The partnership of parents, educators and principals in creating a culture of teaching and learning in schools

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We investigated the partnership of parents, educators, and principals in creating a culture of teaching and learning in schools. To this end, a Culture of Learning and Teaching Partnership Scale (COLTPS) and Factors Contributing to the Decline of a Culture of Learning and Teaching Scale (FCDCOLTS) were used. The findings indicated that parents, educators, and principals, as a group, differed significantly in the extent to which they perceived the partnership role they play in creating a culture of teaching and learning in schools. The findings also indicated that parents, educators, and principals, as a group, differed significantly in the extent to which they perceived the factors that contribute to the decline of a culture of teaching and learning in schools. The findings indicated further that the nature of a stakeholder had a significant influence on parents', educators', and principals' perceptions of the partnership role they play in creating a culture of teaching and learning in schools. Suggestions are made for measures to improve a culture of teaching and learning in schools.

Introduction

After the new South African government came into existence in 1994, concerns about the decline of a culture of teaching and learning, especially in historically black schools, strengthened. This is evident from a relatively large number of studies that were conducted during this period (Maja, 1995; Masitsa, 1995; Chisholm & Vally, 1996; Pager, 1996; Sedibe, 1996; Chetty, 1998; Naidoo, 1999; Nhlapho, 1999; Budhal, 2000; Magqaza, 2000; Lethoko, 2002; Nemukula, 2002; Nzima, 2002; Mthembu, 2003; Sobethshe, 2003; Pepeta, 2003). This is also evident from the initiative by the Department of Education to establish a Culture of Learning and Teaching Services (COLTS) unit in different provinces of South Africa, with the aim of promoting a culture of teaching and learning in schools.

Various studies have focused on different stakeholders in their investigation of a culture of teaching and learning in schools. These stakeholders include teachers (Pager, 1996; Sedibe, 1996; Lethoko, 2002), teachers and principals (Naidoo, 1997; Nzima, 2002), principals (Budhal, 2000; Nemukula, 2002), principals and school governing bodies (Pillay, 1995), school management team (Naidoo, 1999), school governing bodies (Chetty, 1998; Nhlapho, 1999), district officials (Sobethshe, 2003), the relationship between policy and practice (Mthembu, 2003).

Several studies have also explored the factors that contribute to the decline of a culture of teaching and learning in schools. They have shown that it is attributed to a variety of factors. Some of these factors are: poor management of schools by principals such as poor administration, poor time management, poor school organisation, poor time table, inadequate staffing, and promotion of educators in the middle of the year (Mona, 1997; Van Schalkwyk, 1994); educators who are uncommitted, do not prepare lessons, lack subject knowledge, abuse alcohol, set poor role models, conduct themselves unprofessionally, absent themselves from classes, lack discipline and professional working ethics (Ashley, 1993; Steyn, 1994; Wolpe, 1995; De Villiers, 1997; Naidoo, 1997); lack of support from the family such as inadequate housing facilities for studying, lack of proper nutrition and health requirements, illiterate parents

(Borger, 1986; Van der Aardweg, 1990; Pillay, 1995; Van Zyl & Vorster, 1995; Smith & Pacheo, 1996; Van Wyk, 1996; Botha, 1997; McConkey, 2000); learners who lack: proper foundation of knowledge such as basic numeracy and literacy skills, study habits, work ethics and self-discipline as well as learners who do not attend school regularly and play truant (De Villiers, 1997).

Notably, factors related to principals, educators, parents, and learners contribute to the decline of a culture of teaching and learning in schools.

