



## Do principal-educators have the ability to transform schools?: A South African perspective

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### ABSTRACT

Post-1994 South Africa adopted a new education system that would seemingly break with the past practices of the apartheid education system (Naicker, 1999) and produce citizens prepared for a democratic dispensation in South Africa. Accordingly, the new system of outcomes-based education was introduced in order to create the critical mass needed for the transformation of society. Thus, schools would become the sites where democratic practices for democratic citizenship would be fostered. Government duly promulgated the applicable policy documents (National Education Policy Act of 1996; South African Schools Act of 1996).

Our contention is that, despite the fact that education legislation paved the way for thinking differently about education in South Africa, principal-educators are not necessarily imbued with the ideals/virtues of democratic practices needed to empower them to engage in reflective democratic practices within a school context. We argue that the virtues of democracy must be learned through practising democracy. Many principal-educators, who were principals and educators pre-1994, as well as others, who qualified thereafter, may not have acquired any knowledge of the virtues of democracy, or having done so, may not be practising them. The authorities seem to assume that principal-educators are naturally imbued with the knowledge of the virtues of democracy and are able to put these virtues into practice.

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### 1. Introduction

The democratic government of South Africa (1994) set out to foster democratic practices within a transformed democratic society by means of a new education system based on the virtues of democracy. Our contention is that, although the government set out to engender democratic practices through the new education system, there seems to have been the assumption that principal-educators were able to establish democratic managerial practices on their own. The term *principal-educator* is a break from the Apartheid dispensation. The concept of “principal” was connected to an authoritative figure and

that is unacceptable in the democratic school system. Today the education system uses the term “educators” and the concept “principal-educator” refers to the educator leading the team. We argue that principal-educators, and all other citizens in South Africa, have had to learn democratic practices. Where were the knowledge and skills to come from if the virtues of democracy were to be inculcated through practice by principals who did not know what they are? Moreover, the position of the principal-educator has traditionally been locked into a paradigm of power that made principals authoritative and hence anti-democratic. First, we provide the background and context of the South African education system. Thereafter, the concept of change with the regard to the instilling of democratic virtues is contextualised. Further, we explore the meaning of democratic citizenship. Finally, we discuss the role of principal-educators with regard to democratic schools practices, and proposed strategies to empower principal-educators to engender democratic practices within the context of the school.

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### 2. The South African education system: historical background

The first democratic elections in South Africa in April 1994 marked the official end of apartheid in South Africa. According to the

**National Education Policy Investigation (NEPI) report (1992)**, education in South Africa had been characterised by large scale inequalities in the provision of services. Racial segregation and inequality persisted in education administration, the provision of schooling, non-formal education and organisation of higher education and training. **Nasson and Samuel** (cited in **Adams, 2008**) validate this statement in their observation that “...secondary school teachers in black schools in 1976 were poorly qualified to take up their positions. A total of 1.7% had a university degree, 10.4% had a grade 12 certificate, 49.3% had two years of secondary schooling and 21% had only completed primary school” (p. 11). **Naicker (1999)** concurs and believes that the advent of the first democratic elections in 1994 in South Africa, caused wide-scale change and transformation throughout the country. The unification of seventeen education departments into a single ministry of education was paramount to this change process. Methodological approaches taught to educators by separate apartheid teacher training institutions had limited peoples’ thinking, experiences, belief and underlying values to a particular paradigm (**Naicker, 1999**).

The post-apartheid government had to oversee the process of transformation. The imperative to transform South African society by utilising various transformative tools stems from the need to address the legacy of apartheid in all aspects of human activity and in education in particular (**Alexander, 2004**; **National Department of Education (NDE), 2003**). Furthermore, a resurgence in the government, business, organized labour and providers of education and training emphasized the need for educational imbalances which had been prevalent in the country’s rote learning/traditional schooling system to be redressed, and equal educational opportunities to be provided for all citizens (**NDE, 1997**). **Adams (2008)** acknowledges the efforts of the Department of Education in establishing free schools but also reports the numerous challenges to this ideal, claiming that, “Curricula remain underdeveloped and where they were developed, the training of teachers to deliver those curricula is limited or completely lacking. Learner-teacher ratios remain high, libraries are sporadically resourced or completely non-existent, computers are almost never part of education and students are forced to write science examinations without adequate prior access to the necessary technologies” (p. 2) whilst few “township” schools, which are characterised by black learners and black principal-educators are proactive in fostering democratic practices. **Muavia Gallie (2004)**, a representative of the South African Council of Educators (SACE), captures this sentiment aptly in the following words: “Township schools were more democratic than white schools and now we are taking township schools and transforming them into white schools. We are not going to get to democracy like this” (p. 8).

Against the backdrop of the above, it seems that the systemic and related human and physical resource issues affecting the South African education system might be a real challenge to the introduction of democratic virtues to schools.

As noted previously, the South African education system has been characterised by unprecedented change and transformation. We contend that an understanding of the change process in relation to the roles of the principal-educators is needed. Furthermore, we argue that, for the virtues of democracy to be learned, environments conducive to learning need to be established. This calls for principal-educators’ critical contextualization of change within their schools.

