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Leadership dynamics: Managing and leading continued professional teacher development in schools to enhance learner performance

Abstract

Principals and school management teams are expected to provide unwavering leadership and professional and sustainable support to create opportunities for teachers and themselves to develop professionally. Currently, the lack of teacher content knowledge, low rates of motivation and accountability are key challenges resulting in the low-quality education systems in South Africa (Mlachila & Moeletsi, 2019). School management teams perceive their roles as managerial and administrative, detracting from leading teaching and learning. Furthermore, there are few systems to hold principals and teachers accountable for learners' academic performance. This makes school leadership's role inimitable concerning creating a learning environment for teachers where they realise the value professional development has for the effective management of schools and for improved learner performance. Fullan's (2002) theory, "leadership in a culture of change" purports that leadership is responsible for transforming schools through collaborative efforts, working towards creating change as education evolves, and preparing for 21st-century teaching and learning. This interpretive, qualitative study explores how principals and school management teams lead and manage professional development in public schools to improve learner performance. Two principals and their management teams were purposively sampled. Data were collected through semi-structured and focus-group interviews and were inductively analysed. The findings show that the principals and their School Management Teams (SMT) play a role in developing their staff to improve or maintain learner academic performance.

Keywords: Continuous professional teacher development; increased performance; leadership; principals; school management teams



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**1. Introduction**

Continuous Professional Teacher Development (CPTD) became a compulsory responsibility for all teachers according to Section 7 of the South African Council of Educators (SACE), which encourages teachers to develop themselves professionally to meet the needs of teaching in

the 21st century. According to Mlachila and Moeletsi (2019: 4), the South African education system is ineffective since the national government spends approximately 6 per cent of its Gross Domestic Product (GDP) on education, which is comparable with many Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries. However, several sub-Saharan African countries spend far less per learner than South Africa and have far better educational outcomes (Mlachila & Moeletsi, 2019).

Globally, it has been revealed that CPTD enhances teacher performance, which leads to increased learner performance, which ultimately is the purpose of education. According to Johns and Sosibo (2019), CPTD provides learners with highly skilled teachers in the classroom. Knowledge increases, approaches to pedagogy change and practice is enhanced, boosting learning. Therefore, CPTD is critical for teacher development since it improves teacher performance, impacting school effectiveness and, consequently, student academic performance (Johns & Sosibo, 2019).

The principals and their SMTs are inimitable regarding CPTD. It is vital to create a learning environment for teachers where they realise the value CPTD has for them as practitioners, for effective management of schools, and for improved learner performance. Principals and SMTs need to create opportunities for teachers to identify their own developmental needs, provide the necessary resources and support for their development, and generate a school climate conducive to collaboration between teachers to ensure more significant job satisfaction (European Commission, 2013).

Mestry (2017: 1) asserts that “there is growing concern globally that many public schools are not functioning at their optimum, and that learner performance is generally of a low standard”. This low academic performance is a symptom of a lack of adequate leadership and purposeful management in schools, which results from a lack of knowledge and skills to lead teachers adequately to optimise their time in classrooms and improve learner performance (Spaull, 2013). As outlined by Waghid and Kriger (2024), transformative leadership in the educational context necessitates a global perspective while critically examining the local community’s material realities and daily experiences. This approach entails deconstructing and reconstructing knowledge that perpetuates inequalities while maintaining awareness of the pervasive influence and privilege of power (Waghid & Kriger, 2024). This perspective emphasises the pivotal role of leadership in shaping an educational system that promotes equity and equips teachers to address the challenges of the 21st century.

It is against this background that this study, therefore, aims to explore principals and SMTs’ understanding of the value, management and leadership of CPTD in schools to improve school effectiveness and academic performance through the following question:

- How does the principal and school management teams of two high schools value, manage and lead CPTD in public schools to improve learner performance?

2. Literature review

2.1 Professionalisation of teachers through continued professional teacher development

Murray (2014: 8) defines the professionalism of teachers as “the repertoires of professional knowledge, attitudes and values which articulate the character of teachers’ practices”. The value of CPTD lies in the professionalisation of teachers rather than in effecting change

(Evans, 2014). A more skilled teaching workforce can emerge through the professionalisation of teachers, which we believe can positively impact teaching and learning environments, thereby enhancing learner performance.

