

Amandla Ngawethu: Amandla Ngawami¹

Leadership for, in and through education

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Introduction

As a manager within the higher education institutional environment for over 20 years, I am deeply aware that one is constantly having to interact with values, hallmarks, standards and criteria for evaluation of the system of education against which one is often measured.

Some of these concern leadership and certain prescribed or researched taxonomies thereof; 'educational leadership' is about leadership – i.e. accumulating newer taxonomies of 'must haves' and 'must do's' to exercise leadership – and these discourses help us to prepare for educational leadership. However, I argue in this article that most leaders do not draw on any of these prescribed or researched taxonomies; most skilled leaders seem to be unaware of their leadership competences; do not necessarily choose management or leadership positions; and have increasingly become disillusioned with the careerism (rather than leadership) that permeates the goals and aspirations of education today.

The literature seems to be more preoccupied (if not positively obsessed) with whether institutions experience 'good management' or 'good leadership', and 'over-management' or 'under-management', etc. The tendency to generate or refute these taxonomies arises perhaps because the field is often driven by the attempt to 'look scientific', drawing from the kind of social science research (such as traditional/ early psychology)³ that attempted to label and assign fixed specifications to the human condition. Its imitation of the models of empirical truth-making categorisations and certainty became infused into its methodological and epistemological framework. As a social system, any organisation cannot, in my view, be reduced to these essentialist notions and taxonomies.

For example, how and why are the dominant and accepted hallmarks of quality education associated with the learner performances of the matriculation system or the Annual National Assessment (ANA) records for secondary and primary schooling respectively? Are these the only indicators of what quality education should yield? Are these indicators neutral or compliant with other agendas? How and why are those educational leaders who attempt to raise the bar often interpreted as problems rather than standard bearers? An inspirational leader is one who is able to understand the world view within which he or she operates and simultaneously critique its parameters. He or she must offer alternate readings of the accepted and acceptable discourse within their specific environments.

Leadership in education

What is going on in education that undermines the development of creative leadership? Robinson (2011) suggests that schools – as formal organisations of the 21st century – are antithetical to their agenda of preparing the next generation to cope with the challenges of the new society they currently live in.⁴ Rather than generate creativity and development of individual skills, schools 'suck out' any deviation from the norm. Schools are agents of normalising: captains of compliance. The outputs-driven mentality of school systems has driven school managers to chase the indicators of 'success' with little attention to anything else. Omar (2009) showed how easy it was for schools to comply with offering the indicators of success in matriculation scores, while masking patterns of inequity and subjugation at lower levels in the secondary schooling system.

Robinson (*ibid.*) argues that much of schooling is geared towards staring in the 'rearview mirror' to see where we have come from: an obsession with our past records of achievement or non-achievement. We are caught in the cycle of perpetuation of the past; we are adherent followers of ensuring we meet the goals set by others of what good performing schools/organisations should and must do. Our comparisons are not based on individuals within the specific context of our schools/organisations, but on our preparation of learners for the market of the world, which does not necessarily celebrate quality values and ethics. We become implicated in producing demonstrations of competences in test scores and examination results. This is not to suggest that these output factors are not useful as motivations to inspire the youth (or the organisation), but they have become milestones of judgement that condemn individuals to patterns of hierarchies and privileges that they circumscribe for themselves, thwarting their capabilities to realise alternate conceptions of themselves.

Robinson (*ibid.*) suggests that schools should harness three factors: imagination, creativity and innovation. He defines 'imagination' as the ability to bring to mind events and processes that are not present to our senses; 'creativity' as the process of having original ideas; and 'innovation' as the process of putting original ideas into practice. These three simultaneously ought to reinforce each other to activate quality. However, the school/organisation obsessed with 'productivity' foregrounds 'innovation' – which is the output factor – at all costs. It drives the learners within the educational system to contribute to the system to which they belong. Nevertheless, it is so obsessed with the externality of these outputs that it does not pay sufficient attention to the quality of the outputs that are being generated and the purposes to which these outputs are utilised.