### 3. Contextualization of change within the instilment of democratic virtues

The main change with regard to education in South Africa was that seventeen different education departments have been brought under one ministry with the focus on redressing the differences in

resources and access to education; and addressing the needs of curricula, qualification structures, support services and teacher education. The transformation of the education system requires that values, attitudes and perceptions of educators, learners, parents and the community should change (**Donald, Lazarus, & Lolwana, 2002**). The **South African Schools Act (Act 84 of 1996)** introduced democratic change in school communities and granted equal opportunities to all (**Loock, Campher, Du Preez, Grobler, & Shaba, 2003**). The South African Schools Act necessitated a change in the manner in which principal-educators had managed their respective learning environments prior to 1994, especially in black institutions.

**Lewin, Samuel, and Sayed (2003)** view the role of principal-educators under the apartheid education policy as state functionaries with limited autonomy. The sole requirement of principal-educators was bureaucratic and political compliance with state education. Compliance was ensured through a complex set of instruments, including a system of school and individual inspection and a hierarchy of internal and external controls. Principal-educators were regarded as obedient civil servants who executed the well-defined instructional tasks. In contrast to the view expressed by Lewin, Samuel and Sayed, and **January-Bardill (2001)** argues that the breakdown in the rule of law in some South African schools is not because a “culture of human rights” has eroded discipline as implied by educators, but rather that the decades of illegitimacy and abuse of authority under the apartheid education system have resulted in a culture of entitlement and an attitude of non-compliance with rules and regulations. The challenges in South African schools can be attributed to a lack of legitimacy of the education system as a whole which is characterised by poor management and the collapse of teaching and learning (**Department of Education, 1996**). Our contention is that principal-educators need to be provided with the capacity to manage change in a democratic dispensation. In order to establish democratic virtues, principal-educators have to understand their roles as agents of change.

In their roles as agents of change and leaders of learning within their schools, principal-educators are expected to expand their schools’ capacities to learn democratic values by creating learning communities that collaboratively solve problems facing the school. **Shuttleworth (2003)** and **Van Deventer, Kruger, Van der Merwe, and Prinsloo (2003)** state that, as an internal change agent, the school principal is expected to initiate, facilitate and implement change with regard to democratic school practices. Educators, on the other hand, are assets who appreciate in value through knowledge, skills and experience which can be acquired by means of professional development training sessions.

Democratic school governance is part of the moral agenda for a transformed South Africa. A commitment to decentralized, school-based negotiation and stakeholder participation requires a different mindset and set of leadership skills from principal-educators. The challenge at stake is thus for school leaders, such as principal-educators, to re-create schools as learning organisations **Calitz (cited in Calitz, Fuglestad, & Lillejord, 2002)**. The development of collaborative cultures which focus on teaching and learning is needed. This point is demonstrated by **Donahue (cited in Calitz et al., 2002)**, who states that, in many schools, teachers, principals, students and sometimes parents or the community are in conflict. Each group blames the other for the breakdown of the culture of teaching and learning. There is a mutual lack of respect in many schools: principals claim that students and teachers fail to do their jobs; teachers complain that the principal is both incompetent and authoritarian; while students accuse teachers of sexual abuse, harassment, corporal punishment, and of being unprepared and uncaring.

Taking the above into consideration, **Busher (2006)** posits that principal-educators should be actively managing and supporting the implementation of change within their schools and that these

change initiatives should reflect the underlying values and needs of their school communities. Democratic virtues embedded in a school's organisational culture are important components for effective change (Loughridge & Tarantino, 2005). Lumby, Middlewood, and Kaabwe (2003) contend that people in a given organisation need to be persuaded of the necessity of learning for a specific goal, such as, learning the virtues of democracy.

In order to contextualize change within the school context, it becomes necessary to explore the meaning of democratic citizenship as a basis for the instilment of democratic virtues.

#### 4. Exploring the meanings of democratic citizenship

In practice, democratic citizenship does not take place in a neutral environment. It is part of political life, which, under normal circumstances, is actively promoted by the government through education. Seven characteristics of democratic citizenship are important: hope and confidence; courage; self-respect and self-esteem; friendship; trust; honesty; and decency. Galston (1998) remarks that, "devotion to human dignity and freedom, to equal rights, to social and economic justice, to the rule of law, to civility and truth, to tolerance of diversity, to mutual assistance, to personal and civic responsibility, to self-restraint and self-respect – all these must be taught and learned." These are the virtues (constitutive meanings) of democracy and citizenship, and the survival of democracy depends on the practice of democratic citizenship. This paper strives to show that the goods that make for democracy are not the goods with which citizens are born (Turner & Richardson, 2000).

Giroux (1988) states that:

*Citizenship, like democracy itself, is part of a historical tradition that represents a terrain of struggle over forms of knowledge, social practices, and values that constitute the critical elements of that tradition. However, it is not a term that has any transcendental significance outside the lived experiences and social practices of individuals who make up diverse forms of public life. Once we acknowledge the concept of citizenship as a socially constructed historical practice, it becomes all the more imperative to recognise that categories like citizenship and democracy need to be problematised and reconstructed for each generation.*