SACE (2013: 4) references the professional development of teachers as necessary because:

... teachers need to grow their knowledge and skills throughout their careers. Like all professions, teaching requires deep knowledge which is continuously updated and widened, and it involves complex skills that need to be continually adapted to new circumstances.

However, the professionalisation of teachers is not the responsibility of SACE; it is, firstly, the responsibility of each teacher to try to improve themselves professionally. Secondly, school leadership is responsible for providing school-based CPTD activities to develop and grow teacher knowledge and skills. Thirdly, external providers approved by SACE will provide relevant programmes for teachers to develop professionally (SACE, 2013). It can, therefore, be argued that teachers need to remain skilled for quality teaching and learning. Principals as leaders provide these CPTD opportunities and support teachers by encouraging them to develop their shortcomings (Hillard, 2015).

2.2 School leadership and continued professional teacher development

The successful implementation of CPTD rests on significant aspects, which include effective school leadership, buy-in and commitment of teachers, school context, teachers' learning and feedback on teacher development (Johns & Sosibo, 2019). While teacher commitment, learning and development are essential, principals and school leadership teams are the catalysts to creating environments conducive to this learning. Mestry (2017) acknowledges the leadership role principals and leadership teams play in building human capacity to ensure the effective management of schools.

The management function of principals and their SMTs for CPTD should include planning, organising, leading and controlling (Monametsi, 2015). Planning CPTD involves forward-thinking, which establishes how the school wishes to improve. Principals and leadership teams, therefore, need to identify teacher needs, recognise the nature of activities required and determine where, when and how CPTD will occur to ensure the realisation of their CPTD goals (Van der Merwe-Muller & Dasoo, 2021; Monametsi, 2015; Van Blaere & De Vos, 2016). However, Mourao (2018) argues that although it is vital for leaders to provide development opportunities, it is necessary to ensure that teachers do not become too dependent on leader support for CPTD, stifling their growth and potential (Mourao, 2018). When organising CPTD, structures need to be put in place to determine the purpose of the development of teachers and the allocation of tasks and duties for managing the process since poor organisation can result in poor implementation (Monametsi, 2015). Leading CPTD in schools includes leadership's encouragement of teachers to participate voluntarily in activities and drive the process to yield positive results (Monametsi, 2015). Another management function is the effective control of CPTD. The need to ensure feedback on how teachers develop and whether there is progress after implementing CPTD is necessary even though the control may potentially result in problems for school leadership, such as limited time for teacher professional development, teacher resistance, lack of resources and lack of training of SMTs (Monametsi, 2015).

School leadership must fully grasp that institutions are complicated social systems of peers who influence and co-regulate each other's learning. Therefore, "if leaders invest in social interactions, they can foster informal learning at work, transforming everyday work practice into a space for the continuous production of collective knowledge" (Mourao, 2018:133).

2.3 Increasing teacher capacity

Teachers need to be acknowledged as the change agents at their schools. In the planning of CPTD, it is crucial to consider that "teachers are adult learners with their own learning styles, learning modes and preferences, and this should form part of a formalised and purposeful planning process" (Van Der Merwe-Muller & Dasoo, 2021). The school's leadership, in collaboration with the teachers, are responsible for identifying teachers' needs through the pre-and post-evaluation process to prepare them to manage the evolving needs of the 21st-century learner. The creation of CPTD is ongoing and allows teachers to continuously develop and meet the needs of the changing classroom, ensuring that there are effective, high-quality teachers in each classroom. Smith and Lindsay (2016) discuss the immense value attached to teachers determining their own needs. When teachers are allowed to define their own development, there are feelings of greater professional autonomy, leading to more control over their learning (Goodnough, 2016). According to Evans (2014), school leadership needs to be focused on a clear vision, flexible by nature, and resourceful, but most importantly, it must realise that teachers are individuals. Leadership needs to create spaces that promote change and allow teachers to flourish through CPTD programmes. The value of CPTD is to ensure that teachers keep abreast of the changes in school environments, upskill themselves in pedagogical knowledge and content knowledge, and thus improve general classroom practice (Johns & Sosibo, 2019). Vracar (2014) agrees that professional development is needed to expand skills, expose teachers to new, innovative teaching strategies and deepen their knowledge of the subject content they teach.

