

Out-Of-Field Teaching in Rural Schools: Reconceptualising the Role of School Leadership in the Post COVID-19 Space

Shonaphi F. Mashele^{1*}, Barber M. Mafuwane²

¹Orhovelani High School, Mpumalanga Province, South Africa

²Mvuyazi Primary School, Mpumalanga Province, South Africa

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*Corresponding author: Shonaphi F. Mashele

Orhovelani High School, Mpumalanga Province, South Africa

Abstract

This article explores the concept of out-of-field teaching in rural schools with specific focus on its occurrence, implications, and the role of school leadership in dealing with this approach to teaching in the face of the challenges posed by COVID-19. An extensive literature review was conducted to provide a clearer conceptual understanding of this practice and the role of leadership in its execution in rural schools. Out-of-field teaching is increasingly becoming common practice around the world and it is not widely researched. There is lack of adequate research-based information and empirical data on the prevalence of this practice in third-world rural contexts. In this paper, the researchers set out to describe, document, and provide a theoretical perspective regarding the occurrence of this practice in South African rural schools. They conceptualise it against the challenge of curriculum reforms, post provisioning, rationalisation, and the redeployment processes in schools. This paper will contribute to policy and practice by exposing the centrality and fluidity of leadership in dealing with the above challenges which lead to the enactment of the out-of-field teaching approach in order to cushion the processes of teaching and learning against the external threats posed by pandemics on the system.

Keywords: Out-Of-Field Teaching, Rationalisation, Redeployment, Leadership, Teacher Quality, Rurality.

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INTRODUCTION

The outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic may be viewed as one of the biggest tests that schooling systems in the world have ever faced. The pandemic exposed strengths and weaknesses in the systems and South Africa was not spared from this exposure. The pandemic challenged developed and developing countries alike and triggered questions about their preparedness to handle it and other possible post COVID-19 pandemics. The Department of Basic Education (DBE), in response to the novel coronavirus that causes COVID-19, issued several Standard Operation Procedure (SOP) documents that attempted to address the challenges that riddled the South African education system. These procedures were only issued after the declaration of the state of disaster in the country which culminated in the closure of schools and putting the country into a lockdown. A typical downside of the SOPs is that they did not outline clear directives on how teaching and learning should take place after the prescription of social distancing in the classrooms in order to curb the spread of COVID-19. Undoubtedly,

COVID-19 became priority number one in the education system despite the DBE's apparent lack of foresight and preparedness to deal with it or any other pandemic post COVID-19.

Social distancing dictated that people and learners' desks should always have spacing distance of not less than 1.5m from each other and this meant that more classrooms, teachers, and other resources were required to cater for COVID-19 compliant classes. The DBE suggested that schools use methods like school platooning and rotation of learners to cater for the shortage of classrooms due to social distancing but it was silent on the matter of the teachers who had to teach the COVID-19 compliant classes. This challenge was worsened by the issue of teachers who had comorbidities and those that were at the age of sixty and above who had to work from home due to their vulnerability to the pandemic. The teachers that remained at schools had to teach their own subjects in many classes and the subjects of the teachers who were working from home due to comorbidities. The teachers' work was intensified, and the extent of the intensification had far-reaching

implications for the rural teachers. Rural teachers are at the centre of this article and working from home for them was a definite non-starter because of the chronic disadvantages that rural schools often had to grapple with like limited access to the internet, no landline telephones, and other important resources (Department of Basic Education, 2018; Gardiner, 2008; Penrice, 2011). It came as no surprise when the teachers who were granted concessions on the basis of their comorbidities were recalled to their workstations as soon as there was easing of the lockdown regulations with no due consideration for their state of health.