Problem statement

Very few, if any, studies have attempted to investigate the tripartite partnership of parents, educators, and principals as a group of stakeholders in creating a culture of teaching and learning in schools. We intended to do that in the present study. We attempted to unravel the problem of the partnership role these stakeholders collectively play in creating a culture of teaching and learning in schools as well as the factors that contribute to the decline of such culture. More specifically, we attempted to find answers to the following research questions:
- To what extent do parents, educators, and principals, as a group, perceive the partnership role which they play in creating a culture of teaching and learning in schools?
- Do parents', educators' and principals' biographical variables (gender, nature of stake-holder, and highest grade offered by the school) have any significant influence on their perceptions of the partnership role they play in creating a culture of teaching and learning in schools?
- To what extent do parents, educators, and principals, as a group, perceive the factors that contribute to the decline of a culture of teaching and learning in schools?
- Do parents', educators', and principals' biographical variables (gender, nature of stake-holder, and highest grade offered by the school) have any significant influence on their perceptions of the factors that contribute to the decline of a culture of teaching and learning in schools?

Method
Aims of research
The present research aimed at achieving the following objectives:
- Ascertaining the extent to which parents, educators, and principals, as a group, perceive the partnership role they play in creating a culture of teaching and learning in schools.
- Determining whether parents', educators', and principals' biographical variables (gender, nature of stakeholder, and highest grade offered by the school) have any significant influence on their perceptions of the partnership role they play in creating a culture of teaching and learning in schools.
- Ascertaining the extent to which parents, educators, and principals, as a group, perceive the factors that contribute to the decline of a culture of teaching and learning in schools.
- Determining whether parents', educators', and principals' biographical variables (gender, nature of stakeholder, and highest grade offered by the school) have any significant influence on their perceptions of the factors that contribute to the decline of a culture of teaching and learning in schools.

Hypotheses
The following theoretical hypotheses were formulated:

- Parents, educators, and principals, as a group, do not differ in the extent to which they perceive the partnership role they play in creating a culture of teaching and learning in schools.
- Parents', educators', and principals' biographical variables (gender, nature of stakeholder, and highest grade offered by the school) have no significant influence on their perceptions of the partnership role they play in creating a culture of teaching and learning in schools.
- Parents, educators, and principals, as a group, do not differ in the extent to which they perceive the factors that contribute to the decline of a culture of teaching and learning in schools.
- Parents', educators', and principals' biographical variables (gender, nature of stakeholder, and highest grade offered by the school) have no significant influence on their perceptions of the factors that contribute to the decline of a culture of teaching and learning in schools.

Participants

There were four educational regions in the KwaZulu-Natal province at the time of the investigation. These regions, in alphabetical order, were eThekwini; uKhahlamba; uMgungundlovu; and Zululand. Simple random sampling was used to select the Zululand region, which has three districts (Empangeni, Obonjeni, and Vryheid), and to select Empangeni district, which in turn has three circuits (Eshowe, Lower uMfolozi, and Mthunzini). Schools within these three circuits were used for drawing a sample of parents, educators, and principals for this study (Table 1).

Table 1 Distribution of participants according to biographical variables (N=204)

Gender		Nature of stakeholder			Schools' highest grade			
Male	Female	Parent	Educator	Principal	3	7	10	12
111	93	67	70	67	10	74	22	98

Table 1 shows the distribution of participants according to their biographical variables, namely, gender, nature of stakeholder, and highest grade offered by the school. Because of limited space and very few observed frequencies in some cells to yield significance results, highest academic qualifications as well as age of the participants were not included in the table and in the analysis of data. Nevertheless, there was one participant without formal qualifications, two participants with Grade 1–7, 10 with Grade 8–10, 12 with Grade 11–12, 80 with a diploma/certificate, and 99 with a degree. Among them seven had 29 years and below, 61 had 30–39, 84 had 40–49, 46 had 50–59, and six had 60 years and above. The sample included 204 participants, exclusively from previous black, rural and township schools. The schools were selected from the province of KwaZulu-Natal because that is where the focus of the study was. Included in the sample were 70 randomly selected schools, with a teacher, a parent, and a principal from each school. Out of the 300 questionnaires that were distributed, 204 were returned, which is a 68% return rate.

