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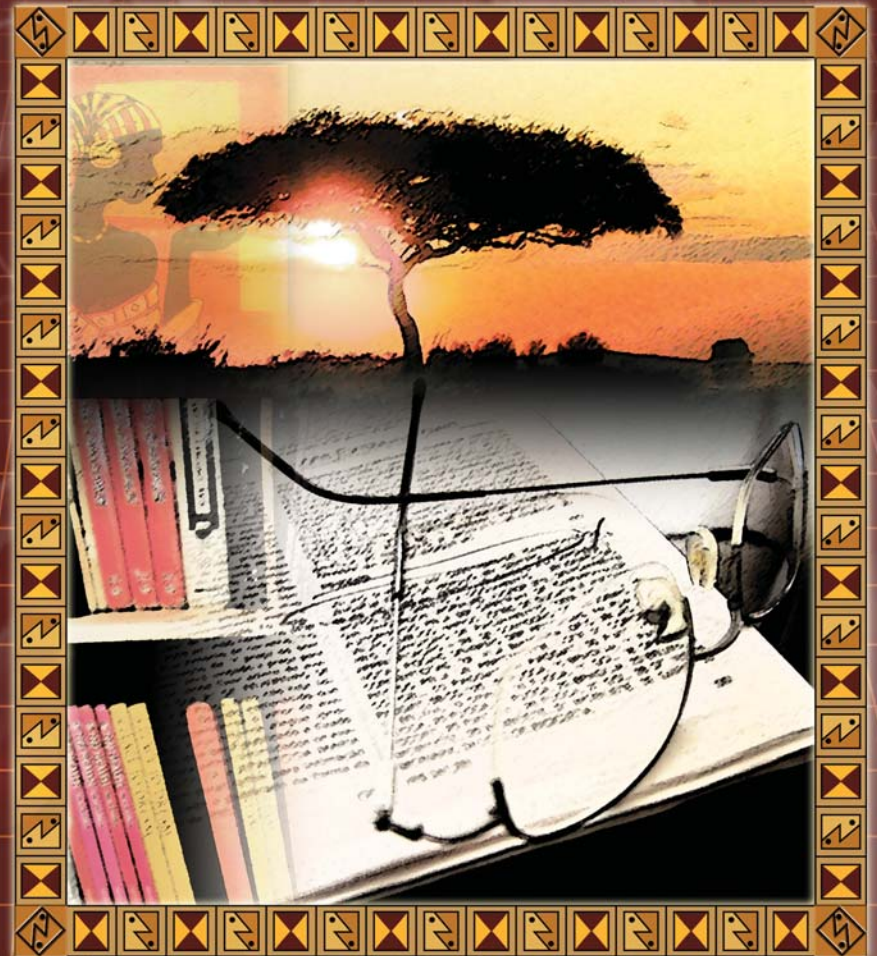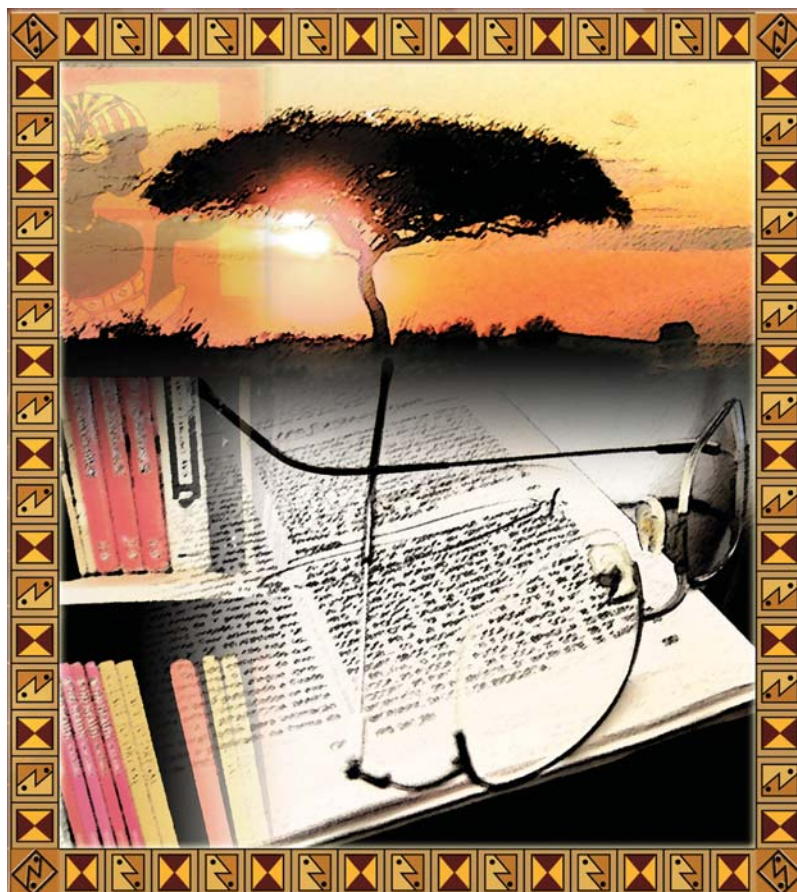
School Leadership and Management

basic education

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REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

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External Evaluation Research Report of the Advanced Certificate in Education:

School Leadership and Management

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NOVEMBER 2009

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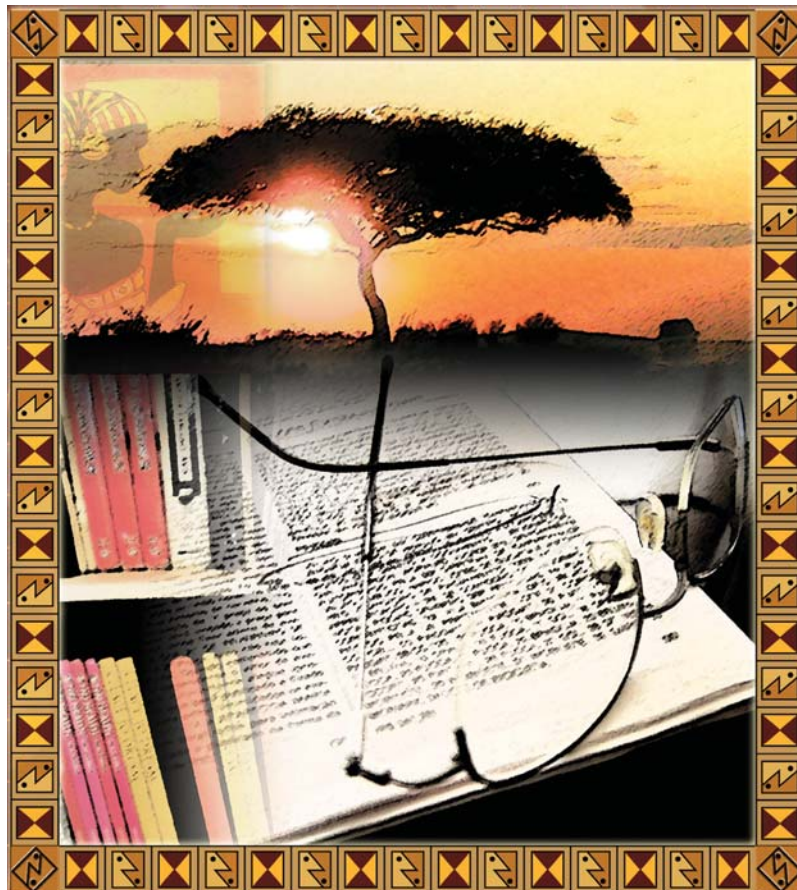**REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA**

ZENEX
F O U N D A T I O N

Contents

External Evaluation Research Report of the Advanced Certificate in Education:

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Introduction

The Department of Education has introduced a new threshold qualification for aspiring school principals as part of its wider strategy to improve educational standards. The course is an Advanced Certificate in Education: School Leadership and, beginning in 2007, the course was tested nationally with candidates, including serving principals, as well as members of School Management Teams (SMTs).

The ACE is being delivered by universities, through a common framework agreed with the national Department of Education and the National Management and Leadership Committee (NMLC). The first cohort of the field test involved only five universities, and the Matthew Goniwe School of Leadership and Governance, but 16 higher education institutions (HEIs) were involved in the second phase of the field test.

The assessment framework stresses the applied nature of the course:

> *'Its primary purpose is to ascertain how much of the course learning has been internalised, made meaning of and applied in practice in the school'*

Methodology

The research provides a comprehensive evaluation of the national field test programme in order to inform the development of the course and to provide advice to the Minister of Basic Education about the suitability and sustainability of the qualification for its intended purpose, *to improve school leadership and management.* The research sought to address ten specific research questions. We show later how this was achieved.

The evaluation involved four phases (preliminary, baseline, mid-term, and impact) and the following specific dimensions:

- Desk research of international and South African leadership development practice.
- Documentary analysis of the initial field test materials.
- Observation of the orientation sessions for candidates.
- Repeat interviews with key HEI staff.
- Two surveys (baseline and impact) with all candidates in the first field test cohort.
- Longitudinal case studies with 27 candidates and their schools (including repeat interviews, shadowing and analysis of school and course documents).
- Observation of mentoring practice.
- Observation of networks.

Overview of Survey and Case Study Findings

Socio-economic background of the learners and the community

Most schools in the survey, and in the case study sample, serve deprived township or rural communities, with high levels of poverty, unemployment, child-headed families, drug and alcohol abuse, and, in secondary schools, teenage pregnancy. This provides an unpromising context for learner achievement. While effective school leadership and management are important, they cannot compensate for such difficult socio-economic challenges.

School achievement

The survey evidence shows that most respondents (75%) claim that their school is 'improving'. However, the secondary school case studies show that only 12% have produced clear improvements in matric results while performance has declined slightly at 38% and fallen significantly at 50% of them. It is not possible to reach firm conclusions on such limited data but it is clear that the ACE programme has not led to short-term gains in matric results at the case study schools. However, this finding needs to set against the national data which show that overall matric results have declined since 2006:

2006:   66.5%

2007:   65.2%

2008:   62.5%

There is some evidence that candidates focused on ACE assignments *instead* of managing their schools. It is possible that the benefits from the programme will become more evident now that the assessment requirements have been completed. Firm evidence on the links between the ACE and school achievement would require a longer-term study.

Academic data were available at five primary and combined case study schools; three showing improvement with two in decline. The composition of learners was offered as a reason for decline in some cases but we also found examples of weak management. This suggests that the initial effects of the ACE programme on learner achievement may be negative or, at best, neutral although we also saw evidence of principals beginning to implement their leadership learning.

School and community relationships

Most (84%) of the survey respondents claim significant improvements in community relationships. New evidence from Leithwood et al (in press) shows that leadership engagement with families can have a powerful impact on learner outcomes. Given the fragmented nature of many South African families, with child-headed and granny-headed units, the 'family pathway' may be even more important in South Africa than in more affluent countries.

Contact sessions

Five universities were responsible for delivering the ACE course with the first pilot cohort (one works with two provinces).

iii

Researchers observed between one and three contact sessions in each HEI. The universities offer diverse models of delivery:

- Block teaching over several days.
- Friday afternoon/evening sessions.
- Saturday sessions.

In the Western Cape, the delivery model is based on a 'public-private' partnership between the university and a consultancy group.

The delivery model does not appear to produce different levels of satisfaction from candidates but it is recommended that contact sessions are scheduled to minimise disruption to candidates' schools. More significant is the size of the learner group, which ranges from 25 to 200. Despite the aspirations of most lecturers, interaction is very limited in the larger groups, thus working against the philosophy of the programme.

Most universities deal with the problem of scale by also providing smaller group facilitation activity. These sometimes lead to successful, interactive sessions, as observed in KZN, Gauteng and Western Cape. However, they may simply be used for administrative purposes, as observed with one Mpumalanga group, or result in 'no proper group work', as in the Eastern Cape. In the small group sessions, as well as the main contact sessions, the settings sometimes inhibited interactive learning.

Teaching materials

The national teaching materials were prepared under the auspices of the National Management and Leadership Committee (NMLC) and were intended to be used by all providers, except in Gauteng, in order to denote a common curriculum. The Gauteng group used MGSLG's modules, which were prepared before the national materials. The research team's baseline report (Bush et al 2007) provides a critique of the national materials based on documentary analysis. Their recommendations were considered by the NMLC's Review Group, which produced revised materials in November 2008. The comments below mostly relate to the unrevised modules.

The impact survey shows very positive findings with 80% saying that the materials are 'of great help' and only 2% responding that they are 'of limited help'. In many cases, this was candidates' first engagement with leadership and management ideas, so they could not adopt a comparative perspective. The case study candidates also have varied views on the materials. Some are positive, saying that they are 'fantastic', a view that may be attributable to their previous lack of familiarity with leadership and management sources. Certain candidates others offer a range of criticisms. The most common view is that the materials are too long or too 'bulky'.

Most lecturers are content with the modules, saying that they are valuable because they are practice-based, and KZN staff, in particular, praise the materials. However, it is clear that the HEIs have chosen to use them in different ways. Some supplement these modules with their own resources and others make only limited use of the national programme, preferring to use it for reference, while leading with their own materials. The varied use of the materials raises questions about the extent to which the ACE can be regarded as a genuinely national programme.

Mentoring

Mentoring is a distinctive and central feature of the ACE programme, designed to facilitate the transfer of learning to candidates' and school practice. Effective mentoring provides strong potential for deep learning. Bush (2008: 43) says that 'mentoring refers to a process where one person provides *individual* support and challenge to another professional' but, within the ACE programme, mentoring usually relates to groups, not individuals.

Selection of mentors

The matching process between mentor and mentee is critical to its effectiveness. This also links to the selection procedure. Some universities employ people who have worked with the HEI on other similar programmes. These are often retired principals, whose professional experience is seen as directly relevant to their role. In Gauteng, the mentors are principals but are also graduates of the MGSLG ACE programme, which has been running for longer than its national equivalent. This seems to be a valuable approach, providing the people concerned have the requisite skills, appropriate training and time to visit their candidates in their schools.

Mentoring practice

In many provinces, including Eastern Cape, Limpopo and Mpumalanga, there is a two-stage process:

- Group 'facilitation' as part of, or separate from, the formal teaching sessions at the University.
- Visits to candidates' schools to provide on-site support.

Mentors are responsible for a number of candidates, ranging from nine in Eastern Cape to 38 for some in the Western Cape. The facilitation sessions take place in groups and do not match the generally accepted definition of mentoring, which assumes a one-to-one relationship. In Gauteng, the mentors do not visit candidates' schools so any 'mentoring' takes place during cohort sessions and through telephone conversations.

The overall picture suggests the need for a review of mentoring practice within provinces, HEIs and the national Department of Education. A well-functioning mentoring programme would be a major asset for this programme and could contribute in a powerful way to developing school leaders and their schools. However, it is clear that there are two major constraints on effective practice; the cost of providing one-on-one mentoring, and the limited availability of well-trained and motivated professionals, with good experience of leading township and rural schools, who are also free to visit candidates' schools during the working day. The success of the ACE programme is likely to depend on resolving these problems. Ideally, mentors would be selected from successful principals, be subject to specific training and be employed centrally to provide expert mentoring in candidates' schools.

Networking

The principles underpinning the ACE include an emphasis on school managers working and learning together in networks or clusters. Most of the provinces have some form of network activity, usually initiated by the mentors or the candidates themselves. The survey findings are positive, with 76% saying that 'developing networks' are of great help. These data are surprising because the evidence from the case studies is that groups in most provinces meet rarely and that the sessions are often informal and

voluntary, with variable attendance levels. The prime focus almost everywhere was on working together to complete assignments, not to share experience in order to improve their schools. This does not suggest sustainable groups, and there is little evidence of the networks continuing following the completion of the course.

Assessment

One of the distinguishing features of the national ACE is its stress on site-based assessment, so that learning can be applied to candidates' leadership and management practice. The main assessment tool employed by the HEIs is the portfolio, which is intended to include all the assignments, plus school-based documents, student reflections and a research project.

The survey data suggest positive views about assessment, with 71% saying that assignments are 'of great help'. In contrast, the case study candidates in all provinces have more critical views of the assessment process, some of which are also shared by the lecturers and mentors.

- The ACE is *over-assessed.*
- *Feedback* on assignments, and on portfolio tasks, was usually late and limited in scope.

Researchers scrutinised the portfolios of the case study candidates. While the quality was variable, most portfolios were well organised and included school documents as well as school-based activities. However, very few of them showed evidence of reflection despite 63% of respondents saying that 'opportunity for reflection' is 'of great help'. It is clear from the analysis of portfolios that many candidates are finding it difficult to go beyond description to adopt a reflective approach, leading to changes in leadership practice.

On-site verification of assessment

The ACE programme provides for on-site verification of assessment to provide a check on claims that changes have been implemented in schools. HEIs are finding this aspect challenging and have adopted different strategies, including outsourcing, and handing the responsibility to mentors or district officials. Lecturers recognised the potential role conflict inherent in these processes but judged that 'trust' was more important than an independent verification system.

Improving the assessment process

Candidates offered suggestions for improvement that were remarkably similar across provinces and are strongly endorsed by the research team:

- *Reduce the number of assignments*
- *Provide timely and constructive feedback and return assignments*

A robust, fair and transparent assessment process is essential for any qualification and is particularly important where national certification is envisaged. We recommend that the NMLC develops a cross-institutional moderation process, linked to the national standards for principalship.

Leadership and management practice

Managing time

Most candidates claimed to be managing time more effectively. The main change identified was improved delegation, mainly to other SMT members. Other reported changes include better planning, regular use of a diary, and improved prioritisation of tasks. A minority of candidates had also introduced classroom observations, designed to improve teaching and learning.

Management practice

Most candidates claim to have improved their management practice and this was sometimes confirmed by role sets, notably the district officials, and by shadowing and scrutiny of school policy documents. Areas of improvement include policy implementation, improved relationships with educators, classroom observations, enhanced financial management, and conflict management.

Strengths and limitations as a school manager

Candidates were asked to identify their strengths and weaknesses and, subsequently, to comment on any improvements. Among the positive developments are several personal attributes, including enhanced confidence, improved self-control and better relationships with educators and SMTs. Some also claim skills' gains, including ICT, problem solving, financial planning and better team work. These gains were often confirmed by role set members, notably the increased confidence and enhanced team work.

Accountability

Most participants referred to multiple accountabilities; to the hierarchy, via the District or Circuit manager, and to parents, the SGB, learners and educators. However, most principals said that their main accountability is to the district or circuit office while SMT members focused mainly on answerability to their principal. Answerability to the hierarchy is logical in what is still a bureaucratic structure but greater accountability to school and community-based stakeholders is essential if school and learner outcomes are to improve.

School improvement

As we noted earlier, there is mixed evidence about school improvement as measured by matric or other examination results. Some schools improved their scores during the ACE programme, but more of them experienced decline. This may be attributable to candidates focusing on their course assignments and 'taking their eye off the ball' in respect of school management. Significant, and sustained, school improvement is likely to require principals to redefine their role as professional leaders, with a central focus on leadership for learning (Bush, Joubert, Kiggundu and Van Rooyen 2009). This approach has three main dimensions:

- Modelling good practice in classrooms.
- Observing educators' practice and providing constructive feedback.
- Monitoring and evaluating learner outcomes and putting in place strategies to address weaknesses.

Professional Development

The national ACE programme was expected to prove challenging for university staff because of its practice-based orientation and its site-based assessment strategy. The ACE was regarded as 'a unique experience for us' and a 'learning curve'. Almost all lecturers point to gains arising from the ACE course. The most frequently cited benefits are:

- Learning from mentors and candidates, for example through student feedback.
- Focusing on a school-based approach, and on site-based assessment.
- Changing from an 'Ivory Tower' approach to rooting scholarship in practice.
- Better understanding of how schools operate.
- Better understanding of the needs, and diverse cultures, of candidates.
- Greater appreciation of how policies are implemented.
- Personal growth through enhanced skills and confidence.
- ACE-related research.

Developing an entry level qualification for new principals

There is almost unanimous support for the principle that the national programme should become an entry-level qualification for new principals. This is because the programme is seen as 'profound', 'very applicable to real life situations' and because 'it is good for school leadership' in South Africa. Despite this strong endorsement, lecturers expressed two reservations:

1. Consideration needs to be given to those many people (estimated to be several thousands) who have other academic qualifications in educational management. While this argument is understandable, it underestimates the practice-based elements of the national and MGSLG ACEs, and the distinctive portfolio-led assessment strategy. Given the inevitable short-term supply problems created by requiring an entry-level qualification, if the Minister so decides, it may be appropriate to allow holders of other similar qualifications to become principals, subject to a conversion process, perhaps through a portfolio to demonstrate the application of theory to school-based practice.

2. Unless they have the support of their principals, deputy principals and HoDs will find it difficult to take the ACE programme, and particularly to undertake site-based activities. Where principals are unhelpful, it may be necessary for ACE candidates to be moved to schools where they can receive appropriate support. Most of the participants on the pilot programme were and are *current* principals while the ACE was intended for *aspiring* principals. While there should be similar features for both client groups, the needs of current and prospective principals are not identical and separate programmes are required.

Subject to these two points being addressed, the research team recommends that the national programme, at Advanced Diploma level, becomes an entry-level qualification for new principals soon as there are sufficient qualified candidates, directly or following the conversion process, to meet the demand for new principals. A statement of intent is required, with a carefully articulated timetable leading to entry-level status for the revised qualification.

Conclusion: Answering the Research Questions

Is the programme design appropriate for the development of more effective school leaders?

The ACE programme has a strong focus on practice-based learning, supported by classroom-based content, and several leadership development processes, notably mentoring, networking and site-based assessment. These approaches are used successfully in other countries, notably in England and Singapore, and have great potential to underpin learning for senior professionals. We are confident that the design is very appropriate for the development of school leaders but the implementation of these dimensions has proved challenging.

Is the learning model sustainable for a large-scale national programme?

The learning model is ambitious and goes well beyond what is delivered in most traditional ACE: Leadership programmes. While the lectures work satisfactorily to deliver knowledge about leadership, they make only a limited contribution to changing the leadership practices of participants. It is widely accepted that mentoring and sustainable networking are helpful if leadership learning is to be translated into effective practice, but these processes have proved to be problematic. Mentoring is largely provided on a group basis, while individual mentoring is required if a trusting professional relationship is to develop. The mentoring model also tends to promote dependency, with mentors advising leaders what to do, rather than development, with mentors using questioning techniques to help prospective principals to produce their own solutions. Specific training for mentors is required to make the process more effective.

As noted above, networking is not fully established and tends to focus mainly on assignment preparation. This does not provide a sustainable basis for collaborative working across schools. It seems likely that effective one-on-one mentoring, in particular, cannot be achieved without increased funding.

A further consideration is that, in the field test, the national materials are being used in very different ways by HEIs. This level of diversity is unacceptable for a national entry-level programme. The NMLC, in partnership with the national Department of Education, is the appropriate forum for addressing this fundamental issue.

Is there sufficient capacity to deliver a large-scale national programme?

This is a critical issue, which relates to HEIs' collective capacity and capability to prepare a sufficient number of prospective principals to meet the need for new appointments and to allow SGBs and provinces a choice of certified applicants. The academic field of educational leadership is still in a developing stage in South Africa with only a limited number of professors and lecturers who combine high level academic qualifications with good professional leadership experience.

Attrition rates (levels of retirement and resignation) are relatively low in South Africa as many principals remain in the same school for a very long time. Our assumption is that approximately 1500 new principals are required each year. Allowing for provincial and district variations, and to provide a choice of candidates, at least double this number should be recruited (3000). To achieve this level, one or more of the following strategies would be required:

- *Increase the intake to each HEI*
- *Increase the number of HEIs involved in the programme*

- *Give consideration to other HEI qualifications in education management*

Are Higher Education Institution faculties of education able to adapt their traditional academic programmes to meet the strongly professional, action-oriented needs of the ACE programme?

The research findings show that HEI staff support the practice-based aspirations of the ACE programme and have made some progress in adapting their programmes to meet the requirements of an audience of mid-career professionals. However, the 'new' aspects of the programme, notably mentoring, networking and site-based assessment, are less well developed than the conventional classroom activities and assignments. These difficulties may be 'teething' problems or signal a fundamental dilemma. Academics are unlikely to progress in their careers simply by providing a good ACE programme. Postgraduate teaching and supervision, plus research and publications, are far more important for lecturers seeking promotion.

Does the ACE programme enhance the leadership learning of principals and aspiring principals?

The evidence from the research is that most candidates have significantly increased their knowledge about school leadership, including relevant theory and South African educational policy. Leadership learning can also be facilitated by mentoring and networks but, as noted above, these processes have had mixed results.

Does the ACE programme lead to enhanced leadership and management practice in schools?

The heavy assessment requirements of the course seem to have diverted some candidates from their central management role. The impact study provides some evidence of improved practice, for example in respect of enhanced team work, classroom observations, and better relationships with stakeholders. However, these changes have not yet led to better student outcomes in all schools. Matric and test scores have sometimes declined or remained unchanged, although there are improvements at some schools. It should be noted also that national matric scores have declined during the period of the evaluation. We recommend that a further impact study be commissioned to establish the longer-term benefits of the programme.

Does the ACE enable principals to provide professional leadership of educators and other staff?

This question has two alternative interpretations? First, it relates to the quality of relationships between principals and educators? Many participants claim improved relationships with educators, arising from the ACE programme, and this has been confirmed by the professional role sets in some, but not all, of the case study schools. The shadowing of principals and other managers shows a modest shift away from the office-bound practice observed in the baseline study but many candidates still give too much emphasis to their paper work at the expense of professional leadership.

Secondly, it refers to the ability of principals to motivate their educators to provide high quality teaching for learners through a strong focus on 'instructional leadership' or the management of teaching and learning. While there are some examples of enhanced practice amongst the case study schools, this element has not developed significantly for most ACE participants.

Does the ACE develop principals' capability to engage productively with parents and school communities?

The survey and case study participants mostly claim enhanced relationships with parents and their communities and the research provides several examples of such improvement. It is clear that the ACE has served to sensitise candidates to the importance of engaging productively with external stakeholders for the benefit of learners. This has not led to significant changes in practice in many schools, although there some impressive exceptions. Given the challenging circumstances facing many learners and their

families, enhancing this aspect of principals' work could make a significant difference to learning outcomes (Leithwood et al, in press).

Does the ACE help to develop schools as learning organisations for the benefit of learners and adults in the school?

Learner attainment remains modest in many schools and educators' professional development is mostly limited to district workshops which have little value except in the transmission of information about new policy initiatives (McLennan 2000). Developing learning organisations takes time and, until recently, candidates were still mainly concerned with completing assignments rather than improving their schools.

Does the ACE assist in developing understanding and capacity among school managers to drive quality education in their schools while being accountable for their performance?

The ACE provides the potential to improve quality in two ways:

1. Enhancing the management of teaching and learning.

There is only limited evidence on this issue, probably because the original 'Managing Teaching and Learning' (MTL) module was weak in addressing management, despite its title. Despite this limitation, several case study candidates have introduced more effective monitoring of classroom practice, including observations by SMT members. It will be at least two years before these changes, if sustained, produce enhanced matric and test scores. The revised MTL module gives more attention to the processes required to manage classroom practice and this should lead to enhanced outcomes in due course.

2. Mentoring

Mentors have usually been selected because of their success as school principals. They have the potential to advise participants about how to develop quality education but their training needs enhancement to avoid what is often an over-prescriptive approach. It is also important to ensure that the overall profile of mentors matches that of candidates, for example in respect of race, gender, and school contexts.

Parallel research (Bush, Joubert, Kiggundu and Van Rooyen 2009) shows that ACE candidates in two provinces are too ready to blame others (learners, parents, previous stages of education, or socio-economic factors) for poor learning outcomes rather than taking appropriate action to address these problems.

Recommendations

Introducing the national ACE programme was a bold and imaginative decision, recognising the pivotal role of principals in leading and managing schools. This is part of an international trend to provide specific leadership preparation for current and aspiring principals.

Programme delivery

All the five providers in the first field test cohort provide lectures to large groups of students, ranging between 39 in the Eastern Cape to 200 in the Western Cape. At best, this is a vehicle for delivering knowledge and *universities should operate smaller groups.* The lecture format is supplemented by small group sessions, variously described as 'mentoring', 'facilitation sessions', or 'cohort sessions'. These provide more potential for interaction but are sometimes used for administrative purposes rather than for linking course content to school practice. Many lecturers lament the inability of candidates to apply theory to practice so *these group sessions should be used to help candidates to develop such skills*.

Teaching materials

The research team's first interim report provided a detailed review of the materials and made recommendations for change. The universities use the national materials in different ways but several regard them only as supplementary material and it is clear that the varied ways in which the course is offered undermines the notion of a 'national' programme. Following our interim recommendation, the materials were revised with the intention of making them shorter, more focused on practice and more relevant to the 'lived' experience' of South African principals. *We recommend that the Department of Education, and the NMLC, keep these materials under review and also monitor how they are being used with candidates. If a decision is taken to make the modified version of the programme (the Advanced Diploma) an entry-level requirement for new principals, it will be necessary to decide what degree of consistency is required to justify the status of a 'national' qualification.*

Mentoring

The inclusion of mentoring in the ACE programme is widely applauded, by candidates, lecturers and the mentors themselves. Many survey respondents, and interviewees, regard it as the key component of the course, which is likely to have a critical impact on whether it succeeds or fails. The international research evidence is overwhelmingly positive (Bush 2008).

However, the model of 'mentoring' used in the ACE programme falls short of best international practice. Much of the mentors' work is with groups rather than individuals and group sessions are led by the mentors, who largely determine the agenda, and dominate the discussion. Where mentors do work directly with the candidates, they often provide 'solutions' rather than asking questions. This reinforces a dependency model rather than providing a vehicle to develop their confidence and skills.

Improving this part of the programme, by providing genuine one-on-one mentoring, involves three major requirements:
- Providing sufficient funding to underpin this preferred model.
- Being able to find sufficient numbers of potential mentors with successful experience of the types of school represented on the ACE programme.
- Providing an extensive training programme to develop genuine mentors rather than people who guide or tell candidates how to run their schools.

We recommend that consideration be given to appointing successful principals as mentors, providing them with specific training, and making provision for them to visit candidates' schools during the school day.

XII

Networking

Networking is another powerful leadership development process that has received strong endorsement in the international literature (Bush 2008). In practice, however, the development of networks is patchy, with a few operating successfully, but most barely functioning or still requiring development. Where they do exist, the overwhelming evidence is that the purpose was to discuss assignments rather than to share management practice. Generating and sustaining effective networks is likely to require either the active involvement of district officials, because mentors and university staff cannot be expected to continue their involvement after the end of the field test, or to involve 'organic' development, led by the candidates themselves. *We recommend that networks be refocused to address school leadership and management issues and not simply on course assignments. We further recommend that provinces and districts consider how to develop and support effective school leadership networks. Candidates should also be encouraged to develop their own networks designed to enhance leadership and management practice.*

Assessment

A practice-based professional qualification for potential principals requires an innovative approach to assessment. While there are assignments in the ACE programme, they are supplemented by a site-based project and by a portfolio, which provides the potential for an integrative approach to assessment. In our second interim report, we commented that the course was over-assessed and based primarily around the prescribed content of the course. Subsequently, some providers have reduced their assessment requirements and also enhanced their practice-based elements. We welcome these changes and *recommend that the assessment strategy be continually reviewed to ensure that it is focused on school management practice. It is also imperative that universities provide timely, and formative, feedback to underpin candidates' management learning.* Universities have found it difficult to provide effective on-site verification of assessment and *we recommend that course leaders should ensure that verification takes place.*

Developing an Entry-Level Qualification for New Principals

We reported earlier on the widespread support for making the national programme an entry-level requirement for new principals. *We recommend that the revised programme, at Advanced Diploma level, be made an entry-level requirement for aspiring principals as soon as there are sufficient qualified candidates to meet the demand for new principals,* subject to four provisos:

1. Consideration should be given to holders of other qualifications in educational management, subject to a conversion process to demonstrate the application of theory to school-based practice.
2. Similarly, consideration should be given to holders of the national ACE programme (the current programme). They should be regarded as eligible to become principals subject to an upgrading process to Advanced Diploma level.
3. Consideration should be given to helping potential principals who do not obtain the support of their principals. This might require the movement of Advanced Diploma candidates to other schools where they can receive appropriate support.
4. Consideration should be given to the selection process for prospective principals. Applicants should be restricted to deputy principals and HoDs, except in very small schools. *We recommend that suitable candidates be funded by government, with provinces and HEIs sharing responsibility for selection, following national criteria.*

Leadership Development Framework

We noted earlier that the ACE, and the Advanced Diploma, should be targeted at aspiring principals, and not at current principals or middle managers. While there are leadership development needs at every level of the education system, the prime need is to improve the quality of future principals through an entry-level requirement. In the main report, we provide advice on creating a Leadership Development Framework, designed to build leadership and management capacity and capability throughout the education system. The Framework would aim to build capable leaders and managers at four levels:

- Current and aspiring heads of department.
- Aspiring principals.
- Current principals.
- District officials and other system leaders.

The Research Director would be happy to provide further advice if required.

Acknowledgements

The research team wishes to thank all those who have supported this research:

- The Zenex Foundation, for generous funding.
- The Department of Education, for ongoing support and funding.
- The universities, and their partners, staff and mentors.
- The ACE candidates and their schools.

We hope and believe that their contributions will make a real difference to leadership and management practice in South African schools.

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FULL REPORT
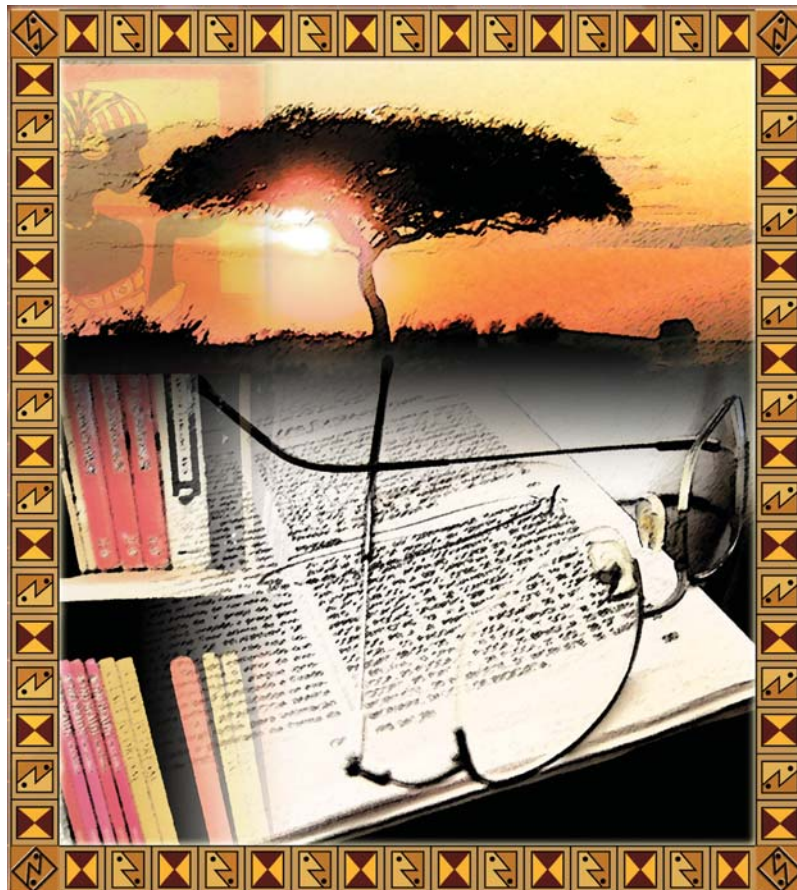
Introduction

The Department of Education has introduced a new threshold qualification for aspiring school principals as part of its wider strategy to improve educational standards. The course is an Advanced Certificate in Education: School Leadership and, beginning in 2007, the course was tested nationally with candidates, including serving principals, as well as members of School Management Teams (SMTs).

The ACE is being delivered by universities, through a common framework agreed with the national Department of Education and the National Management and Leadership Committee (NMLC). Candidates have been selected by the national and provincial departments of education, with the universities and the educator unions, on the basis of criteria set by the national Department of Education. The first cohort of the field test involved only five universities, and the Matthew Goniwe School of Leadership and Governance, but 16 higher education institutions (HEIs) were involved in the second phase of the field test.

The assessment framework stresses the applied nature of the course:

> *'Its primary purpose is to ascertain how much of the course learning has been internalised, made meaning of and applied in practice in the school'*

The ACE also has regard to the South African Standard for School Leadership (SASSL). This defines the role of principals and the key aspects of professionalism required. It serves as a framework to address professional leadership and management development needs. The 'core purpose of principalship' set out below provides a crisp statement of the intended role of school leaders:

> *'The core purpose of principalship is to provide leadership and management in all areas of the school to enable the creation and support of conditions under which high quality teaching and learning take place and which promote the highest possible standards of learner achievement'.*

Research Framework

The research provides a comprehensive evaluation of the national field test programme in order to inform the development of the course and to provide advice to the Minister of Basic Education about the suitability and sustainability of the qualification for its intended purpose, to improve school leadership and management. The research operates at two levels: macro and micro.

The macro level issues are to do with programme issues and variables. Given the ambitious nature of the ACE programme, there are several key research questions that were addressed by the research (see below).

At the micro level, the research sought to establish whether the programme has enhanced the leadership learning of principals and aspiring principals. In particular, it examined whether the programme leads to improved leadership and management practice in schools, notably in respect of relationships with learners, educators, parents and communities, and enhanced learner outcomes.

The outcomes of the research were intended to inform the roll-out of this qualification for all aspirant principals, by the Department of Education.

Research Questions

The core research questions emerged from the aims of the wider project and were structured into macro and micro issues (see above).

Macro

- Is the programme design appropriate for the development of more effective school leaders?
- Is the learning model sustainable for a large-scale national programme?
- Is there sufficient capacity to deliver a large-scale national programme?
- Are Higher Education Institution faculties of education able to adapt their traditional academic programmes to meet the strongly professional, action-oriented needs of the ACE programme?

Micro

- Does the ACE programme enhance the leadership learning of principals and aspiring principals?
- Does the programme lead to improved leadership and management practice in schools?
- Does the ACE enable principals to provide professional leadership of educators and other staff?
- Does the ACE develop principals' capability to engage productively with parents and school communities?
- Does the ACE help to develop schools as learning organisations for the benefit of learners and adults in the school?
- Does the ACE assist in developing understanding and capacity among school managers to drive quality education in their schools while being accountable for their performance?

The research team's responses to these questions, based on the findings, are presented in the conclusion.

Research Focus

These research questions provide the starting point for the Zenex ACE: School Leadership research. The evaluation related to all aspects of the course, including:

- Course materials
- Orientation and contact sessions
- The assessment process
- Site visits
- The verification criteria
- Mentoring
- Network learning.

It evaluation also provides a clear focus on the motivation and experience of students and on the impact of the ACE on leadership and management practice, and school improvement.

Methodology

The evaluation involved four phases (see table 1):

a) Preliminary work, including a desk study of approaches to leadership development in other countries, and documentary analysis of course materials.

b) A baseline study of students to establish their motivation for taking part in the ACE, their previous qualifications and experience, and their attitudes to their leadership and management roles.

c) A mid-term evaluation to establish the experience of students during the programme. This report provides the findings from this mid-term phase.

d) An impact study to assess the nature and extent of effects from the ACE programme, including individual and school level impact.

Research phase	• Providers (all universities participating in the ACE field test – first cohort)	• Candidates
Preliminary phase	• Documentary analysis of course materials • Desk research on practice in South Africa and other countries	
Baseline study	• Observation of the orientation session held for students • Interviews with key staff, including the course organiser and the faculty dean.	• Questionnaire survey of all students embarking on the ACE in 2007. • First phase of case studies of 27 candidates & their schools.
Mid-term evaluation	• Observation of teaching sessions. • Observation of mentoring practice. • Observation of verification practice. • Observation of networking practice. • Repeat interviews with key staff involved in the course.	• Second phase of case studies of 25 candidates and their schools. (Two candidates withdrew before the mid-term phase.)
Impact study	• Repeat interviews with key staff involved in the course. • Documentary analysis of students' portfolios.	• Follow-up survey of all students. • Final phase of case studies of 24 candidates and their schools. (One candidate declined to take part in the impact phase of the research).

Table 1: Overview of research phases and methods

The evaluation also adopts a provider perspective to establish their readiness to deliver a national, action oriented, programme, and their experience of delivering each dimension of the ACE, especially its practice-based aspects. Table 1 shows the methods

used to gather data from both providers and ACE candidates:

Research team

- Professor Tony Bush (director): University of Warwick, U.K.
- Dr. Ntombozuko Duku: University of Fort Hare.
- Dr. Derek Glover: University of Warwick, U.K.
- Dr. Edith Kiggundu: Memorial University of Newfoundland, Canada.
- Ms. Soraya Kola: Independent Consultant.
- Dr. Vuyisile Msila: University of Johannesburg.
- Dr. Pontso Moorosi: University of Warwick, U.K.

Dr. Msila and Dr. Moorosi previously work at universities taking part in the first phase of the national field test but they did not engage in field work with their own universities (see 'research ethics' section below).

Research Ethics

The research team is adhering to a strict code of ethics, including:

- Seeking informed consent from all participants.
- Ensuring that participants are protected from physical and psychological harm.
- Protecting participants from identification by keeping data anonymous.
- Keeping data confidential.
- Ensuring that analysis and interpretation of data are trustworthy.
- Avoiding contamination of data by ensuring that researchers do not work with providers where they have a current or recent professional relationship.

Preliminary phase: desk research of practice in other countries

A small number of countries provide national training programmes for principals (e.g. England, France, Scotland, Singapore) but the South African ACE is believed to be a 'first' in Africa. The desk research provides an overview of existing national programmes and reports on alternative approaches in other countries. A full report of the desk research findings may be found in the first interim report. An overview of the main findings is shown below.

Effective leadership is increasingly regarded as a vital component of successful organisations. The research shows that new principals experience great difficulty in adapting to the demands of the role. The process of professional and organisational socialisation is often uncomfortable as leaders adapt to the requirements of their new post. Developing the knowledge, attributes and skills required to lead effectively requires systematic preparation. Recognition of the importance of specific training and development has grown as the pressures on school principals have intensified. The greater complexity of school contexts, allied to the trend towards site-based management in many countries, has heightened the need for preparation. There is also an acceptance

of the moral basis for specific training and a growing body of evidence showing that preparation makes a difference to the quality of leadership and to school and pupil outcomes (Bush 2008, Bush and Oduro 2006).

While the need for effective leadership preparation is widely accepted, the extent and nature of such provision varies substantially across continents. This is partly for legitimate cultural reasons (Dimmock and Walker 2002) and partly because of differential levels of resource to support development. Beyond these points, there are also philosophical arguments about the kind of leader needed in 21st century schools. The flexibility and initiative required to lead and manage schools in periods of rapid change suggest that preparation should go beyond training principals to implement the requirements of the hierarchy to developing rounded and confident leaders who are able to engage all school stakeholders in the process of school improvement for the benefit of learners and their communities. As Brundrett, Fitzgerald and Sommfeldt (2006: 101) argue, 'educational programmes are required that develop the kind of reflective knowing and higher order cognitive abilities that will undoubtedly be required by leaders in the increasingly complex world of educational leadership in the 21st century'. If the ACE programme can produce such leaders, South Africa's schools will be in safe hands.

Preliminary phase: documentary analysis

The 'content' of the ACE programme largely comprises the written materials, represented by the modules and supporting materials. In the field test phase, there were 12 modules, which have been analysed by the core research team to establish whether, and to what extent, they are 'fit for purpose'. The findings of the analysis, and the research team's recommendations for change, were included in the first interim report. The materials were subsequently revised, informed by the research team's findings. The revised modules were made available to providers in early 2009 but there are uncertainties about the extent to which these new materials have been used in teaching the course. The revised materials have not been subject to systematic analysis but the research director was a member of the review group and contributed to the revisions, as an author and critical reader. An overview of the documentary analysis of the original materials is shown below.