CPTD may take the form of formal or informal programmes and could include activities such as "networking, self-reflection, coaching and action research", all for purposes of improving competencies and increasing teacher performance (Yalçın & Özgenel, 2021: 3). What is critical, we submit, is the assessment of the programmes. There should be a process of pre-assessment and post-assessment of all CPTD activities to ensure that teachers' needs are attended to and measure the impact the activities or new knowledge have on teacher development.

2.4 Continued professional teacher development and learner performance

The critical ingredient necessary for positive change in teaching and learning is the professional development of teachers through CPTD. Through these experiences, they can assist learners in learning by employing various teaching methodologies like inquiry and discovery teaching methods (Raluswinga, 2018; Mestry, 2017). CPTD programmes are presented as an educational modification process which should help "schools and teachers develop more on hard curriculum standards, design, meaning-full educational assessment, guide school improvement plans and advance teachers' knowledge and skills to enhance learners' learning" (Raluswinga, 2018). Mestry (2017) purports that school leadership needs to be adequately prepared to be innovative and creative in their implementation and to promote teacher collaboration, ensure that there are monitoring systems in place and evaluate

professional development to empower teachers to work towards developing strategic plans to improve practice, thus improving learner performance. Darling-Hammond, Hyler and Gardner (2017: 17) state that the most significant value for money is found in the investments in CPTD and conclude that *“teachers who participated in sustained curriculum-based professional development reported changes in practice that, in turn, were associated with significantly higher student achievement scores on state assessment”*.

3. Theoretical framework

Fullan's (2002) theory, “leadership in a culture of change” underpins this study by exploring the five core aspects, which include moral purpose, understanding the process of change, relationship building, knowledge making and coherence making. Fullan (2002) purports that principals and school leadership are responsible for transforming schools through collaborative efforts, working towards creating change as schools and education evolve in preparation for 21st-century teaching and learning. In this paper, moral purpose is evident in how positive change occurs within schools through constant CPTD programmes. Therefore, the moral purpose of this article will be embedded in a culture of change insofar as the culture is characterised by the search for ways to make a positive difference in the lives of learners.

Fullan (2008) states that “classroom improvement is at the heart of change”. Every learner matters; thus, moral purpose is at the heart of serving learners. The moral purpose includes the commitment of each teacher to nurture and support learners to achieve more significant learning (Fullan, 2008). It also includes a commitment from leadership to ensure professional development for all teachers to achieve this outcome. However, moral purpose only becomes valuable if it is activated through action and change. Thus, this study explores how CPTD is led and managed to improve or maintain learners' academic success.

According to Fullan (2002: 5), “it is essential for leaders to understand the process of change”. The key aspects that drive change in this study include emphasising motivation and capacity building, focusing on results and learning contexts (Fullan, 2006). Fullan (2007) suggests the aspects that drive meaningful educational change can occur when principals and teachers make new meaning through sustainable improvement of curriculum materials, skills, understanding, behaviour and beliefs (Fullan, 2007). Fullan (2008: 2) states that “sustainability is pursued through focus, capacity building, collaboration and use of ideas and strategies associated with continuous improvement. And above all, these activities are aimed at the reform of the whole system”.

Fullan's (2002) guidelines for successful change include identifying shortcomings of teaching and learning within the institution; encouraging staff to commit to intended change; implementation of change – being aware of a possible ‘implementation dip’; re-culture – supporting teaching and learning and evaluating curriculum delivery, and being aware of the complexities during this process. The process requires CPTD to effect transformation within institutions. Within Fullan's (2002) culture of change, building sound relationships is imperative. The relationships between teachers and learners become the foundation for improved learning. CPTD becomes the catalyst for constant collaboration, motivation and skills development (Fullan, 2008), which will assist with establishing a positive school climate and enhancing teaching and learning (Fullan, 2002).