We gather that the process of reconstruction is an ongoing "doing practice", along the lines of an Aristotelian notion of practice (praxis). This means that virtues are lived through daily practice – the things that people do. We recognise that democracy and citizenship are sustained and promoted by educational practices, and that democracy and citizenship are, in themselves, educative practices. They are educative in the sense that they generate citizens who are able to live in a democratic society (November, 2005). Democratic citizenship thus nurtures the democratic ideal by creating "democratic agents" through the practice of "doing". We concur with Morrow (1989) when he states, "One of the central aims of education is to generate 'democratic agents'. Education aims to contribute to people's autonomy, to their capacity for critical thinking, to the discovery of what is in their interests, to the development of their moral and political sensibility, and so on, and these capacities and commitments are precisely those of a 'democratic agent'." These aims seem to be the aims of democratic citizenship as well. Our argument is that principal-educators cannot develop or nurture "democratic agents" if they are not aware of what is required of democratic agents (virtues of democracy and citizenship), for democratic citizenship is a practice that has to be lived, daily. Morrow (1989) describes the goods that make for democracy and help to achieve the aims of education as "contributing to people's autonomy, to their capacity for critical thinking, to the discovery of what is in their interests, to the development of their moral and

political sensibility, and so on, ...capacities and commitments... of a 'democratic agent'" (p. 12). In this regard, Galston (1998) stresses "devotion to human dignity and freedom, to equal rights, to social and economic justice, to the rule of law, to civility and truth, to tolerance of diversity, to mutual assistance, to personal and civic responsibility, to self-restraint and self-respect" (p. 4).

According to November (2005), democratic citizenship must be "acquired and nurtured through an educative process. Democratic citizens also have responsibilities (obligations). Moreover, the relationship between state and citizens in a democratic polity is dialogical" (p. 5). Kymlicka and Norman (1994) assert that "public policy relies on personal lifestyle decisions". In this way it "attempts to create a fairer society that will flounder if citizens are chronically intolerant of difference and generally lacking in what Rawls calls a sense of justice" (Kymlicka & Norman, 1994). Citizens need to have virtues that nurture the practice of democratic citizenship. Adherence to and adoption of these virtues are actively encouraged by the state through mechanisms such as schools. Without citizens that have a sense of virtue related to the democratic ideal, attempts by the state to sustain a democratic polity will be difficult if not impossible.

It seems that the intention of the state to foster critical and creative citizens for a transformative democracy favours notions of deliberation, which underscores deliberative democracy. Regarding the merits of deliberative democracy, Enslin and White (2003) posit the following:

*Apart from the potential that deliberative democracy poses for expanding citizenship, it also requires and promises to develop a set of democratic capacities and virtues. As well as the deliberative skills of presenting arguments to others and being able to judge which argument carries the greatest force, deliberation requires a disposition to reciprocity, a willingness to recognise others as free and equal participants in deliberation.*

Deliberative democracy, as proposed by Enslin and White (2003), requires particular skills of democratic citizens in a polity. The emphasis is on deliberation, a virtue of deliberative democracy that, in itself, requires certain conditions that should perhaps be given primacy. The presence of deliberative democracy depends on an attitude of reciprocity, which means that one should be prepared to give and take in deliberation. Also, reciprocity requires the willingness to respect others as equals in deliberation – a sense of openness and fairness. Deliberation requires that one should have the ability to judge some points of view as being more appropriate or more reasonable. The underlying assumption is that one has the ability to put aside one's own point of view in favour of the more reasonable argument. Reciprocity, openness, a sense of fairness and the ability to judge different points of view are constitutive of deliberation. Enslin, Pendlebury, and Tjiattas (2001) mention that:

*The qualities of deliberative democracy include the ability to make reasoned argument, written or oral, as well as the abilities to co-operate with others, to appreciate perspectives and experience and to tolerate other points of view. Talk is obviously fundamental to active citizenship... Deliberative democracy proposes models of participation committed to the public deliberative processes that are essential to the rationality of collective decision-making in diverse societies grappling with problems of the public good.*

Deliberative democracy intends to include rather than exclude. Democratic citizenship, we contend, consists of many features, with deliberation at the core. These features include reasoned argument, the capacity to cooperate with others, tolerance of different views, and the undertaking to respect others as free and equal in deliberation; in short, this boils down to democratic competence and virtues as located within the framework of a critical inquiry paradigm.

## 5. Roles of principal-educators with regard to democratic school practices

In this section, we discuss the roles of principal-educators in relation to democratic school practices. We argue that principal-educators are conscious of their responsibilities to engender democratic practices to cultivate democratic citizenship and that this awareness is pre-empted and encapsulated in numerous policy documents of the National Education Department. The Norms and Standards for Educators, as set out in the [National Education Policy Act \(Act 27 of 1996\)](#), outlines seven roles for educators and their associated competencies, namely: learning mediator; interpreter and designer of learning programmes and materials; leader, administrator and manager; scholar, researcher and lifelong learner; assessor, subject specialist and that of community, citizenship and pastoral role. With regard to the latter role, the educator will practice and promote a critical, committed and ethical attitude towards developing a sense of respect and responsibility towards others. The principal-educator will uphold the Constitution of South Africa and promote democratic values and practices at schools and in society. Within the school, the educator needs to demonstrate an ability to develop a supportive and empowering environment for the learner and respond to the educational and other needs of learners and fellow educators.

The duties of the educator involve upholding the learners' constitutional rights to education, safeguarding the learners well-being and safety, consulting regularly with learners parents, teaching learners the prescribed work, guiding them in developing their full potential and maintaining discipline at school, whilst the legal status of the principal gives him/her authority to ensure that general education policy is implemented ([Joubert & Prinsloo, 2001](#)).