The course modules play a critical role in the ACE: School Leadership programme. They represent the 'content' of the course, and demonstrate the intentions of the programme. Because the ACE is intended to be a radical departure from previous university courses with this label, the materials need to underpin this aspiration. The desk research shows that many university courses in education management have made little difference to school-level practice and this national programme aims to address this weakness.

The modules provide a comprehensive coverage of the traditional education management curriculum, and also introduce several 'process' elements. We made several specific recommendations to improve the modules, including:

1. Provide a stronger focus on school-level implementation, rather than policy analysis, in module one and throughout the course.
2. Provide a stronger focus on the management of learning, as opposed to learning and curriculum theory, in module two.
3. Ensure a clear focus on the learning needs of principals, and aspiring principals, rather than those of middle managers, educators and learners.
4. Develop common standards for the assessment of portfolios to ensure consistency for this national programme.

5. Ensure that module eleven meets the needs of candidates with more limited English language skills.

6. Ensure that all candidates have convenient access to ICT facilities, training and support to provide equity.

We also noted that the ACE is content 'heavy'. Given that the prime purpose of this programme is to develop more competent principals, as a precondition for school improvement, we recommended that content be reduced to focus on those elements directly relevant to school principals. In its original form, many principals were overwhelmed by the content, to the detriment of their leadership learning. The international research (Bush, Glover and Harris 2007) shows that leadership behaviour is unlikely to change significantly simply as a result of enhanced knowledge. The 'process' elements of the ACE, including mentoring, networking, portfolios and site-based assessment, are likely to be more powerful in influencing leadership practice. Reducing content will provide 'space' for these processes to be effective.

Survey of Candidates: Baseline study

The baseline survey aimed to establish the background, motivation and aspirations of candidates following the ACE. The questionnaire was distributed to all participants during university orientation sessions but before they had begun the programme, to provide a genuine 'baseline' perspective. There was a very high response level (379 out of 418 students, giving a 90.6% response rate). This ensures statistical reliability and provides for generalisation. The findings were presented in the first interim report. An overview of the main findings is shown below.

1. These findings gave a very positive view of the motivation of participants beginning the ACE programme. Relationships between principals and school stakeholders were often perceived to be good, their recognition of school achievement suggested that many participants have a good starting point for further improvement, and the leadership attitudes indicated some understanding of the importance of effective leadership in developing teaching and learning.

2. Much of the commentary was informed by the 283 open comments. Of these, 43% were negative, pointing to problems with the SMT, the SGB, and community relationships. There was also a significant body of comment (8%) on the resource context, local socio-economic issues and district-school relationships

3. Problems were identified by about 15% of participants. These largely relate to 'entrenched' staff who will not understand change and need supporting 'all the while', and to 'problems with the community and parents who do not see the need for regular attendance especially after weekend drinking sessions'. The more negative views tend to come from 'Coloured' respondents and the very small number of White principals or deputy principals working in difficult contexts.

4. The positive aspects of responses do not follow normal distribution curves and there is a skew towards the 'good' and 'very good' evaluation of characteristics. This may be unrealistic and reflect the need for further consideration of evaluation criteria and processes. This comment matches the views of other researchers (e.g. Bush and Heystek 2006).

5. These data show that the pilot programme is being undertaken mainly by principals, but the responses of deputy principals and HoDs indicate a need for some differentiation of content, so that their development needs can be met more effectively.

Survey of Candidates: Impact Study

Introduction

Whilst the earlier baseline survey (2007) aimed to establish the background, motivation and aspirations of candidates following the ACE: School Leadership programme (ACE), this survey attempted to ascertain the perceived gains from participation. The questionnaire was distributed to all participants during the final university teaching sessions. This gave a comparatively high response rate of 68% with 284 of the original 418 students responding. This is lower than the original 90.6% response rate but the potential participant numbers may have dropped during this period and so the real return may be somewhat greater. This still ensures statistical reliability and provides strong potential for generalisation of gender, university and province differentials. Marked differences (i.e. greater than ten percentage points) in response, by role, province or former dispensation, have been noted

Biographical and background details

University

Table 1 gives the university attended by respondents. The largest numbers were from the University of Pretoria while the smallest group was from NMMU. The University of Pretoria group included candidates from Limpopo and Mpumalanga. The other universities served participants from their local province.

University	Number 2009	Number 2007	Percent 2009	Percent 2007
University of Pretoria	84	93	29.5%	24.6%
Nelson Mandela Metropolitan	30	33	10.5%	8.7%
University of Cape Town	69	85	24.3%	22.4%
University of KZN	59	100	20.8%	26.4%
University of Johannesburg	42	68	14.9%	17.9%
Total	**284**	**379**	**100%**	**100%**

Table 1. Analysis by university

Province

The provinces of candidates are shown in table 2. KwaZulu-Natal, Western Cape and Gauteng have the largest groups, whilst Eastern Cape has the smallest cohort.

Province	Number 2009	Number 2007	Percent 2009	Percent 2007
Mpumalanga	44	44	15.5%	11.6%
Limpopo	40	49	14.1%	12.9%
Eastern Cape	30	24	10.6%	6.3%
Western Cape	69	85	24.3%	22.4%

KwaZulu-Natal	59	100	20.7%	26.4%
Gauteng	42	68	14.8%	17.9%
Other	0	9	0	2.4%
Total	**284**	**379**	**100%**	**100%**

Table 2. Analysis by province

The Mpumalanga students (44) are predominantly at township schools. The Limpopo students were predominantly from rural schools (both primary and secondary) but their responses varied accorded to school type rather than to location. The original group designated 'other' were self-funded and were studying with NMMU.

Age

Fifty nine percent of the cohort are between 40 and 50 with 27% over 50 and 14% under 40. There is a fall of 6% of those responding from this younger group, possibly related to career moves during the duration of the course. This age profile reflects the very high proportion of respondents (77. 5%) who are principals. There continue to be proportionately more young people in the Limpopo and KwaZulu Natal groups.

Gender

There were more male respondents (55%; 56% 2007) than female (45%; 44% 2007). Assuming that these figures are representative of the whole population, this is a significant finding, as the national guidelines for selection stipulated a 50/50 gender. The imbalance was greatest in the Western Cape group where the respondents were 15 women (21.7%) and 54 men (78.3%).

Race

Table 3 shows the ethnic background of the participants. The reporting groups are comparable in each survey. The overwhelming majority of respondents are African (64.8%) or 'Coloured' (22.9%). Indian (3.9%) and white leaders (4.6%) appear to be under-represented in the sample. There was little evidence of differences in responses according to racial group. Variations were greater by sector (primary, secondary, etc) and by location (rural, township, etc.).

Ethnicity	Nº cit.	Percent
Non-response	11	3.9%
African	184	64.8%
Indian	11	3.9%
Coloured	65	22.9%
White	13	4.6%
Total Obs.	**284**	**100%**

Table 3. Analysis by ethnicity

Current position

The overwhelming majority of respondents (77.5%) were already principals but this differs significantly by province. All Limpopo respondents are principals. The Mpumalanga group comprises senior management teams from a smaller number of schools.

Consequently, 74% of its participants are deputy principals or heads of department (HoDs), and 54% are from secondary schools. In KZN, only existing principals are included; 74% of these are from primary schools. Figure 1 and Table 4 show the breakdown of respondents to this question by gender and position. This provides further evidence of the under-representation of women in the field test cohort.
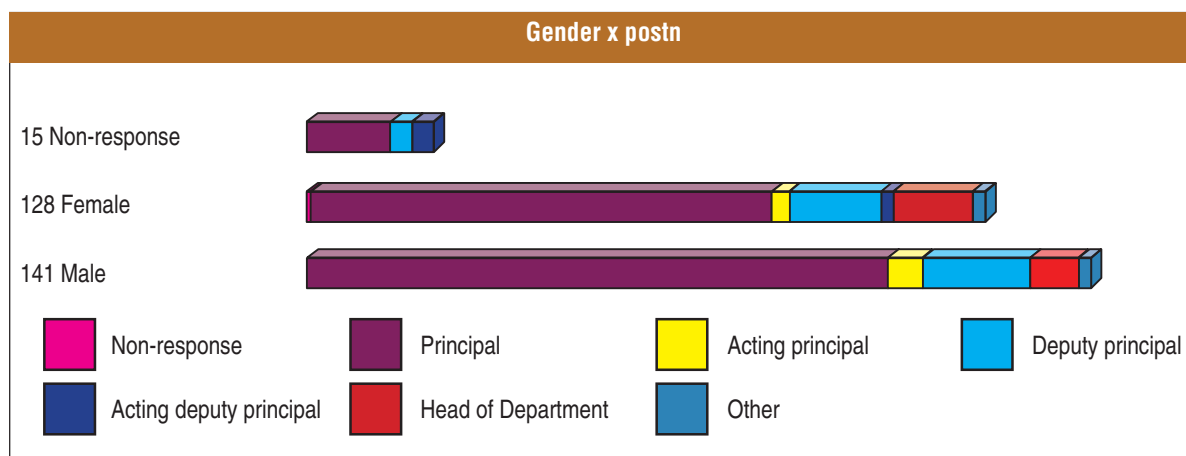

Figure 1: Respondents by gender and position: 2009

Position Gender	Principal	Acting principal	Deputy principal	Acting deputy principal	Head of Department	Other	Total
Female	92	2	15	0	12	1	122
Male	113	4	37	1	6	1	162
Total	205	6	52	1	18	2	284

Table 4: Respondents by gender and position: 2009

The large number of principals in this first field test cohort raises questions about the intended audience for this qualification. If it is targeted at aspiring principals, so that new principals can be qualified, then this field test group does not meet that criterion. If it is targeted at existing principals, to address limitations in their previous training, then it cannot provide a reliable basis for decisions about mandatory status.

School type

Table 5 gives the breakdown of respondents by school type. These are comparable with the baseline response groups although 5% fewer secondary responses were received for the impact survey. Five of the six special schools are in urban or township locations. Participants from these schools offer views similar to those of the full cohort although open comments continue to indicate severe resource problems.

School type	Nº cit.	Percent
Non-response	13	4.6%
Primary	183	64.4%
Secondary	66	23.2%

Combined	16	5.6%
Special	6	2.1%
Total Obs.	**284**	**100%**

Table 5. Analysis by school type

Table 6 shows the former dispensation of schools with only marginal differences from the baseline respondents. Significantly, there is a fall in the number of principals noting problems with SGB relationships (one in this survey compared with three in the baseline survey), and those mentioning problems with educators (two compared with four previously) are from a different racial background from the school's previous dispensation. This supports the evidence on 'cross boundary' leadership from previous research (Bush and Moloi 2007) but points to some improvement in principals' capacity to cope with these situations. There is no evidence of any overall impact of dispensation on leadership attitudes at the conclusion of the programme.

Schooldisp	Nº cit.	Percent
Non-response	8	2.8%
African (DET)	165	58.1%
Indian (HoD)	9	3.2%
Coloured (HoR)	66	23.2%
White	15	5.3%
New schools (post 1994)	21	7.4%
Total Obs.	**284**	**100%**

Table 6 Analysis by former school dispensation

School location

The school location of participations is shown in table 7. The percentages are again broadly comparable with those from the baseline survey. There continue to be certain correlations between location and the type of problems experienced by the respondents. Participants reporting problems with educators tend to work in townships while those mentioning difficulties with parents are more likely to work in rural schools (see figure 2).

Schoolloc	Nº cit.	Percent
Non-response	6	2.1%
Urban (e.g. Durban)	46	16.2%
Township (e.g. Soweto)	69	24.3%
Rural area	119	41.9%
Farm school	32	11.3%
Informal settlement	9	3.2%
Other	3	1.1%
Total Obs.	**284**	**100%**

Table 7. Analysis by school location

By comparing the level of problems noted in the baseline survey, and the extent of improvement noted in the current survey, it is possible to see the impact of the programme on relationships with educators and parents in all school locations (see figures 2a, 2b, 2c and 2d).
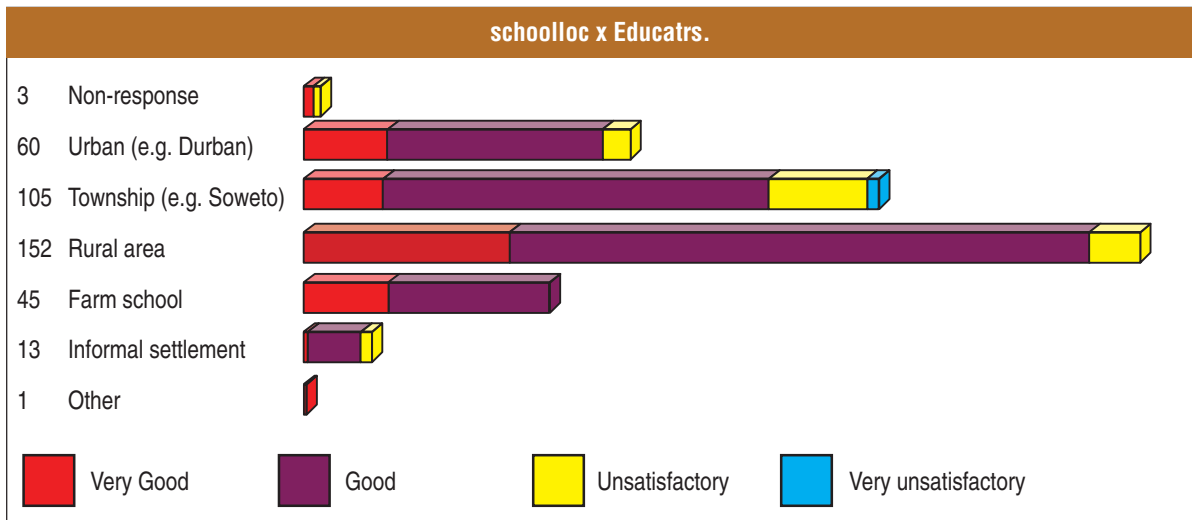

Figure 2a. Correlation between school location and reported problems with educators (2007)
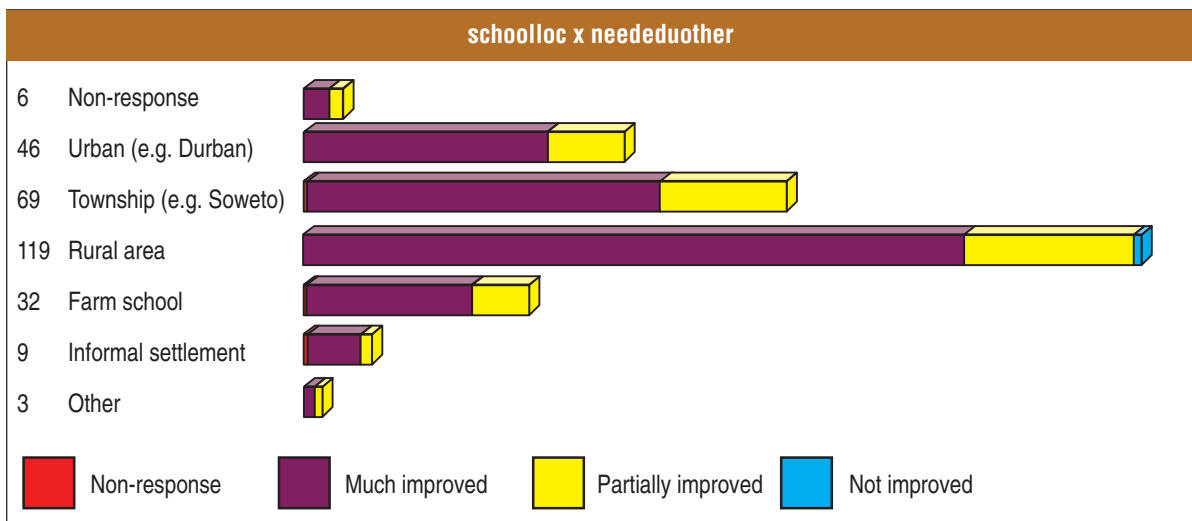
Figure 2b. Correlation between school location and improvement in leading educators (2009)
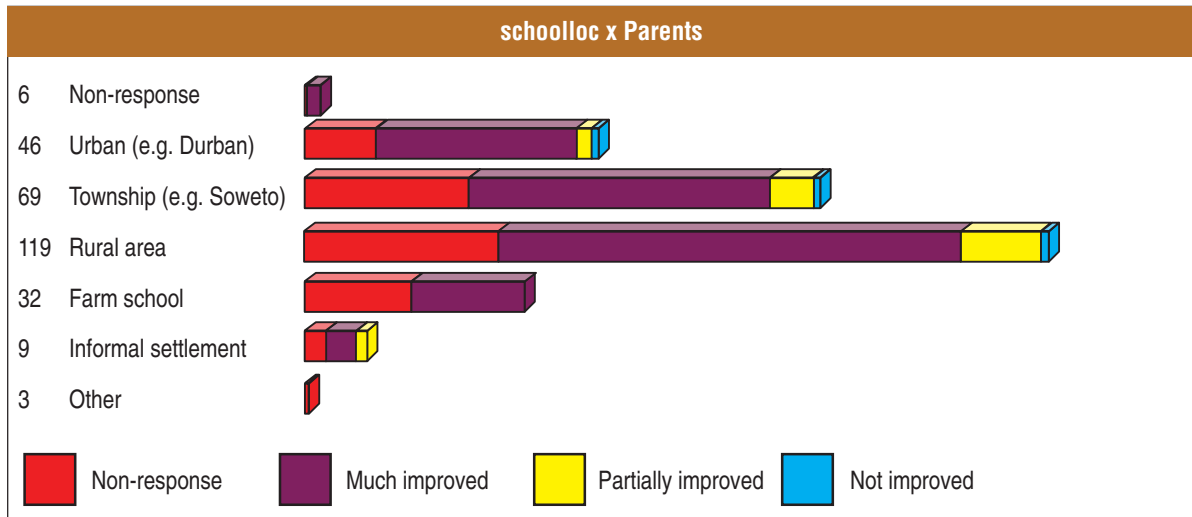
Figure 2c: Correlation between school location and reported problems with parents (2007)
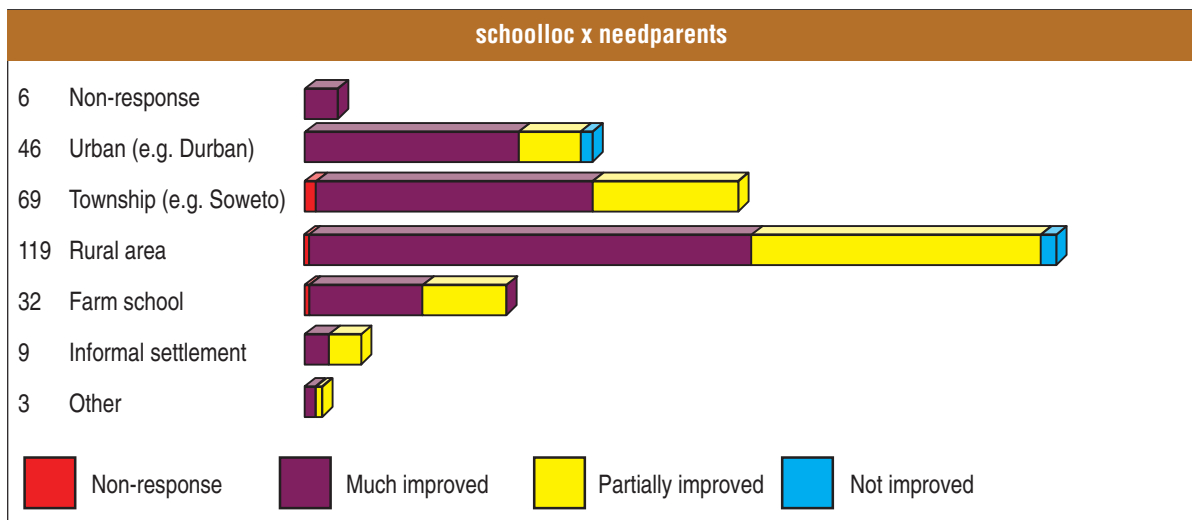
Figure 2d: Correlation between school location and improvement in leading parents (2009)

These two examples show that participants claim that there have been improvements in relationships with teachers in all schools, but especially within the Township schools, and with parents in all areas, but especially in the rural locations.

School achievement

Tables 8a and 8b show respondents' assessment of their schools' achievement levels in 2007 and 2009. These are significant findings but they need to be interpreted cautiously, as they are 'self-reported' data.

Schoolloc	Nº cit.	Percent
Non-response	4	1.1%
Successful and improving	64	16.9%
Successful and stable	34	9.0%

Schoolloc	Nº cit.	Percent
Successful and declining	24	6.3%
Average and improving	163	43.0%
Average and stable	47	12.4%
Average and declining	24	6.3%
Dysfunctional and improving	16	4.2%
Dysfunctional and stable	3	0.8%
Dysfunctional and declining	0	0.0%
Total Obs.	**379**	**100%**

Table 8a. Assessment of school achievement level: Commencement (2007)

Schoolloc	Nº cit.	Percent
Non-response	1	0.4%
Successful and improving	78	27.5%
Successful and stable	32	11.3%
Successful and declining	12	4.2%
Average and improving	136	47.9%
Average and stable	10	3.5%
Average and declining	6	2.1%
Dysfunctional and improving	7	2.5%
Dysfunctional and stable	1	0.4%
Dysfunctional and declining	1	0.4%
Total Obs.	**284**	**100%**

Table 8b. Assessment of school achievement level: Completion (2009)

Table 8 shows that, whilst most respondents regarded their school as 'average and improving' in 2007, a higher percentage are now claiming that their schools are 'successful' and the 'successful and improving' group has increased by 10%. Significantly, compared with the 48 who reported that their schools were dysfunctional in 2007, only 9 report this condition at the end of the programme. When these data are set against school type, and school location, it appears that there is a higher proportion of secondary schools facing problems but that there has been a marked improvement in rural schools. The two respondents reporting that their schools are dysfunctional, but not improving, are rural secondary schools. The seven 'dysfunctional but improving' schools are secondary schools in a range of locations. The dysfunctional and declining school is assessed by a senior leadership team member and this may indicate internal problems. The 'average and improving' secondary schools tend to be in Township areas, whilst the 'average and improving' primary schools are a feature of rural situations (see figures 3a and 3b).
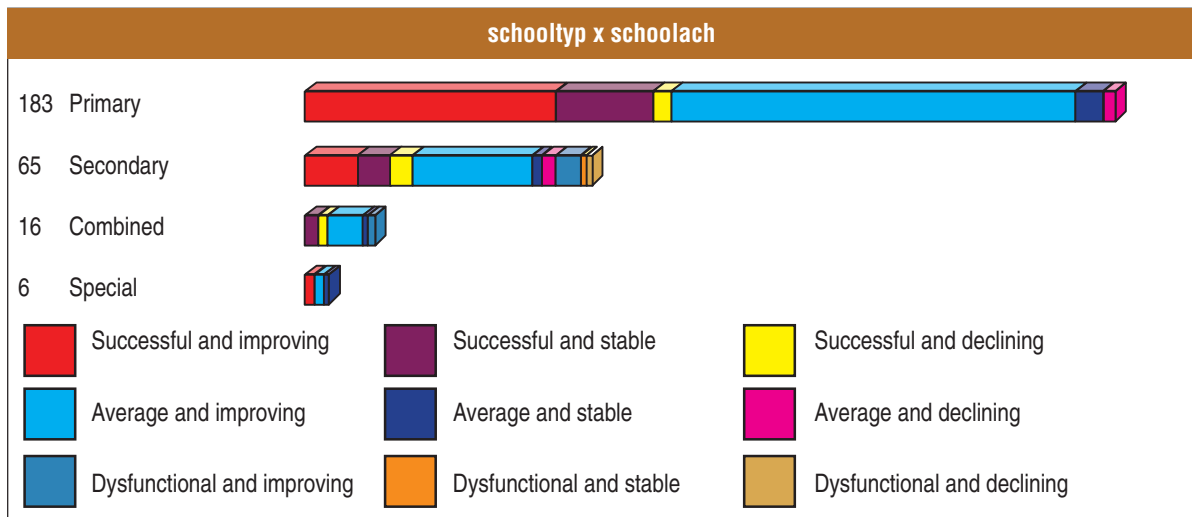
Figure 3a. Relationship between school type and assessed achievement (2009)
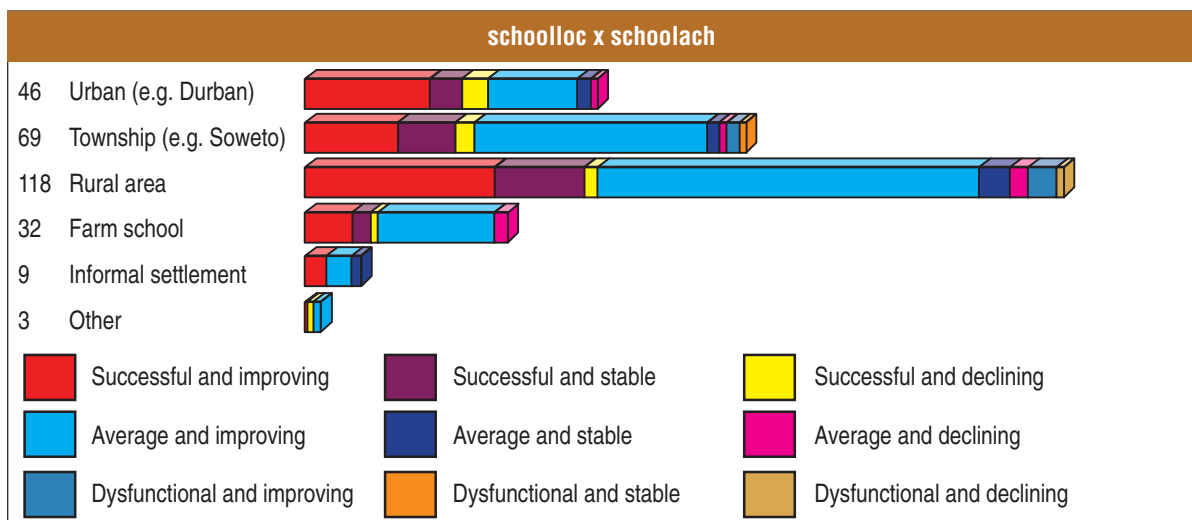
Figure 3b. Relationship between school location and assessed achievement (2009)

Gains from the ACE: School Leadership programme

In 2007, respondents were asked to rank up to three possible motives for undertaking the ACE programme. It seemed that respondents were seeking a 'hands on' approach with 67% seeking to improve their management practice – and 32% mentioning this as their main objective. The instrumental nature of involvement was shown in that school improvement was the second ranked objective overall and learning about leadership and management was significant for 50%. Only 18% overall were attracted by the prospect of gaining a qualification.

In the impact survey, respondents were asked to assess the extent to which they felt that each of these objectives had been met (see table 9). The results showed that 54% claimed that they had gained their qualification, even though the course was incomplete at the time of the survey, while 75% felt that their management objectives had been achieved. Most respondents (73%) claimed that the improvement of their school had been 'fully achieved'. Given the traditional academic nature of much of the course, it is

surprising that only 25% say that 'learning about leadership' was fully achieved while 73% claimed that they had fully achieved their aspiration to learn about management. Care must be taken in interpreting these self-reported findings.

Original Motivation	Fully achieved	Partially achieved	Not achieved
Gaining ACE qualification	54	44	2
Learning about leadership	25	75	0
Learning about management	73	25	2
Improving management practice	63	35	2
Improving my school	73	25	2
Improved relationship to line manager	62	35	3
Improved relationship with the people for whom you have responsibility	60	39	1
Improved relationships with community	45	51	4
Improved relationships with District Admin staff.	43	50	7
Improved academic importance	55	43	8

Table 9. Gains from participation in the programme (percentages)

There was some difference in responses by gender, in that females were over 10% more likely to feel that they had achieved their objectives in leadership, management and managing people, compared with males. This may be explained in that more females were in rural primary schools and felt that they were better trained than their male colleagues, who were more likely to be in urban and township schools. There were also differences in leadership, management and the management of people according to university, as shown in figure 4.
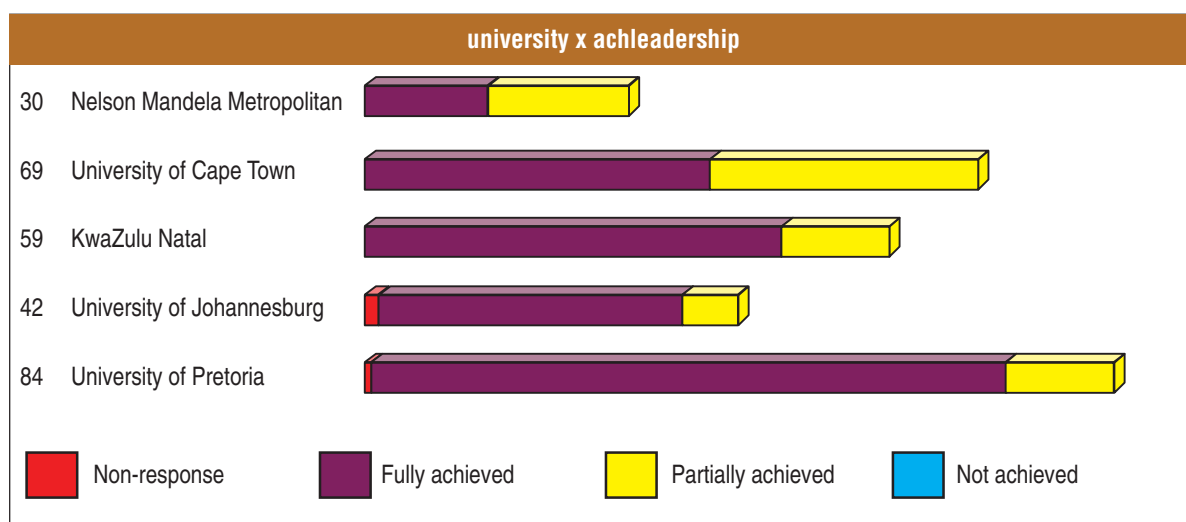
4a. Correlation between university and achievement of leadership objectives
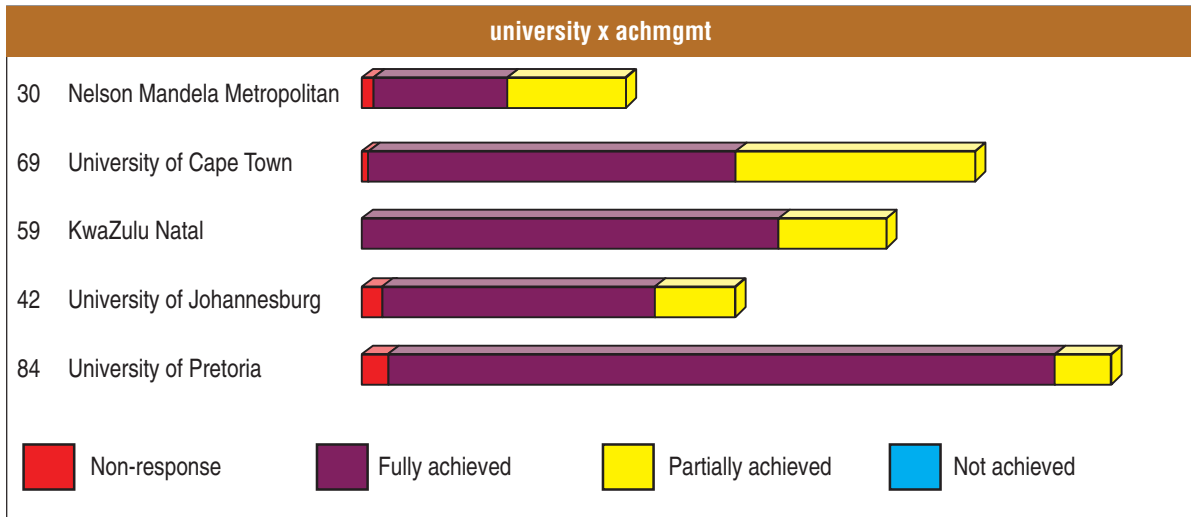
4b. Correlation between university and achievement of management objectives
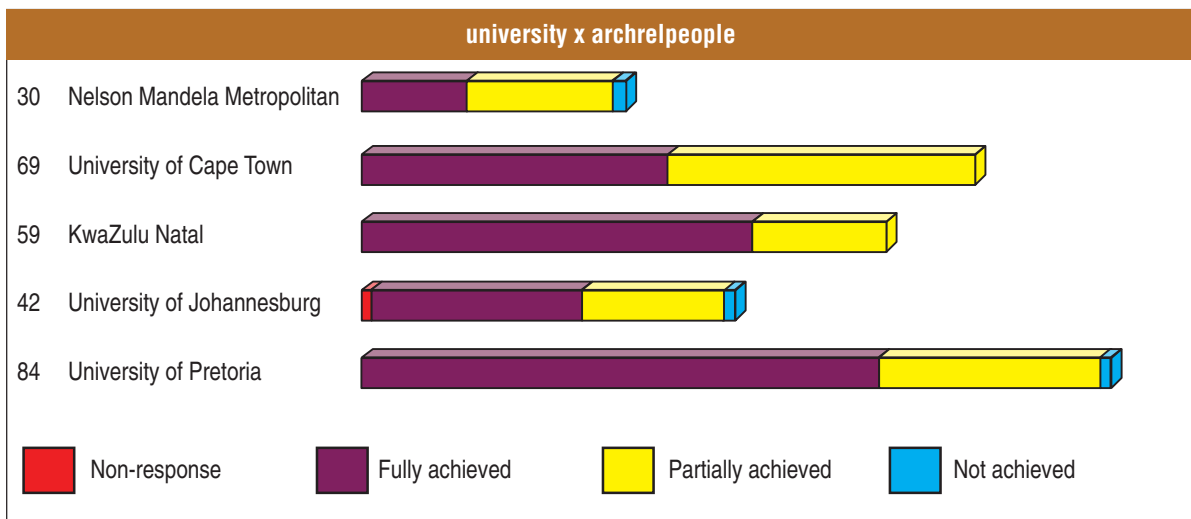
4c. Correlation between university and achievement of people management

Figure 4. Aspects of the university provision of the ACE programme as perceived by respondents

There is considerable difference in the proportions of 'fully achieved' and 'partially achieved' objectives in the different universities but this may have been influenced by the SMT participation in Mpumalanga and the dominance of males (66%) in the Western Cape.

Meeting management needs

Programme members were asked to assess the extent to which their management needs had been improved as a result of participation (see table 10).

Management need	Much improved	Some improvement	No change
Teaching and learning	80	20	
Educators and other staff	75	24	1
Financial resources	65	32	3
Physical resources and site	70	29	1
School governing body	71	26	3
School assessment	65	33	2
Managing learners	76	22	2
Relationships with District	50	44	6
Relationships with parents	63	35	2
Managing ICT	41	49	10

Table 10: Perceptions of improvement to management needs during the programme (%)

Table 10 shows claims of significant improvement across all categories but with more modest progress in managing ICT and in relationships with the district. There is very little variation in responses according to gender although females are 7% more aware of improvement in managing teaching and learning, in managing educators, and in managing ICT, than males. This may be explained by their role in primary schools. Males are 5% more 'much improved' in managing physical resources and the site, possibly because more of them are in the secondary sector. The only marked difference between school sector is that primary participants are 12% less aware of improvement in managing relationships with the district.

Variations between provinces are limited. Limpopo respondents (80%) appear to have gained more than the other provinces (mean 65%) in managing financial resources and in managing physical resources (87% 'much improved' compared with a mean of 70%). Gauteng (81%) and Limpopo (90%) record much improved governor relationships compared with a mean of 71% overall. Resource problems may have influenced the low ratings for 'much improved' in ICT management in Mpumalanga (27%) and Limpopo (17%), compared with a mean of 41% overall. This may reflect their shared learning, or be due to inadequate ICT facilities in these rural provinces. In open comments, four list aspects of improved time management, three refer to financial management and one to enhanced capacity to cope with conflict.

Leadership improvement

One of the major motivating factors for participating in the programme was to improve their leadership. When asked to assess their gains in various aspects of leadership, they were overwhelmingly positive, as shown in table 11.

Leadership skills: Ability to	Much improved	Some improvement	No change
organise team	50	46	4
work with colleagues	80	20	
work with other educators	84	15	1
work with parents	62	33	5

Leadership skills: Ability to	Much improved	Some improvement	No change
relate to the community	50	46	4
work with District staff	39	51	10
engage with learners	80	20	
work with SMT	78	21	1
implement policy	79	20	1
understand teaching and learning	82	17	1
understand administration	79	21	
make reasoned decisions	75	24	1
reflect on practice	67	31	2
write official reports	72	26	2
understand leadership styles	81	18	1
apply leadership styles	71	27	2
understand school improvement strategies	75	25	
apply school improvement strategies	64	34	2

Table 11: Perceived improvement in leadership skills (percentages)

There is a substantial gain overall in the number who feel that they have made considerable improvement in developing their leadership skills. There continue to be some problems in relating to the community and working with teams (both 50% 'much improved') while working with District staff was only 39% 'much improved'. The difference between female and male respondents is within 5%, except for working with District officials, where males are 6% lower than females. There are some differences between universities (see figure 5).
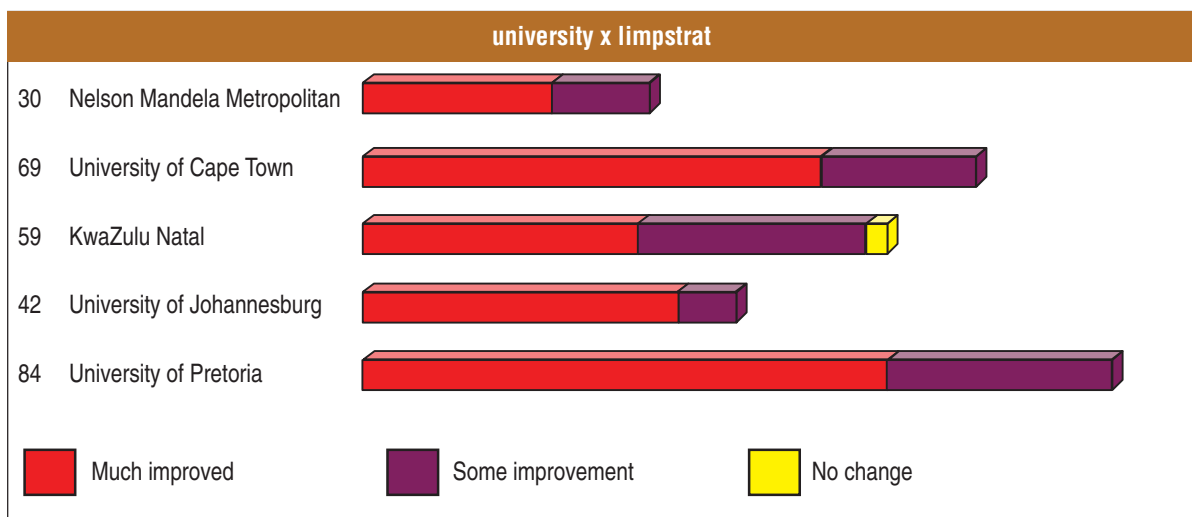
Figure 5a. Correlation between university and understanding of school improvement

20
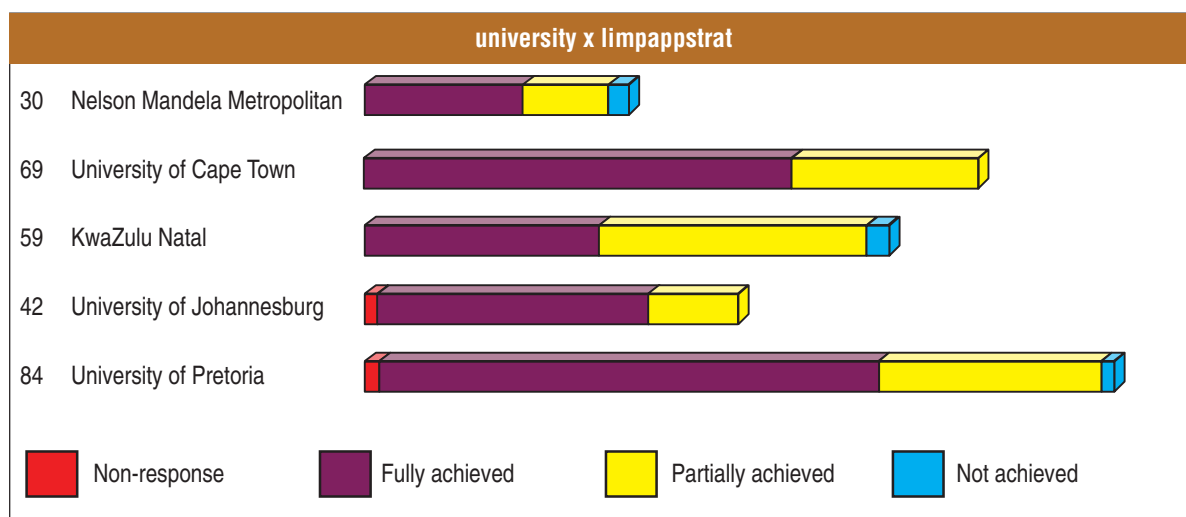
Figure 5b. Correlation between university and application of school improvement strategies

There is little difference in responses according to school type except that secondary respondents (58%) are more ready to claim 'much improved' team development compared with the primary rating of 47%.

Changes in the school

Respondents were asked to list three changes within the schools as a result of participation in the ACE. Their responses reflect both the content of the programme and the ways in which it has impacted on the schools concerned. As there were three changes for each person, more than 800 responses were classified. The 15 most frequent responses are shown in table 12. Most of the comments are broad, such as 'improved management' but there were also 82 practical comments, not shown in the table, such as 'locking the school gates', 'establishing a proper fence' and 'purchasing a filing cabinet', showing the way in which the programme has prompted action

Nature of change	Number of mentions
Improved management	96
Stronger leadership	94
Policy development	68
School improvement	52
Improved learning	48
Better administration	45
Involving stakeholders	42
Site management	32
Improved communications	28
Better financial management	28
New governance approaches	27
Changed discipline approaches	26

Nature of change	Number of mentions
Resource improvement	25
Cultural change	22
Student involvement	18
Other	193

Table 12:Changes within schools as a result of programme participation (mentions)

Respondents were also asked to assess the internal factors (school based), external factors (contextual) and personal factors that have helped or hindered them in course participation. Responses are shown in table 13.

