Negotiated identities: dynamics in parents' participation in school governance in rural Eastern Cape schools and implication for school leadership

Byron Brown and **Ntombozuko Duku**
bbrown@ufh.ac.za; nduku@ufh.ac.za

School governance is a feature of school leadership in schools in South Africa. Currently, there is a dearth of research examining the dynamics in, and how parents navigate their way through, the process of school governance. Using a qualitative approach, we investigated these dynamics. The sample was parents in rural communities in secondary schools in the Eastern Cape. The parents responded to questions in semi-structured phenomenological interviews. Multiple factors linked to gender politics and African traditions shaped how parents participated in school governance. School governance practices were imbued with a tension between values inherent in African traditions/ customs and values of modern school policies/legislations. While outlining the implications for school leadership, we argue that conflict and tension in school governance is likely to continue unless leadership practices and policy provisions reflect more of people's customs/traditions.

Introduction

School governance is a feature of school leadership in schools in South Africa. While there is considerable variation in the way school governance (SG) is defined, one could perhaps argue that within the South African context, SG relates to, *inter alia*, part of the processes and systems by which the school operates; the use of structures of authority and collaboration to allocate resources and co-ordinate or control activities linked to the management of the school (Department of Education (DoE), 2007). In this echelon of management, parents, educators, and learners are drawn into partnership for the education of the learners. When we place the school in its global context, we quickly realize that there is nothing inherently new about SG; it has been a hallmark of school systems in other parts of the world for many years (Lemmer & Badenhorst, 1997). Involving the school in the wider community and the wider community in the school, including its decision-making processes, has been a central theme of social scientists for decades (Sadovnik, Cookson, Semel, 2001). But within the South African school context, SG is a relatively new practice. As Naidoo (2005) points out, the enactment of the South Africa School Act (SASA) in 1996 created the space for SG in school leadership.

While the history of SG in South Africa has been relatively short, the motivation for its introduction in schools and the historical context that gave rise to the legislative framework that supports it are well documented (Duku, 2006; Ministerial Review Study, 2004; Naidoo, 2005). The opportunity for South African parents, learners and educators to participate in the gover-

nance of their education institutions occurred against the background of a shift from authoritarian rule, coupled with racial division and an uneven socio-economic landscape to an atmosphere of democracy (Naidoo, 2005; Statistics South Africa, 2000). Although the ushering in of democracy has however not removed the uneven socio-economic experiences of many parents and school communities (Woolard, 2002:5), it has made these groups able to be involved in the management of their school's affairs. As the main legislation giving legitimacy to SG in schools, the SASA for many therefore is a tool aimed at, *inter alia*, redressing past exclusions and facilitating the necessary transformation to support the ideals of representation and participation in the schools and the country (Karlsen, 1999). It meant that the broad masses of people, regardless of socio-economic standing, or racial divide, are now able to have a 'voice' in the decisions that directly or indirectly impact on them in the school communities. For many parents, this opportunity signals a new dawn of empowerment.

In the current research landscape in South Africa, the advantages, disadvantages, and ideological underpinnings of SG have been extensively studied. Following their assessment of the state of SG in South African schools, the Ministerial Review Committee (Ministerial Review Study, 2004:82) highlighted its unifying effects in schools. But many scholars (Karlsen, 1999; Naidoo, 2005; Sayed & Soudien, 2005) have rejected this view. They argued that conflicts and dilemmas among its membership are central to the experience of SG. In other words, owing to the historical legacies of isolation, racial differences, inequality, and contextual variations, some scholars argued that power and value-relations shape forms of interaction and participation in SG (Bacharach & Mundell, 1993; Naidoo, 2005). But the evidence supporting this claim in different social contexts is limited. When the SASA was introduced, it was on the premise that it would create 'a new school governance landscape' (Naidoo, 2005). Many critics have however blamed it for some of the tension evident in SG. For instance, it is seen as steeply middle-class in identity, and has been accused of normalizing parental participation in SG in middle-class terms; another criticism is that it assumes parents have the resources and time to spend on school activities (Dyer & Rose, 2005; Fakir, 2003; Sayed & Soudien, 2005).

But when these criticisms of the Act are viewed in context with the socio-economic realities of many communities in rural locations in South Africa, it is often difficult to disagree. In fact, the report of the Ministerial Review Committee cited socio-economic related difficulties as a paralysis to how some parents participate in SG in rural communities (Ministerial Review Study, 2004). When poor and privileged parent-groups are gathered, the message of insignificance is often communicated. One effect evident in such gatherings is social tension, rejection, domination, and psychological stress, as Brown (2005), in the context of Botswana, and Thacheen (2005), in the context of Thailand, found. These effects often lead to isolation of individuals. Isolation is antithesis to participation. In situations such as these, it is easy

to push parents, who do not meet the middle-class expectations implied in the SASA, to the margin of SG participation. At the moment, there is a dearth of research examining these dynamics and how parents navigate their way in the process of SG.

Based on evidence from social identity research (Brown, 2005; Erikson, 1980; Hall, 1996), we contend that while parents participate in SG, the social tension, rejection, and psychological stress — often evident when affluent and destitute parents gather for school events — impact on the manner in which these parents negotiate their identities and navigate their way into participating in school governance. This hypothesis represents one of the major exclusions in the existing reflections on the SG debate in the country. The purpose in this article was to investigate these participation dynamics and explore possible implications for school leadership. The theoretical perspective and methodology are discussed in the next section.

Social identity

Social identity is a process of defining oneself relative to shared characteristics with others. In Hall's (1999:21) view, 'social identity has to go through the "eye" of the needle of the other, before it can construct itself'. Identity then, is a bimodal phenomenon, linking internal self-perceptions with the perception of self as part of a social environment — the construction of which involves a distinction between the *self* and the *other*, or between *us* and *them*. The bimodal view of identity means identity formation is one characterized by tension between differentiation and identification, i.e. the need to find boundaries between self and others.