Equality, human dignity, freedom and citizenship as virtues of democracy and citizenship are outlined as a means for the establishment of democratic managerial practices within schools ([Constitution of South Africa, 1996](#), chap. 2). Furthermore, it has been ascertained that, within the framework of the [Employment of Educators Act 76 \(Act 76 of 1998\)](#), principals and educators (see [Table 1](#)), as bearers of responsibility, are best positioned to contribute to the realisation and cultivation of democratic processes. The White Paper on Education and Training ([Department of Education, 2003](#)) reiterates the Government's commitment to the establishment of a values-based educational philosophy:

The education system must encounter the legacy of apartheid by promoting the values underlying the democratic processes and the charter of fundamental rights, the importance of due process of law and exercise of civic responsibility and by the teaching of values and skills for conflict resolution, the importance of mediation and the benefits of toleration and cooperation.

Central to the enhancement of democratic processes is school transformation. The democratisation of management structures through transformation is inextricably linked to the role of the principal-educator. The principal-educator, as the implementer of democratic practices, needs to nurture an environment that is based on human values. Through this process, emphasis should be placed on building teacher capacity in aspects relating to the instilment of democratic citizenship.

If this is the case, then the question is: why are principal-educators seemingly unable to engender democratic school practices at schools? In exploring this question, a description will be given of the role of the principal-educator as staff developer; instructional leader and human resource manager – three roles identified as seminal to the establishment of democratic practices.

**Table 1**

Employment of Educators Act (Act 76 of 1998, cited in [Palmer, 2008](#)). Summary of different roles of the principal and educator in South Africa.

| Core responsibilities of a principal                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             | Core responsibilities of an educator                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>General/Administrative</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To be responsible for the professional management of a public school</li> <li>To maintain school accounts</li> <li>To give proper instructions and guidelines for timetables, admission and learner placement</li> <li>To ensure proper use and maintenance of school equipment and grounds</li> <li>To deal with correspondence</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To co-ordinate and control all academic activities of each subject taught</li> <li>To control and co-ordinate stock and equipment</li> <li>To perform and assist with the teaching duties such as first-aid, timetabling, accidents</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                            |
| <b>Extra-curricular</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To serve on recruitment, promotion, advisory and other committees as required</li> <li>To play an active role in promoting extra-curricular activities in the school and to plan major functions and encourage learner participation in sports, educational and cultural activities organized by community bodies</li> </ul>                      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To assist the HOD to identify aspects which require special attention and top assist in addressing them</li> <li>To cater for the educational and general welfare of all learners in his care</li> <li>To assist the principal in overseeing learner counselling and guidance, careers, discipline and general welfare of all learners</li> <li>To share the responsibilities of organizing and conducting extra- and co-curricular activities</li> </ul> |
| <b>Teaching</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To engage in class teaching as per workload of the relevant post level and the needs of the school</li> <li>To be a class teacher if required</li> <li>To assess and record the attainment of learners taught</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To engage in class teaching, fostering purposeful progression in learning</li> <li>To prepare lessons, plan, co-ordinate, control, evaluate and report on learner progress</li> <li>To take a leadership role in respect of the subject</li> <li>To establish a classroom environment which stimulates positive learning and actively engages learners in the learning process</li> </ul>                                                                 |

### 5.1. The principal-educator as staff developer

Recent changes in the education system of South Africa which have placed internal and external pressures on principals and educators alike, necessitate a review of the role of principal-educators. To absorb the related stressors which are associated with change, low levels of job satisfaction and a decrease in professional commitment, it is incumbent upon the principal-educators to be the initiators of staff development programmes that can assist teachers in becoming agents of change ([Alexander, 2004](#)). [Houston and Pankratz \(1990\)](#) express a similar view: "The major thrust for bringing about effective change is by means of staff development and in-service training" (p. 2). It is thus of critical importance that Heads of Education Departments locate the trust, confidence, authority, ownership, responsibility and professional accountability for staff development within principal-educators as school and classroom managers. Staff development in a democratic dispensation must be aimed at the implementation of [Van der Westhuizen \(1992\)](#) and [Mathole's \(1996\)](#) suggestions that a staff development programme for a specific school must be initiated, planned and organized within the context of the macro-development plan of the [Department of Education \(2000\)](#). Principal-educators are in the best

position to plan and implement development programmes with staff collaboratively, especially the programmes which relate to democratic practices.

Galston (1998) argues that the main aim of citizen education within a democratic dispensation should be to prepare citizens to become responsible, active and well-informed individuals and also to inculcate a value system that fosters tolerance of diversity. He also claims that the development of an authentic democracy depends on the education of citizens whose competency can be embedded in a staff development programme, where the foci should be on aspects like national consciousness or identity, political literacy, equal rights, societal values and general intellectual capacities.

Accordingly, staff development is a pivotal component in the democratisation of school structures. Principal-educators are continually confronted by policy changes that have been forced on them by policy-makers who do not always understand the roles and tasks of the stakeholders in the transformation of schools. Therefore, without prior consultation, principal-educators often have to make changes which do not necessarily fulfil their professional needs or meet with their approval. Sustained professional growth and personal development activities are of cardinal importance in creating awareness and a change in mindset regarding meaningful transformation.