Of considerable help	Of some help	Factor	Some hindrance	Considerable hindrance
		Internal		
62	26	Time to plan for change	8	1
64	24	Financial resources	7	3
71	18	Attitude of SMT to change	7	3
60	25	Attitude of educators to change	10	3
69	27	CPD for colleagues	3	1
64	30	Curriculum understanding by colleagues	4	2
69	24	Admin and leadership understanding of colleagues	6	1
		External		
57	34	Attitude of SGB to change	7	2
43	33	Attitude of District	10	3
40	46	Attitude of local community	12	2
46	40	Attitude of parents	10	4
30	36	Parental support for school funds	24	10
28	32	Socio-economic context	17	23
		Personal		
50	19	Financial resources for training	7	20
68	24	Support of family	5	
66	26	Opportunity for promotion	5	3
65	25	Line manager support	6	4
83	10	Personal motivation	2	

Table 13: Drivers and inhibitors for change (percentages)

Table 13 shows mostly positive influences although there were higher negative ratings for 'socio-economic context' and 'parental support for school funds'. The internal factors are most affected by school type, external factors are most affected by provincial

arrangements and attitudes, and personal factors are affected by gender. These are illustrated in figure 6. Overall, there is little change in the ranking of factors between the baseline and impact surveys but there has been a positive shift of 14% overall from 'hindrance' to 'help' factors, and of 22% from perception of factors of some help, to considerable help. This suggests that the programme has had a beneficial effect on schools through the changed attitudes of participants who, in turn, have secured a more positive attitude within their school context.
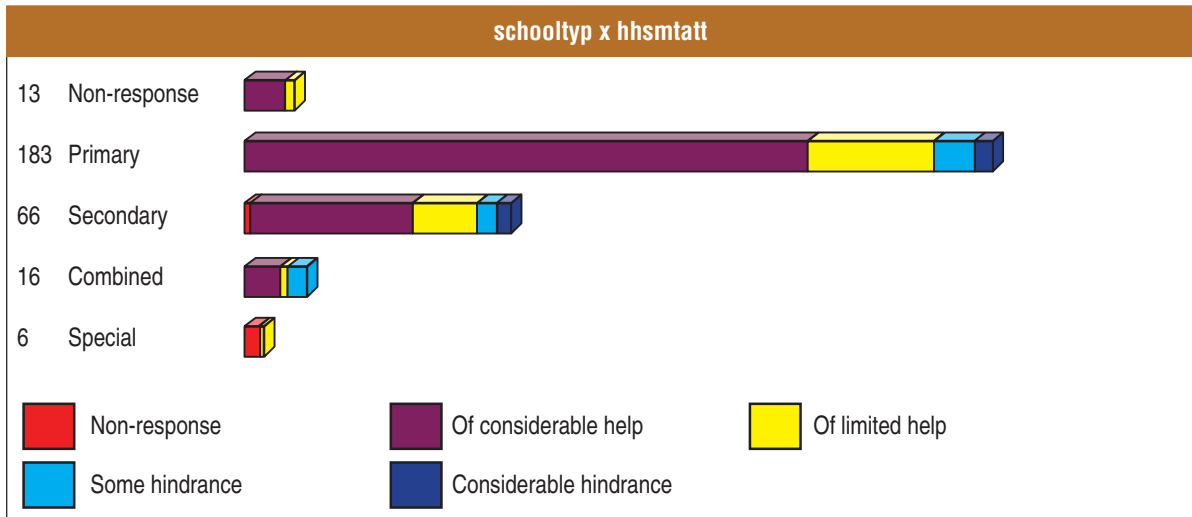

Figure 6a. Relationship between school type and internal factor of SMT attitudes 2009
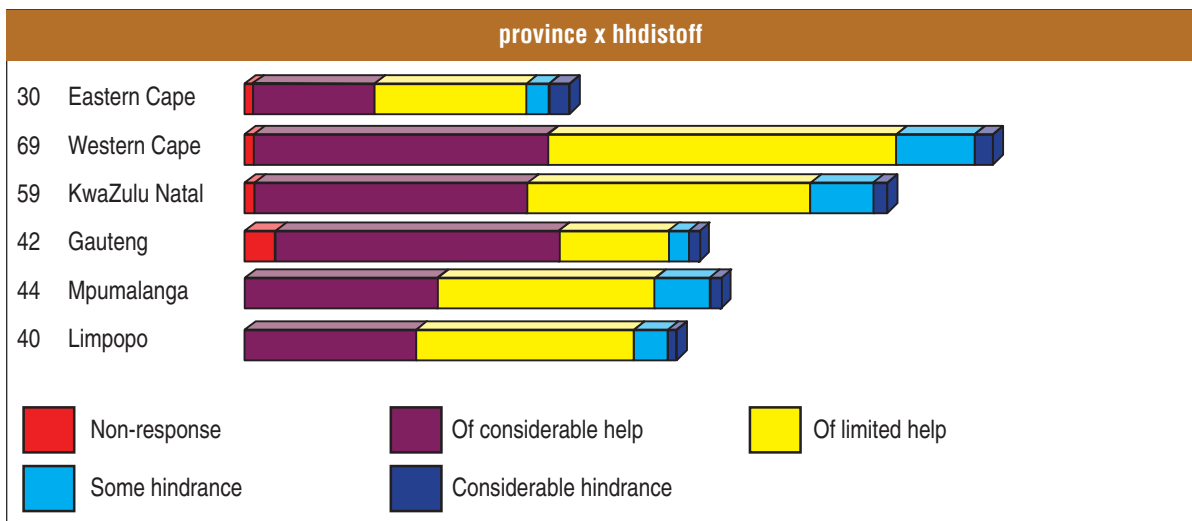

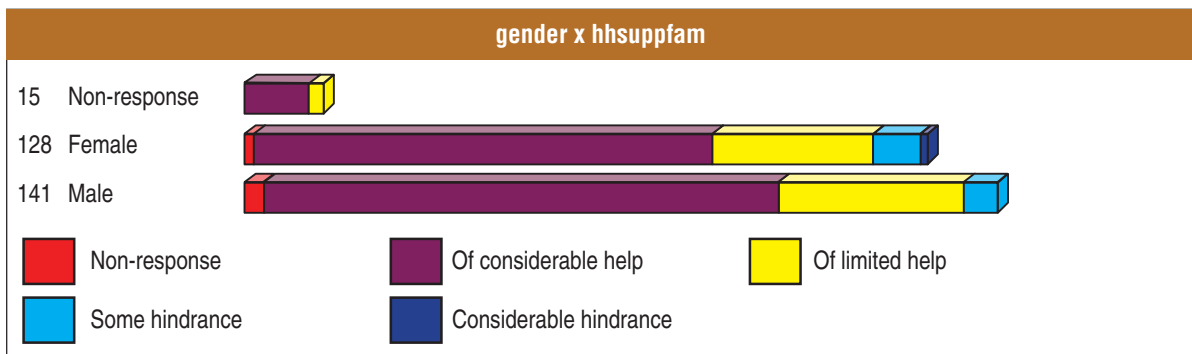Figure 6b. Relationship between Province and district official attitudes 2009

Figure 6c. Relationship between gender and family support for training 2009

These figures show that SMT groups have been overwhelmingly supportive in primary schools, where female principals in rural areas have been effective in introducing more co-operative approaches and in developing negotiation skills. There continues to be considerable evidence of inhibiting attitudes (10%) from District officials especially in KwaZulu Natal, Mpumalanga and Western Cape and, as the context varies to a considerable degree, it would seem that there could be power issues at work. As in the baseline survey, female participants appear to be under greater family pressure in their work and participation with 7% finding this a considerable hindrance compared with 4% of the males.

Participants were asked to give open comments on their experience (see table 14):

Comment area	Example	Number of mentions
Related to course structure	This course has too much work. It was supposed to be a diploma at least, not a certificate. Some tutors lost our assignments and deny losing them, pointing fingers at the students, saying that they did not submit.	46
Related to course content	The issue of mentoring would be taken into consideration, mentors should be people who understand the current trends in education.	44
Related to participation	It has developed me a great deal. Now, I am confident that I am the principal who has positive self-esteem because of it. It is so because I know what to say to my colleagues and why.	42
Related to course personnel	Choosing of mentors must be improved. Control of submission must be improved. Proper records of student marks to be improved.	38
Related to in-school issues	The ACE: School leadership course has helped me a lot in policy formulation and implementation. Helped me also in managing people, teaching and learning. Also assisted in curriculum management and physical resources.	37
Related to community issues	Great change has resulted in time management of strategic planning and effective functionalities of the school.	26
Related to personal improvement	I hope this course will provide an improvement in my grade / mark / salary progression	18
Related to future personal attitudes	The course is very helpful to me. I'm now able to manage teaching and learning effectively. My behaviour the way to look at things in a school has completely changed. I've developed a positive attitude towards leadership and management. I've learnt that consulting other stakeholders in decision making is very important	18
Related to enjoyment	It gave me a great outlook on life concerning further studies. I got more boldness to talk and to act because I am empowered by the course. I enjoyed it all	15

Table 14. Summary of open comment on course experience and its impact 2009

Table 14 offers considerable evidence that respondents had gained from the programme but their comments point to some perceived deficiencies in the delivery of the programme and this was investigated through questions on course content and processes. At the completion stage, respondents were asked to rate the way in which they had gained from the use of a variety of learning approaches (see table 15).

Learning approaches	Of great help	Of some help	Of limited help	Of no help
Textual materials	80	18	2	
Meetings	73	22	5	
Discussions	74	23	3	
Assignments	71	28	1	
Portfolio development	56	36	6	2
Mentoring	59	27	10	4
Access to academic staff	54	35	11	
Opportunity for reflection	63	33	3	1
Learning from others	77	19	3	1
Developing networks	76	22	1	

Table 15: Value of a range of learning approaches (percentage responses)

These data show that the textual materials are very highly valued (80%), especially by those in rural locations, but so too are the opportunities to learn from others (77%) and to establish networks (76%). Open comment indicates that the lower ratings for portfolio development (56%) are related to lack of time, and access to academic staff (54%) is a factor of distance from the centre. Comment also indicates that the 59% rating mentoring as being 'of great help' is a reflection of relationships between mentor and mentee. Overall, there is very little difference (a mean of 3%) between female and male responses but it is significant that the female respondents are generally more positive, and that the ratings of features 'of no help' are from males in secondary schools. Again, care must be taken in interpreting these responses as the case studies (see below) indicate that networks, for example, were scarcely operational in some provinces.

There are only limited differences in response according to school type, with primary school respondents showing greater enthusiasm for access to academic staff (81% compared with secondary 69% 'of great help') and learning from each other (80% compared with 70% secondary 'of great help'). The secondary respondents were 8% more appreciative of the value of textual materials.

The more marked differences in perceptions of the value of learning approaches appear to relate to the university providing the programme (see table 16).

Learning approaches	NMMU	UCT	UKZN	UJ	UP
Textual materials	93	84	78	69	76
Meetings	80	81	64	73	69
Discussions	83	78	66	86	78
Assignments	53	75	75	71	71
Portfolio development	40	59	42	69	62
Mentoring	63	65	29	60	71
Access to academic staff	53	61	51	55	50

Learning approaches	NMMU	UCT	UKZN	UJ	UP
Opportunity for reflection	57	74	53	69	56
Learning from others	90	86	75	86	62
Developing networks	80	86	78	78	63
Mean score	69.2	74.9	61.1	71.6	65.8

Table 16: Percentage ranking the learning approach as 'of great help'

As groups vary in their composition, context, relationships, and preferred learning styles, it may be inappropriate to comment on these figures other than to note the markedly lower rating for mentoring at UKZN, and that the overall mean falls between 61% and 75%.

Overview of survey data

1. These findings portray a very positive view in that participants felt that they had gained both leadership and management skills as a result of the ACE programme. Relationships between principals and school stakeholders appear to have improved although a very small minority of male respondents were sceptical of the gains from participation. Open comment supports the view that schools were being driven by a wish to secure improved teaching and learning and a more co-operative approach to policy development

2. At the baseline stage, there were 283 open comments and there were a similar number (284) in the impact phase. Only 13% of the latter were negative compared with 43% at the start of the programme, pointing to problems with the SMT, the SGB, and community relationships. There is still a significant body of negative comment (6% compared with 8% at baseline) on the resource context, local socio-economic issues and district-school relationships

3. There are some problems identified by about 9% of participants. These largely relate to problems with 'parents who still do not see that we cannot do everything they want of us' and to community problems where 'they still see the building and grounds as their place when we are not there'. However, there are positive signs where principals note 'that it is now easier to negotiate with the community because I feel more confident that I can explain things to them', and 'I am now planning to use our resources so that all the community can benefit and then the SGB becomes more helpful'. The more negative views still tend to come from male 'Coloured' respondents and the very small number of White principals or deputy principals working in difficult contexts.

4. At the baseline stage, we commented that the positive aspects of responses do not follow normal distribution curves and there is a skew towards the 'good' and 'very good' evaluation of characteristics. This has continued and, indeed, intensified with a mean of 76% perceiving the highest rating for each element under consideration. This may be unrealistic and could reflect responses which participants feel that they should be giving. It is also significant that 132 programme participants did not reply at this final stage because they did not attend the final contact sessions.

5. These data show that the pilot programme is being mainly undertaken by principals but the responses of deputy principals and HoDs indicate a need for some differentiation of content, so that their development needs can be met more effectively. This is evident when some of the responses of team members from the same schools in Mpumalanga are compared and heads of department appear unwilling to comment on whole school issues.

6. The greatest gains appear to have been made by African female principals in rural primary schools, whilst there is less appreciation of the programme by secondary male principals in urban and Township areas.

7. Participants of all backgrounds have been critical of some programme elements including 'mentoring by people who are retired and don't recognise that things are changing', 'portfolio activities that should have been supported from day one rather than imposed on us', and 'failure to understand that we are still under great pressure when we get back to our schools'. There are some marked differences in the rating for elements of the programme according to the university concerned.

This broadly positive view of the programme, and of its benefits, contrast with some of the case study data (see below).

Observation of the Orientation Sessions

All providers held orientation sessions for their students as the starting point for the programme. These were important in setting the 'tone' and clarifying expectations for candidates. All these sessions were subject to non-participant observation by a member of the research team. The reports of these observations were presented in the first interim report. An overview of the main points is shown below.

These sessions were valuable in enabling the research team to administer the baseline questionnaire and obtain high quality data with a very high response rate. They also provided opportunities for Department of Education staff, and university teams, to outline the programme and to explain its philosophy. Candidates were understandably nervous, and anxious about how the course would proceed, although there was also considerable enthusiasm in some centres. Many participants had no previous experience of management courses and did not know what to expect. In some cases, there was little interaction and we recommend that future orientation sessions allow for more participation, in line with the philosophy of the programme.

Interviews with Key Staff

Because of the unique nature of the ACE programme, it provided a new challenge for HEIs, which are more familiar with traditional academic programmes. These interviews sought to assess staff attitudes to the new programme and to establish how they addressed its school-based and active learning dimensions. The sampling of interviewees was purposive, to include the faculty dean, the course organiser and other members of the teaching team. The first interviews were held on the day of the candidates' orientation sessions, or shortly afterwards, to ensure a 'baseline' perspective. Subsequent interviews were held during the mid-term phase of the research and towards the end of the two-year research period. The findings from these interviews are included within the case study reports (see below).

Case studies of Candidates and their Schools

The baseline and impacts surveys (see above) provide a detailed overview of candidates' motivation, leadership practice, and experience of the ACE programme, but this approach inevitably lacks depth and 'explanatory power'. To address this limitation,

case studies were undertaken to track candidates through the learning process and to assess changes in their leadership practice and school outcomes. The initial sample was 27 candidates stratified by type of school (city, township, rural and informal settlement, both primary and secondary), and included people from all six provinces involved in the first phase of the national field test study.

The baseline phase of the case studies involved the following methods:

- Tracking candidates for one day to assess their leadership practice and the nature of their engagement with learners, educators, parents and the community.
- Interviews with the candidates.
- Interviews with candidates' role sets, including SMT members, educators, the chairperson of the SGB and a district official.

These case studies were undertaken before the candidates' orientation session, except where indicated below, to provide a genuine 'baseline' perspective. All interviews were held in English, except for those with some SGB chairpersons. In these cases, interviews were conducted in the participants' first languages, and then translated into English by the researcher.

The Mid-Term Evaluation Phase

The mid-term evaluation focused on the learning process, with several methods:

Observation of teaching sessions

The research involved non-participant observation of the university-based teaching sessions. The purpose of the observation was to establish programme content and delivery, and the extent and nature of candidate participation. The researchers sought to establish the extent to which the providers operated with a fixed curriculum delivered in a conventional way, or allowed the candidates to contribute to sessions in ways that allowed them to signal, and work towards, their own learning needs. This approach is strongly supported in the literature on adult learning.

Case studies of candidates and their schools

The case studies are intended to be longitudinal and this second phase took place at the beginning of candidates' second year on the ACE programme. The focus shifted to an assessment of their learning experience and of emerging changes in leadership practice and school outcomes. As far as possible, the sample was the same as in the baseline study as part of an extended engagement with these candidates and their schools. This phase of the study involved:

- Gathering data about school performance, including published examination results.
- Interviewing candidates about their leadership practice and about their experience of the ACE programme.

Observation of mentoring practice

A special feature of the ACE programme is the provision of mentors to support the development of candidates. This is also a significant dimension in many international programmes, including those in Canada, England, Singapore and the United States (see the literature review in the first interim report). The effectiveness of mentoring depends on many variables, including the experience, disposition and training of mentors, the receptiveness of students and the 'match' between mentor and mentee. The observation assessed these factors and noted the ways in which students develop as a result of mentoring sessions. The sample of candidates included in the observation was the same as those involved in the case studies.

Observation of verification practice

An important feature of the ACE is the provision for site-based assessment, linking leadership learning to school practice. This is a critical part of the assessment strategy and is subject to an on-site verification process. The research team intended to observe the verification process to establish how the verification is undertaken and whether this is done in a consistent and reliable manner across schools, providers and provinces. In practice, however, there was little evidence of on-site verification during the mid-term phase (see also the report on the impact study).

Observation of networking

The intention of the ACE programme is that participants should be grouped to facilitate networking. The literature review shows the potential of this approach to enhance mutual learning. The observation provided the opportunity to assess how the networks are operating, and to establish whether and how they contribute to candidates' leadership learning. The sample of candidates was the same as those involved in the case studies. In practice, however, networks were not operational in some cases and, therefore, could not be observed.

Interviews with key staff

These interviews followed those undertaken in the baseline study and sought to ascertain changes in staff attitudes, and their experience of the programme, including teaching sessions, mentoring and assessment. The sampling of interviewees was the same as those for the baseline interviews (see above) with the addition of some staff who could not be interviewed during the baseline phase.

Impact Phase: Case Study Findings

The impact phase of the research featured surveys of all candidates (see findings above). It also included a third phase of interaction with the 27 case study candidates and their schools. All candidates were re-interviewed and each researcher also interviewed members of their role sets (SMT member, educator, SGB chairperson, and district official). School documents and candidate portfolios were also scrutinised and University staff were re-interviewed (see above). The findings from all these sources have been integrated to provide an overview of the experience of providers, candidates and schools in each of the six provinces.

Eastern Cape

Introduction

The first pilot cohort in Eastern Cape began its work in 2007 and completed in May 2009. Case study work continued with two candidates, both principals and both DoE funded. The two candidates are:

Primary School

- An experienced female African, with more than 38 years of experience as a teacher, the founding member of this primary school. She was promoted from a post-level one position to become principal in 2004.

Secondary school

- The principal: a relatively young male African, who has been at the school since 2005.

Methodology

The impact study took place between February and March 2009, and involved the following strategies:

- Interviews with two ACE candidates (one at each school).
- Interviews with four people in each candidate's roles sets; SGB parent member, SMT member, post level 1 educator and Circuit Manager responsible for the school.
- Shadowing of the two candidates for one day each.
- Documentary analysis of enrolment figures and Grade 12 results for 2008
- Interviews with four lecturers (three were interviewed for the mid-term phase)

This report provides an integrated overview of these data sets and reaches conclusions about the value of the ACE programme for these candidates and for the school. It also makes recommendations on the future of the programme.

Type of school

Secondary School

This school is located in a township. It has 1036 (1132 in 2007) learners and 38 educators (38 in 2007). At the time of this report, the school has reportedly not met the Departmental enrolment target for 2009, and has a shortfall of 112 learners. However, the principal is hopeful that the school may be able to meet this target, given the late registrations it normally receives.

Primary School

This is a township school that also serves a nearby informal settlement area. It now has 1054 learners (1064 in 2007) and 25 educators (25 in 2007). The school caters for learners from Grade R to Grade 6. The principal and the Circuit Manager report that the school was in the process of registering Grade 7s and Grade 8s into the school, from 2010. The CM notes that permission has been granted by the Department of Education for this purpose.

Socio-economic background of the learners and the community

There have been no significant changes in school contexts. Both schools continue to serve deprived township communities with high levels of poverty, drug abuse and unemployment. The primary school records indicate an increased number of orphans and vulnerable learners. As a result, the majority of the learners (more than 50% of the learner population) are benefiting from the Government Social Grant.

Awareness of the ACE Programme

In the secondary school, the four role sets were aware that the principal was taking the ACE course. His Circuit Manager (CM) is responsible for processing the fee payment for ACE candidates. It however needs to be emphasised that the role sets received their information from different sources and have different levels of awareness of the principal's ACE participation. For instance one SMT, whose brother is the NMMU lecturer, had a relatively deep understanding about the principal's participation from his brother, whilst the Post Level 1 educator learnt about the principal' s participation from the ACE Researcher during the baseline study.

In the primary school all the role sets except the CM knew about the candidate's participation in the ACE programme, albeit at a limited scale. The CM reported that she only knew about the principal's participation in the ACE when she went to announce the ACE impact research process and requesting her participation. The CM further reports that she was promoted to be CM in 2008 after the principal had enrolled in the national ACE programme. What is puzzling is the CM's lack of knowledge of the principal's participation in the ACE, despite her claim that she 'is one of my best managers and we work very closely'. Yet she (the CM) is aware of other candidates' participation in the ACE programme and had even invited some of them to present and share experiences and knowledge during the principals' meetings.

School Achievement

In the baseline and mid-term phases of the study, there were divergent responses to this question with secondary school respondents focusing mainly on academic achievement while primary school participants mainly addressed other types of achievement. This pattern continued to some extent in the impact study.

Secondary school

In the past three years, matric results have declined as follows:

2006:   66%

2007:   44%

2008:   17.3%

Except for the principal, all the respondents reported that the divisions in the school were the sole cause of demoralisation. The post level 1 educator (who is a site steward for a Teacher Union) painted a picture of a school with a very gloomy future. He said that the principal's lawyers have sent letters to some educators who happened to disagree with him on issues of principle. In contrast, the principal gives the following reasons for poor performance:

- Some of the teachers did not avail themselves of the National Curriculum Statement (NCS) Further Education and Training

(FET), training

- Teachers' lack of discipline as shown in their failure to attend Saturday and Spring classes organised by the Department.
- Teacher experience: some teachers who taught Grade 12 in 2008 did not have the necessary capacity and experience.
- Poor planning and support by SMT: the SMTs did not give enough support to educators. They did not support the planning processes that the candidate had introduced; they would always say they are busy.

Despite the gloomy picture of the matric results, one of the few 2008 matric candidates who passed with University entry scores visited the school on the day of the shadowing to tell the principal of his academic progress. He reported that he had been admitted by one of the local Higher Education institutions for an Engineering Degree. He also reported to have received a bursary covering all costs from one of the local car manufacturers. The principal urged the candidate to study hard, and that he should visit in future to motivate the students.

Within-school variation

- This school experiences extreme variation in performance across learning areas. Pass rates in 2008 range from 100% in Life Orientation and 99, 4% in isiXhosa, to 15% in Accounting and 16,3% in Maths. Similar differences were apparent in previous years.
- The principal comments that within-school variation arises partly because the Economic Management educators were not experienced to teach Grade 12. Consequently the SMT meeting has suggested that more experienced educators be requested to teach Grade 12 in 2009. However, all other respondents attributed the poor results to unhealthy human relations in this school.

The principal and the CM report on the improved record keeping and filing system, resulting from the principal's enrolment in the ACE programme. They also report on the development plans that the candidate has put in place. One such was the school securing funds to establish a computer laboratory for the learners. The principal notes that he used the skills acquired through the ACE to write a funding proposal. On the other hand, the CM notes that 'the ACE course could have impacted but the principal is generally a go-getter.'

Primary school

The principal addresses this question by pointing to the invitation the school received from a United States of America based organisation, called 'People to People', which is inviting eight learners to attend a World Conference in September 2009. These learners will be nurtured on leadership and other related skills. Another achievement reported by the principal is the school's participation in community projects such as HIV/AIDS. These achievements were echoed by other respondents, including the CM and the SGB parent.

School and community relationships

In both schools, community relationships are reported to be positive, although no major changes were reported. For instance, in the primary school, the relationship between the school and the social workers has grown, and the social workers bought some school uniforms for orphans and other vulnerable learners. This was also observed on the second day of this research process. However, this relationship was not a consequence of the ACE as it was forged long before her ACE enrolment. However, the candidate notes

that 'the ACE also encourages that the school becomes part of the community it serves; work for and with the community.'

The candidates' relationships with their role sets are discussed below:

Primary School Principal

The principal's school-based role sets report on the improved relationship between the staff and the principal, since she enrolled in the ACE programme. The Deputy Principal refers to 'the confidence gained by the principal as result of the national ACE'. The two school-based role sets commented on her pre-ACE behaviour:

> 'The principal was moved straight from Post Level 1 to Post Level 4 and was never exposed to any gradual managerial exposure. As a result, she would sometimes shout and be rude to other educators, and would not listen even when we would advise her.'

They report that this attitude has changed and the principal is now more accommodating, and even affords her staff the opportunity to reflect on her leadership and management practices.

Secondary School Principal

The candidate and his role sets report on mixed fortunes with regards to school and community relationships. Positive aspects include improved relationships between the school and parents. The respondents report that, ever since the principal started with the ACE course, more parents attend meetings than before. The principal and the CM emphasise the good relationship that the candidate has with the SGB. One SMT member, however, believes that the SGB members are the principal's 'puppets'. On the day of the shadowing, the District Official had come to the school to listen to the SGB chairman's complaint that he was insulted by two of the school's teachers, as being illiterate.

The SMT member and the CM further report that the principal has forged links with the business community and the school has been sponsored with a computer lab. The CM however could not attribute this to ACE as the candidate "has always been the go getter". All the respondents also report on the strengthened relationship between the school and the police, as well as with Community Police Forum.

Negative aspects include the reported strained relationships between the principal and the educators. The role set members report on a school that is divided into two camps; one supporting the principal, and being supported by him, and one being unsupported and against the principal. This was evident on the day of the shadowing when the principal was visiting classes. In some classes, he was visibly friendly and professional with the teacher whilst, in some instances, he ignored the teacher's presence. The knowledge the role sets had about the principal's participation in the ACE course may also be indicative of the divisions in the school. Only one SMT member reported an in-depth knowledge of the principal's ACE course participation, referring to the assignments the principal discussed with them for implementation. All the other respondents did not have in-depth understanding of the principal's ACE course attendance. The post level 1 educator reports that the first time he knew about it was from the ACE Researcher during the baseline survey. He further reports 'I did not become curious and ask him about it.'

The secondary school principal refers to the relationship between the different school stakeholders (educators and SMTs) and the community as 'unstable and divided.' He notes that the educators, and the SMTs, who support him have a 'healthy relationship

with the SGB'. He is also quick to comment that 'my intention is to close the gap between the SGB and SMT. He further notes with concern that, in most instances, SMTs do not identify with the decisions and plans of the SGB, nor do they attend SGB meetings. They undermine the SGB while he has full confidence in the SGB and they in him.

Contact Sessions

HEI staff say that the contact sessions are 'the exciting part of the programme as they provide candidates with the opportunity to network, share best practices and discuss how theory is implemented on site'. Despite this enthusiasm, two of the lecturers are concerned about the physical structure of the lecture theatre which was not conducive for 'real group work'. One staff member also notes that Friday afternoon lectures 'are long, a bit awkward for the candidates'. This is reportedly one of the issues raised by the student feedback on contact sessions. Some students are dominating others during class discussions, the participant further notes. Another staff member notes that the contact sessions would be more beneficial if lecturers understood the candidates' contexts. However, he says that the aspiration for the lecturers to do school visits was 'ideal and a pipedream as they already have heavy workloads'.

However, both ACE candidates report that the content gained is very helpful and can be implemented on-site. They cite theory modules on time management, financial management, human and physical resource management, as containing theory they have implemented in their schools. The secondary school principal further reports 'What I used to do is to bring the ACE assignments to the SMT members and explore how best we could implement it.' However, it was not always easy to implement. He gave an example of the theory on time management, which he discussed with the SMT. When it came to implementation, there was a problem. He reports that, subsequent to this module, he allocated staff some tasks which they failed to do.

The participative approach of the national ACE is also praised by both principals. The primary school principal also commends the racial diversity of the principals in the class, which give them an opportunity to share skills and tips on issues such as problem solving, applying for sponsorship, etc.

Asked how to improve the contact sessions, the primary school principal and a lecturer respond four hour sessions are too long. The primary school principal advised that 'the lecture time be cut down and increase days instead'. She also felt that they needed more practical tasks in class that will assist them when they implement on site. The other candidate feels that NMMU could record the rich cases studies and interactions presented by candidates and put it in a CD that could be used for future cohorts.

Teaching Materials

Both candidates view the materials as relevant and applicable on-site. The downside noted was their (big) size. The secondary school principal notes 'there are some aspects that I feel need to be shortened or summarized.' He further advised that some of them can be designed in a CD.

All four lecturers were generally satisfied with the quality and length of the materials:
- The language used is simple and easy to understand,
- Was detailed but give one 'room for creative use'
- The revised material was 'just sufficient and not as bulky as the original'.
- Could be used as a handbook and cannot all be dealt with in class.

One lecturer notes that, for the HIV/AIDS elective, he has developed his own material.

Mentoring

Mentoring is a distinctive and central feature of the ACE programme, designed to facilitate the transfer of learning to candidates' and school practice. Effective mentoring provides strong potential for deep learning. Both candidates report on two types of mentoring; individual and collective, where they met as a cluster of about ten, meeting at a central venue for between two and four hours. These sessions were mostly facilitated by the mentor.

Candidate views

The candidates are supported by two mentors who match their gender and race. Both candidates report very good, supportive relationships with their mentors. The primary school candidate reports that her mentor not only talked about the ACE programme, but also was very humane. The secondary school candidate's mentor 'makes me rise above any situation. He was very good at motivating me'. He gives an example of the support given by the mentor when he was put under pressure from the Teacher Unions. The primary school candidate reports that she was advised by her mentor to take extra Computer Literacy classes as she was struggling with the ACE computer module.

The primary school candidate feels that the mentoring sessions should be reduced because of other commitments, whilst the other candidate says he would like more sessions, on a monthly rather than a quarterly basis, suggesting signs of dependency on the mentor. 'We need a critical friend that listens to us. For instance, currently I am under siege from my staff and need a critical friend'. He does not appear to have identified a critical friend from his ACE principal colleagues.

Other stakeholders' views

The role sets for both candidates did not have a relationship with the mentors, and did not know what was happening in the mentoring sessions. These included the Circuit Managers. The primary school's mentor 'met all the staff to introduce herself and that was all.'

Within the lecturing staff, the former programme coordinator and the current coordinator display an in-depth understanding of mentoring. They had a very close relationship with the mentors who presented monthly reports and held meetings with them. One of the other lecturers, however, notes that 'the mentors do not mentor my module. Maybe I should communicate with them and tell them what they should do in my module'. On the day of the staff interviews the researcher sat in on one of the sessions, waiting for the lecturer to finish teaching, and the mentors were not there, as was the case during the mid-term phase.

Networking

The principles underpinning the ACE include an emphasis on school managers working and learning together in networks or clusters. It is evident from the lecturers' responses that networking has been patchy. The co-ordinator notes that the network sessions take place on a monthly basis, facilitated by the mentors, and were more likely to concentrate on assignments than on their individual schools. He further notes that, even though he had received the network reports from the mentors, he still needs to analyse these and produce a comprehensive report. The other two staff members do not seem to be aware of what is happening in the networks. The role sets of both candidates also do not have any information about networking.

Candidates' views on network learning

Both candidates report on meeting three times in 2008 at a central venue for the purposes of network learning. In these sessions, there were between eight and ten candidates. They met for between two and four hours to discuss topics identified by the mentor, mainly based on assignments. The primary school candidate reports on the following benefits of the network meetings:

- One principal shared how he dealt with staff who came to school under the influence of alcohol. She used the same strategy in her school.
- Developed a funding proposal from the skill gained in the networking and has been promised R20 000 for school fencing.

The secondary school candidate on the other hand reports that he improved his computer skills from these networking sessions as his colleagues gave him a detailed feedback on his PowerPoint presentations. However, he is concerned that the District Officials are not aware of the good work they do in these sessions, and also do not know about the impact of the ACE. However, the District Official differs with him when he reports that some principals who have done ACE course have shown a tremendous improvement in their school management. He notes that two principals who started in the ACE difference now have schools that are running smoothly.

Assessment

The candidates report that they completed six assignments and three presentations in 2008. They are both impressed with the 'very constructive feedback which emphasised on how the candidate could improve.' However, they both report that there has been no on-site verification of the portfolio.

Both candidates praise the relevance and helpfulness of the assignments, 'especially the Problem Tree. It challenged me not to look at the problem at face value and that each problem has a solution.' The secondary school principal is impressed with the assignments 'that focused on managing and leading people, resource management, as they were to be implemented on site', despite the evidence of his struggle in dealing with people.

The candidates identified the following as the weaknesses of the assessment process:

- There were too many assignments,
- The ambiguous assignment instructions; 'we struggled at a certain stage to understand the instructions. One lecturer had to change his project three times at one point because the instructions were not clear.'

Some of the University staff also noted that the candidates were over-assessed, and are more concerned about their marking load than candidates' implementation of theory on site.

Verification of on-site assessment

One of the distinguishing features of the national ACE is its stress on site-based assessment, so that learning can be applied to candidates' leadership and management practice. The assessment tool employed by the University, and by other providers, is the portfolio, which is intended to include all the assignments set by the University, together with school-based documents, student reflections and a research project.

The former co-ordinator says that one of the distinct features of ACE is its site-based assessment approach. She also notes that she has developed a rubric for site based assessment, and the University has outsourced verification of on-site assessment to an 'accredited assessor' because of 'heavy [staff] workloads'. The accredited assessor has been given the instrument and the global picture of all the modules. Otherwise all the lecturers interviewed were involved in setting the assignment questions and marking them. They all remark that the mentors are not involved in the assessment but were there to facilitate the candidates' development.

Improving the assessment process

The former coordinator says it is good that ACE assessment is non-examination focused, and that there is more continuous practical assessment done. She also notes that they over-assessed the candidates in the first cohort, and have since changed the number of assignments. One of the reasons for cutting the number of assignments was the [indifferent] quality of feedback given to candidates because so many assignments needed marking. She further says that the University could perhaps involve mentors in marking the assignments.

There was very little awareness of assessment amongst the stakeholders at both schools. The CM says that she is not aware of the assessment requirements but some of the ACE candidates sometimes asked her for provincial DoE documents.

Impact on School Leadership and Management

A distinctive feature of the national ACE programme is the intention to have a direct impact on candidates' leadership and management practice. The learning model assumes that participants will improve their practice by implementing course theory in their schools and classrooms.

Managing time

During the baseline study, both candidates were observed for one day to see how they spent their time. Even though they were both mostly office bound, the primary school principal was also observed teaching. During the mid-term phase, she reported that she is more office bound, and also has four classes to teach than three, as was the case during the baseline study. She says she decided to off-load one class from the HoD so as to allow the HoD more time to do her management duties. During the Impact Phase, she was observed in the classroom teaching Grade 3, and also informally visiting all the classes in the morning. When asked if this was what she did every day, she acknowledged that she normally visits those classes that are experiencing some challenges, including teaching and learning. She also reported that she introduced some morning briefing sessions with the SMTs ten minutes before the school starts (this was observed on the shadowing day). She also does formal and informal class visits. For more formal visits, 'I tell the educator after I have been reported upon by the SMT that there is a problem in a certain class. I also discuss with the concerned educator after my visit.' She went on to say that she is now more visible both in the school grounds and classes. This was observed on the shadowing day. However the principal is quick to point that she does not do the class visits every day.

The secondary school principal was observed visiting all the classes, doing head counts. He reports that he had asked the Secretary to do it a few days ago, but without any success. This is perhaps one of the signs of the candidate's inability to manage human resources, as also noted by some of his role sets, including the CM.

The secondary principal reports that he does not have a class to teach anymore, but was more responsible for Maths remedial sessions after school, as a result of advice given by one of the Maths teachers. This is also acknowledged by other role sets. He further reports that, as a result of the national ACE, 'I now can type on my own and am not concerned about giving confidential documents to the secretary.' This seems important to him as 'secretaries can sometimes be unprofessional.' He also says he now 'has an almost pre-planned day every day.'

The principal's role sets report that the principal was more school based and attended fewer Departmental meetings. The general observation made by the researcher was that, unlike during the mid-term phase, there were fewer parents coming to see the principal during the shadowing day. Upon enquiry, the candidate reports that, as a result of the ACE course, he has introduced Grade Heads and parents communicated more with the Grade Heads than with him.

Management practice

The CM for the secondary school principal notes that the principal has been a diligent person all along and, therefore, there are no noticeable changes as a result of ACE. The CM of the primary school makes a similar comment whilst also noting that she became the CM after the candidate had joined the ACE and could not comment on how the candidate performed before joining ACE.

Accountability

In the baseline study, most participants referred to multiple accountabilities; to the hierarchy, via the Circuit Manager, and to parents, the SGB, learners and educators. SMT members said that their main accountability is to the principal. Both candidates reported that their accountabilities have not changed since the last interviews. This was acknowledged by both CMs who reported that the candidates were very accountable to them. They report everything that is happening in their schools to the CMs. The CM of the primary school further notes that the candidate is also very accountable to the community and the parents, and 'involves the stakeholders whenever there is a problem'. Her school based role sets also report on her improved confidence and reporting mechanisms. However, they feel that there are some Departmental circulars that she does not share with them.

Strengths and limitations as a school manager

In the baseline study, the primary school principal identified lack of self-control as a limitation, especially when things were not going well. However, since participating in the ACE, she has learnt 'to be a better manager, who is more accommodating, control my temper and a good listener'.

Similarly, the secondary school principal had an emotional temper that he considers a limitation. He also had a weakness of lacking focus and wanting 'to deal with all the aspects of school development'. From his participation in ACE leadership, he has learnt to be a better manager who has developed problem solving skills. 'I am now computer literate, and very proud of my skills. I am a better manager who files electronically'.

The secondary school principal also notes that he has grown as a manager. He claims that one indicator of his growth is his improved conflict resolution skills. He goes further and says that; 'However I still cannot deal with the destructive characters. People with what you perceive as unreasonable demands.' Here he may be referring to the vacancy-filling dispute mentioned in previous sections. The candidate is very excited about the EMASA conference he attended in Durban in September, 2008. 'Through interacting with other professionals from different parts of the world, my leadership insights have been broadened.'

The CM notes that 'he seriously lacks the skill of dealing with the people he is working with. We have a very good relationship and he really needs support when it comes to relationships.' He summarizes the situation by noting that the principal is struggling to manage that school.

Commenting on her strengths and weaknesses, the primary school principal notes that, since her ACE enrolment, she has learnt to do the following:
- Give my staff an opportunity to give me feedback about my leadership style. They sometimes tell me that I am autocratic, and this provides me with the opportunity to reflect and try to improve,
- I am more consultative with my staff.

School Improvement

Another distinctive feature of the national ACE programme is the intention to promote school improvement. The learning model assumes that improvement will occur as a result of candidates' enhanced leadership and pedagogic knowledge being implemented in schools and classrooms. The secondary school principal's Circuit Manager reports that the ACE principals are 'very happy' and have really changed since enrolling in this course. He gives an example of one school which, before the principal's enrolment in the National ACE, was run by the SGB. The CM reports, 'after the principal had enrolled in this ACE course it really changed. This ACE is very good; it contributes very significantly with building capacity.' About the candidate who is in the ACE pilot research, he says the school was run properly, and the principal has the community backing, however the candidate's biggest challenge was his inability to manage human resource. The CM for the primary school also notes that the candidate was one of her best managers, who delegates staff and as a result has an 'orderly school.' The SGB member notes that the principals' punctuality has improved since enrolling in the ACE. She further notes that, after the school vacation, she reopens a week earlier before the rest of the staff. The SGB member for the secondary school reports on improved attendance rates at parents' meetings.

Professional Development

The national ACE programme was expected to prove challenging for university staff because of its practice-based orientation and its site-based assessment strategy. The four lecturers all point to professional development gains through their participation in the programme:
- Better understanding of how the principals implement the different policies.
- Better understanding of how principals respond to difficult school circumstances.
- Appreciation of new policies, approaches and programmes.

However, one lecturer notes that, whilst the ACE has exposed them to a better understanding of schools, an opportunity for them to visit schools would benefit them more. The former coordinator notes the following aspects of professional growth:
- Confidence in teaching and management has been boosted
- Growth has been realised. She further notes that the Eastern Cape Department of Education has asked her and a colleague (current coordinator) to develop a mentoring programme and mentor the Education Development Officers
- There is a growth curve, grounded in Management and Leadership.

Perceptions of the ACE Programme

Best parts of the ACE programme

Both candidates identify the contact sessions, where they shared experiences as principals and learnt from one another:

- 'Updating one's knowledge of the latest developments'.
- 'Got exposed to other methodologies of leadership'.

The secondary school principal also expressed excitement at having 'met Prof. Bush and Prof. Hargreaves, after having read their work for such a long time'.

The four HEI participants identify several strengths of the programme:

- Mentoring 'is the best part'.
- Contact sessions which give students opportunity to network, very interactive and have a lot of case studies from schools
- The Conference the institution held that included the District officials
- Observing some students grow

One lecturer notes that the school visits by the academic staff was the 'missing ingredient'. The former coordinator advises that there is a need for post-graduation support, to help students improve theory implementation.

Improving the ACE programme

The four lecturers comment that, even though the ACE was a unique opportunity to train candidates in management and leadership, there some aspects that required improvement:

- The national materials; one lecturer says he uses them only as background reading.
- More mentoring sessions
- A way of controlling student dependency on mentors and mentor domination on students
- Too many assignments, which prevent candidates from real implementation of theory on site.

The candidates also commented on how the programme could be improved. They were both emphatic about a need to 'have fewer assignments so that we can pay more attention to the implementation'. The secondary school principal notes that, as a result of so many assignments, the candidates sometimes leave their staff members behind as they feel anxious to complete the assignment. Also clear and unambiguous assignment instructions were recommended.

Meeting candidates' expectations

The secondary school principal claims that he wanted to develop personal skills such as decision making, planning, conflict resolution and computer literacy. He claims that he has developed these skills, and that he is now 'good at record keeping.' The primary school principal notes that her administration skills have improved, and can now manage information better. She claims that she has developed the following communications for the school:

- Staff minutes
- Learner data
- SGB minutes.

40

Additional points

The interviewees were given the opportunity to offer additional comments. Both candidates and the former coordinator note that the ACE should be made compulsory to all SMT members, so that they 'can all share the same vision and values'. The former coordinator says currently the candidates receive a lot of resistance from the staff when they have to sit and discuss assignments, as they feel they want personally benefit from the ACE. The secondary school principal also reports with concern that ACE candidates have not yet received their academic results, as the Department has not yet paid. The primary school principal notes that leading people is not an easy task, and the ACE has helped her to develop skills on how to work in a collegial environment.

The primary school principal's Circuit Manager notes that the ACE is equipping managers with management skills. Principals seem enthusiastic about this ACE. As a result, he has asked one of the participating principals (not the candidate in this research) to present ACE in one of the circuit meetings. She comments that the case study candidate 'is a go-getter, one of the best principals. Her school is orderly, she delegates and interacts with all the school stakeholders.' She further notes that a programme such as this (ACE) should be used as a capacity building venture for practising principals as well as the aspiring ones, and should be made compulsory in future. In closing, the other CM emphasised the 'helpless' case of the secondary school principal who was struggling to manage his staff. He notes that the District will make funds available for the school to get capacity building on team building.

Overview of Eastern Cape case studies

University

The University has adapted the programme in several ways since the first pilot cohort. These include changes to the mentoring model and in mentoring personnel, portfolio assessment, the focus and content of the afternoon mentor-led sessions, and the research project. The four lecturers believe that the ACE is impacting favourably on the quality of leadership in schools. The former programme coordinator raised concerned about quality of mentoring for the second cohort (scattered all over the Eastern Cape), and the distance from University resources.

Schools

Both these schools are disadvantaged, serving poor township communities. Learners are often hungry and there is concern about teenage pregnancy and drug abuse. The ACE is important but will not be able to resolve such socio-economic problems.

Standards, as measured by matric and test results, are declining at the secondary school, although the secondary school's performance may be regarded as satisfactory in a community with so many social and economic problems. The main reason identified for the declining results, particularly in 2008, is the principal's inability to manage people. This is despite the candidate's claim that he has grown as a manager, and that his conflict management skills have improved. The primary school principal reports improved confidence levels, and collegiality, linked to the ACE programme. Both Circuit Managers also praised the 'good results' observed in other ACE participating schools.