This article focuses on the role of leadership on out-of-field teaching which came as a consequence of the socially distanced COVID-19 compliant classrooms. The emergence of COVID-19 on the teaching-learning situation has challenged school leadership to be agile, to react quickly, to think differently and to lead differently (Shingler-Nace, 2020) in order to deal with the many questions it asked. When teachers had to extend their teaching responsibilities and teach other teachers' subjects, they were inadvertently expected to venture into areas beyond their field of expertise. The leadership of schools had to apply their minds to the situation and work with their teachers to address the challenges the pandemic posed on them. Teachers' subject content knowledge and their pedagogies are critical in improving the quality of education in any education system in the world.

This article is premised on the understanding that the quality of education in a country depends on the quality of its teachers. An education system that has suitably qualified teachers has good drivers for quality education (Mafora, 2013) and these are fundamental components in the performance of a schooling system. The knowledge that teachers have in their field of assignment enhances their teaching practices and it also plays an important role in the performance of their learners (du Plessis, 2015). Palmer (1998) expressed the centrality of teachers' knowledge in shaping up learners' lives when he asserted that "We teach who we are". Therefore, it is imperative that an education system should be staffed with teachers that are qualified to teach the subjects they are assigned to.

The Archaeology of the Concept of 'Out-Of-Field Teaching'

In the context of this study, out-of-field teaching refers to the practice where teachers are assigned to teach subjects that are outside their area of qualification (du Plessis 2015; 2017; Hobbs 2013; Ingersoll 2001; 2002; Sharplin 2014; Steyn and du Plessis 2007). This definition includes teachers who have a secondary school teaching qualification who teach at a primary school or vice versa. The practice covers even teachers who are qualified to teach Life Sciences, for instance, who find themselves teaching Social Sciences (Nixon, Luft, & Ross, 2017). Out-of-field teaching has

been around for a long time and it is one of the least understood phenomena in schooling systems globally because there are measures that have been put in place to ensure that schools have sufficiently qualified teachers, but the practice does not seem to be getting away (Ingersoll 2001). Additionally, this phenomenon that has been given names such as "a taboo practice" (Hobbs, 2015) and "dirty little secret" (du Plessis, 2017; Ingersoll, 2002), subsists in a manner that no one seems prepared to talk about although it has been experienced by many and lately in the wake of COVID-19 it has affected more teachers.

In some countries the practice has reached alarming proportions of up 65% in subjects like Physical Sciences where it warrants urgent attention (Dee and Cohodes 2008; Ingersoll 2001; Sambe 2015). The South African teaching context is not exempted from out-of-field teaching and this paper examines the implications of this universal phenomenon that is widespread and a global concern (du Plessis, 2015, p. 90) from a South African rural perspective. There are no statistical records available for the occurrence of the out-of-field phenomenon in South Africa but research evidence suggests that many teachers have been subjected to the practice at some point (Steyn & du Plessis, 2007). The COVID-19 pandemic brought this problem to the forefront as school principals had to manage the problem of staff shortages and show their leadership prowess. The role played by school leadership in the continued existence of the practice in rural schools is the focal point of this paper due to the silence of research literature on these deprived teaching-learning contexts.

Contextualising Out-Of-Field Teaching

"...it is difficult to teach well what one does not know well" (Ingersoll 2001). The preceding quote emphasises the centrality of content knowledge in the teaching-learning situation. Teachers must be masters of the content of their subjects if they are to deliver it to learners without challenges. This requires that they receive sufficient pedagogical and subject-content preparation before they deliver this knowledge in the classroom. Many teachers who have received training in certain subjects are assigned to subjects they have not been prepared for and they teach them out-of-field (Nixon *et al.*, 2017). Being aware of out-of-field teaching and understanding the dynamics of this practice is essential when it comes to dealing with issues of quality teaching and improving overall learner performance (du Plessis, 2015). The researchers use their lived experiences of teaching in rural contexts to infer the status of out-of-field teaching in schools through the examination of current scholarly literature globally. The complex and universal nature of out-of-field teaching prompts the use of the dialectic of local and global ("glocal") literature review to explore the manifestation of the practice and its implications for school leadership (Weber, 2007).