Fullan (2002) maintains that if leadership understands the value of CPTD and encourages teachers to develop themselves consistently through constant engagement and collaboration, then the information they engage with will result in knowledge creation. Leadership needs to

encourage “contributing one’s knowledge to others” as, according to Fullan (2002: 7), this “is the key to continuous growth for all” and merges the relationship between moral purpose and knowledge creation. A moral compass is required to grow a knowledge society which will thrive and where teachers are constantly “engaged in practising and studying and refining the craft of teaching” (Fullan, 2002: 8).

Moral purpose, understanding change, relationship building, and knowledge creation all come together to create coherence, and evaluations and feedback are necessary to measure the change that is effected (Fullan, 2002). Coherence is complex and can never entirely be achieved, but it becomes the problem the institution needs to address. As these elements are addressed through a range of CPTD programmes, there is a sense of accomplishment for leadership.

This paper explores how principals and school management teams lead and manage professional development in public schools to improve learner performance by asking how principals and school management teams of two high schools value, manage and lead CPTD in public schools to improve learner performance.

4. Methodology

This qualitative research was informed by an interpretive paradigm, allowing the researchers to view the world through the participants’ experiences (Thanh & Thanh, 2015). In seeking answers to the research question, the researchers of this study drew from participants’ experiences to construct and interpret their understanding from the data collected. Qualitative research is set apart by its aims, which are associated with the aspects of social life and its methodology in analysing data using words instead of numbers (McCusker & Gunaydin, 2015). Kozleski (2017) argues that qualitative research is needed as it acknowledges interactions between individuals, relationships humans have with themselves, relationship building, and systems in which we live. The study explores the case of two schools to understand the current school leadership’s role in addressing CPTD and academic performance. Two public high schools were chosen through purposive sampling in the Metro North Education District in the Western Cape Province. These schools were well-performing, even though they serve learners facing inordinate hardships. All South African public schools are categorised into five groups called quintiles, mainly for financial and resource purposes. Quintile one (Q1) is the poorest, while quintile five (Q5) is classified as affluent. The researchers collected data from a Q1 and Q2 school. These schools were purposively selected as they serve communities that experience a range of inordinate hardships. Yet, the schools were able to produce quality National Senior Certificate results for the past three years.

Creswell and Poth (2016) state that purposive sampling is best suited to comprehend the problem better and respond to the research question, as participants are willing to reflect on and share their knowledge. Participants were chosen based on their specific understanding of the topic under study, their personal experiences, and their willingness to share that knowledge with the researchers. Two principals and three departmental heads from each school made up the sample. The researchers used semi-structured and focus-group interviews to obtain participant data. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with each principal. Semi-structured interviews allowed the researchers to probe and explore the participants’ opinions and experiences of leading CPTD in their schools, providing in-depth information (Lambert & Lambert, 2012). Focus-group interviews were conducted with the SMT members, which allowed for synergy and constant engagement among the participants in data generation.

Disadvantages experienced included that some members dominated the group discussions, and at times, some members seemed to conform to the responses of others without expressing themselves adequately. These disadvantages were mitigated by probing questions directly to the participants who did not express themselves fully during the interview. Inductive analysis was used to interpret the data, and thematic analysis was employed to identify and describe the emerging themes from the data (Tracy, 2013).

5. Trustworthiness and ethical considerations

Credibility, transferability, dependability, confirmability, validity and triangulation, which took the researchers' objectivity and bias into account, were the primary areas of attention for trustworthiness (Shenton, 2004). The researchers initially conversed with the participants to make them comfortable with the idea of an interview before interviewing them. The researchers were constantly conscious of any personal prejudice resulting from subjective interpretations. The participants were informed of the paper's findings because the participants' perceptions of a recognised reality in the reported outcomes ultimately determine the validity of the findings.