So, for example, schools may enter into severe competitive spirits to produce the best ANA results, or the best matriculation results, or the best sporting scores, but pay little attention to the quality of academic preparation or insight for higher learning, or sportsmanship that this innovation should produce. Human action is reduced to performing and competing rather than engendering any deeper quality of joy or inspiration. In fact, what it does is simply reproduce the indicators of innovation without deeper innovation goals themselves being yielded. Innovation ought to be about 'adding value'.

Forde (2009) looks at how teachers in their classrooms exercise their own leadership. It is expected as per policy discourses (DoE, 2001) that one of the seven roles of a teachers is to be a 'leader'. However, in his analysis of classroom practice, Forde observed that teachers were not able themselves to articulate what being a leader entailed. Many who executed leadership roles were themselves unaware of what they were doing as leaders. Most of the so-called innovative leaders had no formal training in leadership at all. Many of the teachers associated leadership as something exercised 'outside of the classroom', in the offices of the principal or heads of department. Leadership was unconsciously interpreted as escaping the classroom. However, on deeper probing, Forde was able to point to the deep pedagogical, pastoral and custodial functions that teachers exercised within their classrooms. Teachers as leaders were keenly focused on the growth of their learners, and their classroom activities were usually directed towards a common agenda of working together to produce quality learning. Teachers in exercising leadership were sensitive to contextually appropriate choices; were framed within a discourse of service. Forde suggests from this that there is no clear separation between being a teacher and being a leader. Perhaps the term 'teachership' might be more appropriate to describe how teachers exercise their leadership.

Leadership through education

In the Council on Higher Education report on the review of academic and professional education programmes (2010), it was noted that many initial teacher education (ITE) curricula in South African higher education institutions tended to equate educational leadership development with the offering of specific courses in the 'History and Administration of Education'. This is perhaps a hearkening back to the apartheid conception that a 'good leader' understood the regulatory systemic political and policy context within which one operated. To be good leader in that context was understood to be an efficient administrator of these governmental policies. In post-apartheid discourses, these History and Administration courses are embedded in the ITE curriculum to reflect on matters such as the development of the education system in South Africa; the changing curriculum policy environment; and the changing norms and standards for educators. These are all relevant to learning, but hardly about exercising educational leadership.

Alternate interpretations of the educational leadership take the form of parts of the ITE curriculum directed towards the management of the classroom: for example, organising group work, and ensuring learner discipline. Sometimes whole modules are directed to 'the teacher as leader' of the classroom context. This is certainly a valuable competence for novice teachers, as this is often at the forefront of their early stages of professional

concerns. However, it too is not necessarily about exercising and doing educational leadership. Ironically, student formations aimed at promoting conceptions of the teachers as leaders – about 'doing' leadership – tend to extend outside of the formal parameters of the ITE curriculum. The challenge is how to incorporate these conceptions away from the periphery and into the core of the ITE curriculum.

Enactus

The first example of a student formation constitutes part of an international network of approximately 1,600 higher education institution (HEI) campuses across 37 countries.⁵ Enactus, formerly Students in Free Enterprise (SIFE), is founded on activating deep consciousness within the participants of a sustainable development agenda: joining together the triple 'P' concerns: planet, profit and people. This is sometimes referred to as ensuring the interrelated concerns of education paying attention to matters of equity, the environment and economics in a harmonious dialogue with each other. The locally based chapters at each higher education institution work collaboratively with the community organisation to develop their organisation skills, realise a business plan and activate a project that would be income-generating.

