THE STATE SECONDARY SCHOOL PRINCIPAL AS AN EFFECTIVE LEADER OF LEARNER DISCIPLINE MANAGEMENT

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ABSTRACT: *State secondary school principals in Mauritius are struggling to address the learner discipline problem successfully. They have limited authority since all decisions concerning school matters are taken by the Ministry of Education and Human Resources, Tertiary Education and Scientific Research and imposed on them to implement. This constitutes a major barrier for principals to manage learner discipline effectively. This paper examines the leadership qualities that they must have in order to become an effective leader of learner discipline management. The literature on leadership is reviewed and analysed in the context of learner discipline. The paper concludes by stating that state secondary school principal should rethink their leadership in a holistic and collaborative manner.*

KEYWORDS: State Secondary School Principals, Learner Discipline Management, Leadership Qualities, Effective Leader.

INTRODUCTION

Secondary school learners' lack of discipline is a major problem in public schools in many countries. It is as old as education, yet it has become one of the most contentious problem in schools (Mohapi, 2013; Edinyang, 2017), to such an extent that it is a matter of great concern for researchers, education policy-makers, educators, parents, principals and the local media (Marais & Meier, 2010; Ramjanally, 2015). Mauritius is not an exception to this alarming school situation. In a study on educator motivation in the educational zone 2, Belle (2007) found that learner indiscipline is one among the demotivating factors among state secondary school educators. In addition, in the 2007 and 2011 reports, the Global School-based Student Health Survey indicated that on average of 34% of secondary school learners have recourse to physical aggression at least once in an academic year (Jeannot, 2015). Beebeejaun-Muslum (2014) confirms that there has been an increasingly deteriorated teaching-learning environment in schools due to various forms of learner indiscipline and the absence of effective learner behaviour management strategies.

A study carried out by the Mauritius Research Council in 2012 found the following manifestations of a lack of discipline among secondary school learners: writing or using foul language in class, lateness, classwork and homework not done, smoking, verbal aggression, using mobile phone in class lessons, bullying, class disruption, stealing, unjustified absences from school and bunking classes (Ramharai, Curpen & Mariaye, 2012). Jeeroburkhan (2016) found improper dressing, damaging property, hooliganism, alcohol and drug abuse and immoral acts as additional acts of indiscipline in Mauritian schools. Limited research has been done in the field of learner discipline management in Mauritius over the past decade. So, it is evident that learner discipline is a complex school problem as it may be manifested differently.

The various causes of learner indiscipline in Mauritius are the obsolescence of the curriculum which is academically biased, lack of professional commitment from educators , a laissez-faire

attitude of the school principal and the school administration , and a biased implementation of disciplinary actions by the latter; the demise of the educational authorities and parents, the pervading influence of the media and social networks, and a decrease in the educators' authority to discipline learners who lack respect for them (Ramharai, et al, 2012). Beebeejaun-Muslum (2014) states that the main cause of the alarming situation of learner discipline in state secondary schools is the lack of leadership and power of the school principal; principals are not in a position to take the most appropriate disciplinary actions and strategies at the school level to deal with learners who misbehave since they have to refer each case of misbehaviour to the Ministry of Education and Human Resources, Tertiary Education and Scientific Research. Newcomer and Lewis (2016) recommend the implementation of school-wide strategies since learner indiscipline occurs due to contextual factors that primarily lead to problem behaviour.

According to the School Behaviour Policy document, the state secondary school principal is primarily responsible for learner discipline in the school. He/she is required to:

> "*stimulate a school-wide approach in preventing indiscipline; lead by example by being regular and punctual; work in partnership with parents to develop and support the social and emotional skills of students; promote a positive school culture; acts promptly against all forms of student indiscipline; develop a sense of belonging to the school among the students; provide support to educators in their attempt to sustain high behaviour standards; arrange in-house sharing experiences and good practices; and organise and facilitate training of staff to successfully manage challenging behaviour.*" (Ministry of Education and Human Resources, Tertiary Education and Scientific Research, 2015).