KwaZulu-Natal

Introduction

The first pilot cohorts in KwaZulu-Natal (KZN) began their work in 2007 and completed in June 2009. KZN is a large province with participants coming from the EThekwini area, the UMgungundlovu area, and the northern part of KZN, not far from the Mpumalanga border. The sample was also fairly representative of the schools found in the province; there was a rural school, a farm school, urban and peri-urban schools. The participants were two males and four females. Of these six candidates, four are black Africans, one an Indian and one is white. Two of the candidates are males heading secondary schools and the other four are primary school principals. Of the six schools one is a former Model C school, one a former DET school, one a former House of Delegates (HoD) school and three are schools that fell under the former KwaZulu Government Department of Education and Culture (DEC).

Secondary Schools

School A

> The principal: an experienced black African male, who has been a principal in the school since the mid-90s. The school is situated in a rural area with no running water and very limited physical resources.

School B

> The principal: an experienced Indian male who has been principal in the school since 1999. Before that he was a deputy principal and principal in another district for about three years. The school is situated in an urban area.

Primary Schools

School C

> The principal: a fairly new appointee, a black African female with less than three years experience. Before 2007, the principal was a HoD in a high school. The school is situated in a small township with peri-urban features.

School D

> The principal: a fairly experienced principal who has been at the helm since 2001. She is a black African female. The school is situated in a semi-rural area with limited resources.

School E

> The principal: an experienced black African female who has been a principal in this farm school since the late 90s. The school was formerly under on the private property of the farmer. The farmer has since severed his ties with the school.

School F

> The principal: an experienced white female who started her teaching career at this former Model C School when it had less than 200 learners. The school is situated in a small rural town with peri-urban features.

Methodology

The impact study took place in May 2009 and involved the following dimensions:

- Interviews with six ACE candidates (one at each school).
- Interviews with three people in each candidate's role sets; SGB parent member, SMT member and post level 1 educator.

- Shadowing all six candidates for one day each.
- Documentary analysis of enrolment figures and Grade 7 results for 2007 and 2008 at the combined/primary schools, and of matric results for 2007 and 2008 at the secondary schools.
- Documentary analysis of the candidates' portfolios.
- Interviews with five lecturers (the same people who were interviewed for the mid-term phase).

This report provides an integrated overview of these data sets and reaches conclusions about the value of the ACE programme for these candidates and for their schools. It also makes recommendations on the future of the programme.

Socio-Economic Factors

School F serves learners whose parents are largely middle class black Africans. Many parents in the school are professionals such as the police, teachers and nurses. The other five schools serve deprived rural, township or farm communities with high levels of poverty, squalor, unemployment, poor quality housing, child-headed families, drugs and alcohol abuse. School A, for example, is a school where 60% of the learners are also "bread winners". Their families have been ravaged by the AIDS pandemic. There has been little change in these circumstances since the research began in August 2007.

Awareness of the ACE Programme

Only the teachers were aware of the ACE programme. Parents had only a vague view of what the ACE was. One thought that the programme had to do with AIDS, probably confusing the acronym "ACE" for AIDS. The parents did not have much information on the ACE programme. Those who had some knowledge did not know the details of the programme and its objectives. The District Offices were responsible for nominating the candidates. The SMT members and educators were advised of the programme by the principals. Two of the parents became aware of the ACE programme through the SGB meetings.

Some SMT members became aware of the programme when their principal gave them topics on School Management (School C). In School B, the principal talked about the ACE and has given SMT members some photocopies from the ACE and has engaged his staff in discussions on various management topics. Others mentioned that they could see when the principal was trying out various strategies and assumed that these emanated from the ACE programme.

School Achievement

In both the baseline and mid-term phases of the study, there were divergent responses to this question. Secondary school respondents focused on academic achievement emphasizing mainly grade 12 results. The respondents use this as a yardstick for measuring the schools' success. In other schools, the focus was on not only academic achievement but also on the physical aspects of the school. The respondents appear more concerned about other issues pertaining to the school set up and programme.

Schools A and B (Secondary Schools)
The respondents in both schools talked about the matric results when asked about achievement. School B's respondents, for example, explained that they registered a record number of 183 candidates for matric. Only three of these failed but they were

still disappointed as they have achieved 100% in the past five years. The three failed because of English First language and respondents were quick to point out that, if the learners were writing in their mother tongue and not in English, the school could have achieved 100%. In Mathematics, 10 learners passed with distinctions.

School A's respondents also mentioned that their matric results were much better than the provincial percentage although in 2008 they were lower than in 2007. The school achieved a matric pass rate of 72% and in the previous year the matric results were around 80%. However, the respondents pointed out that the results were still encouraging considering the hardships that the school is going through, including the lack of proper resources (the school still does not have running water and no ablution facilities).

Schools C, D, E and F (primary schools)

The heads of all four primary schools talked about improved parental involvement, quality students, and learners' academic achievement as some forms of achievement. However, it was conspicuous to note that the respondents talked much about the need to change the schools' physical outlook. School F is far different from the first time the researcher visited it. The respondents showed the researcher around the premises with much pride and a sense of fulfilment. School C's respondents explain that they have just been granted more than R4 million to renovate the school and the school governing body chair explained that, "this achievement was through the initiatives of the principal". In School D, the respondents were also pleased because a new toilet for teachers was being built after years of teachers using the learners' toilet that has no running water. School E is a farm school and here the respondents were proud because the school is newly painted and there are also new computers. In all these schools, the respondents talked about the achievement of learners having improved since the previous year's results. However, the main emphasis was on the appearance of the schools. The principals in School D and School E mentioned that the neighbouring high schools wanted to recruit their grade 7 learners. This was attributed to the high pass rate in their schools. School F also had private schools looking forward to admitting their learners.

SMT members tended to mention academic related achievements whilst the parents were more likely to talk about the physical outlook of the school. In School C, for example, the SMT parents mentioned that achievement in the school had been great for the principal has managed to change the "traditional educators". She has introduced a number of innovations, including the use of IQMS, and the relationship between the parents and teachers has grown. The SGB member from the same school mentioned that the principal managed to renovate the old school buildings when she arrived. He also mentioned that the school recently held a successful 60th anniversary. He also hailed the introduction of a school library.

School and Community Relationships

The schools generally find this a major challenge, although responses were mixed. Whilst one respondent from a school might say there is some improvement in school meetings' attendance, another from the same school would say that there is a negligible change in numbers. In some schools, the relationships are worse than in others. The parent element is one particular area that poses challenges. Parents are not visible in the schools and the respondents say it is a struggle ensuring that parents do attend to school issues. In some schools, biological parents are not there at all. The following are some of the factors responsible for non-involvement of parents:

- Parents are not in the same domicile where the school is situated (this is mainly the case in School B where many learners are from the northern part of the Eastern Cape and only live on their own in KZN).

- Parents are not alive, mainly because of the AIDS pandemic. This is glaring in School A, the secondary school where more than half of the school's learners are heads of their families. In School D, many learners do not have parents, and foster parents and guardians appear not to be interested in school matters.
- The candidate in School D said that "parents are just not interested". School E's candidate concurs when she states that some parents would come to a meeting inebriated or reeking of alcohol and this makes it difficult to talk sensibly in meetings.

All these schools are trying various ways to lure parents and community. School B appears to be the best of these schools in working with the community and ensuring school success. Many learners' parents are not in KZN and so the learners are boarders. However, the principal and his staff are able to involve the community members in various ways. When teachers are absent from school, community members come to the school to supervise learners in classrooms. The school also involve community members for fund raising drives and this year they have made close to R100,000. In secondary school A, however, there is not much of a relationship between the school and the community. The principal has forged relationships with an outside group for the needy and this group feeds the learners every day. In school B, a religious group brings food to the school every day.

Generally, though, the relationships need significant improvement. The principals made various attempts to involve other stakeholders in their schools. Four of the candidates mentioned how the ACE programme has sensitized them as to the importance of the other stakeholders. They mention the environmental scan section. They said this was important as they were able to see the school as part of a larger whole that includes the community.

Contact Sessions

All the candidates highlighted the importance of the contact sessions. The candidate from School B is an Indian and he says that the contact sessions helped him to understand some colleagues from the township and the challenges they face. He says that he has come to appreciate the constraints in these schools and sees the efforts some of these principals are making.

The candidates wished that the contact sessions did not take the whole day because they get tired as the day progresses. Some of the concerns from the candidates had to do with preparations by the lecturing staff. School E's candidate, for example, highlighted that students sometimes went to lectures without knowing what was to be done on a particular day. School B's candidate pointed out that some facilitators did not have the necessary experience required for such a programme. Furthermore, others such as School F and School A's candidates were not happy with the stress on academic skills. They say that the programme is to produce better principals, not good academics. School A's principal said that some lecturers thought that all of them would continue with their studies and, in that case, the emphasis on academic writing would be relevant but many of them would not wish to study for a Master's programme. Candidates also complained that some facilitators did not use an interactive strategy and this created many problems as they had to listen to one person presenting.

Despite these criticisms, there was also praise for the contact sessions. The candidates pointed out that this is where they shared their experiences without any fear of criticism. It was also in the contact sessions that they found solutions for their schools. The contact sessions gave them a platform where they would discuss and sometimes discover that what they thought were problems were not problems at all.

The lecturing staff are satisfied with the contact sessions, saying that this is where everybody learns. Some felt that the numbers are too large, making it difficult to concentrate on individuals. They say that, when money permits, there is a need to have smaller groups during the contact sessions.

The candidates say the contact sessions are very fruitful when facilitated by university staff. However, they add that some outside tutors are not competent enough. School B's principal mentioned that one of the tutors was a lady who has never been a principal and he never felt that she was competent in presenting a principals' course. She was always found wanting in discussions. School D's principal said that they had a chance of sharing their schools' experiences in contact sessions. The principal said that it was always refreshing to have people whose views and interests are similar to yours.

Improving the contact sessions

The candidates maintain that all facilitators should promote the interactive approach purported by the programme. The candidates also wished that contact sessions should be used to inform them with new information and facilitators should not regurgitate only what is in the study materials. The candidates also stated that they wish that lecturers, and not outside tutors, would facilitate in the programme. They said they had problems with some of the tutors who did not seem to know what is expected of them. These tutors ended up wasting the candidates' time. Some of them would break the classes early because they were not well versed with their work. Candidates from School F and School A mentioned that their tutor used to come to class unprepared, with no study guides, and with no information beyond that which is presented in the guides. These two also concurred that the university should always try to get effective facilitators. The candidates also stressed that there needs to be more frequent and shorter contact sessions than the long contact sessions during block attendance. The latter was shared by lecturers who also maintain that some material proved too much for the candidates in a day.

Some lecturers maintained that contact sessions should be attended by fewer candidates to enable them to work in smaller groups. One other lecturer said that contact sessions can be problematic because of logistical challenges, for example when the candidates wanted better food and better accommodation. In future, the candidates should organise accommodation and catering themselves because these logistics can delay contact sessions. The lecturers also felt that, because KZN is vast, the candidates need to be grouped in districts and wards.

Teaching Materials

The lecturers are full of praise for the ACE materials. They say that the material has everything that any school leader and manager would need. However, one lecturer stated that the only problem was that some candidates "are not literate enough for the material". He added however, that the material cannot be blamed for this. The lecturers highlighted the following:

- The content is in line with relevant issues such as the IQMS.
- The material is relevant but the candidates are different.
- The programme needs smart lecturers to use the material.
- The material is not intimidating.
- They identify with the material and find it user friendly.

The lecturers also pointed out that:

- The material is structured but the students don't engage with it.
- Sometimes the modules are not doing enough as to tell when activities need to be done.
- Some principals are not very literate but the writers of the modules cannot be blamed.
- The material can sometimes be too theoretical.

It appears that the lecturers have few criticisms of the materials. They stressed that the materials address many issues in schools today and are very relevant. They also said that the candidates who find time to read this material will improve their positions immensely. The activities are also very appropriate, although the Portfolio lecturer said sometimes he finds that he has to use activities from other modules because there are not enough relevant activities in the Portfolio materials.

Using the national materials

The university adapted the national materials. They say they used various relevant sources to supplement the material. They added Emotional Intelligence articles from journals for example, because "this is touched on vaguely in the study guides". In the mentoring module, the HEI used newspaper articles and books. While the guides remained the main sources, the lecturers used any other relevant information they found. The portfolio lecturer says that he did not see any need to use other material although he had to use examples from other ACE modules for activities.

The lecturers also say that the university has to offer 16 credit modules. Some of these were upgraded to 16 credits and some ACE modules were downgraded to 16 credits. Interestingly though, none of the content was cut in the process. They say that it would be interesting to see what other institutions have done when it comes to these logistics.

Generally, the candidates were impressed by the materials although they state that it is such a lot to study. The candidates say that the materials have everything that the principal needs. They say the books are big though and require a lot of diligence. School C's principal says that the material is good and helpful because she, like many other principals. never received any induction. The course material is able to do this well. Some tutors, though, are not able to use the materials well. School F's principal states that their tutor would sometimes not be able to make meaningful use of the materials and they could see that he was not familiar with the content.

Mentoring

The mentoring experiences of the candidates varied, with two extremes. Mentoring is central to the ACE programme. The candidates are supposed to be supported by mentors who will nurture and monitor their professional growth as they journey into the ACE experience.

One of the most important aspects was the selection of mentors. The HEI asked the candidates to present names of possible mentors. Mentors were selected from the ranks of retired principals, retired district officials, and other stakeholders who have an interest in education. These people were then trained by a mentoring expert in one workshop. Their brief was then to mentor the candidates (about 15 per mentor) by visiting them in their schools, supporting them in various ways, and facilitating discussions on

one Saturday per month from 09:00-15:00. Some candidates, though, never experienced on-site visits by any mentor. The role sets in some schools also stated that they had never seen anybody from the university. In the sample of six candidates, only two really had an effective mentoring experience. The two who had good experiences say that their mentor always went "the extra mile". She visited their schools, talked to staff members, and mentored the candidates effectively. During her on-site visits, the mentor had one-to-one conferences with the candidates as she told them of her observations.

However, the other four candidates stated that their mentors did not seem to know what they were supposed to do. Their mentors never really helped as they should have done. School A and School B candidates state that their mentor was always ill-prepared and did not have any capacity to mentor anyone. School A and School E candidates also say that their mentor was a good person, but he failed them as a mentor. While he would send them sms's frequently, the mentor never supported them to enhance their management.

The lecturers stated that the mentoring process was going well although they added that there were many candidates for a single mentor and this aspect needed improvement. The lecturers also stated that the mentors and candidates should be grouped according to wards and districts because it is sometimes difficult for mentors to visit remote areas. There was also a need to have more mentors to make the process more effective. The administrative coordinator of the ACE programme said that mentoring is a project on its own and needs a full time person to coordinate it if it is to be successful. The coordinator says it is very difficult to manage mentoring, given the size of the programme. He adds that district officials should play a role and this must be part of their job description.

Improving the mentoring process

The lecturers are generally happy with the current mentoring model. However, they point out that there needs to be more money allocated for mentors to be effective. The administrative coordinator stated that the mentors need to be full time and be based in the HEIs. The coordinator said that the team of mentors need to come to a common place, report frequently and share information. Whilst the lecturers concur that there were problems initially, they believe that the mentoring process has improved. One even stated that "the mentoring process was perfect and there was nothing to improve".

The candidates, though, maintained that the mentors need to be given a list of responsibilities before they start their work. The four candidates with "ineffective" mentors stated that the mentors do not seem to have been thoroughly briefed as to what was expected of them. Two of these candidates also stated that mentors should specifically help in assignments and be visible in schools. All the candidates also stated that the mentors are necessary because all principals need the support that mentors are supposed to offer. The candidates with the effective mentor argued that more time was necessary; that mentors need more time to be on-site and see what really happens in the schools.

Candidate views of mentoring

School C and School D candidates praised their mentor. She was always there when they needed her. The mentor was diligent and visited the mentees whenever they needed her in their schools. The two candidates also stated that the mentor got a feel for their schools by talking to staff and learners. However, the other four candidates did not benefit much from the mentoring process. The four pointed out that the HEI's lecturers should work hand-in-glove with the mentors. The mentors should know what needs to be

done at the various stages of the programme. School B and School E candidates say their mentor sent sms's of encouragement almost every week but he never really mentored them. Whilst they concur that he is a good person, he does not do much as a mentor and needs a list of duties of what is expected of him. The candidates all agreed that all principals need to be mentored.

Stakeholder views

Most of the other stakeholders (especially parents) knew anything about the work, or even the existence, of the mentor. It was difficult for them to attribute any changes to mentor support. In some schools, even teachers are not aware of the mentor. However, School C and School D's stakeholders were all aware of the mentor because she introduced herself to everyone in the school.

Networking

The principles underpinning the ACE include an emphasis on school managers working and learning together in networks or clusters. The responses from the lecturers and candidates show that there were no formal networks in KZN. Some lecturers appear to be referring largely to the work of the mentor as networking. Yet, there is much networking that happened during some of the mentoring sessions. However, the effect of this differed as one moved from group to group. It was significant to note that lecturers appear to be pleased with the networks although the majority of the candidates did not see much effect of the networking sessions.

Improving networks

The six candidates talked about the challenges that affect the formation of effective networks. Distances are among the challenges. Many candidates live far apart from one another. School B's candidate added that it is difficult for high school principals to network with primary school teachers because the challenges are different. The work of the primary school principals is different from that of the high school teacher. However, the candidates appeared to concur that district officials and mentors can be effective facilitators of meaningful networks. The administrative coordinator of the programme also agreed that district officials should play a role in mentoring as well as networks.

Candidate views

School B principal said that they tried to establish networks but this never took off because the person who was supposed to be the facilitator left the programme. Moreover, there were always going to be problems for high school principals combined with primary school principals. However, other candidates, especially from School A and School F, state that they never experienced any networks. It was also interesting to note that even the two with an effective mentor say that they never had good networks because of distances between schools. School C's candidate said they tried but the person who was supposed to be the facilitator was a very selfish man who did not want to share information and resources. All the candidates said that there were never formal networks in their groups. What the candidates did was to group themselves as friends to do assignments or discuss among themselves when supervised tasks were to be written.

Many of the role set teachers highlighted that the schools did network with neighbouring schools. Many seemed to imply that this happened long before the ACE. The role set candidates saw value in the networks as their schools learnt a lot from the other schools.

Assessment

One of the distinguishing features of the national ACE is its stress on site-based assessment, so that learning can be applied to candidates' leadership and management practice. The assessment tool employed by the University, and by other providers, is the portfolio, which is intended to include all the assignments set by the University, together with school-based documents, student reflections and a research project.

The former acting co-ordinator says that ACE assessment is 'a totally different model'; it is a challenge to assess what it sets out to assess. Assessment relates to academic factors, personal development and school improvement. The initial SWOT analysis is linked to mid-term and final assessment. Students were given a resubmission opportunity.

The ACE administrative co-ordinator says that the problem with assignments is that the principals do not respect due dates and this does not help administratively. Initially, the candidates were not honest; they would say they submitted their assignments when they had not done so. The administrator also points out that the quality of assignment feedback was very poor. The candidates also constantly complained because they were not getting their assignments back. Another lecturer says that the assessment of the portfolio is itself a challenge because many of them have never assessed the portfolio before. He adds that" site-based assessment has been messy". Many candidates were never visited on-site. Distance and time are the main reasons why site-based assessment could not be done. All the lecturers stated that they would have liked to assess the candidates in their schools but they could not do so because of distance and financial constraints.

Another lecturer says that assessment tasks had been practice-based. Excellent work had come out of the assessment tasks. However, some candidates do not "produce work that is up to standard". However, all the lecturers concur that the practice-based assessment has helped change many candidates in their leadership and management practice.

Verification of on-site assessment

On-site assessment generally did not happen for many candidates. Mentors were supposed to support the candidates on-site as the mentors tried to enhance their leadership expertise. Only two candidates had fruitful on-site visits from their mentor. The other four candidates had never received on-site visits from the mentors. The two candidates who were supported in their schools by their mentor found the experience very worthwhile.

The administrative coordinator, and the other lecturers, maintain that it would have helped if they had full time mentors based at the university. These individuals need to have a budget and be able to visit schools on an ongoing basis.

Improving the assessment process

The lecturers state that the assessment process improved as time went on. Initially they had problems in the programme. Sometimes they would not be sure who submitted assignments and who did not because frequently the candidates would say they submitted assignments even when there was no proof of this. However, now the university devised a means of ensuring that every candidate receives an acknowledgement slip when they submit assignments. However, there is a problem in that the candidates are not getting their assignments back because the university keeps them. The candidates might not be able to correct the mistakes they have made in their assignments. The other challenge that the university appear to have tried to resolve was the feedback

on assignments. Initially the feedback on assignments was poor and the lecturers feel that this has now improved. However, the students might not see the comments unless they are given the assignments to photocopy.

The candidates complained that there were too many assignments. However, these were reduced in their second year.

Candidates' views

The candidates are fairly content with the second year's assessment. They are concerned with the fact that they are not allowed to take their assignments home because they need these to improve their practice. Some of their concerns are:

- The assignments are supposed to be practical but, because there is no time, they end up using much theory to address issues.
- The supervised task is too theoretical and should not be used to test practical skills in the ACE.
- Feedback should come sooner
- There is need for 50-50 weighting between the assignments and the supervised tasks. Currently it is 75%-25%.

Impact on School Leadership and Management

A distinctive feature of the national ACE programme is the intention to have a direct impact on candidates' leadership and management practice. The learning model assumes that participants will improve their practice by implementing course theory in their schools and classrooms.

Managing time

During the baseline study, all participants were observed for one day to see how they spent their time. This process was repeated during the impact phase to see if the ACE course had prompted any changes. All the candidates stated that it is always challenging to manage time. They say that the work of a principal is such that time cannot be managed well because the day changes once you arrive at school. A parent comes, it can be the Circuit Office phoning, and so on, and whatever one has planned can be changed easily by the other eventualities. An example of the latter happened as the researcher shadowed School E's principal. A phone rang instructing her to attend a meeting in a neighbouring school. She was never informed about this meeting. Ordinarily, she would have had to leave the school and attend but, because of the researcher's presence, she excused herself. Although all the principals said it was difficult to manage time, the role sets all said that the principals were very good in managing time. The parents, the teachers and the SMT were impressed by time management skills of their principals.

School F's principal starts every day with a short (10-15 minutes) meeting. At 07:00, the staff are expected at the school and the school starts at 07:30. School B also employs the same strategy. It was impressive to see how School B's principal juggles his time. Of all the schools that the researcher visited, this seemed to be the busiest. However, the principal tries to squeeze in a lot and this includes his grade 12 class teaching. Whilst the principal said that he found time management a challenge, he appeared to be in control of all the programmes happening in the school. During the shadowing, he met different parents in the morning session, taught a class and still found time to move around the school. The SMT member mentioned that the principal walks around the school to see that everything is still going well.

In other schools, it appeared as if the principals are still doing mostly administrative work in their offices. The common feature that appears to be emphasized by the candidates in their schools is teaching and learning. They find this crucial in ensuring the success of their schools. One principal summed it up by stating that, "the time is not yours. We are here even in the December holiday because all has to be done...I could have done justice to the ACE course had I had more time."

Management practice

The candidates and their role sets are convinced that their management practice has been enhanced as a result of their involvement in the ACE programme. When the researcher perused some of the schools' documents, it was clear that these schools have indeed moved from the position they were in during the baseline study period. The principals showed improved organisation, for example in respect of filing and application of policy. Their confidence was also enhanced.

During the interviews the principals were more articulate about what their roles should entail. They were also more critical of the Department of Education, and of the district office, but also of themselves. During shadowing, the researcher could see evidence of teamwork and delegation. In School F, School D and School A, the researcher noticed vestiges of shared leadership as colleagues entered the office for various reasons. In School B, the teachers have a high regard for their principal and it is not difficult to see why, for their principal commands respect. The man knows what needs to be done and clearly gives direction to his colleagues.

Accountability

Candidates gave different answers to this question. One candidate says that she is accountable for everything, although she delegates as well. She says that she is accountable for finance, for daily attendance of teachers but teaching and learning is the core. The other candidate mentioned general management and administration as crucial and also stated that finances are important because they make teaching and learning more effective. Several candidates mentioned that they are in the schools for the sake of the learners and this is why there needs to be emphasis on this. The role sets also highlighted the importance of teaching and learning in their respective schools. A number of SMT members stated that they are accountable to the school and the principal has to ensure that a good culture of teaching and learning prevails at the schools. They agree that their accountability is to the principal and the general parent body.

The researcher could not find any candidate who said that they are accountable to the Circuit Office. In fact, School C's principal said that the Circuit Office personnel frequently do not know what is happening in the schools. The principal stated that it is the parents who are more knowledgeable about what is happening in the school than the Circuit Office. These responses are not significantly different from those in the baseline study.

School Improvement

If the ACE programme is doing what it is supposed to achieve, there should be improvement in the candidates' schools. All the candidates and their role sets had much praise for the ACE programme and highlighted ways in which their schools were changing for the better. School A's principal says his school has many challenges, including no running water. However, the candidate has been able to motivate his staff and has ensured that his school is always on top in the ward despite their lack of resources. School B's principal is hailed by all in the school as a good motivator, leader and manager. Teachers in the school say they gain directly

from the principal's involvement in the ACE because he literally transfers the skills to the teachers. The HODs in the school have various copies from the ACE that the principal uses to train his own management. The school is still leading when it comes to matric results, with a 98% pass rate. School F's principal says she has seen her own improvement as she has moved from being a soft leader to being a strong leader. She thinks that her school has attained so much, including new buildings and better fund raising strategies, because of the ACE involvement.

School E is the farm school and it has many challenges when one looks at the physical building. However, the teachers and stakeholders praise the principal for teamwork that she has instilled in the school. They say that the principal involves her staff in almost everything. The same is said by School D's stakeholders, who say that the principal has improved the school through the improvement of her leadership style. They say that the principal believes in team work. They say that, through her ACE involvement, the school has changed for the better. The role set members in School C also praise the involvement of the mentor in their school. They maintain that her involvement has ensured that the principal becomes more polished in the manner in which she leads the school.

Parents in some of the schools praised the principal's leadership of meetings. In Schools D and E, the chairpersons highlighted how the meetings were better run and they could clearly attribute this to the principal's ACE involvement. The stakeholders also talked about learner success as being attributable to the ACE involvement. They also felt that their schools were better managed and this trickled through to the learners, hence the improved academic performance.

Professional Development

The national ACE programme was expected to prove challenging for university staff because of its practice-based orientation and its site-based assessment strategy. The five lecturers all point to professional development gains through their participation in the programme:

- A 'microscopic' view of how universities work
- Experiencing good aspects of mentoring students
- It was rewarding to be able to address various stakeholders such as district personnel
- Using certain strategies in other programmes they teach e.g. portfolios
- Understanding the infrastructure in schools
- Using participating schools as centres of research
- Better understanding of principals' needs.

Generally, the lecturers enjoyed their involvement in the programme. They all say that they are using certain skills gained in other modules and programmes they are involved in at the University.

Perceptions of the ACE Programme

Best parts of the ACE programme

The five HEI participants identify several strengths of the programme:

- The contact sessions which enable the candidates to share experiences

- Collegial learning, networking and support
- Good materials
- The teachers' stories give the lecturers meaningful contexts
- The discussions that make one understand where the candidates are coming from

The current academic coordinator of the programme says it is difficult for him to single out any parts from the programme. He says, generally, that the programme is empowering and he sees it as synergy of various aspects of management. The different parts make the programme run as well as it does. Significantly, the contact sessions are cited by all the lecturers, as well as the candidates, as the best part of the programme. The contact sessions were seen as a forum for debates and this was where the principals shared their inadequacies in a protected and collegial environment. The candidates praise the programme and wish that factors such as networking and mentoring, which did not work well in various districts, could have enhanced the programme even more.

Improving the ACE programme

The five lecturers speak favourably of the ACE programme but point out that there is still much room for improvement, as follows:

- Student commitment; students need to be sensitized around the issues of being committed to the programme.
- More contact time for more quality.
- Teaching the candidates more skills, including academic writing.
- Ensuring that there is always a link between theory and the activities in the materials.
- Ensuring that site visits do occur.
- Improving how the mentors are managed.
- Ensure that lecturers are more committed even to "an undergraduate programme".
- There need to be more full time than part-time personnel in the ACE programme.

The ACE co-ordinator comments that 'there is always room for improvement' but it is a good programme.

The candidates, though, believed that the materials have much information for part-time students. They also believe that the university should not have emphasized academic writing as most of them would not progress to higher degrees anyway. School A's principal said that he sometimes felt that some lecturers were preparing them for the academic world whereas many of the ACE candidates were in the programme to improve their leadership and management styles. This was supported by School F's principal who said that sometimes there was much stress on citations and proper academic writing rather than on practice-based management and leadership. The candidates also concurred that the work was too much for a certificate qualification and should be changed into a Diploma.

Meeting candidates' expectations

Despite the challenges that the candidates pointed out during the interviews, it was clear that the ACE programme met their expectations. Their emphasis on gains differed. Some were impressed by the way the programme enhanced their computer skills while others generally praised the way the programme changed the way they looked at leadership and management. School E's principal says that she is so empowered in management and leadership that she could apply the skills from ACE anywhere. She

says she is now a well-rounded manager. School B's principal says when he started the programme he could not use the computer and hoped that the programme would empower him in computer use. After more than a year in the programme, he says that his expectations were met as she is now able to use the computer. School A, School F and School C's principals all say that the programme has made them better managers of their schools.

All the candidates appear to have had good and not so good experiences. School B's principal says, "my expectation was to learn. I am now confident in ICT and I wish that more time was given to this part of the programme. However, there were tutors who were not good enough to be in the programme. We needed people who would understand the nature of principalship and also listen to our experiences. Unfortunately one or two tutors were not ready to do this." However, even this principal says that the ACE has empowered him to be a better principal. He says that it is a pity that the district officials missed this opportunity because districts can be run well if the district officials are also empowered. The candidate says that "the managers do not seem to be aware of what is happening in the programme. The weakest would be empowered in the programme. But the Department is not keeping in touch with what is happening. This must start from the Department".

Additional points

The interviewees were given the opportunity to offer additional comments. All the candidates believed that the ACE programme should continue. One candidate from School E says the ACE has empowered her so much that she can work anywhere with those skills gained. School B's candidate says that, through the ACE, he is now computer literate. School C's candidate says that she got into the programme whilst she was only a few months in her principalship. The ACE has been a good induction trip for her. She has gained in confidence. School D's principal feels that more educators should be given a chance and be able to be part of the ACE programme in future. All the candidates see the ACE programme in a positive light; they maintained that school principals should all be able to study through the programme. Some candidates stated that maybe the district officials should also be part of the programme otherwise they would find themselves less empowered and leading more empowered principals. The principals believe that now they are good managers, although some say there is still room for improvement. For example, many still cannot manage time well.

The university lecturers made several different points in response to this question:
- Students need more help to do the course.
- Lecturers should visit schools more often.
- The ACE should continue but commitment needs to be instilled in the candidates.
- The programme is good in instilling a sense of lifelong learning among the candidates.
- The ACE should be supported in HEIs so that the programme cannot revert to a traditional university programme.
- Challenges of time, human resource and economics need to be resolved so that the programme can run well.
- There is a need to modularize some of the modules, as students are divided into (i) new principals (ii) aspiring principals and (iii) experienced principals

Overview of KZN case studies

University

The University has adapted the programme in several ways since the first pilot cohort. These include changes in assessment. In the first year, there were more than two assignments per module and now these have been reduced. In the researcher's first visit, one of the complaints from the candidates was that there were too many assignments. The university has also improved control of assignments by giving candidates slips after they submit assignments. There used to be confusion as some candidates claimed to have submitted assignments even when they had not done so. The lecturers in the programme also maintained that assessment is now well received by the candidates.

The university has also supplemented much of the DoE supplied material with their materials. They have used journal articles and books. The lecturers believe that this was necessary at times and the candidates appreciated it. One of the candidates concurs with this when he says that "the ACE materials are of a high international standard". Another candidate was quoted as saying, "although it (the material) appears too much, I cannot think of what to cut because everything seems to be so important to our improvement".

The lecturers also stated that the ACE teaching has made them better lecturers in other courses and modules that they are teaching at the university. They also concur that they were too lenient to the students and might need to tighten their management of the course in future. The five lecturers also maintain that that the ACE is impacting favourably on the quality of leadership in schools. They have listened to the discussions and debates by the candidates in the various contact sessions and believe that the ACE will change the schools for the better.

The lecturers also agree that the ACE should continue although the HEIs should also take it upon themselves and make sure that the students are committed. The administrative coordinator even suggests that future students should pay for themselves if they are to be committed. He also suggests that the Department of Education can motivate the students by refunding all those who complete the course or give them R20,000, whichever is the greater. The university staff also hints that there needs to be more contact time if quality is to be attained. One also stated that they would benefit extensively if they can also get research reports on the ACE, including the Zenex/ACE research. The latter would help them see what needs to be done and what has already been achieved or not achieved. One also says that the research findings should lead to more research and this will help the universities involved.

Schools

Five of the six schools are disadvantaged, serving poor township communities. Learners are often hungry and in four of these schools the candidates take it upon themselves to ensure that the learners eat. Some use the networking skills learnt in the ACE programme to involve the stakeholders outside the school to help rescuing those learners who cannot sustain themselves.

Standards, as measured by matric and test results, are maintained at the two high schools. The primary schools also report high pass rates in their grade 7 tests and report good discipline from the learners. The candidates appear to be focused in wanting to ensure that their schools progress. What is significant is that the ACE candidates in the schools attribute their schools' success to the ACE programme.

The ACE programme

The first field test cohort in KZN has now completed the programme. The case study candidates praise the programme. Talking to the candidates, one gets the sense that it has changed their practice for the better. One principal stated that her skills are now applicable outside the school. One displayed documents that he has started compiling since the ACE. The other showed his newly gained skills in computers and the Gannt Chart he used in executing a big fundraising project in the school. Another explained how her school improved after she introduced class visits to evaluate the work teachers do. Generally teachers related a number of stories as to how they have gained through the ACE. Whilst the candidates talked very much about the challenges encountered in the programme, they were not short of praise. Many explained clearly how their schools have changed. What was also clear was the confidence displayed by the candidates. In the researcher's first visit to the schools, some candidates were not confident as they talked about their school and their practice. However, except for one principal, all the candidates displayed confidence as they talked about their management practice. The candidates appear to not have been sapped of their energy by the unwelcome supervised tasks and late, and incomplete, assignment feedback. Some of these candidates have changed their management approach significantly. School A's candidate was asked by the district to help struggling neighbouring schools. School B's candidate continues to produce good results and is 'workshopping' his own teachers, using some of the ACE materials, meaning that the gain is not just for the individual candidate, but is for the whole school. School C's candidate has also got recognition from the district and peers and is also helping in training some teachers in the district. This candidate is also very enthusiastic and regards ACE highly. She has also changed her school around and teachers talk highly of her. Even when the candidates highlight some challenges in the programme, they also stress the success of the programme in ensuring that they improve their schools.

Limpopo

Introduction

The first field test of the Limpopo group began in 2007 and ended in November 2008. The research began with three case study candidates but there has been sample erosion and only one candidate remained to the end of the research project. The three case study candidates were:

Secondary school

The candidate is an experienced African female principal of a semi-rural high school, who was promoted to a circuit management position after completing the ACE programme in 2008. This candidate was in her late forties and had 21 years of experience in the school. When she got promoted she had been principal of this large secondary school (approximately 1000 learners) since 2002.

Senior primary school

The candidate is an African male principal of a senior primary school located in a deep rural village. This candidate did not make himself available for the final phase of the research, despite several attempts, but he did complete the study programme.

Primary school

The candidate is an African female principal of a rural primary school in her late forties. The principal is one of the two founding members of the school (both of whom are still with the school). Since foundation in 1987, the school has grown from two teachers to five by 2009, including one teacher who was on study leave, and offers a complete primary education course from Grade R to 7 in a multi-grade system. In spite of this growth, the school is struggling and has been declared a quintile one no-fee-paying school. The school has a single block of four classrooms and uses a multi-grade system. At the time of the impact visit, the principal was the only teacher of a combined Grade R and One class. Teaching these two combined grades left the principal no time for management and administration duties within school hours.

Methodology

The impact study took place in March 2009 and involved the following dimensions:
- Shadowing the ACE candidate for one full day
- Interview with the ACE candidate
- Interviews with two people in the candidate's role sets; SGB parent member, and a senior educator.
- Documentary analysis of enrolment figures and Grade 7 results for 2007 and 2008.
- Documentary analysis of the candidates' portfolios.
- An exit interview with the ex-principal candidate who was promoted into circuit management.

The SMT member of the primary school was not available for interview. The interviews with the lecturers form part of the Mpumalanga report. This report provides an overview of the above data sets and makes conclusions about the value of the ACE programme for the candidates and for the schools. It also makes recommendations on the future of the programme.

Socio-economic background of the learners and the community

The schools continue to serve deprived rural communities characterised by poverty, illiteracy and unemployment, where most of the parents and grandparents survive on government social grants. In addition to these, the secondary school also dealt with teenage pregnancy and drug abuse.

The primary school still has a feeding scheme but, with its status changing to quintile one, they now manage their own finances and manage the day-to-day feeding of the learners from their own budget. On the shadowing day, there was no food for the learners because the supplier had not brought food the previous week. The principal was not even aware of this until it was time for lunch. According to the principal, the absence of food was a rare occasion but when it does happen children in the nearby homes are sent home to go and eat. On this particular occasion, learners in grades R and 1 were asked to go home but none did so.

Awareness of the programme

All members of the role sets were aware that the principal has been taking the ACE course. The principal had advised the governing body and the educators before she embarked on the programme. During her studies, the educators were often asked to do some tasks (such as preparation of lesson plans, drawing up policies and filling in some questionnaires) to help the principal

with some of her assignments. When the principal was away attending the lectures, educator colleagues had to complete her work at the school. "We were always getting involved and working together", the senior member of staff added.

The baseline and mid-term studies revealed that there were high levels of awareness of the principals' involvement with the ACE in the secondary and senior primary schools.

School achievement

The baseline and mid-term phases show different responses on this issue with the secondary school focusing mainly on academic performance while primary schools included other types of achievement. A similar pattern prevailed in the impact phase.

Primary school

There was consensus between the educators, the principal and governing body chairperson that Grade seven results had significantly improved in 2008 compared to previous years. They obtained 100% pass rate in 2008 when in 2007 they had some failures. This success was attributed largely to the principal's involvement in the ACE, in which the entire school participated in her support. The senior member of staff, however, believed it was the effort put in by all of them in helping the principal with her tasks.

Although the Grade 7 results had improved, Maths Literacy (Numeracy) for Grade 6 was worse this year compared to the previous year. The school did not have a good record of performance in Numeracy but the 2008 results were the worst so far. The senior member of staff who teaches grades 6 and 7 believes the 2008 tests were too difficult for the standard of the learners in the school while the principal blames this poor performance on the multi-grade system. However, performance in Literacy was better than in Numeracy. The principal said that learners seem generally better at reading than at figures. She believes that learners need more practice, which they presently cannot have because of the multi-grade system.

Academic performance was the main indicator of achievement in the baseline and mid-term reports. However, in the impact phase, achievement was also measured in terms of learner punctuality. According to the principal, attendance had never been a problem in the school but learners were coming in late. This has significantly improved and the senior member of staff believes it is because the principal puts more pressure on the learners. The senior member of staff has observed improvement on the part of the principal in terms of punctuality as well, and believes she sets a good example to the learners and other educators.

The governing body chairperson's view of achievement was measured in terms of physical developments in the school. She also noted that, since the principal enrolled on the ACE programme, there have been several changes in the school. These included the water pump and tank, the school garden, electricity and photocopier, which the school did not have before. She believes that, even if indirectly, the ACE "had something to do with it".

Secondary school

The exit interview with the ex-principal of the secondary school suggested that the Grade 12 results had also improved in 2008 as compared to previous years. They had almost a 100% pass rate with only one learner failing. Although she did not attribute this success to the ACE programme, she acknowledged that such a high pass rate had never been achieved in that school before.

Senior primary

The mid-term study revealed a broad response to the question on school achievement with regard to the senior primary school. The principal reported on the school's acquisition and use of computers and the school's development of school policy guidelines. There was no comment on academic performance.

Overall, school achievement was seen in a more positive light during the impact phase compared to the earlier phases. In the baseline phase, the candidates and other interviewees focused more on what was hindering achievement, such as low numbers of classrooms and shortage of teachers. In the impact phase, the focus was more on the achievements of the school, although these problems were still evident.

School and community relationships

The principal of the primary school believes that the relationships have improved since the baseline phase. Parents' attendance at school meetings has significantly improved. Previously, parents would not come to school meetings despite several calls.

The community also appears to be more cooperative. During the impact study, the school had installed a fenced garden, which was put up by community members. According to the senior educator, the school had an unfenced garden before, which was maintained by the learners and not community members. On the day of the shadowing, parents were observed working in the school garden. Although the principal was not sure how much of this was related to the ACE programme, the senior member of staff attributed this success to the ACE course because the principal tried to involve the parents before but it did not work. "Perhaps it has to do with her approach", the senior educator added.

The principal of the secondary school also reported on increased parental involvement. Relationships in the senior primary school had always been sound even during the baseline study. In the latter, this was marked by parents' willingness to cook for learners without getting paid. In the baseline study, some tensions were picked up from some the senior educators who were apparently not being given the recognition they deserved. These were not as strong in the mid-term study, as the promotion of one educator into the SMT improved working relations between him and the principals. Overall, relationships were sound amongst all stakeholders.

Contact Sessions

The candidates' view of contact sessions varied. One found it difficult to adjust to the rules and regulations of the university while the other's initial response was that sessions were tiresome. There were varied responses in terms of the teaching methods – one preferred the lectures where they were taught by the lecturers while the other enjoyed the interactive sessions more.

The high school principal found the entire year one just repetitive of what she had done before and not very challenging. But she found year two informative and practical. However, the general view is that sessions were useful in both their didactic and interactive nature. Interactive sessions allowed candidates to engage more with the issues and with their mentors. Individual issues were dealt with during school visits.

Improving contact sessions

One candidate was comfortable with the model used, while the other would have liked to see more time being allocated to the actual lectures. The latter felt that groups were more for discussions of assignments and did not deal with the content of the lectures.

Teaching Materials

The candidates thought the materials were too bulky. However, they found their style accessible and practical. One of them added that the materials use an outcomes based approach, which they are familiar with in their own teaching. They also observed that the lecturers used their own materials, and not the national material, during the second year. They only used the national materials for reference. The principal of the rural primary school found the ICT module "useless" since she did not have access to a computer.

Mentoring

The candidates' view of mentoring was that it was a very useful practice. They all had good relationships with their mentors whom they felt were useful and helped them with improving their practice as well as assignments. They found the interactions with mentors most useful.

The principal of the primary school found the mentor very supportive and helpful in giving guidance. The mentor helped them at the school, particularly to develop a good foundation with the multi-grade – that they must also give attention to the lower grade by using the lower grade curriculum instead of just the upper grade one which used to be the case. The principal felt that this advice helped not just her, but the entire school, to adopt a different approach to teaching in a multi-grade system. She was very grateful to the mentor.

Stakeholders' views of mentoring
The school governing body chairperson was not aware of the mentoring process and could not say whether any of the changes she saw resulted from this process. However, the senior educator was aware of the "old white man" who used to come to the school in the morning and spent some hours with the principal. The senior educator never had a chance to interact personally with the principal's mentor but, as educators, they were always preparing stuff (such as their own lesson plans) for the principal to show the mentor. The senior educator added that, since the ACE course, the principal was more hard working and always pushed them as staff to do their best.

Improving the mentoring process
The principal of the primary school felt that there should be more individual interaction sessions with the mentors while the high school candidate thought the model was perfect as it is. According to the candidate, mentoring has been the "best part" of the ACE programme.

