Principals' experiences and reflections on participation in the Advanced Certificate in Education: A School Leadership Programme

By

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ABSTRACT

This thesis explored the experiences of five principals enrolled on the Advanced Certificate in Education: School Leadership henceforth referred to as ACESL, and their reflection on the programme in relation to their professional practice. The ACESL is a professional qualification programme that is currently funded by the Department of Education through a number of service providers.

The paucity of research on the influence of management development programmes on the professional practice of principals formed the background to this study. In 1996, the Department of Education set up a Task Team to explore possibilities of such management development. The purpose of the programme was to provide structured learning opportunities that promote quality education in South Africa through the development of a corps of education leaders who apply critical understanding, values, knowledge and skills to school leadership and management within the vision of democratic transformation. This purpose points to the pivotal role of education leadership and management in transforming schools in South Africa.

This research attempted to address this gap in knowledge by examining the experiences and reflections of principals on the ACESL programme and it also explored the influence of this programme on their professional practice.

The study focussed on the subjective experiences of principals on the ACESL programme. This being the case, this research was located in an interpretivist, qualitative paradigm. The central intention of the interpretivist paradigm is to understand the subjective world of human experience.

The findings of the research suggest that the experiences of the principals on the ACESL are largely positive. Some elements of the programme did give rise to negative experiences. The principals were unanimous in articulating the positive effect of the programme on their professional practice.

DECLARATION

The work described in this dissertation was carried out in the Educational Leadership, Management and Policy discipline. It is my own original work and has not otherwise been submitted in any form for any degree or diploma to any tertiary institution. Where use has been made of the work of others, it is duly acknowledged in the text.

T. Naidoo

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this thesis to my parents, Kistamma Naidoo and the late Dennis Krishnasawmy Naidoo, for always supporting me in all my endeavours in life.

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It is of vital importance to me to acknowledge that contribution of all the people who aided the completion of this study. This study was not as easy one for me and the people mentioned below made the study a bearable one.

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ABBREVIATIONS

ACESL   -   Advanced Certificate in Education : School Leadership

BA   -   Bachelor of Arts

B. Comm -   Bachelor of Commerce

DoBE   -   Department of Basic Education

HOD   -   Head of Department

SGB   -   School Governing Body

SMT   -   School Management Team

STD   -   Secondary Teachers' Diploma

UHDE   -   University Higher Diploma in Education

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CHAPTER ONE

ORIENTATION AND BACKGROUND

1.1.   INTRODUCTION

The need for education management development in South Africa has been expressed by the Department of Education for more than a decade now. In 1996, the Department of Education set up a Task Team to explore possibilities of such management development (Department of Education, 1996). The Task team was located in the Education Management and Development Directorate and it proposed a management development programme. The purpose of the programme was "to provide structured learning opportunities that promote quality education in South Africa through the development of a corps of education leaders who apply critical understanding, values, knowledge and skills to school leadership and management within the vision of democratic transformation" (Department of Education, 2007, p.iv). This purpose points to the pivotal role of education leadership and management in transforming schools in South Africa. However, there is a paucity of research on management development programmes. This research attempted to capture the experiences and reflections on the participation of principals of a leadership and management development programme that is provided by the University of KwaZulu-Natal.

Bush (2003) contends that, "the significance of effective leadership and management for the successful operation of schools and colleges has been increasingly acknowledged during the 1990s and into the twenty-first century" (2003, p.ix). This is supported by Mathibe (2007) when he states that, "many schooling systems do not fulfil their mandates because of poor management and leadership" (2007, p.523). There is strong belief that good school leadership leads to good school results or that leadership development should make a difference in schools. Van derWesthuizen and van Vuuren (2007) concur with the above view but also caution against over-reliance on this belief, and state that:

There is, however, no evidence in the available literature to validate the fairly common perception that either university preparation programmes or national certification make a difference in the professional performance of principals (van der Westhuizen & van Vuuren, 2007, p.438).

This study attempted to capture the experiences and reflections of principals on the Advanced Certificate in Education: School Leadership programme (hereafter, ACESL) and also attempted to explore the extent to which principals, that participated and completed this programme, felt that their participation in and experiences of ACESL programme had influenced their professional practice. The researcher was personally motivated to engage in the study due to the following reasons: Firstly, the researcher is employed as a principal and has served the Department of Education as a facilitator on a number of management development programmes for principals such as Financial Management for public schools, School Development Planning and Integrated Quality Management Systems. Secondly, the researcher is a tutor on the ACESL programme at the University of KwaZulu–Natal. These reasons have prompted me to conduct this research.

1.2.   FOCUS AND PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study was to explore the experiences of principals who were enrolled on and had completed the Advanced Certificate in Education: School Leadership programme (ACESL). It was also to explore their reflections of the programme in relation to their professional practice. The ACE: School Leadership is a professional qualification programme that was piloted by the Department of Education from 2007 to 2009. During that period, access to the programme was limited to the serving principals but it is envisaged that the programme will be extended to members of School Management Teams who aspire to become school principals. The University of KwaZulu-Natal as one of the service providers of the programme admitted the first cohort of principals in July 2007, and this study focused on that cohort of students. The research attempted to capture and document experiences and reflections of these principals who have completed this two year programme. The study therefore was limited to principals who were registered as students at the University of KwaZulu-Natal for the period 2007 to 2009.

1.3. KEY CONCEPTS

Since the study considered the experiences of the principals in a professional development certified programme and also looked at the effect of the programme on their professional practice, the concepts of education management, education leadership, education administration, transformational leadership and reflective practice proved useful in this study. All of these concepts were critical to this study, and are discussed in the following section.

The concept of education leadership cannot be studied in isolation. It cannot be separated from the concepts of education management and education administration (Davidoff & Lazarus, 1997, p.32). The three concepts, though quite distinct in theory, are intertwined in practice. Each concept has a different set of operations or functions. There is a great deal of variance in the usage of these concepts. Education leadership in particular takes on different meaning in different countries and different cultures. A brief explanation of each concept is necessary before one can fully understand the various theories that underpin education leadership.

Coleman, from her United Kingdom (UK) experience states, " leadership tends to be seen as the most important of the three concepts, management tends to relate to more operational matters and administration to relate to tasks which are routine"(2005, p.7). West – Burnham (1992) concurs to some extent with Coleman and distinguishes between leadership as being concerned with values, vision and mission; management as being concerned with execution, organisation and deploying; and administration as being concerned with operational details (West-Burnham, 1992, cited in Thurlow, 2003, p26). Both theorists accord a great deal of importance to leadership. In North America, the term 'administration' relates to the most prestigious level (Coleman, 2005, p.7). It is evident from these differing interpretations that the concept of leadership is largely influenced by professional culture.

In South Africa, a Task Team established by the Department of Education in 1996, emphasised the need to explain how the term 'education management' is used. The following statement provides clarity, " In our consultations and studies we found that the terms 'management'; 'administration' and 'leadership' are used in confusing ways; we do not equate management with administration and we make a distinction between management and leadership (Department of Education, 1996, p. 28). This statement provides some insight in

the conceptualisation of education management but it does not adequately draw a distinction between leadership, management and administration.

Fullan (1991) distinguishes between leadership and management by stating that "the two functions are often compared invidiously (leaders do the right thing; managers do things right) or in a linear relationship (leaders set the course; managers follow it)". He identifies two problems with this distinction. First, it casts the management function as monotonous, dull and less important. Second, it implies that the functions follow a sequence and are executed by different people. Fullan further elaborates that "principals … do both functions simultaneously and iteratively" (1991, p.158). In South Africa both these functions are of great importance as we take on the challenge to make our schools effective sites of teaching and learning. The concepts of leadership, management and administration, although distinct from one another, tend to support one another and happen, in most cases, simultaneously. In the context of educational change in South Africa, one of the articulated aims of the ACESL programme is the development of principals as transformational leaders (Department of education, 2007, p.2).

Transformational leadership is a leadership style where one or more persons engage with others in such a way that leaders and followers raise one another to higher levels of motivation. Transformational leaders offer a purpose that transcends short-term goals and focuses on higher order intrinsic needs. One of the aims of the ACESL programme is to produce transformational leaders in the school context. Bush (2003, p.162) states that, "the principal who practises transformational leadership is not reliant on his or her personal charisma, but is attempting to empower staff and share leadership functions".

Another aim of the ACESL is to, "develop principals who are able to critically engage and be self-reflective practitioners" (Department of Education, 2007, p.3). The theory of reflective practice was conceptualised by Donald Schön. Schön (1983) made a remarkable contribution to our understanding of the theory and practice of learning. Reflective practice is a mode that links thought and action with reflection. It involves thinking about and critically analysing one's action with the goal of improving one's professional practice. One of the course requirements of the ACESL is that each principal uses a reflective journal for recording their reflections during the ACESL programme.

The Department of Education articulates the rationale for the journal as follows:

The use of the personal journal …is strongly recommended as a self- assessment tool…in the current working environment where documentary evidence of professional competence and achievement is becoming increasingly important, your journal will have value as a personal record of your progress through the course and of your professional growth in a larger sense (Department of Education, 2007, p. 86).

It is the value of this tool (Reflective Journal) that led the researcher to choose it as one of the sources of data. More details on this aspect are provided in Chapter Three.

1.4.   RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The research project was driven by two questions and these are stated below:
- What are the principals' experiences and reflections on participation in the ACE: School Leadership programme at the University of KwaZulu-Natal?
- How does principals' participation in the ACESL programme influence their professional practice?

1.5.   RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

Since the study focussed on the subjective experiences, of principals on the ACESL programme, the research was conducted within an interpretivist, qualitative research paradigm. The central intention of the interpretivist paradigm is to understand the subjective world of human experience. This paradigm seeks to understand and interpret the world in terms of its actors and consequently may be described as interpretive and subjective (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2001, p. 22).

The study was conducted within the qualitative paradigm with its emphasis on the interpretive and subjective dimensions. The study examined the subjective experiences and reflections of principals, and took the form of a case study.

A case study is a specific instance that is frequently designed to illustrate a more general principle. It provides a unique example of real people in real situations, enabling readers to understand ideas more clearly than simply by presenting them with abstract theories or principles (Cohen, *et. al*. 2001, p.181). Yin (2002) suggests that case study research should be

defined as research strategy, an empirical inquiry that investigates a phenomenon within its real-life context and that case studies should not be confused with qualitative research as Yin (2002) further points out that they can be based on any mix of quantitative and qualitative evidence. Merriam has the following to say about case studies:

> *A case study design is employed to gain an in-depth understanding of the situation and meaning for those involved. The interest is in the process rather than outcomes, in context rather than a specific variable, in discovery rather than confirmation* (Merriam, 1999, pp.18-19).

Tools to gather or produce data can include surveys, interviews, documentation review, observation, and even the collection of physical artefacts. This study made use of semi-structure interviews and document review in the form of reflective journals.

1.5.1.   Data production methods

The following primary sources were used in this study:
- Semi-structured individual interviews with principals.
- Reflective journal of principals

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with principals. Interviews are one of the most important sources of case study information. The interview could take one of several forms: open-ended, focused or structured (Tellis, 1997, p. 8). Kvale (1996) justifies the use of the interview as follows:

> *The use of the interview in research marks a move away from seeing human objects as simply manipulable and data as somehow external to individuals, and towards regarding knowledge as generated between humans, often through conversations…. The interchange of views between two or more people on a topic of mutual interest, sees the centrality of human interaction for knowledge production, and emphasises the social situatedness of research data* (1996, pp.11-14).

A structured interview is useful when the researcher is aware of what he does not know and therefore is in a position to frame questions that will provide the knowledge that is required. There is also the unstructured interview where the researcher is not aware of what he does not

know and relies on the respondent to tell him (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p.269). As mentioned in the preceding sections, this research study made use of semi-structured interviews as a method of producing the data within qualitative research methodologies. In the case of the semi-structured interview, an interview guide or schedule is prepared and the interviewer is at liberty to explore and prod within the parameter of the guide or schedule. The questions posed were open ended.

1.5.2. Use of reflective journals

All principals on the ACESL programme were required to keep a reflective journal from the very beginning of the programme. The main purpose of the journal was to capture the experiences of the principals and to critically reflect on these experiences and the effect thereof on their personal and professional life. The journal of principals served as a source of data. The data from the journal was analysed thematically.

The researcher also piloted the study to test the methodology. A pilot study is a small scale study that is conducted prior to the actual research. All data-gathering instruments should be tested to check how long it takes respondents to complete them (in the case of survey questionnaires), to check that all answers and instructions are clear and to enable the researcher to delete any items(s) which do not yield usable data (Bell, 2002). The researcher piloted the study with a student who was not part of the sample.

1.5.3. The context

The study was undertaken in five schools (primary and secondary schools). This added to the quality of the data due to the different dynamics of both these contexts.

1.5.4. Participants

Five principals on the ACESL Programme at the University of KwaZulu–Natal were purposively selected to participate in the study.

1.5.5. Data analysis

A thematic content analysis procedure was used to analyse the qualitative data. Data was coded to highlight emerging patterns and themes.

1.5.6. Trustworthiness of the findings

There were four criteria as generated by Guba and Lincoln (1985) that were used in the study to ensure trustworthiness of the findings. These criteria are credibility, dependability, transferability and confirmability. More details on this are provided in Chapter Three.

1.5.7. Ethical issues

For any research to enjoy any credibility, it has to abide by all ethical considerations throughout the process. Some of these considerations include voluntary participation, informed consent, the right to withdraw from the study at any stage of the process, ensuring that permission to conduct research is granted by gatekeepers and participants. More details are provided in the methodology chapter.

1.6. THE STRUCTURE OF THE STUDY

The study comprises five chapters and each chapter deals with a component of the research process. The description of these components is provided below:

1.6.1. Chapter One

 This chapter provides a brief description on the focus and purpose of the study as well as the background to the study. Other aspects discussed include the key concepts of the study, the key research questions and an introduction to research design and methodology.

1.6.2. Chapter Two

This chapter provides a comprehensive discussion of the concepts leadership and management and a thematic review of literature related to education leadership and management.

1.6.3. Chapter Three

This chapter focuses on the design and methodology that was used in conducting the study. Included in the discussion are analysis methods, trustworthiness issues as well as the limitations of the study.

1.6.4. Chapter Four

This chapter pertains to the presentation of findings, and discussion of the findings obtained from interviews and the reflective journals of the participants.

1.6.5. Chapter Five

This chapter provides a summary of the findings as well as recommendations that have emerged from the study.

1.7. CONCLUSION

Chapter One has provided a brief description on the focus and purpose of the study and a background to the study is presented in this chapter. Other aspects discussed include the key concepts of the study, the key research questions and research design and methodology. The next chapter deals with the literature review.

CHAPTER TWO

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK AND LITERATURE

REVIEW

2.1.   INTRODUCTION

This chapter discusses the conceptual framework underpinning the study and reviewing literature pertinent to the study. The literature review focuses on a number of issues that are related to education management and leadership. The discussion commences with the background of education management development in South Africa. In order to gain a better understanding of professional practice of principals, leadership and management theories are also discussed. This study involved an examination of a professional development programme in the form of the Advanced Certificate in Education: School Leadership.