The state secondary school principal is the school leader who can analyse school and student-level data that guide him/her to make decisions about how disciplinary strategies may be implemented at the school level and the impact of these strategies on learner discipline (Kim, 2016). Within the Mauritian education system, the principal is accountable to the Ministry of Education and Human Resources, Tertiary Education and Scientific Research in dealing with cases of a lack of learner discipline. In fact, the Education Act (1957), which still has the force of law and which imposes the legal framework within the education system, stipulates that "*The Minister shall have control of the educational system of Mauritius and shall be responsible for the general progress and development of such system.*" Besides, the School Management Manual for Principals in State Secondary Schools states that "*the principal is responsible for the school under his or her responsibilities but he or she has to send reports to the Zone Director who is responsible for the proper functioning of all the state secondary schools in the Zone; the Director of Zone should keep the Ministry informed of all happenings and performance of schools; and the principal will report all the matters pertaining to the decentralisation of procedures and services.*" (Ministry of Education, Culture and Human Resources, 2009). Reporting school procedures and matters take much time of the principal and this may be a barrier to his effectiveness.

The content analysis of the main policy documents illustrates the findings of Beebeejaun-Muslum (2014) and Ramharai, Curpen and Mariaye (2012) that the principal should use his/her leadership and authority to instil positive learner discipline in schools. He/she should adopt a holistic approach to maintaining discipline and the principal's main objective should be the socialisation and preparation of the adolescents to become better citizens.

Purpose of the study

This paper reviews the general literature on the role of the principal in laying the foundation of positive learner discipline among learners. Within the legal and education context of Mauritius, the principal has a limited authority in learner discipline management; yet he/she is responsible and accountable to the Ministry of Education, Tertiary Education and Scientific Research and the Director of Zone for learner discipline. However, principals must not fail in this fundamental function as Barr and Saltmarsh (2014) maintain that "*principals are accountable in an unprecedented manner*" and they have to endure "*the stress of working in a fishing bowl under the eye of the other stakeholders*" (Watson, 2009). In this context, McDargh (2015) points out that the principal, as the leader, should be like "*a conductor or the principal performer in an orchestra*".

The purpose of this paper is therefore to review the literature on the leadership of the principal in creating a collaborative team approach whereby all the educators, learners, parents and superintendents are contributing towards a safe and saner school learning environment with learners manifesting positive behaviour (Way, 2011). Such an attempt aims at providing insights into the possible ways that the principal should lead to be more effective within the Mauritian education context. The paper highlights the nature of the leadership that he/she must adopt for effective learner discipline management in a more positive and successful manner.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature review focus on the role of the principal by taking into account the seven "P's" for leadership – People, Planning, Personality, Performance, Proficiencies, Purpose and Persuasion (Sloan: 2015) and the seven "F's" of leadership – Focus, Factual, Fairness, Flexible, Friendly, Fearless and Futuristic (Mathew, 2015). It also centres around the ambidextrous leadership of the principal: he/she should strike a balance between daily administrative matters and devising and implementing effective disciplinary strategies to promote a healthy organisational climate and culture (Smyth, 2015).

Visionary leadership

The school principal must be driven by his/her vision and mission for the school and be outcome-oriented. The three main tasks of a visionary principal in an attempt to promote positive learner discipline are: (a) he/she must craft his/her vision about his/her goals in terms of discipline, (b) align the educators, learners, parents and superintendent with his/her vision by communicating effectively, building coalition and empowering them in the process, and (c) inspire learners by making a list of good and socially acceptable behaviour, supporting and recognising them through development and constructive feedback and praise (Modiba, 2015; Wyatt, 2015; Teckchandani & Schultz, 2014; Macharia, Thinguri & Kiongo, 2014).

Vision is essential in an organisation in order to empower, develop, care for and inspire others (Maldonado, 2015). This will ensure a fair exchange between the principal, educators, learners and the superintendent, and the principal thus directs and recognises the learners who in exchange respond positively to the principal by manifesting positive behaviour (Malaykan, 2014). The learners will develop an emotional attachment to the school and be willing to get involved in the school activities (Wyatt, 2015; Cheng, Jiang, Riley, Cheng & Jen, 2014) and behave to the principal's expectations about their behaviour – the Pygmalion effect (Basford

& Molberg, 2013). Everyone, therefore, is involved in the collective goal of promoting effective learner discipline (Berson, Halevy, Shamir & Erez, 2015).