Networking

Candidates' view of networks

When asked about networking, the principal of the primary school asked what it was, suggesting that networking never happened in her case. According to her, they never had any meeting sessions as candidates except for when they met with the mentors. However, the mid-term report showed all candidates reflected on local networks. This might be explained by the ex-principal of the high school's remark that, "networking happened on the bus when we were travelling to Pretoria". She added that they also networked through mentoring sessions, but did not have specific networking sessions. These responses suggest that networks did not work well for the Limpopo candidates. There was also a bit of confusion amongst the candidates with the terms 'networking' and 'mentoring'. This suggested that what candidates called 'networking' could have been group mentoring. There were no networking sessions for the researcher to observe.

Stakeholders' view of networks

Contrary to what the principal of the primary school says, her senior educator remarked that, although she was not sure, the principal would sometimes leave the school to meet with a colleague at another place (school). She added that the principal sometimes left the school to meet with other principals and she would request them to answer some questions that would give the information she needed for her meetings with her colleagues. This was most likely to have been continued assignment discussions with colleagues and not networking on school improvement issues.

Networking is one of the most significant principles underpinning the ACE programme. However, it is evident that there was no 'proper' networking in this case, but the bus interactions and other implied informal meetings may be significant. Perhaps, as one candidate suggested, a more organised approach to networking would be the most obvious way forward.

Assessment

The mid-term reports suggested that candidates did not get feedback in time and that there were too many assessment tasks. Although candidates felt that there were too many assessment tasks, they appreciated the usefulness of the feedback, which helped them with the implementation. However, the relief felt by candidates after completing the ACE suggests that they spent more time on assessment tasks than on improving their practice. There was no mention of late feedback in the impact phase, which suggests there could have been some improvement on the part of the lecturers' response rate.

Lecturers set assignments and although tiresome, candidates found them very useful and practical. Most of these assignments dealt with school policies, finances, budgets and safety policies. They had some of these policies before but the ACE course through assessment helped them with better implementation.

The ACE programme also stressed on-site-assessment as a very significant component of the programme. All interviewees reported that mentors did the on-site verification of the portfolio. The mentors went through the portfolio with the candidate. The ex-principal of the high school remarked that the compilation of a portfolio was the most useful assessment task. "I still use my portfolio even as a circuit manager", she added.

Improving assessment practices

The candidates suggested cutting down the number of assessment tasks.

Impact on school leadership and management

Managing time

Candidates were observed for one day to see how they spent their time during both the baseline and impact studies. The baseline study revealed that principals were mostly office bound except the principal of the multi-grade primary school who had a full time teaching load. However, the impact phase shadowing showed worse results for the multi-grade principal. The principal taught a combined Grade R & 1 class with no assistance at all this time. This commitment left her with no time for management and administration duties within work hours. She performed the management duties in breaks and after school when learners were gone home.

In spite of the full teaching load, the principal commented that she has actually learnt to manage her time better. The ACE course taught them a lot about time-management and prioritising. She has learnt how to prioritise and, besides the teaching, she has learnt to address what is more urgent and more important while, previously, she would want to do everything at the same time, even when she did not have time. She does not take work home any more, which is what she used to do before the ACE programme.

The principal holds short meetings with all four staff members after assembly while learners are getting ready to settle down. This meeting was observed on the shadowing day and the principal acknowledged that the shadowing day was indeed her typical day. School finishes at 2pm but teachers leave the premises at 3pm. This principal uses the hour to catch up with administration work. Fortunately for the school, there are not many parental visits during the day. On the day of the shadowing, there were no school visits at all.

The senior educator and the governing body chairperson acknowledged that the principal has more time for the learners this year after completing her ACE programme and that teaching takes almost all her time. They added that it is problematic now that the principal is the only teacher for grades one and R. It is difficult for the other teachers as well because, when she goes away, the youngest learners cannot be left unattended.

The ex-principal has also improved her time management skills. She has learnt how to prioritise and has taken all she has learnt from the ACE with her. However, she thinks she needs a special course for filing. She still struggles with that. Overall, the impact study reveals that the principals have learnt to manage their time better.

Management practice

Besides being better in managing her time, the candidates believe they have improved their overall practice as managers. In particular, the principal of the primary school is now more motivated to do her work and she treats educators with more respect and more fairly. Handling human relations was one of the areas of weakness identified in the baseline study and it seems to have improved. Other weaknesses included lack of knowledge of policies and lack of proper implementation. The principal acknowledged

that her practice has improved on policy implementation. The senior educator also confirmed that the principal worries about not doing things the right way and she therefore always makes sure she does everything 'by the book'.

The role set of the primary school principal generally agreed that the ACE course has given the principal more confidence in the manner in which she executes her duties and delegates. "She is able to suggest changes for improvement of the school", the chairperson added. Since she has been on the course they have built a storeroom and developed a computer/photocopy room and bought a photocopier. The senior educator stated that she has become more open and wants to learn from others. She added that the principal became firmer in asking for evidence for things that they were doing. She became more particular with policies to make sure they implement them. She was always worried and afraid that her seniors would come here and find things not in order. So she did her work and that forced staff to do theirs too.

In the baseline study, the interviewees complained a great deal about the problems created by the multi-grade system. However, the impact phase showed a significant move towards finding ways to deal with the problem and actual strategies that have been put in place. A long-term impact study would be necessary to establish whether the principals' practice has indeed changed or whether the mentioned changes were addressing the requirements of the course.

Accountability

The impact study shows no significant change in terms of accountabilities within the school. The principals still regard the employers, parents, teachers and learners as her main accountabilities, in that order. The most important accountability is still to the department because it is the employer.

One of the primary school principal's role sets confirmed that the principal would not like to disappoint her seniors, and so she does all implementation as prescribed. The hierarchical line of authority is still observed. At the school level, the principal is accountable to the parents as they are important through the school governing body, and then educators and learners as well. But one of the educators differs in view. She sees the principal's accountability more to them as educators.

School improvement

In the baseline study, the candidates generally identified their management learning needs in terms of their weaknesses or the shortages of resources in the school. Strategic planning, financial planning and improvement in human relations were some of the highlighted areas of improvement as well as policy implementation and managerial tools. These areas appear to have been addressed by the ACE course and have led to improved practice.

School improvement was also seen in terms of visible and physical improvements. In the primary school, besides the apparent improvement in Grade 7 results, the school also had other more visible improvements since the principal's involvement with the ACE programme. There were some physical improvements seen between the baseline study and the impact. Since the baseline study, the school had installed electricity and bought a photocopier, which cut short the journeys that educators made to make copies at neighbouring schools. The school had also fenced its vegetable garden and the school is able to grow and eat their own vegetables unlike before when they would be eaten by goats from the village.

Although the principal and her chairperson of the governing body were convinced that the improvements in the school were as a result of the ACE, the senior educator believes it is the effort they all put in that led to the broader improvement of the school. She adds that the academic changes are a result of all them doing their work, not just the principal. "I cannot say all the changes we have in the school were as a result of the ACE", she reiterates.

Perceptions of the ACE programme

Best part of the ACE

Both principals regarded mentoring as the best part of the ACE. Although the ex-principal found the first year a repetition of what she had done before, she acknowledges that the interactions with the colleagues were extremely useful.

Meeting candidates' expectations

When the programme started in Limpopo, candidates had very mixed feelings about the programme. Some were sceptical about what it purported to achieve while others were hopeful it would develop them into better school managers. However, there was also an expectation that the programme would somehow lead to improved resources.

The impact study reveals that the programme has met candidates' expectations with regard to their own practice and professional development and that the programme was well worth their time. Most importantly, candidates believe all principals need a programme like this one to be good managers. This is what the ex-principal says about the programme, "I enjoyed the course even though I had reservations at the beginning. I think it is a good course that principals need".

The participants' role sets concur with the candidates about the programme's ability to change and improve practice. However, the schools are still facing the problems they had before, such as shortages of teachers and classrooms. There was a feeling of despair, which was also shared by other educators (see below).

Improving the ACE

The ex-principal suggested that the ACE should have a much clearer policy on recognition of prior learning. She worries that currently the programme does not clearly specify how prior learning is recognised. She went through the entire first year repeating what she had learnt before and suspects many other candidates may have gone through the same thing.

Additional points

The ex-principal says that "the ACE has helped tremendously on my current role as circuit manager. It may not have had anything to do with my appointment but I am still using some of what I learnt in that course". Asked to give the final comment, the senior educator at the primary school said: "Yes the principal has finished the ACE but we still have the same problems of workload and classroom shortages". While this suggests that the programme may not have helped to deal with some of the fundamental problems they had at the beginning of the programme, it also highlights the school's unrealistically high expectations of the ACE.

Overview of Limpopo case studies

Schools

The schools in this study are struggling and continue to serve impoverished communities in rural and semi-rural locations. However, the schools are all clearly functional and stable. Poverty and unemployment are the main problems affecting the operation and improvement of these schools. At the beginning of the programme, there was a glimmer of hope that the ACE would bring some changes. The ACE has been completed and has impacted positively on the principals' professional practice and development. However, the schools are still faced with the same socio-economic problems such as poverty, lack of resources and infrastructure, as well as shortage of teachers. The ACE programme may have addressed school managers' professional needs, but it has certainly not been the answer to all the ills and needs within and around the schools.

The ACE programme

The completion of the ACE programme was a huge relief on the part of the participants and a significant achievement in their professional development. However, there can never be certainty about whether any of the school improvements could be exclusively attributed to the ACE. However, the principals' improved management and leadership practice, time management, and effective implementation of policies, was clearly attributable to the ACE. Whether these changes will lead to sustainable improved practice, resulting in better learner performance, is something another study will have to establish. This two-year longitudinal study has established that the ACE field test has led to short-term improved management practice.

Mpumalanga

Introduction

The first pilot cohort in Mpumalanga began its work in 2007 and completed in November 2008. Mpumalanga is untypical in that there are several participants in each of the schools selected for inclusion in the field tests. The researchers continued working with two of these schools within a township close to a small town in a semi-rural context. One school has five ACE participants, while the other has three. Two candidates from each school took part in all three phases of the case study. The four candidates are:

Secondary school

- The principal: an experienced female African, who is the founding principal of the school, which opened in 1993.
- An HoD: a mid-career male African.

Combined school

- The principal: an experienced male African, who has been at the school for 30 years.
- An HoD: a mid-career female African.

Methodology

The impact study took place in March 2009 and involved the following dimensions:

- Interviews with four ACE candidates (two at each school).
- Interviews with three people in each candidate's role sets; SGB parent member, SMT member and post level 1 educator.

- Shadowing all four candidates for one day each.
- Documentary analysis of enrolment figures and Grade 9 results for 2007 and 2008 at the combined school, and of matric results for 2007 and 2008 at the secondary school.
- Documentary analysis of the candidates' portfolios.
- Interviews with five lecturers (the same people who were interviewed for the mid-term phase).

This report provides an integrated overview of these data sets and reaches conclusions about the value of the ACE programme for these candidates and for the school. It also makes recommendations on the future of the programme.

Socio-Economic Factors

Both schools continue to serve the same deprived township community, with high levels of poverty, ill-health, unemployment, poor quality housing, child-headed families, drugs and alcohol abuse, and teenage pregnancy. There has been little change in these circumstances since the research began in March 2007, although one parent governor believes that the situation is getting worse:

> 'The township is suffering a lot and needs finance to develop. HIV is high and there is a lack of employment. Grandparents have to help the children and the children live in shacks. The future is not very bright. Learners need money to continue into tertiary education and many go to taverns and are doing drugs'.

Awareness of the ACE Programme

All seven members of the two role sets were aware that SMT members have been taking the ACE course. The Circuit Manager was responsible for nominating the candidates. The SMT members and educators were advised of the programme by the principals while parents became aware through SGB meetings.

School Achievement

In the baseline and mid-term phases of the study, there were divergent responses to this question with secondary school respondents focusing mainly on academic achievement while combined school participants mainly addressed other types of achievement. This pattern continued to some extent in the impact study.

Combined school

The grade 9 end of year results declined from 96% in 2007 to 80% in 2008. The HoD identified several reasons for the decline:

- Poor attendance by learners.
- Learner pregnancy.
- Unenthusiastic educators due to the "changes introduced by the Department of Education".
- Negative learner attitudes towards Mathematics, in particular.
- One educator has been on long-term sick leave.

The school's enrolment figures have dropped from 900 to 809 since 2007. This was attributed to relocation of some families to another part of the township, rather than as a reaction to the poor results. The low enrolment has led to a decline in the number of educators from 28 to 26.

Secondary school

The school's matric results have declined since the candidates began the ACE programme. The overall scores were:

2006:   62%

2007:   52%

2008:   47%

Interviewees tend to blame the learners, their parents or wider social and educational factors, rather than accepting personal responsibility for under-performance. The educator comments that 'learners were lazy' and not co-operative with extra lessons. She adds that the new NCS was a problem but now she has some experience of it and has more text books. The SMT member says that learners are demotivated and need to be pushed. She adds that 'parents are not supportive and don't care if learners don't learn'. She adds that educators need training in some subjects – some are not sure what to do. HoDs also need training because they don't have enough knowledge to implement the new NCS.

The principal says that poor results arise from:

- Social problems: poverty, no resources at home, no learning materials.
- Shortage of classrooms: the school needs a media centre and a resource centre. This was promised four years ago but has not yet been supplied.

She adds that poor results were expected because this cohort has been weak since grade 8. She adds that some educators 'don't care much' and 'don't make the learners work hard'. Other factors were the absence of one maths educator on maternity leave and a well qualified life sciences educator who is more interested in choral music than his subject.

The HoD ACE candidate confirms that the 2008 cohort was 'a weak group' and that 47% was not too bad considering this. He is critical of the progression criteria which allow students to be 'condoned' even if they have not mastered the previous grade. The Circuit Manager says that the results are not very good in all the four ACE schools. This could be partly because of the NCS leading to a 'content gap', with educators not sure what to teach. There was a lack of team work within this school's SMT but now 'they are working together'.

Within-school variation:

This school experiences extreme variation in performance across learning areas. Pass rates in 2008 range from 100% in Isizulu and English to 17% in Maths, 31% in Accounting and 33% in Physics. Similar differences were apparent in previous years.

The principal comments that within-school variation arises partly because the maths HoD is not exemplary for his department, is arrogant and talks down to the learners. When s/he sought advice from the Curriculum Implementer (CI) for maths, there was a weak response and s/he did not visit the school. The Circuit Manager adds that within-school variation is attributable to educators having the attitude that 'learners won't cope'. She is trying to engage CIs to work with maths and physics educators.

The HoD ACE candidate is responsible for languages and he has an impeccable record of success in terms of matric results (94% in both languages in 2007 and 100% for both in 2008). He attributes within-school variation to educator variables and is reluctant to claim credit or to 'blame' the maths HoD for poor results.

School and Community Relationships

All the combined school respondents report that there are 'positive' school and community relationships and claim that these continue to improve. The HoD comments that 'the ACE has raised our awareness about community school relationships. They taught us that the school belongs to the community'. The principal is concerned that SGB members tend to become inactive once their children leave the school.

There are mixed views about the relationship between the secondary school and its community. The SMT member says that the school has a positive relationship with parents and a close relationship with the SGB. However, the educator says that parents 'distance themselves' from the school and only come when there is a problem. Very few parents come to parents' evenings. The languages HoD adopts a different perspective, saying that 'there is little effort to communicate with the community'. 'Few people know us as educators. We still need to engage the community'.

Contact Sessions

HEI staff say that the contact sessions are necessary to provide the theoretical basis and also to illustrate with examples. 'It is important to provide the theory and to apply the theory'.

Two participants acknowledge that the lecture format (with 100 students) provides limited opportunity for interaction, although relationships with students improved during the year. Smaller groups could not be achieved because the HEI's M.Ed. programme was held on the same day, using the same staff. The HoD expressed concern about the large group and said 'the smaller the better' to facilitate interaction. From 2009, the group size is 50, not 100. The previous acting co-ordinator says that contact sessions generally worked well: 'where not, we improved it'. For example, the research project 'was pitched at too high a level'. The students 'struggled a bit' and were given a second opportunity to submit'.

Most ACE candidates say that the contact sessions were "very helpful". The combined school HOD reported that the distance to the University is 'too long'; 'we need more centres closer to our major town'. She noted that she has managed to implement theory in her class, as 'the manager tended to block implementation in the broader school'.

The principal also suggested that the timetable should rotate modules, so that they are not always taught the Research Module in the afternoons when they are already tired.

Both secondary school candidates say that the Saturday morning one hour sessions (for each module) were not long enough. The principal comments that 'we needed to interact with the lecturers'. 'It's a practical course'. 'We wanted to share our experience, not just have lectures on material we can read later'. 'It would be better to discuss application of the learning'. The HoD would have preferred 90 minute sessions instead of 60 minutes, to help with the assignments.

Interaction is expected to occur in the afternoon where mentors work with student groups, focusing on questions provided by the lecturers. Initially, the afternoon sessions were used for administration purposes but this has improved because of additional mentor training. The secondary school principal comments that there was 'some interaction' in the afternoon but 'mentors are not

specialists in the different subjects'. The HoD says that these sessions were 'boring' although he notes that some groups finished later and other candidates were helped with their assignments.

Improving the contact sessions

Two staff are comfortable with the current model, given the constraints of the lecture format and the opportunity for interaction during the afternoon session. One adds that the sessions were 'totally different' by the end of the first pilot cohort. Lecturers were 'better attuned' to the needs of students'. The afternoon sessions have become more focused and practical, partly as a result of a better focus in the morning. One person notes that the integrated nature of the programme is important and that the portfolio, and especially reflection, is crucial. One lecturer adds that she could not have taught the module effectively if she had not visited the schools to become familiar with the context.

Teaching Materials

All five lecturers are critical of the original pilot materials. Some specific weaknesses were identified:

- There were 'several inaccuracies' in the material related to education law.
- Some of the material was 'pitched at the political level not the school level'.
- 'The best people were not chosen to write the materials'.
- The initial MPF module was 'poorly structured' and contained mistakes.
- The MTL module did not address the management of teaching and learning.

The previous acting co-ordinator says that the original materials were not pegged at the level of the students, who were 'totally lost' in the pile of material. All the lecturers note that revised materials have been received but most have not read the new modules and it is not clear if any of them are being used with the 2009 cohort.

Using the national materials

In 2007/08, the national materials were adapted or used only to support locally developed content:

- The national materials were adapted for Education Law and the University also used its own materials. The ACE co-ordinator adds that it is very important to have a separate module on Education Law, in the South African context.
- The national materials were used 'all the time' for MPF but the lecturer sometimes also provided supplementary material as well as preparing activities linked to management plans or policy documents.
- The MTL lecturer developed her materials through visiting schools. She developed 10 sessions and either added the national materials or taught the topic using only her own materials, to meet the needs of the students.
- The lecturer used his own materials for the Educational Management and Leadership module, drawing on national materials where appropriate.

The former acting co-ordinator says that the UP materials were structured in a client-friendly way while the national materials were used as a resource.

In contrast to the lecturers, the ACE candidates were generally positive about the ACE modules. The combined school principal says that most of them are 'very relevant and I use them as a guide'. The principal gave an example of MTL, which he uses for

improving the composite timetable. The HoD observes that MTL was not very relevant for the principals, who are officially expected to teach only a 5% teaching load. The principal notes that the ICT module material 'needs some flesh'.

The secondary school principal says that most modules are 'very good'. 'I constantly refer to them in my office'. The HoD adds that he did not read the MTL module as the lecturer used her own material. The MPF lecturer referred candidates to specific pages – 'a good strategy'.

Mentoring

Mentoring is a distinctive and central feature of the ACE programme, designed to facilitate the transfer of learning to candidates' and school practice. Effective mentoring provides strong potential for deep learning.

This HEI's mentors engage with the candidates in two ways. First, as previously noted, they provide 'facilitation' after Saturday contact sessions at the University. Secondly, they visit candidates' schools to provide on-site support. This process was left to mentors' discretion in 2007 but the co-ordinator now requires a' school visit report' and wants to see that visits have a 'sense of purpose'.

Most lecturers describe the mentoring process in positive terms; 'mentoring went 'amazingly well'; it has been a 'huge success'. There was some initial confusion about the role of mentoring but there is now a positive relationship, of trust, between mentors and students and even weak principals have been able to make some progress. Two staff note that the model is often one of 'coaching', how to do things in their schools, rather than mentoring, although one lecturer believes that the process is now evolving into the latter.

The ACE co-ordinator adds that there has been positive feedback from regional co-ordinators who gave questionnaires to their students. However, there were problems with individual mentors, who were autocratic, or did not do the job adequately, and they were not used again. Most mentors have built a relationship of trust with their students. The HoD acknowledges that the original mentor group had problems of representivity and that it is an ageing group. New appointments have helped to address these issues.

Improving the mentoring process

Most lecturers are happy with the current mentoring model. Initially, there was only limited contact between lecturers and mentors but regular joint sessions have been held since May 2008. The former acting co-ordinator adds that 'students sometimes preferred someone who could guide them; an alternative to lack of support from the districts'. The HoD notes that the current mentor group is more representative and s/he hopes that former mentees will become mentors for future cohorts.

One lecturer points to problems arising with an inexperienced course leader. 'Some mentors were confused and angry during the first six months, because of an inexperienced course leader. The position is better with the new course leader'. The ACE co-ordinator says that some mentors did not take responsibility for student achievement and bad work was not challenged. They have now been given responsibility for marking assignments according to a rubric and he is impressed with their work.

Candidate views of mentoring

The schools were supported by the same two mentors. The first one was 'disappointing' but the secondary school principal says that the second mentor was very helpful and knowledgeable. He had experience of black schools as a circuit manager and was 'far better than the previous mentor'. 'He discussed the school's problems and usually his advice was very helpful'. The principal still calls him – she has done so twice this year. She adds that it would be valuable if mentoring continued after the course.

The HoD says that the mentor was helpful because 'he gave us a list of things he would like to check'. He would hold meetings and discuss problems concerning assignment submission. The effect of the visit was diminished by spending only one hour with the SMT. Subsequently, he gave the group 90 minutes and later used Sundays as a meeting day also.

The combined school candidates say that this mentor is 'very supportive, good and patient.' The principal notes that the mentor 'expected us to do our best and showed interest in the school'. He comments that the mentor was helpful in 'pushing and encouraging me to submit work' but the HOD reportedly did not benefit as 'we never discussed the assignments; he would just point us to the right pages'. The combined school HOD feels that mentors should be practising managers who are knowledgeable about the system and the specific context. The principal adds that the mentor 'did not take this school very seriously'.

Stakeholder views

There is very little awareness of the mentor's work amongst school stakeholders. Significantly, the Circuit Manager had not met the mentor. The combined school SGB member met the mentor once in 2007, for approximately 30 minutes. During this session, the mentor was urging SGB support for the candidates attending the national ACE programme.

Networking

The principles underpinning the ACE include an emphasis on school managers working and learning together in networks or clusters. It is evident from the lecturers' responses that networking has been patchy. The HoD notes that some mentors created opportunities for networking but most mentoring took place at individual schools. He had the impression that they talked about assignments rather than addressing school management issues.

Mentors have usually been instrumental in establishing the networks but the ACE co-ordinator comments that some students do not want to reveal their problems to a group. However, the Saturday afternoon facilitation sessions do provide networking opportunities. The former acting co-ordinator concludes that networking did not work well in the majority of cases and it would be better if district office people become involved.

Improving networks

The five participants all acknowledge the difficulties involved in sustaining networks. The HoD recommends creating an alumni group while the acting co-ordinator argues that self-motivation is required if networking is to continue. The former acting co-ordinator doubts if networking can be sustained unless someone has it as a specific responsibility. This would need to be a district official.

Candidates' views

The combined school principal says that networking began in 2008, co-ordinated by one of the candidates. This group consisted of all the SMT members of the neighbouring ACE participating schools. The principal says this was forced upon them by the mentor. As most of these meetings were focused on the ACE assignments, non-ACE HoDs felt demotivated.

The principal got support from the group to complete his ACE assignments whilst the HoD got some clarity on the Research Module. The principal felt that the networking should have started when the lectures commenced, whilst the HOD wished that 'the principals will encourage staff to participate again this year'.

The secondary school principal says that networking began in 2008, co-ordinated by the Circuit Manager, not the candidates, as suggested above. This did not continue and the group has not met in 2009. The CM is 'too busy' and 'we would need to arrange our own programme'. She adds that the network mainly discussed school problems and how to solve them, while the other participants say that it focused on assignment preparation. She notes that all local principals feel that HoDs are 'not pulling their weight' and are 'not confident enough'.

The HoD comments that the main focus of the network sessions was to 'help each other with the assignments'. Most SMT members were not comfortable in discussing their problems. Networking 'has died away' as the main focus was the assignments. People now say that they don't have time to meet.

The Circuit Manager says that she organised 'mini workshops' to give the ACE schools a chance to present. She also uses the secondary case study school's principal to advise other schools on resolving problems. She and one other ACE principal are the 'drivers' if the network is to carry on.

Assessment

One of the distinguishing features of the national ACE is its stress on site-based assessment, so that learning can be applied to candidates' leadership and management practice. The assessment tool employed by the University, and by other providers, is the portfolio, which is intended to include all the assignments set by the University, together with school-based documents, student reflections and a research project.

The former acting co-ordinator says that ACE assessment is 'a totally different model'; it is a challenge to assess what it sets out to assess. Assessment relates to academic factors, personal development, and school improvement. The initial SWOT analysis is linked to mid-term and final assessment. Students were given a resubmission opportunity. The ACE co-ordinator says that he is generally happy with ACE assessment but there were some practical problems. For example, all assessment was in one file. There is now one file per module with evidence of school practice and student reflections.

The HoD comments that, in general, portfolios were able to show the progress taking place, for example in the quality of students' reflections and in how to apply their learning. He adds that their ability to provide solutions to problems improved and there were also signs of innovation.

Another lecturer says that assessment is formative during the year, through the portfolio, plus self and mentor assessment, substantiated by evidence. In August 2008, a specific effort was made to help students to develop their portfolios, linked to reflections and evidence, for example templates for classroom visits. Students were given the opportunity to resubmit weaker portfolios and examples of good practice were provided.

One staff member, who has previous experience of portfolios, is now responsible for developing the ACE portfolio module. He stresses the need for assignments to be linked to school development, for example through management plans.

Verification of on-site assessment

All participants state that mentors are responsible for on-site verification, while the process is managed by the ACE course co-ordinator. They acknowledge the problems inherent in allowing mentors to carry out verification in their students' schools but judge that the trust developed outweighed the risk of invalidity. 'I did not want to use the same mentors for site-based assessment but their relationship of trust was important and I did not want to break it' (ACE co-ordinator). The previous acting co-ordinator says that the dual role is 'not a sound practice' but there were no problems. It would be possible for mentors to 'rotate' and verify with different students but continuity is important and 'students often feel more comfortable with the person they know'.

Two staff point to 'isolated examples' of assignments being copied. This was linked to a mentor problem and was prevalent where there were several students from the same school. They say that this problem no longer occurs. Mentors are required to complete three forms following school visits; initial, mid-term and final assessment. Forms have to be signed by the student and the mentor. According to the ACE co-ordinator, this was 'not a huge success' and still has to be revised.

Improving the assessment process

One lecturer says that assessment has improved with the second cohort of students. Clear guidance on assignments, and about evidence, has now been given. The former acting co-ordinator adds that all lecturers, mentors and students need to have a sound knowledge of the assessment process and practice. The HoD comments that staff should remember that these are not full-time students and there should be less course work. The university also needs to look at the research project which may be 'too ambitious'.

Candidates' views

Only two of the combined school candidates had passed the course at the time of the research (March 2009). The third candidate claims that some of his assignments were 'lost' by the institution. Both candidates were happy with the 2008 assignments, which 'forced us to think more about implementation'. However, they expressed disappointment at the slow pace at which feedback was received. The HoD reported 'I did not get the feedback for portfolio until 08/03/09. They quickly faxed them when I told them the ACE researchers were visiting my school'. On another occasion, candidates were told that their files were lost and had 'to re-submit'. Nevertheless, both candidates were impressed with the quality of feedback given which they referred to as 'constructive'. Policies have been developed on Stock Management, Transport and Budgeting but it was not clear what else the candidates had implemented on site.

Both combined school candidates complained about the heavy assessment load (24 assignments in 2008), which impacted negatively on their school work. The HoD reflects that 'some principals complained that HoDs spend time doing assignments

instead of teaching learners'. She goes on to suggest that fewer assignments would afford candidates more opportunity to implement ideas.

Both secondary school candidates were happy with the portfolio approach to assessment. The principal says that it 'covers a wide area' and represents 'your strong and weak points'. She found it time-consuming and the university 'kept changing the requirements'. She adds that the school has implemented 98% of what was learned. 'We are in the transformation phase'.

The HoD adds that he was 'comfortable' with the portfolio approach, except for the 'sudden changes' to submit in a different way. He was also happy with the requirement to provide evidence. He notes that the first aim was to pass and then to move on to implementation.

There was very little awareness of assessment amongst the stakeholders at both schools. The Circuit Manager says that she is not aware of the assessment requirements but the students sometimes asked her for provincial DoE documents.

Impact on School Leadership and Management

A distinctive feature of the national ACE programme is the intention to have a direct impact on candidates' leadership and management practice. The learning model assumes that participants will improve their practice by implementing course theory in their schools and classrooms.

Managing time

During the baseline study, all participants were observed for one day to see how they spent their time. This process was repeated during the impact phase to see if the ACE course had prompted any changes. Candidates were again shadowed for one day.

The combined school principal has introduced an SMT meeting 15 minutes before the start of each school day. However, the researcher observed no other changes in his time management since the baseline study. The HoD comments that 'I am more conscious about time management' but her management work is inhibited by a heavy teaching load. 'Out of a 48 hour teaching cycle, I have 40 hours of teaching'. She acknowledged that her programme on the shadowing day was typical.

The educator reported that she has not noticed any changes in how the candidates manage their time. She complains that staff do not meet regularly. The SMT member commented that the principal is the first to arrive and the last to leave the school. The SGB parent also notes that 'he teaches more' and 'he even comes to school on Saturdays to help with gardening'. The principal reports that ACE has taught him 'to care for trees, lawn and flowers'. There is little evidence that the course has impacted on his management of teaching and learning.

The secondary principal has developed a new 'principal's daily schedule', to be 'exemplary' for the SMT. She wants HoDs to prepare their own schedules. 'We are serious about time management'. She adds that she includes class visits in the schedule to verify what educators are doing. She goes to the class to give support and feedback to educators and to see how they are responding. She looks at educator workbooks and learner workbooks. She comments that it is too early to assess impact but work did improve in 2008 and educator classroom attendance improved.

The HoD has reduced his teaching time to 12 periods each week instead of 18 (out of 36). He also delegates more to educators, giving them opportunities to learn about management. As grade 8 head, he holds meetings of class guardians to explain what is expected of them. He also holds discussions with languages educators.

Management practice

The Circuit Manager says that some of the candidates do their jobs much better and three of the four schools are doing well (including the secondary case study). As noted above, the secondary school principal has produced a revised 'daily schedule', including classroom visits. However, she has not been able to address the problem of within-school variation discussed earlier.

The HoD says that the school has developed in three specific ways:

- The school has a different approach to developing policies. They are built up by a task team, presented to staff meetings and then adopted.
- Morning briefings are used instead of staff meetings, to provide information to staff.
- The school has an observation programme, to help educators to progress. It 'builds momentum for the IQMS'. There is still union resistance, especially to CI observation. Some educators are co-operative, some are not.

The Circuit Manager selected the combined school principal for the ACE programme because of perceived weaknesses in his leadership and management skills. There is little evidence of any improvements in his practice and, as noted above, he had not passed the course at the time of the research. He is teaching Maths because of a shortage of specialists but the researcher notes poor quality teaching, partly because he tends to focus his energies on insignificant issues such as minding the gate and looking after the grounds. He also spends time looking after the classes of the teachers who are absent from school. The principal's inability to delegate aggravates the situation. This was also noted by the Circuit Manager who indicated that the principal is 'not a good manager' and does not delegate. She adds that the school 'has not really changed' and, as a consequence, she may need to 'baby sit' the school. The SMT member claims that the principal 'cannot delegate because we are all full time in teaching'.

The combined school HoD says that she explains policies to her staff more and also tracks their progress. Limitations that have been addressed through the ACE included balancing patience with firmness, as well as using people-centred management and reaching out. She asked her staff to tell her about her limitations. The results were that she was perceived to be 'too strict', 'too harsh', and a 'perfectionist'. She adds that she undertook this exercise because of the ACE. She is currently working on addressing these issues. She also claims 'boosted confidence' that helped her to reach out to staff whenever they experience problems.

Accountability

In the baseline study, most participants referred to multiple accountabilities; to the hierarchy, via the Circuit Manager, and to parents, the SGB, learners and educators. SMT members said that their main accountability is to the principal. The Circuit Manager stated that principals are accountable to their schools but 'the reporting process and the formal accountability is to me'.

There is little evidence of any significant change following the ACE course. The Circuit Manager says that school principals report to her and adds that the strength of the SGB role depends on parents' levels of literacy. All the combined school stakeholders claimed that the principal is accountable to them. The principal says that his accountability has not changed but his awareness of

its importance has been heightened. The HoD says that, before enrolling on the ACE programme, she used to think that she was only accountable to the principal. She has since learnt that she is accountable to the learners, teachers and the community but her immediate accounting officer is the principal.

The secondary school educator comments that she is most accountable to the principal, but also to the HoDs. She also feels that they should be accountable to her. 'We ask them for assistance but don't get it 100%', for example in respect of problematic learners. The SMT member implies criticism of the deputy principal by saying that she is accountable to him, 'when he wants'. However, she mostly solves problems with the principal. The deputy principal 'does not monitor us'. The principal says that she is 'sharing the load' now. 'I am chief accounting officer but the SMT is with me – everyone is accountable'. She adds that her main accountability is to the Circuit Manager and to parents and the community'. The HoD comments that he is accountable to parents and that he reports to the deputy principal. He adds that it would be better if some matters were dealt with directly by the principal, implying criticism of the deputy.

School Improvement

Another distinctive feature of the national ACE programme is the intention to promote school improvement. The learning model assumes that improvement will occur as a result of candidates' enhanced leadership and pedagogic knowledge being implemented in schools and classrooms.

However, the Circuit Manager says that the combined school has not improved. As noted above, grade 9 results declined between 2007 and 2008, although the SMT member claims that they improved. The post level 1 educator says she does not see any changes in how the school is managed. The SGB parent says that there is improved teamwork. The principal also claims enhanced teamwork, illustrating this by saying that 'the teachers call me whenever there is a dispute for intervention'.

The Circuit Manager says that the secondary school has improved but, as noted above, matric results declined from 62% in 2006 to 47% in 2008. The educator says that the school has improved in respect of morning briefings, new policies, notably on learner discipline, and a 'supportive' SMT, for example in respect of problems in the classroom.

The SMT member says that the ACE candidates are 'different'. All educators have copies of new policies and there are 'lots of briefings' in the morning. The SMT often refers to what they have learned. She adds that the school is 'much better managed' but more is needed to improve relationships. For example, 'the deputy should not talk to me in a rude way in front of the educators'. The parent governor believes that the school is very well managed. Educators are interested in the well-being of learners and try to help those who don't do well. None of these examples relate directly to classroom learning.

Professional Development

The national ACE programme was expected to prove challenging for university staff because of its practice-based orientation and its site-based assessment strategy. The five lecturers all point to professional development gains through their participation in the programme:
- Undertaking research to develop modules or in response to student questions.

- Understanding how students manage schools in difficult circumstances.
- Improved handling of portfolio assessment; 'exciting and satisfying' to be involved.
- Better understanding of principals' needs.
- Enhanced subject knowledge.

The ACE co-ordinator says that the ACE is a 'wonderful idea' while the former co-ordinator comments that the ACE was 'a challenge', requiring new skills, competencies and thinking to meet the needs of this qualification.

Perceptions of the ACE Programme

Best parts of the ACE programme

The five HEI participants identify several strengths of the programme:

- Mentoring is the best part, when it is working well, and broadens the pool of experience available to students.
- The involvement of provincial departments with the university.
- It helped students to 'realise' their leadership and management role.
- The programme is integrated, not a series of separate parts.
- Students are enabled to understand the importance of policy documents and how to link them to practice.
- Students understand the importance of a management plan.
- Team work has been enhanced.
- The ACE allows students to apply their learning in their schools and to provide evidence.
- Using senior HEI staff to teach the programme.
- The site-based and evidence-based assessment. One participant notes that some students have progressed well using this approach.

The former acting co-ordinator says that the national ACE is 'unique' to university studies. She adds that the programme is more successful with the second cohort and there is now a 'fully fledged' programme. There is evidence of good progress from most students.

Both combined school candidates say the contact sessions were the best part of the programme. They say this is where they interacted and shared experiences as practitioners. In contrast, the secondary school principal says that she enjoyed everything but the lectures were too short and more interaction was needed. The HoD adds that he enjoyed the MPF module and the Leadership and Management module.

Improving the ACE programme

The five lecturers all comment that the course has improved, notably in respect of the portfolio, but note further improvements that may be required:

- The national materials (although the revised versions have not been read by most staff). They need to be more structured and more student-centred.
- Greater involvement of district officials and the provincial task teams.
- Greater integration of the research project with the rest of the course.

- Move contact sessions nearer to the students, subject to library and ICT availability.
- HEIs should have a say in the selection of students.
- Portfolios still need further development.
- Mentoring may need some attention. Is the current model mentoring or coaching?

The ACE co-ordinator comments that 'there is always room for improvement' but it is a good programme.

The combined school candidates made few suggestions. The principal raised a concern about what he regarded as 'an incompetent facilitator', who was used to substitute for one of the lecturers. The HoD raised concerns about 'the bulky materials' and suggested that loudspeakers were necessary as some of the lecturers had very soft voices.

The secondary school principal says that she would have gained more from interaction with people outside her own circuit. The HoD adds that it would be better to provide all the theory in the first year with implementation in year two. Attempting to implement too quickly 'disturbs the school system'

Meeting candidates' expectations

The combined school principal claims that the course has helped him 'to be a continuous learner'. He says he is learning every day. The ACE programme, particularly the Law module, has 'opened his eyes' on policies and procedures. The HoD says the only management task she knew before the ACE programme was to control the teachers' work. SMT members now meet more often and discuss management related issues. The principal now reports to the SMT whenever he attends a principals' meeting but sometimes does so late, so that the school cannot benefit from DoE initiatives.

The secondary school principal says that she did not know what to expect. She was told it was a practical course and 'was pleasantly surprised and impressed'. The HoD adds that the ACE did meet his expectations but it would have been better if it had been available when he first became a HoD.

Additional points

The interviewees were given the opportunity to offer additional comments. The combined school SMT member commented that all the school based ACE candidates are now computer literate, and that there is also more collegiality because of the ACE programme. The ACE HoD claimed she is now a good manager and ready to manage a school.

The Circuit Manager says that the ACE has been helpful and she wishes that she could put more schools into the programme. The secondary school educator claims that the ACE 'has done a great job'. 'We used to have things happening and we did not know why. The new briefings help a lot'.

The university lecturers made several different points in response to this question:
- Students need more help to do the course, for example through release time.
- Lecturers should visit schools more often.
- There should be more equitable distribution of students; the university has only 50 now but could take up to 200. Students

should also have a choice of provider.

- It was 'wrong' to involve the whole SMT in the programme. 'Some HoDs were not ready and were too inexperienced to become principals'. 'It may have created negative relationships in some SMTs'.

The former acting co-ordinator says that University staff have a lot of experience of working with teachers with a limited academic background and they are all experienced school managers. The academic and professional aspects of the course linked well except with the research project, which was 'pegged too high'. The ACE co-ordinator says that he supports the ACE having mandatory status for newly appointed principals while the HoD raises questions about the sustainability of the programme; 'I hope it doesn't die a death'.

Overview of Mpumalanga case studies

University

The University has adapted the programme in several ways since the first pilot cohort. These include changes to the mentoring model, and in mentoring personnel, portfolio assessment, the focus and content of the afternoon mentor-led sessions, and the research project. The five lecturers believe that the ACE is impacting favourably on the quality of leadership in schools. Significantly, the 2009 cohort comprises principals, rather than aspiring principals, contrary to the intentions of the programme, although this was decided by the Mpumalanga Department of Education, not the University.

Schools

Both these schools are disadvantaged, serving poor township communities. Learners are often hungry and there is concern about teenage pregnancy. The ACE is important but will not be able to resolve such difficult socio-economic problems.

Standards, as measured by matric and test results, are declining at both schools, although the secondary school's performance may be regarded as satisfactory in a community with so many social and economic problems. The combined school's achievement levels are modest and many learners fail to progress through the grades. The principal appears more concerned with peripheral issues, such as the garden, rather than focusing on academic issues. The Circuit Manager's aspiration that the ACE programme would improve the school, and its management, has not been fulfilled.

The ACE programme

The first field test cohort has now completed the programme. The case study candidates enjoyed the programme and appear to have learned a lot about management from the lectures and the mentoring sessions. There is only limited evidence of a change in management practice, although the secondary school has introduced a programme of observations of classroom practice, and school achievement has declined instead of improving. Completing the heavy assessment requirements of the programme seem to have consumed the energy of participants and become a substitute for school management, instead of enhancing it. A longer-term study will be required to ascertain whether ACE learning has been implemented effectively in these schools.

Western Cape

Introduction

In the Western Cape, the University is using a public/private partnership model to deliver the ACE programme. The Fundamentals Training Centre (FTC) is the organisation working with the University to deliver the ACE programme.

Initially, six candidates were included as case studies. However, two of these candidates dropped out of the programme; one candidate was promoted and the other left the province to take up a position in Gauteng. The four remaining candidates are:

Preparatory school

- The candidate is a newly appointed white female principal who taught at the school for a number of years before being appointed as the principal.

Primary school

- The candidate is a newly appointed coloured female principal who taught at the school for a number of years before being appointed as the principal.

Primary school (farm school)

- The candidate is a mid career coloured male principal who has been with the school for a number of years.

High School

- The candidate is a coloured male deputy principal.

Methodology

The impact study took place in August 2009 and included the following:

- Full day shadowing of all ACE candidates;
- Interviews with all four ACE candidates;
- Interviews with between three and four role sets. This included an SGB member (where available), a district officer (where available), educators and a principal where relevant;
- Interviews with three lecturers, and the course co-ordinator at the delivering institution.

Socio-Economic Factors

The socio-economic conditions of all four schools have remained unchanged and, in some cases, have worsened due to the economic recession. The schools continue to serve communities which are characterized by high levels of poverty, unemployment drug abuse, gangsterism, dependence on social grants, and high levels of crime.

Awareness of the ACE Programme

Awareness of candidates' participation in the programme was uneven among the various role sets. Some of the roles sets were informed by the candidates, others by the researcher during the previous phases of the research, and still others by the researcher during this impact phase. At the farm school, it appeared that the candidate informed colleagues at staff meetings and included colleagues in assignments. At the other schools it appeared that only staff members who worked closely with the candidates were aware of their participation in the course.

School improvement

Preparatory school

There were mixed responses to this question with some interviewees saying that they have seen an improvement because the principal is very capable and has the respect of her teachers, learners and parents. Another interviewee felt that there has been an improvement because the principal has "implemented what she has learnt and has become much more hands on". Another interviewee said

> "She is definitely applying what she's learnt and this has been noticed by almost everyone. She also passes on what she's learnt on the course"

However, two of the role sets said it was difficult to answer this question due to the change in learner profile (the learner profile at this school changed from being a predominantly white model C school to just having 20 white learners). These respondents felt that there has been an improvement in some areas, such as literacy, but deterioration in numeracy. However, the figures do not support this – there has been deterioration in both literacy and numeracy. In 2006, the school achieved a 94.4% pass rate in and 74.7% in numeracy. In 2008, the pass rate dropped sharply in numeracy (56.8%) and marginally in literacy (90.5%).