One of the main aims of the programme was to improve the management and leadership skills of principals. Given that this is the case, then there is a need, not only to consider the various theories of leadership and management that frame the study, but also to consider the rationale for a national professional qualification for principals and the paucity of research on the effects of management and leadership programmes on the professional practice of principals. The chapter also covers the motivation to improve schools in South Africa and the need to distinguish between leadership and management. It concludes with a discussion on reflective practice.

2.2.   THE BACKGROUND OF EDUCATION
MANAGEMENT IN SOUTH AFRICA

The national Department of Education, now called the Department of Basic Education (DoBE), realised the importance of effective management at all levels of the education system. In cognisance of this, a national Task Team on Education Management Development

was established. The Task Team finalised its report in 1996 and presented recommendations for a new approach to management development in light of the dictates of the South African Schools Act, which articulates the need for a school– based system of education management (Thurlow, *et. al.* 2003, p.6). The Task Team suggested, "*Schools will increasingly come to manage themselves. This implies a profound change in the culture and practice of schools. The extent to which schools are able to make the necessary change will depend largely on the nature and quality of their internal management*" (Department of Education, 1996, p.28). McLennan and Thurlow (2003) assert that education management thinking in South Africa can be categorised into three paradigms. These are (Christian) scientific education management, Education Management and Education Governance and Management. The paradigms can be summarised as follows:

SCIENTIFIC EDUCATION MANAGEMENT (CONTROL)	EDUCATION MANAGEMENT (LEADERSHIP)	GOVERNANCE AND MANAGEMENT (FACILITATION)
Professionalism	Decentralisation	Relationship building
Christian national education	Devolution of power	Recognition of diversity
Hierarchy and regulation	Performance	Participation and Communication
Rule compliance	Strategic planning	Responsiveness
Planning	Mission driven	Balance and reconciliation
Organising	School effectiveness	Collaboration
Guiding	Human resource management	Change management
Controlling	Total quality management	Support
Work study	Customer focus	Negotiation
Personnel classification		

Table 1: (McLennan & Thurlow, 2003, p.15)

The main elements that I understand of the Scientific Education Management paradigm, relate to it reliance on the ideology of Christian National Education and the belief that God is the supreme authority. This paradigm also refutes the claim that any, "competent teacher with a certain number of years of experience, and the right personality, was well equipped for the task and demand of the principalship" (van der Westhuizen, 1991, p.1). This paradigm also acknowledges that principals have a twofold role, namely, that of a professional leader and

administrative manager. Criticism of the Scientific Education model, in the main, relates to this approach promoting managing styles that are, "authoritarian, hierarchical and inaccessible" (McLennan & Thurlow, 2003, p.9). The Education Management paradigm reflects a shift from scientific management to business – oriented practices.

The education management paradigm came into prominence with the introduction of Model-C schools in 1992. In these schools, parents opted to pay a larger amount in terms of school fees in return for a greater level of independence in terms of teacher appointments, control of school ground and buildings, financial policy and curriculum innovation. These schools operated on business lines. Schools in effect had to compete with one another in order to attract learners and also had to market themselves in order to attract learners. The passing of the South African Schools Act (Republic of South Africa, 1996) saw the demise of Model-C schools in policy but in practice many former Model-C schools continued to operate as they did since 1992. With the advent of School Governing Bodies, created by virtue of the South African Schools Act, schools were granted certain functions such as the right to appoint staff in educator and non-educator posts additional to the number that was provided by the relevant provincial department of education. In effect Model-C schools continued operating as they did and many other schools which could not operate in a "Model-C' mode, now were given the opportunity to do so (McLennan & Thurlow, 2003, pp.11-12).

With the advent of this type of education management paradigm, the principal was seen to play a pivotal role in ensuring that members of staff were motivated and that they performed at a high level. According to Gounden and Dayaram (1990), there was a need for "effective leadership, a predominantly democratic leadership style and competent management" (1990, p. 310). The ACESL, being a practice-based programme, intends to produce principals who fit in with the prerequisites as articulated by Gounden and Dayaram (1990).

The education governance and management paradigm focuses on the issues of governance and managing change. This paradigm focuses on the need for positive relationships amongst all stakeholders in the school environment. Relationships, between the communities and the schools, parents and teachers, the learners and the teachers, the principals and the teachers, the principals and the officials of the Department of Education, had deteriorated over the years due to the policy of apartheid and the struggle to eradicate it (McLennan & Thurlow, 2003). In the post-apartheid state there is a need to reconstruct these relationships so that educational outcomes can be changed for the better. Meyl (1994) proposes the necessity for

'people-centred reconstruction.' He supports the need for real community involvement and management training and support. At the level of the school, Mayosi (1995), Strydom and Bitzer (1990) emphasise the need for alternative approaches to educational management which places collaboration and participation as focal points. Within this paradigm, there is also a need to consider change management (van der Westhuizen & Theron, 1994).

The three paradigms of education management that have been discussed reflect the thinking about education management in South Africa, but more importantly, its influence on practice. In view of this, this study recognises the influence of these paradigms on the education terrain in general and more specifically on schools in particular. Given that my study concerns the experiences of principals on a professional development programme and the influence of the programme on their professional practice, an understanding of the three paradigms serves to elucidate the practices of the principal on the ACESL programme.

2.3. THEORIES OF EDUCATION LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Bush (2007) states that, "various theories of leadership and management reflect very different ways of understanding and interpreting events and behaviour in schools and colleges (2007, pp. 394-395). This is extremely useful for my study as it is focusing on the professional development of principals in the form of the ACESL programme and their feelings on how the programme has influenced their professional practice.

Bush (2003) contends that there are six models or theories of educational management, namely, formal, collegial, political, subjective, ambiguity and cultural (2003, p.33). The six management models are distinct from one another and offer different approaches to the management of educational institutions (2003, p.189). The six models serve as useful lenses to analyse the effects of the ACESL on the professional practice of principals. Hence these models of management can assist in explaining practice. There is also a need to consider the theories of leadership. The literature has served to elucidate the important role that leadership plays in the successful operation of schools.

The vast literature on educational leadership offers a number of models. There is a tendency to cluster the various conceptions into a number of themes or types. Leithwood, Jantzi and Steinbach (1999) identified six models of leadership. Bush and Glover (2002) added

contingency and moral theory. Bush (2003) presents a typology of the management and leadership models as follows:

MANAGEMENT MODEL	LEADERSHIP MODEL
Formal	Managerial
Collegial	Participative
	Transformational
	Interpersonal
Political	Transactional
Subjective	Post-modern
Ambiguity	Contingency
Cultural	Moral
	Instructional

Table 2: (Bush, 2003, p.33).

Instructional leadership does not link to any of the management models because of its focus on the direction of influence, learning and teaching, rather than the nature of the influence process (Bush, 2003, p.34). Instructional leadership is significant in the South African context as there is an urgent need to improve teaching and learning in a large number of schools. There is a dire need for sound instructional leadership that can improve that quality of teaching and learning in South African schools.

2.4.   DISTINGUISHING BETWEEN LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Leadership was traditionally seen as part of management (Bush, 2003). There is increasing evidence from a host of researchers in the sphere of education that leadership has emerged as the most important concept in transforming schools into effective sites of teaching and learning. Coleman (2005) states, " In the UK in present time, ' leadership' tends to be seen as the most important of these concepts, 'management' tends to relate to more operational matters and 'administration' to relate to tasks which are routine (2005, p.25). This has particular significance for South Africa as education policy and practice has tended to be strongly influenced by the developed countries of the western world. Leadership is, to a large extent, about ensuring that there is a vision for quality education for all the people of South Africa. There are many deficiencies in education provision in South Africa. This is largely

due to the legacy of apartheid. The apartheid state, in its allocation of resources, entrenched inequalities that are still very much part of the educational landscape today (Christie, 2001, p.40). It will take many decades to rectify the imbalances of the past but, by building leadership capacity in our educational institutions, there is hope for a better future.

Since the study focused on the experiences of the principals in a professional development certified programme and since it also looked at the effect of the programme on the professional practice of principals, the concepts of administration, education management and leadership served to make sense of the behaviour and events in educational institutions. The literature review has already made reference to the various theories of leadership and management. In particular the concepts of education management, education leadership, education administration and transformational leadership and reflective practice proved useful in this study. These concepts are critical for providing insight into this study.

Effective leadership is generally accepted as being a central component in securing and sustaining school improvement (Muijs & Harris, 2003, p.437). Thus one needs to go beyond management and ensure the development of leadership skills, knowledge and values so that schools become effective in the core business of teaching and learning.

In recognising the important role that leadership can play in transforming education in South Africa, it has become necessary to understand some of the prominent theories of leadership and also try to ascertain whether these theories offer possibilities for the improvement in the quality of education provision. The great man theory depicts the male as a stereotype of a leader (Coleman, 2005, p.6). Given the history of discrimination in this country, based not only on race but also on gender, such a theory offers no scope for transforming schools.

This theory is also limited in its scope as it suggests that leaders are born and that ordinary people cannot be developed for leadership positions. One needs to look at theories of leadership that offer possibilities for transforming schools into what Senge (1990) calls learning organisations. There is a need to ensure that leadership is not only restricted to the principal but one that is extended to other members of the organisation.

Katzenmeyer and Moller (2001) state, " the notion that the principal is the only leader is evolving into a clearer understanding of the leadership roles that teachers must take if our schools are to be successful" (2001, p.2). A leadership theory that alludes to this is Distributed Leadership theory. This theory supports the notion of sharing leadership in an

organisation. Gronn (2000) suggests that distributed leadership implies a different power relationship within a school where the distinctions between followers and leaders tend to blur (Gronn, 2000, cited in Muijs & Harris, 2003, p.440). In essence leadership is extended to more individuals within the organisation. Leadership in South Africa has tended to be restricted to the head of the school. This was very much the situation during the apartheid years as power within the school was centralised. Leadership under the apartheid regime was associated with headship (Grant, 2006). This suited the apartheid state well as it served to maintain the *status quo*. Schools were used for social engineering purposes. Since the birth of the new democracy in 1994, there is growing impetus to share leadership as there is now a greater need to use the collective knowledge and skills of all members of staff.

For teacher leadership to take root and grow in South African schools, a transformational leadership style is preferred over a transactional style of leadership. The former promotes leadership amongst members of staff while the latter style is too dependent on the issuing of rewards. A principal who subscribes to the distributed style of leadership is a transformational leaders and his style of leadership must reveal this. Moral leadership is also needed. Sergiovanni (1990) stresses the importance of moral leadership and asserts that, "the moral school will be the effective school" (Sergiovanni, 1990, cited in Grace, 1997, p.64).

In order to transform South African schools there is a need not only for effective management, but also a need for bold leadership not in a singular sense but in a sense that leadership must be extended to as many members of staff as is possible. Leadership by the principal alone will tend to offer limited scope for improvement. By making more space for people to lead, the possibilities for making schools really effective become very real. The distributed leadership theory takes on greater relevance in the new democratic South Africa. This theory extends leadership roles and creates conditions for schools to be successful. Successful schools are regarded as effective schools.

The Department of Education actively promotes and encourages all schools to become self-managing. Thurlow (2003) refers to this as a "trend towards increased institutional autonomy (2003, p.189). For this to come to fruition, members of management at school level, must be empowered with the necessary skills, attitudes and values to take schools on a path towards self-management. An essential aspect of this drive to become self-managing is strategic management. The Task Team on Education management Development suggests:

South African schools, working within a context of increased autonomy and turbulent environment, need to develop the "capacity to manage themselves" and to "manage change effectively" (1996, pp. 28 -32).

Thurlow (2003) believes that to achieve the aims of self-management and managing change, then schools need to adopt a strategic approach to management. Beare, Caldwell, and Milliken (1989) define strategic planning approach as:

A continuous process in administration which links goal –setting, policy making, short-term and long – term planning, budgeting and evaluation in a manner which spans all levels of the organisation, secures appropriate involvement of people according to their responsibility for implementing plans as well as of people with an interest or stake in the outcomes of the these plans, and provides a framework for the annual planning, budgeting and evaluation cycle (1989, p.143).

If it is the intention of schools to start a journey of improvement then strategic planning becomes an essential tool to attain improvement and effectiveness. Fidler (1999) claims that:

Schools now more than ever will be in a position where they will be largely responsible for their own destiny. Strategy, however, is not only concerned with survival. Whilst this is a first concern, once this has been secured strategy is concerned with ensuring success for the organisation. Since success can come in many forms, strategy involves examining the possibilities and choosing which is most likely to succeed given current and predicted future circumstance (1999, pp.51-52).

This citation points to the need to produce principals of high calibre that can take their school on the path to improvement.

2.5.   RATIONALE FOR A NATIONAL QUALIFICATION FOR THE PRINCIPALSHIP

Prior to 2007, South Africa was one of many countries that did not have a national, compulsory or specific qualification for the principalship. In 2007 a pilot project was introduced by the Department of Education to give effect to the need for a formal national qualification for principalship. This took the form of the Advanced Certificate in Education:

School Leadership. This move addressed the need for the development of principals to national professional standard. The University of KwaZulu–Natal is one of the service providers of the ACESL. International and national literature points to the need for a formal qualification for the principalship.

Research undertaken by Bush (1998), Mathibe (2007), van der Westhuizen and van Vuuren (2007), Mestry and Singh (2007) supports the need for a professional national qualification for the principalship. Mestry and Singh (2007) for instance, state "providing principals with the necessary knowledge, skills, values and attitudes becomes increasingly important … therefore the professionalisation of principalship can be considered as the strategically most important process to transform education successfully" (2007, p.478). At present in South Africa, the minimum requirement for appointment to the post of principal is a matriculation certificate and a three year teaching diploma (M+3) and 7 years teaching experience, not necessarily management experience. In effect this means that as a level one educator (a teacher) can become a principal of a school without having served as a Head of Department or deputy principal. As this is the case, there is a strong case for a practice-based qualification for principals and this research study attempts to explore the experiences and reflections of principals on a pilot national qualification for the principalship.

Busher and Harris (2000) state that, "one of the fundamental findings of research in school improvement is the powerful impact of leadership on processes of successful organisational practice. Further to this, they add that, "subject leaders can make a difference to performance in their subject areas in much the same way as head teachers contribute to overall school performance" (2000, p.5). This provides a compelling reason for the need to develop principals. Walker and Qian (2006) state that many other countries, such as Singapore, the United Kingdom (UK) and the United States of America (USA) have a national professional qualification for the principalship (cited in Mestry & Singh, 2007, pp.478-479). Prior to 2007 there was no professional qualification for the principalship in South Africa. The National Department began the piloting process of the ACESL in July 2007. This research studied the experiences of principals on the ACESL pilot programme and an exploration of their feelings on how their experiences on the ACESL programme have influenced their professional practice.

Bush (2008 & 2010) notes the following reasons for a professional qualification for principals:

- The expansion of the role of school principal; in decentralised systems, the scope of leadership has increased.

- The increasing complexity of school contexts; principals have to engage with their communities to lead and manage effectively.

- Recognition that preparation is a moral obligation; it is unfair to appoint new principals without effective induction.

- Recognition that effective preparation and development make a difference; principals are better leaders following specific training.

(Bush, 2010, cited in Bush, Kiggundu & Moorosi, 2011, p.32).