The normative crisis that occurs in adolescence, according to Erikson (1963), is an identity crisis. However, identity formation is neither fixed, nor unified (Hall, 1996). Witte (1996) explains that as new challenges or situations arise, belief systems are re-examined to cope with the new information, causing identity adjustments. Rossiter (1999) shows that identity can be constructed and reconstructed through the stories we tell and retell about our lives; as new stories are created, new perceptions of identity develop. Reference to the possibility of social identity adjustment throughout life implies that social identity can be bargained, agreed upon, conferred, and even traded. Of course, individuals may seek to lay claim to an identity, and this claim may or may not match the ascriptions by others, i.e. the claim may be rejected or accepted depending on the discourse that enjoys hegemony (Laclau & Mouffe, 1985). The process is one of negotiation (Rossiter, 1999), and finding intermediate identity posture, whereby the individual and/or the significant other is ambivalent, is also possible.

The notion that social identities are never singular, unified or static, but are fragmented and fractured and multiple, and constructed across discursive, antagonistic discourses, informs this article (Hall, 1996). A person can lay claim to many identities (work, religion, ethnicity, etc.) depending on his/her self-interest or life-history. Based on Rossiter's (1999) analysis, nego-

tiation is inherent to the social identity transformation process. As a socialization process, negotiation suggests an exchange perspective — that which can be gained and that which must be lost to achieve that gain — which implicitly connotes equity and expectancy (Brown & Schulze, 2002). Many aspects of social life, including questions of identity, can be explained in terms of implicit and explicit bargaining and negotiating (Scholl, 1981). Successful negotiation of identity indicates a positive exchange relationship.

Social identity negotiation

However, as a process, negotiation is not evident until it is set into motion. Self-interest is one of the main drivers of negotiation (Hoyle, 1986). Individuals will engage in the bargaining process for perceived gain. Self-interest, itself, may be based on the need for power and influence or on other personal goals and hidden agendas (Blasé & Anderson, 1995). But not all aspects of identities can be negotiated. How parents participate in SG can provide clues regarding their self-interest, or lack thereof. It can also provide hints in respect of how the identity negotiation process is approached as the success of the process has a bearing on how it commences (Rossiter, 1999). Ferguson (1999) reports on how migrant African workers renegotiated their way back home to their villages, after being depressed by forces of modernity. For them, renegotiating links with their rural life also meant having to renegotiate their cultural styles (Ferguson (1999). Parents have their own beliefs, customs and traditions and may also have to make similar adjustments in SG. But SG operates within a context, which should be understood.

Issues of school leadership and governance

The issue of leadership is central to SG. But numerous theories on leadership abound and there are probably just as many definitions of leadership as there are theories. What this means is that the notion of leadership is itself contested. However, a theme which the different schools of thought on leadership agree is central to leadership is influence. Yukl (in Bush, 2003:5) confirms this by noting:

> Most definitions of leadership reflect the assumption that it involves a social influence process whereby intentional influence is exerted by one person (or group) over other people (or groups) to structure the activities and relationships in a group organization.

It can be argued that Yukl's observation also applies to school leadership. Bush (2003) is of the view that leaders are able to inspire others to follow them. This perspective implicitly suggests that if SGB membership shirks the following of its leader then leadership in SG stands to crumble. According to Hargreaves and Fink (in Tomlinson, 2004:101)

> … large scale studies of educational leadership effects provide clear indications that some element of shared, collaborative, or distributed leadership is strongly associated with effective leadership in schools.

In other words, for leadership to work, it is paramount for the characteristic

of collaboration to be evident.

Leadership researchers argue that leaders have a responsibility to examine their leadership style to see how it affects the people with whom they work (Cleveland, 2002; Tomlinson, 2004). While some leadership researchers profess that traits and behaviour determine leadership effectiveness and success (Bush, 2003; Sergiovanni, 1994), others believe leadership is situational (Sapre, 2002; Tomlinson, 2004). Although leadership is an evolving function in schools, Davies and Ellison (1997:148) illustrate how leadership has changed over the years and suggest that there are five levels of leadership that are apparent in our schools: autocratic, central, transitional, partnering, and empowering. When the different approaches to school leadership are scrutinised, it becomes clear that they permit varying degrees of participation by followers. In the current school context, South Africa chose to follow a decentralised educational leadership and management framework (DoE, 2005).

The key legislation giving legitimacy to SG is the South African School Act (SASA). School Governing Bodies (SGBs) are tasked with addressing specific aspects and functions. The SASA mandates the structure, roles and responsibilities of SGBs. Naidoo (2005) points out that in terms of the official conceptualisation of governance, the SASA does not mandate the SGB to lead or manage the day-to-day operational issues of schools linked to teaching, learning and assessment. Rather, the Act specifies that SGB leadership responsibilities include the determination of admission policy, setting of language policy, make recommendations on teaching and non-teaching appointments, financial management of the school, determination of school fees, and engaging in fundraising (SASA, 1996). The specification of roles gives clear direction to the nature of the participatory activities that parents and other SGB members can engage in.

School governance and issues of participation in South Africa

The term 'school governance' is a contested concept in South Africa, as evidenced in the difficulties school officials often have in distinguishing between governance and management (Ministerial Review Study, 2004). But while a sense of how this concept is understood in the South African context has been elaborated (*cf*. Introduction), it is argued that SG serves largely as a state decentralisation mechanism for wider community participation. Integrating the school and the community and making the former accountable to its community, and having representation of legitimate interest in the school system, were seen as politically and socially correct in the new South Africa (Duku, 2006). Its posture therefore is anti-apartheid, directed specifically at redressing past educational and socio-political tribulations (Sayed, 2002).

