CHAPTER 1

ORIENTATION

1.1   Introduction

More than ever before, there is a growing awareness, as illustrated by research on school effectiveness, of the role of the school principal in improving instruction and learning. However, a striking aspect of efforts made to improve the managerial capabilities of school principals is the neglect of the unique needs of newly-appointed school principals. Little has been documented about well-structured induction programmes for new school principals. Similarly, the current induction programmes for new principals range from trial and error, swim or sink, wait and see to very **ad hoc**, unco-ordinated strategies.

Within the context of this chapter an orientation to this study is provided. A statement of the problem is provided to facilitate an understanding of the problem under investigation. Following that, the research design is given and terms relevant to the study are defined.

1.2   Statement of the problem

Upon gaining independence from South Africa in 1977, Bophuthatswana, like most developing countries, designed a blueprint for reform in education in line with the findings of the Lekhela Commission. The Popagano Report (1978), in an attempt to improve the quality of education in Bophuthatswana, restructured the school system into a 6+3+3 system. Legotlo (1988:43) argues that the implicit aim of the restructuring of the school system was to improve the efficiency of the education system.

With the high population growth rate (2.8%), there has been a tremendous increase in school population as well as participation rates, and a substantial number of new principalships have been created.

The birth of the 'new South Africa', with new educational policies like free primary education or universal primary education, also calls for

effective principals. In line with this argument the need to support new principals to improve the quality of education and the effectiveness of the schools cannot be over-emphasised.

Van der Westhuizen (1991:3) argues that very few principals today have undergone sufficient training to enable them to cope with the managerial duties required. In Bophuthatswana principals are not formally trained. The path pattern of most principals is from being a teacher promoted to vice-principal or departmental head and later to a principalship.

The growing complexity of the principal's tasks is revealed by researchers like Willis (1980), Martin and Willower (1981) Kmentz and Willower (1982). It is also quite clear from the principal's manuals or guides like the **Bophuthatswana Guide for Principals**. Research studies on school effectiveness also show that the principal is the key factor, and emphasise the role of principals as instructional leaders.

Current literature in school administration reforms, particularly in developed countries like the U.S.A. and the U.K. concentrates on the issues surrounding recruitment, selecting and preparing potential administrators (Gorton, 1983; Bolam, et al; 1985; Southworth, 1985; Daresh, 1986a; Parkay & Amstrong 1987; Boyan, 1988; Parkay & Currie 1989), while research studies on the induction of school principals appear to be in very early stages of development. In developing countries like Bophuthatswana the traditional view of selecting the principal from the ranks of successful experienced teachers without any formal preparation is still the vogue, and very little research has been conducted on the induction of new school principals in the black South African setting. Thus, lack of formal induction of new principals in Bophuthatswana shows that most of them are thrown in at the deep end and this problem is increasingly causing concern.

There is a considerable body of literature on the concerns and problems of beginning principals (Gorton, 1983; Imison, 1985; Daresh, 1986b; Daresh, 1986; Weindling & Earley, 1987; Parkay & Currie 1989; Janson, 1989, for examples) in developed countries in particular. These studies show that the new principal's problems could be categorized as follows:

*   Role clarification: They are not in a position to conceptualise their responsibilities, the extent of their authority and the nature of their new position.

*   Technical expertise: The how-concern, about which one can cite examples, such as how to budget, how to handle legal issues, how to implement policies, how to improve interpersonal relations.

*   Socialisation: Many beginning principals are more concerned about how the staff, students, parents, community and the central office will react to them, and hope to get acceptance from all the groups with whom he will be working.

These problems to some extent highlight the essential skills needed by new principals to enable them to perform their roles effectively. The limited research conducted on the essential skills indicates skills that could be clustered into three categories, namely:

*   Technical skills: These are skills needed by the new principal to enable him to perform his role effectively. This would include the ability to evaluate staff, to know how to conduct parent-teacher-student conferences, and how to monitor school financial budgets.

*   Social skills: These are skills needed by the new principal to enable him to establish a healthy relationship among all the bodies involved, and to encourage all parties to participate meaningfully in order to actualise the goals of the school.

*   Self-awareness skills: These skills are needed by the new principal to enable him to understand why he was selected to run the school, his organisational power and authority, his strengths and weaknesses.

Induction programmes developed by various researchers like Daresh (1986c, U.S.A.), Weindling and Earley (1986, U.K.), and Janson (1989,

R.S.A.) also highlighted all these concerns and problems of the new principals and proposed ways of minimizing them.

Virtually all these studies were conducted in different cultural settings and systems, so the findings of these studies cannot be transplanted in Bophuthatswana without modifications. Induction programmes in developed countries (viz. the U.S.A., the U.K. and the RSA) must address the relevant needs of people concerned, and those programmes that are labelled good abroad, cannot merely be transferred and implemented in the African context, without their being tailored to suit local needs.

This study focuses on the concerns and problems of beginning principals with ultimate intention of developing a suitable induction programme for newly-appointed school principals.

1.3   Aims of the research

The aim of this research can be operationalized in the following five aims:

*   Aim 1: To determine from the literature the nature and scope of induction of new school principals.

*   Aim 2: To determine from the literature the problems and critical skills needed by new school principals.

*   Aim 3: To examine the current induction programmes for newly-appointed school principals.

*   Aim 4: To determine empirically the problems and critical skills for new school principals.

*   Aim 5: To develop an induction programme for new school principals in Bophuthatswana.

1.4 Method of research

1.4.1 Literature study

In a review of literature, a thorough study of secondary and primary sources was made with the view of gathering information on induction programmes for new school principals. A DIALOG-Search was conducted with the following keywords: new principals, beginning principals, administrator problems, staff induction, induction of new principals.

1.4.2 Interviews

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with professors of educational management in the U.S.A. and the U.K. to gain a picture of the support given to new principals in developed countries. The aim of the interviews was to gather information from people with experience in the professional development of school principals in order to get a picture of the dynamics of the support given to new principals.

1.4.3 Empirical investigation

1.4.3.1 Questionnaire

A questionnaire was developed and pretested. The aim of the questionnaire was to gather information from primary, middle and high school principals and to obtain their views of problems facing beginning school principals and critical skills need by new principals for effective performance of their jobs.

1.4.3.2 Population

Out of the total number of school principals (1459) in Bophuthatswana, a stratified random sample (n=500) was selected.

1.4.3.3 Data analysis

With help of the statistical consultants of the Potchefstroom University, computer-aided statistical analysis was employed.

1.5 Definition of terms

* **New principals** refers to all beginning principals who took up their first appointment during the school year 1991-July 1993 in Bophuthatswana.

* **Veteran principals** refers to all principals with four years and more experience as school principals.

* **Induction programme** refers to a comprehensive career development plan designed to help and support new principals as they make the transition from theoretical to operational leadership.

1.6 Chapter headings

1: Orientation

2: The nature and scope of induction in education

3: Problems and skills of new school principals

4: An overview of the induction programmes for newly appointed school principals

5: Research design

6: Data analysis and interpretation

7: Induction programme for new school principals in Bophuthatswana.

8: Summary, recommendations and conclusion

1.7 Summary

In this introductory chapter, a brief orientation to the study is provided, outlining the problem to be investigated, and formulating the aims of the study. The major focus of the study is to develop an induction programme for new school principals.

The problems of beginning principals are to be addressed by giving them a formal support base as they make the transition from being a teacher to a more challenging and complex ship called principalship.