Measures

The questionnaire was used as a research instrument for collecting data. It had English and

IsiZulu versions. The latter version was used to cater for parents who only understand the home language. The questionnaire was appropriate for eliciting and rating respondents' responses as well as for quantitative analysis of data. It consisted of three sections covering the aims of the study. The first section consisted of respondents' biographical information (gender, age, highest academic qualification, nature of stakeholder, and highest grade offered by the school). The second consisted of the Culture of Learning and Teaching Partnership Scale (COLTPS). The third section consisted of Factors Contributing to the Decline of a Culture of Learning and Teaching Scale (FCDCOLTS).

COLTPS and FCDCOLTS

Informed by literature and other previous studies on a culture of teaching and learning, we developed the Culture of Learning and Teaching Partnership Scale (COLTPS) and Factors Contributing to the Decline of a Culture of Teaching and Learning Scale (FCDCOLTS). These were four-point scales. With regard to the COLTPS, respondents were asked to indicate the degree to which they believed parents, educators, and principals play a partnership role in creating a culture of teaching and learning in schools. The ratings were: strongly agree (4), agree (3), disagree (2), strongly disagree (1). With regard to the FCDCOLTS, respondents were asked to indicate the degree to which they felt each of the listed factors contributed to the decline of a culture of teaching and learning in schools. The ratings were the same as in the COLTPS.

Both scales were piloted on a small sample of parents, educators, and principals in order to establish their content and face validity before being used in the final study. The internal-consistency reliability for the two scales was established by using Cronbach's alpha co-efficient. The internal-consistency reliability for COLTPS was .92 and for FCDCOLTS was .95. These are excellent reliabilities (Tabachnick & Fidel, 1989).

The COLTPS consisted of 28 items. The lowest possible score on this scale was $28 \times 1 = 28$ and the highest possible score was $28 \times 4 = 112$. This continuum of 28–112 was arbitrarily divided into four categories, namely: 28–49 indicating a low partnership role level (LPRL); 50–70 a moderate partnership role level (MPRL); 71–91 a high partnership role level (HPRL), and 92–112 showing a very high partnership role level (VHPRL). Therefore the respondent's summated score was classified accordingly into one of these four categories. This procedure yielded data to fulfil the first aim. Data obtained through this procedure were also used together with those of the respondents' biographical data in order to meet the second aim of the present study.

The FCDCOLTS consisted of 32 items. The lowest possible score on this scale was $32 \times 1 = 32$ and the highest possible score was $32 \times 4 = 132$. This continuum of 32–132 was arbitrarily divided into four categories, namely: 32–56 indicating a low factor contribution level (LFCL); 57–80 a moderate factor contribution level (MFCL); 81–104 a high factor contribution level (HFCL), and 105–128 a very high factor contribution level (VHFCL). Therefore the respondent's summated score was classified accordingly into one of these categories. This procedure yielded data to fulfil the third aim. Data obtained through this procedure were also used together with those of the respondents' biographical data in order to meet the fourth aim of the present study.

Procedures

The researchers personally administered the questionnaire to the participants. An explanation

of the nature of the questionnaire and the purpose of the investigation preceded the administration.

In order to achieve the aims of this study, various inferential statistical procedures were followed. The chi-square one-sample test was used to ascertain the extent to which parents, educators, and principals, as a group, perceived the partnership role they play in creating a culture of teaching and learning in schools (aim number 1) as well as to ascertain the extent to which parents, educators, and principals, as a group, perceived the factors that contribute to the decline of a culture of teaching and learning in schools (aim number 3). The chi-square test of independence was used to determine whether parents', educators', and principals' biographical variables (gender, nature of stakeholder, and highest grade offered by the school) had any significant influence on their perceptions of the partnership role they play in creating a culture of teaching and learning in schools (aim number 2) as well as to determine whether parents', educators', and principals' biographical variables (gender, nature of stakeholder, and highest grade offered by the school) had any significant influence on their perceptions of the factors that contribute to the decline of a culture of teaching and learning in schools (aim number 4). The chi-square test is appropriate for categorical data (Orlich,1978; Borg & Gall, 1983; Behr, 1988).