Although the SASA was founded on principles of participation and representation in SG (Lauglo, 1996), it seems the notion of 'participation' is not understood in the same way by all. At a basic level, Duku (2006:29) links it to 'taking part in'. Maharaj (2005) relates it, politically, to how groups/

individuals are empowered and have control over their lives. It is clearly associated with voluntarism and activity. But an issue cited as problematic is that participation in SG does not always extend to all because in the SASA it is based on representative democracy (Sayed, 2002). This means that only those who have been politically elected are empowered. In this sense, Fakir (2003) argues that communities in South Africa are complex, dynamic entities, with shifting, subjective boundaries and with internal cleavages and stratification along different lines. For these reasons, debate about who participates, what is involved, and how it enables equality of access has been controversial and representative democracy often fails to reflect these nuances (Maharaj, 2005).

Maharaj (2005) found loyalty and domination issues plaguing community participation in SGBs in the country. Individuals with educator identity have dominant and powerful voices and a higher inclination for loyalty to the state than to the local community (Maharaj, 2005). Grant-Lewis and Naidoo (2004) report that despite explicit provisions in the SASA regarding who should participate in SGBs, and how, in practice participation is structured and institutionalised through the actions of principals who define who participates, how they participate and what decisions are open to participation. INEXSA (in Duku, 2006) confirm this in their report that parental participation in many local-community contexts tends more to involve parents in fundraising and social events, rather than in SG initiatives involving the curriculum, policy, or administration. These references point to authority identity influences in SG role and discourse.

There are some indications that parental participation in SG is sporadic and class-based. Maharaj (2005) found that although in theory parental involvement is not explicitly 'classed', in practice, it is middle-class parents who are mostly involved and visible. This implies that parents with lower social stratum identity are in the background. A number of studies have reported that many parents in black African schools often defer decisions to teachers because of the teachers' class positions/identity, rather than being up-front and vocal (Grant-Lewis & Naidoo, 2004; Soudien, 2003). Based on this evidence, Maharaj (2005) contends that the devolution of decision-making to lower (community) levels may not necessarily extend participation of the marginalised; it may instead extend expert elite or privileged groups. Constructing parental participation in SG decision-making in elitist identity is rife as, according to Grant-Lewis and Naidoo (2005), marginalised parents do not have the power to challenge existing patterns of participation.

Pampallis (2002) found that although the SASA provides that SGBs may apply to provincial education departments for additional functions in areas like curriculum, policy development, and improvement of infrastructure, only parents in former white schools, whose SGBs usually include individuals with skilled professional and managerial identities, have granted these powers. For parents to participate equally in SG, they must possess the qualities and quantities of resources to dispatch their duties satisfactorily (Maharaj, 2005).

But with the current inequality crisis prevailing in the country (Everatt, 2003), parental participation is more likely to be negotiated than evolved based on equity.

In studies conducted in other parts of the world, parents' identity label such as their socioeconomic status (SES), employment status, level of education, race and ethnicity have been shown to have significant influence on their involvement in SG activities (Brown, 2005; Henderson & Mapp, 2002). Parents of children in primary and secondary schools, respectively, tend to approach SG differently, with those having children in the former focused more on curriculum issues, such as homework supervision, whereas those with children in the latter participated more in SG issues. But although identity related factors have shown to mediate SG engagement, the social dynamics among the individuals in this process is still unexplored. In this study we explored the following main question:

How do parents in socio-economically mixed SGB contexts construct their social identities and navigate their way in school governance, and what are its implications for school leadership?

Theoretical framework
This work was informed by three social theories: (a) Mamdani's (1996) theorization of citizens and subjects; (b) Nyamnjoh's (2002) as well as Ahluwalia's (2001) social constructionist theory; and (c) Bourdieu's (1992) theory of social practice. The dichotomous conception of social identity as 'citizenship' (unified social existence), and as 'subject' (bifurcated social existence), is the aspect of Mamdani's (1996) work that is of relevance to this study. Mamdani theorised that these identities are determined by the presence or absence of binary-opposites in society. Of significance is the claim that 'subjects' reasoned in terms of 'self' or 'other', whereas 'citizenship' was perceived in terms of a universal social way of life. But this latter quality ignores the recognition of differences (Mamdani, 1996:11). The evidence above suggests that struggles, tension and competition are at the heart of SG participation. This theory is applied to interpret the stories and attitudes that parents take to SG participation. But social constructionists (Alhuwalia, 2001; Nyamnjoh, 2002) reject the uni-dimensional notion of identity proposed by Mamdani. They suggest that identity is not single but multiple. Given the racial and socio-cultural peculiarities of South African parents, both Mamdani and the social constructionist school of thought can place the findings of this research in perspective.

Bourdieu's (1992) theory of social practice draws attention to the issue of habituated activities of ordinary living that people acquire through socialization. Conceptual resources are drawn from Bourdieu's three theoretical tools of: (a) field, (b) habitus, and (c) cultural capital. 'Fields' are entities with their own logic/rules (Bourdieu 1992). 'Fields' are used in this context to refer to the area of SG and the culture and traditions of parents. Compliance with the logic in a 'field' is necessary to establish legitimacy. Bourdieu (1992) suggests that, to gain authority and power, individuals often internalise the

habitus (i.e. the culture) of a 'field'. As individuals are immersed in cultural capital (education, social class, family background, and other non-economic forces), they become more powerful: gaining control, legitimacy, and the clout to speak for others. This means it is possible to find power plays within 'fields'.

Evidently, capitals are distributed within 'fields'. Capitals can influence the social outcomes and regularities of those involved in the 'field'. It is argued that capitals represent 'bargaining chips' within a given 'field'. In this context, capitals may give parents leverage in SG. Since parents bring various bodies of knowledge, understanding, languages, and belief systems to the 'field' of school governance, the habitus (the culture of SG) provides a key means of understanding their lived SG experiences.