At the institution within which I serve (University of KwaZulu-Natal), Enactus chose to work with different community organisations, activating potential designers of a marketable food-crop development into soup production and developing tunnel farming using environmentally friendly methodologies to support a school feeding scheme. The student chapters based at each campus of my institution meet on a weekly basis to provide written reports to the mother body (institutionally and nationally) outlining work in progress. Organisational experts teach students business leadership skills as well as oral communication competences. There are 27 HEIs involved in the South Africa national Enactus structures. A national Enactus competition expects the campus-based organisations to report on their work annually. The goal is to

Leadership and creativity

Creative leaders choose to understand the value of innovation. They choose to focus on the manner in which an organisation produces or does not produce a 'cultural ethos' – a way of being in the world; a way of seeing the world in fresh and inspirational ways. The creative leader pays attention to the quality of the 'habits' and 'habitats' (Robinson, 2006) that characterise the school/organisation. What routines and rituals are celebrated or frowned upon in the pursuit of one's goals? What is the quality of the physical, moral, social and cultural environment of one's organisation? These are the questions that pay attention to the goals of education as both a personal and communal activity. Robinson suggests that the aim of schooling ought to harmonise personal, cultural and economic goals, which bring together the learners' talents and capabilities, the processes of developing an understanding and critique of the world in which they live and thus enables them to operate and earn a living that is productive and sustainable. An exclusive focus of any one of these core goals alone for education is what forces leaders and their learners to capitulate and contribute to individualism and materialism.

produce a caring citizen, a compassionate leader and an environmentally conscious teacher/learner; what I refer to as 'responsible and developmental leadership'.⁶

Community Development Association (CDA)

The second example of a student formation is a voluntary, local and institutionally based programme activated by students themselves. The Community Development Association (CDA) programme targets the development of youth in schools and within the ITE curriculum by actively involving student teachers in a service to the goals of education. An annual winter school supports Grade 11 learners to talk about and experience career decision making, interact with individuals across racial, geographical and class lines, and live as a community in our university residences. It is interesting to note that this programme grew from approximately 20 learners from across the provinces in 2004 to around 200 learners as of 2012. CDA members engage with the fund-raising to support the week-long programme, and are mentors and project leaders on the many activities that they offer the learners over the course of the programme.⁷ Many of the learners are inspired by the quality leadership these prospective student teachers render, and they often choose to become teachers themselves within the institution. The CDA also offers locally based programmes for the voluntary teaching of matriculants as they prepare for the examinations in the form of 'Saturday additional classes'. In addition, they provide cultural events such as music, choir and debating activities on the campus.

A third example is provided by the Gülen movement, to which I refer in my article in *Commonwealth Education Partnerships* 2012/13. This is essentially about communal leadership and connects with what is known in many contexts as 'service learning'.

Leadership in the popular imagination

Films such as *To Sir with Love* (1967), *Lean on Me* (1989), *Dangerous Minds* (1989), *Dead Poet's Society* (1989), *Finding Forrester* (2000), the early *Harry Potter* films (2001, 2002) and the US television series *Fame* (1980), to mention only a few from different eras, have attempted to articulate the complex world of managing and organising schools.⁸ These have become iconic in representing to the lay public the challenges facing education leaders. However, Gregory (2007) cautions us about the persistent stereotypes of learners, teachers and school leaders that many of these films offer. What he argues is that these narratives largely seem to perpetuate myths of romanticised or caricatured figureheads of the schooling system. Principals are highly charismatic or exceedingly cruel; teachers are glamorous and entertaining, majorly alternate and imaginative, sometimes misunderstood and alienated, or blatantly incompetent; while learners are easily pigeon-holed into stereotypes such as nerds, jocks, the marginalised, the airheads and the silent, unrecognised genius.

Few educational film narratives are able to capture the ordinary, complex, confused, 'in formation' individuals, and fewer still are able to portray the nuances of dealing with the complex task of learning the competences of specific subjects or disciplines. Gregory (*ibid.*) argues that teaching and learning is hard work;

managing schools is not only about charisma; and that life as a learner is tough. Our narrative world (including films) should aim to reveal this complexity rather than to promote stereotypes of what it means to be a member of a school community: including an adolescent in search of direction and meaning.

A research project undertaken by Jansen, Koza and Toyana (2011) assembles a national collection of reflective accounts of whom the public regard as 'great South African teachers'. The anthology is infused with the multiple perspectives that celebrate a variety of competences, which the recipients (learners and fellow teachers) choose to remember as having made a marked impact on their lives. The stories offer sometimes contradictory messages about what constitutes a great teacher/leader, an inspirational leader – and not a taxonomy of definitive categories.