This is also supported by Prew (2007). Prew's paper reports on a micro study of four principals' reaction to change. Two of these principals were successful in transforming their schools and two were not. The successful principals were effective at working with the surrounding community and the local district office. Prew (2007) contends that principals who reflect the changing management norms in South Africa can be typified as the leadership styles of Presidents Mandela and Mbeki – which are typified by inclusive, participatory and distributed. These principals are more adept at managing change and leading high schools. His other contention is that the majority of principals in South Africa typify 'Botha-esque' management style, which is centralised, hierarchical, 'militaristic' authoritarian, rule-driven, and secretive.

Prew (2007) used a case study approach that used both quantitative and qualitative research methods. His findings show that the principal plays a central role as the key figure in determining the take-up of an innovation in a school. The Mandela/Mbeki principals were more adept at moving their schools forward and making them more effective. The principals in less successful schools exhibited Botha-esque authoritarian tendencies, limited access to decision making, kept the community out of the school and blamed the district officials for their problems. Prew suggests that there is a need to transform management styles of principals so that schools can become more effective. The ACESL sets out to attain this very same objective.

2.6. PAUCITY OF RESEARCH OF THE EFFECTS OF MANAGEMENT/ LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT ON THE PROFESSIONAL PRACTICE OF PRINCIPALS

Spillane (2003) states, "in general, the impact of leadership on instruction or improvement (or indeed any measurable school outcomes) has not been the subject of research" (2003, p.343). In respect of educational research, Gorard (2005) concurs with Spillane by stating that, "the field is very inward-looking, apparently unwilling to test the impact of leadership on anything but management itself (2005, p.158). At present, educational research is concentrating on the impact of change on management rather than the effect that management and leadership has on anything else (Spillane, 2003; Gorard, 2005). There is a need to understand the interplay between management and leadership development and the professional practice of principals. Although Spillane (2003) and Gorard (2005) are writing about the United Kingdom and the United States of America experiences, their views are shared by South African academics (Van der Westhuizen & van Vuuren, 2007; Mathibe, 2007; Mestry & Singh, 2007).

Van der Westhuizen and van Vuuren (2007) also allude to the need for the professional development of principals but emphasise the point that, "empirical data on the effects of leadership development programmes on the participants, their stakeholders and organisations must replace rhetoric and mere policy logic as a driving rationale for the professionalisation of principalship in South Africa" (2007, p. 439). Thus there is a need for research that actually focuses on the effect of professional development programmes on the professional practice of principals.

Research on the ACESL programme was conducted by Mestry and Singh 2007. Their research focussed also on the pilot ACESL in six provinces in South Africa. They present a case for a professional qualification for principals. Their research will now be cited in some detail as it is closely related to my study. Singh and Mestry, in their research focussed on the rationale for a new practice – based qualification and they also set out to determine the perceptions of principals on how the ACESL contributed to the principals and how the programme impacted on the principal. This clearly shows the this research is related to some extent with the research of Mestry and Singh (2007) as it focussed on the experiences and reflections of principals on the ACESL programme and how the programme influenced the professional practice of principals.

The findings of the research conducted by Mestry and Singh (2007) point to significant benefits derived by principals who had participated in the ACESL at the University of Johannesburg and a non – governmental organisation, the Matthew Goniwe School of Governance. Respondents also indicated that after engagement with the course they knew what to do. This is confirmed by this statement made by one of the respondents:

> *"I feel capacitated. I feel rejuvenated. I feel like somebody who has*
> *been brought back to life" (*2007, p. 483*).*

The programme clearly had a profound effect on this respondent. This respondent was in the post of principal and did not clearly understand the requirements of the job. The following themes emanated from the research conducted by Mestry and Singh (2007). There was a shift away from authoritarian to collegial leadership. The respondents recognised that there was a need for an inclusive mode of operation at the level of the school and the need to include all stakeholders in the decision making process. Mestry and Singh (2007) also allude to the total lack of an induction programme for principals. Principals in the study also mentioned that the ACE programme had contributed to their professional growth and improved their interactions with all relevant stakeholders. This they credit to the fact that they adopted an invitational style of leadership. The principals expressed negative comments about the large number of assignments that they had to complete.

More recent research on the ACE programme was conducted by Bush, Kiggundu and Moorosi (2011). That research involved an evaluation of a pilot ACE programme in six provinces. At the outset they point to the issue of qualifications. They state:

> *"Although many school leaders hold university qualifications in management, their*
> *collective impact on school outcomes had been minimal. Their focus appeared to*
> *have been on achieving accreditation rather than improving their schools"* (2011,
> p.32).

The issue of qualifications is of particular importance to my study as the sample that I have chosen comprises of principals who are graduates.

The review of the literature of Bush, Kiggundu and Moorosi (2011) reveal that there is a gap in the understanding of whether university preparation programmes or national certification makes a difference to the professional practice of principals. There is also a paucity of

research of participation in professional programmes for the principalship. The voice of participants in professionalisation programmes is noticeably absent. This research aims to address this gap by examining the experiences of principals on the ACESL programme. It also entails an exploration of their feelings on how the ACESL has influenced their professional practice.

2.7. MOTIVATION FOR NEED TO IMPROVE SCHOOLS

The core business of schools is the provision of effective teaching and learning. Schools exist mainly for this purpose. To make schools attain this purpose is not an easy task. In this regard, Dalin and Rolff (1993) capture the essence of schooling when they state, "towards the improvement of pedagogical practices" (Dalin, *et. al*. p. 119). To achieve this requires interplay of various practices and processes. It will mean understanding what effective schools are, how to bring about changes in school culture, transforming schools into learning organisations and the need for strategic planning and organisational development. This alone will not be sufficient, there is also a need for strong and purposeful leadership to not only initiate change but also to sustain it. Given the dysfunctionality of many of the schools in South Africa (Christie, 2001, p.40), the interplay of the factors mentioned above, if properly planned and implemented, could lead to a general improvement of schooling. This is aptly captured in the Task Team Report on Education Management Development (1996) which states that there are some schools where a culture of learning prevails. But the presence of Christie and Potterton's (1997) 'resilient schools', that is , those schools which make progress despite existing in a difficult context of poverty, unemployment and, sometimes, violence is more of an exception rather than a rule. Bush and Anderson (2003) point to the harsh reality of schooling in South Africa when they state:

> *The absence of a culture of learning in many South African schools   illustrates the long-term and uncertain nature of cultural change……. However, educational values have to compete with the still prevalent discourse of struggle and it seems likely that the development of a genuine culture of learning will be slow and dependent on the quality of leadership in individual schools* (2003, p. 96).

This has significant importance for schooling in South Africa. The effects of apartheid are still evident today. A large number of students come to school from homes with a poor socio-

economic background. Christie states, "an enduring legacy of apartheid education in South Africa has been the dysfunction of many historically African schools…. it is also increasingly understood that it is not an easy task to turn around the quality of teaching and learning in these schools" (Christie, 2001, p. 40). This to some extend impacts on what the school can achieve. Given this low socio –economic background, the challenge facing schools is whether education can compensate for this deficiency.

2.8.   REFLECTIVE PRACTICE

The ACESL programme requires all principals to keep a journal which should contain entries relating to their reflections of a professional nature. The journal, which is part of the portfolio of evidence, requires principals to engage in reflective practice. Osterman and Kottkamp provide the following definition of reflective practice:

> *Reflective practice, while often confused with reflection, is neither a solitary nor a relaxed meditative process. To the contrary, reflective practice is a challenging, demanding, and often trying process that is most successful as a collaborative effort. Although the term reflective practice is interpreted and understood in different ways, within our discussion, reflective practice is viewed as a means by which practitioners can develop a greater level of self-awareness about the nature and impact of their performance, an awareness that creates opportunities for professional growth and development* (1993, p.5).

From the preceding definition of reflective practice, it is evident that reflective practice requires professionals to engage in an intense process of self- evaluation and through this, reflect on their practice with the intention of improving their professional competence. In practice this is not always the case as Bush, Kiggundu and Moorosi caution when they state:

> *Candidates may be reluctant to reflect on any perceived weaknesses. Despite these limitations, portfolios have a valuable role to play in candidate evaluation and leadership development, and represent a potential improvement on formal examinations and theory-based essays. Researchers scrutinised the portfolios of the case study candidates. While the quality was variable, most portfolios were well organised and included school documents as well as school based activities. However, very few of them showed evidence of reflection, despite 63% of respondents*

saying that 'opportunity for reflection' is 'of great help'. It is clear from the analysis of portfolios that many candidates are finding it difficult to go beyond description to adopt a reflective approach, leading to changes in leadership practice (2011, p.37).

From the preceding discussion on the theory and practice of reflective practice, a conflicting picture emerged. In theory, reflective practice should lead to an improvement in professional competence but in practice, this improvement could be elusive. Thus reflective practice is an important part of the ACESL programme and it would be interesting to see what unfolds from the data in the reflective journals of the principals that formed the sample of the cohort of principals on the pilot ACESL programme.

2.9.   CONCLUSION

This chapter provided a background to education management development in South Africa. The discussion then turned to providing some perspectives of leadership and management theories. Thereafter, a rationale for a national professional qualification for principals was provided. The paucity of research of the effects of management and leadership development programmes was also highlighted. A motivation to effect school improvement in South Africa was provided and the concepts of leadership and management were discussed and the chapter concluded with a discussion on reflective practice.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

3.1. INTRODUCTION

This chapter in the main discusses the research design and methodology that was used in conducting the study. Issues of the research paradigm which underpinned the design are also discussed. In addition to this, the following issues are outlined in this chapter: the research aim and questions, the selection of participants, methods of data elicitation, recording of the data, piloting of the study and the issues of trustworthiness and ethical considerations.

3.2. RESEARCH AIM AND QUESTIONS

As already mentioned in Chapter One, the intention of this research was to understand the experiences and reflections of principals and also the feelings of principals on how their participation in the ACESL Programme has had an influence (if at all) on their professional practice.

3.3. RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

The study adopted a case study design which is located within the qualitative research approaches. This case study design consisted of five principals of an Advanced Certificate in Education –School Leadership class at the University of KwaZulu-Natal and their reflections on how the ACESL influenced their professional practice at their respective schools. Case study research does extremely well at bringing us to an understanding of a complex issue or object and can extend experience or add strength to what is already known through previous research. Case studies emphasise detailed contextual analysis of a limited number of events or conditions and their relationships. Researchers have used the case study research method for many years across a variety of disciplines. Social scientists, in particular, have made wide

use of this qualitative research method to examine contemporary real-life situations and provide the basis for the application of ideas and extension of methods (Soy, 1997, p. 1). Yin (1984) defines the case study research method as an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context; when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident; and in which multiple sources of evidence are used (1984, p. 23). A key strength of the case study method involves using multiple sources and techniques in the data gathering process. The researcher determines in advance what evidence to gather and what analysis techniques to use with the data to answer the research questions. Data gathered is normally largely qualitative, but it may also be quantitative. Tools to elicit or produce data can include surveys, interviews, documentation review, observation, and even the collection of physical artefacts. This study made use of semi-structured interviews and documentation in the form of a reflective journal.

Sturman (1999) contends that a distinguishing feature of case studies is that human systems have a wholeness or integrity to them rather than being a loose connection of traits, necessitating in-depth investigation (1999, p.103). In addition to this, contexts are unique and dynamic; hence case studies investigate and report on the complex dynamic and unfolding interaction of events, human relationships and other factors in a unique instance (Cohen, *et. al.* 2000, p.181). Hitchcock and Hughes (1995) suggest that case studies are set in temporal, geographical, organisational, institutional and other contexts that enable boundaries to be drawn around the case and that they are also related to the characteristics, roles and functions of individuals and groups (1995, p.319). Case studies also serve to probe the lived experiences, thoughts and feelings of participants. This does not suggest that case studies are unsystematic or merely illustrative as case study data are gathered systematically and rigorously.

There is much strength in using case study as a methodology. One of the great strengths of case studies is that they allow the researcher to concentrate on a specific situation and to identify the various interactive processes at work (Bell, 2002). These processes may be hidden in a large scale survey but may be crucial to the successes and failures of systems or organisations. Cohen, *et. al.* (2000) state that case studies can penetrate situations in ways that are not always susceptible to numerical analysis (2000, p.181). Nisbet and Watts (1984) identify a number of strengths of case study- the results are more easily understood by a wider audience, they are immediately intelligible, they catch unique features that may be lost

in larger scale data (e.g. surveys), strong on reality, they provide insights into other, similar situations and cases, thereby assisting interpretation of other similar cases, they can be undertaken by a single researcher and they can embrace and build in unanticipated events and uncontrolled variables (Nisbert & Watts, 1984, cited in Cohen, *et. al.* 2000, p.184).

There are also a number of advantages of case study to educational evaluators or researchers: case studies allow generalisations about an instance or from an instance to a class, case studies recognise the complexity and 'embeddedness' of social truths, case studies may form an archive of descriptive material sufficiently rich to admit subsequent reinterpretation, case studies are a "step to action as they begin in a world of action and contribute to it and finally case studies present research or evaluation data in a more publicly accessible form than other kinds of research report" (Cohen, *et.al.* 2001, p.184). Another advantage of the case study is its applicability to real-life, contemporary, human situations and its public accessibility through written reports. Case study results relate directly to the common readers everyday experience and facilitate an understanding of complex real-life situations.

Despite the advantages I have highlighted, there are disadvantages as well, and I need to highlight them. Cohen, *et.al.* (2001) also point to some of the shortcomings of case studies. The results may not be generalisable except where other readers or researchers see their application, they are not easily open to cross-checking, hence they may be selective, biased, personal and subjective, and they are prone to problems of observer bias, despite attempts to address reflexivity (Cohen, *et. al.* 2001, p.184). The tendency of case studies to be associated with interpretive paradigm has rendered it an object of criticism and in this regard, Smith suggests that:

> *The case study method… is the logically weakest method of knowing. The study of individual careers, communities, nations, and so on has become essentially passé. Recurrent patterns are the main product of the enterprise of historic scholarship* (Smith, 1991, p.375).

Cohen, *et. al.* (2000) counter this criticism by stating, "This is prejudice and ideology rather than critique, but signifies the problem of respectability and legitimacy that case study has to conquer amongst certain academics" (2000, p.183). In order to ensure that data is collected in a systematic and rigorous manner, Nisbet and Watt (1984) offer the following advice to case study researchers to avoid: journalism (distorting the full account in order to emphasise the

more sensational aspects); selective reporting selecting only that evidence which will support a particular conclusion, thereby (representing the whole case); an anecdotal style (degenerating into an endless series of low-level banal and tedious illustrations that take over from in-depth, rigorous analysis); pomposity (striving to derive or generate profound theories from low-level data and finally blandness (unquestioningly accepting only the respondents' views or only including those aspects of the case on which people agree rather than areas on which they might disagree (1984, p.91). I was at all times mindful of the advice Nisbet and Watt (1984) proffer.

Case studies are complex because they generally involve multiple sources of data, may include multiple cases within a study, and produce large amounts of data for analysis. Researchers from many disciplines use the case study method to build upon theory, to produce new theory, to dispute or challenge theory, to explain a situation, to provide a basis to apply solutions to situations, to explore, or to describe an object or phenomenon (Soy, 1996, pp.9-10). Case studies, despite their limitations, have proven to be effective in educational research. Tools to collect data can include surveys, interviews, documentation review, observation, and even the collection of physical artefacts. This study made use of interviews and documentation in the form of reflective journals.