Research methodology and methods
Qualitative research design
The study adopted a qualitative research approach. The researcher adopted this strategy because it facilitated entry into participants' life-world to explore their lived-experiences. Crucially, this strategy contends that knowledge is subjective and ideographic and truth is context dependent, which can only be obtained after entry into participants' reality. The phenomenological design was deemed the most appropriate qualitative strategy as it allowed us to probe the process of data collection.

Sample
Parents, who had children in schools and who were SGB members, participated in the study. This was the main selection criterion. Sampling of the participants took place at the schools. Participants were identified conveniently with the assistance of the school principal and through their school children, whose classes were visited. To ensure gender balance in the population, selected learners were requested to disclose whether they stayed with both parents or with one. In cases where learners stayed with both parents, we requested the participation of the male parent. This was done because experience indicated that most children in the communities generally stayed with a female, single parent. Overall, a total of 48 parents participated: of these numbers, 31 were female and 17 male. The majority of parents were black African, followed by coloured. The parents were in their late adulthood (40–65 years). While there was no strict requirement as to the number of participants selected per research site, it turned out that on average there were eight parents per site.

The study area
Six community sites in the Eastern Cape province in South Africa were researched. The sites were classified as: Deep-rural, Rural, and Township, based on the degree of access to social amenities and the state of existing infrastructure. In this study, deep-rural site refers to sites in remote areas, which had relatively poor infrastructure and little access to social amenities

in their immediate vicinity. At the other end of the continuum, is the township site, which had easy access to these social amenities and relatively better infrastructure. Two sites per classification were used. Since the province had emerged from an amalgamation of two former highly populated and under-resourced homelands (homeland refers to former settlement area of blacks) and one relatively developed, border region, (former settlement area of whites) (Cole, Godden, Lawrence & England, 2007), the choice of these communities allowed for the selection of a diverse parent cohort, reflecting a range of beliefs, attitudes, and customs. To gain access to the schools, the principal in each school served as 'gatekeeper', whereas the SGB chairperson served as gatekeeper to access some SGB members/parents.

Data collection instrument and procedures

Data were collected through semi-structured, phenomenological interviews conducted by the researchers. This strategy was chosen because it allowed us to ask probing questions, while ensuring some consistency in the main ques-tions posted to each participant. Furthermore, many of the participants were illiterate and could not respond to the questions through means other than face-to-face interviews. This ensured that participants related their *lived experiences* freely. Participants were interviewed individually.

The interviews covered the following themes — gender and tradition in school governance; micropolitics in school governance; and identity labels in school governance — linked to how parents participated and managed their social identity in school governance.

The interview questions were developed in English, and later translated into the local language of *isiXhosa*. This was to facilitate their easy retrans-lation back to English. All interviews were conducted in this local language. Reference to the semi-structured interview guide was kept to a minimum. For the collection of rich data, participants were allowed to converse on issues beyond what was specified on the interview guide and were only asked questions from the guide when the participant seemed to have nothing further to say. In these instances, the guide questions acted as prompts.

Each interview took, on average, 60 minutes. The interviews were conducted at the home of participants; these were tape-recorded verbatim, with their permission, and later transcribed verbatim and translated to English. Of the 48 parents, two were uneasy with the use of the tape-recorder, in which case the researchers resorted to note-taking. Furthermore, some of the expressions used during the interviews did not have direct English equi-valence. In these instances, the researchers simply reported the mother tongue expressions, with the English translation in italics. This preserved the meanings of the perspectives lived experiences shared. Data were analysed using constant comparative methods of narrative analysis (Brown & Schulze, 2002). Comparisons within and between transcripts were made and common patterns emerged. The findings that emerged are outlined and discussed here.

Research findings and discussion

The following themes, linked to how parents participated and negotiated their social identity in school governance, emerged from the stories that participants shared in the interviews:

- gender and tradition;
- micropolitics; and
- silenced dialogue among females.

- Gender and tradition politics in school governance role and membership

Different circumstances appeared to have shaped community dynamics in the villages, which in turn seemed to influence how parents, particularly females, negotiated their involvement in the school governance process. The sentiments shared by one female respondent reflected this experience well:

> *Our men are forced out of the rural area for work; we are left to keep the 'fires burning at home'. Sometimes the idea of 'keeping the fires burning' and being a 'school governor,' clashes. I often feel distress in this situation. Nothing makes me unhappy during my reign as SGB treasurer, except when my husband brought my livestock from Johannesburg; which competed for my attention while I was doing school business. Teachers called for me; and even though I indicated that I was busy and could not just leave the consignment with the kids, they insisted and I had to go.*

Social labels are clearly assigned. This is evidenced in the notion of being the one who keeps the metaphoric 'fire burning' and at the same time being a governor. The above respondent had to make what Laclau and Mouffe (*cf.* Theoretical framework) termed a "hegemonic intervention" in favour of her identity as a school governor. In some instances among participants, there was evidence of anxiety to participate. Females seemed to experience more of this coercion and anxiety:

> *They* [villagers] *chose me … I didn't want to; but they reasoned that the chairmanship was not necessarily for men only. I protested but they forced me into it* [chairperson role]. *I did not like the fact that even before they elected me, they did so for the chairmanship. I wanted somebody else to be elected, regardless of a man or a woman.*

Throughout the interviews, apprehension, self-doubt, and distress characterised the manner in which female parents undertook leadership related school governance roles. Perhaps as a consequence of these experiences, when women were elected to these positions, they would often reject it, as echoed in the story of one respondent: "… *it was the first time that a woman had been elected as the chairperson; I however declined and asked a man to lead the committee instead*". The desire to reserve the leadership role to men seems linked to the socialisation tendencies among the parents, where men in the 'deep-rooted' traditional African context are projected as household heads (*cf.* Understanding social identities and school governance). There seems to have been good reason for these feelings and decisions, as one respondent noted:

> *People did not want to follow me. Whenever I called a meeting, they would*

> *not turn up. Even when they did they would be very few. The situation would change once Miss* (the principal) *called them. I thought they undermined me because I was a woman. But this perception of mine changed when I realise they did the same to the previous SGB chairman.*

Although more women, than men, served as SGB members, the gender identity of females was clearly a limiting factor for them in the school governance process. The power and authority of African tradition was very strong, as, in contrast to women, men dominated roles of leadership and authority. It had nothing to do with the competence of women as leaders. Women often concede in these environments. This approach to school governance participation appeared naturalised, and was evident in each of the six communities visited. This observation, as Nyamnjoh reminds us, indicates that our ways of talking and doing things do not neutrally reflect our social world, identities and social relationships (*cf*. Social identities and school governance). While this is perhaps unsurprising, given the inclination of black Africans to show loyalty to traditions, it however contradicts the premise and aspirations of equity posited in the SASA and other policies developed for education management in the new South Africa (*cf*. Social identities and school governance). The strong gender influence in the tradition is made clearly:

> *Old Xhosa tradition prescribes that men should be the ones to lead proceedings. I think parents want to have the head of the SGB just like at home where the head is the man. Men should take the initiative and be in control. A man is always SGB chairperson.*

In the leadership dynamics of school governance, the participants appeared to pay allegiance to what they thought were their cultural traditions and value systems. Having a male figure as leader was a meaningful social norm — the identity of which was essential to maintain. Women participation in school governance was mainly in non-leadership roles (e.g. secretary). Men saw themselves as more worthy of leading, than females; this notion was rooted in African tradition, and appeared non-negotiable. Indeed, the separation of roles in gender terms illustrated what Mamdani referred to as a tendency of bifurcated social existence among parents (*cf*. Theoretical framework). The gender politics in school governance was clearly steeped in favour of males for what appeared also to be attributes that men brought to the position of authority. Consistently, the respondents noted:

> *… men always bring dignity to the organisations. People generally respect men, and sometimes are not challenged because they are men. That is why we always elect a man for SGB chairperson.*
>
> *I think they elect a person for a chairman who has already been experienced in chairing committees. In most instances men are the experienced ones. Besides, women do not seem to be interested in becoming chairperson.*
>
> *Men do not have secrets. You know that sometimes women can be subjective, and take decisions on the basis of the fact that they know the child's parents or something like that.*

The discourse of masculinity above was evident in the operation of SGB

structures in different rural schools. It revealed important social stereotypes, and reference to these was evidence that parents entered school governance processes with their lived experiences, or what Bourdieu (*cf.* Theoretical framework) labelled generator of 'habitus'. But although the authority role identities in school governance had a male bias, they were conditional; they were not freely open to all male figures. In other words, the social identity label of male as the main authority in SGB had criteria to meet before it could be ascribed. As participants noted, age was a pivotal criterion for acceptance, influence, and clout in school governance:

> *… most of us men are elders* [pensioners] *… it's important as old age represents wisdom; elders are ancestral representatives … we bring dignity and leadership.*

The influence of old-age as an identity status marker in school governance appears to flow from what Polanyi calls tacit knowledge (*cf.* Social identities and school governance), and their habitus (*cf.* Theoretical framework), as represented by tradition. The elder men appeared to judge that their younger counterparts lacked the esteem and social quality crucial for taking up prominent roles in school governance. This discourse was widespread across the different research sites. It is perhaps for these reasons that Alhuwalia (*cf.* Social identities and school governance) suggests that social identities and culture cannot be hermetically sealed off. The traditional influences also contradict arguments that suggest that socio-economic factors are often the most important factor in participation relations (*cf.* Social identities and school governance).

But the age deference opened the door for the younger men in SGBs to negotiate issues of leadership in school governance. However, this was often rejected and scoffed at:

> *Teachers do not like him* [young man] *because he drinks a lot. Besides he does not sit and chair meetings. He does not have the dignity that meetings deserve. You have to be dignified; even what comes out of your mouth has to be dignified … I rejected him because he like being out of order. We have that sense that he* [young man] *likes to play; he is a bit disorderly;* Uthanda ukubhoxa. *He likes passing jokes and some people are not comfortable with jokes. When we elected the Finance committee, of course he was the member of this finance committee, but we decided not to elect him for the fundraising committee. In fact staff requested that he be substituted.*

The young males were not accepted as leaders. Withdrawal of support is evidence of a lack of acceptance. Respect was pivotal for acceptance in school governance. But the issue of gender was not an isolated issue, but one that is wrapped up into other valued African traditional factors such as entitlement, traditional leadership, and marital status. These were equally paramount in how school governance participation evolved. For some elderly males, their participation in school governance was a 'birthright'. In this context, birthright assumed a clear identity marker, as one traditional leader explained:

> *… I am a SGB member because I am a traditional leader; I inherited this position from my great-grandfathers; it is my birthright to participate in school governance; the school belongs to us.*

Birthright is linked to notion of 'entitlement'. The claiming of school governance participation as birthright or entitlement implies that for some male parents in the communities, aspects of their identity in school governance can be negotiated or ascribed (e.g. roles), while other aspects (e.g. membership) can simply be claimed. But Jorgensen and Phillips argue that the "logic of equivalence" (*cf.* Theoretical framework) gives men a common platform to claim supremacy over women in these matters.