Primary school

The overall perception at this school was that school achievement has not changed since any measure of achievement should be closely linked to socio-economic conditions and these have worsened. There was a strong feeling that the main reasons for bad school results stem from the difficult socio-economic problems in the area. Having said this, one of the role sets felt that the candidate has tried to bring about change, saying that "results have not changed but her input has changed. You cans see that she has learnt a lot. She is listening to the staff and taking staff development seriously".

Primary school (farm school)

At the farm school there was general consensus that a lot has changed since the principal started the ACE course. All the interviewees felt that the principal was always good at what he did, but participation on the ACE course has still been beneficial. Areas in which changes have been noted are improved communication with learners, teachers and parents, better time management and providing a better working environment.

High school

Respondents at this school felt that overall results have not improved but this did not necessarily have anything to do with the deputy principal's attendance on the ACE programme. Respondents felt there has been a drop in matric results nationally and not

just at their school. They have attributed this to poor language proficiency, and the new criteria for the language exams, as well as the fact that the 2008 matriculants were the first group to write the new NCS exams. In 2007, there was an 81% matric pass whereas in 2008 this dropped to 60%.

The candidate at this school agreed that the results have deteriorated but this was primarily due to external factors, as mentioned above. However, he claims that there have been improvements in other areas, such as learner and teacher motivation, as well as learner attendance and punctuality. The latter has been largely due to the implementation of positive non-punitive measures.

School and Community Relationships

Respondents at the farm school and the preparatory school report that there has been a positive improvement in communication between the school and parents, and candidates have more confidence now in dealing with parents and SGB members. A role set at the preparatory school reported that "with the knowledge she (candidate) gained from the course she now knows how to answer questions from the SGB and parents, especially knowledge related to procedures, legal issues and finances". One of the staff members at the farm school said that the principal has:

> "Changed a lot at the school, he has implemented a lot of what he has learnt at the ACE. He has involved the community – previously parents meeting were not well attended but now it is full, parents can see there are lots of projects at school and there is always something happening at school."

Respondents at the primary school reported that the candidate always had a good relationship with the community, and the parents in particular. However one of the respondents did not view this positively saying:

> "She is very accommodating, sometimes too accommodating, especially with regards to the community. She listens to everybody and it sometimes gets too much. For example parents don't make appointments but just 'rock up'. She has an open door policy but they (parents) should make an appointment, they can't just come in at any time."

The candidate at this school said she would like to get the community more involved but felt they did not have the skills even if they want to be more involved. According to her "there are some parents who are always doing little things to help out but the majority can't really do much".

At the high school, responses to the questions around stakeholder relationships were generally not very positive. The SGB member was most critical, pointing out that he is not sure about his function on the SGB and felt that "the SGB gets blocked by the school whereas they should be assisting. Parents are left out". He also reported that sponsors have recently pulled out because the school was not performing in the areas it was being sponsored for. The principal, however, felt that the SGB was not functioning as a fundraising entity because they did not have the expertise to do so. He said that SGB members were reluctant to perform any of the SGB functions.

Another role set at this school confirmed what the principal said. She noted that there has not been a big change in the relationship between the parents and the school, and the school is still struggling to get the parents involved.

The candidate at the high school expressed disappointment about the lack of good co-operation between the school and the parent body but felt that this was largely due to the fact that the school population has changed (there are more learners from outside the immediate vicinity) so there is a need to redefine the school community. He also felt it was difficult to make any firm judgments on the school's relationship with the SGB since the SGB was recently elected and was still in transition.

Contact sessions

The overall reaction to the course content was positive. However, three of the four candidates said that the contact sessions at the beginning of the first year were disappointing. The lecturers subsequently changed and the content improved significantly. Candidates felt pleased that their suggestions in the evaluations at the end of each contact session were taken seriously. This was confirmed by the course co-ordinator who said they "used the evaluations of students to ascertain the strengths and weaknesses". One of the candidates had the following to say:

> "I was disillusioned at the beginning of the first year. I didn't think the sessions did more than what was covered in the manual. It was not well structured and the content was not really helpful, could have just read the manual. If we go to the contact session, we want to come back with more than just what was in manual. It later became valuable, the course co-ordinator used the feedback that they were given".

After the initial round, candidates felt that the rest of the contact sessions were well organized, punctual and the materials were always ready. One of the candidates felt that the plenary sessions were meaningful, there was a focus on the modules and guests were generally very informative. All the candidates who were interviewed felt there was a good balance between theory and practice because "the course demonstrated how theory can be integrated into the school system". Candidates also felt that the sharing of ideas, and drawing on the experiences of the participants, worked well.

Improving the contact sessions

When candidates and lecturers were asked for suggestions on how to improve the contact sessions, the bulk of the issues raised focused on time. Overall, candidates and lecturers felt there was not enough time to cover all the issues. However, they admitted that this was a problem that would be difficult to solve. One of the candidates felt the time between the contact sessions was too long and suggested more frequent shorter sessions on Saturdays in addition to the current week-long sessions. The course co-ordinator felt the Saturday sessions would not work because the candidates are working and have many demands on their time.

Teaching materials

All HEI staff involved in the course said they used the materials extensively. The modules formed the core of the course and were supplemented with additional materials if necessary. However, there was a feeling that the materials are generic and dependent on the innovative thinking of the lecturers. One of the lecturers felt that "the volume is tremendous but at the same time would not want to cut down on any material". There was a feeling among lecturers that the material was not always relevant to each session and there was concern that the materials did not adequately cover the outcomes for the fundamentals. One lecturer expressed disappointment that the materials did not include any African experiences.

The lecturers felt that the material was a "fundamental basis for everything". They used the materials to prepare and underpin all the contact sessions and also added supplementary, information trying to make it interesting for the students. According to one of the lecturers, the diversity of the students on the ACE programme makes it a constant challenge for them to meet all the needs of students. This was the case in relation to the material as well, especially for students whose first language is not English. There was a feeling that Afrikaans and Xhosa speaking students struggled with materials. This was confirmed by one of the candidates but he did not see it as a problem:

> "As Afrikaans speaking sometimes it was difficult to deal with the material but I don't think this was a problem, I saw it as a way of growing."

In addition to providing additional resources, the lecturers also posted material on the website that was created for students attending the ACE course.

Although candidates felt that overall the materials were good, there were some who were not entirely satisfied. One said it was of a high standard but required too much additional work, especially in relation to assignments, and suggested that the readings for the assignments be included in the course pack.

Mentoring

Mentoring is an important aspect of the ACE programme. In this province, the lecturers served the function of mentors as well and they included a mix of ex-principals, ex-department officials as well as people involved in the NGO and private sector. One of the lecturers reported that:

> "Selection of mentors was a stringent process and mentors are regularly assessed. Mentors are generally the same people as our lecturers and are a good mix of ex-principals, ex-department officials as well as people involved in the NGO and private sectors."

All mentoring is done on site and is combined with the assessment of students. Lecturers use the students' work base projects as a basis for on-site verification which, in essence, is proof of implementation. Working together with students on these projects is also seen as mentoring process, where the lecturers check progress with students and discuss what needs to be done for the next visit/assignment. Mentors also attend study group sessions and, for each study group, a report has to be completed by the mentor. This report is submitted to the co-ordinator and she deals with any problems that are indicated in the report.

All the lecturers felt that the mentoring aspect of the programme was constrained by the budget and they had to "make do" and "be creative" with the resources that were available, for example by combining the on-site assessment with mentoring. This is often not the best practice.

Improving the mentoring process

Lecturers were unanimous in their opinion that the two on-site visits per year, which also served as the mentoring sessions, were not enough. There was a strong feeling that there was a need for more mentoring sessions and serious thought should be given to encouraging a combination of "generalist and specialist mentors", implying that some mentors were not able to deal with all aspects covered in the programme. One of the lecturers felt that the structured mentoring sessions are not helpful and that mentoring has to be more needs-based. "Mentoring is about developing a particular type of relationship with an individual and we can't develop

this type of relationship if the system is too structured. In this instance mentoring has become more about assignments and not about the development of the whole person".

The course co-ordinator felt that, in terms of assessment, the role of the lecturer/mentor is crucial and it is ideal to have a lecturer who is also a mentor to ensure a more in-depth knowledge of the issues covered in the course. In particular, there was a feeling that this function be assigned to ex-principals who have the "practical as well as academic knowledge of the context in which the candidates work".

> *'They have the relevant experience, are aware of the school environment and know how to deal with policy and curriculum issues. We have worked with professional mentors but the students have indicated a respect for those who have walked the walk'.*

Candidates' views of mentoring

Candidates had mixed opinions of the mentoring aspect of the programme. Although all the candidates understood the importance of the mentoring process, some felt it did not benefit them much. This was primarily the case for candidates who had more than one mentor over the course of the two years.

> *"I can't say much, I had three mentors. The first and second did not perform well but, when the third mentor came, I could see the value of having a mentor, especially with regards to personal growth."*

Another candidate reported that "initially the mentoring was very good. I had a good mentor who was a former principal who is still active in education and himself a doctoral candidate. The input and practical advice was beneficial and they met often individually and as a group. I had a good relationship both in terms of academic and personal support". However, this discontinued when "mentors were changed by the course coordinators. One of the reasons cited was that the bond between mentor and candidates was too 'strong', 'sympathetic' and the relationship between the (subsequent) mentor and the candidate was not as good as it was with the first mentor." The reasons cited for changing mentors is disconcerting since it indicates a lack of understanding about the role of mentors.

Other candidates found the mentoring sessions very useful. They developed good relationships with their mentors and felt that the mentors were very supportive. Even though they did not meet often with the mentors, the mentors were always accessible by telephone. One of the candidates had the following to say:

> *"I could ask him for help and he was always available. He helped deal with a problem relating to prioritising work and this has helped tremendously."*

Another candidate said that the mentor "gave direction for the portfolio, gave direction for assignments and helped work out deadlines. It was also good for interpersonal relationships, encouraging, motivating and checked if you were on the right track".

One of the candidates reported that the mentor provided "another objective opinion in relation to assignments, how we're doing at school and whether we're integrating what we've learnt on the ACE at school. It's good to know you are on track because the time between the contact sessions is long".

Candidates felt that there was a need for more interaction with mentors and that course co-ordinators should consider separating the mentoring and assessment functions:

> *"Mentors should take on the role of guides, sounding boards, advisers and resource persons. They should also discuss and reflect on assignments but the grading of the assignments should be done by the assessors".*

Some of these opinions seem to imply that the dual nature of the functions performed by the mentors is problematic.

Stakeholders' views

The majority of the stakeholders were not aware of the mentoring aspect of the course. Those that were informed about it had no idea what it entailed and what its function was.

Networking

The general opinion among lecturers is that the networking worked very well. The networking groups were determined mainly by geographical proximity, except for farm schools which formed a group of their own due to their own specific needs. The course co-ordinator felt that networking was very successful, especially within the study groups. She reported that the networking aspect of the programme not only allowed students to share ideas but also resulted in students assisting each other with problems at their schools.

Improving networks

One of the lecturers felt that the networking could be improved by bringing in more prominent individuals, institutions and resources into the same space as the students and providing students with the opportunity to meet people who will benefit their schools. These might include people involved in infrastructure development, and social issues (such as dealing with drug abuse, pregnancy etc.). The co-ordinator felt that they have learnt a lot about networking over the two years and have tried to incorporate improvements for cohort 2 and 3. She said that "this is indicative of what we have learnt and we have become very streamlined and clear of the expectations we have of our students".

Candidates' views of networking

Three of the four candidates felt that the networking worked well and that they benefited from it. One of them stated that networking was one of the biggest assets of the ACE programme. The networking helped candidates to make friends, but most importantly demonstrated that many of the problems faced by principals were very similar and the networking sessions provided candidates with the opportunity to share ideas on how to deal with some of their problems:

> *"As a principal you can tend to feel alone since you can't always speak to your staff. Having other principals to talk to is very helpful."*

Another candidate felt that the networking helped them to "exchange ideas and develop long term relationships. I can now phone someone from the group for advice and can also get new ideas from these groups".

It appears that networking evolved from having regular meetings to interacting by telephone, with e-mail or via sms. In some cases, networking has expanded to include socializing with partners.

The one candidate who didn't think that the networking worked too well felt that it needed to be more formalised. Having said this, this candidate nonetheless still benefited from the networking saying that "we developed a camaraderie based on shared experiences. For example the issue of late coming was a general problem and all came to the same conclusion that punitive measures did not work".

Suggestions for improving the networking included providing more structure or direction for the groups. One of the candidates felt that too much was left to the group to decide and they needed to know more about what was expected from the networking session, especially at the beginning. Another candidate felt that the networking groups should remain the same throughout the course and have the same mentor.

Assessment

One of the unique features of the ACE programme is the inclusion of site-based assessment and the emphasis on providing evidence that what was learnt on the course was implemented at the schools. Passing an assignment did not mean that students would automatically pass the module. There had to be evidence of the implementation of what was covered in the course. This approach required a shift in mindset on the part of the students and the lecturers. According to the course co-ordinator, students were initially very competitive and focused on marks and did not completely understand the concept of practical implementation. However, there has now been a shift to a realization that implementation is key.

One of the lecturers reported that, initially, the assessment was complex, daunting and overloaded candidates. However, over time, assessment tasks were re-examined and improvements were implemented.

Verification of on-site assessment

A lecturer expressed concern that, in some instances, the evidence did not always match the required outcomes. In addition there were times when he felt that the "evidence is so contrived and is difficult to measure". He suggests that regular contact with principals may be one way of dealing with such issues.

Improving the assessment process

Lecturers indicated that they have tried to systematically improve the manner in which assessment was done and will continue to explore ways to "make it better. For example, the portfolio assessment will be modified based on what we have learnt through the process of marking cohort 1". The lecturers felt that, initially, the protocol called for an inordinate and unrealistic volume of materials to be placed in a portfolio. They have now distinguished this from a Portfolio of Evidence that only includes vital evidence needed to prove competence against the set outcomes and assessment criteria.

Candidates' views of assessment

Candidates view assessment as a combination of assignments, work based projects and portfolios. Some candidates thought the assessment was fair and gave students an opportunity to benefit from the course, reflect about the inputs and integrate theory and practice. They felt that the quality of the feedback was generally good even though initially the feedback on assignments was slow. All candidates suggested that feedback on the assignments should be given to them as soon as possible.

Impact on School Leadership and Management

Managing time

During the impact phase of the research, all candidates were observed for one day to see how they spent their time. Although all the candidates taught some classes, the principal at the multi-grade farm school spent most of his time teaching. He felt that it was a challenge to be both principal and teacher. Attending the ACE course has helped to some extent; he now has a monthly planner which seems to help with managing his time better. He felt that he has "to know what I'm going to be doing in class way before so that I am able to keep the children busy if any principal duties come up with the department". One of the teachers at his school confirms that they plan much more. She said they now plan "for the week and also for the month, he checks what the department requires and delegate more. Each staff member gets a task and will be responsible for that task. The way he works now is just more systematic". However, the principal is aware that this is not the ideal situation and he recognises the need for an additional teacher at the school.

During the baseline study, the deputy principal at the high school did some administrative work but spent a large proportion of his time teaching. However, this has changed and it appears that the teaching load has decreased. The school previously had two deputy principals but now has only one, resulting in more administrative duties being given to him. This is confirmed by the level one educator who said that the candidate "is now responsible for discipline and is the curriculum co-ordinator. Nobody explained the ACE to me so not sure if the changes are due to ACE or is just his role as deputy or whether he has increased responsibilities because of just having one deputy now". The candidate confirms that he is more office based now and has learnt to be more efficient and is able to delegate more.

The principal at the primary school felt that not having a deputy who is office based has resulted in her having to take on a big load and this meant that she has to do whatever needs to be done and that her work is often done on a needs-driven basis. She reported that some of the very basic things she has learnt on the course have been very helpful. For example she has been "taught the importance of using a diary in planning and has realised that the diary is also helpful to refer back to what was done during the week".

The principal at the preparatory school felt that she has learnt to prioritise her activities. She still continues to teach but the teaching load has decreased to some extent and she spends more time dealing with parents and teachers. She claimed that she has never been completely office based and likes being visible. This was confirmed during the observation when she walked around the school a number of times during the day and spent time outside her office interacting with teachers and, during breaks, with learners.

The principals at all the schools still spend a significant amount of time attending departmental meetings as well as meetings with parents. All have complained about the time they spend attending meetings set up by the department, some of which are arranged at the last minute, and this has a negative impact on their ability to manage their time.

Management practice

The deputy principal at the high school felt that his ability to plan the curriculum has improved. He also reported that he has

managed to develop better financial management skills. These improvements have been noticed by the principal as well as the SMT member and the level one educator. The level one educator said that "he has applied what he learnt on the ACE here at school especially with regards to curriculum issues and assessment. He now looks at the child more holistically and takes into account the socio-economic background of the learners". The SMT member felt that, in the past, the candidate was rigid but is now more inclined to take advice from others and in this way things are changing for the better. However, the principal said that the candidate still "needed to develop his skills in dealing with people and understand that not everything is black and white".

The principal at the farm school felt that the course has taught him how to manage with limited human resources and this is directly related to managing staff better. The teachers at this school reported that they have seen an improvement in the manner in which the principal is managing his time because of better planning, communicating better with the parents and trying to get them involved in school activities. All the role sets were very positive in their feedback on the principal and felt that he goes the extra mile to ensure that the children ultimately benefit.

The principal at the primary school felt that a valuable management skill that she has learnt on the course is the importance of reflection. She said that she does a lot of reflection that "helps her to look at gaps and think more about why things didn't work out and what can be done". She has also realised the role played by the school community and now understands the importance of the link between what happens at school and the socio-economic conditions in the community.

Her role sets have noticed a positive change in some of her management practices. She is now much firmer in her decision making and has also recognised her short-comings. One example of this is her willingness to move away from class teaching to subject teaching on the basis of the recommendations of the teachers. She is sympathetic but firm and is beginning to put more demands on her teachers instead of doing everything on her own. Another teacher said "she is not so one directional, is more democratic and more flexible. For example, she now allows staff early time off on their birthdays (once the children have left) whereas previously this was not the case. It's not just demanding from them but is also giving to the educators".

The principal at the preparatory school said she has added to her management strengths but still feels she needs to continue learning. She identified a number of areas in which she thinks she has learnt and these include:
- Understanding the difference between acts and policies;
- Time management;
- Communication;
- Dealing with staff.

Staff members have confirmed that she now is able to delegate more, her attitude to staff has improved and she is better able to deal with discipline. One of the staff members reported that, although she was always firm and fair, her "attitude to staff has improved and stabilised". An important plus noted by a staff member is that the principal is now more reflective and encourages staff to do this. However, one staff member felt that, although the principal's management skills have improved, "there is still room for further improvement, particularly in relation to her people skills. She has to realise that she can't reprimand people in public".

Accountability

In the baseline study, the candidates felt that the principal is accountable for everything, including staff, learners, the parent community and the department. The deputy principal is accountable to the principal who, in turn, accounts to the department.

Candidate's views have not changed in relation to their accountability. However, one candidate reported that she "didn't realise that she was responsible for so many things". Two of the four candidates felt that, even though they are able to delegate, they are ultimately accountable.

At one of the schools, role sets were not completely convinced about the candidate being accountable to them. Three of the four role sets at this school felt that the principal was not wholly accountable to them and that she did not realise that accountability works both ways. There was a view that "the principal likes to be correct and doesn't handle criticism well".

School Improvement

When role sets at the high school were asked if they thought there was an improvement in the school, since the candidate started the ACE programme, there were varied responses. The SBG member did not think so but this was not surprising since his views about the candidate were very negative overall. The level one teacher was not sure and her response was based primarily on the basis of the poor matric results last year. However, she conceded that the 2008 matric learners were 'problematic' and felt that "changing the school doesn't rely on one person alone". The SMT member reported that she has definitely seen an improvement in discipline at the school, the classes are now supervised and all the assessments are done. According to the principal, the school has benefited from the expertise that the candidate now brings to the school. He also felt that the candidate is more reliable saying that "for example tomorrow I have to go to a meeting for the entire day but I feel comfortable knowing that the deputy principal will be able to deal with any problems that may come up and this has to do with his attendance at the ACE".

The role sets at the farm school were unanimous in reporting that they have seen an improvement at the school since the principal started the ACE course. They add that, even though the principal did his best prior to starting the ACE course, they feel that things are more structured now; they discuss how to deal with problems. For example, in literacy and numeracy, every teacher knows what is expected from them and understands the importance of them working together as a team.

One of the teachers at the preparatory school felt that the school is a better place mainly because the principal has developed a new strategy for dealing with discipline and has encouraged the teachers to do the same. She further said that the principal is much more confident and firmer, knows her rights and what to expect from parents. However, the most important thing is that the principal puts "the child's interest first". Another role set said that the school "is now a better place. You can feel, see and experience the kind of passion". Another role set said that previously they had a different principal who was more of a disciplinarian and a good administrator. The current principal is more of an extrovert and is warmer and as a result they experienced some problems with discipline, but this is changing now and they are dealing with it".

Two of the three role sets at the primary school felt that the school is better since the principal started the ACE programme. The HOD said that the previous principal did not involve them but the current principal makes more of an effort to involve the staff. The other role set said that, although the school is better, there are still teachers who are unhappy. This unhappiness is primarily due to the heavy demands placed on the teachers by the department. There was a feeling that the teachers at this school go the "extra mile but the learners are not. When the children don't achieve, the department blames the principal and the teachers and it is not that simple in a school like this". All respondents at this school felt the socio-economic conditions of the environment played a major role in the poor academic results at the school.

Professional Development

All lecturers felt that participating in the ACE programme has benefited them professionally. There was unanimous agreement that they learnt from each other and from the students. Participating in the programme has also provided them with the opportunity to sharpen their own knowledge and skills and provided the space for them to give expression to their passion for school leadership. In addition, one of the lecturers said participating in the programme meant that:

- They read more widely on current issues.
- They had to recognise that they were dealing with professionals.
- They had to develop critical intelligence to communicate sensitively.

Perceptions of the ACE Programme

Best parts of the ACE programme

For all the lecturers, the best part of the programme focused on the interaction with the students. This ranged from witnessing the development of the students to the two- way engagement with the students. One of the lecturers felt that bringing a diverse population into one learning environment "is a recipe for heightened learning experiences and provides for exchanges that will live with us forever". For the course co-ordinator, knowing that things were happening at the schools because of the ACE programme was one of the best parts of the programme.

Doing the assignments and the portfolio were the best part of the programme for three of the four candidates. Going through the ACE materials, networking, and having guest lecturers, were also identified as some of the highlights of the programme for the candidates.

Improving the ACE programme

According to the programme co-ordinator, the part of the programme that needs improvement is the budget. The programme co-ordinator felt that the design of the programme does not make it easy to deliver on a tight budget. This was a problem particularly in relation to the mentoring model. This view is shared by the lecturers, with one of them saying that the mentoring needs less structure and should be needs based. One lecturer felt that it is important to acknowledge the model of delivery that included the combination of public (University) and private (Fundamentals Training Centre) interaction, which provided a good example of successful public/private partnership. He felt that "it would be in the interest of continued high quality delivery of this programme that the relationship UCT has with The Fundamentals Training is maintained and built upon".

Candidates identified the following areas for improvement:

- Mentorship and networking system

  There were suggestions that mentors should not be changed once allocated and that the number of mentoring sessions be increased. Candidates felt they needed more structure to guide the networking sessions.

- Contact sessions

  One of the candidates felt that the contact sessions were too long and more breaks were required.

- Clear guidance on what is required for the portfolios.

Meeting candidates' expectations

All the candidates felt that the course met their expectations. One of the main reasons for this, according to two of the candidates, was the fact that the course was "so practical" and "was work directed". One candidate reported that the course exceeded his expectations.

Additional points

In the main, the lecturers and co-ordinator were extremely supportive of the programme, saying "it is a profound programme" and "the entire experience has simply been phenomenal and one can only hope that more and more people will be given the opportunity to participate in this amazing programme". One lecturer said the programme showed people how to lead differently and demonstrated how important it is for principal to have leadership skills. The course co-ordinator felt that time is a problem since students feel quite pressurised mainly because they are working in difficult environments. It would be worth considering offering the course over a longer period.

Candidates felt that this is a good course that would be very beneficial for aspiring principals. One of the candidates said that he will certainly encourage all principals to do this course. However, there was a feeling that the course should take place over a longer period, since there was not enough time to go through all the modules adequately.

Overview of Western Cape case studies

University

The lecturers and co-ordinators appear to be very enthusiastic about the ACE programme. They have made some changes, for example combining the assessment with on-site mentoring, reviewing the assessment requirements as well as adding additional materials for the students. In addition, they have incorporated what they learnt during the pilot phase for cohort 2 and 3. A strong plus for the way in which this ACE was delivered was the importance the organisers of the course gave to the feedback they received from the students. However, there was concern about the mentoring aspect of the course and feel strongly that mentoring is being compromised by budgetary constraints.

Schools

All the schools participating in the ACE programme serve poor and underprivileged communities. Participating in the ACE will help to some extent but the primary causes for dysfunction at these schools are the broader socio-economic conditions, which

contribute to poor school results. However, all four candidates appear to have benefited from participating in the ACE. There have been improvements at each of the schools related to their participation in the ACE. In general, the role sets at each of the schools, as well as the lecturers, have given positive feedback on the various candidates' performance. Discussions with the candidates indicate the importance they place on having good management skills for the successful functioning of their schools. Although all the candidates claimed that they learnt a tremendous amount on the course, they feel that they still have a long way to go.

The ACE programme

As mentioned above, the case study candidates learnt much about management and some have introduced good practices at their schools, such as better planning, instituting programmes for the benefit of learners, listening to their staff and trying to adopt a team approach to the running of the school, delegating, building on people's skills, and displaying more confidence in the running of the school. However, it is not possible to know if these improvements are sustainable except, perhaps, through conducting further research on the same candidates at some point in the future.

Gauteng

Introduction

The Gauteng programme is untypical in two ways:

1. The ACE programme being delivered with the 2007 cohort is not the same as that developed by the NMLC for the National Department of Education but was prepared earlier by the Matthew Goniwe School of Leadership and Governance (MGSLG). The practice-based philosophy is similar but it is delivered, in partnership with a University, using different materials.

2. The participants did not take part in the baseline study as their programme had begun before the research began, but they participated in the midterm phase and the impact study.

The participants in the research are two principals and four deputy principals. Four of the respondents are male while two are female (see table 17).

Candidate	Designation	Gender	Race	Years in school	School
A	Principal	Male	Indian	11	Training Centre
B	Principal	Female	Black	3	Primary School
C	Deputy principal	Female	Indian	26	Primary School
D	Deputy principal	Male	Black	5	Secondary School
E	Deputy principal	Male	Black	26	Secondary School
F	Deputy/acting principal	Male	Black	8 months	Secondary School

Table 17: Case study candidates in Gauteng

Candidate A is a principal in a school for the mentally challenged. During the previous interview, his responses were characterised

by negativity, saying that the ACE programme did not add any value to him because he already had a B.Ed. Honours in Education Management and he saw it as a duplication of what he had already done, but at lower level.

During the impact phase interview, however, the researcher observed that the scorn had abated to a great extent and the candidate was more positive and cooperative. He still maintained that the ACE has not had much impact on him in terms of overall school management but he gave some positive feedback on the sustainable project he was required to do in partial fulfilment of the ACE qualification. He chose to do a reading project within the special school environment and comments that the project has had a great impact on improving learner reading skills.

The other candidates are:

- Candidate B: an energetic middle aged, female black primary school principal who has been at the school for three years.
- Candidate C: an experienced, hardworking and very positive female Indian deputy principal, who has been at the school for 26 years.
- Candidate D: an enthusiastic and ambitious mid-career male African deputy principal who has been at that particular school for five years.
- Candidate E: an experienced male deputy principal who has been at the school for 25 years.
- Candidate F: an experienced male African deputy principal and acting principal. During the midterm phase, the candidate was in another school but he requested a transfer to another school closer to his home. At the time of the impact study interview, the candidate had been in the school for only 8 months.

Methodology

The impact study took place in February 2009 and involved the following dimensions:

- Interviews with the six selected ACE candidates.
- Interviews with four people in each candidate's role sets; IDSO, SGB parent member, SMT member, and post level 1 educator.
- Shadowing each of the six candidates for one day.
- Documentary analysis of enrolment figures and Grade 7 results for 2007 and 2008 at the primary schools, and of matric results for 2007 and 2008 at the secondary schools.
- Documentary analysis of the candidates' portfolios.
- Interviews with four lecturers (six lecturers were interviewed for the mid-term phase but one subsequently left the university while another had retired).

This report provides an integrated overview of these data sets and reaches conclusions about the value of the ACE programme for these candidates and for the school. It also makes recommendations on the future of the programme.

Socio-Economic Factors

All participating schools serve the same deprived township communities, with high levels of poverty, and unemployment. There has been little change in these circumstances since the midterm phase.

Awareness of the ACE Programme

All 24 members of the six role sets were aware that SMT members have been taking the ACE course. The IDSOs were responsible for nominating the candidates. The principals recommended the candidates; other SMT members and educators were advised of the programme by the principals, while parents became aware through SGB meetings. Some SMT members and educators indicated that they were actively involved in the assignments and the school project.

School Achievement

In the mid-term phase, all respondents took pride in the academic achievement of their schools and, with the exception of one candidate, the respondents consistently attributed the achievements to the ACE programme. Some respondents also reported significant improvement in sports activities. During the impact phase, candidates also discussed other aspects of school achievement, such as learner attendance, learner motivation and educator motivation.

School A: The training centre

The candidate says that the school has got better in terms of implementation of the curriculum. He explains that the curriculum is in line with the National Curriculum Statement with learning outcomes and assessment standards. The academic performance ranges from very good to excellent because they adapt the curriculum to suit the needs of the different children. The documentary analysis shows that the curriculum is flexible enough to accommodate the specific learning needs and there is evidence of a referral system where individuals with more specialised expertise are asked to assist learners.

The candidate says that;
- Learner attendance is better, and the learners are highly motivated because they are screened and assigned to classes suited to their mental ability. Scrutiny of the class registers confirmed that learner attendance had improved by 20%.
- The parents are more motivated because the school involves them in school activities.

The candidate attributes the improvement in learner performance to his character and management style. He says that he is a straightforward person, fair and transparent in whatever he does. He also says that the school establishes policies that are adapted to the children's needs.

All role sets agree that the level of achievement has improved. Learners are motivated because they are given a chance to excel in areas that they are stronger in and learners are given chance to learn at their own pace and level. Courses such as beauty therapy, dress making, construction, bricklaying, building, plastering, and painting, have been introduced. All role sets, with the exception of the IDSO, concur with the candidate's response that most of these things were in place before the ACE course.

School B: Primary school

The candidate claims that the academic performance has improved from average to good, especially in literacy. The candidate attributes the improvement to the literacy/reading project she undertook during the ACE programme and the sponsorship she got through networking with other candidates. The sponsors supplied the school with English books and charts which have improved the learners' reading and their comprehension and listening skills. Learner achievement has also improved in terms of discipline and punctuality. The candidate motivates learners by giving awards to best performers and by inviting parents to discuss learner progress.

Parental interest and involvement in school activities has also improved. The candidate attributes this to the initiative she undertook to introduce and enforce parents-teacher contacts to discuss learners' performance and any related problems. She says that it was a practice she learnt and observed from other ACE candidates, and adds that it has improved learner achievement.

Educator motivation has also improved. The educators' attitude towards their work is now more positive, they are more responsible, they work as a team, they share information and they always provide feedback to the principal. She attributes the increased educator motivation to the

- adherence to policy which is enforced by the SMT.
- Availability of LTSM and other resources.

The principal explains that educator absenteeism has been reduced and petty requests are minimal. She says that the ACE has 'capacitated her':

- She says that she communicates daily.
- She encourages educators to attend workshops.
- She conducts strategic planning meetings away from the school where teachers, SGB and support staff are involved.
- She promotes staff development. Five of the educators are doing an Advanced Certificate in Education (ACE).
- High performing educators and learner are recognized and given awards.
- She follows policy to enforce discipline. She introduced the prefect system to assist the teachers and teach them responsibility.

The above claims were confirmed by the deputy principal and the educator and there was a record file showing evidence of workshops and courses attended by educators, minutes of meetings, awards presented, and the available policies.

All role sets agree with the candidate that the level of achievement in the school has changed since the candidate enrolled for the ACE course:

- The school is not rated as 'underperforming'. The pass rate is above 80%, especially in literacy.
- The candidate has acquired skills on how to analyse results on a termly basis. This has helped the candidate to identify learners who need support and she is able to come up with remedial programmes, as opposed to finding the problem at the end of the year.
- The work of the educators has improved drastically.
- There is a lot of support from the SGB.
- There is teamwork among the teaching and non teaching staff.

- Educators have performance contracts and they know their job description.
- The IQMS- award is based on performance. All the educators qualified for the award.
- Many things have changed, especially with the availability of LTSM.

School C: Primary

The academic performance of the school is very good. Scrutiny of academic records and other school files confirmed that the pass rate has improved in the last two years to 98.6%.

Learner attendance has improved because the candidate:

- Takes registers on a weekly basis.
- Checks each class's daily attendance.
- Sends request letters to parents to visit schools.
- Parents sign commitment letters.

Learner are highly motivated because,

- The school provides stationery and other resources to facilitate learning. This leaves the learners with no excuse for not attending school for lack of stationery and other resources.
- Assessment programme drawn up on termly basis. The parents are aware as to when assessment is to take place and they encourage learners to attend.
- The merit and demerit system encourages learners to work hard.
- Learners are given awards in the Assembly for work well done.

Educator motivation has also improved because of the following strategies:
 The educators are involved in every activity at the school

- Educators are given gift packs (Stationery).
- The candidate explains to the educators the benefits of going for further training to empower themselves.
- She encourages educators to attend workshops and further studies.

The candidate explains that she got most of the ideas during cohort group discussions at MGSLG. The principal and the educators confirmed that the candidate actively involved the whole school in the ACE programme by encouraging them to take part in the assignments, especially the school project. During the shadowing, the researcher observed the candidate moving from one class to another, monitoring the reading project and giving feedback to educators. The role sets affirm that the candidate is a disciplinarian and as a result there is a great improvement in academic performance, especially in the areas of reading and numeracy. The principal says that the candidate organises poetry books for underachievers, motivates them to take part and also encourages parents to donate books.

School D: Secondary school

Learners' academic achievement has declined in the past two years. The pass rate dropped in 2007 from 70 to 60% but there was a slight improvement in 2008 to 61.38%. In terms of university entrance, there was an improvement from 15% in 2007 to 22% in 2008.

The respondents attribute the improvement in the academic performance to the monitoring systems which the candidate introduced after interacting with other principals during the contact and cohort sessions. There are also extra classes every weekday and on Saturdays, an initiative introduced and driven by the candidate.

School E: Secondary school

The matric pass rate has improved slightly to 73% with 11 distinctions in 2008, compared to 72.29 in 2007 and 67 in 2006. The modest improvement is attributed to the intervention programme driven by the candidate, where they conduct morning and evening classes (6-10 pm) every weekday. The candidate explains that those extra classes give educators a chance to complete the syllabus.

The principal explained that the candidate was in charge of curriculum and, to improve the Maths and physical science performance, the candidate suggested that the school opens one week early. The candidate is directly involved with the extra classes and he ensures that the whole process is running smoothly. The pass rate in life science for 2008 was 80%, compared to 50% in 2007. All role sets concur that the candidate is driving force behind the intervention programmes.

The principal explains that, through the ACE, the candidate managed to put the IQMS in place and the IDSO rated the school as the best in the region as far as the implementation of the IQMS.

The candidate says that he continuously motivates educators. He puts ideas on the table for discussion and the educators buy into it. He also invited parents and learners, and spoke to them about the importance of the intervention programme, before implementing it. To check the effectiveness of the intervention programme, the candidate introduced a register to check attendance. The candidate says that they used to share ideas with other principals and deputy principals. They would share good practices and he would implement them in his school. He has introduced effective procedures for dealing with absence and truancy in the school.

School F: Secondary School

Academic performance in this school has been fluctuating. The results were better in 2007 but, in 2008, the pass rate went down to 56%. The poor performance is attributed to instability in management. The candidate explains that he has been in the school for only eight months; however he has observed gradual changes among the learners and educators. Learner attendance has improved. There has been an improvement in maths since the candidate teaches this learning area. Classes start at 8:00 am but the school gate is closed 10 minutes before and the candidate ensures that all educators and learners are in their respective classrooms. The Deputy Principal also notes a change in human relations. She says that the candidate actively works with the SGB and the whole school team.

The candidate conducted a strategic planning exercise which involved all stakeholders, parent and educators, using knowledge from the ACE course. They had advocacy at the beginning of the year to discuss how results could be improved. He says that the educators are motivated because of his transparency. He takes them through policies, especially the code of conduct, SASE, IQMS. He takes disciplinary measures against educators who do not comply.

The IDSO reports that there is a more cohesive SMT. He notices teamwork in the school and he attributes it to the candidate. He

explains that, prior to the candidate's appointment, the school went through upheaval and confusion. He thinks that the candidate has brought order and stability in the school. He took the initiative to build strong relationships with all the stakeholders. He notes that:

- There is gradual progress in the achievements of learners.
- There is active participation by learners.
- He encourages student participation in co-curricular and extra-curricular activities.
- The school follows the National curriculum requirements.
- The discipline has improved.
- The candidate has improved the level of performance in communication.

The SGB member gives credit to the candidate. She says that he has good listening skills. He shares information with educators and advises them accordingly.

School and Community Relationships

School A

During the midterm phase, the candidate said that the school does not necessarily serve the needs of the community in which it is situated because LSENs come from different communities. All role sets on the other hand agree that there is a good relationship between the school and the community. The chairperson of the SGB says that the principal is involved in the school and the community gives back to the school. The Deputy principal mentions fundraising activities with the community. Community members offer to render services to the school for example, they volunteer to assist in cooking, bring food packages and offer donations in kind. The candidate networks with the companies to provide employment to the learners.

School B

All respondents report that the relationship between the school and its stakeholders is excellent. Community members play an active role because the candidate encourages them and they have a sense of ownership of the school. The candidate believes that the developments in the school since 2006 are drawing the community closer to the school, for example, the construction of the sports grounds and the paving of the school yard. The chairperson of the SGB says that there is active interaction with the community. The candidate attributes the reduction in learner delinquency to the community involvement with the school. The principal explains that the community involves the school in activities such as drug awareness and 'stop child abuse', which are connected by an NGO in the township. Ex convicts also come to address the learners. The school works with counsellors and NGOs within the community.

Several specific aspects of community participation were mentioned:

- Taking care of the school at night and during school holidays; it is the community members who protect the school.
- Learner enrolment has increased because the community can see the difference in the school management.
- There is a vegetable garden tended by the community in the school.
- The night school (FET) is held at the school.
- The school formed partnerships with business sectors; for example, the school is awaiting the erection of the MTN latic mast which will benefit the school financially while at the same time benefiting the community.

School C

The candidate says that there is an excellent relationship between the school and the various stakeholders. The candidate ensures parental participation in numerous surveys to improve the school. All parents were involved in the development of the vision and mission statement of the school. The candidate reports that people were sceptical that this was for the candidate's benefit but later they realised that it was for the good of the school. As a result, there is an 'overwhelming' response when they are called for parents meeting. The candidate says that the course has given her insight into strategies to be used.

The Chairperson of the SGB says that there is good interaction with the community. The community is very supportive because the candidate built a very good rapport with the community. 'She is very pro-active when it comes to interaction with the community':
- Inviting the people from the old age home to the school. They organise shows for them and the elderly tell stories to the learners.
- Inviting psychologists to the school to help learners.
- Working hand in hand with the vendors and taxi drivers to instil discipline among the learners.

School D

The candidate maintains that the relationship between the school and its stakeholders is better now and he gives credit to the ACE programme, saying that the ACE taught him the importance of having good relationships with the community: 'the community are our eyes'. He also mentions that the community uses the school premises on weekends for church. He invited the counsellor to visit the school and he (counsellor) offered bursaries to four students.

The principal says that the relationship between the school and its stakeholders has always been good but the candidate is very good in implementing and maintaining this good relationship. She says that the candidate has been instrumental in putting systems in place and enforcing policies. For example, he invites parents at school to discuss children's progress and/or misconduct. The IDSO also reports that there is more parental involvement in the school. The deputy principal echoes the IDSO and the principal. She explains that there is an increase in the number of parents attending parents meetings because they have realised that they now get a lot of information. She attributes it to the ACE saying that the candidate was taught the importance of communicating effectively. The SGB educator reports that the candidate was born in that area and relates well to community members. He has helped to sort out the drug problems.

School E

The candidate maintains that there is a good working relationship with the community. The principal says that student enrolment has increased to 1230 and attributes the increased enrolment to the ACE course. The candidate reports that parental involvement has improved since they informed parents about the phasing out of school fees. The educator says that the school works as a team but the candidate takes the lead in communicating and engaging the community.
- He introduced a system where he gives letters to children and encourages parents to check the books of the learners.
- They hold special meeting to make parents aware of happenings in the school.
- He uses members of the police forum to address the issue of drugs and to warn drug users. Once each term, the policemen search the whole school for drugs, so learners are very careful not to bring drugs in the school. The candidate says that he got most of those ideas from other candidates during discussion in the contact sessions.
- The school has opened a computer centre where community members can acquire computer skills.

- During parents' meeting, the candidate educates parents on the NCS and he advises them to enable their kids to choose the right learning areas.
- The school choir sings during funerals and the candidate encourages learners to visit the bereaved families.

School F

The candidate could not make any assessment because he had just joined the school. However, he reported that the community utilises the school for church meetings, they report learners who are roaming and any dubious activities which might be taking place around the school.

The second deputy principal, who has been in the school for 26 years, reports that the school has always had a good working relationship with the stakeholders. She mentioned that

- Individual pastors, doctors and social workers offer to address learners, to motivate them.
- The school is involved in the local community projects and activities.
- Neighbours watch the school.
- Community ward meetings are held at the school.
- The rugby field is used by other schools as well for training sessions and tournaments.

The SGB and the educator say that parents now take more interest in their children's work because of the improved communication.

Contact Sessions

The lecturers express satisfaction with the contact sessions. The coordinator says that they plan for a lot of interaction and there is a lot of participation from students. The other lecturers say that:

- The students were enthusiastic.
- The sessions are very interactive since students share their experiences.
- Attendance was good.
- Students learnt a lot from each other.
- There is excellent participation.

The lecturers say that there is a 50/50 balance of theory and practice, and a lot of learning comes from students.

Five ACE candidates say that the contact sessions were "very helpful", participative and focussed on candidates' experiences. The content was helpful in developing the candidates' capability as leaders in the sense that having the knowledge boosted the candidates' confidence in their practice. Issues which were reported included the ability to apply policy and enabling candidates to negotiate with learners.

In explaining the benefits gained from the discussions during the contact sessions, one candidate says that there are so many things in their work place with legal implications, yet principals and deputy principals were not aware of them. Another candidate says that, before the ACE course, the school did not have policies on many things, but now they have opened up files and drawn

up policies on HIV/AIDS, and on safety and security.

The candidates say that:

- The rapport was excellent with lecturers.
- Most of the content was practice based.
- There was a good balance between theory and practice.
- The lecturers used participative approaches.
- Most lecturers were excellent.
- Content focused on candidates' own school experiences.

Only one candidate had misgivings about the contact sessions. He says that, for people with higher qualification in Management, the course is like a refresher course. He further argues that people with postgraduate qualifications in management should not do it. He also noted that there was no balance between candidates because they were not at the same level.

Improving the contact sessions

All lecturers are comfortable with the current model but a few technical issues were noted:

- The long distance travelled is an issue for the students.
- As teaching takes place during the holidays, they sometimes encounter resistance from the candidates.
- The gaps between contact sessions are quite long, affecting motivation and feedback. It was suggested that, for the sake of continuity, they should have had weekly contact sessions but the lecturers say that this is not possible because of the busy work schedule of the principals and lecturers.