The ethical role-model

The Bandura Social Learning Theory (1977) stresses that children learn by observing, copying and watching the attitudes and behaviour of adults (Adigeb & Mbua, 2015). So, the principal, who is the father-figure in the school, should interact with the learners with trustworthiness, honesty, integrity and by modelling positive behaviour and self-discipline (Temitayo, Nayaya & Lukman, 2013; Mjoroge & Nyabuto, 2014). Besides, the Best Practices Language Model urges the principal to use words of high expectations, love, respect, relationship, accountability, hope, guidance, understanding unity and guidance (Holloman & Yates, 2012). As a matter of fact, learners have the feeling of being empowered and valued, and manifest positive emotions (Fox, Cong & Attoh, 2015).

By being the role model to learners, principals transmit their authenticity and learners trust them as their leader (Sehring, 2015; Smithgall, 2016). They transfer the ownership of positive learner behaviour to the learners and this becomes the latter's responsibility in the school setting. Hence, the learners develop the accountability for their own behaviour, and therefore, according to Govender and Sookrajh, (2014), they become self-discipline, as theorised by the Glasser's model of control discipline (Glasser, 2009).

Instructional leadership

Instructional leadership focuses on the core mission of the school – effective teaching and learning - by creating a healthy school climate (Manaseh, 2016; Belle, 2015). The principal is the one who shapes a vision of academic success and manage people to improve the school (The Wallace Foundation, 2013). Indeed, the Contingency Model of Principals' Pedagogical Beliefs suggests that the instructional role of the principal has a positive influence on learners' behaviour (Peariso, 2011). Ensuring that instruction is effective brings about an improvement in the behavioural climate of the school (Putnam, Horner & Algozzine, 2016).

As an instructional leader, the principal has the responsibility to ensure the most conducive physical learning environment; establish clearly what is expected of the learners in terms of academic success and behaviour; organise their time; ensure that teaching and learning materials are available; involve them actively in the relevant activities; provide them with feedback on their behaviour; teach and reinforce appropriate behaviour skills; use sanctions as an opportunity for them to learn to improve their behaviour; teach replacement behaviour; and closely monitor the work of learners through the student journal (Olley, Cohn & Cowan, 2010). Also, he/she must encourage the use of interactive teaching techniques such as mobile learning and use the social media to increase the learners' interest in their learning (Shantal, Halttunen & Pekka, 2014) and create a technology-rich environment (Schleicher, 2015). The principal must lead learner in the digital age to reduce the gap between the teaching styles and the learning styles with a view to reduce learner misbehaviour (Meade, 2016). This type of leadership is essential since, according to Lukman and Hamadi (2014), learners manifest acts of indiscipline when the curriculum is not relevant to the learners' needs and expectations.

Distributed leadership

Schooling is becoming a complex system as far as purpose, organisational change and development and structure are concerned; so more possibilities should be given to the educator

and the learner to be leaders (Naicker & Mestry, 2013). The secondary school principal must eliminate the asymmetrical relationship that exists between educators and them (O'Brien, 2015) so that there is a collective efficacy (Nicholaides, LaPort, Chen, Tomassetti, Weis, Zaccaro & Cortina, 2014). He/she should therefore redistribute power, authority and leadership about learner discipline: He/she must set up collaborative meetings in which the school superintendents, educators and the principal discuss about the problem of learner behaviour and how to restore or maintain socially desirable behaviour in a multidisciplinary dialogue (Malaykan, 2014; Berg-Panitz, 2014; Gorder, 2015; Smithgall, 2016).

Bawany (2015) maintains that the principal must coach educators about the best practices in dealing with learners' lack of discipline and give them the opportunity to work collaboratively to develop a framework for comprehensive positive school discipline, which includes mainly partnership, planning and acting; this helps to improve practices of school discipline and address underlying factors such as academic deficits, mental health and behavioural issues (Bershad & Hudson, 2017). Besides, by using relationship-building and community-building approaches with educators and learners, in partnership with school districts, mental health providers, law enforcement and juvenile justice and families (Bershad & Hudson, 2017), social capital is positively built and wrongdoing is responded through participatory learning and decision-making about learner discipline (Kim, 2016). With all the school stakeholders having a voice in learner discipline management, the school environment is more energising than intimidating for the learners, in particular, and for the educators, the principal and the school superintendent, in general (Pietler, 2015).