In order to understand how the respondents responded to each statement on some of the factors contributing to the decline of a culture of teaching and learning in schools, descriptive statistics were used. To this end, data were summarised by averaging group scores (Table 10). When the mean or average for the responses to each item was converted to the nominal categories, it gave an indication of the group's response to a particular item (Orlich, 1978; Henerson, Morris & Fitz-Gibbon, 1987).

Results

Tables 2, 3, and 4 show that there were no observed frequencies for LPRL group cells, therefore, it was advisable to collapse it.

With regard to the first aim, the chi-square test ($\chi^2 = 89.676$; df = 2; $p < 0.05$) indicated that significant difference was found among the moderate partnership role level (MPRL), high partnership role level (HPRL), and very high partnership role level (VHPRL) groups (Table 2). This finding showed that parents, educators, and principals, as a group, differed in the extent to which they perceive the partnership role they play in creating a culture of teaching and learning in schools. The three groups of partnership levels differed among themselves. Put differently, the existence of these three groups was not due to chance factors but was statistically significant.

Table 2   Respondents grouped according to partnership role levels

	MPRL (50–70)	HPRL (71–91)	VHPRL (92–112)
Frequencies	5	108	91

$\chi^2 = 89.676$ df = 2 $p < 0.05$

The results of analysis for the second aim revealed that no significant difference was found between males and females with regard to reported partnership role levels (Table 3). This finding showed that gender had no influence on parents', educators', and principals' perceptions of the partnership role they play in creating a culture of teaching and learning in

schools. Any gender differences pertaining to the three partnership role levels were due to chance factors, and not statistically significant.

Table 3 Gender and partnership role levels

Gender	MPRL (50–70)	HPRL (71–91)	VHPRL (92–112)
Male	3	63	45
Female	2	45	46

$\chi^2 = 1.635$ df = 2 $p > 0.05$

Table 4 shows that significant difference was found among parents, educators, and principals with regard to reported partnership role levels. This finding showed that the nature of stakeholder has an influence on parents', educators', and principals' perceptions of the partnership role they play in creating a culture of teaching and learning in schools. Any stakeholder differences pertaining to the three partnership role levels were not due to chance factors but were statistically significant.

Table 4 Nature of stakeholder and partnership role levels

Nature of stakeholder	MPRL (50–70)	HPRL (71–91)	VHPRL (92–112)
Parent	0	37	30
Educator	5	38	27
Principal	0	33	34

$\chi^2 = 10.972$ df = 4 $p < 0.05$

Table 5 indicates that no significant difference was found among the highest grades offered by the schools (Grades 3, 7, 10, and 12) with regard to reported partnership role levels. This finding showed that highest grade offered by the school had no influence on parents', educators', and principals' perceptions of the partnership role they play in creating a culture of teaching and learning in schools. Any highest school grade differences pertaining to the three partnership role levels were due to chance factors, and not statistically significant.

Table 5 Schools' highest grade and partnership role levels

Schools' highest grade	MPRL (50–70)	HPRL (71–91)	VHPRL (92–112)
Grade 3	0	5	5
Grade 7	0	32	42
Grade 10	0	13	9
Grade 12	5	58	35

$\chi^2 = 11.936$ df = 6 $p > 0.05$

With regard to the third aim, the chi-square test ($\chi^2 = 139.451$; df = 3; $p < 0.05$) indicated that significant difference was found among the low factor contribution level (LFCL), moderate factor contribution level (MFCL), high factor contribution level (HFCL), and very high factor contribution level (VHFCL) groups (Table 6). This finding showed that parents, edu-

cators, and principals, as a group, differed in the extent to which they perceived the factors that contribute to the decline of a culture of teaching and learning in schools. The four groups of factor contribution levels differed among themselves. Put differently, the existence of these four groups was not due to chance factors, but was statistically significant.