Ethical clearance was obtained from the institution with which the researchers are affiliated. Permission was also granted by the Western Cape Education Department (WCED) to conduct research in the two schools. Consent forms were signed by all participants and the researchers ensured that the participants understood that their input was voluntary and that they had the option to discontinue participation at any moment. Participants were also assured of confidentiality and anonymity.

6. Findings and discussion

The researchers present the findings and discussion of the themes that emerged from the focus-group interviews. The themes are as follows: School leadership's understanding of the value of CPTD, leadership management of CPTD and leading CPTD in schools to improve academic performance.

6.1 School leadership's understanding of the value of continued professional teacher development

UNESCO (2015: 3) suggests that "an education system is only as good as its teachers". However, the role of teachers has evolved and because of the constant change greater demands have been placed on them. This requires greater capacitation of teachers, which should be affected through CPTD and purposefully led by school principals and leadership teams. The SMTs were asked about the value of professional development within their schools, and their responses followed.

It is clear from the responses from both principals that CPTD is a key feature in the development of teachers:

I believe the teachers must continuously develop, you can never say you are done learning ... but there are still things I do not know... each year the department send stuff for developmental purposes and I really encourage my staff to attend these sessions ... (Principal A)

It is something that must be done...teachers think that when you are done studying you are done learning ... (Principal B)

Principal B further intimated that he constantly encouraged his staff to attend sessions for developmental purposes. This encouragement is vital since the educational landscape is changing, and teachers need to shape how they think to align with 21st-century complex skills learners need to learn. Effective leadership accepts the responsibility to engage teachers in developing initiatives that will change their thinking and challenge their capacity to think critically about their teaching and learners (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017).

Both principals found the need for their development to be as important as staff development. They stated:

I attend this principal's academy where we have mentors to help us lead our schools better, I also have an experienced principal come to school to guide me through the process of principalship (Principal A)

... it is necessary that I develop myself enough to gain better insight into good leadership and teaching practices ... and I take every opportunity for myself and the staff because it can only improve our schools (Principal B)

A study conducted by Mestry (2017) found that education departments place insufficient emphasis on the professional development of principals. There is a tendency to expose principals to workshops dealing with policy dissemination and administrative and curriculum issues rather than focusing on updating and widening their knowledge and developing the more complex skills needed to manage their schools effectively (Mestry, 2017).

Both principals suggest that developing themselves and their teachers is essential. The 'development of self and others' is regarded as one of the five critical professional practices in Australian schools (AITSL, 2011: 4). This practice secures the building of a professional learning community where principals work collaboratively with teachers and other stakeholders to focus on improving teaching and learning. Brown and Militello (2016) and Kraft and Gilmour (2016) confirm that principals' influence on teachers' professional growth is central to creating a learning culture within schools as well as the effective functioning of schools. Fullan's (2002) moral purpose suggests that the nurturing and support offered to teachers are necessary if positive change is to be effected.

Members of the two SMTs recognised CPTD as essential because it created "the idea of life-long learning to always adapt and change" and "to be able to embrace change and move with time". They felt that it promotes "new ways of teaching all the time ... to upskill ...". We contend that it is imperative for school leadership to advocate for and implement professional development initiatives that foster the professional growth and development of our teaching staff. This will ensure their continued efficiency and effectiveness in their classroom roles.

6.2 Leadership management of continued professional teacher development

Managing CPTD, according to Brown and Militello (2016), is where the principal promotes CPTD to the staff to increase the effectiveness of teaching and learning. Ovens, Hebib and Radović (2019) agree with Brown and Militello (2016) by highlighting that how a principal manages CPTD plays an essential role in learner performance and the overall quality of their results.

The researchers asked the participants to discuss the management of CPTD at their respective institutions. The evidence of their responses follows. Principal A announced, "I keep register of the professional development we do" with his SMT members, explaining that they have training bi-weekly and workshops to upskill teachers. School leadership continuously needs to stimulate professional development among their staff members. It is important for educational leaders at all levels to avoid having limited ideas about professional development, including how and where it takes place (Evans, 2011).