Most of the available research on out-of-field teaching points a finger at the supply and demand of teachers as the main source of the phenomenon; more particularly between rural and urban areas (Hobbs, 2013). Rurality plays a vital role in the supply and demand of teachers in the South African context because the availability of teachers in a school may be dependent on whether the school that needs a teacher is in a rural or urban geographical area. It therefore contributes to out-of-field teaching because specialist teachers from urban areas may not necessarily be ready to render their services to rural schools (Player, 2015). Rurality also includes proximity to cities and availability of education services, electricity and commercial services (Ebersöhn & Ferreira, 2012). The narrative is such that urban areas are more appealing to newly qualified teachers than rural areas because of the differences between the conditions of rural and urban schools, and the teaching experiences that these different contexts offer to teachers.

Rural schools are usually located far from urban areas and they are generally affected by the conditions of underdevelopment and poverty that tend to make them less attractive to prospective teachers (Mafora, 2013; Mukeredzi, 2013). Typically, rural schools experience shortages of teachers in critical subjects like Physical Sciences and Mathematics and as a result they resort to assigning teachers out-of-field (Mafora, 2013). In this paper, the researchers argue that in South Africa, out-of-field teaching is mainly caused by the change of curriculum, the rationalisation and redeployment policy that has been in place since the inception of the democratic dispensation. The outbreak of the novel Coronavirus and its associated Covid 19 contributed to the prevalence of the current out-of-field teaching that characterised the majority, if not all rural schools in South Africa. The South African education system has witnessed many curriculum changes in the past two decades that started from Curriculum 2005, followed by Outcomes-based education (OBE), Revised National Curriculum Statement (RNCS), National Curriculum Statement (NCS) and lately Curriculum Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS) (Hoadley, 2011; Mashele, 2018).

Continuous curriculum reforms are done by policymakers in response to developments in the society but these changes sometimes create new situations that teachers must inadvertently adapt to (Defise, 2013). These reforms have seen the introduction of new subjects and a transformation of subject fields in the education system. The subjects were to be taught by teachers who were already in the teaching field. The global outbreak of COVID-19 exposed more teachers to out-of-field teaching due to the schools' mandatory adherence to social distancing protocols and the concessions granted to teachers who were either over the age of sixty or had comorbidities. The teachers who remained at school were expected to teach the new subjects without being prepared and as a result they became unqualified or

under qualified in the new subjects. The application of the practice of out-of-field teaching has to do with the incongruence between what a teacher is assigned to teach versus his or her training, but not necessarily the amount of professional education the teacher has received (Ingersoll 2001).

The leadership of a school that is in a situation where teachers are assigned out-of-field has the responsibility of developing them to face the daunting task in hand and this is what we referred to as the fluidity of leadership which, according to Alina (2020:1), is the ability of a leader to protect the organization against external threats, setting direction for the organization, aligning the personnel and providing motivation. It is doubtful if the leadership of rural schools managed to develop the teachers who were affected COVID-19 related out-of-field teaching when one considers that the pandemic affected many teachers at the same time. The assignment of teachers in fields that are outside their areas of specialisation poses a challenge to the quality of teaching in any education system. This challenge affects all schools irrespective of whether they are rural, urban, public or independent (Sambe, 2015). Although out-of-field teaching is universal, this article focuses on its existence from a rural perspective because much of the literature that is available on the topic indicates that the problem is rife in rural areas. Out-of-field teaching does not only occur due to curriculum reforms (that occur at widely-spaced intervals) and COVID-19 but it is also associated with post provisioning where schools are allocated a specified number of posts annually based on their enrolment for the previous academic year. The process directs that the number of teachers who are employed at a school in a specified academic year must correspond with the number of allocated posts irrespective of the curriculum needs of the school. As things stand currently, out-of-field teaching is a natural consequence of both curriculum reforms and the process of post provisioning. This means that teachers that exceed the given threshold must be redeployed to another school that needs teachers and the remaining teachers must teach the subjects of the teachers that have been redeployed regardless of their subject-matter competence or pedagogical content knowledge of the subject. Redeployment of teachers in schools takes place due to one or more of the following reasons: curriculum changes; grading of schools; merging or closing down of schools; financial constraints; and learner enrolment (ELRC, 2003). All teachers within a school except the principal may be affected by redeployment. A principal may only be affected by the redeployment process when schools are merged or graded. This implies that all teachers within a school at one point or another in their working lives may be subjected to the practice of out-of-field teaching. Learner enrolment changes on an annual basis and it follows that redeployment will also be done yearly.