### 5.2. The principal-educator as instructional leader

The implementation of “Curriculum 2005” in South African schools in 1998, and its approach to teaching and learning, namely “Outcomes-based Education (OBE)”, signalled a process of modernising and equalising the curriculum in all schools. To coincide with the new democracy in 1994, the main aim of outcomes-based education was to shift the focus of teaching and learning from content and rote learning towards an emphasis on outcomes, such as the development of creative, confident and critical thinkers – citizens who can respond to the challenges of a multicultural democratic society (Van Wyk, 2007). This radical curriculum change meant that principal-educators have had to review their roles and be inducted and orientated into “new” roles as instructional leaders. The following statement by the Department of Education (2000) reaffirms this conclusion:

*All public schools in South Africa must implement the new curriculum in accordance with the National Department of Education's implementation policy and plan. This new OBE approach is not a set of rules and regulations handed down by the Department and which schools just have to follow. It is a set of guidelines for how schools can put the new Curriculum (National Curriculum Statement for grades R-12) into practice (p. 2).*

It seems that principal-educators have entered a new phase in the educative process and, whether they embrace their new role as instructional leaders or not, they are bound by the Department of Education's decision to engage their staff components in issues relating to instructional leadership. Thus, the primary responsibility to empower principal-educators with regard to instructional leadership lies with the Department of Education.

Aspects dealing with curriculum delivery and development are the major priorities of deliberation within an instructional leadership framework (Alexander, 2004). According to the Department of Education (2000), the principal-educator and members of the School Management Team (SMT) are responsible for managing issues relating to whole school curriculum development, and each school has a responsibility to ensure high-quality teaching and learning. The National Curriculum Statement (NCS), South Africa's official response to OBE, plays an important role in promoting democratic values like freedom, human rights, inclusivity, and environmental and social justice (Department of Education, 2003; Van Wyk, 2007).

In our view, forums created for instructional leadership can be a platform for meaningful principal-teacher engagement, participation and decision-making, especially with regard to issues dealing with democratic citizenship. Through deliberative and conscious actions, principal-educators would be taking bold steps to promote democratic practices. In this way, their efforts should form part of a whole school development process – meaning that the process of transformation should be facilitated in a holistic sense, not only in schools, but in the wider community as well.

### 5.3. The principal-educator as human resource leader

The management task of the principal-educator has undergone dramatic changes in recent times. This evolutionary change is seen in the shift from a pedagogic-didactical orientation to a more managerial approach (Calitz, 2002; Van der Westhuizen, 1987). Changes in educational management in South Africa have also resulted in principal-educators not being prepared for their duties as school managers (Thurlow, 2003). Ubben, Hughes, and Norris (2001) postulate that the management task of the principal-educator has changed from that of a reactive manager who had to maintain the status quo and give voice to the policy requirements determined by a bureaucratic hierarchy, to that of the present-day principal-educator who has to ensure that schools become beacons of productive learning by utilising his/her leadership acumen. By means of the dynamic humanness developed out of an own-value system, a principal-educator must endeavour not only to change a school, but also to cooperate proactively with institutions inside and outside the school in order to transform the school into a professional institution capable of excellent learning and teaching.

A significant management task in the daily routine of the principal is Human Resources Management (HRM). Marx (1993) views HRM as a process that involves the provision, maintenance and development of staff in order to steer an organisation in a particular direction to achieve the primary aims of the organisation. In most cases, this management task is delegated by education departments without the proper induction of newly appointed principal-educators.

In order to reinforce democratic practices within schools, principal-educators must be made aware of the role of the organisational culture as an aspect of the organisational structure. Organisational culture has a great influence on the HRM task of the principal. De Villiers and Gouws (1993) believe that organisational culture refers to a school's underlying system of values, habits, norms and attitudes that must be emulated by teachers and management in an organisation. Principal-educators, therefore, have a fundamental challenge to shape a school culture that establishes core democratic values and beliefs within the school.

Principal-educators are facing the challenge of managing the democratic education system. The organisational culture in schools contributes to the establishment of consensus, participative decision-making, harmony and solidarity among educators. Principal-educators, as HRM-leaders, should be provided with the capacity to develop a school culture that would encourage the establishment of core democratic values as a prerequisite for the enhancement of democratic school practices.

## 6. The challenges facing principal-educators in engendering democratic practices

Having explored the roles of the principal-educator as staff developers; instructional leaders and human resources managers, we shall now take a closer look at why principal-educators find it a challenge to engender democratic practices at school level.

The current violent environment within which South Africa's schools exist daily needs to be contextualised within the history of our fragmented and separated education system as an attribute of apartheid. In turn, the “violent” legacy of apartheid places a heavy burden on the current education system in our country, especially our principals who have to engender democratic practices at their respective schools.

In the next paragraphs, we examine instances why principal-educators do not create democratic practices at school level. If one examines our education system today, it is clear that in South African schools, education is seen as a fundamental constitutional human right that is a powerful tool in the fight against oppression, exploitation and poverty. However, sexual harassment, violence, rape and bullying – learners against teachers and teachers against teachers within the school system have been identified as serious hindrances to the transformation of schools and institutions across the country.