Learner leadership

The success of the school head in maintaining effective learner discipline depends largely on participatory leadership he/she delves onto the learners to eliminate misbehaviour (Ugboko & Adediwura, 2012). Indeed, He/she has to listen to learners in devising and implementing the school disciplinary plan (Macharia et al, 2014). Learners should be treated as equal partners and trusted collaborators in learner behaviour (Learning and Skills Improvement Service, 2010) since it is their matter of concern and they have their voice about it. In so doing, principals act as leadership capacity builders in learners (Huggins, Klar, Harmmonds & Buskey, 2017). This is likely to motivate learners to respond and abide by the school disciplinary procedures, practices and policies (Macharia et al, 2014).

The principal must play a vital role in developing learner leadership in state secondary schools. Learners should be taught leader attitude, leadership knowledge, decision-making, will and desire, critical thinking, reasoning, intra and interpersonal relationships and written and oral communication (Rehm, 2014). The Ministry of Education, culture and Human Resources (2009) stipulates that the Prefects Body, which consists of learners, should help the principal in maintaining discipline inside and outside the school premises. So, the school head may include the Prefects Body in all school structures so that the learners may share their opinions and provide solutions about learner discipline and he/she must recognise these learners as leaders in the school.

Professional development and growth

The principal has the responsibility to change the school culture in order to promote positive learner discipline. However, change is not an individual but a collective process (Edinyang, 2017), and therefore, he/she needs to have educators who are well formed in learner discipline

management skills. Professional development of educators should be emphasised to bring the required change (Friedman, 2012). The skills and abilities of the educators as well as of the principal in dealing with behaviour problem should be improved (Lunenburg, 2011).

Staff development workshops on conflict management and resolution, social skills development, technology-enhanced teaching and learning approaches and relationships with learners may be organised by the school principal and other external resource persons (Magwa & Ngara, 2014). Besides, educators should be trained in applying school policies, procedures and practices in a fair way in order to avoid disproportionate use of punitive disciplinary strategies to the socially disadvantaged learners (US Department of Education, 2014). This helps the de-criminalisation of school discipline (Raufu, 2017). The principal should also recommend the young uncertified educators, known as the supply educators in Mauritius, for pre-service training at the Mauritius Institute of Education and the Open University of Mauritius since they face many forms of learner indiscipline (Manguvo, Whitney & Chareka, 2011) which they are unable to manage (Ozben, 2010).

The principal may undergo training in effective school discipline to enable him/her to create a safe and saner teaching and learning environment for learners. Shantal, Halttunen & Pekka (2014) mention that the basic sources of leadership practices in terms of school discipline are theory, practice, networking and leadership. Ibukun, Oyole and Abe (2011) add that through conferences, professional development programmes and workshops, principals may improve their practice about how to respond to individual learner's needs by using shared leadership, leadership by listening, teamwork, the setting up of a technology rich environment, and mentoring skills. Govinda-Seenauth (2016) argue that when principals and educators undergo professional development programmes, they lead with more trust and collaboration. There is, thus, a no-drama leadership, where each individual in the school is accountable for his/her own actions, attitudes and behaviour (Chism, 2015).

The school-parents' partnership

The principal can only share his/her goals and values in terms of learner discipline when the school parents are involved in the functioning of the school (Barr & Saltmarsh, 2014). Okeke (2014) and the Ministry of Education and Human Resources, Tertiary Education and Scientific Research (2014) concur that when parents are involved in their children's education at home and at school, the latter's cognitive and literacy abilities are positively influenced, and this ensures the learners of more psycho-social and behavioural competencies.

Ali, Dada, Isiaka & Salmon (2014) and Seegopaul (2016) affirm that when the principal involves parents in the School Governing Body, the school disciplinary committee and the Parents-Teachers Association, they are more willing and participate actively in helping the former and the educators to deal with academic and behavioural problems of learners. Moreover, Okeke (2014) states that the principal must accommodate parents in the Board of Management so that they are involved in the process of any school disciplinary plan and they provide support to the school in the implementation phase. Parents may also be involved in curriculum matters, parent-educator games, speech days, parents' evenings, school debates and discussions with educators on issues of learner discipline through periodic meetings (Rigby, 2011; Edinyang, 2017). The principal as well as educators may do home visits as a form of pastoral care in an attempt to better understand the learner's family situation and hence deal with behaviour problems in a more effective manner (Panchoo, 2016).