The transfer of teachers due to the rationalisation process is compulsory and any teacher that is declared in excess in a particular academic year must move to an identified school that is understaffed (ELRC, 1998). The school leadership has the sole custodianship of this process and it must always make certain that the process is carried out in a manner that leaves its staff satisfied. The application of this annual process is such that schools that have a decline in their enrolments will always have teachers who are wrongly assigned as the school leadership must make sure that learners are never without a teacher irrespective of whether or not the teacher is qualified for the newly assigned subject. The placement of a teacher out-of-field when another has been redeployed is a way of doing damage control to a situation that is instable and it does not provide a permanent solution to the problem except that it throws the out-of-field teacher on the deep end. This quick-fix solution actually masks the seriousness of the incidence of out-of-field placement of teachers by creating a false impression that school staffing problems are resolved (Hobbs, 2013).

The provisioning of posts in South Africa is done in accordance with Resolution 6 of 98 that provides for the rationalisation and redeployment of teachers in line with budgetary considerations (ELRC, 1998). Budgetary constraints play a key role in the prevalence of out-of-field teaching because a school can only have a given number of teachers that corresponds with its allocated budget by educational authorities by principals tend to promote the continued existence of out-of-field teaching assignments (Hobbs, 2015). These dubious practices by the school leadership may include the retention of teachers that no longer meet the curriculum needs of their schools because they already work there or because of convenience (Mashele, 2018). Schools with low enrolments have lower budgets, fewer post allocation, and consequently, teachers in those schools are likely to experience more incidence of out-of-field teaching than high-enrolment schools.

When there is a shortage of teachers in a subject as a result of redeployment it is characteristic of schools to replace them with out-of-field teachers (Sharplin, 2014; Steyn & du Plessis, 2007). This probably explains why the quality of education dropped to an exceptionally low level to the extent that the Department of Basic Education had to intervene and introduce Annual National Assessments in some grades (Department of Basic Education, 2011). Out-of-field teaching in terms of the provision of quality education is a point of concern internationally in countries such as Australia, USA, UK, Korea, Europe, Turkey and South Africa (du Plessis, Carroll, & Gillies, 2017).

This problem warrants the attention of everyone who is interested in education from education authorities, teachers, parents and teacher unions. Training methods that are used to prepare teachers to teach a subject vary

from one subject to the next because the subjects are different and if follows that a teacher who must teach a given subject must be trained in delivering the content of the subject in question. In countries like the USA, teachers who are assigned to the field they are not qualified to teach need to undergo some training in the out-of-field subject and need to be accredited for it (Barley & Brigham, 2008). This is not the case in South Africa; here a teacher who has a qualification in teaching may be assigned to any subject that the school leadership may allocate to him or her if they both agree on the move. In the current Covid 19 setting in South Africa, teachers acceded to teaching out-of field in the context of saving the academic year but there is scanty evidence to support their effectiveness in their out-of-field assignments. In some schools, particularly in secondary schools, teachers are facing charges of refusing to take lawful instructions (EEA 76 of 1998, section 18.1(i)) to teach out-of-field.