Principal B mentions that CPTD can be an opportunity where "you can just have a conversation with someone, become part of a community of learning ..." with an SMT member corroborating that the CPTD "does not always have to be a formal setting". Van der Merwe-Muller and Dasoo (2020:46) argue that:

CPTD is both the end-product and practice of learning through explicit and implicit methods [with] explicit methods comprising workshops and seminars and more implicit methods including the teachers' reflection on problems and solutions with a colleague down the corridor.

They continue to explain that CPTD can occur incidentally in the daily activities of teachers or more formal settings, but either way, it enhances professionalism. Little (2012) agrees that this informal CPTD can occur during interactions between teachers when planning, peer teaching, and mentoring colleagues. Fullan (2002: 7) emphasises that "knowledge creation and sharing is central to effective leadership", but the information given can only become knowledge through sharing within learning communities.

Furthermore, SMT 1 at School B explained, "We do CPTD at least once a term", and "We submit documents to WCED proving that we have done CPTD with staff every six months." Documentation reporting all CPTD is required by the South African Council of Educators (SACE) at least twice a year. Since all teachers are bound by the code of SACE, they are obligated to develop professionally throughout their teaching careers (SACE, 2013).

School leadership's role in assisting teachers to identify their own developmental needs is critical (Van der Merwe-Muller & Dasoo, 2020). SMT 1 understood this and related

... I will address issues one on one with the teachers if there is an issue and help them develop.

Focusing on the differentiated needs of individual teachers is a model that will enhance teacher support, leading to improved practice (Vanblaere & Devos, 2016).

SMT 3 discussed the importance of the leadership developing themselves through CPTD because:

these workshops prepare me as the head of department (HoD) to better develop my own team ...

Principal B agreed that for him, CPTD was as important since there was a:

need to develop myself enough to gain better insight into good leadership and teaching practices [and] I am a teacher and I have to lead people ...

Continuing to develop leadership based on individualised needs can result in transformation within schools (OECD, 2009). Through these processes of CPTD, leadership can have "an impact on the organisation's performance, on the processes of change, on the commitment,

satisfaction and wellbeing of employees" (Mourao, 2018: 128) and can create a learning environment through assisting teachers in identifying their developmental needs through continuous encouragement and support (Vanblaere & Devos, 2016). Fullan (2002) suggests it is important to change what teachers value and how they collaborate to attain organisational goals rather than focus on superficial or structural change.

6.3 Leading continued professional teacher development in schools to improve learner performance

Within schools in South Africa, principals as leaders are placed in a unique position that enables them to have a direct influence on CPTD, which in turn promotes quality teaching and learning to take place (Brown and Militello, 2016). The fundamental goal of professional development activities is to raise teachers' performance and, eventually, the quality of education by improving their knowledge, skills, and competencies (Van den Berg, 2002). Supporting teacher professional development is considered of the utmost importance when considering the effects of teacher performance on school efficiency and student academic success (Yalçin & Ozgenel, 2021). To improve the quality of education, all stakeholders should prioritise the professional development of teachers (Yalçin & Ozgenel, 2021). This includes the school leadership, which should strive to empower teachers, develop goals, monitor progress, and improve practice (Mestry, 2017).

School management teams were asked how vital CPTD is for teachers to enable improved learner performance, and they responded as follows: The principal from school A clearly stated that he "... will not give a matric class to an educator that does not continuously develop." The principal surely relies on CPTD to equip teachers better with the necessary skills and competencies to deliver the curriculum well and, in doing so, improve students' academic performance (Johns & Sosibo, 2019). What Principal A does, according to SMT 1, is that he:

gives our allocation at the beginning of the year, what we need to teach and who needs to teach what ... and then you develop continuously, develop yourself for those learners ...

Principal B acknowledged that:

CPTD is needed for teachers and a school to be successful ... I take every opportunity [for CPTD] for myself and the staff because it can ... help us improve the academics of our learners.

SMT 3 corroborated this with:

He [principal B] called in every single teacher and he wanted to know how we are going to develop ourselves to ensure our learners' results improve as the year progresses.

SMT 3 continued to explain that:

the principal provides training opportunities to teachers ... we could ... speak to the principal about the challenges we are facing and he would also find ways to help us address these issues that might hinder academic performance of learners.

