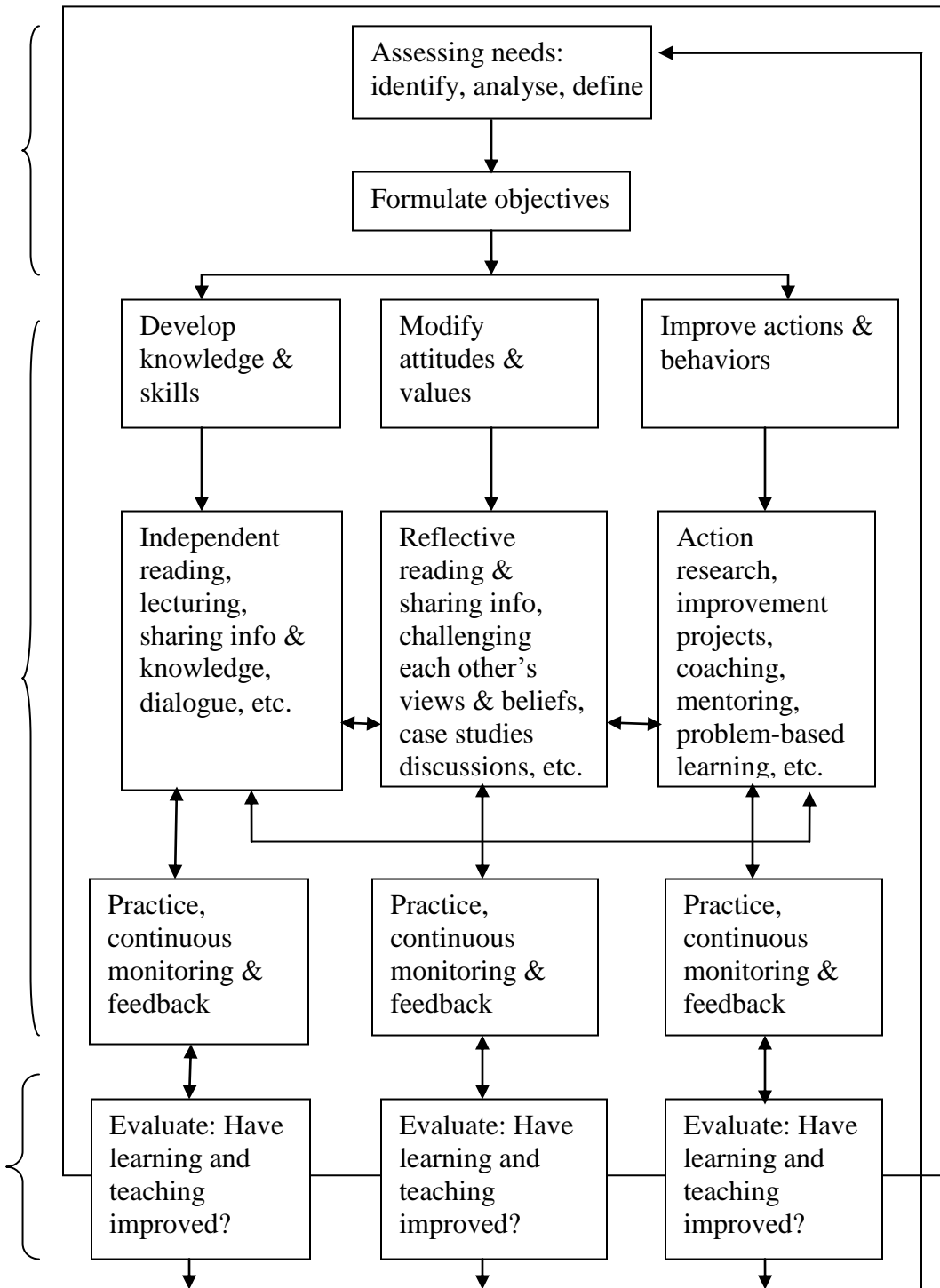


Figure 2: In-service Professional development model

The model starts with a needs assessment. Any professional development exercise that is not preceded by a needs assessment is akin to a medical doctor prescribing medicine to patients without prior thorough diagnosis of their diseases. Such a professional development exercise is likely not to have any impact.

The model uses a variety of professional development approaches and strategies, so that they complement each other and cater for individual principals' preferred learning styles. While strategies intended for each area of development are best suited to achieving objectives in that individual area, all strategies can be employed in all areas. For example, while action research is best suited to help principals apply knowledge, the same strategy can, to some extent, help principals to modify their beliefs and attitudes or acquire more knowledge and skills. Increased knowledge and skills and modified beliefs and values have an impact on actions and behaviors and vice versa. Thus, the strategies are interrelated, interdependent and complementary to each other.

The separation of professional development into three areas does not imply that the areas should be developed separately. The development of principals, using this model, focuses on all areas of development, with special emphasis on the area that needs more development. The learned skills and knowledge, and values and attitudes should be applied in a real working environment and the application should be monitored and evaluated.

The model suggests that every professional development exercise should end with an evaluation. Improved learning and teaching in schools are important indicators that principals have improved their leadership and management.

Evaluation stage

The effectiveness of the model is determined by the extent to which it can prepare principals to bring about the desired improved learning and teaching in schools. When the evaluation of the model does not show improvement in learning and teaching, a component of the training methodology was not effective or new professional development needs crept in, and therefore the exercise should be restarted. Thus, the model shows that a professional development exercise has to be evaluated to (i) determine the extent to which it has achieved its objectives and (ii) to serve as a source of objectives for future professional development.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the model is simple, user friendly and cost-effective, so even an individual principal or a learning organization can implement it unassisted. It is just a question of:

Planning → Implementing → Evaluating → Restarting the process all over again.

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