Leadership by relationships

The school principal should aim at developing trust, relationship and rapport with all the stakeholders of the school (Perruci & McManus, 2015; Gendron, 2015) since relationship-building ranked tenth out of sixteen leadership competencies, according to the Creative Centre for Leadership Studies (Rao, 2015).

The principal has a relational function as he/she operates in a social organisation (Bates & Weighart, 2015). The leadership of the principal is therefore intensely interpersonal (Fox, Cong & Attah, 2015). This is the social justice dimension of educational leadership where the school head values the principles of equality and solidarity, values and understands human rights and recognises each individual through care, empathy and respect (Mafora, 2013).

The principal must demonstrate his/her commitment to serve the others as a servant leader (Cook, 2015) who establishes quality relationships (Staats, 2015) in terms of listening, persuasion, foresight, fostering collaboration, moral development, humility, developing people, building community, capacity of reciprocity, valuing people, influencing, delegating, altruism, encouraging, providing leadership, credibility, resourcing visible presence, integrity and delegating (Focht & Ponton, 2015). Basically, when the principal leads learners by relationships, the latter feel more safe and secured at school; besides, it promotes the learner autonomy and self-discipline (Van der Vyyer, Van der Westhuizen & Meyer, 2014).

RECOMMENDATIONS

From the foregoing section, it is obvious that the state secondary school principal is the key agent, as the school head, to develop certain specific leadership qualities that would enable him/her to be successful in maintaining positive discipline among learners. He/she has to be an authentic leader, an instructional leader, a servant leader, an inspirational leader, an ethical leader, a moral leader, a collective leader, a visionary leader and an ambidextrous leader. His/her leadership should not be linked to his/her position, authority or hierarchy, but to his/her abilities to effectively practice the most appropriate disciplinary strategies. So, the "hero-paradigm" of leadership should be ignored. The leadership of the principal should be learner-focused and learner-inclusive. This may allow him/her to deal with school matters from a holistic view.

The principal should stop from being a school manager who looks into the administrative aspects of the school in his/her office (his/her comfort zone), leaving little time to work *with* the learners, educators, parents, educators and the school superintendent. Though, maintaining learner discipline is a management task, yet the principal must lead the school from the nexus of a web of interpersonal relationships (Belle, 2015). Learner discipline problem arises due to the existence of relational problems of the learners with their parents, educators, other learners and the family (Belle, 2014). So, he/she must manage the different relations that prevail in the school which is indeed the social setting. There should be a construal fit between the principal and the learners as well as the educators, parents and the superintendent (Berson, Halevy, Shamir & Erez, 2015) so that the social and temporal distances between them are reduced. This will allow the creation of a community of practice among all of them who will be working towards the goal of achieving sustainable positive learner discipline management. Once learner discipline is no more a school problem, the teaching and learning process becomes effective. School effectiveness should be the main objective of the principal. It should not only be

measured in terms of the success pass rate at the Cambridge School Certificate and the Higher School Certificate examinations. Learner discipline management is one of the variables to be considered and monitored effectively.

The Ministry of Education and Human Resources, Tertiary Education and Scientific Research of Mauritius should rethink about the traditional approach of centralisation in education and introduce a decentralisation policy where the school principal may autonomously take decisions about learner discipline management at the school level, by for instance, setting up a school discipline management plan that takes into consideration the specificity of the school: each state secondary school has its unique characteristics. So, the disciplinary measures adopted by the principal in a particular school should be context-bound, and not imposed upon all state schools by the Minister of Education and Human Resources, Tertiary Education and Scientific Research, as stipulated in the Education Act (1957) and all amended Education Acts of Mauritius.

CONCLUSION

This paper analysed and discussed the possible leadership approaches that the state secondary school principal may adopt and implement in order to maintain effective learner discipline. Given the legal and political framework in which the principal operates currently, learners' lack of discipline is worsening in Mauritius. So, the school head should be able to strike a balance between what disciplinary strategies he/she may adopt and implement and what the different education laws allow his/her to do. It is only by so doing that he/she may attempt to maintain discipline in the best possible manner. The principal's task is not to accept *status quo*, but to influence his/her followers to bring change to the school climate and culture. The principal should therefore rethink about his/her leadership in a holistic and collective manner.

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