But the social identity of marital status was also important. It was a key identity label which shaped participation, but the label itself was gendered. Married SGB members commanded respect in school governance. Unmarried female parents faced isolation and ostracism in SG. But the same attitude was not shown to unmarried males. A typical experience of single females was captured:

> *I do not consider myself qualify to attend parent meetings … I am not married … my parents are the active ones in these things … they are married but not literate … I ask them to play the role on my behalf … this is what is socially expected.*
>
> *This is my home. I have two kids and went as far as Standard 10. I am not married and have given up on marriage. I do not participate in school or village politics … people are dismissive of my participation.*

The social space in SG had clear definition. Single or unmarried women felt like misfits, and had to negotiate their participation in SG activities. Their engagement in SG processes was indirect, i.e. through immediate or extended families. For men, single parenthood is, "*… reflection of unruliness … they* [single women] *are disobedient as they do not have husbands to respect and therefore cannot participate*". These accounts reflect the powerful influence of African traditions, which is often male bias. This was evidence that SG practices did not necessarily coincide with what the designers of the SASA policies envisaged.

•   Micropolitics in school governance participation

Although gender and valued African traditions (see above) were defining elements of the 'whom' and 'how' in SGB processes, there were instances where these were violated. The younger male, and many women, resorted to micropolitics to navigate their way in school governance. Hidden agenda, self-interest, and social bargaining were inherent features of micropolitics (*cf.* Social identity and school governance). The main bargaining chip for these individuals (e.g. their education, friendship network) was related to what Bourdieu (*cf.* Theoretical framework) labelled social capital. The only female SGB chairperson in the six research sites, for instance, drew on her identity as having an education and being married to negotiate her way into SGB leadership to have a 'voice'. She recounted her experiences:

> *I had to fight … I had to let it be known that* oomama batshaphu kule lali

kuba bafundile [*women are bright as they are educated*]*; therefore we have
the right to speak*.

But from the point of view of the elder men, education was not a valued social
criterion for involvement. Consequently, the women who possessed this social
capital were never accepted totally. One villager noted: "… *education is not
important; there must be respect and dignity*". The history of the village as a
traditionally 'Reds' area may explain the attitude expressed regarding educa-
tion. The traditional 'Reds' clan rejects modern western education and religion
(*cf.* Social identity negotiation). To maintain legitimacy, younger males, and
educated women had to use 'side-bets' and other devices of micropolitics to
complement their academic qualifications in order to work their way into
school governance. A respondent noted:

> … *I had to join the church; eventually I was ordained as a preacher; so I
> am involved in the community. I get support there; I served as secretary for
> the Village Council … women are visible even in church*.

The younger males also used side-bets. One explained:

> … *I had to use my participation in church politics to influence my SGB
> chairman election. In my village* [one of the research sites], *some parents
> were elected in the SGB because of their involvement in community politics:
> example, Ward Counselling.' And association with traditional leadership
> institution was also used to influence community school governance partici-
> pation … that's how I was appointed and get to participate…*

For these individuals, 'side-bets' involved turning to the wider community for
support. This social capital however had to pass, it seemed, through the 'eyes'
of, and be judged by, dominant African traditions. They did not guarantee
acceptance.

Self-interest also influenced how teacher-parents participated in school
governance. Many of the parents, who were also teachers in local schools,
spoke of how they had negotiated against threats to their authority in school
governance. Two of these respondents noted:

> … *we favoured those people we know would conform to our agenda …
> older people are preferred as chairpersons as they are respectful and obe-
> dient towards us, and towards authority at large … many of them are not
> working, and we are able to meet between eight and twelve o'clock in the
> morning.*

The self-interest agenda was quite evident. Elders were preferred in SGB be-
cause of their unemployment status in the village, and the social capital
(respectful, knowledge of traditions) they possessed. But the actions of many
of these teacher-parents were not always successful. Where a lack of success
emerged, there was a tendency among them to share the authority identity.
These evidences indicated that school governance, as a distinct field of social
practice, provided an avenue in which to negotiate various forms of social
identities.

But not all aspects of these identities were negotiable. The prevalence of
micropolitics in SGB participation is unsurprising, given the large-scale
dominance of males, and the concerns for aspects of valued African traditions:

age, marital status, and so on. Hoyle (*cf.* Social identity and school governance) noted that it is in these kinds of environment — where there is a hidden agenda, concerns for the implicit rather than the explicit, and for those activities that occur among individuals and groups outside rather than inside the formal structures — that micropolitics strives. These micropolitical behaviours are evidence of what Bourdieu called the habitus (culture and dispositions) of SG (i.e. the field) which predispose parents to act in certain ways.

• Silenced dialogue as a marker of female social identity in school governance
Women gave first priority and deference to elder men in the SG participation process and used 'silence' as a bargaining chip to gain respect, and maintain a social status. A typical comment was:

> … *Women think that a school meeting is like an* imbizo *by the kraal side. Sometimes it happens that when men are discussing we would keep quiet. That may be because of the fact that we feel 'small' because we are women. You must remember that we are people of rules and customs; we are always under the guidance of men. We do things according to the customs that when we meet, the most important word is that of men; we always take men's words as a mark of respect and to show our femininity.*

The men also recognised this disposition of women:

> … *Sometimes I do notice that even though women are in the majority, their presence is not felt … they would be apologetic before they speak and ask whether they have the right to speak … they still observe the old practice that women can't speak in the presence of men and yet today we are not talking of* inkundla.

In the company of elder men, school governance participation for these women is more or less conditioned by customs and traditions. Sentiments among females of 'feeling small' in the company of males during SG discourse seemed to reflect feelings of defeat in their spirit. Clearly, the parents 'old' familial habits and customs were more powerful in guiding their actions in SG than modern 'tools' such as the SASA provisions.