Table 6 Respondents grouped according to factor contribution levels

	LFCL (32–56)	MFCL (57–80)	HFCL (81–104)	VHFCL (105–128)
Frequencies	5	15	105	79
$\chi^2 = 139.451$	df = 3	$p < 0.05$		

The results of analysis for the fourth aim revealed that no significant difference was found between males and females with regard to reported factor contribution levels (Table 7). This finding showed that gender had no influence on parents', educators', and principals' perceptions of the factors that contribute to the decline of a culture of teaching of teaching and learning in schools. Any gender differences pertaining to the four factor contribution levels were due to chance factors, and not statistically significant.

Table 7 Gender and factor contribution levels

Gender	LFCL (32–56)	MFCL (57–80)	HFCL (81–104)	VHFCL (105–128)
Male	1	7	64	39
Female	4	8	41	40
$\chi^2 = 5.371$	df = 3	$p > 0.05$		

Table 8 shows that no significant difference was found among parents, educators, and principals with regard to reported factor contribution levels. This finding showed that the nature of a stakeholder had an influence on parents', educators', and principals' perceptions of the factors that contribute to the decline of a culture of teaching of teaching and learning in schools. Any stakeholder differences pertaining to the four factor contribution levels were due to chance factors, and not statistically significant.

Table 8 Nature of stakeholder and factor contribution levels

Nature of stakeholder	LFCL (32–56)	MFCL (57–80)	HFCL (81–104)	VHFCL (105–128)
Parent	4	6	31	26
Educator	1	8	37	24
Principal	0	1	37	29
$\chi^2 = 11.549$	df = 6	$p > 0.05$		

Table 9 indicates that no significant difference was found among the highest grades offered by the schools (Grades 3, 7, 10, and 12) with regard to reported factor contribution levels. This finding showed that highest grade offered by the school had no influence on parents', educators', and principals' perceptions of the factors that contribute to the decline of a culture of teaching of teaching and learning in schools. Any highest school grade differences pertaining

to the four factor contribution levels were due to chance factors, and not statistically signi-
ficant.

Table 9　Schools' highest grade and factor contribution levels

Schools' highest grade	LFCL (32–56)	MFCL (57–80)	HFCL (81–104)	VHFCL (105–128)
Grade 3	1	0	4	5
Grade 7	2	10	29	33
Grade 10	0	1	15	6
Grade 12	2	4	57	35

$\chi^2 = 15.599$　　　　df = 9　　　　$p > 0.05$

Table 10 Rank order of group responses to Items 1–32 (N = 204)

Rank order	Factor	Mean	SD
1	Poor school administration	3.48	0.791
2	Poor time management	3.41	0.766
3	Poor school organisation	3.35	0.751
4	Educators' absence from class	3.34	0.774
5	Inadequate staffing	3.27	0.788
6	Alcohol abuse by many educators	3.25	0.865
7	Educators' lack of subject knowledge	3.22	0.814
8	Poor time table	3.20	0.782
8	Unprepared lessons by educators	3.20	0.796
8	Educators' unprofessional conduct	3.20	0.813
8	Learners' truancy	3.20	0.718
12	Overcrowded classrooms	3.18	0.750
12	Lack of work ethics among learners	3.18	0.817
14	Poor role model set by educators	3.17	0.770
14	Learners' irregular school attendance	3.17	0.689
16	Learners' lack of ability to concentrate in class	3.14	0.763
17	Promotion of educators in the middle of the year	3.13	0.805
18	Learners' inability to express themselves through the medium of English	3.12	0.762
19	Lack of study habits among learners	3.07	0.806
19	Lack of self-confidence among learners	3.07	0.632
21	Under-qualified educators	3.01	0.885
22	Lack of furniture in school	3.00	0.794
23	Family's low level of income	2.99	0.848
24	Contracting values between home and school	2.98	0.803
25	Lack of proper foundation knowledge such as basic numeracy skills among learners	2.95	0.849
26	Lack of administrative equipment such as computers	2.93	0.839
26	Lack of proper nutrition	2.93	0.766
28	Lack of healthy requirements	2.85	0.835
29	Inadequate housing facilities	2.82	0.835
30	Family's low level of education	2.81	0.875
31	Family's low level of occupation	2.75	0.877
31	Illiterate parents	2.75	0.862

Table 10 shows that factors related to principals' poor management of schools were ranked high, followed by factors related to educators' unacceptable behaviour. It also reveals that factors related to learners and parents' socio-economic status were ranked the lowest.