The case study design was conducted within the qualitative paradigm with its emphasis on the interpretive and subjective dimensions (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2001, p.181). The study took the form of a case study because it provides a unique example of real people in real situations, enabling readers to understand ideas more clearly than simply by presenting them with abstract theories or principles (Cohen, *et. al.* 2000, p.181). Yin (2002) suggest that case study should be defined as research strategy, an empirical inquiry that investigates a phenomenon within its real-life context and that case studies should not be confused with qualitative research and points out that they can be based on any mix of quantitative and qualitative evidence (Yin**,** 2002). Merriam adds to the understanding of case studies by stating that:

> *A case study design is employed to gain an in-depth understanding of the situation and meaning for those involved. The interest is in the process rather than outcomes, in context rather than a specific variable, in discovery rather than confirmation* (Merriam, 1999, pp.18-19).

In line with case study research designs, this study focussed on the subjective experiences and feelings of principals on the ACESL programme. This study attempted to gather data by using multi-methods in the form of semi-structured interview and the analysis of documentation in the form of reflective journals of principals. This being the case, this research was conducted in an interpretivist, qualitative paradigm. The central intention of the interpretivist paradigm is to understand the subjective world of human experience. This paradigm seeks to understand and interpret the world in terms of its actors and consequently may be described as interpretive and subjective (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2001, p. 22). This approach is also referred to as the 'hermeneutic/interpretive' paradigm of social and educational research which focuses on social practices. The proponents of this approach argue that the model to follow should not be the idealised and universal logic of scientific research, as is the case with positivism, rather a model or approach that, *"looks for culturally derived and historically situated interpretations of the social life- world"* (Crotty, 2003, p.67).

Cohen *et. al.* (2001, p. 181) outline three broad approaches to educational research. The first, based on the 'scientific' paradigm, rests upon the creation of theoretical frameworks that can be tested by experimentation, replication and refinement. The second approach seeks to understand and interpret the world in terms of its actors and consequently, may be described as interpretive and subjective. A third approach that takes account of the political and ideological contexts of much educational research is that of critical educational research. This study is located within an interpretive paradigm because it involved understanding the subjective experiences of principals on a professional development programme and also required their reflection of the programme on their professional practice. The interpretive paradigm served to elicit "deep-seated" feelings of principals. The researcher sought to extend his "horizons" or attain a better understanding of the principals' experiences and reflections on the ACESL programme and how the programme may have influenced their professional practice. Since the study did not seek to measure or quantify the experience of the principals on the ACESL programme, it cannot be located within the scientific or positivist paradigm. Neither did the study attempt to effect change in the experiences and professional practice of principals to place the study in the critical paradigm.

In addition to the three broad approaches to educational research discussed earlier, it is also necessary to understand the concept of methods and methodology. Method refers to the range of approaches used in educational research to gather data which are to be used as a basis for

inference and interpretation, for explanation and prediction. Traditionally, method refers to those techniques associated with the positivistic model but it can be extended to participant observation, role-playing, non-directive interviewing, episodes and accounts. Thus, methods refer to techniques and procedures used in the process of data-gathering (Cohen, *et. al.* 2001, p.44). The aim of methodology on the other hand, according to Kaplan is:

> *To describe and analyse these methods, throwing light on their limitations and resources, clarifying their presuppositions and consequences, relating their potentialities to the twilight zone at the frontiers of knowledge. It is to venture generalisations from the success of particular techniques, suggesting new applications, and to unfold the specific bearings of logical and metaphysical principles on concrete problems, suggesting new formulations* (Kaplan, cited in Cohen, *et. al.* 2000, p.45).

In essence the aim of methodology is to help us understand, not the products of scientific inquiry, but the process itself.

3.4.   SELECTION OF PARTICIPANTS

Purposive sampling was used to select the five principals from different contexts. Principals from urban, rural and township schools were selected. In purposive sampling the researchers handpick the cases to be included in the sample on the basis of typicality or possession of the particular characteristics being sought (Cohen, *et. al.* 2007, p.114). My motivation for this is that although all principals were in the same class on the ACESL programme, they worked in different contexts and this study was concerned with, not only their experiences on the ACESL programme, but also the influence of the programme on their respective schools.

In deference to the principle of anonymity, the participants and their respective schools were coded so that the identity of the participants and their respective schools would not be disclosed. The principals and their respective schools were coded as follows:

P-A   : Principal of School-A

P-B   : Principal of School-B

P-C   : Principal of School-C

P-D   : Principal of School-D

P-E   : Principal of School-E

3.5.   METHODS OF DATA ELICITATION

Yin (1994) identifies six primary sources of evidence. It is not necessary to use all sources in every case study but a combination of sources does contribute to the reliability of the study. The six primary sources are: documentation, archival records, interviews, direct observation, participant observation and physical artefacts. This study made use of semi –structured interviews and documentation in the form of reflective journals.

Multi-methods were used in generating data that provide answers to the research questions. These are reflective journals and semi-structured interviews, and these methods are discussed below.

3.5.1.   Reflective Journals of principals

The reflective journal is a compulsory component of the ACESL programme. All principals on the programme were required to commence with journal entries from the very first day of the course. These entries recorded their thoughts, feelings and reflections about the ACESL programme while they were attending contact sessions and also while at their respective schools (sites). The journals were used to reflect on the programme and how the programme was continually impacting on their professional practice. At the end of the programme, the journal had to be submitted, as part of the portfolio of evidence, to the University of KwaZulu–Natal for assessment. In this study, the journals served as an invaluable source of data in capturing the feelings and experiences of the principals while they were on the ACESL programme and also on their reflections of the course. The journals aided in eliciting data that allude to the research questions presented in this study. The Department of Education articulates the rationale for the journal as follows:

The use of the personal journal …is strongly recommended as a self-assessment tool…in the current working environment where documentary evidence of professional competence and achievement is becoming increasingly important, your journal will have value as a personal record of your progress through the course and of your professional growth in a larger sense (Department of Education, 2007, p.86).

The validity of the journals was carefully reviewed to prevent incorrect data from being included in the data base. Documents also served to confirm data gathered or produced from other sources. The researcher also guarded against the over-reliance on the journals as evidence as some types of documents cannot be regarded as unmitigated truth.

3.5.2. Semi –structured interviews

Interviews are one of the most important sources of case study information. The interview could take one of several forms such as open-ended, focused or structured interviews. (Tellis, 1997, p.8). LeCompte and Preissle (1993) identify six types of interviews: standardised interview, in-depth interviews, ethnographic interviews, elite interviews, life history interviews and focus groups while Bogdan and Biklen (1992) add semi-structured interviews and group interviews and Lincoln and Guba(1985) add structured interviews and Oppenheimer (1992) adds exploratory interviews (cited in Cohen, *et. al*. 2001, p.270).

Thus deciding on the type of interview to use will to a large degree depend on the purpose of the interview. In this study, semi-structured interviews were undertaken. Since the study asked two critical questions, it was necessary to elicit the inner feelings of the participants and to gain access to hidden data that does not emerge in formal questionnaires. Hitchcock and Hughes (1989) provide support for semi -structured interviewing when they state, this form of interview is a more flexible form of an interview because it allows depth to be achieved by permitting the interviewer to probe and expand the interviewee's response (1989). The researcher acknowledges that the construction of the interview schedule was a challenging task.

3.6.   RECORDING THE DATA

It was vital that all data that was obtained during the research process should be captured accurately. In the case of the interviews, permission was granted by participants for the use of a tape-recorder. A semi-structured interview schedule was used to produce or generate the data. I also explained to the participants that the tape-recorder was needed to ensure accuracy of the content of the interview process and the discussions thereof. I also used a journal to make notes while the interview was in progress. The actual time spent on the interviewing of each candidate ranged from thirty-five to fifty-five minutes. Interviews were transcribed verbatim and the texts were analysed.

The other source of data was the reflective journals of the participants. Permission was granted by the participants and copies were made. The journal contained entries where students reflected on elements in the ACESL that they found helpful and those that were not. Other entries that were of importance to me were those where students were reflecting about their current professional practices, and the extent to which such practices were attributed to the ACESL.

3. 7.   PILOTING THE STUDY

The researcher also piloted the study to test the methodology. A pilot study is a small scale study that is conducted prior to the actual research. All data-gathering instruments should be tested to check how long it takes respondents to complete them (in the case of survey questionnaires); to check that all answers and instructions are clear and to enable the researcher to delete any items(s) which do not yield usable data (Bell, 2002). The researcher elected to pilot the study with one of the principals who did not form part of the sample. The pilot assisted the researcher in amending the questions and the interview schedule.

3.8.   DATA ANALYSIS

According to Henning, Van Rensburg and Smit (2004), the true test of a researcher operating with a qualitative research paradigm, is the analysis of the data. She further states that data analysis "requires analytical craftsmanship and the ability to capture understanding of the data in writing". As this study was conducted within the qualitative paradigm with its

emphasis on the interpretive and subjective dimension, the data analysis process was aimed at getting a thorough understanding of how the participants experienced the ACESL programme and how the programme affected their professional practice. With this in mind, I had to fit the analysis procedures with the methodological position of the study. The data analysis procedure that most suited this study was content analysis.

I commenced this process by reading the interview transcripts and the entries in the reflective journals several times. I read the transcript and commenced with what Henning *et. al.* (2004) refers to as open coding, whereby the researcher reads the entire text to get a global impression if the content. This served to alert the researcher to some of the emerging themes. I read all the transcripts and reflective journals thoroughly before I actually started the coding process. This is supported by Henning and others (2004) when she states that:

> *Because open coding is an inductive process, whereby the codes are selected according to what the data mean (to the researcher), you need to have an overview of as much contextual data as possible. It thus makes good sense to read all the relevant transcriptions before any formal meaning is attributed to a single unit* (2004, p.104).

I then set about identifying units of meaning. Similar codes were linked to form categories and themes. The categories served to elucidate the themes that were constructed from the data

3.9.   ENSURING TRUSTWORTHINESS

Qualitative studies can be influenced by the subjectivity of the researcher. In order to counter this trustworthiness must be ensured. Concepts of validity and reliability have been used by qualitative researchers, borrowing them from quantitative researchers. Subsequently, qualitative researchers, after realising that these two concepts do not mean the same thing for quantitative researchers as they do for qualitative researchers, then developed their own criteria (Shenton, 2004, pp.63-64). The basic question regarding trustworthiness in naturalistic inquiry is, "how can an inquirer persuade his or her audience that the findings of an inquiry are worth paying attention to, worth taking account of?" (Guba & Lincoln, 1995, p. 301). They present four criteria in a framework that ensures trustworthiness. The four criteria are credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability (Guba & Lincoln, cited in Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 2002). This framework is used to discuss the issue of trustworthiness

Credibility refers to the ability of the researcher to produce findings that are convincing and believable (Guba & Lincoln, 1985). Guba and Lincoln suggest a variety of strategies for improving the likelihood that the findings are credible. To this end, I have used triangulation and member checking. In order to address the credibility of this study, the researcher used multi-methods to generate data to ensure credibility of the findings. According to Cohen *et. al.* (2011, p. 195) "triangulation may be defined as the use of two or more methods of data collection in the study of some aspect of human behaviour" (2011, p.195). This study made use of semi-structured interviews and the reflective journals of the participants. This served to enhance the credibility of the research findings. Secondly, I used member-checking, which is a process whereby participants verify the data and interpretations thereof (Guba & Lincoln, 1985). I also used member-checking to enhance credibility. To ensure credibility in this study, I provided written transcripts for validating the accuracy thereof.

To demonstrate confirmability, copies of all taped interviews and discussions, notes taken while the interview was in progress and hard copies of transcripts are kept on file. After the findings have been arrived at, I confirmed with participants through telephonic conversations, and in some instances, visited the principals and we had discussions about what was emerging from the data. To ensure that a research study can stand up to a test of dependability, it must be able to be replicated and the findings should be similar or identical. Since I undertook measures to ensure the credibility of the study, namely member checking and triangulation, this contributed to the dependability of the study. Transferability is entrenched in this study by providing thick descriptions of the experiences of the participants.

3.10.   ETHICAL ISSUES

Any research study must show due cognisance of ethical issues. Ethical issues may include informed consent, right to anonymity, right to privacy, confidentiality and observing the principles of beneficence and non-maleficence (Brink & Wood, 1998, pp. 200-209). They elaborate on the issue of beneficence and non-maleficence. Beneficence refers to the extent to which the participants will benefit from the study and the non-maleficence principle refers to the steps taken by the researcher to ensure that no harm is caused to the participants and that the necessary steps are taken to safeguard the participants (Cohen, *et. al.* 2011).

In practice, I showed adherence to the ethical issues as follows. At the outset, a request for permission to conduct the study was made and was granted by the Department of Education as well as the participants. Each participant was guaranteed the rights to the anonymity of their identity and also to anonimise their respective schools. They were also informed that confidentiality would be respected at all times. This was done by ensuring that all interviews were conducted in an office with no third party present. I also accorded a great deal of respect to all participants. This was done by indicating that their participation was entirely voluntary and that they had a right to withdraw from the study at any time they deemed fit to do so. This was given to all participants in writing. I also explained in detail the purpose of the study. Participants were also informed that they would not be rewarded financially or in any other method or means. In that way it is unlikely that whatever participants told me was inspired by what they were expecting to get from me or from anybody else, for having participated in the study.

3.11.   CONCLUSION

In this chapter, the research design and methodology was discussed. Other aspects of the research process were also outlined. These aspects involve selection of the participants, data elicitation, data recording, and the piloting of the study, data analysis, trustworthiness and ethical issues.

CHAPTER FOUR

PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION OF DATA

4.1.   INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents the data that was produced through conducting semi-structured interviews with five principals who had been students of the ACE School Leadership programme in 2007 and 2008. An analysis of the reflective journals that they used as students of this programme was also done. The data presentation comprises two sections, the first section profiles each participant and his or her school and the second section illuminates the themes that emerged when analysing the data that surfaced in respect of the participation of principals in the ACESL programme and the effect thereof on their professional practice.

The second section comprises three components. Pre-ACE, during ACE: School Leadership and Post-ACE: School Leadership. Pre-ACE: School Leadership deals with participants' views, expectations and aspirations prior to enrolling for the ACE programme; During ACE: School Leadership deals with their views and experiences of the programme as students who interacted with lecturers, materials, tutors, mentors *et cetera*; Post-ACE: School Leadership deals with their views about their leadership and professional lives after completing ACE programme. In short, their views regarding this period give an idea of the extent to which participants feel that their participation in the programme was beneficial.