Jita and Mokhele (2014) suggest that it is essential for principals to engage teachers effectively in reflective practice regarding what and how they will help learners achieve. The principal engages all teachers by creating an open-door policy where they feel free to ask for assistance, which Fullan (2002) regards as the start of building relationships. These relationships are significant in an institution that seeks transformation. Fullan (2002) maintains

that if relationship-building occurs between principals and their staff, positive change will arise. The participating principals improved their relationships with the staff by promoting CPTD. Relationship building occurred between the principal and teachers because he provided a platform, through CPTD, to address issues that might hinder the academic performance of learners. A significant function of the principal and the SMT is to determine individual teacher needs, decide on the professional development required by teachers, set times for delivery of the development and ascertain the resources needed to ensure that the goals are achieved (Monametsi, 2015). This suggests a connectedness and coherence in how the leadership intends to effect change (Fullan, 2002). According to Spaul (2013), the role of principals with SMTs is vital as, globally, one of the significant symptoms of poor academic performance is ineffective management and leadership at schools.

The SMTs agreed that developing teachers was crucial, especially since:

we live in a world that is changing ... [and there is a need for teachers to] ... adapt and change to the needs of the learners

Another SMT member intimated that:

CPTD is important because we must be able to offer the learner something more... something new... [and as a result at their institution] ... teachers are continuously upskilling themselves with new methodologies, [because there is a need to] improve the academics of our learners.

SMT 2 stated that:

... in order to improve results, we have to improve ourselves as teachers too...

The moral purpose for all teachers is to carry the responsibility to grow their knowledge and continuously update their skills as education trends evolve to accommodate 21st-century expectations (Fullan, 2002). When principals and their SMTs provide access to CPTD, it encourages transformed teaching practices and develops opportunities for teachers to continuously capacitate themselves to make a difference in learners' learning, ultimately improving learner performance (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017).

7. Conclusion

More significant pressure is placed on school principals and leadership teams regarding accountability for school success and improved learner performance. Teacher effectiveness impacts this outcome. Therefore, we argue that principals promote CPTD for themselves and teachers to build a professional learning community.

What emerged from the data is that although principals and SMTs understand the value of CPTD, they realise that the management of CPTD at schools requires a hands-on approach. The data reflect the value that leadership places on developing themselves to create a positive environment within an institution so that they can stimulate professional development among staff, encourage thinking and practices that align with 21st-century learning needs, and, as a result, improve the academic performance of learners. The participating principals were aware of the importance of developing themselves as leaders first, thus leading them to understand the developmental needs of their teachers (Fullan, 2002).

Principals and SMTs expressed the importance of promoting both formal and informal development programmes. They encouraged attendance at formal programmes, which included distributing information relating to departmental workshops and short courses and informal activities such as communities of learning, conversations with colleagues and one-on-one discussions and feedback among peers. The school leadership encouraged bi-weekly, monthly or even quarterly attendance of various professional development activities arranged by the principal and the WCED. Providing opportunities for continuous teacher development will increase teacher support, positively impact their practice, effect the change needed and influence learner performance. As expected by SACE (2013), schools submit documents outlining CPTD activities for all teachers every six months. Dynamic management of CPTD at these schools holds the moral purpose of teachers in high account as leadership proceeds to “stimulate growth, change and develop teachers and their practice”, characterised by “teachers working together, openness, networks, partnerships, respect, good relationships and a collective responsibility for student learning” (Nhlumayo, 2020:20).

Improving learner performance is a responsibility conferred upon the leadership in schools. The principals and SMTs in this study validated the importance of leading CPTD to assist teachers in adapting to the needs of 21st-century learners, seeing beyond the classroom and offering learners something more and new. Setting goals for teachers and working towards achieving them to align with the school's vision requires professional development. Principals and SMTs acknowledged the importance of allowing teachers to reflect on their practice and determine their developmental needs. Principals and the leadership identified appropriate CPTD activities to support their needs, continuously capacitating teachers. This brought about intellectual confidence, improved teaching and learning, and improved learner performance.

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