The candidates made varied suggestions for improvement. While one candidate reports that the attendance during holidays and Saturdays was very poor and advocates more contact sessions during school terms, other candidates call for cutting down the lecturing time and offering short sessions which are more effective. While others advocate more group work, others say that lectures should not allow for too much discussion around individual experiences.

One candidate suggests that they should work on some technical issues. He cited an example of receiving an SMS, at short notice, informing them about a contact session, when candidates may have other commitments.' He also notes that UJ and MGSLG did not check the district's programme when drawing up their timetable, leading to clashes. Overall, most candidate comment that the teaching was excellent and the lecturers were always well prepared. However, one candidate suggests that the project plan should take priority and he also feels that there was no thorough input from lecturers.

Teaching Materials

Unlike the ACE programme in the other provinces, the materials are prepared by MGSLG. Most of the respondents are satisfied with the materials, describing them as being excellent, relevant, and very user friendly, with enough learning depth and suitable for the practice-based ACE. The lecturers supplement the teaching materials with other resources and they also change the material to address policy changes and to stay abreast of changes in education. The lecturers point out that the teaching material is presently undergoing review and will be revised for 2010.

However, one lecturer expresses dissatisfaction with materials development, saying that they are not part of the process from conceptualization to completion; they only come in as reviewers. He suggests that, since they are delivering the module, it would be right if they took ownership of the materials from the beginning. Other lecturers concur that they should be involved in materials development.

Four candidates describe the teaching materials as being sufficient, valuable, clear and easily comprehensible, user friendly and very helpful. They were suitable for the practice based approach. Candidate used the teaching material to prepare the timetable, the budget and the SIP, and to draw up and implement different school policies. One candidate feels that, although there is nothing wrong with the content, the teaching material is a 'watered down' version of the B.Ed.

One candidate felt that the materials were not informative during the first year but this improved greatly during the second year, where it was linked with OBE and it was easy for candidates to see a cross section of issues such as the IQMS and Whole School Evaluation. Candidates continue to complain about the inaccessibility of support sources in the libraries at MGSLG and UJ.

Suggestions for improvement include regular update of information in the teaching materials, reducing the volume of material, making prescribed materials more available in the MGSLG and UJ libraries, and making teaching materials more 'hands on', with practical scenarios.

Mentoring

Despite mentoring being a distinctive feature of the ACE programme, all lecturers, maintain that there is no formal mentoring programme in place at the University. They say that mentoring is being done by MGSLG, because the lecturers do not have time for mentoring. The lecturers say that there is no relationship at all between the mentors and the lecturers. This affects the mentoring and teaching outcomes.

Improving the mentoring process

To improve mentoring the lecturers suggest that;

- There should be more frequent contacts between students and mentors to discuss pressing problems.
- There should be more funding to pay for more mentors.
- It should be formalized.
- Mentors should do site-based visits and get more personally involved in mentoring.
- Good ex principals with experience should be appointed for mentoring.
- The existing mentors need training because they don't know what to look for.
- Candidates should spend more time with the mentors (at least a day).
- Follow up meetings should be organised to provide feedback .
- Lectures should attend some of the cohort sessions.
- Meetings should be held between lecturers and mentors to discuss student progress. (However, the time factor is pointed out as a problem).

Candidates' views of mentoring

During the midterm phase, there was a lack of clarity about mentoring. As a result, there were divergent responses as to who does the mentoring. This pattern continues to some extent in the impact study. Some candidates reported that mentoring was done by ex-principals and IDSOs. One candidate singles out two of her lecturers at UJ as being her mentors and also mentions one of the facilitators at MGSLG.

Overall, candidates maintained that there was no formal mentoring programme at UJ and they still referred to the mentoring sessions held at MGSLG, where facilitators who have done the ACE course did the mentoring. The mentors meet candidates in groups of ±20 once in six weeks (6-7 sessions a year). However, it was noted that sometimes there are cancellations and extensions due to unforeseen problems.

The relationship between mentors and candidates

Most candidates commend their mentors as good role models. They say that they are enthusiastic, committed and good listeners. Most candidates say that they benefited a lot from the mentoring sessions, especially on how to tackle assignments. One candidate explains that he did not know how to choose the right suppliers but the mentor told him about the proper tendering procedures. Another candidate learnt to make notes when preparing a project plan, and checking the viability of project implementation. One candidate insists that he never experienced any mentoring. He says that, during the cohort sessions, it was more facilitation than mentoring.

Most candidates report having a good relationship with their mentors but there were some criticisms:

- Never had regular contact with mentors. They only met during sessions.
- Mentors never visited the school but the candidate could phone them 'any time'.
- Mentors never initiated contact with candidates.
- The meeting were not frequent and were not 'one on one'.

To improve the mentoring process the candidates suggest that

- Mentoring should be introduced from the start of the course.
- The mentors must have a natural affinity with the principals.
- It is better to get someone in our geographical area who is also managing a school and should have done the ACE course.
- The number of sessions should be increased, especially 'one on one'.
- Mentors should visit the schools.
- There should be an 'open door' policy at the university.

Stakeholder views

All role sets are unaware of the mentoring process, saying that they had never seen a mentor at the schools. During the midterm phase, mentors confirmed that they did not visit the schools because of the geographical distances and time constraints.

Networking

Both lecturers and candidates identify two types of student networking:

- Networking facilitated by a facilitator during the cohort session at MGSLG.
- Informal local networks formed by student themselves.

The lecturers are not involved in networks because of time constraints but they view the cohort networking with peers, and facilitated support by MGSLG, as an important and successful component of the programme. One lecturer explains that the cohort sessions create a platform where candidates:
 Share invaluable experience.

- Get to meet other people who have solved similar problems.
- Form a bond which continues even at the end of the course.
- Provide a lot of support for each other, especially the women.

The coordinator points out that, while networking for some candidates was excellent, others did not buy into it. 'For some it was "a paper chase" to complete the qualification, not necessarily about the growing or improving their schools.'

Improving networks

The lecturers say that they have no experience of networking, because they do not have free Saturdays to attend the cohort sessions. They suggest that the lecturers should have at least one representative in the cohort sessions. One lecturer suggests that full time tutors should be appointed to facilitate the networks for all students and to provide at least 20 hours of service and communication between the students and lecturers. He says that the tutor should be an ex principal with experience.

Candidates' views of networking

The candidates mention the networking during the cohort sessions at MGSLG but the main emphasis is on the informal networks initiated and facilitated by the students themselves. The numbers in a group varied between 4-6 participants. The networking sessions did not have a definite time and place. Candidates would meet at a convenient school whenever there was an assignment to be done but, usually, they would just discuss by phone. This implies a limited use of networks because the intentions of the programme were that school managers should work and learn together to develop their schools. In practice, they only met when there was an assignment to complete. One candidate complained that networking was costly because they had to use cell phones to arrange meetings. It was also difficult to get a convenient date for all members. One candidate explains that she did not attend regularly because she was staying far from the other candidates.

Despite these difficulties, candidates said that the meetings were very helpful because they used to share ideas and discuss assignments. The following benefits were highlighted:

- Getting resources from other colleagues which enabled them to complete assignments.
- Sharing books and information .
- Providing a perspective on what had to be done and whether they are meeting deadlines.

Candidates mentioned specific ideas and skills acquired through networking:

- Managing conflict between the educators and learners.
- Listening to learners.
- Discussing policy regularly.
- Introducing control registers.
- Getting donors.
- Getting ideas about fundraising.

One candidate mentions that he got the idea of the 'early departure' form from one of his colleagues during the network sessions. He introduced it in his school and it is working very well, to control the outgoing and incoming of educators. He uses it as a monitoring tool.

To improve networking, the candidates suggest:

- That there should be a schedule to encourage commitment by the candidates, and not meet only when there was an assignment to be completed.
- Networks should be made mandatory.
- Cluster people who are in the same area.

Role set views

 In most schools, the role sets were aware that the candidate was involved in networking with candidates from other schools because they used to meet at their school. Some indicated that these networks extended beyond the ACE cohorts. SGBs in three schools were not aware that the candidate was involved in networking. The IDSO and the educators in two of the secondary schools say that the candidates were networking with teachers in other schools.

Assessment

Assessment of the ACE has three components:

- Assignments.
- Project plans.
- Portfolio preparation.

During the midterm phase, it was indicated that candidates were required to write three assignments for each of five modules, making a total of 15 essays. Lecturers and candidates both complained that this was too much. During the impact phase a decision had been taken to reduce the assignment tasks to eight essays.

Candidates are also required to compile a portfolio which includes all the assignments set by the University, together with school-based documents, student reflections and a research project. The facilitators/mentors help the candidates with the portfolio. Candidates do not write tests and exams.

The coordinator explains that initially staff members did not want to mark portfolios but the assessment has now been re-worked

and candidates have been given a rubric so they know what lecturers expect. This makes the work a lot easier for the lecturers. One lecturer reports that they are piloting a new system in 2009. They are looking at a more integrated assessment. However, he adds that they have to stick to university policy.

Verification of site-based assessment

The lecturers are not involved in site-based verification. The IDSO and MGSLG do the on-site verification, but lecturers were uncertain as to whether it was being done. Asked about the role of the mentors in assessment, lecturers echoed the candidates' response that the mentors guide the candidates through the assignments.

Improving the assessment process

In order to improve the assessment process, the lecturers suggest that:

- Mentors/facilitators and lecturers should get together and speak with 'one voice'.
- More people should be involved in the assessment.
- Peers assessment should be introduced, and candidates should be encouraged to visit each other's school. (The time constraint is mentioned as a hindrance).

Candidates' views

The assessment activities were determined by the University. The candidates say that the assignments were very relevant to their practice. They were practical because they had to do research and apply it in the school situation, for example, strategies to overcome communication challenges in the school. The candidates found the assignments and the project quite helpful.

Candidates gave varied responses concerning feedback. While some feel that the feedback was not satisfactory, others were satisfied with it. One candidate says that it was not timely and not detailed. Another complained that feedback from the lecturers was poor, not prompt and never informative. However, three candidates said that they received quality and timely feedback from lecturers.

During the midterm phase, on-site verification of the portfolio had not been done and there was no clarity as to who was supposed to do it. However, the candidates were certain that it would be conducted during the second term. During the impact phase, varied responses are given. While some say that the IDSO conducted the on-site verification of the portfolio, three candidates say that there was no on-site verification of the portfolio. To explain why it had not been conducted, one candidate highlighted that only a few schools were chosen for on-site verification and that his school was not among the ones chosen.

Improving the assessment process

The candidates suggest that:

- There should be detailed timely feedback from lecturers.
- There should more support with portfolios.
- There should be on-site verification.
- They should introduce an effective mentoring system.
- They should provide more resources in the libraries at UJ and MGSLG.
- The MGSLG library should be more accessible. It was open during the working hours, but should work on flexi times to allow access.

Role sets' views

The role sets presented varying views pertaining to the assessment. The SGB, the educator and the IDSO in school A did not know anything about the assessment for the ACE. The deputy principal, however, says that the candidate would discuss the activities for his reading project with the educators.

Similarly, in school B, the respondents were not clear about assessment issues. The IDSO and the SMT member knew about the portfolio and the project plan, and they say that the candidate would involve the educators in the assignments. The IDSO also says that she assisted the candidate with her portfolio.

The principal of school C says that she would see the candidate doing the assessment activities at school. For example, preparing the budget started as an assignment for the ACE. The IDSO confirms that he was assessing the candidates. 'I went deep into their work to check whether they were implementing what they were studying'. The deputy principal also confirmed that site based assessment was done by the IDSO.

Similarly, the second deputy principal of school F says that the candidate had to submit a portfolio and all teachers were involved. Minutes had to be submitted as evidence that it was done at school. She explained that the IDSO had to check the Portfolio before the final submission

All role sets had never seen anyone from the university carrying out site-based assessment. The principal highlights that only a few selected schools were involved in site-based assessment. The lecturers confirmed that, because of their busy schedules, they cannot do site-based assessment and verification.

Impact on School Leadership and Management

A distinctive feature of the national ACE programme is the intention to have a direct impact on candidates' leadership and management practice. The learning model assumes that participants will improve their practice by implementing course theory in their schools and classrooms.

Managing time

During the midterm phase, candidates said that there had been a change in the way they planned their time on a typical day and they attributed the change to the ACE programme. Apart from one candidate, the rest claimed not to be office bound. They said that they were more visible around the school. During the impact phase, all participants were shadowed for one day to see how they spent their time. Five candidates acknowledge that their programme on the shadowing day was their typical day.

The school A candidate says that he spends 75% of his time in the office, having meetings and discussions pertaining to the daily running of the school, and 25% of the time is spent outside, checking the grounds and the building activities taking place. Unlike other candidates, he does not teach. This was confirmed during the shadowing experience where the candidate was observed holding one meeting after the other with different stakeholders. These included school bus drivers, builders, electricians, the deputy principal, the SGB chairperson and a management meeting with the SMTs. All meetings took place at his office and different members were giving feedback on different management aspects such as classroom inspection, classroom visits, and evacuation

drill, finalising the new budget and registers). In all meetings, the communication was two way. The candidate was asking relevant questions, taking notes, and he addressed all people in a respectful manner. In the meeting with the SMT, the secretary was taking minutes.

After the meeting with the SMT, the candidate went out to meet the staff before they left for the day to discuss the day's activities and concerns and to bid the educators farewell. The candidate explains that he does that every day.

Contrary to the candidates' response that he spends 75% of his time in the office, the chairperson of the SGB says that the candidate is everywhere seeing to the wellbeing of the school. The deputy principal also says that he is not office-based. He knows about everything that goes on around the school, for example, the feeding scheme, transport, building project and curriculum issues. The deputy principal and the educator say that the candidate does classroom visits. The IDSO notes that the candidate is an excellent manager because he delegates. This was observed during the shadowing. The IDSO adds that the candidate is a trustworthy, loyal and diligent person who takes pride in his work, but empowers people to deal with problems.

The candidate in school B says that, before the course, she was not good in planning. She says that there were always distractions during the day and she would end up taking work at home. However, that changed after the course. She says that she is now more visible around the school.

> 'I don't send my administrator...I usually go and see my subordinates instead of calling them to come to my office...
> I involve all relevant staff members during meetings and I request them to give feedback on any project they are
> involved in.' I communicate to all, I check the food [and] talk to the food vendors. ... If there is a blockage in the toilet,
> instead of just calling the plumber, I inspect it first and then I make an informed decision.'

Most of the candidate's claims were confirmed during the shadowing. All role sets also agree that the candidate was visible around the school and she does more work outside the office. They say that the candidate supervises the maintenance around the school, she ensures that everything is in order, for example checking that gates are closed and that learners are in class.

Similarly, the candidate in school C was more visible around the school. During the shadowing, she was observed doing class visits, monitoring the reading project and holding meetings with different people. She says that she:

- Has learnt how to manage my time more effectively.
- Puts time limits on what she has to do.
- Manages administration, SMT, educators and learners.
- Oversees all aspects of the school.

All role sets concur that the candidate is highly visible around the school. The SGB says that the candidate handles the challenges at the school with confidence. She has a positive approach when dealing with issues during the SGB meetings. The HOD describes the candidate as an octopus but with extra tentacles. She says that the candidate spends a fair amount of time in the office, staff room, and with janitors.

The candidate in school D says that he now manages his time better. His typical day starts from 6:45 offering extra maths lessons to grade 12 learners, after which he has a briefing with educators in the Staff room. He has a management plan for the week. He

is not office based. This was evidenced during the shadowing. The candidate spent more time going around the school checking on different aspects and speaking to different people. He taught four periods in grades 11 and 12. He briefed grade 12 learners, addressing some disciplinary issues. During the breaks, the candidate walked around the school checking whether learners are smoking Daga, checking the work done by groundsmen, and checking the food sold to the learners. The candidate was very strict with students and very respectful to the food vendors. He ensured that all learners and educators were in class before going back to his office to do some administration work.

The principal says that she has noticed a great change in the candidate's management. He has always been a visible person but the course has helped him to act more responsibly. The IDSO also notes that the candidate has set systems in place which have helped him to manage his time more effectively. For example, the time book, class registers and registers for early departures. He notes also that gates were always locked and no learner could leave during contact times. The deputy principal confirms that the candidate is involved in administration. He draws up the timetable and ground duty rosters. He gives the management plans for the whole term with submission dates and he forces educators to adhere to the submission dates. She adds that filing has helped. The candidate now uses less time looking for things.

During the shadowing, the candidate in school E spent most time teaching. He complained that his teaching load was heavy and is the same as that of an HOD. The candidate says that he has improved a lot in his filing system.

All role sets of Candidate E say that the candidate has improved a lot in time management. He is more visible around the school. He monitors many aspects in the school, for example he monitors the work of the HODs, he monitors late coming of learners, he enforces submission of management plans, and he initiated and drives the extra classes for grade 10, 11 and 12. The educator explicitly states that, without the candidate, the school would come to a standstill. For example, he does the school time table, runs the examination time table, and helps grade 12 learners with enrolment forms.

The candidate in school F states that, on average, he spends more time in the office and in class teaching maths. He says that he drew up a timetable for checking the grounds. The candidate explains that he got the idea of drawing a timetable during the discussions in the cohort sessions at MGSLG. The role sets state that the candidate is visible around the school. He spends less time in the office and he never misses his classes. He monitors the grounds to ensure that learners and educators are in class.

Management practice

Despite earlier allegations that the ACE had brought aggravation in his life, candidate A was very positive when asked whether the ACE has impacted on his practice. He said that the course reinforced certain things such as:

- Interpreting and implementing policies.
- Networking with candidates.
- Implementing the project plan which greatly enhanced the learners' reading skills.

However, he insists that, overall, it is the other candidates who benefited from his experience.

According to the deputy principal, the only positive contribution of the ACE is the reading programme. She says that the candidate initiated it in the school and ensures the smooth running of the programme through effective monitoring and evaluation. Other than

the reading programme, she echoes the candidate's view that the ACE was a waste of time for the candidate because he was already doing most of the things before the ACE. However, the IDSO says that, although he was a good principal, the ACE course made him even better in several areas:

- Knowledge of the policies,
- He was always autocratic but now he is more democratic.
- The financial system has always been good but now he has refined the financial process. For example they have a financial committee which runs the school finances. The school budgets well and caters for the needs of the school. The IDSO attributes this to the financial management module.

The SGB chairperson and the educator also say that the candidate has always been a good principal but he has now perfected his work. The SGB mentions several strengths developed over the past two years:

- He is a good listener.
- He ensures that things are done in a professional manner.
- He consults with the chairperson of the SGB.

Candidate B says that she has gained confidence in dealing with people and making important decisions pertaining to the daily running of the school and taking up any challenge:

> *'I was not familiar with certain aspects of the finances, for example monitoring the budget. Now I have learnt to stay within the limits. I have also learnt more about substantive fairness and procedural fairness'.*

The role sets mentions several other ways in which her management practice has improved:

- Communicating effectively with both staff and learners.
- Enforcing policy, for example encouraging parents to be part of interview panels.
- Transparency.
- Involving parents and other stakeholders, and encouraging accountability to them.
- Role demarcation and delegating.
- Alleviation of educators' fears.
- The meetings are now well conducted and detailed minutes are taken.
- Managing time more effectively.
- Learning to say 'no'.
- Learning to implement the principles of legotla, Ubuntu and Afrikan management.

The principal of school C says that the candidate has become an asset and they discuss issues pertaining to the school daily. The principal says that the programme gave the candidate a firm foundation and he is positive that the candidate can now run her own school effectively. The principal lists several positive aspects:

- She handles the school based support team (SBST).
- She is the chief coordinator of the LTSM committee.
- She is the coordinator of the annual survey.
- She is a disciplinarian.
- She is a good team player.

- She can handle conflict very well.
- She is a pastoral care mother of the school.
- She is approachable.
- She provides timely feedback to the principal and educators.

The principal adds that his task is a lot easier now since the candidate runs the school and the principal is able to attend to other pressing issues such as disciplinary issues at the school.

The role sets say that the candidate is a better manager, especially in the area of conflicts management around the SGB. She plans well, helps the educators to develop and supports them. She ensures the smooth running of the school and conducts meetings. The candidate has introduced several new ideas, such as the reading project and the feeding scheme project. The SGB says that the candidate managed to persuade the stakeholders to accept the changes.

All role sets of candidate D say that he has always been a good manager but the ACE has helped him to be better. The IDSO notes that there is now order in the school. The principal reports that, when she gives the candidate responsibility, he takes his job seriously and listens to her. The second deputy principal mentions several strengths:

- Conducting meetings very well, notably the SGB meetings.
- Writing detailed minutes.
- Record keeping.
- Drawing policies.
- Control of registers.
- Open communication.
- Delegation.

Candidate E testified that he used to forget to file important documents but he has now improved in this area. He says that he drafts the school composite timetable and the exam timetable. He explains that he used to do it manually but now he uses the computer to draw up the timetable.

The candidate further confesses that he used to get so emotional and sometimes slap learners but, after learning about the legal implications, he refrains from beating learners. 'The ACE course taught me to be more tolerant with my colleagues and learners. I am now more confident and I am able to accept other people's opinion/view and not looking at it as undermining my authority'.

The role sets in school E say that the candidate has always been a good leader but he became even a better manager after the course. The principal points out that the candidate's management practice has improved greatly. He was an introvert, keeping things to himself, but now ACE has changed and he displays confidence in whatever he does. For example, the candidate monitors late coming of learners and he enforces submission of Management plans. The educator says that, without the candidate, the school could come to a standstill. He does the school time table and he heads the exams and helps the grade 12 learners with the enrolment forms. The role sets point out that the candidate is a better manager because he is more patient and tolerant with colleagues and learners, a character trait which the candidate himself admits to having lacked before the ACE.

The second deputy principal of school F states that the candidate knows his office work, and the files that contain documents from the Head office and the District office are always in order. The candidate introduced morning briefings in the school where he addresses staff members and allows time for discussions and reflection on issues pertaining to the school. The educator says that this has enhanced team work.

The shadowing day was not typical but it provided some insights into the candidate's management practice. There were visitors from the district and another group from MGSLG. The IDSO's visit was unexpected and the candidate had to mobilise and put together all the necessary documents required by the IDSO and his team. He also had to attend to the group from MGSLG who had come to interview learners, educators and SMT members on disciplinary issues. The candidate delegated different tasks to educators and the IDSO commended the candidate for his efficiency in providing the required documents. Despite the long day, when the visitors left at 12 noon, the candidate went to teach the grade 12 class, after which he held a meeting with the second deputy principal. The researcher observed that there was mutual respect and agreement between the candidate and the second deputy principal.

Accountability

In the mid-term phase, the four deputy principals reported a significant change with the accountability. They said that they used to be directly accountable to the principal and the SGB. However, after embarking on the ACE course, they felt accountable to the parents, learners, and other teachers too. The two principals said that, although they reported to the circuit managers and district office, they were accountable to the SGB, parents and learners. Similar responses are given by all candidates during the impact phase.

The role sets also affirm that the candidates are accountable to all stakeholders. The IDSO, SGB and the deputy principal of candidate A say that the candidate is accountable to them and they think that the nature of his accountability has changed in the sense that he consults them. The educator also says that the candidate takes time to explain his actions to the educators and the learners.

The role sets of candidate B also say that she is accountable and she gives feedback all the time to the IDSO, SGB, SMTs and the educators. The role sets of candidate C say that she is accountable to the SGB, the principal, the educators and the learners. The principal says that the candidate realises that the principal carries much responsibility so she tries to involve everybody.

All respondent agree that candidate D is more accountable. He ensures that he gives feedback to the principal on whatever he does. This was confirmed during the shadowing when the candidate spent over 30 minutes with the principal telling her about what had happened in the school in her absence. The candidate also feels accountable to the learners.

The principal in school E comments that the candidate is accountable to the SGB, while the educator states that the candidate does not do anything without consulting the educators and discussing with the principal. He does everything in the interest of the learners. The second deputy principal in school F says that they are accountable to each other. The SGB reports that the candidate is accountable to them.

School Improvement

Another distinctive feature of the national ACE programme is the intention to promote school improvement. The learning model assumes that improvement will occur as a result of candidates' enhanced leadership and pedagogic knowledge being implemented in schools and classrooms.

All respondents say that the schools have improved in terms of learner motivation, performance, discipline, team work among educators and policy implementation. Despite the candidate's insistence that he did not benefit from the ACE programme, all role sets in school A concur that the school is better since the candidate began the ACE programme:

- The management style is more democratic.
- The educators are more positive and motivated.
- The reading programme has improved the reading skills of the learners.
- The learners are disciplined and motivated.
- New infrastructure (classrooms and office block) have been put up.

All respondents of school B say that the school has improved. The IDSO says that the school moved from being an underperforming school to a school which is steadily improving. The candidate mentions several ideas, obtained from networking with other candidates, which she implemented in her school:

- Getting sponsors who sponsored the ground facilities and teaching aids (TV sets for learners, a computer and printer).
- Selling the idea of no fees and writing a proposal to the Department of Education to support her argument (at the time of the interview, all learners' fees were paid by the government.)
- Motivating and introducing the grade R in the school in 2007.
- Introducing strategic planning in the school (she takes all staff members away from the school for team building.

The role sets in school C note that there is a big change in the school since the candidate embarked on the ACE course. The chairperson of the SGB says that there is an improved working relationship with the SGB, enhanced educators and learners' motivation to participate in different activities, and enhanced teamwork among the educators. The SGB explains that the candidate goes the extra mile; she is not an '8-4' educator.

The principal and the HOD report several areas in which the candidate has contributed towards the school improvement:

- Drawing up the school improvement plan (SIP), and the strategic plan.
- Coming up with a project plan (literacy) for the development of the learner. This was incorporated in the SIP and WSE.
- Rewriting the finance policy.
- Being instrumental in training janitors in computer literacy.
- Encouraging the educators to do the ACE.
- Sending proposals to companies for donations.
- Increasing the pass rate.
- Buying furniture for the classes.
- Spearheading the improvement of the vision and mission of the school.

All role sets in school D report that the school has greatly improved. The principal say that, since the candidate's project was on the IQMS, he has worked hard on managing the Master files and he has opened files for each educator and manages them well. The IDSO comments that the school is counted among the best in the district. Areas mentioned as having improved are:

- Curriculum management
- Improvement of grade 12 results, especially in mathematics and science (the candidate teaches maths.)
- There is enhanced teamwork and discussion among the educators.
- Minimised late coming and student loitering. This was confirmed during the shadowing, where the candidate was observed walking around the school during and after breaks to ensure that all learners are in class.
- Organising motivational speakers to come and address learners.
- Organising educational tours for learners.

The principal of school E says that the school is getting better. There has been an increase in enrolment because the community has developed confidence in the school. As a result of the intervention strategies introduced by the candidate, the quality of teaching has improved and has resulted in improved matric results. The SGB comments on improvements in cleanliness and learner discipline.

The candidate of school F has been in the school for only eight months. The second deputy principal says that the candidate has established order in the school and there are several improvements which should lead to improved academic performance:

- The learners are now controllable. They attend classes.
- The educators are more disciplined and act in a professional manner. This has created a positive learning environment.
- Educators are motivated and they have taken on extra morning classes for grades 11 and 12.
- The SGB meetings are running smoothly.
- The candidate has formulated clear policies that are required to run the school effectively. For example he has established procedures to curb absenteeism, late coming and truancy.
- Overall learner behaviour within the school has improved.

Professional Development

The four lecturers all point to professional development gains through their participation in the programme. The coordinator says that participation in the ACE has been a 'learning curve'. He explains that 'we learn a lot' from the candidates. This has enabled the lecturers to understand the school contexts. The coordinator further mentions that the ACE course has helped him to keep up to date with national provision and the Department of Education

One lecturer says that the interaction with the candidates provides several benefits:

- Getting to know practical problems in the schools
- Earning extra money.
- Doing research .
- Providing a better understanding of management problems.

Another lecturer states that interaction with student is invaluable because

- It enables the lecturers to learn from the students
- It facilitates the lecturers' understanding of candidates' problem, needs and what motivates them.
- It facilitates lasting friendships.
- It creates better understanding of management practices and the school context.
- It facilitates the ability to integrate theory into practice.

Overall, the ACE programme provides the following benefits for the lecturers:

- Student feedback promotes reflection and professional development.
- Papers pertaining to the ACE programme have been published.
- Gaining exposure to different modes of delivery.
- Helping the lecturers to reflect on their theoretical framework.
- Helping lecturers to understand different school contexts.
- Lecturers are forced to read widely to keep abreast of new developments.
- Improved management practices.

Perceptions of the ACE Programme

Best parts of the ACE programme

The lecturers identify several strengths of the programme:

- The interaction with different candidates in the programme provides a better understanding of how different schools operate.
- The student's active involvement during the contact session.
- Listening to candidates' experiences and challenges was enriching.
- The practice-based component has brought a lot of advantage for the school principals and it has facilitated interaction with other principals.

The candidates offered varied responses. Some mentioned the contact sessions while others chose networking, where candidates shared ideas with other principals. Others single out the support from the cohort sessions at MGSLG while one mentions the assessment model. Overall comments include:

- 'The knowledge and information acquired was priceless'.
- 'I learnt to take information and channel it properly'.
- 'I met people who have inspired and motivated me'.
- 'I enjoyed interacting with other candidates and I appreciated the simplicity of the different principals' approach'.
- 'I enjoyed the support from lecturers and library personnel'.

Improving the ACE programme

The lecturers offered diverse suggestions for improvement. One lecturer mentions assessment, recommending that fewer tasks be given and lecturers give more direct feedback. Other suggestions include:

- There should be more contact sessions, especially on portfolio development.

- Lecturers should be involved in the review of the materials.
- Lecturers should attend some of the cohort sessions.
- Meetings between lecturers and mentors should be held to discuss student progress.
- Mentors and lecturers should 'speak with one voice'.

The candidates suggest several areas of improvement:
- The practical part of the ACE content need to be improved.
- Quality and timely feedback should be provided.
- Mentoring sessions should be held on a one-to-one basis to assess the project and plan and guide candidates through the process.
- It should close the gap between theory and practice; interpretation of policies.
- Visits to schools to check implementation, either by mentors or lecturers.
- More on site verification by the IDSO.
- More involvement of the District. Some district officials seem to be totally unaware of the programme.
- There should be more communication between the provincial DoE and the university.

Meeting candidates' expectations

Most candidates agree that the ACE has broadened their understanding and boosted their confidence. However, candidate A maintains that the ACE programme has not met his expectations because the practical perspective of the course, where lecturers and mentors visited schools, was not implemented.

The candidate in school B says that the ACE programme has met her expectations in the sense that she has acquired management skills and knowledge on how to interpret and implement policy, and she has improved in her planning.

The candidate in school C says that the knowledge imparted was excellent:
- I have learnt to become more of an instructional leader, thus becoming a more effective deputy principal.
- The ACE has empowered me to plan more efficiently and to play my role more effectively.
- It has facilitated the implementation of continuous development, coaching and giving feedback to educators and to develop educators to become lifelong learners.

Candidate D says that the ACE has met his expectations in the sense that he has improved as a manager and he feels he can run the school as a principal.

Candidate E reports that the ACE has met his expectations. He has improved in policy development, timetabling and communication with educators. After the course, he reviewed and updated the policies. The revised policies were seen by the researcher and they were explicit and applicable to the school context. The candidate further explains that:
- Before doing anything, I start by checking the legal implications. I constantly refer to policy.
- I used to think and work haphazardly but now I am more careful.
- I have moved away from the idea of saying that it is 'my thing'. It is teamwork now. We share ideas before implementing anything.

Candidate F states that the ACE has broadened his scope and has boosted his self confidence. 'I have started networking with principals all over Gauteng province'

Additional points

The interviewees were given the opportunity to offer additional comments. The lecturers said that:

- The course is very good because it enable lecturers to meet principals and deputy principals, to understand their challenges, frustrations, anxieties, joys, and changes in the education system.
- There was a great need but the ACE course has made a difference in terms of school management. The lecturers get a lot of positive feedback.
- The district official should not criticize and look for faults.
- Universities should introduce a management course for District officials with emphasis on supporting principals.

Role sets' views

One IDSO comments that it is a very good course. It has helped the candidates to deal with transformation issues, representation and humanitarian issues. SMT members and educators advocated a national roll out. They say that the ACE is an excellent course which should be done by all school managers and especially newer principals. One IDSO notes that the programme is beneficial to the entire school community.

Candidates' views

With one exception, all the candidates say that the course is empowering and they recommend that all school managers should take the course. The candidates recommend that the ACE becomes a national qualification for all SMT members.

Overview of Gauteng case studies

University

The University lecturers maintain their enthusiasm and excitement about the ACE programme. Time constraints affect lecturers' participation in mentoring, networking and site based assessment. The interaction with the ACE candidates has provided valuable experience and knowledge to the lecturers and promoted reflection on their theoretical framework and professional development. Informed research papers pertaining to the ACE programme have been developed and published. Teaching in the ACE programme has helped lecturers to understand different school contexts and lecturers are forced to read widely to keep abreast of new developments and new legislations The teaching material is undergoing review and assessment tasks have also been reduced. The lecturers believe that the ACE is impacting favourably on the quality of leadership in schools. The 2009 cohort comprises both principals and deputy principals.

Schools

All schools continue to serve the same deprived township communities, with high levels of poverty, and unemployment. All candidates are concerned with improving academic performance and standards, as measured by matric and test results, are slowly but steadily improving. In the two primary schools and the training centre, the candidates embarked on a project plan to improve

the learners' literacy skills, while the candidates in the three secondary schools introduced intervention programmes where they conduct morning, evening and Saturday classes. In addition to academic issues there has been a notable improvement in aspects such as learner enrolment, attendance, motivation and discipline, and educator motivation. Similarly, relationships between schools and their communities are noted as having improved as a result of the ACE programme. In five cases, the respondents attribute the change to the positive attitudes acquired after interacting and sharing ideas with other principals.

Candidates report formidable changes in the way they approach management issues, notably the manner in which the budget is drawn, management of teaching and learning, articulation of policies and improvement in discipline management. Care should be taken in interpreting these self-reported findings.

The ACE programme

The case study candidates are from the third cohort of the ACE programme developed by MGSLG in partnership with UJ. All candidates passed and were looking forward to the graduation. The candidates seem to have benefited a lot from the course and there was evidence of improvement in their management practice in terms of policy articulation, facilitating team work, improved working relationships with educators and the SGB, and implementation of the project plan. There is no formal mentoring programme in place at UJ and the candidates did not have regular contact with mentors. They only met during the cohort session at MGSLG. Contrary to the intentions of the programme, the candidates' networks were informal and dominated by completion of assignments as opposed to school management and development. Reportedly there was no on-site verification of portfolio.

Overall, most respondents are very positive about the ACE programme. They say that it is empowering and they recommend that all SMT members should do the course. Candidates say that the ACE programme meets their expectations especially in the area of policy articulation.

Overview of Survey and Case Study Findings

Introduction

The research team conducted two 100% sample surveys with the first pilot cohorts in six provinces and also worked a smaller group of ACE candidates in each province. There were 27 case study participants in the baseline phase, but sample erosion reduced this to 25 in the mid-term phase and 24 in the impact study. Two of the Western Cape sample withdrew from the programme and one candidate in Limpopo declined to co-operate with the research team.

Almost three-quarters (74%) of survey respondents are principals, while the rest are deputy principals or HoDs. Similarly, most (17) of the case study participants are current principals, while five are deputies (four in Gauteng and one in the Western Cape) and two of the four Mpumalanga candidates are HoDs. Mpumalanga is untypical in that there are several participants in each of the schools selected for inclusion in the field tests. The researcher is working with two candidates in each of two schools while there is only one participant per school in the other provinces.

The 24 case study candidates provide a good gender balance in line with the aims of the ACE programme (13 women and 11 men). Eleven are from primary schools, 10 from secondary, two from combined schools and one from a training centre.

Case study methodology

For the impact study, the research team employed a consistent research strategy across the six provinces:
- Shadowing 23 of the 24 candidates to observe their leadership and management practices.
- Interviews with all 24 candidates.
- Documentary analysis of portfolios, policy documents and school achievement data.
- Interviews with up to five lecturers at each university.

In earlier phases of the research, mentoring sessions were observed and mentors were interviewed. Observation of network activities was also part of the planned methodology in the mid-term phase but this was not achievable in all cases, either because network activity had not taken root, or because network meetings did not coincide with field-work visits.

Socio-economic background of the learners and the community

Most schools in the survey, and in the case study sample, serve deprived township or rural communities, with high levels of poverty, unemployment, child-headed families, drug and alcohol abuse, and, in secondary schools, teenage pregnancy. This provides an unpromising context for learner achievement. While effective school leadership and management are important, they cannot compensate for such difficult socio-economic challenges.

School achievement

In the baseline study, there were divergent responses to this question with secondary school participants focusing mainly on academic issues while primary school respondents mainly addressed other types of achievement. This pattern continued in the mid-term phase and, to some extent, in the impact study. While candidates often reported enhanced achievement levels, hard evidence, where available, did not always support these claims.

Table 8b shows that 221 of the 284 respondents claim that their school is 'improving' while only 19 say that it is 'declining'. Similarly, table 9 shows that 73% of candidates claim that their aim, to 'improve my school', has been 'fully achieved. Table 10 shows that most respondents claim 'much improved' for a whole range of post-ACE outcomes, including 80% for teaching and learning. These are self-reported data and must be interpreted cautiously, especially as case study findings do not support these claims (see below).

The case study data show that secondary schools were judged mainly on their matric results. Findings were available for eight schools (there were two candidates at one school and one interviewee was no longer working at the case study school). Only one has produced clear improvements in matric results while performance has declined slightly at three schools and fallen significantly at four of them. The decline was attributed to changes in the composition of the learners and/or to internal division within schools.

Two of the schools have substantial 'within-school' variation, with excellent performance in some learning areas and very weak outcomes in others. It is not possible to reach firm conclusions on such limited data but it is clear that the ACE programme has not led to short-term gains in matric results at the case study schools, in contrast to the claims reported in the survey findings. This finding needs to set against the data which show that national matric results have declined since 2006:

2006:   66.5%

2007:   65.2%

2008:   62.5%

There is some evidence (see below) that candidates focused on ACE assignments instead of managing their schools. It is possible that the benefits from the programme will become more evident now that the assessment requirements have been completed, and the researchers found some examples to support this assumption. The international evidence shows that effective leadership development is likely to produce gains in learner outcomes but that such benefits are often long-term as enhanced leadership takes time to impact on learning. Firm evidence on the links between the ACE and school achievement would require a longer-term study.

Primary and combined schools use a range of criteria to address achievement, including performance in sport, enhanced buildings and equipment, learner discipline and welfare, and changes in school culture and climate. These improvements may eventually impact on learning but this was not evident during the research period. Academic data were available at five schools; three showing improvement with two in decline. The composition of learners was offered as a reason for decline in some cases but we also found examples of weak management. Again, these findings contradict the self-reported survey claims. The ACE programme may have produced short-term decline because participants switched their focus from school management to assignment completion. This leads to the conclusion that the initial effects of the ACE programme on learner achievement may be negative or, at best, neutral although we also saw evidence of principals beginning to implement their leadership learning. Candidates in all provinces complained of assessment overload, although this eased in some provinces in the second year of the programme (see below).

A wider problem is the tendency for principals not to conceptualise their role as 'leaders of learning'. Bush and Heystek's (2006) research in Gauteng showed that principals placed 'leadership of learning' only seventh of ten factors, when asked to rank aspects of school management in order of importance. A more recent small-scale study of ACE candidates in Limpopo and Mpumalanga, funded by the Zenex Foundation (Bush, Joubert, Kiggundu and Van Rooyen 2009), shows heightened recognition of the significance of this leadership dimension, with some principals introducing new initiatives, such as classroom observation, designed to monitor the quality of teaching and learning. This suggests that the ACE programme's Managing Teaching and Learning module has begun to change attitudes and practice.

School and community relationships

Table 11 shows that survey respondents claim significant improvements in relationships with a wide range of stakeholders. For example, 84% claim that 'working with other educators' is 'much improved'. Similarly, most case study participants report improved relationships with parents and some, but not all, attribute this to the ACE programme. Links with parents have always been regarded as significant but new evidence from Leithwood et al (in press) shows that leadership engagement with families can have a powerful impact on learner outcomes. Given the fragmented nature of many South African families, with child-headed and

granny-headed units, and the poor quality of housing for many learners, the 'family pathway' may be even more important in South Africa than in more affluent countries.

Candidates' awareness of the value of strong community links has been enhanced by the ACE, for example in the Eastern Cape, where one candidate says that the school must become part of the community. Some school principals have become adept at gaining sponsorship from business, for example in KZN, while Limpopo principals report parental involvement in school activities such as fencing the grounds, or cooking food for learners. There is also evidence of enhanced relationships with the South African Police Service and with social workers. In Mpumalanga and Western Cape, candidates' awareness of the value of community engagement has been enhanced but this has not led to significant changes in practice in most schools and one participant says that 'we still need to engage with the community'. Some of the Gauteng schools have developed their community links, and this has led to improved learner behaviour and enhanced involvement of parents.

Contact sessions

Five universities were responsible for delivering the ACE course with the first pilot cohort (one works with two provinces). Researchers observed between one and three contact sessions in each HEI. The universities offer diverse models of delivery:

- Block teaching over several days (UCT, UJ and UKZN).
- Friday afternoon/evening sessions (NMMU).
- Saturday sessions (University of Pretoria).

In the Western Cape, the delivery model is based on a 'public-private' partnership between the university and a consultancy group.

The delivery model does not appear to produce different levels of satisfaction from candidates but it is recommended that contact sessions are scheduled to minimise disruption to candidates' schools. More significant is the size of the learner group, which ranges from 25, to 200 in the Western Cape, where two cohorts have been combined. It is clear from the observations, and from candidate and lecturer interviews, that there is a link between class size and levels of interactivity. Despite the aspirations of most lecturers, interaction is very limited in the larger groups, thus working against the philosophy of the programme, summarised in the annual report of one course co-ordinator. 'The delivery mode implies that students will not merely be taught, but that effective learning will take place, focusing on a movement away from passive learning to the active involvement of students in the management of schools'. Two researchers note that most candidates are still too dependent on their lecturers, stressing the receipt of 'information' rather than its application to school practice.

Most universities deal with the problem of scale by also providing smaller group facilitation activity. These sometimes lead to successful, interactive sessions, as observed in KZN, Gauteng and Western Cape. However, they may simply be used for administrative purposes, as observed with one Mpumalanga group, or result in 'no proper group work', as in the Eastern Cape. In the small group sessions, as well as the main contact sessions, the settings sometimes inhibited interactive learning.

The survey findings suggest considerable satisfaction with aspects of the contact sessions, with 73% saying that 'meetings' were 'of great help' while 74% say the same about 'discussions'. However, 'access to academic staff' was much lower at 54%. Lecturers

also offer a positive picture of the contact sessions. Most academic staff are enthusiastic about the programme and, in Eastern Cape, for example, they see the contact sessions as 'exciting', while also acknowledging that lectures are not conducive to group work, a point echoed by staff at all five universities.

The case study candidates offer varied views of the teaching, some welcoming the teaching while others say that sessions are 'boring' and over-theoretical, as well as providing few opportunities for interaction. The impact study findings suggest that universities have responded to some of these concerns as candidates were more positive than they were in the mid-term phase. However, care should be taken in interpreting such findings, as candidates may have been experiencing euphoria following their successful completion of the programme. This element may also have influenced the positive survey ratings.

Teaching materials

The national teaching materials were prepared under the auspices of the National Management and Leadership Committee (NMLC) and were intended to be used by all providers, except in Gauteng, in order to denote a common curriculum. The Gauteng group used MGSLG's modules, which were prepared before the national materials. The research team's baseline report (Bush et al 2007) provides a critique of the national materials based on documentary analysis. Their recommendations were considered by the NMLC's Review Group, which produced revised materials in November 2008. The comments below mostly relate to the unrevised modules, although the Eastern Cape lecturers note that the revised material is 'just sufficient and not as bulky as the original'.