Commissioned by the Department of Education in 1996, a study was conducted by the Gender Equity Task Team (GETT) to analyse the impact of violence in the education system from a gender perspective. GETT identified the problem of sexual violence in schools as severe, systematic and infringing on the rights of the learners. The report revealed that one out of every three Johannesburg schoolgirls has experienced sexual violence and harassment at school (Wolpe, Quinlan, & Martinez, 1997). Another study reported by Human Rights Watch (2001), found that “on a daily basis in schools across the nation, South African schoolgirls of every race and economic class encounter sexual violence and harassment at school that impedes their realisation of the right to education” (p. 239). *The Mail and Guardian*, a weekly newspaper (2006), wrote an article: “South Africa; schools are really under the spotlight” (p. 12) in which it reported that many schools are “urban war zones”, with teachers struggling to cope with unruly learners, some of whom were armed with knives, guns, and sharp objects. Violence in these schools had escalated beyond that normally associated with bullying, and now included levels of violence, and even deaths. We contend that quality education will not be possible in such a state of fear. Another newspaper article reports that a seventeen-year-old boy was fatally stabbed in the classroom while an eight-year-old boy was hacked to death by classmates at a primary school. These violent crimes have forced many principal-educators to plead with the Department of Education to intervene urgently to prevent school violence and to provide security (Mail & Gaurdian, 2007). A research study conducted by De Wet (2005) in schools in the Free State Province of South Africa, revealed that verbal bullying is increasing (31,97%) and huge problems, such as victimization, stealing, swearing and lying are encountered at most schools. Another study on bullying which was conducted and presented by Du Plessis and Conley (2007) at an International Conference on Learner Discipline in Potchefstroom, South Africa, concluded that most pupils were targeted by bullies in taxis on the way to school, or in toilets and bathrooms at most schools.

As a result of these examples of violence at schools, the previous National Minister of Education, Naledi Pandor (2008), addressed the media on October 27, 2008 and spoke about the lack of values in South African schools. She stated clearly that “an absence of values permeates our schools and we all need to do much more to change this. We have violence at universities, school children bring weapons to school, children are doing drugs at school, and they bring cell phones to school and use them to record violence” (p. 2). The above examples demonstrate clearly that there are challenges impeding principal-educators’ efforts to engender democratic practices at schools. We propose the following strategies which might capacitate and empower principal-educators to instil democratic practices.

## 7. Strategies to empower principal-educators to engender democratic practices

Democracy in a democratic education system should parallel the democratic structures found in civil democracies. However, as Carnoy (1990) postulates, education adds an additional layer of complexity since it exists as a primary tool of the state to instil the values of the government. John Dewey regarded democracy and education as sharing support for broad-based participation, effective communication, collaboration, and creative problem solving (as cited in Boydston, 1980). Paulo Freire understands the role of democracy in education as a means to and an example of democracy in action, as “an introduction into the democratisation of culture” (1998).

We contend that principal-educators do not necessarily have the ability to engender democratic practices to transform their schools, but are given responsibilities as custodians of the fundamental values of the South African Constitution (South Africa, 1996, chap. 2, Article 14). Principal-educators are conscious of their responsibilities, but are not able to establish good managerial practices to enhance democratic values (Department of Education, 2001). Thus, principal-educators, as well as all other citizens in South Africa, have to learn democratic practices and take full responsibility for establishing a democratic culture at school.

Thus far we have argued that principal-educators do not necessarily have the capacity to engender democratic practices. Subsequently, we discussed three roles that would enable principal-educators to transform their practices. Our question is: “What possible strategies can be proposed to enable principal-educators to engender democratic school practices? We propose the following strategies:

- The enhancement of a culture of participation;
- The establishment of democratic values within the school;
- The promotion of education for citizenship and
- Other strategies to engender democratic practices at school level.

We shall now discuss these strategies.

### 7.1. The enhancement of a culture of participation

Principal-educators are expected to be knowledgeable about curriculum changes, instructional effectiveness, staff development and learner leadership development. Fullan (1991) and Bottoms (1998) argue that the role of the principal-educators is to encourage collaboration among staff, learners, the school governing body and the community to play a more central role through active participation at school. Principal-educators often find it difficult to build good relationships and this can be remedied in the following ways. Principal-educators can be empowered through the implementation of workshops, seminars, in-service training sessions and principal conferences by the provincial education departments and non-governmental organisations (NGO). At these sessions, aspects of consensus-seeking, capacity building, understanding diversity and differences among staff, SGB and learner leaders can be discussed.

Capacity building is not only about developing the ability of individuals and institutions to perform effectively and consistently but also involves the creation and development of new learning cultures. The goal of capacity building is for people to develop the capacity to value, be skilled at, and engage in new forms of behaviours that produce different and better results. The establishment of new cultures should focus on improvements in teaching and learning and on inculcating democratic collaborative practices (Calitz in Calitz et al., 2002).

With regard to the above, we argue that democratic citizenship as an educational activity can thus do justice to diversity if it contributes to the provision of equal opportunities to all learners and when it prepares them adequately for living together in a democratic, pluralist South Africa. Principal-educators must learn to be effective managers of diversity, and learners need to be guided in a complex and diverse societal context. Within the cultural diverse domain of their school, learners must learn to be unprejudiced, unbiased and non-stereotyped.

It can be argued (especially currently in South Africa) that virtues to be learned in multicultural schools should cater for citizenship, based on participatory democracy, equality of opportunity based on school success and democratic school practices (Le Roux, in Calitz et al., 2002).