Implications of Out-Of-Field Teaching

The problem of out-of-field teaching is widespread and its implications need to be examined closely (Steyn & du Plessis, 2007). Although the practice occurs regularly in different countries, it has the potential of wearing down the fabric of effective teaching and learning environments if it goes unchecked. Not much research has been done on the implications of the practice in third-world countries, but research-based information in first-world countries suggests that it is associated with low academic performance (Jimerson 2004; Steyn and du Plessis 2007). Studies in South Africa, however, link learner-teacher performance with content knowledge gaps where inadequate subject knowledge for teaching is assumed to contribute to poor learner achievement (Vekatakrishnan & Spaul, 2015). Apart from being linked to underperformance, out-of-field teaching is largely viewed as one of the key obstacles to quality education (Sambe, 2015). It impedes instruction in the classroom where you find that teachers who teach in-field subjects do so in a fine-tuned way and with many ways of doing their presentation, but when teachers teach out-of-field, they struggle to teach (Nixon *et al.*, 2017). If these assertions are correct, South African education will have more problems that are related to underperformance in the post COVID-19 space because of the number of teachers who were assigned out-of-field teaching during the pandemic.

The poor qualification – poor learner performance dichotomy is further confirmed by (Mukeredzi, 2013) who contends that poorly educated teachers produce poorly educated learners. Despite being linked to underperformance, teaching out-of-field challenges teachers' working lives. There is consensus based on research and common sense that if learners are to perform well, their teachers must be knowledgeable about the subjects they teach (Hobbs, 2015; Jerald & Ingersoll, 2002; Steyn & du Plessis, 2007). It follows that no schooling system should allow teaching to take place

outside the field of expertise in its classrooms if it wants to produce quality education.

The authors have not come across research-based information that links underperformance directly with out-of-field teaching or COVID-19, but studies conducted in South Africa have linked poor learner performance to teachers' lack of content knowledge. One study found that many mathematics teachers in South Africa have below-basic levels of content knowledge where most of them were unable to answer externally set questions meant for their learners (Spaull, 2013). This could mean that these teachers practice their teaching out-of-field and consequently their learners underperform in the subject. Vekatakrisnan and Spaull (2015) argue that these teachers lack both content and pedagogical knowledge to enable them to carry out their teaching responsibilities in the classroom because their background has been affected by the legacy of apartheid. The cause-effect relationship between apartheid and teachers' poor pedagogical knowledge stems from the fact that most of the teachers in rural schools are products of inferior training that was received from homelands during the time of apartheid.

Teachers who teach subjects that they are not qualified to teach have their professional working lives intensified because they need to show determination to be successful in teaching the out-of-field subjects. They must also exert extra effort in their lesson preparation which may subsequently add undue stress to their workload (Sambe, 2015). Working under intensified environments with stressful workloads increases teacher burnout. The workload left by a redeployed teacher increases the burden for the teachers who remain behind and also worsens the problem of out-of-field teaching (Rapeta, 2019).

Generally, teachers who work in environments that are affected by out-of-field teaching struggle to teach effectively and this adversely affects their views about their profession (Steyn & du Plessis, 2007). Such teachers' foci are likely to be more on the difficulty of their out-of-field assignment than applying themselves towards better learner performance in their classrooms. Consequently, out-of-field teaching, as (Sambe, 2015) correctly points out, creates a vicious circle of teachers whose self-esteem, sense of identity, and overall wellbeing are affected. When this happens, burnt-out teachers exit the education system and they are replaced with new ones only to find that the same thing happens again to another group of teachers. Furthermore, out-of-field assignments increase teachers' anxiety and make teachers less confident about their teaching practices, and once this situation sets in, crisis abounds (du Plessis, 2015; Steyn & du Plessis, 2007).

School leaders are faced with the task of juggling the act of the teachers each year due to the rationalisation and redeployment process that has come

to be known as "rightsizing" (Rapeta, 2019). The token placement of an unqualified or under qualified teacher in front of learners as a quick-fix solution to the problem of teacher shortages is problematic because it compromises the quality of education that the learners receive, and it has a damaging effect on the teacher who must act like a pawn in a chess game, fighting battles he or she did not start (du Plessis, 2017). Collective Agreement 6 of 1998 (ELRC, 1998) indicates that teachers that are declared in excess must be treated fairly but it is quiet on the teachers who remain behind to carry out the departed teachers' job unprepared and it also says nothing about the learners who are going to receive lessons from a teacher who is not qualified to teach the deployed teachers' subjects.