The silence had meaning. It meant more than the mere absence of ideas, or the assumption of having nothing to say. It meant respect, honour, and duty. It was also conditional:

> … *When a question is asked, we give the opportunity to elder men to speak first … the elders are like our father-in-law and we have to respect them … but when it is the younger men who are in attendance, we become free to participate.*

These females were more interested in silence because of what it symbolises: respect, dignity, and even fear. Wenger (*cf.* Theoretical framework) explains that we do not only produce our social identities through the practices we engage in, but we also define ourselves through the practices we do not engage in. It seemed that as silence marked female identity in school governance, femaleness itself took on the identity of 'respecter of tradition'. But not all the female parents conformed to the forces and circumstances of tradi-

tions. Females who saw themselves as vocal and educated resisted, but they were in the minority. These females noted:

> *… Women are the strongest contributors in meetings in this village … I do not know the reason; perhaps it is because they are the 'sharpest'* [well-informed], *since they are more educated than men … the majority of men are not educated in this village … but still we have problems.*

The silence identity label was clearly rejected by educated females. By rejecting it they simultaneously challenged aspects of valued African traditions. But they were not accepted by elderly men who saw education as unimportant. It was often in this tension that the educated females had to negotiate their way in SG. But their assertion may well indicate these women's aspirations to constructing new possibilities for females (*cf.* Theoretical framework). But while the educated females' rejection of the *status quo* is consistent with Bourdieu's theoretical expectation as regards capitals as sources of powers (*cf.* Theoretical framework), the insistence of elders that education is not important for acceptance and participation in SG could be described as having a 'dismantling' effect in so far as it disrupts the notion that only the educated may participate in education-related activities.

Implications for school leadership

What do the findings reported above mean in the context of school leadership? It is clear from the three distinct themes in the findings that gender politics is inherent in SG in the schools. The manner in which this gender politics is portrayed places SGB leadership practices in these rural communities in an isolationist context. While the belief, for instance, that men should be leaders, or the giving of deference to elder men by female SGB members, is clearly informed by African traditions and customs, it runs counter to the value of *equity/equality* and the notion of shared leadership and collaborative management that the school system has adopted in its educational leadership and management framework. This counter-posture to the values of the wider educational leadership framework in itself is problematic because the leadership ought to ensure that the values of the SASA are realised. It is argued that the resistance by male elders in the SGBs towards accepting females or younger males into a leadership rank is a failure in part to recognise and accept diversity. We argue that this is unfortunate because studies on group diversity have consistently shown the various benefits; for instance, that diversity improves group performance because the full potential of everybody is used; that it creates higher morale and better relationships in the group; that diverse groups are more creative; and that it often leads to freer discussion and reduces the risk of 'group-think'. If the current trend of resistance around gender, age, martial status, or ethnic affiliation is allowed to continue in the SGB membership, the chance of leading successfully clearly stands to diminish.

While the argument about diversity is important, it is paramount to also recognise from the limited evidence of this research that the SG practices provide evidence of some tension between two seemingly opposing domains

of values. Indeed, SG practices are imbued by a tension between values inherent in African traditions/customs and values of modern school policies/legislations. In other words, there is a metaphoric collision between the 'old' and the 'new'. This value collision is clearly apparent in the treatment of females and younger males by elder men in SGB leadership, compared to values of redress, equity, and equality that informed the SASA. We argue therefore that school leadership, especially from an SGB perspective, is faced with a dilemma because it follows that the leadership which ensures that this Act is followed must also demonstrate its values through actions and words. But how likely is this when the Act's values are different from others of its implementers? This is where there is a need to now work to find a balance because, as sociologists consistently argue, people do not set aside their cultural values and life preferences when they gather for events such as SGB. In rural communities where traditions are still held sacred, it seems the provision of the SASA cannot be implemented verbatim. This confirms the observation of many previous researchers. The onus is on school leadership to be sensitive and to work with local communities to find the best ways to implement the SASA provisions.

An important starting point in this process may be to work with parents who are using micropolitical means to negotiate and ensure participation in SG. While self-interest, hidden agendas and the unofficial, rather than the official, means are the tools of micropolitics, the broad leadership in the school should try to use this positively. But for the above-named reasons, being open, empowering, and participative as leaders or members in SG may not happen easily.

Conclusions

In this study we investigated, qualitatively, the dynamics in parents' participation in SG. Parents' socialisation shaped how they engaged in SG. But SG practices are imbued by a tension between values inherent in African traditions/customs and values of modern school policies/legislations. In other words, there seems to be a metaphoric collision between the 'old' and the 'new'. Micropolitics is used to cope and survive. The implications for school leadership are critical. Conflict and tension may continue unless leadership practices and policy provisions reflect more of people's customs/traditions. The leadership in SGBs and the school as a whole must be sensitive to these and work with local communities to find the best ways to implement the SASA provisions.

References

Ahluwalia P 2001. *Politics and Post-colonial theory: African inflections*. London: Routledge.

Bacharach SB & Mundell BL 1993. Organisational politics in schools: micro, macro and logics of action. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 29:423-452.

Blasé J & Anderson GL 1995. *The micropolitics of educational leadership: from control to empowerment*. London: Cassell.

Bourdieu P 1992. Thinking about limits. *Theory, Culture and Society*, 9:37-92.

Brown B & Schulze S 2002. The development of working relationships between indigenous and expatriate teachers. *Journal of the Botswana Educational Research Association*, 10:3-20.

Brown B 2005. The incorporation of poverty into adult identity over time: implications for adult education. *International Journal of Lifelong Education*, 24:393-404.

Bush T 2003. *Theories of Educational Leadership and Management*, 3rd edn. UK: Sage Publications.

Cleveland H 2002. 'Leadership: the get-it-all-together profession'. *The Futurist*, 42-47.

Cole P, Godden J, Lawrence L & England V 2007. The context of the Eastern Cape Province. In: L Lawrence & G Moyo (eds). *Education and social transformation: an Eastern Cape study*. East London: University of Fort Hare Press.

Davies B & Ellison L 1997. *School Leadership for the 21st Century*. UK: Routledge.

Department of Education (DoE) 1996. South African Schools Act. *Government Gazette, Notice No. 84 of 1996*. Pretoria. Government Printer.