4.2.   BIOGRAPHICAL DATA OF THE PARTICIPANTS

Principal –A

Principal-A is a male who was appointed as a teacher in 1993 and was appointed as a HOD in 2005 and in 2006 was appointed as the principal of the same school. Therefore, Principal-A did not serve as a deputy principal in a school. He was promoted from HOD to principal. He did not occupy the position of Deputy Principal. In term of qualifications, he has a Secondary Teachers Diploma (STD), a Bachelor of Commerce (B.Comm) degree and a Certificate in

Computer Practice. Principal –A has 16 years teaching experience in total. He spent 12 years as a level one educator and two years as a Head of Department before he was promoted to the post of principal in 2006. In terms of the context of the school, Principal –A is employed at a school that is in a rural area and it is a high school. The school has 450 pupils and serves an economically disadvantaged community and because of this, it is regarded as a Quintile One school. Quintile One refers to schools that are most economically disadvantaged and on the opposite end of the spectrum, Quintile Five refers to school that are most advantaged. The quintiles in between one and five will account for the varying levels of disadvantage of schools in South Africa. It must also be noted that Principal – A also has a teaching load over and above his leadership and management duties.

Principal –B

Principal –B is a female who was appointed as a principal in 2000. She has twenty five years teaching experience. She started her teaching career as a Post level One educator in 1984. In 1993, she was appointed as an Acting Principal. She served in an acting capacity until 2000, when she was appointed on a permanent capacity. She did not at any stage in her career occupy the post of deputy principal or HOD of a school. Her qualifications include a Junior Primary Diploma, A Diploma in Remedial Education and the Bachelor of Education (Honours) degree. She also taught multi-grade classes, that is, Grades One, Grade Three and Grade Four at the same time. In terms of the school context, the school is a primary school that is situated in a rural area. In addition to this, the school is a farm school. A farm school is situated on land that belongs to a farmer and serves the local farm workers. It is, in effect, a public school that is built on land that belongs to private individuals. It is a small school of approximately eighty pupils. The school is situated in an economically disadvantaged area and is a Quintile One school. To a large extent, the school depends on the benevolence of the farm owner.

Principal – C

Principal – C was appointed as a teacher in 1988 in a rural school and assumed the role of Acting Head of Department from 1998 to 1999. In 2000 she was promoted to principal of a farm school. Since the farm school was a small school, it was a level two principal post. In 2008 she was appointed as principal of a larger school which was post level four. Principal – C served as an Acting HOD for two years and did not occupy the post of Deputy Principal. She did occupy the post of principal of a small farm school. Her present school is situated in

a large township that is situated quite close to a large urban area. The school serves a community that is largely economically disadvantaged. Although this is the case, the school is classified as Quintile Five since it has a tarred road leading up to it and piped water. This is a bone of contention for Principal-C as other schools that are situated quite close by are classified as Quintile Three and below. In terms of qualifications, she has a Junior Primary Diploma, a Remedial Education Diploma and a Bachelor of Education (Honours) degree with an Education Leadership and Management specialisation. In addition to this, she has completed the coursework for the Master of Education degree in the Education Leadership and Management stream. This particular participant was awarded the Post Graduate Diploma in Education Leadership and Management as the dissertation for the Master of Education degree was not completed.

Principal –D

Principal – D commenced his teaching career in 1985 in a secondary school. In 1986, he was transferred to a secondary school in another town. In 1997, he was promoted to the post of Head of Department. Barely three months in the post, he was appointed as Acting Deputy Principal of the same school and four months later, in January 1998, he was appointed Acting Principal. In August 1998, he was promoted to principal of a large secondary school where he had started his teaching career. He has 24 years teaching experience and had served eleven years as a principal at the time that the research was conducted. When he commenced the course in 2007, he had already served as principal for nine years. In terms of qualifications, Principal-D has a Bachelor of Arts (BA) degree, a University Higher Diploma in Education (UHDE) diploma and a Bachelor of Arts degree with honours in English. Principal-D occupied all management posts in a school situation, albeit for short periods of time. He also teaches English to a Grade 12 class. The school that Principal-D managed is a large secondary school with in excess of one thousand one hundred pupils. It is a Quintile Five school that is located in a large township in an urban area. The school serves an economically disadvantages community and in addition to this, almost 90% of the pupils reside in areas that are far off and in some cases they are from other provinces and take up residence as boarders in private dwellings that are located near the school.

Principal – E

Principal –E is a female who commenced her teaching career when she was appointed as a teacher in 1993. In 2000, she was promoted to the post of principal at a primary school.

Principal – E did not occupy the posts of HOD or Deputy Principal. Her qualifications include a Junior Primary Diploma and a Bachelor of Arts (BA) degree. She has 16 years teaching experience, of which, nine years have been in the post of principal. She is also responsible for teaching multi-grade classes. The school is located in a deep rural area and serves an economically disadvantaged community. Due to this, it is a Quintile One school.

The information in Table 3 below reflects information that was gleaned in the main from the semi-structured interviews with the participants and from entries in their reflective journals. This information provides more details about the participants and serves to enlighten the reader about the personal details of principals that comprised the sample. This is also useful in assessing how their experiences of the ACESL have been influenced by their qualifications and/or experience and type of school.

PRINCIPAL	QUALIFICATIONS	TEACHING EXPERIENCE IN YEARS	EXPERIENCE AS PRINCIPAL IN YEARS	GENDER	TYPE OF SCHOOL
P-A	Secondary Teachers Diploma, B. Comm. Certificate in Computer Practice	16	3	Male	Secondary
P-B	Junior Primary Diploma, Diploma in Rem. Education, B.Ed (Honours)	25	15 (Acted for 6 years)	Female	Primary
P- C	Junior Primary Diploma, B.Ed(Honours)	19	11	Female	Primary
P-D	BA, UHDE, B.A(Honours-English)	24	11	Male	Secondary
P-E	Junior Primary Diploma, BA	16	9	Female	Primary-Multi-Grade

Table 3: Biographical details of principals

Table 3 reflects that all principals have over seven years teaching experience which is the minimum requirement for appointment to a principal's post. All principals are professionally qualified. All principals have degrees and three of them are in possession of a post graduate qualification in the form of a Bachelor of Education (Honours) degree. Principal P-A was promoted to principal after ten years of teaching. This is not unusual as his post is located in a rural setting that did not attract a large number of applicants. The same can be said about principal P-B as she is a principal in a rural farm school. Principal P-D was appointed as a principal after fifteen years of teaching. This could be attributed the school being located in

an urban area that attracts a large number of applicants and where preference is generally given to more experienced educators.

All principals were appointed through a similar process. They had applied on the open vacancy list whereby all educators are eligible to apply irrespective of whether they are in management positions or not, as long as they have seven years teaching experience and a three year teaching qualification. This is the only way in which a person is appointed to a principal post. They were short-listed and interviewed by the School Governing Body (SGB) and the SGB recommended their appointment to the Province of KwaZulu-Natal Department of Education. In terms of gender, principals P-A and P-D are males and P-B, P- C and P-E are females. Four principals are Black South Africans with the exception of principal P-D, who is a South African of Indian origin.

4.3.   PRINCIPALS AND THE CONTEXT OF THEIR SCHOOLS

PRINCIPAL	GENDER	SCHOOL TYPE	CONTEXT OF SCHOOL
P-A	Male	Secondary	Rural
P-B	Female	Primary	Rural farm school
P-C	Female	Primary	Township
P-D	Male	Secondary	Urban
P-E	Female	Secondary	Rural

Table 4: Principals and the context of their schools

The legacy of apartheid has had disturbing effects on education in a large number of schools in South Africa. Due to the unequal funding of schools, there is great disparity in education provision across the spectrum of schools in different contexts (Thurlow, Bush & Coleman, 2003, p. ix). Urban schools were better resourced than township schools and township schools were better resourced than rural schools. The rural farm school in this sample was controlled by the Department of Education but was situated on land that belonged to the owner of the farm. Thus the context of the school must be considered and used as a lens to make sense of the data that emanated from the semi-structured interviews and the reflective journals. It will be interesting see from the data, whether the context of the school has had a bearing on the experiences of the principals on the ACESL programme.

4.4. TRAJECTORY OF THE PROFESSIONAL CAREERS OF THE PARTICIPANTS

In the context of the school, the principalship represents the highest office that one can occupy. One enters the profession as a teacher at level one. I have used the term teacher as opposed to educator as all professional personnel at the level of the school are classified as educators. The next level of progression is that to Head of Department (HOD) at level two. The next promotion post is that of deputy principal at post level three and the pinnacle being the post of principal at a post level that is dependent on the number of learners that are at a particular school, thus the post level varies from level two to level four. Although the post level may vary, the job description is exactly the same.

From the foregoing discussion, it is evident that two participants (P-B, P-E) were promoted from teacher to principal without occupying the post of HOD or Deputy Principal. P-C served two years an acting HOD before becoming a principal. P-A served as a HOD for one year and P-D served as a HOD and Acting Deputy Principal for three months and four months respectively. P-B and P-D had served as Acting Principals prior to their appointment as principals. With this background information on all the participants, it will be interesting to ascertain whether all participants shared similar experiences on The ACESL programme. The attention now turns to the themes that emerged from the study.

4.5. THEMES FROM THE DATA

A thorough analysis of the semi-structured interviews and the reflective journals of the principals have led to the emergence of the following themes. In the case of the interview, each line in the transcript was numbered and coded. This led to the formation of categories and eventually these evolved into themes. In the case of the reflective journals, information was highlighted and coded and placed into categories and eventually into themes. Each theme will be discussed in detail. The themes will be presented in three sections, namely, Pre–ACE, The ACE Experience and Post-ACE: School Leadership programme, which is the application of learning from the ACE Programme in the professional management of a school.

4.5.1. Pre - ACE: School Leadership

This section presents participants' views, expectations and aspirations prior to enrolling for the ACE programme.

4.5.1.1. Arsenal of qualifications, but still no preparation for the post of principal.

The minimum requirements for appointment to the post of principal in a school are far from demanding. The person aspiring for a principalship must satisfy two conditions. The first relates to the minimum professional qualification of M+3, which means that the applicant must have a matriculation certificate and a professional teaching qualification. This qualification could be a diploma which entailed three years of study, hence M+3 refers to matriculation plus a three year professional qualification. The second condition relates to years of service. The minimum requirement in this regard is seven years teaching experience. There is no stipulation that an applicant must have management experience. This, in practical terms, implies that a level one teacher with seven years experience as a class teacher is eligible for consideration for appointment to a post of principal. This can and does take place whereby a person may be a teacher and is appointed in the post of principal without serving as a Head of Department or deputy principal. Moreover, the Department of Basic Education as the employer does not provide any orientation or induction to the newly appointed principal. In the case of the sample, as a cohort, they represent a group of highly qualified educators. All participants that comprised the study were professionally qualified as teachers. Table One has provided a detailed description of this phenomenon.

Despite the high level of qualifications of the sampled participants and their management experience, all principals were excited about being accepted for the ACESL. In the case of Principal–B, she had occupied the post of principal for fifteen years with six of these years in an acting capacity and Principal–D had served eleven years as principal, eight months of these in an acting capacity. When the question was posed relating to their selection for the ACESL programme, all of them expressed positive comments, despite their levels of qualification and experience in management positions in schools, as can be ascertained from the comments below:

> *When I was selected I was very happy because I knew that I didn't have knowledge how to run a school. When I was appointed I was just appointed as an educator so I had many challenges because no one had told me what to do when I got the office. So*

it was an honour to me to decide how to do things. Sometimes I find that I did things that were unacceptable because I was lacking in information and knowledge **[Principal-A].**

From this, one can infer that although Principal-A had a Secondary Teacher's Diploma (STD), a Bachelor of Commerce (B.Com) degree with a specialisation in Business management and a certificate in Computer Practice, there is still an indication that not much was known about how to actually lead and manage a school. Principal-A was promoted from Head of Department to Principal. In this case there was no formal school leadership training programme provided. The participant also indicated that when appointed to the post of principal, there was no formal induction or training for the post. This sentiment resonates with Mestry and Singh's (2007) assertion that, "the lack of stringent criteria and the absence of a qualification for the appointment of principal have resulted in many principals under–performing in their leadership and management roles (2007, p.478). The position of principal carries many and varied responsibilities and one has to, to a large extent, learn on the job. Principal–B also expressed similar sentiments to Principal–A.

Although I did not know what the criteria were, I was very excited because I knew many people had applied. It meant that first of all I was going to receive free education and then it meant that I was able to learn more about what I'm supposed to be doing as a principal in school since no one has ever been trained as a principal you just learn on the job. So the first time I was going to know what I'm supposed to be doing **[Principal-B].**

It is also evident that the lack of preparation for the principalship contributed to the principals' positive attitude to the ACESL programme. Principal–B was actually 'excited' about being accepted for the programme. Principal–B commenced with her career as a level one teacher in 1984. In 1993, she was appointed as Acting Principal and in 2000 was appointed principal of a farm school. The statement the participant makes, "*then it meant that I was able to learn more about what I'm supposed to be doing as a principal in school since no one has ever been trained as a principal you just learn on the job*", resonates with the comment made by Principal-A. Principal-B makes this assertion, pointing to the lack of knowledge and skills for the post of principal. This comment is made despite the fact that the participant being in possession of a Bachelor of Education (Honours) degree with an Education Leadership and Management Specialisation. This evokes the value of the ACESL

in professionalising the principalship. The programme was believed to offer practical knowledge and skills to this particular participant. Principal–C also articulates similar sentiments.

> *Well it meant the whole world for me because I indicated in my previous response I was financially broke, I needed to develop myself but I could not participate in anything that is going to develop myself and because it was my understanding that now again you have to keep going and keep learning as there are always changes* **[Principal-C].**

In the above extract, Principal–C articulated the need to develop herself. She also alluded to the financial implications of studying. She was elated to be selected to the programme as the ACESL was funded by the former Department of Education, now referred to as the Department of Basic Education. Principal –C commenced her teaching career in 1988 and served as Acting HOD from 1998 to 1999. In 2008, she was promoted to the post of principal. Principal–C is in possession of a Primary Education Diploma, a Bachelor of Education (Honours) degree with an Educational Leadership and Management specialisation.

Despite a high level of involvement and accomplishment in education leadership and management studies, the participant was not averse to further study in this field. The data suggests that the reason for undertaking the ACESL may be two-fold. Firstly, it was a fully funded programme in that the Department of Education paid for the cost of tuition at the University of KwaZulu-Natal and secondly the participant was desirous of professional development as education was a dynamic terrain to work in. Principal-D also has a post-graduate qualification and whose response resonates with responses made by Principal-C.