Discussion

The findings revealed that parents, educators, and principals, as a group, differed significantly in the extent to which they perceived the partnership role they play in creating a culture of teaching and learning in schools. A very high percentage (97.5%) of them reported an above average level of partnership role compared to those who reported a moderate level (2.5%) (Table 2). None of the parents, educators, and principals reported a low partnership role level. This means that the majority of these stakeholders believed that they, as a group, did play a partnership role in creating a culture of teaching and learning in schools.

The findings also indicated that the biographical variables, gender and highest grade offered by the school, (Tables 3 and 5), had no influence on their perceptions of the partnership role they play in creating a culture of teaching and learning in schools. This means that gender and the highest grade offered by the school were not a significant factor that will influence these role-players' perceptions about their partnership role. With regard to the nature of a stakeholder, a small percentage (2.5%) of educators reported a moderate partnership role level (Table 4). Neither parents nor principals reported a moderate partnership role level, instead both groups reported above average partnership role levels. This means that only some few educators perceived the partnership role played by parents, educators, and principals in creating a culture of teaching and learning as moderate.

The findings further indicated that parents, educators, and principals, as a group, differed significantly in the extent to which they perceived the factors that contribute to the decline of a culture of teaching and learning in schools. A very high percentage (90.2%) of them reported above average level of factor contribution (Table 6). This indicated that, although a very high percentage of parents, educators, and principals reported above average level of partnership role they play in creating a culture of teaching and learning, they still felt that the factors listed (Table 10) did contribute to the decline of a culture of teaching and learning in schools in general.

The findings also revealed that parents', educators', and principals' biographical variables (gender, nature of stakeholder, and the highest grade offered by the school) had no influence on their perceptions of the factors that contribute to the decline of a culture of teaching and learning in schools (Tables 7, 8, and 9).

With regard to the order of factors that contribute to the decline of a culture of teaching and learning in schools, factors related to principals' poor management of schools were ranked high (Table 10). To be specific, three of the six poor school management factors were ranked as top factors. Four of them were ranked among the top five, and five of them were ranked among the top ten factors. This showed that the factors concerning principals' poor management of schools were the most factors perceived to be contributing to the decline of a culture of teaching and learning in schools.

The factors that were ranked high after poor school management were those related to educators' unacceptable behaviour. To be precise, included in the top ten were five of the seven factors associated with educators. This indicated that educator-related factors were also highly perceived as contributing to the decline of a culture of teaching and learning in schools. These findings supported the results of previous studies which have shown that little change is pos-

sible without the active role of teachers (Rhodes & Houghton-Hill, 2000:427; Robinson & Carrington, 2002:247).

The factors that were ranked the lowest, not among the top ten, were those concerning learners as well as those associated with parents and their socio-economic status as heads of families. This indicated that learners' and parent-related factors were not perceived to be relatively high in contributing to the decline of a culture of teaching and learning in schools.

Conclusion

Given the findings of this study, which revealed that the majority of the participants (90.7%) in the study felt that the factors listed in the questionnaire did contribute to the decline of a culture of teaching and learning in schools, there appears to be a need to pay attention to them. Particular attention should be paid to factors related to the management of schools by principals, as well as to those factors associated with the behaviour of educators. Joint partnership of parents, educators, principals, learners, ward managers, district managers, regional managers, and other more senior officials in the department of education, including the minister, can play an important role in this regard. This may go a long way towards eliminating the factors that contribute to the decline of a culture of teaching and learning in schools, thus making the majority of schools functional. Further research, including learners as one of the stakeholders, is proposed so that more light can be shed on the findings.

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