Department of Education (DoE) 2007. *School ACE (School Leadership): Understand school leadership and management in the South African context*. Pretoria: Department of Education.

Duku N 2006. The exploration of African parents' negotiation of their identities in school governance participation in six selected Eastern Cape communities. Unpublished PhD thesis. University of Cape Town, Cape Town.

Dyer C & Rose P 2005 *Decentralization for educational development? An editorial introduction*. Available at http://taylorandfrancis.metapress.com/media/012pujruqn72my13xxb0/contributions/h/... Accessed 06 January 2006.

Erikson EH 1980. *Identity and Life Cycle*. New York: Norton.

Everatt D 2003. The politics of poverty. In: D Everatt & V Maphai (eds). *The Real State of the Nation*. Johannesburg: Interfund.

Fakir E 2003. Political Participation in South Africa. Paper presented at the *5th Conference of the International Network — Education for Democracy*.

Ferguson J 1999. *Expectations of Modernity: Myths and Meanings of Urban Life on the Zambian Copperbelt*. Berkeley: University of Columbia Press.

Grant-Lewis S & Naidoo J 2004. *Whose Theory of Participation? School Governance Policy and Practice in South Africa*. Available at http//www.id21.org/insights/insights-ed02/insights-issed02-art02.html. Accessed 20 January 2005.

Hall S 1996. Introduction: Who needs 'Identity'? In: S Hall & P Du Gay (eds). *Questions of cultural identities*. London: SAGE.

Henderson AT & Mapp KL 2002. A new wave of evidence: The impact of school, family, and community connections on student achievement. U.S.A Department of Education. Non-Regulatory Guidelines. Available at www.ed.gov/programs/titleiparta/parentinvguid.doc. Accessed 15 January 2008.

Hoyle E 1986. *The politics of school management*. London: Hodder & Stoughton. *Human Rights and Tolerance*. Foreign Ministry, Berlin. Available at http://www.tolerancenet.org/downloads/fakir.pdf. Accessed 5 January 2006.

Karlsen G 1999. *Decentralised centralism — Governance in the field of education Evidence from Norway and British Columbia, Canada*. Sor-Trondelgo College, School of Teacher Education. Available at http://www.umanitoba.ca/publications/cjeap/issue13.htm. Accessed 18 March 2002.

Laclau E & Mouffe C 1985. *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics*. London: VERSO.

Lauglo J 1996. Forms of decentralisation and their implications for education. In: J.D. *et al*. (Eds) *The Reconstruction of Education: Quality, Equality and Control*. London: Cassell.

Lemmer EM & Badenhorst DC 1997. *Introduction to education for South African teachers: an orientation to teaching practice*. Cape Town: Juta.

Maharaj A 2005. The Development and implementation of School Governing Policy in the South African Schools Act (SASA) and the Western Cape Provincial School Education Act (WCPSA). PhD thesis submitted to the Faculty of Education, University of the Western Cape, Western Cape.

Mamdani M 1996. *Citizen and Subject*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Ministerial Review Study 2004. Review of School Governance in South African Public Schools: *Report of the Ministerial Review Committee on School Governance*. Pretoria: Department of Education.

Naidoo J 2005. Educational Decentralization and School Governance in South Africa: From Policy to Practice. PhD thesis presented to the Harvard Graduate School of Education, Harvard.

Nyamnjoh FB 2002. Might and Right: Chieftaincy and Democracy in Cameroon and Botswana. Paper presented at the *CODESRIA's 10th General Assembly on "Africa in the New Millennium"*. Kampala, Uganda, 8th 12thDecember 2002. Available at http://www.codesria.org/Archives/ga10/Abstracts% 20GA%2015/colonialism_Nyamnj. Accessed 19 May 2003.

Pampallis J 2002. The Nature of Decentralisation in South Africa. Available at www.cepd.org.za/publications/decentralization.pdf. Accessed 21 January 2001.

Rossiter M 1999. A narrative approach to development: implications for adult education. *Adult Education Quarterly*, 50:56-71.

Sadovnik A, Cookson P & Semel S 2001. *Exploring education: an introduction to the foundations of education*. 2nd edn. Boston: Allyn & Bacon.

Sapre P 2002. *Realising the potential of educational management in India*. *Educational Management and Administration*, 30:101-108.

Sayed Y & Soudien C 2005. Decentralization and the construction of inclusion education policy in South Africa. *Compare*, 35:115-125.

Sayed Y 2002. Decentralizing Education in a Decentralized System: South African policy and practice. *Compare*, 32:35-46.

Scholl R 1981. Differentiating organisation commitment from expectancy as a motivating force. *Academy of Management Review*, 6:589-599.

Sergiovanni T 1994. *Moral Leadership: Getting to the Heart of School Improvement*. San Francisco: Jossey Bass.

Statistics South Africa. 2000. *Measuring poverty in South Africa*. Pretoria: Government Printer.

Thacheen P 2005. Walking a new Path of Life: learning tours, 'agrofrestry' and the transformation of the village of Bann Na Isarn, Thailand. *International Journal of Lifelong Education*, (submitted).

Tomlinson H 2004. *Educational Leadership: Personal Growth for Professional Development*. London: Sage Publications.

Witte J 1996. Identity theory and persistence: a tentative synthesis of Tinto, Erikson and Houle. *Journal of Sociology*, 8-15.

Woolard I 2002. An overview of poverty and inequality in South Africa. Unpublished briefing paper, HSRC, Pretoria.

Authors
Byron Brown is Deputy Director of the School for Postgraduate Studies at the University of Fort Hare. He has over 16 years teaching experience and has published widely in the fields of educational management and leadership in schools, curriculum studies, and pedagogy.

Ntombozuko Duku is MEd programme co-ordinator in the School for Post-graduate Studies at the University of Fort Hare. He has eight years teaching experience and his current research interest is school governance in South African schools.