> *I was appointed principal at ******* Secondary school in August of 1998. I have been the principal of ****** Secondary since then. It's been very empowering; I know I used the word about ten times now. It's been different, it's been challenging, and it's been exciting. Each day brings in a new experience. The bottom line is in this game here that education is so dynamic that one cannot stop learning as long as one is receptive to want to learn. I am presently enjoying what I do, I enjoy what I do and the truth is there is so much to learn and I welcome these opportunities to learn, in order to better my skill as a practitioner in my present job* **[Principal-D].**

Principal–D has occupied all management posts in the school situation, *albeit* for an extremely short period of time. Having commenced teaching in 1985, he was promoted to HOD in 1997 to another school. After occupying this post for three months, the participant was asked to serve as Acting Deputy Principal for four months. Subsequently, he was to assume an Acting Principal post at the same school. After eight months, he was appointed as principal of the school where he had started his teaching career. Principal–D is the only participant who served in all management positions. The participant has a Bachelor of Arts degree with honours in English and the University Higher Diploma in Education (UHDE), which is a professional teaching qualification. Despite the participant's management experience and tertiary qualifications, he pronounced the need for further learning so that he can develop his skills as a practising principal. At the commencement of the ACESL programme, he had already served nine years as principal of a large secondary school in an urban area. Despite being a principal with nine years of experience in the post, the participant expressed the need for development thereby enhancing his professional practice. Principal–E also supports the need for a programme such as the ACESL as is evident in the statement below:

> *It was a fortunate to me because I applied as you normally do but when I received a letter that states that I was given a chance to participate in this ACE programme so at first I thought I just want to know what this ACE programme is all about but I can say that I was fortunate, really fortunate because when I look at the programme I can see that principals do need this programme, all principals do need this programme because we learn a lot from it* **[Principal-E].**

Principal-E commenced teaching in 1993. In 2000, Principal-E was promoted to the post of principal, without having served in a HOD or Deputy Principal position. In terms of educational qualifications, Principal–E has a Primary Educators Diploma and a Bachelor of Arts Degree. Although armed with these qualifications, Principal–E, in a similar vein to all other principals in the sample, supported the need for a professional development programme for principals. Principal–E asserted that all principals are in need of the ACESL. The anomaly is that the two participants were in possession of post graduate degrees in Education Leadership and Management. These two participants, Principal–B and Principal–C had completed the Bachelor of Education degree with a Leadership and Management specialisation. Principal– C had completed the course work for the Master of Education

degree with an Education Leadership and Management specialisation. Despite this being the case, both participants were unanimous in their support for the ACESL as a professional development programme. But for all principals in the sample, it was a challenge to study and manage their schools at the same time.

4.5.1.2. Absence of training and induction for principals
Learning on the job

All participants were excited about being promoted to the post of principal. They regarded that position as the pinnacle of school based promotion posts and only the fortunate few are given entry into occupying these posts. The appointment to the post of principal is not automatic. It is a rigorous process that eventually leads to the actual appointment. Candidates aspiring for the post of principal are required to submit an application form together with detailed *curriculum vitae*. The application form is handed to the Department of Education. Officials of the Department of Education sift the applications and conduct an administrative shortlist. During this process candidates that do not meet the minimum requirements are sifted out. Candidates that fail to observe the proper procedures in completing the necessary forms are also sifted out. The application forms of candidates eligible for appointment are handed to the School Governing Body (SGB) of the school where the post occurs. The SGB begins the process of short listing with members of the recognised teacher unions in attendance as observers.

There are occasions where unions fail to deploy observers but this does not stop the process. The SGB   uses the criteria provided by the Department of Education to compile a shortlist of candidates who are then subjected to an interview process. After this process, the candidates are ranked and a recommendation is made to the Department of Education for a particular candidate to be appointed. The successful candidate is informed in writing to report for duty as a principal.

A successful candidate needs not have served in any management positions prior to appointment to a principal post. In effect, a level one educator who meets the minimum requirements could become a principal of a school with holding the post of Head of Department or Deputy Principal. This can and does happen in all the provinces of the Republic of South Africa. There is also no formal induction or training programme for newly appointed principals. It is for this reason that participants in this study welcomed the ACESL

programme. The statement from Principal-A that "…*there was no formal training of educational management of any sort*" bears testimony to the lack of capacity building exercises by the provincial department.

4.5.2. Experience during ACE: School Leadership

This section deals with participants' views and experiences of the programme as students who interacted with lecturers, materials, tutors, mentors *et cetera*.

4.5.2.1. Part-Time Study and Full-Time Principal – Very challenging for some, but worthwhile

This theme has emerged from participants responses to two questions that were posed by the researcher. The first question related to the experiences of the principals on the ACESL programme and the second question related to the difficulties that principals experienced whilst undertaking the course. All principals in the sample alluded to the challenging demands of the post of principal. In addition to fulfilling the demands of being a principal, all participants were also class teachers. This added tremendously to their workload and fulfilling their study obligations only served to compound this problem. Interview data and entries in the reflective journals describe the stress that principals experienced as captured in the statement below.

> *It wasn't easy because it took a lot of time whereas if you are running a school, if you are working full time at the school you need more time, so the ACE programme took a lot of our time. But I enjoyed it because in these programmes I learnt many things which I did not know but since I entered into this there are things that I learnt...* **[Principal-A].**

There were particular aspects of the ACESL programme which proved to be daunting for the participants. Completing assignments and attending to the demands of the principalship proved a formidable task for the principals. For instance, Principal–A provides an illuminating account of the imperative of reconciling the competing demands of being a principal, having a teaching load and studying to part-time. The demands of running a school are many and varied. He is the principal of a rural secondary school and is bold enough to state that he is not in a position to effect change at his school whilst he is a student on the

ACESL programme. This honesty points to the complexity of undertaking part–time study while trying to fulfil one's contractual obligations as a principal of a school. Principal-B echoes similar sentiments as is evident from the statement below.

> *First of all it has not been as easy as I thought it would be, there has been a lot of work that is involved in this course. But I must say I've been enjoying every moment of it because I've been learning a lot about what I should be doing at school. I also have gained some skills because now I can use a computer, something that I didn't know before I was involved in this course. Also we were required to do some research so I learnt about research skills. So there's a lot* **[Principal-B].**

Principal–B alluded to learning what her job entails. It must be noted that the person making this statement has been an incumbent in the post for a period of fifteen years and remarked that she was learning what the job requires now that she was in the ACESL programme. The actual positive effect of the programme is discussed later in the section entitled, 'Effect of the ACESL programme on the professional practice of principals. Principal–B also made an entry in her reflective journal about the demanding nature of the course. This entry was made in her reflective journal:

> *I have learnt that we are going to be visited by the whole School Evaluation Team. I am going crazy because there are so many assignments to do and now this*! **[Principal –B]**.

Thus far in the discussion of this theme it is evident that the ACESL programme required a great deal of work and took up a great deal of time. All participants alluded to the demanding nature of the principalship and attempting a university programme at the same time. All participants complained about having to do so many assignments. In some cases, it was four assignments per module and given that students had to complete two modules per semester, this meant that eights assignments had to be completed and further to this, students had to study for one supervised task per module. It was a daunting task for the principals to be full-time in a very demanding job and fulfil the course requirements of the ACESL programme.

4.5.2.2. Knowledge of leadership theories – a revelation

In the ACESL programme, the principals as students of the programme are exposed to a multitude of theories. In the 'Leading and Managing People' module for instance, students were exposed to various leadership theories including trait, behavioural, contingency and neo-charismatic theories. Each theory was unpacked and discussed in great detail. Reference was made to local and international literature to provide a detailed account of theories that impact on leadership in schools. Reference was also made to leadership for change. In this regard, attention was focussed on transactional and transformational leadership models. In effect, the authors of the module 'Leading and Managing People' were forthright in suggesting invitational theory as a possible means that could assist to effect change in schools. In the module the authors state, "in this unit we identified invitational theory as an approach that could be used to drive the transformation of schools (2008, p.50). Given that one of the aims of the ACESL programme was to effect transformation of schools, then there is no hidden or covert agenda, the overt or open agenda is to encourage the students on this module to practice invitational leadership. There is a need for transformational leadership and invitational leadership in schools in South Africa and this is supported by literature. Bush and Anderson (2003) point to the harsh reality of schooling in South Africa when they state:

> *The absence of a culture of learning in many South African schools illustrates the long-term and uncertain nature of cultural change……. However, educational values have to compete with the still prevalent discourse of struggle and it seems likely that the development of a genuine culture of learning will be slow and dependent on the quality of leadership in individual schools* (2003, p.96).

The above statement points to the pivotal role of leadership in school. Bush and Anderson (2003) present a compelling argument for change in schools. The theories of leadership presented to students offers insights into the different theories but principals have to make a conscious decision to implement these theories with particular focus transformational and invitational leadership theories. Principals on the ACESL programme have recognised the efficacy of adopting transformational and invitational theories. The principals that comprised the sample have realised the merits of these two theories and have put in practice as can be seen from the statement made by a participant. This application of these theories is evident in some of the schools of the participants as is evident from this statement made by Principal-D:

There are aspects specifically in terms, let's look at the module of leading and managing. I mean although I had been a practicing principal for 9 years, the truth of the matter things like invitational leadership, specifically invitational leadership you know it was something that we had not considered. We had not considered in terms of being absolutely fundamental and necessary to implement in ones school. The basic concept to invite persons other than yourself to lead to actually, to set the terrain to set the atmosphere to create the atmosphere to empower people of different levels etc within a school situation. To inspire in them the quality of leadership that all people have was something that was mind blowing from an experiential point of view and it was something that was sensible to embrace. So that module in its self was really beneficial to all persons whom I come into contact with [**Principal –D**].

Principal–D acknowledged that invitational leadership was not previously considered, hence it was not practiced. It must also be noted that Principal–D was the principal of a large secondary school and has been occupying the post of principal or nine years. It is through his participation in the ACESL that he has received exposure to invitational leadership and has, through reflection, actually put the theory into practice and he was astounded by its results. This experience was not restricted to this principal only. Other principals also alluded to changes in the way they lead their schools.

4.5.2.3. Mentoring and Induction

Mentoring and Induction is one of the modules of study in the ACESL programme. In respect of mentoring, there are two dimensions to mentoring in this programme. The first related to the theory of mentoring that students were exposed to on the 'Mentoring and Induction' module of the ACESL programme. The second relates to the process whereby the principals as students on this programme were actually mentored by retired principals or former officials of the Department of Education, for example, Superintendents of Education (Management) or former directors of the Department of Education. The actual mentoring process of students is addresses in this part, namely, the ACESL Experience while the actual implementation of mentoring by students as principals is discussed later in the third component, namely, the effect of the ACESL on the professional practice of principals.

Mentoring is a distinguishing element of the ACESL programme. According to Bush *et. al.* (2011) mentoring is, "designed to facilitate the transfer of learning to candidates' and school practice". Effective mentoring provides strong potential for deep learning. There is substantial international evidence supporting the efficacy of mentoring and coaching for deep learning (2011, p.35). Mentors for students were appointed by the University of KwaZulu-Natal. Although the students had been asked to assist in identifying mentors, in practice, they played no part in these appointments. They could choose their own mentors but that actually did not happen. Retired principals and former senior officials of the Department of Education were recruited and trained to mentor student principals. The mentoring took the form of a series of visits to the schools of the principals, telephonic conversations and group mentoring sessions. The mentors were expected to support and guide the principal in carrying out his or her duties and to provide assistance in compiling a portfolio of evidence. The portfolio of evidence was a compulsory part of the ACESL programme and it was assessed as an independent module of the course. The literature on mentoring points to the need for proper training of mentors, proper matching process between mentors and mentees, proper planning on mentoring sessions and the mentor adopting the role of a peer (Bush, *et. al*, 2001, p.35).

Principals on the ACESL programme had ambivalent feeling about the mentoring process. Principals expressed comments about the actual practice of mentoring. The data suggests that principals had different experiences of mentoring. No principal objected to being mentored. The quality of the interaction was commented on. Principal –D comments on a negative experience with his mentor. As is evident from the statement below:

> *In so far as the mentors are concerned, my experience is that my mentor means well, my mentor is a very decent human being but having said that my mentor is very limited. When students from other districts, when we compare notes in terms of the kind of guidance and support specifically in so far as the portfolio is concerned which is a module on its own, you know we are very anxious of the experiences that our colleagues from other districts share where their mentor for e.g. is so kind of on the ball and is able to periodically check on the progress of the work set out in the different chapters etc. Unfortunately we don't have such a positive experience. Our mentor means well but perhaps our mentor has not been briefed or guided as well as should have been* **[Principal –D].**

Although Principal–D expressed dissatisfaction with his particular mentoring experience, he made reference to the experiences of other principals on the programme who have had positive encounters with their mentors. Principal–D made reference to the portfolio that each principal had to compile. The portfolio is a collection of evidence of the professional practice of principals. According Bush *et. al.* (2011) the portfolio is the main assessment tool in that it comprises all assignments, school-based documents, for example, school development plans, school policies, minutes of staff and management meetings, and student reflections in the form of a journal (2011, p.37). It is a mammoth task and requires a great deal of work in producing evidence that supports professional growth. He alludes to the mentors who were more thorough in their support of principals. Principal–B confirmed the comments made by Principal–D:

> *I think our lecturers and tutors were very knowledgeable people, we were very happy with them. They provided us with a lot of knowledge and skills but mentors should be trained on how they can help us and support us. I think they were doing different things in different groups, like here in Pietermaritzburg we have another mentor and in Durban we have another mentor, they are supporting us in different ways not the same so we here that others are doing this with their mentors which we are not doing with our mentors so we think they should be trained* **[Principal-B].**

Principal–B echoes the sentiments of Principal–D. There is a perception that some mentors should be better trained. The reality is that principals made comparisons with other principals and in this case there is evidence to support the view that all principals did not receive the same level of support and guidance from their mentors. It must be reiterated that some mentors carried out their duties as per the expectations of the University of KwaZulu–Natal and some obviously fell short of these expectations. Principal–A in the extract below concurs with Principal–B and Principal–D in that mentors ought to be properly trained. He states:

> *Mentors, I'm not too sure about mentors. Sometimes I ask myself why were they employed, maybe they were never guided so well or never given specific functions to do. I'm not sure what it is exactly they were doing because I was thinking that maybe they would be visiting our schools, they will see our programmes at schools and they would be able to advise us as people with experience. This is how they should go about doing these things but unfortunately in my experience, it wasn't like that because I wasn't visited by any mentor just to come and see. So if you still want to*

make use of mentors I think you must to be serious about them, try to give them
specific duties and functions so that there will be improvement when they are there. I
think with mentors they must go to schools for the first time, in other words when
students register for the first modules go there so that there will see how is the school
now. Then towards the end they must also go and check is there improvement in that
school otherwise you won't get a picture **[Principal –A].**

Principal–A also raised a pertinent suggestion in that mentors must conduct a visit to principals before they start the programme and also towards the end of the programme to ascertain whether any development had actually taken place at the school. It is evident from journal entries that some of them did not visit schools but used telephonic conversations more. Visits to the schools were rare. I must add that these students were more critical of the mentors because they had been taught in the Mentoring and Induction module. In addition, they had even implemented ideas gained from that module as part of their assessment task. So, when mentors started working with them, they had obtained knowledge and knew what to expect from a mentor, and when mentors did not meet their expectations, they were disappointed.

4.5.2.4. Information and communication technology, a real challenge.

An area of study that constitutes part of the ACESL is that of Information and Communication Technology (ICT). This particular area of study presented a tremendous challenge to principals. Among the participating principals, none were competent in the use of computers. The ICT module placed a great deal of stress on the principals. They were required to master the use of the computer using a range of software and also were expected to use the internet and emails. In respect of particular programmes, much time was spent on using the Microsoft office suite with particular attention on the programmes Word, Excel and PowerPoint. Principals were expected to type their own letters draw up spreadsheets and compile a PowerPoint presentation. This was a mammoth task for principals, irrespective of the context of their school. Many principals complained and some dreaded the assessment component of this module. This is evident from the comments made by Principal –D:

If I look at ICT for e.g. the technological aspect of this course specifically the use
of computers. Before having been accepted onto this course, I did have a phobia,

to engage as fully as one could in terms of the use of computers, assessing computers, assessing programs and things related **[Principal –D].**

Principal–D expressed a deep fear for the use of computers. One had to bear in mind that this particular person is a principal of a large urban school and also a university graduate, despite these factors, he still displayed a dread for the use of computers. It will be interesting to see how this particular principal copes with ICT and how he fared towards the end of the course. I make reference to this issue in component three of this chapter, which I call 'the effect of the ACESL on the professional practice of principals'.