Teachers do not like being assigned out-of-field teaching responsibilities because the practice is time-consuming when they must do lesson preparation and it further frustrates them when they must go and deliver the learning content in the classroom (Jerald & Ingersoll, 2002). The assignment of teachers out-of-field has more serious consequences when it is done to new teachers who are in the early stages of their teaching profession where they are still developing their practice because it may frustrate them and cause them to leave the profession (Nixon *et al.*, 2017). The out-of-field teaching phenomenon also reduces the chances of successfully implementing curricula because the people who are expected to do so are not pedagogically knowledgeable in their assigned fields (Steyn & du Plessis, 2007).

The Role of School Leadership in Out-Of-Field Teaching

Everything rises and falls on leadership (Maxwell, 1993). The discussion on out-of-field teaching so far has hinged on its context and implication without focusing on the critical element of school leadership. Schools are under the leadership of principals and school management teams (SMTs). The SMT comprises of the school principal, deputy principal(s) and departmental head(s). For the purposes of this paper, leadership refers to either the school principal or the SMT and the principal. Principals oversee schools and they are responsible for the assignment of subjects to teachers. The level of support and leadership offered by the principal to teachers when assigning them duties determines the level of autonomy and self-efficacy they will have when they carry out their duties as professional teachers in their classrooms (Mafora, 2013).

It is the responsibility of school principals to ensure that they assign teachers to subjects that they are qualified to teach. Assigning teachers to their field of qualification increases their morale, commitment, competence, confidence, well-being, and self-efficacy (du Plessis *et al.*, 2017; Hobbs, 2013). The leadership of a school influences the school culture which in turn determines the quality of education provided by the school and consequently, its performance. Poor leadership by school principals aggravates out-of-field

teaching (Sambe, 2015), like when a teacher is declared in excess of the post-establishment due to curriculum needs and the principal uses his or her influence to keep the teacher at the school. The leadership practices provided by the school principals have the capacity to intensify teachers' working lives or giving them windows of opportunities to learn as professionals when teaching out-of-field (du Plessis, 2017).

Processes like post provisioning expect principals to be on the forefront when teachers who are declared to be in addition to the post establishment must be transferred to other schools (ELRC, 2003) due to some of the factors discussed above. Essentially, this means that the principal takes a decision that has far-reaching effects because it affects the quality of education delivered in their schools due to the misassignment of teachers that follows the decision. Principals need to provide effective leadership that connects them to classroom situations where they will ensure that there is sufficient support for out-of-field teachers. It is also the responsibility of the principal to ensure that curriculum is effectively delivered in the classroom. This obligation means that principals must influence their teachers to accept out-of-field teaching as part and parcel of the teaching-learning environment with the understanding that the practice is not going to go away anytime soon.

The leadership of the school is bound by the need to fill the gaps in the timetable so that all subjects have teachers allocated to them. This need for a "warm body" in front of the learners compels principals to allocate teachers to teach in out-of-field position because there is no one else to take the subject. In some instances, principals use their leadership influence to encourage teachers to take out-of-field assignments with the notion of trying something new when there is a vacancy in a subject and there is no teacher who can take it (Hobbs, 2013). The leadership style chosen by the principal amid out-of-field assignments influences what happens in the classroom and how the school is going to perform because it directs the school's professional culture. There are different styles of leadership that are at the principal's disposal to use to lessen the out-of-field burden. These include, but they are not limited to, transactional and transformational leadership.