Key questions

The questions generated in this paper are directed towards expanding the field and methodology of educational leadership and management. I suggest that the questions that I have asked about the innovative alternate student leadership formations could equally be extended to include our discipline of educational leadership and management. Has the discipline of educational management and leadership reached moribund status as it continues to operate at the periphery of the complexity of what being a manager/leader entails? Who/what is driving the agenda of the research choices of our disciplines or organisations of educational leadership and management? Do we talk too much 'about' leadership rather than promoting 'doing' educational leadership? What can be shared, borrowed, exchanged across borders as we seek new partners or philosophies for our educational leadership? What would we regard as critical, creative and responsible educational leadership?

Conclusion

Throughout this paper I have been referring to the challenges to the dominant methodological approaches to educational management and leadership research. I have pointed out that there is need for our research methodologies to establish a much more complex understanding of the factors influencing the practice of doing educational leadership. Forde (2012) argues that leadership involves not only *knowing* about the qualities in an abstract theoretical sense. Leadership also requires an action of service (*doing*). It involves, moreover, *choosing to relate* to others in an equitable and just manner.

I have argued elsewhere that the discipline of educational management and leadership has continued to spawn theoretical conceptions of alternative discourse to the performance culture that dominates the current climate of schooling internationally. And that the responses of audiences – by subverting, re-interpreting and jettisoning the arguments given above – serve to demonstrate how hard it is to enact alternatives.⁹

Quality leadership is about engaging with the complexity of competing agendas, but always choosing a moral and ethical course of action as an enunciation of the fullness of one's being and one's quest for greater fulfilments of *becoming*, other than simple capitulation to other external instrumentalist forces. It is about being more.

Endnotes

- 1 *Amandla Ngawethu* is a popular political slogan oftentimes used in public gatherings to remind South Africans of the struggle to achieve 'power to the people'. Unlike this first slogan, *Amandla Ngawami* translates into 'the power is mine', representing an individualist rather than a communal goal.
- 2 This paper was first presented as a keynote address at the 13th International Conference of the Education Management Association of South Africa (EMASA), 27–29 July 2012, UKZN, Edgewood campus, Pinetown; Conference Theme, 'The benefits of education leadership and student success beyond the learning institution'. It was subsequently presented at the Limpopo Provincial Department Seminar: Circuit Managers Improvement Programme, in conjunction with Irish Aid and the University of Pretoria, Bolivia Lodge, Polokwane, 13 August 2012; and the Mauritius Institute of Education Postgraduate Diploma in Education: School Rectors programme, 22 August 2012, Reduit, Mauritius Institute of Education, Mauritius.
- 3 Notably the field of psychology has itself challenged these stereotyping of 'psychological pigeon-holing' of individual behaviours and personalities, or so-called 'disorders'. New sub-disciplines of psychology now include social psychology, critical psychology, community psychology, etc., to accommodate for more complex recognition.
- 4 He also argues that these values could be shared as building blocks for industry and the corporate world, where he is increasingly being asked to activate innovation, growth and development.
- 5 For more information, see: <http://enactus.org/who-we-are/our-story/>.
- 6 For two successive years, the Enactus (which changed its name from Students in Free Enterprise, or SIFE, in October 2012) chapter of my institution was voted the national winner. They participated in 2011 in Malaysia and were placed 6th in the international competition. In 2012, they were again declared national winners and went to Washington, DC, to the international competition where they reached the semi-final round.
- 7 Mentors now originate from outside the ITE sector, across campuses and higher education institutions.
- 8 Gregory's (2007) article constitutes a comprehensive overview of the world of education films showing in a nuanced analysis how many myths rather than realities of the complexity of schooling are being offered.
- 9 Michael Samuel (2013), *Educational Leadership: The audience creates the text* (forthcoming).

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