Principal–A makes a journal entry with regard to ICT as follows:

Principals are given an opportunity to touch the computer for the first time in life. I am excited and scary because I am not sure whether I will make it or not **[Principal –A – Journal].**

From the above statement it is evident that ICT appeared to be a daunting task for him. The positive part of the comment is that he was 'excited'. Like Principal–D, he is graduate and but is situated in a rural area.

4.5.2.5. 'Back to Basics – Managing the Core Business of Schools'

Going back to the basics is some kind of a slogan or a realisation that supporting teaching and learning is in fact, the main responsibility of any principal. All management and leadership activities at a school must support teaching and learning. Teaching and Learning is considered the core business of the school. One of the modules on the ACESL programme is Managing Teaching and Learning. In this module the central focus is on managing the teaching and learning process at the school. This entails ensuring that there is constant focus on the actual teaching and learning activities. The module puts the spotlight on turning schools into learning organisations. Emphasis is also placed on constant innovation. The module advocates the position that principals must take the role of a curriculum leader. The module also covers the concept of distributed leadership and the establishment of a learning culture at a school. Through interaction with this module, principals in the sample realised what their core business is as is evident from the comments made by principals:

As I said earlier I know that the curriculum is the most important but earlier I had no problem in interrupting people and upsetting the whole teaching and learning process but now whatever I want us to do that is outside the curriculum I do it after the children have left. I do not want to interrupt lessons and now I am associating the success of the school with teaching and learning having been done thoroughly because I know that the time and tasks with the learners does have a positive effect on the progress of the learner **[Principal–B]**.

Principal–B's comment shows a shift in her attitude with regards to teaching and learning. In the period before the ACESL experience, she did not place the curriculum on top of the agenda. Through her interaction with the module and the contact sessions, she has come to the realisation that she must in fact support the teaching learning activities at the school and she refrains from engaging in any activities that require the teachers to leave the class during teaching time. The module has served to reinforce her commitment to teaching and learning activities in the school. In effect, her engagement with the ACESL has been a positive one and has had positive consequences for the learners at her school.

Similar sentiments are expressed by Principal–E:

It helped me a lot, what I did before as I said I did not keep records so now when it comes to, I even helped educators to design their assessment programmes. For the first this year we drew the assessment programme for the school so now I know that we have to follow things and when they are following it, even though you are not up to date you do it accordingly and then when it comes to the curriculum I do manage the curriculum now **[Principal –E].**

Principal-E acknowledged her involvement in the management of the curriculum. She has actually assisted her teachers in drawing up assessment programmes. Principals on the programme realised that they have to get back to basics, that is, they must involve themselves in the core business of the school and that is, managing teaching and learning. This is confirmed by the statement made by Principal–B below:

I have learned a lot; basically I know what should be happening in a school than I knew before. For example, before I knew that the school curriculum was important but now I know that curriculum is the most important thing at the school, it's the

primary function of the school and all the other activities are secondary **[Principal–C].**

This statement supports the claim that principals realised the importance of the curriculum management and the prime focus being placed on teaching and learning. The next theme relates to policy formulation.

4.5.2.6. Policy Formulation – Getting it right

Schools are required to develop a range of policies that direct various aspects of life in a school. The policy formulation process should be an inclusive one. Parents, educators, non-educators, learners and the School Governing Body (SGB) are expected to contribute to the policy formulation (Department of Education, 2008, p.191) Schools have to develop a large number of policies. These include the following policies: Vision and Mission, Constitution of the SGB, Admissions, Language, School Code of Conduct for learners, Safety and Security, Religious. Schools may develop other policies in addition to these, for example, financial or school fee policy. In the ACESL programme, principals were required to study a module entitled, Managing policy, planning and governance. This module emphasises the knowledge and actions that school leaders must carry out to ensure compliance with the legislative and policy requirements. In respect of policy, there was particular emphasis on stakeholder involvement. The principals on the ACESL realised the importance of policy formulation and commented as follows:

> *Now I know how to formulate the policy, I'm confident in formulating the policy, I know that I have to consult people and do research and I know all the steps in formulating the policy. And I also know that the structures in the schools should be used to realise the vision and the mission of the school. And we shouldn't be formulating the policy just for the sake of having the policy. We must know that the policy should go according to our vision of the department and the policy should be in line with the vision of the policy of the department* **[Principal–B]**.

The extract from the interview with Principal–B shows an increase in confidence in policy formulation. She indicated that she understood the policy formulation process and realised the importance of consultation with stakeholders. Her comments clearly demonstrate a

positive experience as a result of engagement with the module. Comments made by Principal–D resonate with the comments made by Principal–B.

> *One being is policy formulation. When we were appointed principals at schools we inherited the schools, we inherited the policies etc. and at that point in time working with the limited literature we had from the department of education that we need several basic policies, essential policies we need this and we need that. Although we were not trained or schooled at how to draw up a policy or formulate a policy this course has been fundamentally good or the one module of the course. In giving us a structured breakdown of what policy means from the point of need. Do we need it? Why do we need it? What do we need it for? Who needs it, to the point of legislation to the policy now. You can't have your own ways in formulating policy. It must be cast in the legislation of the times, the present legislation, the democratic dispensation chapter 2 of the bill of rights etc. So policy formulation definitely from what I've learnt on this module has helped to a large extent in identifying areas where we can improve as a school* **[Principal –D].**

Principal–D articulates the value he gained from the Policy planning and governance module. At the outset he speaks about the lack of direction from the Department of Education. Through engagement with this module he recognises that policy formulation is a process and that it must be constructed with a legislative framework. It is evident that principals are getting the policy process right.

4.5.3.   Post -ACESL - Effect professional practice of principals.

In this section, I cite actual instances where the ACESL through various modules has had an influence on the professional practice of principals. Section two addressed the experiences of principals on the ACESL programme, whereas this section builds on that section and shows how the professional practice of principals was influenced by the ACESL programme. This section specifically addresses the second research question of the study.

4.5.3.1. School Development

The ACESL programme aims to impact in a positive way on the professional practice of principals and this ought to translate to school development. School development not only refers to the physical improvement of the school but also to improved teaching and enhanced learner achievement. When Principal–D was questioned about the effect of the ACESL programme on his professional practice, he provided a lengthy response which captured the extent to which the programme affected his professional practice.

> *There is a greater degree of appreciation that as an SMT and management we show to our teachers... as a leader I'm more tolerant, I'm more open to suggestions than before. Responsibly, I listen to people more than I have ever listened and that makes a huge difference because as a leader, no man is an island and as a leader you cannot achieve on your own. You need people to lend support so that you can achieve. There is less an atmosphere of fear that normally is pervasive in a school situation, a high school situation in particular. You know there is an easiness of communication more so than there has been in the past* **[Principal –D].**

Principal – D gives a great deal of credit to the ACESL programme. He accounts for a change in management style. He indicates that programmes are in place to affirm teachers on his staff. He is also able to accommodate suggestions made by members of staff. His final statement reflects an atmosphere that is more conducive to teaching and learning and the removal of fear and the lines of communication are now open. In terms of the pronouncements made by Principal–D, it is clearly evident that the programme has had a transformational effect on him and this has impacted on his professional practice. Principal–D indicates that, "*because as a leader, no man is an island and as a leader you cannot achieve on your own*". Principal–C also recognises the importance of working with people by adopting an inclusive approach. This is confirmed by the statement below, made by Principal–C.

> *Yes, I know more about management and leadership especially that you cannot manage your school alone. You will need other minds so you must involve people in all areas* **[Principal –C].**

Principal–C clearly recognised the importance of working in an inclusive manner with all members of her staff. This realisation points to an increased awareness of the need for

transformational leadership and this is one the intended outcomes of the ACESL programme. Principal–B provides and all encompassing statement about the positive effect of the ACESL programme by as is evident in the statement below:

> *Professional Practice – I'm very glad I went through this course because I know exactly what I should be doing, for example I know about the filing, how I should file the documents, how I should formulate the policies, how the equipment should be maintained, how to deal with people for instance in this course we also learnt about conflict resolution and mentoring and managing teaching and learning and managing people* **[Principal –B].**

Principal–D accounts for an improvement in the execution of administrative tasks and alludes to the improvement in filing. In the module, Managing Organisation Systems and Resources, reference is made to the importance of filing. Clear direction is given on the manner in which document ought to be filed, for example, Human Resource circulars, KwaZulu-Natal-Education Department circulars and District circulars. She further provides illumination on how to maintain equipment, conflict resolution, mentoring and curriculum management. This clearly points to the immense benefit that Principal–B derived from the ACESL programme.

4.5.3.2. Information and communication technology (ICT)

In Section Two, reference was made to ICT and in the discussion, there was evidence to the effect that principals had a 'phobia' for computers and also that they were scared and excited at the same time. As the ICT module unfolded, principals became more confident in the use of computers. The fear for computers began to diminish and principals began to gain confidence in the use of computers for word-processing, spreadsheets and PowerPoint presentations. This claim is supported by an extract from the interviews and the reflective journal that supports the assertion made in respect of growth in ICT skills of the principals. This statement made by Principal–A gives credence to the claim made:

> *In terms of skills, one thing I've learnt is that though I had a bit of knowledge is this of using ICT presenting. I think it was quite interesting to be able to use a projector and laptop when you are presenting. For instance a principal who has to conduct a meeting somewhere and will be able to present so well because you have all the*

equipment, I think it's one of those skills that I think all principals need that skill because it makes their work a bit easier **[Principal –A].**

Principal – A commented on his ability to use a computer to make a presentation and more specifically to the ability to use PowerPoint. This shows professional growth. Principal –A expressed comments to the effect that he was 'scared' of computers. As he made inroads into the Module, his skills improved and his fear decreased. Principal–D indicated that he had a phobia for computers. The statement below shows his growth in the use of ICT:

By the end of the two years as we speak now my knowledge of technology especially the use of computers and assessing programs is significant. I'm grateful for that. So it's a knowledge that translates to a skill now and that's a lifelong skill. It definitely has improved my level of confidence. In the past, one used to actually brush of this duty and actually assign it to persons with computer knowledge at school at different levels whether they deputy principals or HODs or senior teachers or the level 1 teachers or the computer teacher. I use to rely heavily on my secretary in the past, you know of every form of correspondence that had to be typed was typed by the secretary. Now I'm glad to say that I do all my correspondence myself. I think that's a big plus and a step in the right direction **[Principal –D].**

It is evident that Principal–D has conquered his phobia and his competence in the use of ICT has drastically improved to the extent that he is able to type his own correspondence using the computer. Both Principal–A and Principal–D had benefited tremendously and this manifested itself in their professional practice.

4.5.3.3. Mentoring and induction at schools

The module Mentoring and Induction presented different perspectives on mentoring in the context of the school. Students were exposed to the concept of mentoring, the difference between mentoring, coaching and induction, principles of adult learning, types of mentoring, models of mentoring, qualities of effective mentors and developing a mentoring programme in a school. The module, in summary, provided a detailed expose of all matters relating to mentoring. In terms of mentoring as a practice to be implemented in school, the principals were positive about using mentoring as a method to develop members of their staff. All

participants welcomed mentoring as a means to effect development. This was confirmed by the following statement made by one of the principals:

> *Because of this course I have learnt the correct way of doing things, I now know that if a new teacher arrives at school, that teacher needs to be orientated and also needs mentoring. It doesn't matter if she comes from college or university the teacher needs to be helped on site to do things the way the organisation does things so that she gets confident in doing her job which is one area I wasn't aware of because I thought the teacher is well trained, she is from university she knows everything she will be able to cope but this course helped me to see that* **[Principal – B].**

Principal–B provided an account of the value of mentoring newly qualified teachers. She related the assumptions she had about university trained teachers and realised that the new teacher needed to go through a process of mentoring. This statement points to the improved practice of this particular principal. Principal–D made comments about mentoring that resonates with Principal–B:

> *The other modules e.g. mentoring and induction, you know this country solely needs this especially in the Education fraternity. We absolutely need programs whereby we induct people properly and we mentor persons responsibly e.g. we are governed by different acts, we are governed by the EEA, we are governed by our SACE, we are governed by a whole range of acts but there is not anything that specifically tells teachers and principals and SMTS that when new teachers come to your school you mentor them and you mentor them in this way. What was interesting and refreshing about this module was that it actually lays down very specifically structured programs of how to go about the business of inducting, mentoring and monitoring* **[Principal – D].**

Principal–D concurred with Principal–B in respect of the value of mentoring. He complemented her views on mentoring and also mentioned the practice of induction. The ACESL programme exposed these principals to these progressive practices. The statements made by Principal–A and Principal–D serve to confirm that the ACESL programme has a positive effect on them in respect of inducting and mentoring members of staff. Principal–D also alluded to the structured nature of mentoring programmes. This speaks directly to the

content of the Mentoring and Induction module in that there is a need for mentoring to be planned and properly structured for it to be effective.

4.6.   CONCLUSION

Chapter Four commenced with a professional profile of each participant the comprised the sample. Discussion was also extended to the context of their schools and also the trajectory of their respective careers. The second part of this chapter focussed on the themes that emerged from the data. The themes were presented on three parts, namely, the Pre-ACE, during ACE: School Leadership and Post-ACE: School Leadership. Pre-ACE: School Leadership dealt with participants' views, expectations and aspirations prior to enrolling for the ACE programme; During ACE: School Leadership dealt with their views and experiences of the programme as students who interacted with lecturers, materials, tutors, mentors *et cetera.* Post-ACE: School Leadership dealt with their views about their leadership and professional lives after completing ACE programme. The data demonstrated differing experiences for the participants but the effect of the programme on their professional practice was similar.

CHAPTER FIVE

ANALYSIS, FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1.   INTRODUCTION

This chapter contains a brief overview of the data analysis process, similarities and differences amongst the principals and the schools, re-stating of the research questions and the findings that emanated from this study. The main purpose of re-stating the questions is to ascertain whether the data managed to shed light on these areas of concern and also to present the findings that emanated from this research. Recommendations emanating from this study are also presented.

5.2.   DATA ANALYSIS

Data was obtained from the transcripts of semi–structured interviews that were conducted with five principals, who comprised the research sample. The data was coded and then categorised and from these, the themes evolved. The themes were presented in three components, namely, Pre–ACE, The ACE Experience and Post-ACE: School Leadership programme, which is the application of learning from the ACE Programme in the professional management of a school. The other source of data was the reflective journals of the principals. The journals were read through many times and entries were highlighted that matched the themes that emerged from the data analysis approach that was used to make sense of the semi –structured interviews. The journals did not yield much data as many of the entries were largely descriptive and contained very little evidence of actual reflections of improved professional practices of the principals that formed the sample. Many principals neglected the reflective journal and tended to make entries when the portfolio was due as opposed to the making of entries on a continuous. This is personally observed as a tutor and assessor of the portfolio on the ACESL programme.