The impact survey shows very positive findings with 80% saying that the materials are 'of great help' and only 2% responding that they are 'of limited help'. In many cases, this was candidates' first engagement with leadership and management ideas, so they could not adopt a comparative perspective.

Most lecturers are content with the modules, saying that they are valuable because they are practice-based, and KZN staff, in particular, praise the materials. However, it is clear that the HEIs have chosen to use them in different ways. Some supplement these modules with their own resources and others make only limited use of the national programme, preferring to use it for reference, while leading with their own materials. Lecturers in one HEI, in particular, were critical of the modules, describing them as 'dense, 'not user-friendly' and written 'to fill pages'. There was also specific criticism of the original 'managing teaching and learning' module, which gave little attention to the management of teaching and learning. The varied use of the materials raises questions about the extent to which the ACE can be regarded as a genuinely national programme.

The case study candidates also have varied views on the materials. Some are positive, saying that they are 'fantastic', a view that may be attributable to their previous lack of familiarity with leadership and management sources. Certain candidates others offer a range of criticisms. The most common view is that the materials are too long or too 'bulky'. Many candidates say that the modules are too general and too detailed ('we must bring along wheelbarrows') while some state that there are too many activities. In Eastern Cape, Limpopo and Mpumalanga, lecturers often used their own material rather than the national modules. Participants in KZN and Western Cape were generally satisfied with the materials.

The Gauteng group had different materials, provided by MGSLG. Most of the candidates say that they are excellent with sufficient depth and 'very user friendly', although one criticises them as a 'watered down version of a B.Ed.'. The core texts were used as the

main sources with support material being added by university lecturers. The research team did not conduct a formal documentary analysis of the MGSLG materials but it appears from candidate comments that they are shorter and more-practice-based than those in the national programme. However, if the programme is to become an 'entry-level qualification (see below), it will be necessary for all provinces to follow the same broad curriculum.

Mentoring

Mentoring is a distinctive and central feature of the ACE programme, designed to facilitate the transfer of learning to candidates' and school practice. As the literature review indicates (see baseline report), effective mentoring provides strong potential for deep learning. Bush (2008: 43) says that 'mentoring refers to a process where one person provides individual support and challenge to another professional' but, within the ACE programme, mentoring usually relates to groups, not individuals.

Selection of mentors

The matching process between mentor and mentee is critical to its effectiveness. This also links to the selection procedure. Some universities employ people who have worked with the HEI on other similar programmes. These are often retired principals, whose professional experience is seen as directly relevant to their role. In Gauteng, the mentors are principals but are also graduates of the MGSLG ACE programme, which has been running for longer than its national equivalent. This seems to be a valuable approach, providing the people concerned have the requisite skills, appropriate training and time to visit their candidates in their schools.

In most cases, mentors and lecturers perform distinct roles but, in the Western Cape, 80% of mentors are also lecturers, providing the potential for role ambiguity, but avoiding the lack of co-ordination often evident in other provinces, where teaching and mentoring were separate processes.

In some provinces, notably in Eastern Cape, KZN and Gauteng, the mentors are representative of the student population, in terms of race, gender and their experience of similar school contexts, providing the potential for appropriate matching of mentors and mentees. This is not the case in Limpopo and Mpumalanga, where mentors are predominantly male, overwhelmingly white and with leadership experience in well-resourced City schools, not in the township and rural schools where the great majority of candidates are employed.

Mentoring practice

Mentoring is widely regarded as a key dimension of the programme, providing the potential for personal engagement with candidates and their schools. Mentors can also be the conduit between HEI theory and school-level practice. In many provinces, including Eastern Cape, Limpopo and Mpumalanga, there is a two-stage process:

• Group 'facilitation' as part of, or separate from, the formal teaching sessions at the University.
• Visits to candidates' schools to provide on-site support.

Mentors are responsible for a number of candidates, ranging from nine in Eastern Cape to 38 for some in the Western Cape. The facilitation sessions take place in groups and do not match the generally accepted definition of mentoring, which assumes a one-

to-one relationship. In Gauteng, the mentors do not visit candidates' schools so any 'mentoring' takes place during cohort sessions and through telephone conversations.

Where visits do take place, the candidates often praise the help and support provided by the mentors. There were good and 'supportive' relationships in Eastern Cape but here, and in Limpopo and Mpumalanga, the researchers' observations suggest that candidates are 'over-dependent' on the mentors, who adopt 'a tightly focused teacher-student relationship', which is not likely to lead to innovative leadership practice.

In KZN, the researcher reports a confused picture with mentoring apparently not yet in place in some districts. Only two of the six candidates had an 'effective mentoring experience' while the others said that their mentors 'did not seem to know what they were supposed to do' and did not 'enhance their management'. In Western Cape, mentoring was reported to be the 'best part' of the ACE programme.

The case study findings are largely corroborated by the survey data. While a majority (59%) of respondents say that mentoring was 'of great help', more than a quarter (27%) were more cautious, saying only 'of some help', while 14% said that it was of limited or no value.

The overall picture suggests the need for a review of mentoring practice within provinces, HEIs and the national Department of Education. A well-functioning mentoring programme would be a major asset for this programme and could contribute in a powerful way to developing school leaders and their schools. However, it is clear that there are two major constraints on effective practice; the cost of providing one-on-one mentoring, and the limited availability of well-trained and motivated professionals, with good experience of leading township and rural schools, who are also free to visit candidates' schools during the working day. The success of the ACE programme is likely to depend on resolving these problems. International research (e.g. Bush, Glover and Harris 2007) shows that effective learning processes, such as mentoring, are more effective in changing leadership practice than content-based courses. Ideally, mentors would be selected from successful principals, be subject to specific training and be employed centrally to provide expert mentoring in candidates' schools.

Networking

The principles underpinning the ACE include an emphasis on school managers working and learning together in networks or clusters. Most of the provinces have some form of network activity, usually initiated by the mentors or the candidates themselves. The survey findings are positive, with 76% saying that 'developing networks' are of great help and only 1% (3 people) saying that they were 'of no help'. These data are surprising because the research team found that networks were operating in a limited way in most provinces (see below).

The evidence from the case studies is that groups in most provinces meet rarely and that the sessions are often informal and voluntary, with variable attendance levels. The prime focus almost everywhere was on working together to complete assignments, not to share experience in order to improve their schools. This does not suggest sustainable groups, and there is little evidence of the networks continuing following the completion of the course. Shared work in completing assignments also raises questions

about the validity of individually submitted assignments. However, in Gauteng and Western Cape, there were also more informal networks, where candidates met, or exchanged e-mails and phone calls, to share ideas about school management. Elsewhere, network activity was patchy during the course and largely ceased following completion of the programme. In KZN, there is little evidence of network activity and no formal clusters. The sustainability of networks is likely to depend on the initiative of district officials, or of the candidates themselves, and on developing a clear sense of purpose for cluster activity, perhaps focused around the development of professional learning communities. We recommend that the Department of Education and the NMLC review this aspect of the programme.

Assessment

One of the distinguishing features of the national ACE is its stress on site-based assessment, so that learning can be applied to candidates' leadership and management practice. The main assessment tool employed by the HEIs is the portfolio, which is intended to include all the assignments, plus school-based documents, student reflections and a research project.

There are many common features in the assessment models used by HEIs, as should be expected in a national programme. These features are:

- Practice-based.
- Competency based.
- Continuous.
- Integrated, through the portfolio and the site-based research project.

The survey data suggest positive views about assessment, with 71% saying that assignments are 'of great help' and a more modest but still significant 56% making the same judgement about portfolios. In contrast, the case study candidates in all provinces have more critical views of the assessment process, some of which are also shared by the lecturers and mentors.

1. The ACE is over-assessed. In most HEIs, three or four assignments were required to complete module assessment. One over-arching assignment should be sufficient for candidates to demonstrate competence on each module. Some HEIs responded to this criticism by reducing assessment demands for the second year of the programme.
2. Feedback on assignments, and on portfolio tasks, was usually late and limited in scope. Candidates complained that feedback was not received in time to inform the next assignment and, in any case, often comprised just summative assessment (a mark) and not formative assessment, to enable candidates to improve. There is some limited evidence of improved feedback in the second year of the programme but this remained a concern for many candidates.

Researchers scrutinised the portfolios of the case study candidates. While the quality was variable, most portfolios were well organised and included school documents as well as school-based activities. However, very few of them showed evidence of reflection despite 63% of respondents saying that 'opportunity for reflection' is 'of great help'. It is clear from the analysis of portfolios that many candidates are finding it difficult to go beyond description to adopt a reflective approach, leading to changes in leadership practice.

In several provinces, there is evidence that the heavy assessment load means that candidates' focus is on completing the

127

assignments rather than applying their learning to school management, contrary to the aims of the programme. Some researchers observed the candidates working on assignments in school time. A reduction in the volume of assessment, coupled with timely and formative feedback, should facilitate improved quality and enhanced links between theory and practice.

Differences between ACE and other assessment

The main difference between ACE assessment and other school management courses is that there are no formal exams, except in KZN, where candidates are required to take a 'supervised task', regarded with distaste by the candidates, who call it a 'test'. Exams are not appropriate for senior professionals but universities do need to ensure that work submitted by a candidate has also been prepared by that person. There is some evidence that network meetings, which focus almost exclusively on assignments, were occasionally used to divide up work, leading to similar assignments being submitted.

On-site verification of assessment

The ACE programme provides for on-site verification of assessment to provide a check on claims that changes have been implemented in schools. HEIs are finding this aspect challenging, not least for budgetary reasons and have adopted different strategies. In the Eastern Cape, verification was outsourced to an accredited assessor because of 'staff workloads'. In KZN, on-site verification was supposedly handled by mentors but only two of the six candidates received such visits. In Limpopo and Mpumalanga, verification was also the responsibility of mentors. Lecturers recognised the potential role conflict inherent in this process but judged that 'trust' was more important than an independent verification system. Staff commented that there were 'isolated' cases of candidates copying assignments. Verification was also the responsibility of the mentors in the Western Cape. In Gauteng, verification was seen as the responsibility of the IDSO (district official) but it operated with only a sample of schools, not all of them.

Improving the assessment process

Most candidates were comfortable with the portfolio approach, despite the 'teething' problems in many HEIs, as lecturers adapted to this unfamiliar approach. Candidates offered suggestions for improvement that were remarkably similar across provinces and are strongly endorsed by the research team:

1. Reduce the number of assignments

   Particularly in the first year, modules were often assessed by three or four assignments, leading to a potential 18-24 to complete the course, plus a research project. It should be sufficient to require a single integrative assignment for each module and some HEIs moved towards this model in the second year of the programme.

2. Provide timely and constructive feedback and return assignments

   Reductions in the number of assignments should provide space and scope to provide better and faster feedback but this was still a concern for candidates even during the impact study. Universities often retained the assignments, perhaps for external examiners, so that candidates could not see in-text comments. One candidate received her portfolio only after telling staff that the researcher would be visiting the school and wanted to see it!

A robust, fair and transparent assessment process is essential for any qualification and is particularly important where national certification is envisaged. This aspect requires further work if it is to be appropriate and rigorous for an entry-level qualification. We recommend that the NMLC develops a cross-institutional moderation process, linked to the national standards for principalship.

Leadership and management practice

In the baseline study, the research team investigated candidates' school management practice to provide a starting point for establishing the impact of the ACE programme on their actions as school leaders. This part of the report provides an assessment of changes in management practice, if any, and of the role of the ACE in influencing such changes. These findings rely partly on self-reporting but, during the impact study, researchers also triangulated the data by asking for role set comments and by shadowing the candidates to observe their management practice.

Managing time

The candidates were all asked if they were managing their time differently since embarking on the ACE programme. Most of them claimed to be managing more effectively, and attributed these changes to the ACE. The main change identified across provinces was improved delegation, mainly to other SMT members. Other reported changes include better planning, regular use of a diary, and improved prioritisation of tasks. A minority of candidates had also introduced classroom observations, designed to improve teaching and learning.

Despite these claims, supported to some extent by shadowing evidence and role set comments, most candidates also attested to the challenges of effective time management, mainly caused by the unpredictable nature of their work, with frequent interruptions and unscheduled activities, including district and parental needs. Some leaders also had an increased teaching load and this made managing time more difficult.

Management practice

Most candidates claim to have improved their management practice and this was sometimes confirmed by role sets, notably the district officials, and by shadowing and scrutiny of school policy documents. Areas of improvement include policy implementation, improved relationships with educators, classroom observations, enhanced financial management, and conflict management.

In the Eastern Cape, district officials say there has been little change in candidates' practice, although both were performing well before the ACE. The principal at one of the Mpumalanga schools also seemed to have made few, if any, changes to his (indifferent) practice while one Gauteng candidate has modified the school's reading programme but made no other changes to his practice.

Strengths and limitations as a school manager

In the baseline study, candidates were asked to identify their strengths and mention their weaknesses. In both the mid-term phase, and the impact study, they were asked to comment on any improvements. Among the positive developments are several personal attributes, including enhanced confidence, improved self-control and better relationships with educators and SMTs. Some also claim skills' gains, including ICT, problem solving, financial planning and better team work. These gains were often confirmed by role set members, notably the increased confidence and enhanced team work. In the Mpumalanga combined school, however, the principal's claims of enhanced delegation and team work were contradicted by the HoDs, who point to a lack of delegation and add that 'the SMT does not meet as a team'.

Accountability

In the baseline study, most participants referred to multiple accountabilities; to the hierarchy, via the District or Circuit manager, and to parents, the SGB, learners and educators. The responses to this issue differed little during the mid-term and impact phases although there was some evidence of a change of emphasis with enhanced appreciation of the need to be answerable to a range of stakeholders. However, most principals said that their main accountability is to the district or circuit office while SMT members focused mainly on answerability to their principal. This was sharply different in KZN where no candidates mentioned accountability to the Circuit Office, which is perceived not to know what is happening in schools. Answerability to the hierarchy is logical in what is still a bureaucratic structure but greater accountability to school and community-based stakeholders is essential if school and learner outcomes are to improve.

School improvement

This question links to the earlier discussion about the impact of the ACE programme. The aims of the programme go beyond individual development to encompass enhanced school and learner outcomes arising from candidates' new knowledge about leadership and pedagogy. This links to the international evidence that effective leadership development provides benefits that go well beyond the individual leader (Bush 2008). The gains acquired by the candidates were intended to promote school improvement, not least because of the site-based nature of the assessment process. This aspect was a central focus of the impact study.

As we noted earlier, there is mixed evidence about school improvement as measured by matric or other examination results. Some schools improved their scores during the ACE programme, but more of them experienced decline. This may be attributable to candidates focusing on their course assignments and 'taking their eye off the ball' in respect of school management. Role set members often focused on different gains, such as school discipline and order, greater team work, physical and infrastructure benefits, learner motivation, and enhanced relationships with SGBs. These may lead to improved school and learner outcomes in the longer term but these were often not apparent during the impact study. Significant, and sustained, school improvement is likely to require principals to redefine their role as professional leaders, with a central focus on leadership for learning (Bush, Joubert, Kiggundu and Van Rooyen 2009). This approach has three main dimensions:

- Modelling good practice in classrooms.
- Observing educators' practice and providing constructive feedback.
- Monitoring and evaluating learner outcomes and putting in place strategies to address weaknesses.

Professional Development

The national ACE programme was expected to prove challenging for university staff because of its practice-based orientation and its site-based assessment strategy. The ACE was regarded as 'a unique experience for us' and a 'learning curve'. Almost all lecturers point to gains arising from the ACE course. The most frequently cited benefits are:

- Learning from mentors and candidates, for example through student feedback.
- Focusing on a school-based approach, and on site-based assessment.
- Changing from an 'Ivory Tower' approach to rooting scholarship in practice.
- Better understanding of how schools operate.

- Better understanding of the needs, and diverse cultures, of candidates.
- Greater appreciation of how policies are implemented.
- Personal growth through enhanced skills and confidence.
- ACE-related research.

These developments, if sustained, should lead to improvements in the delivery of the programme. Professional development gains are limited in the Western Cape because the HEI outsources the programme to an external organisation. This partnership approach should be reviewed if the programme becomes an entry-level Advanced Diploma.

Perceptions of the ACE programme

Best parts of the programme

The co-ordinators and lecturers mostly praise the innovative features of the ACE, including portfolios, mentoring, site-based assessments, networking and the practice-based aspirations of the programme. One lecturer adds that the whole philosophy is 'novel and innovative' and has the potential to make a 'huge difference'. The candidates also praise mentoring and the portfolios, in particular, although they criticise some aspects of assessment (see below). In practice, however, some of these features, notably networking and site-based verification of assessment, are not fully developed. While mentoring is working well in some provinces, it remains problematic in others. These processes are the most challenging, but potentially the most rewarding, parts of the programme. Providing national guidance, based on the best examples from the provinces, may be a helpful way forward but the financial implications of these costly processes also require attention. As suggested earlier, appointing successful principals as mentors, with specific training and access to mentee's schools during the day, is likely to be beneficial in developing and institutionalising mentoring.

Some lecturers and candidates also praise the contact sessions, although there are criticisms about the format with lectures being provided for up to 200 participants. This model provides economies of scale but does not allow for the interactive approach espoused in the programme rubric. Some of the candidates, but smaller numbers of lecturers, also applaud the materials, but many HEI staff were critical of some of the content while candidates were concerned about their excessive length. These comments relate to the first batch of materials. It remains to be seen if HEIs and future candidates will be happier with the revised modules.

Despite these reservations, the practice-based features of the programme were regarded positively by most of the candidates. One concludes that the ACE will 'change the complexion of management in our schools' while one Gauteng participant said that the knowledge and information acquired was 'priceless'.

Meeting candidates' expectations

The great majority of the case study candidates said that the ACE met their expectations. Many claim enhanced skills, for example in ICT, planning, conflict resolution and communication. Factors offered in support of this view are that the modules are 'meeting our needs', the value of the practice-based approach, enhanced confidence and skills, and perceived professional growth. The few negative respondents cite problems with a specific tutor or mentor, 'lengthy materials', 'too many assignments', the course's perceived failure to address school-based problems, and its 'over theoretical' focus. While these problems need to be addressed, either locally or through course redesign, these high levels of satisfaction are admirable, especially for a pilot programme.

Areas for improvement

Lecturers distinguished between University and national issues:

University

- Developing a more structured approach to mentoring.
- Increasing contact time.
- Checking the impact of the programme in schools.
- Providing more mentoring.
- Mentors needing to learn 'facilitation' skills instead of offering solutions.
- Requiring fewer assignments.
- Mentors and lecturers meeting to discuss student progress.
- Providing contact sessions closer to candidates' schools.
- Allowing HEIs to participate in selecting students.

National

- Materials need to be updated and redeveloped. Some lecturers use them only as background reading. These comments apply to the first pilot materials and they may feel differently about the revised versions.
- SMT members should be admitted to the programme instead of principals.

The candidates made many suggestions for improvement, some of which relate to local 'housekeeping' issues. More fundamental points include:

- There should be more time for ICT and provision of hardware and connectivity for all candidates.
- There should be fewer assignments.
- The materials should be reduced in length.
- There should be enhanced guidance and feedback on assignments and portfolios.
- There should be greater emphasis on practice and less on theory.
- There should be more mentoring, provided on a one-to-one basis.
- There should be more district involvement.
- There should be a clear policy on recognition of prior learning.

Some of these points have resource implications (e.g. more mentoring), some have already been addressed (reviewing materials), while the assessment issues are under review in many HEIs.

Developing an entry level qualification for new principals

Almost all lecturers and candidates believe that the programme should continue and many district officials would like to nominate more candidates for the programme. There is almost unanimous support for the principle that the national programme should become an entry-level qualification for new principals. This is because the programme is seen as 'profound', 'very applicable to real life situations' and because 'it is good for school leadership' in South Africa. Some also argue that it should be compulsory for all SMT members so that they 'can all share the same vision and values'. Despite this strong endorsement, lecturers expressed two reservations:

1. Consideration needs to be given to those many people (estimated to be several thousands) who have other qualifications in educational management, at ACE, B.Ed. (Hons.), master's or Ph.D. levels. One co-ordinator says that it is 'dangerous' to say that people cannot become principals without the national qualification when many people have these qualifications. It is also significant that one of the Gauteng candidates has a B.Ed. (Hons.) and is dismissive of the MGSLG ACE. While this argument is understandable, it underestimates the practice-based elements of the national and MGSLG ACEs, and the distinctive portfolio-led assessment strategy. Given the inevitable short-term supply problems created by requiring an entry-level qualification, if the Minister so decides, it may be appropriate to allow holders of other similar qualifications to become principals, subject to a conversion process, perhaps through a portfolio to demonstrate the application of theory to school-based practice. This could be an interim arrangement, say for five years, until the supply of national programme graduates is sufficient to meet the demand for new principals.

2. Unless they have the support of their principals, deputy principals and HoDs will find it difficult to take the ACE programme, and particularly to undertake site-based activities. Where principals are unhelpful, it may be necessary for ACE candidates to be moved to schools where they can receive appropriate support. Most of the participants on the pilot programme were and are current principals while the ACE was intended for aspiring principals. While there should be similar features for both client groups, the needs of current and prospective principals are not identical and separate programmes are required. The ideal solution would be to develop a Leadership Development Framework, covering all levels of school and system leadership (see Appendix A).

Subject to these two points being addressed, the research team recommends that the national programme, at Advanced Diploma level, becomes an entry-level qualification for new principals soon as there are sufficient qualified candidates, directly or following the conversion process, to meet the demand for new principals. A statement of intent is required, with a carefully articulated timetable leading to entry-level status for the revised qualification.

Overview comments

All case study candidates and course lecturers were asked to offer overview comments on the ACE programme. The main points made are summarised below:

Universities

There is widespread enthusiasm for the ACE programme amongst the co-ordinators and lecturers interviewed for the research. 'It will bring about the necessary transformation in our schools' and 'is impacting favourably on the quality of leadership'. This is a remarkable response from academics whose previous experience was mostly with traditional academic programmes. The programme is the 'first step' to professionalising the principalship.

It is also clear that the universities have shown flexibility in modifying the programme in the light of their experience, and the views of their pilot groups. Changes include reductions in the number of assignments, modified mentoring programmes, linking mentoring with on-site verification of assessment, and reviews of module content and delivery. However, they also express some reservations:

- There may be insufficient capacity, of academics, mentors and assessment verifiers, to take the programme to scale. Assuming that there are 1500 new first-time principals each year, and to give SGBs and provinces a choice of qualified

candidates, at least 3000 aspiring principals need to take the ACE course every year. Currently, numbers are well below this level and most of those are current, not aspiring, principals.

- As noted above, mentoring is widely regarded as a key part of the programme but there are ongoing concerns about whether there are sufficient high-quality, and properly trained, mentors available to allow the programme to go to scale.

- Careful consideration of the funding model is required. Candidates could be required to pay their own fees but this may mean that there are insufficient candidates and some high quality leaders may not become principals. The most expensive parts of the programme are mentoring and school visits. It may be sensible for national or provincial departments to pay for these features while candidates pay for the University-based elements, as do thousands of students registered on other ACE programmes. This can be seen as an investment in their future. Alternatively, it may be regarded as appropriate for national and/or provincial governments to provide the funding required for an entry level qualification.

- The materials have been revised in response to concerns about their excessive length, and about their suitability for a practice-based programme. It remains to be seen whether these revised materials are now 'fit for purpose'.

- The course is widely regarded as over-assessed but the universities have responded to such concerns by reducing the number of assignments. The revised assessment requirements may now be appropriate for the programme although there are ongoing concerns about the appropriate balance between theory and practice.

Schools

Most of the case study schools serve disadvantaged communities, facing a range of social, economic and health-related problems. The ACE programme is important but will not be able to resolve such socio-economic problems. There is emerging evidence that, where school leaders engage positively with school communities, the impact of such challenges on learner outcomes can be ameliorated (Leithwood et al, in press), but many of these problems cannot be resolved without multi-agency interventions.

Most of the candidates are enthusiastic about the programme but it is too early to make confident judgements about its impact on learner achievement. The early evidence is variable, with matric and test results declining or 'flat-lining' in most schools and only a minority showing academic gains. This may be because candidates focused on completing their assignments rather than applying their learning to school management practice. The candidates, often supported by their district officials and other role sets, claim to have implemented a range of improvements, including enhanced team work, classroom observations, and better relationships with SGBs and parents. These provide the potential for longer-term gains but further research will be required to ascertain whether such potential benefits have been realised. However, caution is required in assessing the potential for beneficial change as developing one manager may be insufficient to produce significant gains. While the programme has clear potential to improve schools, it should not be seen as a panacea. The Leadership Development Framework (see appendix A) could provide the potential for more school managers to be trained, providing greater leadership density with commensurate benefits for enhanced learner outcomes.

The ACE programme

Almost all the case study candidates enjoyed the programme and appear to have learned a lot about management from the lectures and the mentoring sessions. As well as knowledge gains, there is also some evidence of changes in management practice. It is too early to be confident that participating in the programme will enhance learner outcomes, and school improvement, although the early evidence is variable. Even where gains can be observed, it will not be straightforward to attribute them to the ACE programme, when there are many other contemporaneous changes.

The radical dimensions of the programme, mentoring, networking and site-based assessment, seem to be welcomed by candidates, lecturers and mentors, and have clear potential to change management practice and improve schools. However, these processes are new to the HEIs and several 'teething problems' are evident. 'Mentoring' is usually group-based rather than individual, as recommended in the literature, and this is bound to limit the 'honesty' and trust required to induce change. Networks are not fully operational in most provinces and seem to have had little impact, except to encourage collaborative work on assignments. Verification of site-based assessment is variable and it is not always clear that improvements reported by candidates reflect real change at school level. The warm support for the national programme provides a good starting point for school improvement but it is too early to make confident judgements about its impact on schools and learners.

Conclusion: Answering the Research Questions

The three-phase longitudinal evaluation has produced a substantial volume of survey and case study data. These underpin the following responses to the research questions set out on page five:

Is the programme design appropriate for the development of more effective school leaders?
The ACE programme has a strong focus on practice-based learning, supported by classroom-based content, and several leadership development processes, notably mentoring, networking and site-based assessment. These approaches are used successfully in other countries, notably in England and Singapore, and have great potential to underpin learning for senior professionals. These features of the programme have been welcomed by most HEI lecturers and candidates. We are confident that the design is very appropriate for the development of school leaders. However, the implementation of these dimensions has proved challenging (see below).

Is the learning model sustainable for a large-scale national programme?
The learning model is ambitious and goes well beyond what is delivered in most traditional ACE: Leadership programmes. While the lectures work satisfactorily to deliver knowledge about leadership, they make only a limited contribution to changing the leadership practices of participants. It is widely accepted that mentoring and sustainable networking are helpful if leadership learning is to be translated into effective practice, but these processes have proved to be problematic. Mentoring is largely provided on a group basis, because of shortages of human and financial resources, while individual mentoring is required if a trusting professional relationship is to develop. The mentoring model also tends to promote dependency, with mentors advising leaders what to do, rather than development, with mentors using questioning techniques to help prospective principals to produce their own solutions. Specific training for mentors is required to make the process more effective.

As noted above, networking is not fully established and tends to focus mainly on assignment preparation. This does not provide a sustainable basis for collaborative working across schools. Our conclusion is that the mentoring and networking models used by HEIs and provinces need to be reviewed. It seems likely that effective one-on-one mentoring, in particular, cannot be achieved without increased funding.

A further consideration is that, in the field test, the national materials are being used in various ways, with some HEIs substituting alternative modules for those prescribed by the NMLC, while others make little use of these materials, using their own content

instead. This level of diversity is unacceptable for a national entry-level programme. The NMLC, in partnership with the national Department of Education, is the appropriate forum for addressing this fundamental issue.

Is there sufficient capacity to deliver a large-scale national programme?

This is a critical issue, which relates to HEIs' collective capacity and capability to prepare a sufficient number of prospective principals to meet the need for new appointments and to allow SGBs and provinces a choice of certified applicants. The academic field of educational leadership is still in a developing stage in South Africa with only a limited number of professors and lecturers who combine high level academic qualifications with good professional leadership experience.

Attrition rates (levels of retirement and resignation) are relatively low in South Africa as many principals remain in the same school for a very long time. Our assumption is that approximately 1500 new principals are required each year. Allowing for provincial and district variations, and to provide a choice of candidates, at least double this number should be recruited (3000). The second field test involves 16 HEIs. If each university recruits 100 participants each year, as most of them are doing at present, this would leave a substantial shortfall. To address this problem, one or more of the following strategies would be required:

Increase the intake to each HEI

To provide 3000 places a year, each university would need to recruit up to 200 students for the Advanced Diploma programme. However, HEIs may not be willing or able to recruit such large numbers because of their own capacity and capability issues. As we noted above, school management and leadership is still an emerging field in South Africa and there are insufficient lecturers and other staff with appropriate academic and professional expertise. Another problem relates to mentoring and the need to provide one-to-one support. This would require large-scale recruitment and training.

Increase the number of HEIs involved in the programme

This solution would spread the load, and might also provide enhanced geographical coverage, but it is doubtful if there are many new providers with the requisite skills and experience. Even if additional HEIs could be involved, they would face the same problems in recruiting and training new academics and mentors.

Give consideration to other HEI qualifications in education management

As noted above, there are thousands of educators holding ACE, B.Ed. (Hons), masters', and doctoral degrees. These could be regarded as equivalent to the national programme, subject to a standardised conversion process. This would provide a short-term solution to the capacity problems until HEIs can address the problems outlined above.

In practice, it may be necessary to address the issue of scale through a judicious blend of all three strategies.

Are Higher Education Institution faculties of education able to adapt their traditional academic programmes to meet the strongly professional, action-oriented needs of the ACE programme?

The research findings show that HEI staff support the practice-based aspirations of the ACE programme and have made some progress in adapting their programmes to meet the requirements of an audience of mid-career professionals. However, the 'new' aspects of the programme, notably mentoring, networking and site-based assessment, are less well developed than the conventional classroom activities and assignments. Mentoring is usually divorced from the academic aspects of the programme and, except in

136

the Western Cape, lecturers do not perform mentoring roles. Networking is patchy and university staff do not seem to regard it as their responsibility to foster networks, and are even less willing to help in sustaining them after candidates have graduated. Site-based assessment is working reasonably well but verification is challenging for HEIs. These difficulties may be 'teething' problems or signal a fundamental dilemma. Academics are unlikely to progress in their careers simply by providing a good ACE programme. Postgraduate teaching and supervision, plus research and publications, are far more important for lecturers seeking promotion. This may mean that ambitious staff do not work on such programmes and/or that the time-consuming aspects, such as mentoring, networking and site-based verification of assessment, are outsourced to other people or organisations, potentially damaging the integrity of the programme.

Does the ACE programme enhance the leadership learning of principals and aspiring principals?

The evidence from the research is that most candidates have significantly increased their knowledge about school leadership, including relevant theory and South African educational policy. There are reservations about the content of the modules used with the first pilot cohort but these have been addressed and the revised materials seem to be more suitable for subsequent cohorts of participants. Leadership learning can also be facilitated by mentoring and networks but, as noted above, these processes have had mixed results.

Does the ACE programme lead to enhanced leadership and management practice in schools?

The evidence on this issue is mixed. While most candidates claim enhanced practice, there is only limited supporting evidence for this assertion. The heavy assessment requirements of the course seem to have diverted some candidates from their central management role. The impact study provides some evidence of improved practice, for example in respect of enhanced team work, classroom observations, and better relationships with stakeholders. However, these changes have not yet led to better student outcomes in all schools. Matric and test scores have sometimes declined or remained unchanged, although there are improvements at some schools. It should be noted also that national matric scores have declined during the period of the evaluation. A definitive response to this question will not be possible until ACE graduates have had more time to implement their learning and we recommend that a further impact study be commissioned to establish the longer-term benefits of the programme.

Does the ACE enable principals to provide professional leadership of educators and other staff?

This question has two alternative interpretations? First, it relates to the quality of relationships between principals and educators? Many participants claim improved relationships with educators, arising from the ACE programme, and this has been confirmed by the professional role sets in some, but not all, of the case study schools. The shadowing of principals and other managers shows a modest shift away from the office-bound practice observed in the baseline study but many candidates still give too much emphasis to their paper work at the expense of professional leadership.

Secondly, it refers to the ability of principals to motivate their educators to provide high quality teaching for learners through a strong focus on 'instructional leadership' or the management of teaching and learning. While there are some examples of enhanced practice amongst the case study schools, this element has not developed significantly for most ACE participants. The revised Managing Teaching and Learning module gives significant attention to the processes required to enhance classroom teaching and this provides the potential for principals to act effectively as professional leaders.

Does the ACE develop principals' capability to engage productively with parents and school communities?

The survey and case study participants mostly claim enhanced relationships with parents and their communities and the research provides several examples of such improvement. It is clear that the ACE has served to sensitise candidates to the importance of engaging productively with external stakeholders for the benefit of learners. This has not led to significant changes in practice in many schools, although there some impressive exceptions. Given the challenging circumstances facing many learners and their families, enhancing this aspect of principals' work could make a significant difference to learning outcomes (Leithwood et al, in press).

Does the ACE help to develop schools as learning organisations for the benefit of learners and adults in the school?

This is a specific aspiration of the ACE programme but there is very little evidence to support its successful implementation in the case study schools. Learner attainment remains modest in many schools and educators' professional development is mostly limited to district workshops which have little value except in the transmission of information about new policy initiatives (McLennan 2000). This finding is not surprising as developing learning organisations takes time and, until recently, candidates were still mainly concerned with completing assignments rather than improving their schools.

Does the ACE assist in developing understanding and capacity among school managers to drive quality education in their schools while being accountable for their performance?

The ACE provides the potential to improve quality in two ways:

1. Enhancing the management of teaching and learning.

   There is only limited evidence on this issue, probably because the original 'Managing Teaching and Learning' (MTL) module was weak in addressing management, despite its title. Despite this limitation, several case study candidates have introduced more effective monitoring of classroom practice, including observations by SMT members. It will be at least two years before these changes, if sustained, produce enhanced matric and test scores. The revised MTL module gives more attention to the processes required to manage classroom practice and this should lead to enhanced outcomes in due course.

2. Mentoring

   Mentors have usually been selected because of their success as school principals. They have the potential to advise participants about how to develop quality education but their training needs enhancement to avoid what is often an over-prescriptive approach. It is also important to ensure that the overall profile of mentors matches that of candidates, for example in respect of race, gender, and school contexts.

Participants have been asked about formal accountability on three occasions and it is clear from the evidence that they acknowledge their responsibility for learning outcomes while also pointing to the contextual problems that sometimes undermine a drive towards enhanced quality. However, parallel research (Bush, Joubert, Kiggundu and Van Rooyen 2009) shows that ACE candidates in two provinces are too ready to blame others (learners, parents, previous stages of education, or socio-economic factors) for poor learning outcomes rather than taking appropriate action to address these problems.

Recommendations

The research team has completed all three phases of the evaluation and it is now possible to make certain recommendations, grounded in what is a substantial evidence base. Introducing the national ACE programme was a bold and imaginative decision, recognising the pivotal role of principals in leading and managing schools. This is part of an international trend to provide specific leadership preparation for current and aspiring principals. Some of these countries require prospective principals to undergo specific preparation while others simply make it available without prescribing it.

The field test for the ACE involved more than 400 school leaders, most of whom are current principals. Their experience on the course provides helpful guidance on its suitability for aspiring principals but is not a wholly reliable guide for this rather different audience. The overview of the surveys and the case studies in six provinces provide the starting point for the following recommendations:

Programme delivery

All the five providers in the first field test cohort provide lectures to large groups of students, ranging between 39 in the Eastern Cape to 200 in the Western Cape. This is an economic delivery model but is not conducive to interaction between lecturers and candidates. At best, it is a vehicle for delivering knowledge. Given the practice-based aspirations of the programme, this is a disappointing feature and universities should operate smaller groups.

The lecture format is supplemented by small group sessions, variously described as 'mentoring', 'facilitation sessions', or 'cohort sessions'. These provide more potential for interaction but are sometimes used for administrative purposes rather than for linking course content to school practice. Many lecturers lament the inability of candidates to apply theory to practice so these group sessions should be used to help candidates to develop such skills.

Teaching materials

The research team's first interim report provided a detailed review of the materials and made recommendations for change. These were addressed by a review group set up by the Department of Education, and the National Management and Leadership Committee (NMLC). During the mid-term and impact phases, researchers were able to witness how the materials were delivered; 'curriculum in use'. The universities use the national materials in different ways but several regard them only as supplementary material and it is clear that the varied ways in which the course is offered undermines the notion of a 'national' programme. These variations reflect different views about what ought to appear in a practice-based programme and also represent misgivings about the nature and content of the original materials. In addition, most candidates regard them as too long and too theoretical. Following our interim recommendation, the materials were revised with the intention of making them shorter, more focused on practice and more relevant to the 'lived' experience' of South African principals. This revised curriculum has not been used with the first pilot cohort, but we have some limited evidence that providers regard the new materials as more appropriate than the original versions. We recommend that the Department of Education, and the NMLC, keep these materials under review and also monitor how they are being used with candidates. If a decision is taken to make the modified version of the programme (the Advanced Diploma) and entry-level requirement for new principals, it will be necessary to decide what degree of consistency is required to justify the status of a 'national' qualification.

Mentoring

The inclusion of mentoring in the ACE programme is widely applauded, by candidates, lecturers and the mentors themselves. Many survey respondents, and interviewees, regard it as the key component of the course, which is likely to have a critical impact on whether it succeeds or fails. Such 'process related' interventions are widely used in other similar programmes, for example in England, Canada, Singapore and the United States, and the research evidence is overwhelmingly positive (Bush 2008).

However, the model of 'mentoring' used in the ACE programme falls short of best international practice. Much of the mentors' work is with groups rather than individuals and this almost inevitably means that the group sessions are led by the mentors, who largely determine the agenda, and dominate the discussion. Where mentors do work directly with the candidates, they often provide 'solutions' rather than asking questions. This is often welcomed by the candidates, but it serves to reinforce a dependency model rather than providing a vehicle to develop their confidence and skills.

Improving this part of the programme, by providing genuine one-on-one mentoring, involves three major requirements:
- Providing sufficient funding to underpin this preferred model.
- Being able to find sufficient numbers of potential mentors with successful experience of the types of school represented on the ACE programme.
- Providing an extensive training programme to develop genuine mentors rather than people who guide or tell candidates how to run their schools.

These are challenging requirements but the mentoring dimension of the programme will not achieve its potential unless such issues are addressed. We recommend that consideration be given to appointing successful principals as mentors, providing them with specific training, and making provision for them to visit candidates' schools during the school day.

Networking

Networking is another powerful leadership development process that has received strong endorsement in the international literature (Bush 2008, Bush, Glover and Harris 2007), so its inclusion in the national ACE programme is welcome. In practice, however, the development of networks is patchy, with a few operating successfully, but most barely functioning or still requiring development. Where they do exist, the overwhelming evidence is that the purpose was to discuss assignments rather than to share management practice. Given this focus, networks are not likely to be sustainable, and the impact study evidence shows that most have not operated since candidates completed the course. Generating and sustaining effective networks is likely to require either the active involvement of district officials, because mentors and university staff cannot be expected to continue their involvement after the end of the field test, or to involve 'organic' development, led by the candidates themselves. We recommend that networks be refocused to address school leadership and management issues and not simply on course assignments. We further recommend that provinces and districts consider how to develop and support effective school leadership networks. Candidates should also be encouraged to develop their own networks designed to enhance leadership and management practice.

Assessment

A practice-based professional qualification for potential principals requires an innovative approach to assessment. It is not satisfactory simply to ask candidates to complete traditional assignments based on a body of theory delivered by academics. While there are assignments in the ACE programme, they are supplemented by a site-based project and by a portfolio, which provides the potential for an integrative approach to assessment. In our second interim report, we commented that the course was over-assessed and based primarily around the prescribed content of the course. Subsequently, some providers have reduced their assessment requirements and also enhanced their practice-based elements. We welcome these changes and recommend that the assessment strategy be continually reviewed to ensure that it is focused on school management practice. It is also imperative that universities provide timely, and formative, feedback to underpin candidates' management learning. Universities have found it difficult to provide effective on-site verification of assessment and we recommend that course leaders should ensure that verification takes place.

Developing an Entry-Level Qualification for New Principals

We reported earlier (pp.196-197) on the widespread support for making the national programme an entry-level requirement for new principals. We recommend that the revised programme, at Advanced Diploma level, be made an entry-level requirement for aspiring principals as soon as there are sufficient qualified candidates to meet the demand for new principals, subject to four provisos:

1. Consideration should be given to holders of other qualifications in educational management, subject to a conversion process to demonstrate the application of theory to school-based practice. The conversion process would involve the preparation of a portfolio for applicants to demonstrate how their management learning has been translated into effective practice. This could be an interim arrangement, say for five years, until the supply of Advanced Diploma graduates is sufficient to meet the demand for new principals.

2. Similarly, consideration should be given to holders of the national ACE programme (the current programme). They should be regarded as eligible to become principals subject to an upgrading process to Advanced Diploma level.

3. Consideration should be given to helping potential principals who do not obtain the support of their principals. This might require the movement of Advanced Diploma candidates to other schools where they can receive appropriate support.

4. Consideration should be given to the selection process for prospective principals. Applicants should be restricted to deputy principals and HoDs, except in very small schools. We recommend that suitable candidates should be funded by government, with provinces and HEIs sharing responsibility for selection, following national criteria.

Leadership Development Framework

We noted earlier that the ACE, and the Advanced Diploma, should be targeted at aspiring principals, and not at current principals or middle managers. While there are leadership development needs at every level of the education system, the prime need is to improve the quality of future principals through an entry-level requirement. In Appendix A, we provide advice on creating a Leadership Development Framework, designed to build leadership and management capacity and capability throughout the education system.

Acknowledgements

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APPENDIX A

LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT FRAMEWORK

Introduction

We recommended earlier that the national ACE programme (and the proposed Advanced Diploma) should be targeted at aspiring principals, not current principals or other school and system leaders. However, there is no doubt that there are leadership and management development needs throughout the system. The purpose of this appendix is to propose a Leadership Development Framework, to build capable leaders and managers at four levels:

- Current and aspiring heads of department
- Aspiring principals
- Current principals
- District officials and other system leaders

Current and Aspiring Heads of Department

Heads of Departments (HoDs) have wide-ranging roles, including what is often a significant teaching load, curriculum leadership for one or more subjects, and school-wide leadership and management. While this combination is likely to continue, their main role should be seen as subject leadership and management. Training for this modified role could be provided by asking, or requiring, all HoDs to take a modified version of the ACE Managing Teaching and Learning (MTL) module.

Aspiring Principals

As noted throughout the report, we recommend that the revised Advanced Diploma programme be made an entry-level requirement for all aspiring principals.

Current Principals

Most of the candidates taking the pilot ACE: School Leadership have been current principals. This demonstrates that provinces, and the principals themselves, perceive the need for leadership and management training. As we note throughout the report, the role of principal is not the same as that of educator and specific training is required. Given that current principals cannot be required to take an entry-level qualification, it is not appropriate for them to take the Advanced Diploma. However, similar content is required for this group and, in particular, they should be asked to focus on their role as leaders and managers of teaching and learning. This might involve them being asked to take modified versions of the MTL module, and of the Managing People module.

District Officials

District officials have a key role to play in co-ordinating provision in their areas. However, the research evidence suggests varying levels of confidence in them within schools. A comprehensive training programme needs to include district officials as they are the 'frontline' system leaders, who act as conduits between schools and provincial departments. There are few precedents for training this group although MGSLG offered a programme in 2005/06. The main elements of their training should be management of teaching and learning, and particularly effective evaluation and monitoring strategies, and managing people.

Overview

The purpose of this short appendix is to stress that, while requiring new principals to have an entry-level qualification is highly desirable, this is only one part of a widespread requirement to develop the leadership and management skills of all senior and middle leaders in schools and the wider system. The Leadership Development Framework provides an outline of how this might be achieved. The Research Director would be happy to provide further advice if required.

Notes

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