Transactional Leadership Style

This style is premised on the impression that leaders give subordinates what they want in exchange for getting what they want (St Thomas University, 2018). It has three sub styles: management by exception, laissez-faire (avoiding involvement), and contingent reward (Arnold, Kara A.; Connelly, Walsh, & Martin Ginis, 2015). Transactional leadership often applies in organisations like the military that require rules and regulations to complete objectives on time or move people and supplies in an organised way. Transactional leaders are not suitable for places like schools that

require creativity and innovative ideas are valued (St Thomas University, 2018). Situations that need the assignment of teachers out-of-field cannot be addressed through transactional leadership because it requires that the people should be self-motivated. The practice of out-of-field teaching is despicable and as such the teachers who are to apply it are frustrated and are far from being self-motivated.

Transformational Leadership Style

This style was chosen as the one that would be suitable for application by rural school principals to teachers who are affected by misassignment because it is generally seen as the one with more positive effects on followers (Gough 2013). Transformational leadership has the following attributes (Arnold, Connelly, Walsh, and Martin Ginis 2015): individual consideration, idealised influence, intellectual stimulation, and inspirational motivation. These features of transformational leadership may be used by principals in schools when assigning teachers out-of-field or when giving teachers who are already assigned out-of-field the necessary developmental support. The advocates of transformational leadership argue that one of the main tasks of school leaders is to help create a working environment in which teachers are inspired and motivated to attain a school's goals (Kwan, 2020).

This means that principals who are transformational leaders have the daunting task of disconnecting with their offices and going to the out-of-field teachers to develop them hands-on. The principal must show willingness to go all out to support the teachers who may be getting frustrated by the problems of rurality first and their lack of content and pedagogical knowledge in their new field of assignment second. Teachers who receive maximum support from their principals will be motivated enough to cope with their misassignments and adapt as quickly as possible. Support mechanisms that principals may provide include provision of resources to be used by the affected teachers and also getting support of specialist teachers from neighbouring schools (Steyn & du Plessis, 2007).

The desired outcome of such development will be evidenced by teachers' improved competency and delivery of subject content that brings out effective learning and improved learner performance in the school. If this support is not provided by the school leadership, the out-of-field teachers will feel vulnerable, exposed, uncertain and insecure in carrying out their professional duties (du Plessis, 2017). Furthermore, if such developmental ventures are successful, rural school principals will slow down the revolving door which allows schools to lose teachers to their urban counterparts. This will give rural schools some sigh of relief from vacancies that are hard to fill because of rurality and post provisioning that has seen rural schools losing their teachers to urban schools or neighbouring rural schools.

Towards a Fluid Leadership Culture to Compensate for Out-Of-Field Teaching in the Face of Covid 19

The subject matter of this paper is putting leadership at the centre of mitigating the pressure that was placed on teachers by out-of-field teaching in the face of the Covid 19 pandemic in particular and other pandemics that may break out in the future. The researchers in this paper contend that school leaders must create a fluid leadership culture in their schools that will enable teachers to adapt to external threats of any nature that may impact their practice. The researchers further acknowledge that under the Covid 19 circumstances, teachers' levels of anxiety and fear of infection escalated and they believe that only a fluid leadership could enable the workforce to cope with the demands of the period. This could only happen if the leadership of the school built a culture of resilience that would enable the schools to handle the complexities brought about by Covid 19.

CONCLUSION

Out-of-field teaching tendencies, particularly in rural schools, are generally an under-researched field that needs further attention (du Plessis, Carroll, and Gillies, 2017). Continual curriculum reforms and rightsizing processes are embedded sources of these practices that challenge teachers' content knowledge and pedagogies. These sources cannot be wished away and schools need to find ways of navigating their way through the resultant outcomes. School principals need to apply their transformational leadership styles to assist their schools to cope with the emerging and prevalent practices that affect their teachers' working lives (Yang, 2014). The school leadership is perfectly positioned to reduce the possibilities and continued existence of out-of-field teaching in rural schools through staff development programmes for newly assigned out-of-field teachers or recruitment of suitably qualified teachers who can teach and improve the quality of education in rural schools. The study adds to the literature on out-of-field teaching in rural areas by focusing on the leadership role of the principal when teachers are allocated subjects for which they have no content and pedagogical knowledge.

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