The principal-educator, school management team (SMT), SGB executive members and learner leaders can be informed by the provincial education department about democratic values in education in order to transform their school. Building consensus and understanding difference through dialogue is at the heart of nurturing a culture of communication and participation in South African schools (DoE, 2001; South African Human Rights Commission, 1999). Through this particular action at school level, vigorous debating calls not only for dialogue, but the space for the safe expression of ideas. Nurturing a culture of communication and participation in schools means opening up channels of dialogue between parents, educators, learners and officials. These types of actions will definitely enhance a culture of confident, inquiring and empowered learners (Alexander, 2001). If principal-educators implemented these practices at their schools, we believe that the culture of communication would be enhanced.

Why should principal-educators instil a culture of communication, interaction and participation at school? Communication is very important for transparency and building consensus to enhance a culture of openness and the interaction and the participation of all stakeholders in school meetings and debates. All role-players should contribute to the agenda of meetings held in the school, and the contributions of every stakeholder should be encouraged and acknowledged with consensus being reached on aspects pertaining to governance, management and teaching and learning at school to inculcate a culture of communication, interaction and participation.

The following quotation by Professor Kader Asmal (2001), former Minister of Education, reiterates the sentiment expressed in the foregoing paragraph:

*Values cannot simply be asserted; they must be put on the table, be debated, be negotiated, be synthesised, be modified, be earned. And this process, this dialogue, is in and of itself a value – a South African value – to be cherished (p. 23).*

A research study conducted by the Department of Education (2000) revealed that the ability to engage in constructive dialogue is one of the values most desired and most lacking in South African schools. The primary conclusion of this research is that “the central importance of dialogue in promoting democratic values in schools is a great challenge but it is important to defend spaces for expression” (p. 23).

## 7.2. The establishment of democratic values within the school

Berger (1981) argues that the principal-educator's role includes the promotion of school-parental interaction to enhance democratic values. The author believes that the spirit of the school and the enthusiasm of the staff, learners and school management team (SMT) reflect the principal-educator's leadership role as morale builder. The principal-educator fulfils this function through

supportive guidance, and the development of individual school improvement plans. In this way, the principal can inculcate a culture of transparency in decision-making to enhance good managerial practices. Principal-educators must recognise their responsibility in setting an example as role models at school level. The Code of Conduct of the South African Council of Educators (SACE, 2000) – a statutory body – is even more specific. SACE commits principal-educators to “acknowledge the noble calling of their profession to educate and train the learners of their country”, to “acknowledge that the attitude, dedication, self-discipline, ideals, training and conduct of the teaching profession determine the quality of education”, to “acknowledge, uphold and promote basic human rights”, to “commit themselves to do all within their power, in the exercising of their professional duties, to act in accordance with the ideals of their profession”, and to “act in a proper and becoming way such that their behaviour does not bring the teaching profession into disrepute” (p. 4–23). In other words, to have internalised the ten fundamental values of the South African Constitution, Article 14 (South Africa, 1996) themselves, and to act as role models for their learners. Role modelling promotes commitment as well as competence among learners that will definitely demonstrate the values they are meant to uphold in the school environment. In such a sharing environment, the principal, school management team and staff members will be positive and enthusiastic. A second managerial role that can contribute to role modelling is that of programme designer, which involves the implementation of an educational programme. The principal-educator needs to recognise the importance of home-school-community relationships in the success of an educational programme and strive towards the establishment of productive working relationships. The principal-educator can also make recommendations to the SGB to co-opt community members with specialised skills as well as those who are willing to contribute towards good managerial practices. All stakeholders within the school can contribute to the school improvement plan through a suggestion box where inputs of parents, the community, learners and staff can be placed (Moswel, 2007).

According to Jung and Avolio (1999), principal-educators who inculcate trust and commitment at school, promote new values and alternative visions that transcend the status quo. These principal-educators inspire and stimulate all stakeholders to adopt a collective purpose for the school.

The principal-educator must ensure that democratic structures, such as school governing bodies (SGB), subject committees, forums and learner representative councils are properly constituted in accordance with the South African Schools Act, and that the principles of cooperative school governance are applied (Department of Education, 1997). Within these democratically elected structures, all stakeholders must play a meaningful role to advance and engender democratic values to make democratic citizenship a reality. It is the principal-educator's management task and responsibility to invite the provincial education department or any NGO that specialises in capacity building in managerial areas to inform all role-players about racism and racial awareness programmes. In accordance with the School Development Plan (SDP), principal-educators have the responsibility to implement and monitor staff development and learner leadership programmes for the establishment of democratic values within the school.

## 7.3. The promoting education for citizenship

As a concept, human rights are misunderstood and underrated because principal-educators and educators believe that their rights and authority in the classroom are being undermined, making them feel powerless. Principal-educators can be empowered through an

“education for citizenship” programme via workshops and discussion sessions by the provincial education department (Weiss & Cambone, 1994). Education for citizenship can include aspects such as political literacy, peace education, environmental education, democracy education and anti-discrimination programmes. Provincial education officials, such as Community Development Officers (CDOs), have the responsibility to implement these programmes to empower principal-educators and to monitor the programmes they implement at their schools. Principal-educators must also be equipped with conflict resolution skills to entrench aspects of tolerance, friendship and mutual respect in the school. We contend that infusing the classroom with a culture of human rights is an imperative. Ironically, a survey has shown that no less than 78, 4% of educators believe that “the government puts too much emphasis on human rights, which leads to problems in our classroom” (DoE, 2000, 2001). The challenge is to show that the path towards good citizenship, and effective education, is precisely founded in human rights, not any form of totalitarianism masquerading as moral regeneration.