5.3. SIMILARITIES AND DIFFERENCES AMONGST THE PRINCIPALS AND THE SCHOOLS

The sample of principals selected for this research was diverse. A detailed profile of each principal and his/her school was provided in chapter four. A global description which captures the salient characteristics of the principals that comprised the sample is now provided. The sample comprises males and females from across the racial divide. In addition to this the context of the schools that the principals were responsible for comprised deep rural, rural, township to and urban. There was also a great deal of variance in the relative experience of the principals. Some of them had served in management posts before being appointed as principals and some were promoted from level one teacher to principals. One principal in particular had served as an acting principal for six years before being substantively appointed and at the commencement of the ACESL programme had served as a principal for sixteen years. In terms of educational qualifications, there was a great deal of similarities. All principals were university graduates with three of the five having undertaken postgraduate studies. All principals were also class teachers. Despite this relatively high level of qualifications and many years of teaching and management experience, all principals conceded that neither their experience nor their qualifications adequately prepared them for their role as a principal.

5.4. RESEARCH QUESTIONS RESTATED

Research question have been used as subheading under which main findings of the study are presented, and these are discussed below.

5.4.1. What are the principals' experiences and reflections on participation in the ACE: School Leadership programme at the University of KwaZulu-Natal?

In respect of the first question, the data that was elicited from the principals provided insights into a range of aspects that made up the ACESL experience. Prior to even commencing the programme, principals were unanimous in expressing the view that they were excited about being accepted for the ACESL programme. The principals in the sample, despite their level of qualifications and experience, indicated that although they were occupying the post of

principal at their respective schools, they were never subjected to an induction process. This lack of induction or management development programmes is discussed in detail in section **4.5.1.1 and 4.5.1.2.** In Chapter Four the voices of the principals were used to highlight this point. The experience of the principals on this issue is summarised by this statement by **Principal-A** that "…*there was no formal training of educational management of any sort*." This extract points to a lack of professional development programmes for principals by the Department of Education. This is confirmed by Bush and Odura (2006) when they state that there is a lack of formal leadership training for principals. In the sample, all the principals enunciated the clear lack of any form of induction.

Once the programme got underway; there were a range of experiences that provided an insightful account of the authentic experiences of the principals. Experiences cited in the interview were confirmed by entries in the reflective journal. Some of these experiences were positive and some were negative. Fortunately for all concerned there were more positive experiences. In the next paragraphs a summary of these experiences is presented.

In respect of assessment on the programme, all principals articulated that there was an overload. Principals were expected to complete four assignments per module and a supervised task. The supervised task is in effect an examination that is administered under examination conditions. Given that they had to complete two modules per semester, this translated to eight assignments and two supervised tasks per semester. This was clearly an overload for the principals as they were participating in this programme on a part – time basis and they still had to fulfil their professional obligations at school. This was compounded by the fact that all principals also had a teaching load. This is supported by Bush, Kiggundu and Moorosi when they state, that "the ACE has too many assignments and the research team concurs that the course is over–assessed" (2011, p.37). The University of KwaZulu–Natal subsequently responded by reducing the number of assignments to two per module and of recent, certain modules only have one assignment as a requirement. The supervised task has been retained.

This will no doubt prevent principals from 'going crazy' **(Principal-C)** from having to complete so many assignments. In terms of their experience in policy formulation, all principals expressed positive comments and on the Policy, planning and governance module. The module gave them an in depth understanding of the policy process and the importance of engaging the relevant stakeholders in the policy process. Principals alluded to the past

practice of drawing up policies in isolation and the present practice of getting all the stakeholders to collaborate. This is evident in section **4.5.2.6**. There were experiences on the ACESL programme that principals had ambivalent feelings about.

Principals articulated differing views on the Information, Communication and Technology module. This was a compulsory module for all principals. At the outset, one principal indicated that he had a phobia for computers. Another principal indicated a fear of computers. Through interaction and engagement with the programme, all principals began to transcend their fears and phobias and eventually became more competent in using the computer. One principal even indicated that he was now confident in ICT and could actually do a PowerPoint presentation. Principal–D describes how he is now capable of typing the correspondence of the school instead of asking his secretary to assist in this regards.

An area that gave rise to negative experiences is that of mentoring. In the context of the programme it can be regarded as negative but it can also be regarded as a positive experience, which will require elaboration after I address the negative experiences. Mentoring is an important element of the ACESL programme. All principals are mentored by retired principals or retired Department of Education officials. The literature confirms the value of mentoring as a method to facilitate learning and change. All principals that comprised the sample expressed negative experiences of the mentoring process. This is evident in section **4.5.2.3.** All principals indicated the need for the proper training of mentors as they felt that some mentors did not know what was required of them and that they were not familiar with the latest theories and practices in education leadership and management. One principal actually suggested that a mentor visited them at the start of the ACESL programme, provided support and guidance during the programme and visited them at the end of the programme and check whether improvement had taken place at the school. From looking at the comments made about the mentoring process, principals offered pertinent criticisms of the mentoring process. They were able to offer critique from an informed position.

A possible explanation for the ability of principals to offer a critique of the mentoring process is that they studied a module entitled Mentoring and Induction. In this module, the principals were exposed to the concept of mentoring, the difference between mentoring, coaching and induction, principles of adult learning, types of mentoring, models of mentoring, qualities of effective mentors and developing a mentoring programme in a school. The module, in summary, provided a detailed rendering of all matters relating to mentoring. This

comprehensive mentoring and induction module positioned principals to critique the mentoring programme. They were able to provide an informed view on the mentoring process. In respect of the value of mentoring programme at their respective schools, all principals expressed positive comments about mentoring of educators. The view expressed below is repeated from chapter four as it vividly captures the essence of the views of the other principals. For instance Principal-B said, "*I now know that if a new teacher arrives at school, that teacher needs to be orientated and also needs mentoring*".

Principals also alluded to the good practice of another mentor in a different district that was doing a wonderful job and used this as a yardstick to evaluate their own mentors. Evidence of this is discussed in **4.5.2.3**. In respect of mentoring at school, there is a realisation that mentoring can be used as a strategy to aid professional development. In respect of the experiences of principals in respect of mentoring it is evident that principals did not have pleasant memories of their mentoring process but the positive aspect of their experiences is that they were able to offer a critique of their process and also the realisation that mentoring can be used at their respective schools. Another area that produced positive experiences for all principals was the emphasis of the Managing Teaching and Learning Module that highlighted the core business of the schools, which is teaching and learning. Principals realised that this was an area of utmost importance and all other activities in the school must support the core business of the school. For more details on this refer to **Section 4.5.2.5**.

5.4.2. How does principals' participation in the ACESL programme influence their professional practice?

In the post ACESL period, there is evidence that points to positive developments in school. The data suggests that principals realised the importance of transformational leadership. In the school of Principal–D, he alludes to putting the principles of Invitational leadership into practice. He describes positive developments in his management style and the removal of 'fear' in his school. He also describes how he now affirms teachers. There is also an ease of communication at his school. Principal–B describes how an administrative task of filing is now fully understood and Principal –C states that, *"Yes, I know more about management and leadership especially that you cannot manage your school alone. You will need other minds so you must involve people in all areas*. Principal– C clearly recognised the importance of working in an inclusive manner with all members of her staff. This realisation points to an

increased awareness of the need for transformational leadership and this is one the intended outcomes of the ACESL programme. Other areas that resulted in an improvement in the professional practice of principals are that of ICT and the value of mentoring at school. These areas have already been addressed in the ACESL period and point to positive experiences for all principals that formed the sample.

In summary, both research questions were answered. The evidence points to similar experiences for all the principals that formed the sample. Some of these experiences were positive and some were negative. In terms of the effect on the professional practice of principals, there is overwhelming evidence that points to a positive effect of the ACESL on the professional practice of all principals and they all are unanimous in supporting the ACESL as a compulsory programme for serving principals and those who are aspiring for the post of principal.

In Chapter Two, the literature review chapter, I used literature which articulated the rationale for conducting this study. The literature review pointed to the lack of research had been done on the actual experiences of principals on an ACESL programme and especially the effect of such programmes on their professional practice. This study has cast some light on these two areas and hopefully fills some of these gaps in our understanding. I now turn to the recommendations that emanate from this study.

5.5.   RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE STUDY

This study has served to illuminate the experiences of the principals on the ACESL programme and the effect thereof on their professional practice. The study has brought to the surface the positive and negative experiences of the principals as they engaged with the programme. The effect of the programme on their professional practice has been positive. In light of this, the following recommendations are made to the Department of Basic Education, the University of KwaZulu-Natal, to serving principals and those aspiring for a principalship.

5.5.1. Recommendations directed at the Department of Basic Education (DoBE)

- The DoBE must be lauded for supporting such a programme. When the programme was piloted it was controlled by the national Department of Education. Subsequently the Department of Education has split into two, with the Department of Basic Education concerned with education matters relating to all schools in South Africa and the Department of Higher Education concerned with education matters relating to universities.

- There is clearly a need for ACESL to be rolled out as a programme that will become a permanent feature in the South African education landscape. Given the department has split into two there are challenges linked to the possibility of funding this programme as it now belongs to the DHET while the clients belong to the DoBE.

5.5.2. Recommendations directed the University of KwaZulu-Natal

- Principals on the programme have indicated the need for proper training of principals as mentors. Their role function must be clearly spelt out. This has been a negative experience for all principals on the programme. The principals did not dispute the need for mentoring.

5.6. CONCLUSION

The ACESL programme has afforded the participants many positive experiences. Those experiences that were negative have not compromised the programme. The principals that took part in this study pointed to the many positive experiences of the programme and were unanimous in articulating the positive effect the programme has had on their professional practice. The study has served to elucidate the experiences of the principals. The questions that underpinned this study have been answered and the recommendations can only serve to enhance the ACESL programme.

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APPENDICES

A   Ethical Clearance from University of KwaZulu-Natal

B   Change in title of thesis

C   Permission to conduct research

D   Semi – structured interview guide for principals

Appendix A:

ETHICAL CLEARANCE FROM UNIVERSITY OF KWAZULU-NATAL

UNIVERSITY OF
KWAZULU-NATAL

RESEARCH OFFICE (GOVAN MBEKI CENTRE)
WESTVILLE CAMPUS
TELEPHONE NO.: 031 – 2603587
EMAIL : ximbap@ukzn.ac.za

28 NOVEMBER 2008

MR. T NAIDOO (912421111)
EDUCATION AND DEVELOPMENT

Dear Mr. Naidoo

ETHICAL CLEARANCE APPROVAL NUMBER: HSS/0765/08M

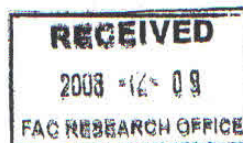I wish to confirm that ethical clearance has been approved for the following project:

"Professionalising school leadership: Principals' experiences and reflections on participation in the ACE: School Leadership Programme"

PLEASE NOTE: Research data should be securely stored in the school/department for a period of 5 years

Yours faithfully

MS. PHUMELELE XIMBA

cc. Supervisor (Dr. TT Bhengu)
cc. Mr. D Buchler

RECEIVED
2008 -12- 09
FAC RESEARCH OFFICE

ling Campuses: ▬ Edgewood ▬ Howard College Medical School ▬ Pietermaritzburg ▬ Westville

PLEASE NOTE: Research data should be securely stored in the school/department for a period of 5 years

Appendix B:

CHANGE IN TITLE OF THESIS

Dear TT

The Faculty Higher Degrees Committee at its meeting on 1 November 2010 recommended change in the title for Naidoo T.

Kindly ensure that the title is corrected.

Thanks

Naidoo T   912421111   M Ed (ELMP)

       Supervisor: Dr TT Bhengu

       Title: *Professionalising school leadership: Principals' experiences and reflections on participation in the Advanced Certificate in Education (ACE): School leadership programme*

Resolved to recommend a change of title as follows

             Principals' experiences and reflections on participation in the Advanced Certificate in Education a school leadership programme

Kogi Doorasamy
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2011/08/30

<h1 style="text-align:center">Appendix C:</h1>
<h1 style="text-align:center">PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH</h1>

The Principal

…………………. School

Dear Sir/ Madam

PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH

I am currently a second year Master of Education student at the University of KwaZulu–Natal : Pietermaritzburg. I am presently involved in an independent research study on the experiences and reflections of principals on the Advanced Certificate in Education: School Leadership. Leadership and management education programmes are a new phenomenon in South Africa and I am interested in the experiences of participants of the programme and their reflections of the programme in relation to their professional practice. I have selected you and your school because I believe that I will be able to collect valuable information that will serve to add to the knowledge base in this new field.

In order to access information, I request permission to peruse your reflective journal as well as participate in a semi - structured interview. Please note that this is not an evaluation of your performance or competence. The identities of all participants in this research project will be protected in accordance with the code of ethics as stipulated by the University of KwaZulu–Natal.

I undertake to uphold your autonomy and of all other participants and extend the right and freedom to withdraw from the research at any time without negative consequences to any person. Participants will be asked to complete a consent form. Feedback will be given at the end of the study. My supervisor is Dr. T. T. Bhengu and can be contacted at the Faculty of Education (Pietermaritzburg campus). His contact number is 033 – 2605354. My contact number is 033- 3914500.

You are free to contact my supervisor or myself should you have any queries or questions.

Trusting that this request is favourably considered.

Yours faithfully

T. Naidoo

DECLARATION OF INFORMED CONSENT

I,………………………………………., (full names of participant) hereby confirm that I understand the contents of the above document and the nature of the research project. I consent to participate in the research project.

I understand that I am at liberty to withdraw from the research project at any time, should I so desire.

…………………………..

Signature of participant

Date **: ………………………….**

SEMI – STRUCTURED INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR PRINCIPALS.

Thank you for participating in this interview and being part of my research study. I would like to assure you that all information will be treated with the strictest confidence and your anonymity will always be protected. Please remember that your participation is voluntary and you are at liberty not to respond to any question/s that you are not comfortable with.

I appeal to you to be as honest and open as possible and do not hesitate to speak your mind and articulate your views.

From your participation in the ACE:SL programme, kindly respond to the following questions.

Areas for probing.

1.   Tell me about your career thus far.

2.   You have been selected for the pilot ACESL programme. What does this mean for you?

3.   What are your experiences of studying on the ACESL programme.

4.   Tell me about your lecturers, tutors and mentors.

5.   What difficulties did you experience in participating in the ACESL programme?

6.   What are your views on assessment in the various modules?

7.   What have you learnt in terms of knowledge, skills and your personal abilities?

8.   What have you learnt about your management and leadership of your school?

9.   Are there any changes in your school that you associate with your participation in the ACESL programme.?

10.   What areas do you still need to develop in?

11.   How has the programme assisted you in managing the curriculum at your school?

12.   In what way has the programme helped you identify areas for improvement in your school?

13.   Are there any challenges/obstacles to improving your school?

14.   Has the course provided you with any insights in overcoming these obstacles/challenges?

15.   How has your participation in the ACE programme affected :
15.1.   Your staff ?
15.2.   Your School Governing Body?
15.3.   Your professional practice?

16.   Is there anything else that you would like to add?

Thank you for your participation.