Principal-educators can take the lead by inviting the ward councillor, community police forum leaders, the business community and church leaders to discuss possible strategies to make the school safe and build good relationships with the school. They can then place initiatives such as “adopt a cop campaign”, “gangsterism”, “drug free schools” and “zero-tolerance on crime” on the agenda of staff meetings to enhance safety at school. Why are these campaigns important to the school? Because they promote the involvement and participation of teachers, learners, parents and the greater community in discussion forums. If the principal-educator implements these strategies, stakeholders in the school will respond by expressing their respect and acceptance, and they will feel more empowered with regard to all of these issues. Furthermore, the ward councillor can also be invited to talk about safety, substance abuse and participation in the school’s ward activities. Here the principal-educator can take the lead, together with the ward councillor and community leaders, to make inputs and enhance mutual understanding in the ward. At all of these forums, inputs and ideas can be captured by the principal-educator and later shared with all role-players to further engender democratic practices.

#### 7.4. Other strategies for the enhancement of democratic practices at school level

We contend that *arts and culture* must be integrated into the curriculum as an empowering initiative to give learners the means to express themselves creatively, through music, drama, dance and visual art, when language alone proves itself incapable: in an environment where children are often taught in second or even third languages, the expressive force of art and performance transcends the limitations. Edward Said (2001) describes performance as “a non-coercive and voluntary instrument for submitting oneself to the ensemble” (p. 6). He mentions that such an instrument could provide a way for the values of equality, non-racism, non-sexism, openness, reconciliation and respect to be instilled in young people. We believe that *instilling South African history* by integrating it into the school curriculum could support and strengthen critical inquiry. Through this process principal-educators and learners might forge a common historical consciousness of their past. According to Callinicos (2001), a critical knowledge of history is essential in “building the dignity of human values within an informed awareness of the past, thereby preventing amnesia, checking triumphalism, opposing a manipulative or instrumental use of the past, and providing a buffer against the ‘dumbing down’ of the citizenry”.

We also recommend that *character/moral education* must be integrated into the curriculum in order to provide the scope for learners to explore the diversity of religions that impel and inspire society, and

the morality and values that underpin them. Nolan (2001) expressed the importance of the introduction and infusing religious education from an early age into the curriculum to instil democratic virtues. We support the argument of Nolan (2001) that religious education can reaffirm the values of diversity, tolerance, respect, justice, compassion and commitment in our learners. We believe that all role-players must learn from one another, but that this can only happen by developing multilingualism in South African schools. We contend that learners acquire knowledge far more efficiently when they learn in their mother tongue – especially in the early years. This strategy seeks to offer practical ways to make multilingualism work in a world it recognises as being dominated by English.

We believe that *sport can be use as a powerful strategy* to shape social bonds and nurture nation building at school, for example the “loveLife” games (Department of Sport, Arts and Culture, 2000; Fredericks, 2001; Ramsamy, 2001). These games promote the culture of sport as an integral part to the learning process and the “loveLife” games offer learners in all South African schools the opportunity to build team skills, lifelong friendships and healthy styles for living. The “loveLife Games”, the largest school sports competition in South Africa, promotes healthy living, self-motivation and personal achievement to more than 400,000 school students annually (Kaiser Family Foundation). We believe that these games promote exchange and acceptance of our diverse arts and culture, entrench the values and principles enshrined in the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa and provide an environment for our young people to reach their full potential. The nurturing of a *new South African patriotism* through national symbols (anthem, flag, coat of arms, springbok and protea emblems, etc.) could affirm a common citizenship (Yiso Yiso Focus Group Research, 2001). This ought to be critical in establishing a shared sense of pride and common identity amongst learners and principal-educators. We contend that this new patriotism is forged through an allegiance to the constitutional values of democracy, equality, social justice, non-sexism, non-racism, accountability, openness, respect, reconciliation and the rule of law. The virtues of openness, discussion, debate, dialogue, and the acknowledgement of difference should be further acknowledged in school settings.

It is extremely important that principal-educators infuse and nurture a value system in their schools that is workable, owned by everybody, and in line with the principles not only of the Bill of Rights, but of all who should play their part to engender democratic values in all practices at school level.

## 8. Conclusion

Democracy in a democratic education system should parallel the democratic structures found in civil democracies. However, as Carnoy (1990) postulates, education adds an additional layer of complexity since it exists as a primary tool of the state to instil the values of the government.

We contend that principal-educators do not necessarily have the ability to engender democratic practices to transform their schools, but are given responsibilities as custodians of the fundamental values of the Constitution (Constitution of South Africa, 1996, chap. 2). Principal-educators are conscious of their responsibilities, but are not necessarily able to establish good managerial practices to enhance democratic values (Department of Education, 2001). Thus, principal-educators, as well as all other citizens in South Africa, have to learn democratic practices and take full responsibility for establishing a democratic culture at school.

Thus far we have argued that principal-educators do not necessarily have the ability to engender democratic practices at their respective schools. Subsequently, we discussed three roles and strategies that would enable them to transform their practices and to engender democratic practices at school level.

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